

**Stanley, Brian. *Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A World History*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018.**

**Dr Ruth Slatter, University of Hull, Cottingham Road, Hull, HU6 7RX, UK**

This ambitious book reflects on the changing character of Christianity throughout the world during the twentieth century. Stanley explicitly notes in his introduction that it is an exploration of how theological ideas were translated and implemented by Christian communities in different geographical locations during this period and is not intended as a history of Christian theology or biblical scholarship (p.3). Nevertheless, as Stanley is well aware, even with this particular focus the project is considerable. As a result, he has managed the huge breadth of possible material by taking a thematic approach.

Stanley begins with a notably candid introduction. In addition to laying out the motivations behind his publication, he also discusses its limitations and biases. Not only does he explain how his own primary research interests (in evangelical mission) have resulted in particular topics being given more attention than others, but he also includes considered reflections on how his personal religious beliefs and theology impact the publication's tone and direction (p.7). He then follows this with fifteen chapters that use pairs of geographically diverse case studies to explore (what he considers) to be the key issues that shaped Christianity during the twentieth century. These include war, genocide, nationalism, mission and migration. Finally, Stanley brings these thematic discussions together in his conclusion, summarising each of their arguments. Interestingly, although his introduction explains that the book was never intended as a chronological survey of Christian developments (p.5), the structure of these concluding remarks illustrate the specific chronology of each theme discussed, highlighting how his chapters' organisation have allowed him to tell a particular story of change over time. However, despite emphasising this underlying chronology, Stanley's conclusion does not attempt to reach any overarching or unifying deductions about Christianity during the twentieth century. Although this results in the conclusion becoming a summary rather than a statement of argument, such an approach seems necessary given the diversity of the examples he has engaged with.

Initially, this book's broad temporal and geographical scope suggests that Stanley's endeavour is an outdated grand narrative of religious history; an application of an approach that has largely been rejected by twenty-first scholarship in preference for more personalised and localised discussions that facilitate explorations of individuals' personal and subjective faith and spirituality. However, both the tone of his introduction and thematic approach establish important differences between this publication and earlier grand narratives of religious developments. Firstly, by highlighting the difficulties that his own positionality created when conducting research for and writing this book, Stanley illustrates the possibility of conducting an overarching approach to religious history with twenty-first-century sensibilities. In addition Stanley's thematic approach and simultaneous discussion of two geographically diverse examples of the translation, adaptation and redefinition of Christian theology in each chapter, not only results in a publication that provides useful contextual information for any study of Christianity during this period, but also offers new, surprising insights and alternative platforms for discussion in relation to both unusual and well-established case studies.

Perhaps the most striking example of this is his discussion of Christianity's relationship with genocide. Any history of the twentieth century would be incomplete without reference to Nazism (Chapter 7, p.150). However, rather than simply retelling a well-known narrative, Stanley uses his pairing method to open up a broader discussion about the relationship between Christianity and injustice. Initially Chapter 7 presents a review of the extensive literature surrounding Christian responses to and (in some cases) facilitation of the Final Solution. This is then paired with a discussion of the role of western missionaries in highlighting racial differences and how this eventually contributed to genocide in Rowanda. The simultaneous discussion of these examples allows Stanley to reflect more broadly on how Christian churches need to acknowledge their role in twentieth-century human injustices, which at their most extreme culminated in genocide.

However, despite engaging with a diverse range of global issues that effected Christianity throughout the twentieth century, Stanley's discussions are limited in two important ways. Firstly, although often mitigated by the specificity of the examples he discusses, the book's world-wide focus occasionally results in overarching reflections that are unable to engage with the complications of personal faith and community practices. For example, despite beginning with comments that emphasise how history should never be written as a series of political events (p.12), Stanley's opening chapter on the relationship between Christianity and the First World War has to simplify the complicated dynamics between political events and church communities' practices. The scale of the project means that he is unable to drill down into specific communities and only has space to make sweeping statements about the British context in general. Similarly, while his concluding remarks note that 'the war reinforced existing religious trends more than it initiated new ones' (p.33), the majority of the chapter's content does not position post-WW1 changes to Christian practices within a broader context and does not reflect on the localised nature of specific congregations' responses to First World War. Secondly, this book's contribution is limited by Stanley's consistent approach to Christianity as an institution run by prominent (generally male) individuals, who's decisions and implementations of theology were directly and traceably effected by specific political and social moments. As a result, his reflections rarely explore the agency of ordinary people who attended Christian churches, or believed in God but did not consider themselves active members of church communities. This is best illustrated by his discussion of belonging and believing in Chapter 5 (p.102). Undertaken with reference to the contrasting patterns of church membership and belief in the USA and Sweden, this chapter pays minimal attention to the specific spirituality of the individuals who were part of these communities (or decided to not be part of these communities) and focuses on how churches (as institutions) responded to declining attendance figures or encouraged new expressions of belief.

Nevertheless, this book does make an important contribution to the history and historical geography of religion during the twentieth century. It demonstrates the potential and necessity of thinking globally about religious groups in a historical context that saw ever increasing global relationships. It will undoubtedly introduce every reader to at least one example of Christian practice or change that they are unfamiliar with and by using pairs of case studies to explore specific themes, it will provide even the most well-read scholar with new perspectives on familiar examples.