

REVIEW ESSAY

# Of Handbooks, Companions, and Essay Collections: Recent Multi-Authored Volumes on Calvin and Calvinism, the Genevan Reformation, and Global Protestantism

Philip Benedict

Institut d'histoire de la Réformation, University of Geneva, Geneva, Switzerland  
Email: [Philip.Benedict@unige.ch](mailto:Philip.Benedict@unige.ch)

Readers of this journal will surely have noticed the remarkable proliferation in the past few decades of “handbooks” and “companions” devoted to major – and even obscure – topics, thinkers, and actors in religious history. The simultaneous appearance in 2021 of *The Oxford Handbook of Calvin and Calvinism* and Brill’s *Companion to the Reformation in Geneva* provides an opportunity to reflect on the character and value of such volumes, the conditions of their production, and the reasons for their recent proliferation. Also discussed here for purposes of comparison will be an ambitious collection of essays of a more conventional sort: *Protestant Empires: Globalizing the Reformations*, edited by Ulinka Rublack.<sup>1</sup>

What must immediately be recognized about handbooks and companions is that they are first and foremost commercial products. Over a thousand Oxford Handbooks have been published to date across the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and law. The *Companion to the Genevan Reformation* is number 96 in Brill’s far more specialized series of “Companions to the Christian Tradition,” which the publisher describes as “handbooks and reference works on the intellectual and religious life of Europe, 500–1800.” It is no coincidence that ordering options for the Oxford Handbooks appear on the Press website under the rubric “institutional books products,” nor that I could not immediately discover there the price for the volume under review for an individual seeking to buy it. (Other bookselling websites suggest that it is \$145, although you could get it from Amazon for \$116.49 in August 2023 and \$110.01 in March 2024; the price of the Brill *Companion* is \$235.) The volumes are destined chiefly for sale to libraries, often as part of larger packages, and the business model behind them seems clear. At a time when sales of academic monographs are in free-fall, the internet has upended the ways in which both students and scholars access knowledge, and Wikipedia offers a handy introduction to everything at a tap or mouse click, works

---

<sup>1</sup>*The Oxford Handbook of Calvin and Calvinism*, eds. Bruce Gordon and Carl R. Trueman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021) [henceforward *OHCC*]; *A Companion to the Reformation in Geneva*, ed. Jon Balsarak (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2021) [henceforward *CRG*]; *Protestant Empires: Globalizing the Reformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020) [henceforward *PE*].

© The Author(s), 2024. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of American Society of Church History. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial licence (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original article is properly cited. The written permission of Cambridge University Press must be obtained prior to any commercial use.

of this sort offer libraries what seem to be must-have titles: up-to-date works-of-synthesis-like volumes on big topics promising an entree into the topic that is more authoritative than Wikipedia, can be purchased in electronic as well as print versions, and whose stand-alone chapters can be easily mined for inclusion in course packs.

Best of all from the publisher's point of view, they are books that can be produced relatively easily, rapidly and reliably, then sold for a high price. No need to wait for a single author to pull together a vast body of scholarship and source material into a coherent synthesis, a task that too often takes many more years and words than the original contract specifies, if the book is completed at all. (Legion are the tales of those who died with a drawer full of contracts for unfinished books.) All that is required for a handbook is, first, an editor with name recognition, enough imagination to devise a schema for the desired volume, and the contacts and knowledge required to line up contributors capable of writing something that roughly conforms to what they imagined; and, second, the successful recruitment of enough contributors to fill out the volume, a task facilitated by the promise in advance of guaranteed publication on a subject that the targeted author is likely to be currently researching or has previously written about. The time commitment for both editors and authors is manageable alongside other duties. Engagement in the project signals to deans or potential employers that those involved are recognized authorities in their field. Of course, delays can still arise when individual contributors take longer than asked, drop out, or furnish chapters that fall so far short of an exigent editor's vision that revision is demanded. But these are mere cracks in the road compared to the sinkholes into which individual authors may fall when faced with the challenge of a large book. So long as new topics can be conceived, a steady flow of volumes can be kept moving through the pipeline, generating a revenue stream that can compensate for a lot of specialized monographs published at a loss.

Is there a difference between a "companion" and a "handbook"? The terms themselves seem to suggest as much, just as they seem to signal a difference between both and the collectively written histories that are a longer established genre within academic publishing and also currently are multiplying. Where histories aspire to offer comprehensive treatments of a subject, one could easily imagine handbooks to be more practical guides with special features for easy reference, and companions sets of complementary essays meant to widen perspectives and offer unexpected insights on a topic. Not so, the publishers' own websites suggest. Brill's description of its *Companions to the Christian Tradition*, as has already been indicated, explicitly characterizes them as handbooks. "Written by the foremost specialists in the respective fields," it promises, "they aim to provide full balanced accounts at an advanced level, as well as synthesis of debate and the state of scholarship" – in other words, something very much like a history, too. Oxford University Press promises that "Each Oxford Handbook offers an authoritative and state-of-the-art survey of current thinking and research. Specially commissioned essays from leading international figures in the discipline give critical examination of the progress and direction of debates, providing scholars and graduate students with compelling new perspectives." The most immediately obvious difference between the handbook and the companion discussed here is their heft. *The Oxford Handbook of Calvin and Calvinism* has 39 chapters and weighs three pounds; *A Companion to the Genevan Reformation* has 20 chapters (including the Introduction) and weighs 1.8 pounds.

