

Ian Hugh Clary

Reformed Evangelicalism and the Search for a Usable Past

The Historiography of Arnold Dallimore,
Pastor-Historian



Reformed Historical Theology

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Volume 61

Ian Hugh Clary

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Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek:
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie;
detailed bibliographic data available online: <https://dnb.de>.

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Typesetting: 3w+p, Rimpf
Printed and bound: Hubert & Co. BuchPartner, Göttingen
Printed in the EU

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Verlage | www.vandenhoeck-ruprecht-verlage.com

ISSN 2197-1137
ISBN 978-3-647-56724-2

For Vicky

“Nowadays the present and the future are too terrifying to be escaped from, and if one bothers with history it is in order to find modern meanings there.”

George Orwell

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Acknowledgements

The original dissertation which led to this book took a lot of time and effort, not just from me, but from the many who helped me. First and foremost, my *Doktorvater*, Profs. Michael A. G. Haykin and Adriaan C. Neele where of tremendous guidance; I could not have done this without either of them. In addition, I would like to thank Prof. Dolf Britz who served alongside Dr. Neele at The Jonathan Edwards Centre Africa, The University of the Free State (Bloemfontein). It was a pleasure to study with this fine institution and its people. In this relation, I am also grateful for the help and friendship of Dr. Mark Jones. Additionally, Dr. Haykin, who is a dear friend and mentor, provided the impetus for this book, cheered me along the way, and was a fantastic source of information.

I am humbled that Prof. Herman J. Selderhuis was willing to accept my dissertation into the Reformed Historical Theology series; it is a tremendous honour. The editors at Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht have been very patient and kind. Thanks are due to Miriam Espenhain and Renate Rehkopf for their diligent work.

Before this book was a dissertation it was a book. I had initially been contracted to write a small biography of Arnold Dallimore that never materialised. I am thankful to my friend Clint Humfrey for encouraging me to take the work I had done and pursue doctoral studies with it. I was greatly helped in doing so by Cheryl Shuttleworth, daughter of Arnold Dallimore, as well as her brother the late Paul Dallimore. Cheryl set up a meeting with her mother May Dallimore, and provided me with a lot of source material that shaped the biographical portions of this work. Her daughter, Rebecca Wagler, also provided useful information pertaining to her grandfather. Rev. Richard Valade, who had been mentored by Dallimore (and who in turn has mentored me), gave me some great insights into what their mentoring relationship had been like.

While I offer some criticism of The Banner of Truth Trust, I do so with great admiration for their work. I am especially thankful to Rev. Iain H. Murray, who appears frequently in these pages, for providing correspondence between Dallimore and the Banner; it was incredibly kind of him to do so. I was also helped by the late Rev. Erroll Hulse who kindly engaged in email discussion about various

Dallimore-related topics. I am sorry that he passed and will not be able to read this book.

Arnold Dallimore and I share an alma mater as we both, at very different times, attended The Toronto Baptist Seminary and Bible College. Rev. Lucien Atchale, then the head librarian of the seminary's Peter McGregor Memorial Library, tracked down some relevant sources for me, and Deborah Michaud granted me access to personal files housed in the seminary. These helped to fill out aspects of Dallimore's time as a student at TBS. The Heritage Library at the Heritage College and Seminary (Cambridge, ON) granted me access to their copies of *The Baptist Evangel*, for which I am thankful. Dr. Christian George formerly of the Spurgeon Archive at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary helped with sources pertaining to C. H. Spurgeon. Dr. Nick Tucker of London, UK, helped sharpen my thinking on aspects of Edward Irving's Christology. I am grateful to Dr. Jared C. Hood for allowing me to use parts of my article on Dallimore that I published in *Reformed Theological Review*.

A number of others offered encouragement or help along the way: Andrew Atherstone, John Bell, Joy Campbell, D. A. Carson, Tim Challies, Justin Galotti, Lee Gatiss, Crawford Gribben, Bobby Jamieson, David Ceri Jones, Thomas S. Kidd, Gary W. Long, Larry L. Morton, Mark Nenadov, Dennis Ngien, David Robinson, Roger V. Rydin, Richard Snoddy (for help with writer's block), Dale Spencer, Jeff Straub, Justin Taylor, Geoffrey Thomas, Austin Walker, Jeremy Walker, Loren Warkentin, Ryan Wassell, and Steve Weaver.

