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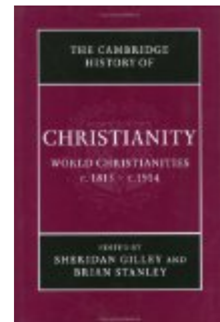
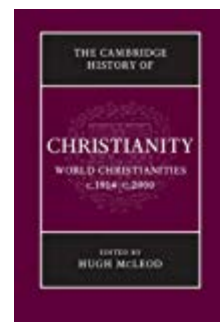


Sheridan Gilley, Brian Stanley, eds.. *World Christianities, c. 1815-c. 1914, Volume 8.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. xvi + 683 pp. $180.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-521-81456-0.



Hugh McLeod, ed.. *World Christianities, c. 1914-c. 2000, Volume 9.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. xviii + 717 pp. $180.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-521-81500-0.

Reviewed by Rudy Koshar

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Scholars of modern European and German history were once accustomed, too accustomed, to thinking of the last two centuries as an age of religious decline and "secularization." A growing body of scholarship on both sides of the Atlantic now questions this narrative, but the general orientation of research on late modern Europe still persists, carrying an underlying assumption that, if not now then soon, Christianity will assume its proper place as an historical artifact, ready to make room for topics more appropriate to the project of modernity or postmodernity. In Raymond Williams' once-influential formulation, Christianity was seen as an element of "the residual," which meant it was not irrelevant to the present but rather operated at some distance to "the dominant" and "the emergent."[1] Notwithstanding Williams' efforts to give the residual its due (and to show how dominant and emergent cultures used residual images and ideas), his analytical schema always attributed greater weight and positive value to what he defined as emergent cultural expressions, especially when they assumed Marxist or "Marxisant" form.

Cambridge University Press's excellent new multi-volume series on the history of worldwide Christianity gives further reason to be skeptical about the older perspective, just as it raises question about how to analyze and narrate the history of religion now that the new focus has become sharper and taken on greater definition. The subject covered in these volumes is not a residuum

but rather something both well understood (as the scholarship to which the bibliographies and notes of most of the selections refer makes clear) and open for serious re-examination. As with most such publications, new or startling research insights are rare, as most of the authors synthesize the results of previous research rather than striking out in new interpretive directions. It is rather the overall effect, and the manner in which subject areas in one field may be related to others through continued reading and comparison of the individual selections, that constitute the real value of such series. But in comparison with other specialist undertakings of this genre, this one stands out even more because of its volume, which exceeds six thousand pages and gives the work an almost encyclopedic status; its array of editors and contributors, which includes many of the key specialists in their respective fields from Europe, the United States, Australia, Africa, India, and elsewhere; its useful mix of chronological accounts and thematic analyses encompassing both institutional and informal aspects of religion and religiosity; its pan-denominational focus, which distinguishes it from so much historical scholarship on Christianity; and finally its decision to address Christianity as a global phenomenon without thereby "de-centering" the areas of traditional research on the subject, namely Europe and the United States. To illustrate the last point, Volume 8 devotes about one-third of its pages to the new Christian churches outside Europe, including Latin America, Africa, the Philippines, India, China, Korea, Japan, and Indochina.There are oversights or irregularities, most obviously in this volume in the thin treatment of the Eastern Orthodox community. The editors recognize such omissions as an inevitable outcome of a far-reaching and ambitious project such as this one, but they are correct to claim that the series nonetheless achieves a thematic depth and global breadth unmatched in the literature on the history of Christianity.

It is impossible within the limits of a shorter review to do justice to the many problems and themes addressed in these two volumes. All the essays are meant to be self-standing accounts grouped in broad thematic arrangements: thirty-six pieces in three sections on "Christianity and Modernity," "The Churches and National Identities," and the "Expansion of Christianity" in Volume 8; and thirty-three essays organized into sections on "Institutions and Movements," "Narratives of Change," and "Social and Cultural Impact" in Volume 9. In this latter volume, we get useful overviews of Christianity in the Great War (Michael Snape), on the churches' politics during the turbulent interwar period (Martin Conway) and in World War II (Andrew Chandler), on western churches during the Cold War (Hugh McLeod), and on religion in the eastern European revolutions and early post-communist era (Philip Walters). As in the volume on the nineteenth century, essays are also included on the United States, Australia and New Zealand, Africa and the African diaspora in the Caribbean and Europe, East Asia, Southeast Asia, and Latin America. Staying with the twentieth-century volume (and with more specifically European content), useful general pieces are provided on Christians and Jews, theology, sexuality and gender, homosexuality, marriage and the family, women and the churches, socioeconomic differences, the sciences, music, art, film, literature, and architecture. Simply to list (by no means exhaustively) the variety of topics is already to get a sense of how Christianity continued to operate in and through European culture, right into the present, despite its well-documented institutional losses.