The editors of *The Oxford Handbook of Calvin and Calvinism*, Bruce Gordon and Carl R. Trueman, put themselves in a tricky situation when they signed on to oversee

a volume on that topic. Synthetic histories still in print offer broad overviews of the history of Calvinism. (Full disclosure: I am the author of one published in 2002 that does not yet seem to me to have been so overtaken by more recent scholarship that a revised edition is required.<sup>2</sup>) A *Cambridge Companion to John Calvin* appeared in 2004.<sup>3</sup> The five hundredth anniversary of the reformer's birth in 2009 generated a spate of good biographies, including one by Gordon himself; gave rise to numerous conference volumes and essay collections covering different aspects of his life and legacy (more disclosure: I am the co-editor of one of these); and saw the publication in both German and English of a *Calvin Handbook* with exceptionally thorough coverage of the main features of the man's life, thought, and influence.<sup>4</sup> Faced with such an ample already existing literature, much of it quite recent, what remained for another handbook to do? The editors do not shrink from the question. "Why another collection of essays on Calvin and on the theological tradition which (somewhat simplistically) bears his name?," they ask in their Introduction. "Do volumes such as this witness to nothing more than academia's need to constantly reinvent markets for its work by repackaging old material as speciously novel insight?"<sup>5</sup>

The solution they chose slyly subverts the standard goals of the Oxford Handbooks to yield a large collection of original, tightly focused essays of interest chiefly to specialists in the history of Reformed Protestantism, while at the same time fulfilling a stated goal of the editors to provide many younger scholars a prestigious venue for publication. As they explain, they judged it wisest to avoid well-worn subjects and *éminences grises* and to search instead for fresh topics and insights. Aware of their debt to more senior scholars who gave them opportunities to publish their first essays when they were young, they wanted to pay the debt forward by including contributions from Ph.D. students or recent Ph.D.s. "It is with these two strategies in mind – a broadening of the scope of Calvin studies and a desire to see a new generation of scholars take their place within the field – that we offer this volume to the reader, in the hope that it does not simply retrace well-trodden paths but opens up new vistas of intellectual exploration of the life and legacies of the great sixteenth-century Reformer."<sup>6</sup> "We have focused in particular on new directions in research and engaged our authors to explore unfamiliar and underexamined aspects of the Reformer and the diverse individuals and movements who have claimed his inheritance."<sup>7</sup>

The volume's coverage of topics is eclectic rather than encyclopedic. Roughly a third of the essays deal chiefly with Calvin himself. The remainder range across people, movements or churches conventionally labeled as "Calvinist," with no definition imposed of how that word should properly be understood, nor tracing of its changing connotations

<sup>2</sup>Philip Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), covering only the years to 1700; see also Daryl Hart, *Calvinism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), shorter but covering the period from the Enlightenment to the present as well.

<sup>3</sup>Donald K. McKim, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>4</sup>Herman J. Selderhuis, ed., *Calvin Handbuch* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008)/*The Calvin Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009). An overview of the events and publications of 2009 is provided by Christoph Strohm, "Medien, Themen und Ertrag des Calvin-Jubiläums 2009," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 102 (2011): 299–327.

<sup>5</sup>OHCC, 2–3.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., v.

across time and space. The focus is chiefly on the history of theology, although church building, piety, and Calvinism's wider implications for politics and society also receive attention. While the volume makes no effort to provide a comprehensive view of the tradition's international diffusion, it has a global reach, especially as it nears the present: the chapters treating people or developments since 1900 concern Karl Barth, Korean Presbyterianism, interest in Calvinism among Chinese and Brazilian Protestants, faith healing in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, and the "New Calvinist" current in American and British evangelicalism. This selection alone indicates the volume's eclecticism. Other individuals besides Calvin and Barth who make important appearances here are Jonathan Edwards, Friedrich Schleiermacher, William Cunningham, and Abraham Kuyper.

A few contributors chose to survey the state of their chosen question. Jesse Spohnholz's "Reformed Exiles and International Calvinism in Reformation-Era Europe" is an exercise in historical revisionism, calling into question the argument that exile encouraged tight discipline and confessional consolidation among those forced to flee *religionis causa*. The great majority of the authors, however, strive to offer new insights or information through the focused examination of a specific aspect of the broader topic announced in their title. Thus, to give just one example, Costas Gaganakis's "Calvinist Debates on History: *Historia Sacra*, *Historia Humana*" turns out to be a very illuminating essay about how just three historians of the era of the French Wars of Religion, Simon Goulart, Theodore Beza and Lancelot Voisin de La Popelinière, situate the national historical events they recount in relation to sacred, providential history. How far certain chapters stray off the beaten path of Calvin studies can be suggested by a few titles: "Calvin, Shakespeare, and Suspense"; "Angels from John Calvin to Jonathan Edwards via John Milton"; "Religion and the Republic: An Eighteenth-Century Black Calvinist Perspective" (this last being an examination of the theo-political imagination of Phyllis Wheatley and Lemuel Haynes). Preceding this miscellany is an editors' Introduction that quickly situates Calvin within the broader currents of the European Reformation, highlights a few works in English about Calvin that appeared subsequent to the publication wave of 2009 that the editors judge particularly suggestive, and previews the chapters to follow. Like each subsequent chapter, it is accompanied by a short list of suggested readings and a longer list of works cited. There is no cumulative bibliography, nor has space been devoted to directing advanced students to the key tools or source collections for research on the reformer. I particularly regretted the absence of any effort to inventory and assess the vast international outpouring of publications of 2009. There are no maps, tables, or chronologies.

If narrow in focus, the essays in this volume are of generally high quality and admirable variety. Few will read through them all, as the obligation of reviewing required me to do, but specialists in the history of any period of Reformed Protestantism who dip into the book are likely to find, as I did, chapters that provoke them to think anew about topics they know well and others that instruct them about topics they know less well. They will not find many, if any, that they are likely to extract for course use. Nor is this a volume to be recommended to those at any level looking for an introduction to the state of the question concerning major topics in Calvin studies. It is, as previously suggested, more a hefty essay collection than a handbook in any usual sense of the term. That it does not fulfill most of the stated aims of the series of which it is a part probably did not overmuch disturb its commissioning editor. It is out in a handsome format between hard covers, and the reputation of both the press and the editors, as well as the character of the previous books in the series, undoubtedly assured it good sales upon publication.

