

[MJTM 22 (2020–2021)]

#### BOOK REVIEW

Ian Hugh Clary. *Reformed Evangelicalism and the Search for a Usable Past: The Historiography of Arnold Dallimore, Pastor-Historian*. Reformed Historical Theology 61. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020. 266 pp. Hbk. ISBN 978-3-5255-6724-1. \$179.00.

It is not likely that many have heard of Arnold Dallimore. For those who are aware of this author, it will likely be in connection to his monumental two-volume work on George Whitefield (*George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth-Century Revival*. 2 vols. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1970–1980). But who is the author behind these works? And how do these works fit into the greater debate surrounding evangelical historiography in the twentieth century? These are the questions that this monograph aims to answer.

Following an introduction and overview in Chapter 1, Clary uses Chapter 2 to set the stage for the debate over how evangelicals should write history. The two main positions are set out as follows:

One, illustrated by Murray, argues that Christians must not adhere to the canons of academic neutrality to faithfully do history. The other, illustrated by Trueman, maintains that faithfulness to Christianity is not forfeited by ‘objective’ historiography (24).

After surveying the history of this debate, Clary concludes by arguing that historians should “be aware of their audience and write their history accordingly” (57). This means that at times, a historian can write history from a providential perspective when it is done for the edification of believers, and at other times, one can write history according to the standards of secular scholarship in service of the academy.

In Chapter 3, Clary offers a biographical sketch of the life and

ministry of Arnold Dallimore. Clary details the early years of Dallimore, his education at Toronto Baptist Seminary, his work as a pastor, the beginning and continuation of his ministry as a historian, and concludes with his final years.

The fourth chapter is what Clary claims to be “the most important to the thesis of this study” (20). Here, Clary surveys and analyzes the historical method used by Dallimore in his works on Whitefield and seeks to determine if they are hagiography, as they are often labelled. However, through his analysis, Clary defends Dallimore against the charge of writing hagiography although Dallimore explicitly wrote the biographies for the sake of encouraging believers and “with the express conviction that twentieth-century evangelicalism has something to learn from Whitefield” (165).

Chapters 5 and 6 deal with other less popular studies by Dallimore. Chapter 5 focuses on Dallimore’s works on Edward Irving and Charles Spurgeon while Chapter 6 centers on his works on Charles Wesley and Susanna Wesley. Clary shows how Dallimore’s theological biases made his work on Irving unfairly anachronistic, leading him to write a polemically charged work rather than a historically reliable one. The other three studies are shown to be mostly reliable, albeit basic, life stories of the respective people. Yet throughout all of Dallimore’s works, Clary mentions that “there is a discernable interpretive bias that regularly manifests itself, namely Dallimore’s assumptions about the problems of the charismatic movement” (234).

Chapter 7 serves as the conclusion to the book. Clary reflects on the lessons that the current historian can learn from the life and ministry of Dallimore. While there are warnings about letting one’s theology cloud one’s historical judgement, there are also encouragements about the validity and importance of the study of history for the edification of the church.

In review, two main comments come to mind. First, this monograph is a part of the Reformed Historical Theology series but its contents are much more focused on biography and historiography than it is on theology. There are theological aspects to the work, namely those instances in which Clary focuses on the theology of select individuals; however, this theological component

fits within the greater focus of Clary on the historical method and reliability of Dallimore. Thus, what the reader will find in *Reformed Evangelicalism* is an interesting and stimulating study on historiography rather than the type of historical theological work typically represented in the Reformed Historical Theology series.

Second, the debate that Clary engages with in this work is really an insider discussion for those curious about how history and Christian faith can work together. The debate centers on “evangelicals in the twentieth century” (25); it is not focused on historiography in the twentieth century more generally. One will not read of the ways the academy wrestled with postmodern philosophy and critical theory but only of how evangelicals questioned whether they should write for the academy and the church or the church alone. If one is looking for a study on the former, I would recommend the work of Elizabeth A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). These two works serve different purposes, and for a fuller perspective of historiography in the twentieth century, both works can be read alongside each other.

As for the readership, this monograph will appeal to several different audiences. For one, it will be of interest to those who want to learn about the life and writings of the pastor-historian Arnold Dallimore and the Canadian Baptist history of which he was a part. It will also appeal to those interested in the topic of historiography and the evangelical debate in the twentieth century. Practically speaking, it is also written in such a way that can help guide historians wrestling with the question of how their own faith and historical scholarship might be compatible.

Reading about a historian involved in the Canadian context is a welcome change. Along with reading about places like London, England, one can also find in this monograph Ontario’s small towns like Essex and Cottam. Such places are not likely to be spoken of in countries outside of Canada, yet this monograph helpfully places a Canadian pastor from such small towns into a larger discussion of evangelical historiography. In this way, Clary, a native of Canada, has done the church and academy a great service with this work. Being beautifully written, well

researched, and fairly balanced, this monograph is a delight to read. It not only fills a lacuna in historical biography but also makes important strides in how evangelicals can understand their own work and ministry as historians. Without question, this work is to be highly recommended and widely read.

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