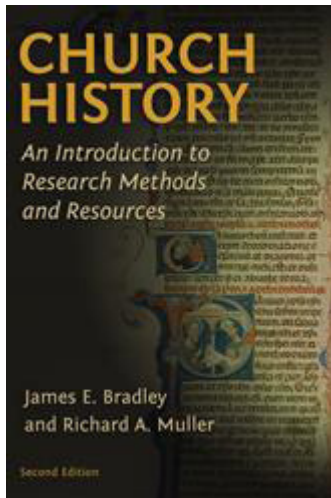


Church History: An Introduction to Research Methods and Resources

James E. Bradley and Richard A. Muller. *Church History: An Introduction to Research Methods and Resources*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016. Second edition. 293 pp. \$30. ISBN: 9780802874054.



With the 1995 release of *Church History: An Introduction to Research Methods and Resources*, James E. Bradley (of Fuller Theological Seminary) and Richard A. Muller (of Calvin Theological Seminary) set out to provide a comprehensive introduction to the academic study of church history. The resulting text was highly regarded; reviews show that the book was well received for its thorough discussion of historiographic methods and its treatment of bibliographic resources, and the work was commended as a reference for both emerging and veteran scholars. In 2016, the authors published a second edition, and revisions naturally invite questions: Why is a new edition necessary, and to what extent must the work be revised? And does the endeavor succeed? Although there are some shortcomings in the second edition, it is an important and worthy successor to the earlier work.

The text's stated audience is doctoral students beginning research in church history and other historically oriented theological disciplines. Clearly, much of the work's insights come from the authors' experience in teaching and mentoring novice academics, and the work offers emerging church historians guidance throughout the full lifespan of a scholarly career. Through discussing critical methodologies and the interrelationship of church history with other disciplines both theological and secular, Bradley and Muller respond to concerns about objectivity, bias, and critical rigor. The book's emphasis is clear: the authors seek to prepare professional scholars. But this concern is valuable for students at any level of theological education, as issues regarding scholarly rigor and personal bias extend beyond just students in the beginning stages of doctoral study.

The work consists of three parts: first, the text in six chapters, which address the historiography, methodology, and the growth of church history as an academic discipline (chapters 1-2), matters of strategy and resources for study (chapters 3-4), and the scholarly practices of research, writing, teaching, and publishing (chapters 5-6); then, a substantial and extensive bibliography which presents sources organized by era (e.g., "Early Church" or "Medieval and Renaissance") and resource type (e.g., journals, dictionaries, or dissertations); and finally, an appendix which details a variety of databases and electronic resources, ending with attention to microform materials. Given the limitations of the work, resource listings are naturally selective. This is not intended as a complete register of all resources. Rather, the lists convey what the authors consider essential texts or significant introductory works; ongoing and deepening research will naturally lead to other resources. The work lacks an index, a puzzling omission for a work about scholarly information.

The second edition introduces additional material to the historiography and methodology discussion, such as a new discussion of "The Distinction and Interrelationship of Intellectual, Political and Social History" (30-31). The addition of a section on World Christianity in the bibliography reflects the authors' increased attention to the development of indigenous Christian communities. Otherwise, much of the work on methodology and approach has remained stable between editions. The bibliography has been thoroughly updated with (per the authors) "about 450 titles of reference works, research tools, and sources, most published since 1995" (xii). The bibliography is extensive; at almost one-hundred pages, it occupies one-third of the book. More important to this reviewer, however, is the revision's attention to technology and online resources. The first edition was released in the mid-1990s and displays an awareness of the major developments in information sources and research tools that were already in motion. In 1995, though, "the Internet"

was still a thing largely in quotation marks for most people, and the first edition's treatment of electronic resources wrestled with things like CD-ROMs, Telnet, and Dialog. (For some librarians, such technology might invoke nostalgia; for others, it might induce nausea.) Ultimately, any instruction in modern research strategies and resources is dead in the water without meaningful integration of modern online or digital information sources. Even though the first edition discussed far more than just information sources, a not-inconsequential portion of the work's original text and resources is now obsolete. If Bradley and Muller's work — valuable for its historiographic and methodological contents — had any future, this issue had to be addressed.