Since finishing the dissertation I took up a teaching position at Colorado Christian University, Lakewood, CO. It is gratifying to teach in the School of Theology with such amiable and intelligent colleagues. I would like to thank our university president, Dr. Donald W. Sweeting, whose love for church history is a tremendous encouragement to me. I would also like to thank my dean, Dr. David Kotter, for his leadership and support. My colleagues are also my friends, which is a blessing. Thanks to David Bosworth, Megan DeVore, Matt Jones, Michael Plato, Seth Rodriguez, Kevin Turner, and John Wind. Ms. Elise Hegarty, a CCU student, helped me immensely by editing this work for publication and for doing the index.

Finally, I am thankful for my family, who have been nothing but supportive of my scholarly endeavours. My mother and father, Jean and Donald Clary, along with my sister Jane, my in-laws Christopher and Yvette Rixon, are all a great encouragement. I am especially thankful to my long-suffering wife Vicky, who not only encouraged this work, but also gave the manuscript a good going over many times. Thanks also to our children: Jackson, Molly, Catharine, and Thomas.

Canada Day
Ian Hugh Clary

Foreword by Michael A.G. Haykin

It was in the autumn of 1982 that I first met Arnold A. Dallimore. I was just beginning to read seriously in the literature of the eighteenth century since my training as an historian had been almost entirely focused on the Patristic era. At my graduation in May of that year I had been given a gift of Dallimore's massive two-volume biography of George Whitefield. It was a key turning-point in my thinking about a number of areas of the Christian life, including pastoral ministry and the concept of revival. So, it was a thrill to spend an afternoon with the author of what had been a life-changing set of books for me. At the time, Dallimore was working on his life of C.H. Spurgeon, about whom I knew very little, but his discussion of the Baptist preacher whetted my appetite to learn more. We especially talked about Whitefield and the remarkable revivals of his day. I had little idea at the time that this world of the long eighteenth century would eventually become my home for research and historical reflection.

This personal contact with Dallimore was fostered over the next number of years until his death in the late 1990s. Although he had never been trained formally as an historian, I never for a moment doubted that he was indeed an excellent student of history. In the 1990s, his two-volume study of Whitefield's life came under attack from some historians in the Academy, who accused Dallimore of being guilty of hagiography. But close scrutiny of his work on Whitefield reveals a true historian at work, as Thomas S. Kidd has recently noted.¹

And so I am very thankful for this new study of Dallimore as an historian by Ian Clary, in which the historical principles guiding his work on Whitefield are examined at length along with those undergirding his other historical biographies on two contemporaries of Whitefield, Susanna Wesley and her son Charles, C.H. Spurgeon (a logical choice for a Baptist like Dallimore), Edward Irving (where he allowed his distrust of the Charismatic Movement to unduly shape his

1 Thomas S. Kidd, *George Whitefield: America's Spiritual Founding Father* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

narrative), and his friend, the Canadian Baptist leader Jack Scott. Clary expertly deals with the accusations of hagiography and helpfully reminds the readers of this fine study that there are always two horizons in any historical endeavour: that of the historian and that of the subject being studied. It is to Dallimore's credit that, at his best as an historian in his work on Whitefield, he also never forgot this basic truth about all history writing.

Fort Lauderdale, Florida

February 18, 2020

Chapter 1: Introduction

The search for a usable past

The epigraph to this study, penned by George Orwell (1903–1950), is typical of the dystopian author’s pessimistic view of the way that moderns use the past. A perennial concern of Orwell was the abuse of history by totalitarian governments as they scour the past for politically self-serving ends.¹ Near the end of his novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, for example, Orwell’s anti-hero Winston Smith has been brainwashed to mindlessly repeat the Party slogan, “Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past.” This chilling refrain is certainly one example of a misuse of the past, but this does not mean that all uses of the past are guided by nefarious purposes.² Another example, well-worn cliché though it may be, comes from the pen of philosopher George Santayana (1863–1952): “Those who cannot learn from the past are condemned to repeat it.”³ Santayana rightly assumed that there is a positive use of the past in which history can be responsibly employed to impart wisdom to the present.

The “search for a usable past” is rooted in the idea that since the past shapes the present, it can be used to inform and guide the present.⁴ It is possible that the

1 The quote is from George Orwell, “Arthur Koestler,” in Sonia Brownell and Ian Angus, ed., *The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters of George Orwell. Volume III: As I Please, 1943–1945* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1968), 237.

2 Reflecting on Orwell’s use of history, Ken Osborne writes, “The more I read [*Nineteen Eighty-Four*], the more it dawned on me that the novel is a profound meditation on the power of history.” Ken Osborne, “‘To the Past’: Why We Need to Teach and Study History,” in Ruth Sandwell, ed., *To the Past: History Education, Public Memory, and Citizenship in Canada* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 103.

