white Christian America. For many white Christians, lynching is a nebulous historical reality, to be acknowledged but also to be left in obscurity because of the pain of bringing it into the open for honest and systematic consideration. But lynching was so accepted by our white grandparents and great-grandparents that, according to Mathews, 'at least thirty five times in 1899, white crowds of varying sizes came together to lynch black men in Georgia' (244). That amounts to an average of three occasions per month—or, to put it in prosaic terms, somewhat under the average number of runs to the grocery store for an average family of four. The historical normality—or as Mathews puts it, the American-ness (2)—of lynching demands a thorough consideration if atonement can be made, resulting in true Christian reconciliation between races.

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John Gerstner and the Renewal of Presbyterian and Reformed Evangelicalism in Modern America
Jeffrey S. McDonald
Eugene, OR; Pickwick Publications, 2017; x + 212 pp, pb. ISBN 9781498296311

In this monograph, Jeffrey McDonald offers readers the first sustained analysis of the career of American church historian and controversialist, John Gerstner (1914–1996). Reflecting the fruits of doctoral research carried out under Dr David Bebbington at the University of Stirling, this volume opens up two new vistas in the study of American evangelical Christianity in the twentieth century.

McDonald sketches out the contours of his subject's career in two initial chapters. Gerstner was a late-adolescent convert to the Christian faith nurtured in the broadly-evangelical United Presbyterian Church of North America (a body which merged into the mainline Presbyterian Church in the USA in 1958). A graduate of Westminster College in his native Pennsylvania, he went on to complete studies in the recently-established (1929) Westminster Theological Seminary and Harvard University. Leaving pastoral ministry in 1950, he spent the rest of his working career as a theological teacher: first in his denomination's Pitt-Xenia seminary and (from 1959 onward) in the enlarged Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, which incorporated professors from the two merging denominations. This second transition fundamentally altered the trajectory of Gerstner's theological career.

It is central to the argument McDonald advances in two further chapters (III & IV) that we see Gerstner as the maintainer of the Christian orthodoxy of the pre-WWII era. This had been the doctrinal stance of past leaders in his beloved United Presbyterian Church such as William G. Moorehead (1836–1914) and Melvin Grove Kyle (1858–1932). Throughout his difficult career after the 1958 merger, Gerstner laboured to uphold this theological legacy within a now-broadened mainline setting. It is here that we may note two new vistas McDonald's work has opened up.

The reigning interpretation of the renewal of American evangelicalism post-WWII centers on Boston, on Harold John Ockenga of Boston's Park Street Church, and on a coterie of doctoral students trained in Harvard and Boston universities. With Ockenga as choreographer, this coterie dispersed from greater Boston to enrich theological instruction in both greater Chicago (at Wheaton and eventually Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) and in Pasadena-
na, California, where Fuller Seminary was founded with Ockenga presiding. One can find this narrative elaborated by George Marsden (1988), Joel Carpenter (1997), Garth Rosell (2008) and most recently Owen Strachan (2015). The constant theme is that these 'northern evangelicals', once dispersed from New England, became the pace-setters for evangelical America during the next half-century.

McDonald, while not directly aiming to overthrow this reigning interpretation, demonstrates its inability to offer a comprehensive explanation of American evangelicalism's trajectory in these decades. He demonstrates that various American evangelical institutions (notably Westmont College, Sterling College, and Columbia International University) owed their existence to the same pre-1958 United Presbyterian theological heritage which had also nurtured Gerstner. Determined that this heritage would not disappear, Gerstner—positioned at Pittsburgh—functioned as the mentor and model for a generation of young theological conservatives who after 1958 would attempt to maintain an orthodox and evangelical position within mainline Protestantism. R.C. Sproul (1939–2017) is simply the best known of these protégés.

Using his Pittsburgh chair as a launching pad, Gerstner simultaneously exerted influence in rallying theological conservatives within his now-expanded denomination. He threw his weight behind an organization established for theological renewal, Presbyterians United for Biblical Concerns, and also helped to lead the chorus of those resisting the adoption of the theologically latitudinarian 'Confession of 1967'. Using that same Pittsburgh vantage point, from 1977 onward Gerstner collaborated with other theological conservatives in a cross-denominational effort working to re-articulate the belief that the Scriptures are inerrant. His activism in this matter, in league with other mainline evangelicals such as J. I. Packer, helped to ensure that inerrancy would not come to be perceived as the pet doctrine of a sectish evangelicalism. Gerstner, in sum, embodied the perseverance of pre-WWII evangelicalism in post-WWII America. With this 'perseverance model' highlighted by McDonald, other researchers may now go on to highlight further examples of it in additional regional centres of the USA. The Boston-Ockenga hypothesis has now been superseded.

McDonald's monograph opens up a second vista by enabling us to look differently at the legacy of Westminster Theological Seminary, founded in 1929 under the leadership of J. Gresham Machen (1881–1937). This confessional institution is generally credited with assisting in the launch of a number of strictly confessional Presbyterian denominations in decades when this stance had disappeared in older bodies. But this is not the whole story. Rosell (2008) pointed the way in showing how his subject, Ockenga—another early Westminster graduate—found his way (with Machen's assistance) into the pastorate of Boston's Park Street Congregational Church. Gerstner (also a Westminster graduate), just as much as Ockenga carried a zeal for historic orthodoxy into mainline Christianity and laboured to ensure a future for it. Renewal movements continuing to this day in the mainline, as well as movements which have stood apart from it since the 1970's—both beneficiaries of Gerstner's labors—suggest a legacy for Westminster which is not only distinct from what it has customarily been known for, but a legacy remarkably similar to what J. Gresham Machen originally sought.

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