Scholars of modern Germany will find the volumes useful in a number of ways, partly to give greater weight and profile to well-accepted historical interpretations, but partly also to give a more comparative dimension. Anthony J. Steinhoff's "Christianity and the Creation of Germany" in Volume 8 belongs to the first category. It reminds the reader that the evolution of German

national identity was intimately connected to religious faith, a point often overlooked or downplayed precisely because it is taken for granted, or because historians working in the modern period rush too quickly to take a secularist perspective. Steinhoff also makes the point, unsurprising on the face of it, that "Germany never stopped being at heart a Christian state" (p. 283). But to take this statement seriously is to recognize that Catholics, despite their social and political experiences in Imperial Germany, and despite the very real differences that separated them from their Protestant co-nationals, always could claim membership in the German nation in ways far more significant than German Jews or Social Democrats could. In the same volume, John Rogerson's discussion of "History and the Bible" is an example of the second category. It demonstrates that before 1914 only in Germany were the practical consequences of scholarly Biblical criticism apparent in a limited degree to the churches and their memberships; in Britain, by contrast, and in most other European nations, this awareness would await the interwar era. This conclusion raises interesting comparative points about how such criticism, so shocking and unsettling in many respects for ordinary believers, worked its way through the cultural fabric at differential rates and with historically specific impacts in the modern period. It suggests close linkages and interchanges between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, of which more will be said below. And it reminds us that national histories often do little to capture the reality of the situation. British scholars read German Biblical criticism, sometimes with greater effect on intellectual discussion in the Anglophone world than in Germany. National comparisons thereby lend themselves to a history of Christianity that is "transnational" in the truest sense of this now over-used term.

As for the volume on the twentieth century, Germanists will note that scholarship on the history of Christianity in Europe is undernourished compared to earlier periods, except for a few points of illumination such as the Church Struggle under Nazism, the Holocaust, and perhaps the religious revival within the major belligerents in World War I. But the volume also suggests that what is well-known to students of German history also reveals much that is not well-known or known in ways that may have become stale or unoriginal. For example, historians take account of the Swiss theologian Karl Barth's leading role in the German churches' resistance to National Socialism, but aside from theologians, who have produced literally a mountain of scholarship on him, scholars of German political thought or of intellectual history more generally, have done little to integrate him into their narratives.[2] Instead, he enters the historical picture narrowly as a heroic (but finally ineffective or, in some recent accounts, deeply flawed) foil to Hitler's plans, rather than as a theologian who published and wrote for more than fifty years, and who, as David Cheetham writes in his "Theologies of Religions," left his mark on religious discourse for almost the entire century (p. 510). The consequence of this skewed perspective is that, for example, the upsurge of theological debate that marked Europe's twentieth century, and in which Germany played such a central role, is often misinterpreted. Students of modern German culture might attribute this debate to Christianity's encounter with an increasingly secular world, whatever that might mean; or to the churches' growing knowledge about "the other," which in this case could mean non-Christian traditions discovered in the course of popular and academic "Orientalism," in missionary work, or in response to European Judaism. But in fact, Barth's contributions--and the strong radical impulse that his "critically realistic dialectical theology" carried--were not primarily responses to secularization or to non-Christian belief systems, but rather the product of an intra-Christian problem, namely the all too comfortable ***modus vivendi*** liberal Protestant theology had worked out in the course of the previous century with modern society and the German national

state.[3] This means, moreover, that Barth's reaction to Nazism cannot be understood only with respect to the challenge the National Socialist state issued to Christians, important as it was, but must also be considered in relation to the complex, long-term interactions between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that took place in a culture that was, all countervailing trends notwithstanding, still deeply attentive to theology's contributions to public discourse. Indeed, Barth's importance, questioned by some and celebrated by others, is properly understood only by paying due attention to the history and intellectual content of European theological culture in the widest sense, a perspective that scholars of modern German history have rarely acknowledged.

To argue that the Holocaust was a central feature of the relation between Christians and Jews in the twentieth century is an understatement. Daniel R. Langton discusses this topic in "Relations between Christians and Jews, 1914-2000," but in doing so he embeds the Holocaust in a much wider history covering, as the title implies, the full course of the century from the Great War to the millennium. Historians of modern Germany will find that the author's bibliography on the Holocaust neglects some of the key recent studies, which is regrettable, but the overall value of the chapter is evident because it gives considerable attention to the history of the creation of the state of Israel, from pre-World War I Zionism to the Balfour declaration and the United Nations recognition of Israel, all of which may have had as much to do with efforts at rapprochement between Christians and Jews as guilt over the mass extermination did. A further implication is that the far-reaching implications of the Holocaust for theology became evident--and then only sporadically and unevenly in German-speaking Europe--only once Israel appeared on the historical scene. It is also useful to find this essay paired with other essays on Christian relations with "the other," including Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus.