3 George Santayana, “The Life of Reason: Introduction and Reason in Common Sense: Critical Edition” in Marianne S. Wokeck and Martin A. Coleman, ed., *The Works of George Santayana, Volume VII, Book One* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2011), 172.

4 William J. Bouwsma, *A Usable Past: Essays in European Cultural History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1990); K. S. Brown and Yannis Hamilakis, “The Cupboard of Yesterdays? Critical Perspectives on the Usable Past,” in Keith S. Brown and

term was first used by American historian Van Wyck Brooks (1886–1963), but as a concept it has a much older vintage.⁵ William J. Bouwsma quoted Johann von Goethe (1749–1832) as saying, “I hate everything that merely instructs me without augmenting or directly invigorating my activity.”⁶ Bouwsma commented, “Historians are properly the servants of a public that needs historical perspective to understand itself and its values, and perhaps also to acknowledge its limitations and its guilt. Historians have an obligation, I believe, to meet public needs of this kind.”⁷ Due to the fact that every community is shaped by its history, the memory of this history is needed for orientation and identity. Church historian Michael A.G. Haykin, taking Hebrews 13:7 as a model—“Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith” (NIV)—placed the phrase “usable past” under the rubric of mentorship: what we learn from the inhabitants of the past will help to mould us into a better community today. He said, “[T]he past does indeed have significance for the present and [...] the historian has a duty to share his historical studies with a public wider than the academic guild of historians and to help non-specialists see the way the light of the past can help illumine the present.”⁸

The goal of this book is to examine the way that this concept of a usable past informed the writings of the independent historian, Arnold A. Dallimore (1911–1998). His two-volume biography of the transatlantic revivalist George Whitefield (1714–1770) has had a significant impact both upon the historical academy and upon the church.⁹ Dallimore also wrote a series of “lesser biographies” of varying degrees of quality on other figures from evangelical history. As a pastor Dallimore had strong theological convictions. He was an evangelical who embraced Reformed soteriology and Baptist ecclesiology and had a profoundly anti-charismatic bent. How did these theological perspectives shape the way he did

Yannis Hamilakis, ed., *The Usable Past: Greek Metahistories* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2003), 1–22.

5 Cf. Dayton Kohler, “Van Wyck Brooks: Traditionally American,” *College English* 2.7 (April 1941), 630.

6 Bouwsma, *Usable Past*, 1. Bouwsma lifted this quote from Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” in R. J. Hollindale, trans., *Untimely Mediations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 59–123.

7 Bouwsma, *Usable Past*, 1.

8 Michael A.G. Haykin, *The Reformers and Puritans as Spiritual Mentors: Hope is Kindled*, The Christian Mentor 2 (Kitchener, ON: Joshua Press, 2012). For a study of Haykin’s approach to history see Clint Humfrey, “Michael A.G. Haykin: historian of the Spirit,” in G. Stephen Weaver Jr. and Ian Hugh Clary, ed., *The Pure Flame of Devotion: The History of Christian Spirituality, Essays in Honour of Michael A.G. Haykin* (Kitchener, ON: Joshua Press, 2013), 503–514.

9 Arnold A. Dallimore, *George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth Century*, 2 vol. (Edinburgh, UK/Westchester, IL: Banner of Truth Trust/Cornerstone, 1970 and 1980).

history, both in terms of how he chose his subjects and how he interpreted them? And in what ways did Dallimore believe the past to be of value for the present? Dallimore's biographical studies coincided with a renaissance of religious history in the Academy as historians like George M. Marsden, George A. Rawlyk, David Bebbington, Grant Wacker, David N. Hempton, Harry S. Stout, Stuart Piggins and Nathan O. Hatch began to issue a steady stream of monographs and articles that dealt with various aspects of evangelical Christian history.¹⁰ While each would to varying degree identify as Christian or even evangelical, they nevertheless adhered to the canons of scholarly research. They wrote 'objective' history and rarely revealed their own religious commitments. However, Dallimore's work was markedly different, reflecting the historiographical perspective of historians like Iain H. Murray, John Thornbury, Faith Cook, Eifion Evans, and more generally Martyn Lloyd-Jones.¹¹ Historians of this outlook wrote intentionally to edify the reader in the Christian faith, were open about their religious commitments, and carefully discerned God's providence in history, particularly when dealing with revival.

