

INTRODUCTION

If one thing is clear about our guild, it is surely that the history of Christianity is understood quite differently today than it was a generation or so ago. Then, it was heavily theological and entailed a predilection for the Protestant story. That, in turn, meant a predilection for the time after 1500 and, as far as the North American story was concerned, a predilection for New England and Puritan divines. Nowadays, the picture has become more complex as well as richer. American “religious history” encompasses the Catholic and Jewish traditions, while the European narrative has been enriched by the inclusion of women and the use of new methodologies.

Indeed, all sorts of conceptual and methodological questions have been raised about the study of the history of Christianity. The social history of the Christian past has received vigorous attention, as a result of which intellectual (theological) and institutional history have taken a back seat. Thematically, recent historiography has demonstrated an awareness that the study of Christian history in the past had the tendency to ignore a part of the story—women, outsiders, heretics—and that a richer picture of Christian history emerges by a more inclusive approach.

In 2000 the editors of *Church History* received a grant from the Louisville Institute to organize a conference of the journal’s editorial board members in order to address these and other aspects of our common work. The theme was “the study of the history of Christianity at the turn of the twenty-first century,” and the aim was to give the editors of the journal a sense of how *Church History* might improve its service to the profession and to the members of the American Society of Church History. We were aware, of course, that the question of why and how to do “church history” is not at all new, especially if its setting is outside seminaries and the question is examined of what the “church” in church history means. Nonetheless, the notion was that a renewed probing would serve the journal and the profession well indeed.

This issue of *Church History* is the outgrowth of this conference, at which the papers were given by the members of the journal’s editorial board and several junior colleagues. Unfortunately, some of the presentations constituted “works-in-progress” that will need refinement before eventual publication. Also, the much-lamented death of Heiko Oberman deprived us of a contribution dealing with the Reformation

of the sixteenth century. Nonetheless, the essays included in this issue cover a wide span of the history of Christianity and should prove to be most informative of trends and developments in our field of study.

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For the editors