

sexually charged texts without at least a little fun. In the lead up to the destruction of Sodom, the images are understated. However, once God begins to destroy the city, subtle sexual imagery emerges. The comets of brimstone look surprisingly like magnified sperm as they fall on Sodom. As the doomed citizens climb over one another, rising out of the pile of bodies is a very prominent rear end which is struck by one of these comets.

Read plainly, the book of Genesis is a foreign text filled with strangeness, but our familiarity with tradition and interpretation often conceals the strangeness from us. Contrary to some critics, Crumb does justice to the text without mocking it. His ultra-literal renderings do not make the texts seem strange or foreign, but rather allow the foreignness of the text to emerge naturally. Crumb believes that it is absurd to view the Bible as the Word of God, even though he values the text. Perhaps by 'playing it straight', he has done more to present the absurdity of seeing these ancient stories as scripture more clearly than he ever could have done with cheap laughs and mockery. As Crumb notes, 'The text is, after all, so very, very **OLD!**'

Apart from reading for personal enjoyment, Genesis could be very useful in undergraduate teaching, particularly for dealing with the text on a literary level. It can often be difficult to get students to engage the biblical narratives without reading what they 'already know' into it. This could also provide the students with an accessible and fun example of artistic interpretation to be viewed alongside other religious art. However, Crumb's illustrations might not be appropriate for all institutions. As already discussed, some images are graphic and could cause offense.

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World Christianity in the 20th Century, Noel Davies and Martin Conway, SCM Press, 2008 (ISBN 978-0-334-04043-9), 293 pp., pb £19.99

A Short History of World Christianity, Robert Bruce Mullin, Westminster John Knox Press, 2008 (ISBN 978-0-664-22686-2), 287 pp., pb \$29.95

These books compliment each other very well, and together they provide the general reader or student with a helpful overview of how Christianity has developed throughout the world, and the particular

challenges it faced in the twentieth century. Written from an Anglican/Episcopal perspective, the authors use an accessible writing style to present issues surrounding the worldwide scope of Christianity and ideas of ecumenicalism. These books can be read with benefit and are clearly the product of scholars who have been teaching and presenting this material for years and so have had the time to become abundantly familiar with the subject. If there is a downside, it is only that a great deal of information is fit into relatively small space, but this need not be understood as a negative because the books are an introduction to a very large amount of material.

In the Davies and Conway volume, seventeen chapters are devoted to understanding the challenges of the twentieth century for Christianity around the globe. The introduction sets the context of the twentieth century, and the first chapter discusses the nature of Christianity as a worldwide religion. Chapters 2–5 consider specific traditions within Christianity, going over Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, and Pentecostalism. Then Chapters 6–12 are dedicated to regional studies with a closer look at how local problems unfolded in the twentieth century. Then the last chapters, 13–17, study thematic problems for the twentieth century, such as war, science and faith, the role of woman, and Christianity and other religions. The last chapter gives a view of how the author's might respond to Christianity's position as the twenty-first century begins.

The Mullin's volume is divided into seven sections composed of a total of twenty chapters. The sections help provide an overview of how Mullins understands the progress of Christianity history. The first is about the shaping of a Christian tradition and covers the time period from Christ to Constantine. The second studies how Christianity became a religion that covered much of the known world from Constantine to the end of Rome. The third section studies the emergence of European Christianity up until the Reformation, and the fourth section covers the battle for Europe between Roman Catholics and Protestants through the Enlightenment and the Great Awakenings in America. The fifth section studies the nineteenth century, while the sixth and seventh study modernity and postmodernity respectively.

One methodological similarity is that each book is a study of challenges and how Christianity has responded. It is in the response that Christianity either develops what is latent in itself or moves in new directions. In either case, this sets the context for new challenges and new responses. One of the ways that the author's own view comes out is how the responses are analyzed. What is it that is essential to Christianity, and what is the goal of Christianity as it spreads into the world and develops over time?

An example of where these books overlap is in their consideration of Christianity's relationship to other religions in the contemporary

world. Davies and Conway give four possibilities, taken from Kenneth Cracknell, for Christianity and other religions: one religion triumphs over the others; the creation of a new religion in which diverse people can find fulfillment; the conscious decision by religious communities to live and let live; something as yet not known which God will bring about. The way these are presented makes it seem that religions are competing over basically the same goal. In some sense, this is, of course, true. But where exactly the competition resides is what must be identified and is left somewhat vague here.

Christianity, with its worldview of creation, fall and redemption is competing in the sense that other religions deny that there was a creation (all is one) or deny that redemption is required through vicarious atonement. Thus, the competition is at the level of beliefs about the nature of reality. These two books are descriptive in nature and so are not making it a goal to explain how such competition among beliefs might be resolved.

In a different sense Christianity is not competing with the other religions. To have a competition in this sense would mean that there is another religion that offers the same message as Christianity and the two are struggling over the same possible adherents. However, Christianity's claim about the need for redemption through vicarious atonement, a need which arises due to the sin of exchanging the eternal power and divine nature of God for unbelief, is not offered by other religions. Similar, the goal of eternal life as knowing God and Christ Jesus (John 17:3) is not a part of other religions. The competitive factor usually arises when the term 'God' is emptied of specific content and many different views of God are all allowed to be summarized under that one ambiguous term.

Thus, the question for the twenty-first century is what will become of Christianity's teaching about creation, fall and redemption? Just as these have been clarified through the process of challenges in the past twenty centuries, will they continue to be maintained and expanded upon or will they be set aside in favor of alternative basic beliefs such as the claims that *all is one* or *all is process*, which have already become popular in some theological circles? And how will the Christian claim about vicarious atonement be understood in contrast to the other theistic religions? These books can help prepare readers to think about such questions.

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