Thus this study provides an intellectual history of Dallimore by locating him within his own historical and historiographical context, and evaluates the quality of his scholarship. The biographical portions demonstrate how his life and work intersected and how they shaped his writing of history. A study such as this is significant primarily due to the importance of Dallimore's work on Whitefield which is cited by historians as an important contribution to Whitefield and related studies. The methods that he employed shaped his history writing and an examination of them helps us see where he fit within the larger debates of

10 Representative works of each from this perspective are George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870–1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980); George A. Rawlyk, *Ravished by the Spirit: Religious Revivals, Baptists, and Henry Alline* (Montreal, QC/Kingston, ON: McGill-Queens University Press, 1984); David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989); Grant Wacker, *Augustus H. Strong and the Dilemma of Historical Consciousness* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985); David Hempton, *Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion* (New York: Routledge, 1984); Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Stuart Piggins, *Evangelical Christianity in Australia: Spirit, Word and World* (Melbourne and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989).

11 Works from this perspective include Iain H. Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987); John Thornbury, *Five Pioneer Missionaries* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965); Faith Cook, *William Grimshaw of Haworth* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1997); Eifion Evans, *Daniel Rowland and the Great Evangelical Awakening in Wales* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1985); D.M. Lloyd-Jones, *Knowing the Times: Addresses Delivered on Various Occasions, 1942–1977* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2013). It is noteworthy that each of these is published by The Banner of Truth Trust.

Christian historiography. As well, due to his relationship with British evangelicals, Dallimore provides a window into that movement in the mid-twentieth century and its subsequent influence in the twenty-first. As a founder of the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches of Canada Dallimore also helps us understand twentieth-century Canadian Baptist history. As this is the only biographical and methodological study of Arnold Dallimore, it also fills a unique role in studies on the Christian reflection on history.

Method: Signposting the narrative

By examining each of Dallimore's biographies in the order that they were published this book creates an intellectual history of Dallimore's approach to the past. The first volume of his Whitefield biography appeared in 1970, while the second was published ten years later. Then, in short succession came his lesser biographies on the lives of Edward Irving, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Charles Wesley, and Susanna Wesley. Examining his biographies in chronological sequence provides an understanding of the development of his historiography.

This study of Dallimore as an historian also needs to be related to the broader discussion that religious historians have had over the relationship between faith commitments and the writing of history. Therefore, after this introduction, the second chapter traces the twentieth-century debate over how to do history as a Christian. It begins by summarizing the history of the debate, paying attention to source material relevant to this study, and concludes by placing Dallimore in the framework of the supernatural end of the historiographical spectrum. This sets the context for Dallimore's own historiography. It also argues for a mediating approach that recognizes the validity of both methodologies to history and gives a theologically-grounded rationale for this perspective.

The third chapter is effectively a biography of the biographer: it tells the life of Arnold Dallimore from his upbringing in London, Ontario, to his education under the Fundamentalist Baptist T.T. Shields (1873–1955) at Toronto Baptist Seminary and Bible College, and his various pastoral charges. It also explains how Dallimore first became interested in writing a life of Whitefield, his research in Britain, his relationship with the British evangelical Martyn Lloyd-Jones and the Banner of Truth Trust, and how his major biography was received at a popular and scholarly level.

In many respects the fourth chapter is the most important to the thesis of this study: by looking more deeply at Dallimore's major biography of Whitefield, it studies how he worked as an historian. It evaluates the way Dallimore treated three important themes in Whitefield's life, themes that could suffer most at the hands of an ideological bias. These themes are: Whitefield as the first modern

American celebrity, the issue of slavery, and the concept of revival. It is here that the strengths and weaknesses of Dallimore's work are best seen. While Dallimore wrote from a supernaturalist perspective, and openly sympathized with Whitefield and his Calvinism, he did not fully allow his religious commitments to cloud his judgment. Dallimore was critical of Whitefield, especially his use of slavery. While the work rightly fits in the category of filiopietistic history, it is not necessarily a full-blown hagiography.

The fifth chapter marks a transition to a study of Dallimore's lesser biographies. Due to their smaller size, and because less ground-breaking work was done in them, this chapter and the next treat two biographies each. Focusing on the Romantic and early Victorian period, chapter five examines Dallimore's lives of Irving and Spurgeon, though the emphasis is weighted to the former. As a Canadian Baptist Dallimore was strongly anti-charismatic and viewed the growth of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements in Canada with deep suspicion. Arguing that Irving was the "forerunner of the Charismatic movement," Dallimore used him as a means of tracing the history of the Charismatic movement's questionable practices. Dallimore is at his most anachronistic in his biography of Irving, and his anti-charismaticism is strongly felt. Due to Dallimore's Reformed and Baptist sympathies, Charles Spurgeon fares much better than Irving. While his biography of the Victorian preacher is good as a standard introduction, it does little to further Spurgeon studies. It actually contributes to the problem of what some have called the "forgotten Spurgeon." We know much about the basic life story of the 'prince of preachers,' but know relatively little about his thought.

