

The New Westminster Dictionary of Church History

Robert Benedetto, ed. *The New Westminster Dictionary of Church History*. Vol. 1: *The Early, Medieval and Reformation Years*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008. 691 pp. \$59.95. Hardcover. ISBN: 9780664224165.

The *New Westminster Dictionary of Church History* (NWDCH) is the first of an intended two-volume set, and is edited by Robert Benedetto, the Director of the Flora Lamson Hewlett Library of the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California. Associate editors are responsible for specific time periods and include James O. Duke (modern), Carter Lindberg (Reformation), Christopher Ocker (medieval), and Rebecca H. Weaver (early).

This volume updates the earlier *Westminster Dictionary of Church History*, published in 1971 and edited by Jerald Brauer of the University of Chicago. The original edition covered the expanse of church history in a single volume and had been primarily written with an American audience of pastors, scholars, and students in mind. The stated editorial intent for the new edition is to include more current scholarship in the field of patristics and to enhance the coverage of both Eastern Orthodoxy and the spread of global Christianity. Contributors to this edition are to better reflect the breadth of the modern church internationally, and to include articles by and about women and people of color.

So, how do the editors do with these goals? Many of the contributors hold significant posts in church history and related fields and are well-recognized for their expertise. There is diverse representation across denominations. It seems that the intended audience is likely much the same (pastors, scholars, and students), but this volume should be able to expand the scope of its readership on the virtue of a more varied contributor base.

The selection of women scholars *is* greater in this edition (representing a little more than 20 percent of the authors and more than three times the number from the earlier work). New articles that reflect a more global perspective include “Christianity in T’ang and Yuan China,” “Ethiopian Christianity,” articles on reformation movements in countries throughout Europe, a considerable number of articles on Eastern Christianity, and a variety of articles on individuals who served as missionaries, preachers, and theologians throughout the world. There is a significant increase in the number of international contributions—from about 3 percent to the current 22 percent, if one considers this solely from the institutions represented. A number of scholars affiliated with American schools may also represent international expertise, which would bring the edition in line with its stated goal. The majority of international contributors in this first volume are located in Europe or Canada, however, with no representation from a Latin American institution and only one contributor from an institution in Asia. Perhaps as the second volume is underway, the global authorship might continue to be enhanced.

As with the earlier edition, the articles are designed to provide an introduction to the subject and are not intended to be exhaustive. Westminster John Knox Press has created additional dictionaries that support some related subject areas, such as *The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (2005) and *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship* (2002). The first volume of NWDCH includes 1,419 articles by 203 contributors. New to this edition, articles are signed and include short bibliographies (the earlier edition had a few bibliographies but now this is a consistent feature throughout the work and quite helpful). The layout and font size are significantly easier to read, and new indices for the articles and for the abbreviations commonly cited are included at the front. See references are generally added when a named person or event might be found in more than one location,

although, as seen below, the consistency in indexing of some articles can be a little complicated. Most articles are relatively concise—a few paragraphs per topic is common. Longer articles on major figures in the church, such as “Augustine of Hippo” and “Luther, Martin” average just over a page. While the typical bibliography is quite brief, most contain at least some recent resource (generally written in the past fifteen years), and these notes provide excellent sources for further bibliographic and collection development work.

More than half of the articles are about important individuals in the church and in government throughout these periods of history. Articles on church councils are located by the name of the council, such as “Nicaea, First Council of” as well as under “Councils, Later Middle Ages.” There is a longer overview article on the “Crusades” as well as additional articles (which are see referenced at the end of the article) for the “Baltic Crusade,” “Children’s Crusade,” “First Crusade,” and “Fourth Crusade.” The *NWDCH* includes a variety of topics that impact the culture of the life of the church, such as art, with a sampling that include the artists “Leonardo da Vinci,” “Michelangelo Buonarroti,” and “Raphael,” as well as articles on “Art in Early Christianity,” “Art, Reformation,” and “Crucifixion in Art in the Orthodox Church.” In keeping with the inclusion of more articles on Eastern Christianity, there are lengthier articles on “Icon” and “Iconography” as well. Several articles of importance to church musicianship include those on “Liturgical Music,” “Chant” (and “Gregorian Chant”), “Hymns, Early Christian,” and “Reformation Music” as well as those highlighting the work of musicians such as “Tallis, Thomas.”

Recognizing that no single volume can include all of the leaders and historic documents of the church, I did find myself surprised, however, by not being able to locate an article on the Reformed theologian and pastor Theodore Beza (included in the earlier edition). There are articles that mention him, such as “Calvinism,” “Poissy, Colloquy of,” and “Nîmes, Synod of,” but no lengthier article describing his contributions to the Reformation or of his scholarly writings.

Certainly there are other resources that cover this time period. Two worth mentioning are *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Third Edition, Revised (Cross and Livingstone, 2005) and *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Revised Edition (Douglas, 1978). In both instances, these dictionaries cover the span of Christian history in one volume. The *Oxford Dictionary* is more comprehensive and the articles are aimed at a more scholarly audience; bibliographies are lengthier and some articles are more akin to short bibliographic essays. Contributors to this volume are largely from the United Kingdom with some international representation. *The New International Dictionary* has articles of similar length and tone to the *NWDCH* but does not consistently include bibliographies and is now more than thirty years old. The authorship, while still significantly comprised of contributors from the United Kingdom and North America, manages to include a more diverse representation of countries than either *NWDCH* or the *Oxford* volume.

Overall, the breadth of article coverage and scholarship is excellent, and I can imagine turning to and recommending this resource regularly. *The New Westminster Dictionary of Church History* would be a fine addition to the library collections of theological schools; it would also be an excellent purchase for the pastor or student who might be building a personal library collection. As dictionaries go, the price is significantly more affordable than many—a fact which is greatly appreciated and which might enable it to be included on syllabi as a recommended resource as well. I warmly commend it to you!

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