By contrast with *The Oxford Handbook of Calvin and Calvinism, A Companion to the Reformation in Geneva* feels like a missed opportunity, even though a number of its chapters are of much greater utility for students than any found in the *Oxford Handbook* and two in particular should be required reading for anybody who has ever tried to make sense of this most important of urban reformations. Where Gordon and Trueman had to figure out how to situate their volume in relation to so many other already existing histories and handbooks, the scholar recruited to edit this one, Jon Balsarak, a specialist in Calvin's theology, moved into a gaping void. All survey courses on the European Reformation devote attention to the Genevan Reformation, yet no synthetic account has appeared in English since William Monter's *Calvin's Geneva* of 1967. In the interval, two generations of research by Genevan, Belgian, Dutch, English, and especially American scholars has greatly enriched our understanding of the topic. Over the same period, the full publication of the correspondence of Theodore Beza and of the acts of the Genevan Company of Pastors to 1618, as well as the great progress made on the more recently launched projects devoted to the records of the Consistory and governing Council during Calvin's lifetime, have given scholars around the world more linear feet of new printed source material about Reformation-era Geneva than any other city of the time. The moment is thus ripe for a new synthetic history, and this is what the Brill volume promises on its back cover: a description of "the course of the Protestant Reformation in the city of Geneva from the 16th to the 18th centuries" that surveys "the most significant aspects of life in the city, examines the major theological and liturgical subjects associated with the Genevan Reformation, and describes the political, social, and cultural consequences of the Reformation for Geneva." A second, rather curious, aim mentioned in the Introduction is "to make better known to readers of English the most recent research on the varied and complex developments that characterized the Genevan Reformation" – curious because most of that research was published in English.<sup>8</sup>

Building something approximating a comprehensive history with multiple contributors is never an easy task. Inevitably, individual chapter authors will understand their charge differently, write with different questions uppermost in mind, and highlight different aspects of their topic from those examined in parallel chapters by authors with other concerns or forms of expertise. Where a single author can run a series of themes or story lines through a history from beginning to end, chapters from multiple contributors rarely tie together in this way. For some aspects of a subject, especially a relatively narrow one, it may simply be impossible to find contributors with adequate expertise to treat the subject. Many of these problems can be overcome by an interventionist editor prepared, first, to require individual contributors to substantially overhaul their first drafts where necessary to avoid overlap and omission, and, second, to fill gaps and draw information together around big questions in a substantial introduction or conclusion. But it seems characteristic of these series that the publishers do not want to place too many burdensome obligations on the volume editors. Urging them to write lengthy introductions as needed, asking them to fill gaps, or insisting upon the inclusion of reader-friendly aids such as chronologies, uniform maps, glossaries, or an annotated bibliography would slow down the production process. Furthermore, even the best multi-authored histories are rarely as instructive or readable as those by a single author. Those I have read that I consider particularly successful most often involved considerable advance consultation among the contributors or relatively few authors, each given

<sup>8</sup>CRG, 20–21.

wide scope to range over the essential aspects of their part of the whole.<sup>9</sup> The template for both the Brill Companions and Oxford Handbooks, by contrast, involves many shorter contributions. Nineteen authors contributed to the *Companion to the Reformation in Geneva*. Not all had done extensive research in Geneva on the topics they signed on to write about.

The organizational structure developed by Balsarak for the *Companion to the Reformation in Geneva* is well suited to its stated ambitions. Part One, “Reforming Geneva,” offers chapters on the course of political and religious change in the city and surrounding region from the pre-Reformation era of the prince bishopric through the last gasp of Savoyard pretensions to rule the city and roll back the century’s religious changes, the 1602 Escalade. Parts Two and Three look at the ministry, preaching, and the institutions of education, discipline and control created at the Reformation. A final section covers “Relationships and Developments.”

Balsarak obtained contributions from nearly all of those who recently have or currently are doing important research on one aspect or another of the volume’s topic. Many of the most authoritative and useful chapters are those in which the authors of recent monographs provide the distilled essence of their books: Michael Bruening on developments in the neighboring Pays de Vaud; Christian Grosse on the liturgical changes introduced in Geneva at the various stages in the Reformation; Scott Manetsch on the pastoral corps; Erik de Boer on the biblical instruction provided through sermons, lectures, and the weekly *Congrégations*; Jeffrey Watt on the Consistory and its workings.<sup>10</sup> Graeme Murdock draws on archival research to illuminate “Religious Life in Rural Geneva.” Two chapters offer especially important contributions to our understanding of key aspects of the Genevan Reformation. Mathieu Caesar, the historian of late medieval Geneva now working on the faction fights of the pre-Reformation and early Reformation era, explains better than any previous author how Geneva managed to gain and retain its independence in this era of stronger monarchies by situating the city’s political history within its larger regional context and showing how it was able to benefit from the shifting balance of power between the expanding Swiss Confederation to the east, the French monarchy to the west, and the immediately surrounding duchy of Savoy that passed through a cycle of crisis, occupation, and resurrection. Sara Beam presents some of the fruits of her ongoing research on the use of torture within the criminal justice systems of the time to provide statistical data of unprecedented precision about just how the secular magistrates treated a wide range of crimes and misdemeanors during the period of maximum cooperation between the Consistory and the Council that ran from roughly 1555 to 1570. Nobody who ever teaches about the Reformation in Geneva should overlook these two chapters.

<sup>9</sup>I am thinking here, for instance, of Jacques Verger et al., *Histoire des universités en France* (Toulouse: Privat, 1986); or Henry Laurens, John Tolan and Gilles Veinstein, *L’Europe et l’Islam. Quinze siècles d’histoire* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2009).