Much of this is largely resolved in the second edition. The technological changes that were on the horizon in 1995 are now part of the modern research landscape and have been integrated into the text's second edition. Updates and revisions occur throughout the text and are not confined to a single section. The discussion of secondary sources (chapter 3) includes enhanced attention to databases, networks, and online libraries. The material on primary source research (chapter 4) includes discussion of Internet databases. The first edition's appendix has been thoroughly updated and now addresses modern scholarly databases, both commercial and academic. Throughout the text, references to resources (e.g., journals, series, monographs, etc.) are accompanied by URLs where appropriate. In this respect, the revision is thorough and successful in its attention to the proliferation of electronic resources and their impact on the modern scholarly ecosystem. It shows the amount of work given to the task of updating this text.

There are some areas, however, where further discussion would have been welcome in the revision. Much has happened in libraries and information technology during the twenty-one years between the two editions of this work, and the first edition was the product of a different era. Traces of this era can be found in the book, with puzzling discussions on "Research with Computers" and "Word Processing the Dissertation" (156-160). Although these sections contain mostly current material and are meant to provide helpful counsel, separating out this kind of material can seem anachronistic. (A book that names and discusses particular word processing programs has probably shortened its shelf life considerably.)

There is a conservatism in the authors' approach to information technology and research; though they have caught up to present realities, emerging issues could have received more attention. For example, the work addresses the distinction between surface web and deep web sources, and mentions open access resources (especially digitized primary texts), but nowhere is there attention to the important debate surrounding open access publishing and secondary literature (whether journals or books). Both emerging and veteran scholars need to engage with this issue. Similarly, there is no discussion of the use of social media (and its attendant promise and perils) for primary and secondary sources in historical and social research. This material would be more valuable and forward-oriented than advice on computers and word processing.

Furthermore, a fair amount of the resources provided in the work provide database, vendor, or publisher details such as names, ownership, and URLs, which are a proverbial moving target. Given their ephemeral nature, such information changes easily and quickly. For example, references to the *ATLA Catholic Periodical and Literature Index*[®] (*ATLA CPLP*[®]) are essentially obsolete in 2018 given the database's merger with *ATLASerials PLUS*[™] (*ATLAS PLUS*[™]). On a related note, the Appendix incorrectly asserts that the *ATLA Religion Database*[®] (*ATLA RDB*[®]) and *ATLASerials*[®] (*ATLAS*[®]) are "accessible only through Association libraries" (272). Individually, these are little details, but as they accumulate they can gnaw at a work's longevity. Such problems are certainly expected in a work of this nature, but there are ways to help future-proof the work, through online errata, appendices, or updates. This, however, is a publishing-level issue, and not the responsibility of the authors. Finally, at the broader theoretical level, it is clear from the Acknowledgements that librarians assisted the authors, but some of the concerns identified here raise the legitimate question of whether a volume on research and resources might have involved a librarian at a more substantial or authorial role.

These are important concerns that could not be ignored and which would merit attention in a subsequent revision, but this is nonetheless a significant and welcome new edition of a valuable text. Bradley and Muller are to be lauded for their undertaking and for providing new life to an important work. Its potential readership is wide; *Church History: An Introduction to Research Methods and Resources* has much to offer students and scholars at various levels of study. Furthermore, the bibliography and resources in the work are not simply valuable for church historians, they are invaluable for librarians involved in collection development as well as information literacy instruction. The material on methods and approaches is particularly interesting and relevant to information literacy, and the second chapter's discussion of the

relationship of primary, secondary, and tertiary sources is particularly commendable in this regard. As a work written to introduce historical research in the history of Christianity as a lifelong scholarly vocation, there is much in this text that can accompany and shape scholars at every stage of their career. Any academic library (undergraduate or graduate) with collections in theology and religious studies would benefit from the acquisition of this text.

James Estes
Wesley Theological Seminary
Washington, DC