
This collection of essays comprises papers delivered at the meetings of the Ecclesiastical History Society in 2010–2011, and constitutes the 48th volume of the annually published series Studies in Church History. In accordance with the Society’s aims, the contributions to this collection “foster the study of ecclesiastical history viewed in a wide historical context and broad inter-disciplinary relationship.” The volume is filled with 33 insightful papers exploring a vast range of topics, from the epistolary formulas of ancient and early medieval Christian letters to the spirituality of contemporary American evangelical fiction. The broad underlying theme of the volume is the dynamic relationship between Christianity and culture. The majority of the papers draw attention to British literary texts that can serve as evidence for the considerable influence of Christianity on the literary and intellectual history of the West.

Even though the articles range widely, it is possible to discern certain threads and topics that recur throughout the volume. One of them is the emergence of new literary genres as a result of the encounters of Christianity and secular culture. In the opening essay, Renie Choy discusses the inclusion of intercessory prayer formulas in the Latin Christian letter-writing of late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages. As Choy argues, the Christian innovation that occurred in the classical rhetoric tradition of epistolary formulas enabled the writer and the addressee of the letter to enrich the customary rhetorical expression of friendship with an articulation of the active potential of prayer. Eamon Duffy in his paper on Thomas More’s Confitutation of Tyndale’s Answer (1532–1533) discusses how the treatise, which has been often mistakenly read as a literary failure, is in fact an adaptation of a Latin argumentative form that More deemed most suitable for his purpose of refuting heresy. Duffy suggests that More’s text should be read as a conscious polemical construction that employs the technique of learned debate, referring at length to the arguments of the opponents and disproving them one by one. In another intriguing paper Caroline Watkinson examines eighteenth-century travel writing, focusing on its potential for putting into question the dominant anti-Catholic ideology of the period. Watkinson shows
how travel writers who otherwise professed anti-Catholicism would offer surprisingly sympathetic portrayal of Catholic nuns when describing exiled English convents in France. Travel writing could be therefore seen as a genre with a considerable potential of challenging certain stereotypes and creating space for possible cultural exchange.

As the editors of the volume state in the introduction, the particular focus of the collection is the nineteenth century English novel, viewed “both as field of conflict between Protestants and Catholics and as evidence of a more tolerant religious atmosphere.” Several papers discuss the historical importance of this genre for understanding the relationship between Christianity and the nineteenth-century culture and society. Benjamin L. Fischer focuses on the development of the mission narrative as an evangelical alternative to the secular prose fiction. Such a literary form, according to Fischer, provided readers with both a compelling story and an appropriate spiritual content. Thus it could meet the standards of the Evangelicals who viewed the reading of secular novels as too distracting from spiritual life. In another interesting article Mark Smith investigates the phenomenon of the Waldensian historical fiction that formed part of the philanthropic campaign aimed at helping the Alpine Waldensians. Smith argues that such campaigning novels should be approached from the perspective of international Protestantism rather than anti-Catholicism of the period. In the paper that follows, John Wolffe analyses the portrayal of Jesuits in the nineteenth-century novel. He challenges the thesis that anti-Jesuitism present in British fiction was a manifestation of anti-Catholicism. Wolffe argues, supporting his point with numerous textual examples, that the novels presenting Jesuits as archetypal villains often included Catholic characters that were portrayed in a more ambivalent manner, and the authors typically discriminated between Jesuits and other Catholics.

Apart from these outstanding essays discussing the historical phenomenon of the emergence or transformation of literary genres, the volume includes several noteworthy papers devoted to particular writers and the spiritual dimension of their lives and works. John Took discusses the ecclesiology of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, Thomas N. Corns explores John Milton’s relationship with the Church of England in the context of the seventeenth-century religious politics, Andrew Sanders considers the Christian dimension of Charles Dickens’s works, David Brooks examines the question of religion and national identity in Disraeli’s *Young England* trilogy, and Judith Maltby analyses Rose Macaulay’s reflections on the Reformation, Anglicanism, and the Church of England.

Given the great diversity of the volume’s articles, probably any historian, literary scholar, and theologian investigating the interaction between Christianity and cultural production will find some particular paper of considerable interest. Probably not all the readers, though, will benefit from every essay. One thing