
The predecessor of these two volumes is the seven volume ‘A People's History of Christianity’ by the same publisher. Obviously, then, a lot of the material in the original seven volumes has been either condensed or left aside. But that is to be expected in a ‘student edition’ which aims not at absolute completeness but at a general overview, which these two books accomplish magnificently.

Indeed, the last two volume history of Christianity to appear which impressed was that of Kurt Aland, and that was in 1980 (the German edition). Thirty five years is a very long time to wait for a concise and yet superior history to be written (leaving aside, for the moment, Diarmaid MacCulloch's amazing one volume history of the Reformation and one volume history of the Church).

Yet Aland's history (along with MacCulloch's and most of the others with which I have more than a passing familiarity) is from the point of view of the elite. This history, from the point of view of the people, is unique and for that reason alone absolutely essential.

Janz has assembled a team of contributors who clearly know their areas very, very well and who are more than competent to describe the history of the Church. The Publisher provides, on their website, the entire table of contents and the list of contributors as well as the opening chapters. To see these, readers are encouraged to visit these web pages:


A quick trip to those web addresses will convince potential perusers of the value of these volumes. Naturally, it would be simple to criticize the editor or authors for leaving out material of special
interest to various specialist readers, but it's useful at this point to remind ourselves of two facts: first, this is meant to appeal to and instruct and be useful to a very wide audience (of students) and second, the act of distilling complex and complicated material to its essence so as to simultaneously retain the core and yet also retain the significance of less central items is incredibly difficult. Anyone who has attempted it knows exactly how hard it is and anyone who hasn't should give it a try.

So, there are certainly drawbacks to such contractions but in all the books in hand avoid the worst of them and as a consequence provide the interested reader/student with a virtual mountain of information concerning the Church and how those who were members of it lived their lives from the beginning to, for all intents and purposes, the present.

Rather than extract portions of the volume – since folk can visit the aforementioned links and read extracts of the opening parts – I will instead move immediately to technical observations:

First- the volumes are nicely produced. The font is very nice and the illustrations are uniformly clear. The sidebars are good and the 'extra reading' bibliographies at the end of chapters are very up to date.

Second- the contributors are, again, excellently chosen. Each is an expert.

And now, to the criticisms (which are few and which should be taken only as my own personal inclinations rather than as an indictment of the publisher, editor, or contributors).

First- Chapter 11 of Volume Two, titled **Existential Ritualizing in Postmodern Sweden** is, to be perfectly blunt, bizarre. Not in and of itself, but as a contribution to a volume of this sort. It is, instead of being suitable for this collection, more suited, in my view, to a Journal. What the specificity of such an essay has to do with the broader sweep of Christian history is difficult to discern and it is here, and here alone, that I think the editor has failed in terms of extraction and distillation. It seems to me that there is a boatload of material more intrinsically useful.

Second- there is too little of the Church outside of Europe and the West. What of the development of Christianity in Asia? Or the Island Nations? Or the Orthodox of the East? More on these needs to be included even in a extract so that Westerners are robbed of the impression that they are the Church and the Church is Western in dress, style, outlook, and disposition. A People's History must, it seems to me, of necessity, be a history of all the peoples of Christendom.

Third- There are insufficient voices from Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia included in the various bibliographies. Where are the Germans? The Swiss? The French? The Japanese? The Nigerian? These nations produce brilliant Church historians but the bibliographic references virtually ignore them. As a consequence of this and the second point above, this work runs the risk of being Americano-centric in the extreme.
Yet these two books should be assigned to any course on Church History—whether as the primary text for a course designed to look at the Church throughout its history or in a specialized course on, for instance, the Reformation. They are excellent. They are not, however, perfect. But what book is?

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