The volume alters or highlights common understandings of the course and content of modern German history in other ways, of which I mention only two more examples here. First, Christianity's distance from the socialist working class is a common theme in the historiography. But information here reminds us that this detachment was attributable not only to the churches' stronger identification with the state and with authority in general but also to Social Democratic leaders' unwillingness to countenance explicitly Christian thought or practice. Moreover, as Andrew Chandler states in "Catholicism and Protestantism in the Second World War in Europe," we find this mutual rejection to be a not uncommon pattern on the European Left, since it has parallels in French republicanism's often vicious anti-clericalism and suspicion of religion in general, which drove French Catholicism away from the fold of democratic forces as much as other factors did (p. 272). Second, historical research on German colonialism, now more vibrant and active than ever before, legitimately stresses Christianity's close involvement with the metropole's violent exploitation of African or Asian peoples. Here scholarship and public opinion move in the same direction. As Kevin Ward writes, "the image of missionary as destroyer of local culture, as part and parcel of the imperial project and as unsustainable in a post-colonial world, has tended to persist in the popular European secular mind" (p. 86). But the historical reality was more diffuse. Not only did European Christianity slowly and painfully begin to establish a more independent relationship to imperialism and the European state, but German missionary work, though of essential importance to the nation's belated search for a colonial empire, cannot be equated only with the motif of destruction. Whereas colonial economic and labor policies, as well as Christian educational institutions, disrupted or severely injured local societies, so too did missionaries mark up successful attempts to preserve or adapt some aspects of tribal tradition and identity. The most successful case

was the German Lutheran church's efforts among the Chagga of northeast Tanganyika, where church structures were developed as much as possible in conjunction with local tribal patterns, all in an effort to create a kind of African *Volkskirche*. Although this effort related strongly to German ideas of racial identity, it is not reducible solely to racist and National Socialist influences. In such cases, but especially in later periods of the twentieth century, we see the missions' involvement not only in strategies of domination and exploitation, but also in processes whereby African peoples asserted both tribal interests and an indigenously developed Christianity that today continues to grow, often against all expectation or specialist prediction.

To return to the continent, in Hugh McLeod's interesting piece in Volume 9, "Being a Christian in the Early Twentieth Century," the companion essay to his "Being a Christian at the End of the Twentieth Century," which concludes the volume, the reader gains a strong impression of how difficult it is to measure belief and unbelief, even in an age when much historical evidence points to declining religiosity. Drawing in part on his own research, McLeod notes that Berlin may have been the most irreligious city in Europe, a function among other things of its aggressive socialist politics and its large immigrant population, cut loose from ties to local parishes and small-town or rural traditions of piety. Nonetheless, few Berliners, despite their low attendance in churches, were atheistic or agnostic, but rather manifested a pattern now widespread in post-1945 Europe, namely "believing without belonging."[4] McLeod uses another term, borrowing from an Anglican bishop, who spoke of a "diffusive Christianity" (p. 22) in which people rarely attended church but thoroughly identified as Christians. One could argue that the upshot of McLeod's discussion, as well as of many of the other contributions, is that in Germany and elsewhere, patterns of irreligiosity could be attributed to factors others than, or to the side of, unbelief. At the same time, the obverse is true, and strong church attendance, to take one of the most accessible proxy measures, could also be evidence of strong loyalty to the state or monarchy, a function of family and local tradition, or many other factors. It requires careful contextualization and rigorous research to assess the true meaning of evidence that argues for a substantial decline of religious belief in the twentieth century, just as it is difficult to assess evidence for substantial piety in the previous century.

Such complexities are compounded by urban-rural differences. Berlin's low rates of church attendance--manifested in, but perhaps partly also sharpened by, the very low number of churches per capita--was a more exaggerated example of a broadly European disparity between the pious countryside and non-churchgoing cities. But the difference was never absolute. Many rural areas also showed evidence of people who were believers but who foreswore doctrine and attended church only on key annual holidays. Apparently, such patterns held in parts of the Latin American countryside as well, where rural populations were strongly Catholic but attended mass only infrequently. Martin Conway ("The Christian Churches and Politics in Europe, 1918-1939") discusses evidence showing that urban Europe had many largely dechristianized urban centers (Madrid and Barcelona are examples) but also industrial centers in western Germany and the Netherlands where important confessional associations were active and influential (p. 155). The urban-rural difference becomes even muddier if we take notice of the strong pattern of conversions among highly urbanized and educated European intellectuals, often writers, poets, or artists. Among the more prominent here were the novelist, journalist, and public intellectual G. K. Chesterton in England (from Anglicanism to Anglo-Catholicism and then Catholicism) and the philosopher Jacques Maritain in France (to Catholicism). Although such individual conversions did little to alter the larger sociology of be-

lief, they did much to influence cultural discourse since such intellectuals were among the best and brightest their respective societies had to offer.

