

Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A World History, by B. Stanley

Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 2018, xxi + pp. 477
ISBN 978-069115710-8

Reviewed by Graham A Duncan

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2583-1914>

University of Pretoria, South Africa

graham.duncan@up.ac.za

This book provides a valuable addition to current scholarship in the twentieth century. Written by one of the two leading historians of global Christianity, and dedicated to the other, Andrew Walls, it will be a much sought after source for contemporary scholarship. It covers the period in which “Christianity became more truly a world religion than ever before” (p. 11). Stanley covers the century thematically, giving case studies in each of his chapters to illustrate his argument, with introductory and concluding sections. For example, in the final chapter 15 on Migrant churches, the introduction is: “Migration and the making of world Christianity, followed by case studies from the American south and Jamaica, and the trans-Pacific, with a conclusion on Migration and the reshaping of Christianity in the West.”

Within chapters, the case studies provide well-researched narratives. In his chapter 2 on “Holy nations? Uneasy marriages between Christianity and nationalism,” Stanley discusses the diffusion of the European concept of the nation-state as it was accompanied by the spread of mass nationalist sentiment. He discusses the situation in predominantly—but certainly not monochromatically—Roman Catholic Poland, with its devotion to the Virgin Mary who has held together the antimony between Catholicism and nationalism in her joint role as universal mother of all the faithful and Queen of the Polish nation. He defines the source of Poland’s national identity as being related to three historical/mythical events: first, the baptism of Miesko I in 966CE, whose millennial celebrations included the transportation of the Black Madonna to Jasna Góra, a prime site of Marian devotion; second, when Jasna Góra survived an assault in 1655 this led to the Virgin being declared the Queen of Poland; and third, the murder of bishop Stanislaw of Kraków provided substance to the narrative of Polish Catholic nationalism. This was reinforced by Karol Wojtyła (Pope John Paul II) as he



Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae
<https://upjournals.co.za/index.php/SHE/index>
Volume 46 | Number 3 | 2020 | #6941 | 2 pages

<https://doi.org/10.25159/2412-4265/6941>
ISSN 2412-4265 (Online)
© The Author(s) 2020



Published by the Church History Society of Southern Africa and Unisa Press. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)

planned to visit Poland to commemorate the 900th anniversary of Stanislaw's martyrdom in a "highly charged" and politically significant event. This demonstrated the awkward relationship between Christianity and nationalism, yet one which has been "extraordinarily effective as a dynamo of collective resistance to colonial oppression or other forms of injustice" (p. 56).

The twelfth chapter on "The noise of war in the camp: Human rights, gender and sexuality"—with particular foci on the role of women in Australian Anglicanism and gender and human sexuality in the USA context—demonstrates a high level of constructive historical research on a perennial contentious issue that defies resolution.

The conclusion is a *tour de force* of the history of Christianity in the twentieth century. It summarises and offers perceptive reflections, not the least of which are Stanley's devastating closing remarks: "If the greatest challenge faced by Christianity in the twentieth century was the repeated subversion of Christian ethics by a series of tragic compromises between Christianity and ideologies of racial supremacy, the most serious challenge confronting the religion in the twenty-first century looks likely to be the preparedness of some sections of the church in both northern and southern hemispheres to accommodate the faith to ideologies of individual enrichment" (p. 366).

Stanley has provided an innovative and insightful window of Christianity in the twentieth century. While not covering the entirety of this history, he has given us a novel approach to studying the broad sweep of history. The extensive scope of the book makes absolute accuracy difficult. This is evident from the statement in chapter 6 when dealing with the twentieth century ecumenical movement: "No significant church unions were formed in the remainder of the century" (p. 133). Depending on what is meant by "significant," can we underestimate the unions which brought the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (1994) and the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (1999) into being in the wake of the demise of apartheid? Further, this was the beginning of a movement whose ultimate aim is to reunite all of the branches of the Reforming tradition in southern Africa. Nonetheless, this book is to be commended and recommended for students of the recent history of Christianity.