

The Cambridge Companion to American Protestantism. Edited by Jason E. Vickers and Jennifer Woodruff Tait. Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2022. xii + 523 pp. \$39.99 paper.

In the 1980s, American religious history had achieved something of a plateau. Led by Sydney Ahlstrom's *A Religious History of the American People* (1972) and Martin E. Marty's *Pilgrims in Their Own Land* (1984), the field of study turned away from its earlier emphasis on church history (with a focus on the growth of denominational families) toward the larger question of what difference the religions of Americans made for the life and culture when it came to politics, society, thought, and faith. Both Ahlstrom and Marty provided strong interpretations to the histories they narrated. For Ahlstrom, puritanism and its many half-lives over 350 years motivated American faith. For Marty, the frame was ironic and the narrative was one of unintended consequences for ever since the pilgrims religious Americans experienced the sensation of not quite belonging in a land that they were actually free to claim as their own—finding themselves always surrounded by religious others. Both these master narratives, which centered the meaning of American religion in early American Protestantism brought forward, came to be challenged by scholars who turned to later eras in the historical record and to narratives of dissent as opposed to consensus, such as in Nathan Hatch's *The Democratization of American Christianity*, George Marsden's *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, Albert J. Raboteau's *Slave Religion*, and John Butler's *Awash in a Sea of Faith*. The turn toward dissension and diversity funded an astonishingly diverse set of monographs. What then can be said about American Protestantism as the largest expression of American faith and its outsized impact on American culture after the explosion of books and interpretations produced in the last four decades? That is the question to which the *Cambridge Companion to American Protestantism* is addressed.

The *Companion* is explicitly geared toward providing undergraduates and graduate students a state of current knowledge and an introduction to what is known about American Protestantism from its beginnings and to the present. As such, the companion is divided into three major sections. The first narrates American Protestantism in four chronological epochs, and the third focuses on the history of eight theological traditions that have produced churches in America from European transplants to American originals up to and including Pentecostalism, each unfolding chronologically. The second section meanwhile explores a range of “religion and” topics, such as education, temperance, politics and governance, and healing.

The first and the third sections are uniformly well executed. Indeed, before a student or even a seasoned scholar begins a new research paper or project, the *Companion* will serve as a reliable guide to chronology, major arguments, divisions and resolutions, and to the theologies and figures that it otherwise takes years of study to internalize. The essays in each section are accompanied by extensive notes that allow readers to see the underlying evidence the scholars have used, a serious improvement over many encyclopedia and dictionaries with abbreviated lists “for further reading.” Though the contributors assembled by editors Jason Vickers and Jennifer Woodruff Tait tend toward the evangelical wing of historians of American religion, the authors' arguments are balanced in their treatment of the wide range of Protestant traditions. The evidence

the authors draw upon is likewise representative of contemporary scholarship. On the other hand, the subject matter of all the chapters focuses on people who have occupied Protestant churches and their vicinities, and not the broader and more amorphous category of American religion.

It is in the second section of the companion where the limitations and idiosyncrasies of the volume emerge. Several of the chapters are clear models for how one might elaborate a “religion and _____” history by defining terms effectively and delimiting important turns or themes within an essay. Many of the best of these, from Jason Vickers on “Bible, Doctrine, and Theology” to Jennifer Woodruff Tait on “Temperance,” and from Heather Vacek on “Mental Illness” to Dennis Dickerson on “American Protestants on Race” are outstanding in part because the authors have previously written one or more books on their respective topics. Some other essays attempt to do too much or run out of print before they have covered all the territory their titles promise will be included. Even here, however, the essays are informative and their incompleteness instructive to readers engaged in their own interpretive work of how to (and not to) narrate a fair, focused, and comprehensive story. The lesson is an old one: often, less is more.

The *Companion* is a welcome addition to libraries and deserves a wide use in teaching and the pursuit of independent scholarship. Its concentration on the history of churched people is not a return to old-fashioned providential church history, but rather a useful turn toward the bodies, ideas, and groups where the largest number of people have lived out their faith throughout American history.

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***Dr Williams’s Trust and Library: A History.* By Alan Argent.
Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 2022. xx + 335 pp. \$115.00
cloth; \$29.95 ebook.**

Instigated by the tercentenary of its benefactor’s death, Alan Argent’s history of Dr Williams’s Trust and Library is a full and detailed account of the activities and leading persons involved in the over-300-year history of this philanthropic organization. The book follows a linear chronology, with information on the main elements of the Trust’s charitable work found in each chapter and carried through to the present day. Dr. Argent’s work is based on a thorough examination of Dr Williams’s Trust Archives; Dr Williams’s Library archival, book, and portrait collections; and several archival collections elsewhere. It tells an important and fascinating story about the impact and legacy of these institutions from the early eighteenth to the early twenty-first century.

The book begins with a brief biographical sketch of the founder, Daniel Williams. Born in the Welsh border town of Wrexham, Williams began preaching at a young age. In the mid-1660s, he accepted a position as a personal chaplain in Ireland and there became connected with Irish Presbyterianism and Independency. After over