

[MJTM 14 (2012–2013)]

#### BOOK REVIEW

Dyron D. Daughrity. *Church History: Five Approaches to a Global Discipline*. New York: Peter Lang, 2012. xiii + 289 pp. Pbk. ISBN: 9781433116957.

Dyron Daughrity is associate professor of religion at Pepperdine University in Malibu, California. This is his second book on global Christianity, the first being *The Changing World of Christianity: The Global History of a Borderless Religion* (Peter Lang, 2010).

*Church History* is written primarily for those who have no background knowledge of the history of Christianity and need an accessible yet thoughtful introduction to the discipline. Its global emphasis reflects the continuing shift among scholars away from a Eurocentric view of the history of Christianity to a more accurate account of a movement that is truly global in identity.

What makes this text different from other introductory works on the history of Christianity is the emphasis on examining the church's history through the use of five different methodologies in five distinct chapters, with each covering the same two thousand years of history. The first approach is a "chronological approach" that details the history of Christianity from its inception to the present day. Important dates and events form the core content of this chapter, the most traditional chapter in the book in regards to methodology. The second chapter is a "denominational approach" that focuses attention on the three major traditions (Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant) that together comprise the larger trajectory of Christianity. Some of the material in this chapter is based on personal observation and field experience—something that could potentially lead to a subjective or narrow analysis—but Daughrity demonstrates well how to integrate such sources within a larger narrative. The

“sociological approach” to church history demonstrates how the use of the tools of sociology (i.e., statistics, social trends, and demographics) can inform our understanding of the growth and development of Christianity (this chapter, as he admits, mirrors the hybrid work of Rodney Stark). The fourth chapter, a “geographic approach,” divides the world into eight blocks, and examines the unique growth and development of the faith in the Middle East, Eastern Europe, Western Europe, Asia, Africa, Latin America, North America, and Oceania. Finally, his “biographical approach” to the history of Christianity provides numerous biographies from the past two centuries. Daughrity selects a number of figures that are standard fare when it comes to biographies, but makes significant and important departures from the norm. For instance, he examines Constantine’s mother Helena and Martin Luther’s wife Katherina rather than the two leaders themselves. His intention is not to downplay the importance of the two “greats,” but to include other voices and perspectives—especially female ones—in the telling of the story.

There are advantages to telling the story of Christianity from five different perspectives in different chapters, for each perspective helps to illuminate aspects of the story that otherwise may have been missed. However, one disadvantage when reading the book from cover to cover is the experience of going back to the beginning of the story five different times. Also, while these five chapters do provide examples of how to incorporate different methodologies into researching the history of Christianity, the book does not demonstrate how to fuse them all together into one cohesive whole.

Daughrity makes it clear that he writes as an evangelical Christian, an admission of perspective and bias that is often appreciated in the postmodern world. His writing of history from a confessional perspective is refreshing for a number of reasons. First, he avoids the simplistic hagiography of both ancient and contemporary popular-level confessional writings and remains critical in his analysis of events and people. Second, he does not begin church history with the Church Fathers, skip over the “dark ages,” and then begin the “real story” in 1500 by focusing almost exclusively on Protestantism. Rather, he tells the story of

the three main traditions, and places them all within the broad contours of Christian history. Third, his story of the faith will be “safe” reading for evangelical undergraduates as they sort out their identity as Christians, but also push them to include within that faith people and perspectives that their Protestant traditions have not always readily identified as Christian.

In conclusion, I recommend this book as a text for undergraduates, as well as for thoughtful laypeople. I also recommend it for professors, for it is a helpful book that nudges us to think in new and creative ways that we may both understand and tell the story of the faith.

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