

Book Review: Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A World History by Brian Stanley

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Stanley, Brian. *Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A World History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018. xxi + 469 pages. Paper, \$27.95.

The twentieth century witnessed an unparalleled and worldwide dispersion of Christianity. While extraordinary growth in the Christian faith arose in sub-Saharan Africa and areas of Asia, a considerable decline befell most of Europe, Australia, and portions of North America. In *Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A World History*, historian Brian Stanley prudently “selects fifteen themes that are of preeminent importance for understanding the global dimensions of contemporary Christianity and analyzing the various ways in which Christians have responded to some of the most important social, cultural, and political trends of the twentieth century” (p. 5). Adopting a thematic approach accentuated by geographical case studies, Stanley adeptly presents a comprehensive account of popular manifestations and institutional developments in twentieth-century Christian life.

Stanley begins his survey with the response of British and American churches to the First World War and its remarkable global religious legacy. U.S. President Woodrow Wilson’s League of Nations abetted the propagation of the principle of national self-determination. The aftermath of the First World War brought international circulation of the idea of the nation-state and subsequent proliferation of nationalistic attitudes. Stanley investigates links between nationalism and Christianity by means of Protestant nationalism in Korea and Catholic nationalism in Poland. A fascinating chapter on conversion to Christianity in West Africa and Melanesia is presented before addressing the issue of secularization in France and the former Soviet Union, which “constitute the two most prominent European examples of a concerted campaign by twentieth-century states to reduce or even eliminate the social influence and political role of Christianity, especially as represented by a national church” (p. 99). An apt

evaluation of divergent secular developments in Scandinavia and the United States of America follows.

Stanley pays ample attention to unity and disunity among Christians throughout the century. The 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh that brought together over one thousand Protestant delegates to formulate a more effectual common approach to evangelization and the inauguration of the World Council of Churches at Amsterdam in 1948 are assessed in a chapter on the ecumenical movement, which highlights the unions and schisms amongst Christians in India and China. A chapter on Catholic and Protestant missionary endeavors devotes careful consideration to the Second Vatican Council of 1962-1965, the Uppsala assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1968, and the Lausanne Congress for World Evangelization organized by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association in 1974.

Germany in the 1930-1940s and Rwanda in the 1990s provide the opportunity to examine Christians confronted by the moral challenges of hatred and murder. The genocides in Nazi Germany and in Rwanda occurred after extensive submission by ecclesiastics and congregations to the sinister appeal of racial ideology. “For Christians,” writes Stanley, “what is doubly disturbing about the unprecedented scale and rate of ethnic killing in these two cases is the seeming impotence of their faith to resist the destructive power of racial hatred” (p.153). Stanley laments the silence and inertia of many Christians amidst mass cruelties.

In the wake of the Second World War and the Holocaust, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which expressed Christian sentiments. Theologies of liberation emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. After skillfully explaining the origins of liberation theology and its flourishing during the Cold War era, Stanley juxtaposes works by Latin American and Palestinian liberation theologians. Churches in South Africa and

Canada are the focus of Stanley's assessment of the influence of the human rights agenda regarding racial and aboriginal justice. A chapter on gender and sexuality scrutinizes the debate on the ordination of women in the Anglican Church in Australia and the debates over sexual orientation in churches in the United States of America. A noteworthy chapter on Eastern Orthodoxy describes the international transmissions and ethnic divisions of Orthodox Christianity before focusing on Orthodoxy in Greece and Turkey and tracking the curious road of expansion of Orthodoxy in twentieth-century Africa. In a chapter on Christian-Muslim relations, Stanley deftly examines Africa's oldest church, the declining Coptic Orthodox Church, before turning to examine the growing Christian community of Indonesia, home to the largest Muslim population of any nation in the world today.

Substantial recognition is duly given to Pentecostal forms of Christianity that challenge the Roman Catholic Church and historic Protestant denominations, most notably in Africa and Latin America. "Undoubtedly the most striking single contrast between the face of the world church in 1900 and that of the world church in 2000 is the salience and near ubiquity of Pentecostal styles of Christianity by the end of the century," asserts Stanley, "forms of Christian expression that in 1900 were still uncommon and deemed to be at best eccentric and at worst heretical" (p. 365). Stanley's fifteenth and final chapter takes on the role of human migration and social networks in the formation of global Christianity, particularly the black exodus from the U.S. South and Jamaica to New York City and the trans-Pacific connections of Chinese migrant churches. Human migration in the twentieth century, Stanley concludes, transformed the secularizing North Atlantic nations into multi-faith societies with churches of great ethnic, cultural, and denominational diversity. Stanley's admirable global survey will be enthusiastically received by readers eager to understand the people, issues, and events that have

shaped the trajectory of the Christian faith in the face of two world wars, the disassembling of colonial empires, Cold War politics, Third World emergence, genocide, mass migration, human rights discourse, and the phenomenal rise of Pentecostalism.

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