<sup>10</sup>The relevant longer works of these authors are Michael Bruening, *Calvinism’s First Battleground: Conflict and Reform in the Pays de Vaud, 1528–1559* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005) and Michael Bruening, *Refusing to Kiss the Slipper: Opposition to Calvinism in the Francophone Reformation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021); Christian Grosse, *Les rituels de la cène. Le culte eucharistique réformé à Genève (XVIe – XVIIe siècles)* (Geneva: Droz, 2008); Scott M. Manetsch, *Calvin’s Company of Pastors: Pastoral Care and the Emerging Reformed Church, 1536–1609* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); E. A. de Boer, *The Genevan School of the Prophets. The Congrégations of the Company of Pastors and their Influence in 16th Century Europe* (Geneva: Droz, 2012); and Jeffrey R. Watt, *The Consistory and Social Discipline in Calvin’s Geneva* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2020).



Unfortunately, too many of the common problems encountered in collective histories crop up here for the volume to add up to a satisfactory full history of the Genevan Reformation. Important portions of the story of how Geneva was transformed by the Reformation pass unexamined for want of a contributor or adequate treatment in the Introduction. Jameson Tucker, author of a recent monograph on Crespin's martyrology and the formation of Reformed identity, traces the great expansion of the city's printing industry stimulated by Calvin's presence and the mid-century wave of religious refugees; the volume contains nothing comparable on the other major economic or social transformations that resulted from the immigration wave, such as the introduction of watchmaking, new technologies of textile production, or the recomposition of the city's ruling elite. Emanuele Fiume covers (rather inadequately) "Geneva, the Italian Refuge, and Contact with Italy"; there is nothing comparable on the British refugees, their church, and Geneva's contacts with England and Scotland. Where different chapters do treat comparable topics, they do not always explore similar aspects. Jeffrey Watt on the consistory delves into how the institution actually functioned; Elsie McKee on the diaconate focuses on Calvin's theological views about the subject, then slides to the topic of women in Geneva. In the end, information as basic to Geneva's history – and as well studied – as the overall volume and chronology of migration flows into the city or the fluctuations of its population between c. 1500 and 1602 is nowhere detailed.

Part One's narrative of the course of the Genevan Reformation especially suffers from uneven treatment. The early years prior to Calvin's arrival are treated via an essay on "Guillaume Farel and the Reforming of Geneva" by Theodore Van Raalte, a specialist in the history of theology whose work on Farel has focused on his spirituality. Van Raalte provides a good introduction to the current state of Farel studies and a clear narration of the advance of the Reformation in the city from 1530 to 1538 drawn largely from the relevant chapters in the standard 1930 collective biography *Guillaume Farel 1489–1565. Biographie nouvelle écrite d'après les documents originaux par un groupe d'historiens, professeurs et pasteurs de Suisse, de France et d'Italie* (now that I think of it, a good collective history with numerous authors).<sup>11</sup> But the focus on Farel means that the reader gets no sense of the secret assemblies and initial celebration of an evangelical Lord's Supper led in his absence by Garin Muète, of the tumultuous confrontations and crowd actions that drove so much of the Reformation process forward, or of the sectors of the population that were particularly favorable or hostile to the cause.<sup>12</sup>

A chapter follows on "Calvin and the Continual Crises of Geneva, ca. 1535–1560" by William G. Naphy that is very much in the spirit of his 1994 monograph *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation*.<sup>13</sup> It narrates the Frenchman's conflicts with and ultimate political victory over the members of the Genevan elite who resisted the Consistory's increasingly tight exercise of moral discipline and control over admission to the Lord's Supper, but omits his concurrent conflicts over doctrine with critics both internal and external. Most regrettably for the purposes of a coherent narrative, it fails

<sup>11</sup>Neuchâtel: Delachaux and Niestlé, 1930.

<sup>12</sup>For these, see especially Victor van Berchem, "Une prédication dans un jardin (15 avril 1533). Episode de la Réforme genevoise," in *Festschrift Hans Nabholz*, ed. Antoine Lagardier (Zurich: Leemann, 1934), 151–170; Carlos Eire, *War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), ch. 4.

<sup>13</sup>William G. Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).

to provide the basic chronology of the institutional innovations introduced in this period that the subsequent two parts will examine in greater detail.

The forty years after Calvin's death were then placed in the hands of Hervé Genton, a long-time member of the editorial team working on the Beza correspondence. Although his chapter is titled "Théodore de Bèze and Geneva," Genton frankly declares at the outset that he aspires only to offer a brief general biography of the man. As might be expected from an author who has seen Beza's life chiefly through his letters, this focuses for his years in Geneva primarily on his theological polemics against non-Genevan opponents and his engagement in events elsewhere. His relations with his pastoral colleagues and the ruling authorities inside Geneva, the larger rebalancing of power between ministers and magistrates that occurred in this era, and the extent of continuity and change in the other practices and institutions established in Calvin's lifetime all go unexplored. Balsarak's Introduction, far from compensating for these omissions, is relatively perfunctory. It simply situates the Genevan Reformation in relation to Wittenberg, Zurich, and French evangelicalism, then previews the chapters to follow.

Another common problem of collective histories, at least those without a sternly *dirigiste* editor, is an incapacity to build toward a coherent answer to central interpretative questions. Often this is because pertinent information is scattered across multiple contributions. In this instance, the problem is compounded by the Introduction's failure to foreground some of the questions that have long been at the heart of historical discussion of the Genevan Reformation.

