

Ted Byfield's Christian History Project

A review of the first volume – "The Veil is Torn"

The Veil is Torn: A.D. 30 to A.D. 70 Pentecost to the Destruction of Jerusalem.

Opening Volume of "The Christians: Their First Two Thousand Years."

Editor: Ted Byfield

Christian Millennial History Projects Inc, 2002

288 pages; Hardcover; 39.95 US or 59.95 CDN (including shipping)

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reviewed by Johan D.Tangelder.

Our culture is in deep trouble. It is becoming increasingly hostile to any kind of Biblical worldview. Every morning when I read the *London Free Press* and the *Globe & Mail*, I wonder what is next on the liberal agenda, which is so strongly influenced by practical atheism, radical feminism, gay rights, promiscuous abortion and the drive for the legalization of euthanasia. Sick and paltry jokes are made about conservative Christians. Worldwide, it is already very precarious to be a Christian. In Canada religion has not so much disappeared but has been banished from the public square. Furthermore, in terms of the United States and Canada there are many types of persecution where many people in positions of power look down upon believers. Consequently, Christians who dare to speak out in public for moral absolutes may well become "prisoners of conscience."

Our Christian roots

Ted Byfield, well-known Canadian journalist and founder of *Alberta Report*, is the initiator of the ambitious Christian History Project, which will be ultimately a 20-

volume set. He observed a notable and growing lack of awareness of Christian origins of our Western culture, even among otherwise knowledgeable Christians. He also believes in the impending persecution of Christians in North America. His objective for the project is to provide a sweeping, social, and a cultural overview of Christianity and in the process demonstrate that the origins of Western civilization are almost wholly Christian. He is convinced that without the advent of Christianity, Western civilization would have been different. "The fact is that our cultural origins are almost wholly Christian," Byfield states in the introduction to Volume 1. "Our founding educational institutions, our medical system, our commitment to the care of the aged and infirm, our concept of individual rights and responsibilities, all came to us through Christianity." Byfield also fears that we are forgetting and denying these roots, and "the result of all this is a culturally dispossessed people."

The writing of the entire history of Christianity is a daunting task, especially from a conservative Christian perspective. So much contemporary history teaching and writing is slanted in favor of secularism. But one does not have to read history books for too long before one realizes that there is no such thing as neutrality. Secular and Christian history writers are, like the rest of the human race, valuing, judging and selecting individuals. Regardless of which perspective is pursued, each historian selects and ignores according to his or her predetermined set of values and priorities. They all have their value systems and priority scales, using them either consciously or subconsciously to focus on, to cull out, and hold up for public examination that which they consider important. The contributors of the series are all highly respected scholars with a legitimate Christian bias. But contrary to what many think of history books as an exposition of dry facts, they tell history as a narrative, as bystanders, as people who have been actually witnessing and experiencing the unfolding sequence of events. Byfield enlisted a lot of Americans and some of their names are well known and their institutions are well known. Academic consultants include William Barker of the Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and Dennis Martin, a professor of historical theology at Loyola University in Chicago.

The first book

The first volume, *The Veil is Torn*, is comprised of nine chapters, bringing Jesus' life and the beginning of the Christian church into a sharp focus. One chapter describes the apostle Peter. Three chapters cover the story of Saul, the fierce persecutor of the early church, his dramatic conversion, and his relentless and courageous efforts to spread the Gospel. One chapter relates what is known about the Gospel of Matthew, Mark and Luke. The final chapters cover the horrendous persecution in Rome by Nero, the mad emperor who fiddled while Rome was burning, and the spectacular siege and fall of Jerusalem. These last chapters especially are popular, responsible, history writing at its best. *The Veil is Torn* provides a wonderful insight into the background of the early church, the geography of Bible lands, and their history and culture. It also has intriguing sidebars, such as on anti-Semitism and the history of circumcision, photographs of artifacts from the Holy Land, and maps and illustrations to illuminate the time and place. To further enhance the appeal of the book, it has forty-nine full-color, original works of art.

Contrary to what some futurists predicted, thankfully books are not becoming obsolete. Francis Bacon (1561-1626) said: "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested." The *Veil is Torn* is a book that should not only be tasted, but also be chewed and digested. I highly recommend this popular history. It should be in every church and school library. It also makes a fine Christmas gift or for another special occasion. It is not only an apology for the Christian faith. It helps Christians to get in touch with their roots and to strengthen them to withstand persecution. It will be a valuable book for decades to come. It is not available in bookstores.