The sixth chapter returns to the early evangelical period where it becomes clear that Dallimore is again in familiar territory. His biographies of Charles and Susanna Wesley benefited from the research that he had done on Whitefield years earlier. His work on Charles Wesley is a helpful introduction and makes a number of historiographical interpretations. As his Whitefield biography functions in part as an apologetic against John Wesley, likewise Dallimore's work on Charles has elements of an anti-John perspective. Charles is clearly the good brother. Dallimore's anti-charismatic bias also appears in his interpretation of Charles' conversion. His biography of Susanna Wesley is similar to his work on Spurgeon; it succeeds as a basic introduction but does not carry the study of Susanna any further than it had already gone in Methodist studies up to this point. Like his other biographies dealing with this period, this work also sets John Wesley in his context in order to demonstrate his poor character. Though Dallimore did not write a biography of him, the third section of this chapter focuses on John Wesley. It explores the way Dallimore interpreted key aspects of Wesley's life and thought, particularly his conversion, his role as the founder of Methodism, and his doctrine of perfection. In this study of the three Wesleys two themes recur, namely Dallimore's non-standard

interpretations of their respective conversion narratives, and his anti-charismaticism that shaped his historiography.

The conclusion culls the historiographical issues from the study of each of Dallimore's biographies and presents a perspective on the strengths and weaknesses of Dallimore as an historian. The related issue of what an historian is, and what is the function of history, is also addressed. Though he was not educated as an historian, and never practiced as a professional historian, I conclude that it is appropriate to call him an historian due to the nature of history as a discipline.

Chapter 2: *Status Quaestionis*: The Debate over Christian History

Introduction: A twenty-first century illustration

Recent evangelical approaches to history are conflicted as the debate over the legacy of D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899–1981) illustrates. In the book *Engaging with Martyn Lloyd-Jones*, edited by Andrew Atherstone and David Ceri Jones, scholars critically evaluated aspects of their subject's ministry and thought.¹ Iain H. Murray, a twentieth-century biographer of Lloyd-Jones, wrote a review-essay of the book for *Banner of Truth* magazine criticizing a number of the contributions specifically and evangelical historiography in general. Murray argued against Christians doing “scholarly” research with “neutral objectivity.”² Historian Carl R. Trueman responded to Murray's “attack on historical method” and chastised him for conflating “neutrality” and “objectivity.”³ While neutrality is impossible, according to Trueman, objectivity “simply acknowledges the fact that history is a public discipline, the results of which can be assessed by public criteria.” He argued: “History has its sphere of competence and its ambitions, and its methods and results should be understood accordingly.”⁴ The two Reformed historians had engaged on the same subject in 2010, after Trueman published criticisms of ‘the Doctor’ in a volume honouring the Anglo-Canadian theologian J.I. Packer.⁵ In a review, Murray wrote that Trueman's chapter had “serious

1 Andrew Atherstone and David Ceri Jones, ed., *Engaging with Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Life and Legacy of “The Doctor”* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2011).

2 Iain H. Murray, “Engaging with Lloyd-Jones: A Review Article,” *Banner of Truth* 585 (June 2012).

3 Carl Trueman, “The Sin of Uzzah,” *Reformation21* (July 10, 2012) <http://www.reformation21.org/blog/2012/07/the-sin-of-uzzah.php> (Accessed December 5, 2013).

4 Trueman, “Sin of Uzzah.” See also his discussion of objectivity and neutrality in Carl R. Trueman, *Histories and Fallacies: Problems Face in the Writing of History* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 27–28.