By the middle of the sixteenth century, a myth of Geneva had taken shape that would continue to mold the city's identity and governance for centuries to come, namely that (as John Knox famously put it) pure doctrine might be preached elsewhere, but manners and morals were more thoroughly reformed there than anywhere else. Catholic controversialists of the era claimed to the contrary that the city was a stew of immorality, a haven for convicted criminals and lusty clergymen. Emigres who clashed with Calvin depicted him as a second Pope who made everybody kiss his slipper. From their complaints – and their fate – arose the negative view of the reformer as a proto-totalitarian apostle of intolerance that would run from Voltaire to Stefan Zweig and still lingers in the title of Volker Reinhardt's 2009 account of Calvin and the Reformation in Geneva: *Die Tyrannei der Tugend* [*The Tyranny of Virtue*].<sup>14</sup>

What were the sources of Calvin's power and charisma? How did he exercise influence within the city? How coercive was the oversight of behavior and belief established in his lifetime? How extensive and enduring was the transformation of manners and morals actually effected? Few questions are more central to understanding the Genevan Reformation and its wider importance, yet neither they nor the relevant historiographic traditions are evoked in the Introduction, nor is there mention there – or even inclusion in the Selected Bibliography – of the pioneering articles by William Monter that sought to place the exploration of morals enforcement in the city on a firmer archival basis and shift the discussion away from the most notorious *causes célèbres* toward a statistically grounded assessment drawing on Geneva's rich consistorial and judicial archives.<sup>15</sup> The questions are too important, and the tradition of research

<sup>14</sup>Stefan Zweig, *Castellio gegen Calvin oder. Ein Gewissen gegen die Gewalt* (Vienna: Herbert Reichner, 1936 and many subsequent editions and translations); Volker Reinhardt, *Die Tyrannei der Tugend. Calvin und die Reformation in Genf* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2009).

<sup>15</sup>William Monter, "Witchcraft in Geneva, 1537–1662," *Journal of Modern History* 43 (1971): 179–204; Monter, "Crime and Punishment in Calvin's Geneva, 1562," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 64 (1973):



initiated by Monter now too deeply rooted, for contributors not to engage with them. By the time readers have reached the end of this volume, they will have learned a great deal pertinent to these questions: for instance, that a church consistory that for a time exercised independent powers of excommunication was the chief instrument of morals control in the city and an institution that set Geneva's Reformed church apart from that of Zurich; that the intensity of consistorial surveillance and the frequency of suspension from communion rose sharply after 1555 and peaked in the late 1560s just after Calvin's death, then declined substantially over the next three decades; that the Consistory also had the power to refer many of those brought before it for offenses such as dancing, blasphemy, or sexual misconduct to the secular authorities for punishment; that cases arising from such referrals peaked around 1560, a year in which the Small Council handed down criminal convictions against no less than 3.4 percent of the population and banished 114 people from the city; and that although in theory the Consistory could only administer spiritual punishments, in fact during these same years it condemned boys who skipped Sunday afternoon catechism to be beaten in front of the class by their teacher. But this information is scattered across multiple chapters. There are no concrete illustrations of just how Calvin or the other ministers of his or the next generation operated within the Consistory or interacted with the secular authorities in Council chambers. The statistical information assembled over the past decades that permits the most precise, nuanced appreciation of the extent and limits of morals control and behavior modification is nowhere systematically assembled and reviewed. We do, however, read in Jill Fehleison's chapter on "Francois de Sales, Annecy and Reformation" that recent studies using the Consistory records "clearly show that Calvin never achieved the hegemony of practice and belief in Geneva that the Reformers envisioned" – but in Beam's that after 1570 most Genevans "grew up in a city where intense moral regulation was considered the norm and they had adapted to its strictures."<sup>16</sup>

If certain shortcomings of the *Companion to the Genevan Reformation* are those of many collective histories, others must be attributed to the individual chapter authors and production team here. Errors are more frequent than they should be in a work with multiple chapters parceled out to subject specialists. The Waldensian "synod" of 1532 that gathered at Chanforan in the Val d'Angrogna is said to have met at Charenton.<sup>17</sup> Since contemporaries considered Geneva geographically part of Savoy, its conquest of civic independence can hardly be called liberation from "foreign (Savoyard)" domination, as Naphy does, nor was the city threatened in the 1530s because of its proximity to the "Spanish Road" taken by Habsburg troops on route from Italy to the Netherlands "where they were suppressing Dutch Protestants," something that would not be the case until three decades later.<sup>18</sup> Farel hardly "settled" in Geneva in 1532, as Balsarak writes; he was expelled within two days of his arrival

---

281–287; Monter, "The Consistory of Geneva, 1559–1569," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 38 (1976): 467–484; Monter, "Historical Demography and Religious History in Sixteenth-Century Geneva," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 9 (1979): 399–427; Monter, "Women in Calvinist Geneva (1500–1800)," *Signs* 6 (1980): 189–209; Monter, "Sodomy and Heresy in Early Modern Switzerland," *Journal of Homosexuality* 6 (1981): 41–55. Other historians, notably Watt, Manetsch (especially in "Pastoral Care East of Eden: The Consistory of Geneva, 1568–1582," *Church History* 75 (2006): 274–313), and Beam, followed the trail blazed by Monter.

<sup>16</sup>CRG, 411, 344.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 61.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 76, 77.

and first sermons in town.<sup>19</sup> The Turretini family's Grande Boutique, while important, hardly "controlled the trade in silk and other fabrics in most of Western Europe."<sup>20</sup> A more attentive editorial and production team might have noticed that where Fiume puts the size of the Italian refugee community at its peak at 1,000 souls, Tucker places it at a totally improbable 4–5,000.<sup>21</sup> Why include in chapter 10 an illegible map meant to identify and locate Geneva's rural possessions when legible ones in chapters 1 and 3 had already done so?