Gender and class differences also give rise to rather jagged patterns. Historians often argued that the narrative of growing unbelief was particularly applicable to the male population, with male industrial workers, increasingly drawn by socialist politics, as the most extreme case. Theologians argued in an analogous manner, but they emphasized different factors. Citing the influence (and misappropriation) of Friedrich Schleiermacher's ideas, Paul Tillich once said that "when religion was preached as feeling, the male section of the German congregations stopped going to church."[5] The "feminization" of the church, especially in Catholic Europe, evident in everything from pilgrimages (a nineteenth-century growth industry) to mission work, was a correlate. Even so, the weight of the evidence related in these volumes, from Europe to the South Pacific (Katharine Massam, "Christian Churches in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific, 1914-1970"), reminds us that men still played the dominant role in church lay administration and in Christian proclamation through pastoral work and preaching until relatively late into the twentieth century. And in Europe the 1960s decline in church attendance, which was unprecedented in comparison to earlier periods not only because of its scope but also because it affected *all* social classes, could be seen among ***both*** men and women, and often for the same reasons even when certain changes, such as the sexual revolution and increasing work outside the home, were specific to women (Hugh McLeod, "The Crisis of Christianity in the West: Entering a post-Christian Era?" pp. 329, 338). But this is not to imply that the churches were immune to new secular understandings of sexuality and intimate relations, thereby driving women away. In fact, the church did respond, often positively and creatively, even when the picture as a whole was one of "diffuse, divisive and slow" engagement (Adrian Thatcher, "Marriage and the Family," p. 534).

In the piece mentioned in the previous paragraph, McLeod also raises the interesting question of the nature of belief in Europe at the end of the twentieth century. He points out that the question of whether Europe is "post-Christian" is very much a matter of perspective (p. 340). Given the patterns of institutional and membership declines noted throughout the volume, McLeod nonetheless notes that the great majority of Europeans claim to be Christian. Whereas such a claim may refer only to a nominal Christianity, the public role of the churches is still great, and German specialists will note that Germany as well as Italy, Spain, and the Scandinavian countries continue the church tax system. American scholars working abroad who have placed their children in Italian public schools, as I once did, know that state schools still teach religion from a confessional standpoint, as do most German states, in contrast to other European countries where such instruction is neutral or oriented more to a "world-religions" approach. Nonetheless, the presence of "religion," as both belief and academic subject, remains strong even here, a primary conduit of "secular" cultural transmission. Moreover, the churches maintain an important profile in public debate and in institutions of public welfare, as they do in questions of immigration and political asylum. Politicians continue to invoke religious belief, sometimes truthfully, even as they criticize an allegedly American tendency to interpret politics in eschatological or "dispensationalist" terms. No German specialist is unaware of the tremendous role played by the churches in East German social protest preceding the fall of the Wall and the dissolution of Communism. To argue Europe has entered a "post-Christian" era is premature, according to McLeod, who nonetheless cautions that recent institutional weaknesses, if left unchecked, will mean tough times for the Christian churches, which face challenges from the growth of non-Christian religions, the continued

decline of churchgoing and withering adherence to Christian practice, the growing number of professed atheists and agnostics (who, it might be noted, often talk about God in public culture more than believers do!), and the shift in legislation indexing a pluralist rather than explicitly Christian society.

The overall impression, in this and the previous volume, is that Christianity in the last two centuries entered a period of extraordinary growth and dynamism when considered in its global ambit, and that Christianity in Europe, though weakened, operated independently and actively well beyond the limits of the residual through most of the late modern period. It may very well be that the recent "religious turn" in modern European historiography, if it is indeed occurring, is in part the recovery of a body of historical evidence too hastily shunted aside by decades of narrowly focused secularist scholarship and the ideological exigencies that often drove it. These volumes offer a rich compendium of background knowledge to facilitate that recovery.

Notes

[1]. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 121-127.

[2]. A recent exception is Matthew Hockenos, *A Church Divided: German Protestants Confront the Nazi Past* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), which, however, also reinforces the point since it discusses Barth with respect to his anti-Nazi resistance and his role in the German churches' memory of the Holocaust.

[3]. Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995).

[4]. Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

[5]. Paul Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought: From its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism* (New York: Touchstone, 1968), 393.

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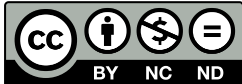
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