5 Carl R. Trueman, “J.I. Packer: An English Nonconformist Perspective,” in Timothy George ed., *J.I. Packer and the Evangelical Future: The Impact of His Life and Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 115–129; Iain H. Murray, “J. I. Packer and the Evangelical Future—A

inaccuracies” and misinterpreted the contentious events involving the infamous split between Packer and Lloyd-Jones.⁶ Trueman responded in the e-zine *Reformation21*, focusing on Murray’s historical method as expressed in the latter’s two-volume biography *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones*.⁷ Of it, Trueman wrote, “[I]nstead of a genuine assessment of [Lloyd-Jones’] strengths and weaknesses which might have been of real value to the contemporary church, what we have is a personality cult, supported by a body of hagiography, and maintained by a defensive mentality, where all critics are dismissed as unworthy slanders and mediocre historians.” Specific to hagiography Trueman critiqued Murray for writing “a massive two volume biography of M[artyn] L[oyn]-J[ones] which contained virtually no criticism whatsoever.”⁸

This twenty-first century interchange is a microcosm of a larger discussion that was held in the twentieth century over how to write history as a Christian.⁹ The question under review was, “Is there a Christian way to do history?” Evangelicals generally answer in the affirmative, but there are clearly two different paths that evangelicals take in answering thus. 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. This debate has direct bearing on Arnold Dallimore, the subject of this book. Though the dispute over the doing of Christian history is much larger than Dallimore, he was involved in one important portion of it, namely the interpretation of one of evangelical history’s most celebrated figures, George Whitefield. A survey of the larger debate is therefore important as the nature of the question and its conclusions impact the way Dallimore can be understood as an historian. This chapter summarizes the history and perspectives in the dispute over Christian history,

Review by Iain H. Murray, “*Banner of Truth* (March 2010); Carl Trueman, “On the Gloucestershire Way of Identifying Sheep: A Response to Iain Murray,” *Reformation 21* (March 2010), accessed December 5, 2013, <http://www.reformation21.org/articles/on-the-gloucestershire-way-of-identifying-sheep-a-response-to-ian-murray.php>.

6 Iain H. Murray, “Review of *J. I. Packer and the Evangelical Future*,” *Master’s Seminary Journal* 21.2 (Fall 2010), 238.

7 Iain H. Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The First Forty Years, 1899–1939* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982); Iain H. Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith, 1939–1981* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1990).

8 Trueman, “On the Gloucestershire Way of Identifying Sheep.”

9 Such debates were also engaged outside of evangelical Christian circles. For instance see the discussion of Mormon historiography in Melvin T. Smith, “Faithful History/Secular Faith,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* (December 1, 1983): 65–71. Smith spoke in weary tones of the Mormon debate saying, “I readily admit that the topic of ‘faithful history’ may gain more by praying for the demise of the debate than by trying to provide life-extending arguments or by seeking to resurrect it.” Smith, “Faithful History,” 65.

explains how Dallimore fits into the discussion, and offers a third alternative to the opposing views.

History wars: “Natural” vs. “supernatural” historiography

The debate illustrated in the introduction to this chapter is not just about how an historian’s work is publicly perceived, but has as much to do with how the historian understands his or her own vocation.¹⁰ Historians are faced with many self-reflective questions. Is it appropriate for a professional historian to write for a popular audience and do so in a way that reveals their own faith commitments? Can an evangelical historian write for a scholarly audience without abandoning religious principles? Does Christian history require recognition of divine providence in the events of the past? This section considers the different ways that evangelicals in the twentieth century have sought to answer such questions.

The history of history writing: Historical background on historical thinking

Broad discussions about the relationship between Christianity and history have occupied church historians from the mid-twentieth century onwards. For instance, in the United States the Conference on Faith and History (CFH) began in 1968 as a loose gathering of Christian historians who met to discuss such issues, among other things.¹¹ Its journal *Fides et Historia* published conference proceedings, and in the early years focused largely on the relationship between faith and history. In its second volume one of the founders of the CFH, Charles J. Miller, asked the question “Is there a Christian approach to history?”¹² Citing the historian’s own personal philosophy that biases their scholarship, Miller answered in the affirmative: “As long as Christians are writing history, there is a

10 For reflections on the historian and vocation see Arthur S. Link, “The Historian’s Vocation,” *Theology Today* 19 (April 1962): 75–89; Douglas A. Sweeney, “On the Vocation of Historians to the Priesthood of Believers, A Plea to Christians in the Academy,” in John Fea, Jay Green and Eric Miller, ed., *Confessing History: Explorations in Christian Faith and the Historian’s Vocation* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 299–315.

11 D.G. Hart notes the discrepancy in accounts over when the CFH was born; some involved testify that it began in 1959. See D.G. Hart, “History in Search of Meaning: The Conference on Faith and History,” in Ronald A. Wells, ed., *History and the Christian Historian* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 72.

12 Charles J. Miller, “Is There a Christian Approach to History?” *Fides et Historia* 2.1 (1969): 3–15.