The most regrettable editorial and production failure in a volume intended as a vademecum for those who wish to learn more about the subject is the sloppy, gap-riddled Selected Bibliography. The portion devoted to primary sources buries the key sets of printed documents for Geneva's politico-religious history beneath an avalanche of theological treatises of uneven pertinence (40 by Beza alone), not to mention such non-Geneva-specific works as the *Biblia Latina cum Glossa Ordinaria* and Jean Nicot's 1606 French dictionary, while omitting the *Sources du droit du canton de Genève* and François Bonivard's important chronicle.<sup>22</sup> In the portion on secondary sources, a chunk of which has been placed out of proper alphabetical order, works may be found on the Reformation in Fife, Montauban, and Eastern Europe, but one searches in vain not only for many of Monter's articles, but also for such fundamental titles as Harro Höpfl's *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*,<sup>23</sup> Alfred Perrenoud on the population of Geneva,<sup>24</sup> or the standard works on Calvin's opponents (e.g., Roland Bainton on Servetus; Ferdinand Buisson and Hans Guggisberg on Castellio<sup>25</sup>) that cast such sharp light on the Genevan Reformation from their distinctive angle. One statistic will suggest the scale of the omissions. When Christian Grosse and I taught a course on Calvin and Geneva at the University of Geneva in 2008–2009, we assembled a large packet of primary and secondary sources. Of the 39 books or articles from which we chose selections, only 16 appear here. One has to ask if a volume that fails to inform users about so much prior work advances or sets back future scholarship.

For all of the shortcomings of *A Companion to the Reformation in Geneva*, the importance of its most original chapters and the utility of a good number of its others for those seeking a reliable introduction to the chapter topic make it a volume that all historians of the Reformation will wish to be aware of and perhaps even have in their university library, even though libraries with strained budgets may rightly balk in light of the its price. I have had occasion to consult and even acquire a few other Brill Companions from the same series. In those instances, too, I often found myself learning from the better chapters yet disappointed by the lacunae in coverage and failure of the

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 143.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 380.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 375, 399.

<sup>22</sup>*Les sources du droit du canton de Genève*, eds. Émile Rivoire and Victor van Berchem, 4 vols. (Aarau: H.R. Sauerländer, 1927–1933); François Bonivard, *Chroniques de Genève*, ed. Micheline Tripet, 3 vols. (Geneva: Droz, 2001–2014).

<sup>23</sup>Harro Höpfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

<sup>24</sup>Alfred Perrenoud, *La population de Genève du seizième au début du dix-neuvième siècle. Étude démographique*. Mémoires et documents publiés par la Société d'histoire et d'archéologie de Genève vol. XLVII (Geneva: A. Jullien, 1979).

<sup>25</sup>Roland H. Bainton, *Hunted Heretic: The Life and Death of Michael Servetus, 1511–1553* (Boston: Beacon, 1953); Ferdinand Buisson, *Sébastien Castellion, sa vie et son oeuvre* (Paris: Hachette, 1892); Hans Guggisberg, *Sebastian Castellio, 1515–1563: Humanist and Defender of Religious Toleration in a Confessional Age* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

whole to add up to a satisfactory overview of the subject. In creating this series of Companions to the Christian Tradition and dedicating so many of them to topics about which no good recent synthesis exists, Brill has clearly hit upon a way of producing volumes that go some way to filling these gaps by capturing some of the best ongoing thinking and research about such topics, even if they do not add up to the full, balanced account of the topic that the series description promises. Costly handbooks and companions like both of those reviewed here are probably a sub-optimal use of scarce library resources and faculty time. Given the commercial and professional dynamics encouraging their production, however, they are not likely to stop appearing any time soon. That being the case, would it be too much to ask Brill to invest more time and effort in quality control and all such series to encourage the inclusion of features such as chronologies, guides to essential primary sources, and fuller introductions to better fulfill the stated purposes of books on which they put such a hefty price tag?

Turning now to *Protestant Empires: Globalizing the Reformations*, we move from would-be synthetic volumes, the initiative for which lies in good measure with the publishers commissioning the project, to a collection of essays growing out of an academic conference held at the Huntington Library in 2017, the initiative for whose publication, it seems safe to assume, arose from the editor and/or conference organizers. For presses on the receiving end of the many proposals for essay collections that come their way, the business calculation is different than for handbooks or companions. Acquisitions editors must ask themselves if publishing the contributions as a single volume yields a book with enough scholarly value, interest and sales potential to merit the effort, knowing in advance that many such collections end up being used by readers for only one or two essays. Anybody who has ever pitched such a volume to a major university press knows that the answer likely to come back is, "Our rule is not to publish essay collections." Unless their proposal has assembled an unusually large number of distinguished contributors, adds up to something approaching a full overview of an important topic, appears to open up an exciting new field of inquiry, or surfs on the latest big trends within the discipline – in which case this rule is suddenly forgotten.

With contributors including Anthony Grafton, David D. Hall, Carla Pestana, and Merry Wiesner-Hanks, *Protestant Empires: Globalizing the Reformations* hits all of these rule-effacing marks except the second. As world history has replaced Western Civ as the American survey course of choice and global history has moved to the forefront of academic historiography, Reformation historians have increasingly felt the need to get aboard the global train. Not only did the Huntington Library choose for 2017 to mark the five hundredth anniversary of the posting of the 95 Theses with a conference on this topic; the editors of the venerable *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* also chose as the theme of their special issue for that year "The Global Impact of the Reformations." Because the early modern Protestant empires devoted less ostentatious attention to church-building in their colonies than their Catholic counterparts, as well as because the great age of Protestant extra-European missionary activity did not take off until the eighteenth century, historians of Protestantism have been slower to board this train than their counterparts who work on early modern Catholicism, about which much of the most exciting recent scholarship of the past two decades has focused on the faith's expansion outside Europe and interactions with indigenous cultures in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. *Protestant Empires* tries to suggest how best to get the history of Protestantism on board. It also displays a concern to apply new historiographic frontiers to the far-flung geographic frontiers examined; contributors draw on the history of emotions, of gender, of sexuality, and the study of material texts. With a nod in the

direction of Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Ulinka Rublack's brief but helpful and stimulating Introduction even gives the book a mission and a manifesto. "A commitment to understanding 'entanglements' and 'connected histories' remains key for all contributions," she asserts. "Plural histories in global interactions and their effect on Europe form part of a history of the 'long Reformation' in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries properly conceived." Approaching these histories through "densely researched case studies of cultural and intellectual encounter informed by questions derived from the history of knowledge and the anthropology of religion" is a good way forward.<sup>26</sup>

