

[MJTM 13 (2011–2012)]

#### BOOK REVIEW

Ruth A. Tucker. *Parade of Faith: A Biographical History of the Christian Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011. 509 pp. Hbk. ISBN 0310206383.

Ruth A. Tucker is a well-known author of a significant number of books and articles on Christian history, especially on topics related to missions and/or women in the church. Her previous academic appointments were at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and Calvin Theological Seminary. Her academic credentials and publishing history make her well qualified to write this two-thousand-year history of the church.

I enjoyed this book for a number of reasons. It was written primarily for college and seminary students, lay people, and even “smart home-schoolers,” and thus makes the history of Christianity accessible for a wide audience (in ways that the often dense and technical works written for professional historians do not). Its biographical focus makes for a story-telling type of book that vividly portrays the narrative of people’s lives—something that makes for an interesting read, especially for rookie-readers of history. Tucker’s inclusion of numerous stories of the impact and experience of women provides a needed corrective to the common male-dominated story of the church. The many sidebars, pictures, maps, quotes, and “everyday life” sub-sections are helpful and informative distractions from the main text. Tucker’s devotional thoughts at the beginning of each chapter reveal her ardent passion for the subject and demonstrate the way in which the study of the history of Christianity can be a form of spiritual reflection and discipleship. Finally, the “what if” counterfactual questions at the end of each chapter are a novel way of getting readers to consider other possibilities, as well as recognize the importance of the decisions actually made.

However, I have a few issues with the book. *Parade of Faith* has twenty-four chapters divided into two equal sections; the first section covers the period from the birth of the church to the reforms of Luther and Calvin, and the latter section begins with the sixteenth-century birth of Anabaptism and ends with developments at the beginning of the twenty-first century. What this structure means is that half of the book's twenty-four chapters deal with the post-Reformation period, a period of a mere five hundred years of the church's two-thousand-year history. It also means that the one-thousand-year medieval period is covered in a scant one hundred pages. This unbalanced focus on the modern period is most likely due to Tucker's evangelical Protestant convictions—it is disappointing nonetheless for those who want a more balanced portrayal of the church's history. Another disappointment is related to contemporary global developments. Tucker is well aware of the growth of the global church in Africa and Asia, but surprisingly such developments do not draw much of Tucker's attention. In fact, the final chapter of the book closes with a distinctly Western (and American) focus on C. S. Lewis, Martin Luther King Jr., Mother Teresa, Desmond Tutu, and Billy Graham.

Despite these few disappointments, I recommend the book for students and lay people who are looking for an easy-to-read but informative introduction to the history of Christianity. It will inform, challenge, and inspire, and I will be having my own “smart home-schooler” read it.

Gordon L. Heath  
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