

Decorvet, Jean D., Tim Grass, and Kenneth J. Stewart, eds. *The Genevan Réveil in International Perspective*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2023. 544pp. + 22pp. (front matter).

English-speaking Christians are generally not as familiar with the *Réveil* as with revivals such as Britain's Evangelical Awakening or the Great Awakening in North America. Yet it was a profoundly influential awakening in the nineteenth century. It began in French-speaking Geneva shortly after the close of the Napoleonic wars. (The word *réveil* is French for “revival” or “awakening”—and for “alarm clock” too.) One can see its widespread impact in the lives of people as diverse as Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper and South African missionary and devotional writer Andrew Murray.

This anthology is a first-rate, fairly comprehensive study of the *Réveil* in English. In many ways the best English-language survey up until now has been the relevant sections of James Good's *History of the Swiss Reformed Church Since the Reformation* published in 1913.<sup>1</sup> This work is a needed update. Because it is a collection of essays by different authors, it lacks a cohesive narrative, but the combined results of these articles provide a detailed overview of the revival. Sometimes the authors overlap or repeat what has been said elsewhere in the book, but that reflects the nature of the format. It is the foremost book to which I would point an English-speaking student to learn about this topic.

The collection traces the awakening from its beginnings in Geneva to the rest of Switzerland, then to German lands, the Low Countries, and even Italy. It also presents studies of the revival's acceptance in and effect on North America in the US and Canada (mostly Quebec). The anthology provides biographical sketches of major leaders such as Adolphe and Frédéric Monod, brothers who provided leadership to the revival in France; Félix Neff, missionary to the Waldensians; Jean Henri Merle d'Aubigné, the prolific church historian; and Louis Gaussen, a theologian noted for his apologetic for the inerrancy of the Bible. Although there is no biographical study of Robert Haldane, the Scottish preacher who helped initiate the revival, Deryck Lovegrove provides a fine article on his influence in Geneva. Likewise, there is no biographical sketch on César Malan, one of the earliest converts to the revivalists' cause in Geneva, but Yannick Imbert provides a good article on Malan's apologetic method.

Several of the articles discuss the widespread impact of the awakening on the culture at large. One reads how Henry Dunant, a leading figure in the founding of the International Red Cross, sat under the teaching Merle d'Aubigné. Although Dunant later abandoned allegiance to the Christian faith, other founders and leaders of humanitarian organizations reflected the impact of the *Réveil* on their lives. The revival promoted the growth of the idea of the separation of church and state, notably in Switzerland. The revivalists' concern was not simply having freedom for themselves to worship but also the deleterious religious effects of state churches. They demonstrated this evangelical concern in articulating how they feared the Lord's Supper would be celebrated by unbelievers in state churches.

In fact, one significant observation I took away from this work is how the leaders of the *Réveil*, particularly in the earlier phases, connected correct doctrine with spiritual life. One common criticism

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<sup>1</sup> One should mention, however, several notable monographs such as Kenneth Stewart's *Restoring the Reformation: British Evangelicalism and the Francophone Réveil 1816-1849* (2006) and John Roney's *The Inside of History: Jean Henri Merle d'Aubigné and Romantic Historiography* (1996), along with biographical studies of leading figures, such as James Osen's on Adolphe Monod, *Prophet and Peacemaker: The Life of Adolphe Monod* (1984).

of revivalism is its overemphasis on subjective experience over objective truth. Such is not true of the leaders of the *Réveil*. Jean Decorvet, for example, notes, “For Louis Gaussen, orthodox dogmatics and militant revitalization of the life of faith were intrinsically linked,” and this view is typical of the revivalists. The participants of the awakening ignited a controversy by sponsoring the republication of the Second Helvetic Confession as representing their doctrinal convictions. This confession, written in the 1560s, represented the consensus of the Reformed Christians on the continent in the Reformation era. But for the rationalists who had come to dominate the Genevan church by 1800, such an affirmation of orthodoxy was divisive. It occurred to me that this tendency explains the comments of J. H. Merle d’Aubigné in his qualified approval of his beloved teacher, church historian August Neander. Merle deeply appreciated Neander’s emphasis on the interior life of the Christian but regretted that Neander did not join a solid doctrinal orthodoxy to that emphasis.

The tone of the book is generally sympathetic, although the authors do not hesitate to offer critiques of some activities of the leaders of the awakening. The scholarship is broad, drawing from an array of authors both European and American, many of whom have previously written in depth on the revival. As one looks over this excellent volume, one can hope that some historian will be inspired to draw these essays together in a single, comprehensive narrative history of the *Réveil*.

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