Most of the eleven substantive essays explore aspects of Protestant religiosity, knowledge-making, and missionary practice outside Europe, chiefly on the other side of the Atlantic, but also in Dutch Southeast Asia, Danish South Asia, and wherever Moravian missionaries were active around the globe. One contribution looks at how a family of Protestant publishing entrepreneurs inside Europe, the de Brys of Frankfurt, viewed non-European societies. Here, Susanna Burghartz argues convincingly that the two series of illustrated travel accounts to the West and East Indies that this Reformed family published between 1590 and 1630 did not simply express the Protestant, anti-Spanish Black Legend of Catholic imperialist atrocities that the volumes have often been taken to epitomize, but instead spun the accounts of European cruelty as an admonition to repentance applicable to both Protestants and Catholics as part of a wider publishing strategy of appealing to a supra-confessional, international market. Another chapter examines how converted Ottoman or African slaves were integrated ritually into German Lutheran communities in what its author, Renate Dürr, presents as a study of "the effects of transcultural encounters within the very heart of the continent."<sup>27</sup>

The many case studies in the volume are indeed densely researched, impressively so, but some are less transculturally entangled than others. In an especially rich and multi-layered essay, Carla Pestana examines aspects of the church life of Plymouth Plantation as an object lesson in the sorts of problems religious migrants often faced as they sought to recreate the worship practices and traditions they had known back home in distant overseas settlements. Among the key points to emerge are the difficulty of attracting capable ministers to serve in under-funded colonies across the oceans (more than one of those who did come were men with checkered pasts hoping to start anew), the space that colonial settings often created for dissenters, and the related difficulty of maintaining discipline and encouraging zeal when labor was scarce and the possibility of migrating to other nearby settlements ever-present. David Hall's chapter on the lived religious experience of the Puritans of Massachusetts Bay colony, covering ground that will not seem unfamiliar to those who know his fine books on the subject, likewise highlights the importance of the community's particular geographic and geo-political setting in shaping its distinctive religious culture but shows little entanglement with indigenous cultures. From Anthony Grafton's examination of learned reading practices in Britain's North American colonies as revealed by the books and marginalia of the Winthrop and Mathers of Boston and of Francis Daniel Pistorius of Germantown, we learn that humanist reading practices overseas looked very much like what they were back in Europe. (It is also hard to see that the reading practices, as opposed to the books read, can be meaningfully qualified in any way as distinctively Protestant.) Neil Kamil's exploration of how two generations of the Fontaine family of Huguenot

<sup>26</sup>PE, 11, 15.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 198.

refugees in England and Virginia sought to assert their status and make their way as inventive artisans is likewise principally a study of cultural continuity, in this instance of the tradition of Reformed Paracelsianism that Kamil believes to have been established and maintained in the province of Saintonge from 1562 onward.

Far more entanglement can be seen in the case studies that focus on conversion work and missionary encounters. Charles Parker, whose subsequently published *Global Calvinism: Conversion and Commerce in the Dutch Empire, 1600–1800*<sup>28</sup> now stands as a major contribution to globalizing the Reformations, offers here the portion of his research tracing how Dutch Reformed understandings of Islam changed as missionaries sought to win converts among Muslims in VOC (The Dutch East India Company, or the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie) territories, and as scholars in universities back home deepened their knowledge of oriental languages and the Qur'an. James Van Horn Melton also contributes material from an important larger book project, his *Religion, Community, and Slavery on the Colonial Southern Frontier*.<sup>29</sup> His chapter follows the efforts to convert Indians and enslaved Africans, as well as the changing views about the possibility of making genuine conversions among these groups, of the Halle-trained Pietist pastor Johann Martin Boltzius, who accompanied a small group of Salzburg refugees to the young Georgia colony in 1733 and pastored there for more than three decades as the initial effort of its trustees to establish a territory built on free labor gave way to the introduction and growth of slavery. Jon Sensbach's "The Sacred World of Mary Prince" builds outward from the as-told-to autobiography of this woman born enslaved in Bermuda in 1788, converted to Christianity while toiling in Antigua, and made famous in 1831 when the story of her life and sufferings as a slave was published and widely circulated by London abolitionists after she obtained her freedom there. Sensbach reads the text alongside Moravian disciplinary records for what these documents together reveal about the likely religious beliefs and practice of this exceptionally well-documented figure among the more than 10,000 Afro-Caribbeans that the Moravians claimed to have converted on Antigua by 1823. His telling of her life story also ends with an illustration of the sting of unforgiving church discipline. Following the publication of *The History of Mary Prince*, pro-slavery forces attempting to discredit her testimony cited a letter furnished by her former master that asserted that she had been "turned out of the Moravian chapel" for promiscuity. When she sought admission to the Moravian congregation in London a year later, the congregation turned her down without even hearing her side of the story. Sensbach, perhaps a bit melodramatically, calls her exclusion from the one community in the big city with which she had a prior association her "second soul murder," the experience of slavery's destruction of family ties being the first.<sup>30</sup>

Both Ulrike Gleixner's "Globalizing the Protestant Reformation through Millenarian Practices" and Jacqueline Van Gent's "Global Protestant Missions and the Role of Emotions" stand apart from the other essays in the book in not being case studies, although they contain plenty of entanglement. Both offer informative overviews of

<sup>28</sup>Charles Parker, *Global Calvinism: Conversion and Commerce in the Dutch Empire, 1600–1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022).

<sup>29</sup>James Van Horn Melton, *Religion, Community, and Slavery on the Colonial Southern Frontier* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 301, 20. To understand the chronology of the accusations and events at issue in this essay, see also Sue Thomas, "New Information on Mary Prince in London," *Notes and Queries* 58 (2011): 82–85, one of the key sources used by Sensbach.

eighteenth-century missionary enterprises – in the first instance, those of the alliance between Halle Pietists, Denmark’s king Frederick IV, and the London Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge; in the second, those of the Moravian Brethren – to which each adds a distinctive focus. Gleixner’s is on the role of millenarian ideas in stimulating missionary efforts. These, she argues, made Pietist missions particularly open to recruiting indigenous collaborators as translators, catechists, and pastors; her essay also highlights the role of the regularly published Halle mission reports in bringing knowledge of the wider world to Europe. Van Gent emphasizes the distinctive emotional script of “heart religion” that structured Moravian conversion experiences. This, she suggests, explains why Moravian missions attained little success in cultures like that of the Inuit whose emotional regimes made it hard for them to relate to enthusiastic religion or, indeed, make any sense at all of what the Moravians were talking about when they urged them to pray to Jesus to warm their heart with a drop of his blood. The volume’s final essay, Merry Wiesner-Hanks’ “New Perspectives on Gender and Sexuality in Global Protestantism, 1500–1800,” is a review essay that highlights the widening of geographic perspectives, inclusion of a broader range of actors, and focus on the history of emotions in recent work on gender and sexuality within Protestantism.

For those, like myself, who have been so deeply buried in their research about the Protestant Reformation in one part of Europe that they have not kept abreast of recent work with a wider geographic compass, this book will come as a godsend in enabling them to get up to speed on it. Historians of international Calvinism or England’s particularly long Reformation have recognized for some time the importance of developments in New England for the story of Puritan Independency and Dissent and included these in general histories of those subjects. Charles Parker’s chapter here and subsequent book should ensure that, going forward, those who write about the growth of the Dutch Reformed churches and the extent and limits of their incomplete monopolization of religious life in the different constituent parts of the United Provinces will integrate treatment of their colonies into those stories. Simple generalizations about Protestant rulers or clergymen being less interested than their Catholic counterparts in bringing Christianity to non-European peoples will also require more nuance in the wake of his work. Studies such as those assembled here on the missionary experiences of the Halle Pietists, the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, and the Moravians clearly merit rapid integration into the history of eighteenth century pietism and Protestantism, as well as into the trans-confessional history of Christian overseas missions and their varied outcomes in different corners of the globe. More generally, as dechristianization continues to advance across the developed West while inhabitants of other parts of the world bulk ever larger within major Protestant denominations, the global spread of the various forms of Latin Christendom that emerged from the Reformation era is fated to become an increasingly central theme of the history of Christianity *tout court*. Since these varied forms cannot be explained without reference to the Reformation, we can thus confidently say that the Reformation is essential component of global as well as European history.

To say that, however, is not necessarily to embrace all of the claims advanced by Rublack in her Introduction. To situate as she does the story of eighteenth-century Protestant missionary ventures and their entanglement with indigenous cultures within the “history of the ‘long Reformation’ in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries properly conceived” only makes sense if properly conceiving the long Protestant Reformation means running the story all the way to 1800. Most historians of the subject have tended to think of it as ending around 1700 and to conceive of the eighteenth



century as a new epoch in the history of Protestantism, marked by the unraveling of the confessional orthodoxies whose establishment was the central process of the preceding two centuries. For the period prior to 1700, it may be wondered just how much “densely researched case studies of cultural and intellectual encounter informed by questions derived from the history of knowledge and the anthropology of religion” will truly enrich or alter understanding of central issues at the core of Reformation studies. As a general rule, micro-histories informed by the anthropology of religion or the history of reading only contribute to the construction or revision of larger interpretive narratives when placed in dialogue with macro-generalizations or hypotheses. What big questions about the Reformation case studies of entangled encounters outside Europe can move us to reconsider is not clear to me after putting down the book. Finally, I cannot escape a fear. A recurring pattern within contemporary academic historiography is that when new research agendas encouraged by macro trends within the larger profession come to be seen as the shiny new thing, fruitful research agendas internal to sub-fields often get left by the wayside before they have exhausted their potential. As one convinced that many aspects of the history of the Reformation within Europe remain ripe for further investigation and reinterpretation in the wake of the past half century’s paradigm shifts, too much disengagement from older research questions in pursuit of the global would be regrettable.<sup>31</sup> That this volume provokes such broad reflections nonetheless shows how stimulating Rublack’s provocative Introduction is. Together with the perspective-widening essays collected here, the whole becomes more than the sum of its parts and one that many Reformation scholars might want to have in their library for more than just one or two essays, should Cambridge University Press make it available in an affordable paperback version alongside the current hard-bound and ebook versions that, both priced at \$103.00, once again may be a sub-optimal use of library resources.

**Acknowledgments.** The author would like to thank Nick Okrent and Peter Agree for information and feedback from the perspective of a librarian and an editor.

**Philip Benedict** is Professor Emeritus and former Director of the University of Geneva’s Institut d’histoire de la Réformation. Prior to that, he taught for 26 years at Brown University. He is the author or editor of thirteen books, including *Christ’s Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (Yale University Press, 2002) and, most recently, *Season of Conspiracy: Calvin, the French Reformed Churches, and Protestant Plotting in the Reign of Francis II (1559-60)* (American Philosophical Society Press, 2020).

---

<sup>31</sup>For my sense of agendas that remain unfulfilled: Philip Benedict, “Thinking about Religion and Society in the 17th and 18th Century: Confessionalization, the History of Toleration, and Beyond,” *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Religions- und Kulturgeschichte* 101 (2007): 247–256; Philip Benedict, “Global? Has Reformation History Even Gotten Transnational Yet?,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 108 (2017): 52–62.

**Cite this article:** Benedict, Philip. “Of Handbooks, Companions, and Essay Collections: Recent Multi-Author Volumes on Calvin and Calvinism, the Genevan Reformation, and Global Protestantism.” *Church History* 93, no. 1 (March 2024): 126–140. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S000964072400060X>.