

ing the views of persons who have dealt with the same topic as Luther. In quite a number of instances, a connection is made between Luther and the particular individuals inasmuch as Luther makes reference to having read those individuals' works. However, in a few cases it seems to this reviewer that the link has not been thorough enough to provide a genuine exercise in intellectual *history*, even though the material nevertheless elucidates aspects of the thought world of the time.

The topic of the first chapter, "Luther Against Luther," needs clarification. Here Steinmetz deals with Luther's *Anfechtungen*—most precisely those linked to Luther's concept of the confessional as connected with his "monastic struggle." Our author chooses Dietrich Kolde and John of Paltz as illustrations of what is entailed in the confessional. In assessing Luther's situation as compared with these forerunners, Steinmetz says it is clear that Luther "had little sympathy with Paltz's minimal program of attrition and obedience. Luther took his cue from spiritual advisers like Kolde, who stressed the importance of rendering satisfaction for sins over and beyond the penances assigned by the confessor, and who attempted to make a sincere and complete confession out of a disposition of contrition" (p. 7).

As fascinating and enlightening as all of the studies in Steinmetz's *Luther in Context* are, it is impossible in this brief review to survey them, except to make the general statement that the author has revealed an immense sense of both depth and balance in covering a rather wide variety of topics and details. Perhaps it can be mentioned, in addition, that the final chapter on "Luther and the Two Kingdoms" does not follow the usual method of presentation; rather it highlights, in rebuttal to Reinhold Niebuhr, the fact that Luther's discussion of the "two kingdoms" is more in the pastoral vein than in the arena of political philosophy.

The volume contains endnotes (rather than footnotes) and a fairly comprehensive index. As a compilation of essays prepared at different times, it lacks some of the unity that a volume by one author normally displays, but this fact is not unduly detrimental. Perhaps, however, a final chapter of general review and assessment might have been helpful.

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Stiebing, William H., Jr. *Ancient Astronauts, Cosmic Collisions and Other Popular Theories About Man's Past*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1984. 217 pp. \$18.95/\$9.95.

This book by W. H. Stiebing, Jr., a history professor at the University of New Orleans, critically reviews several popular theories and ideas that have gained wide currency among the general public. The popular concepts dealt with are the universality of the Deluge, Atlantis, cosmic catastrophism, ancient astronauts, the mysteries of the pyramids, and early

voyages to the Americas. A concluding chapter summarizes some elements common to all of the above. In this final chapter Stiebing cites the poor nature of the evidence; simple answers to complex problems and a pervasive anti-establishment rhetoric are examples of the common elements. Stiebing goes on to conclude by furnishing some reflections on why the views commonly held by the public have gained such popularity. This growing popularity, he believes, is due primarily to the gap in communication between scholars and the general community.

Stiebing's treatment of the idea of a universal Flood is essentially even-handed. He brings to bear deficiencies in the interpretations of myths concerning the Flood, such as overstatement of the evidence and difficulties in locating the alleged landing-place of the Ark. Stiebing makes an acceptable case for most Flood stories being regionally and temporally disparate. He also notes that many of the stories that are cited in favor of universality can be understood as local in character or as having been brought by early Christian proselytizers and then regrafted into the tribal tradition. Stiebing also finds that some evidence is overstated, as in the case of the mass and instant destruction of the mammoths in Siberia, which is believed by many to be proof of a universal flood. Stiebing brings expert testimony to bear on this issue, to the effect that such deaths were far less instantaneous than some believe, inasmuch as decay was present in the corpses before they froze.

Also, at least five suggested locations for Noah's ark are noted, of which the one on the mountains of Ararat on the Turkish-Russian border, according to a number of lines of inquiry by Stiebing, is not very compelling. These, as well as the absence of any column of flood layers, plus the presence of flood layers from different time periods in Mesopotamia, make the idea of a universal Flood difficult to maintain uncritically, Stiebing feels. (For my view that stands in contrast to Stiebing's thesis of two Flood accounts in the book of Genesis, see William H. Shea, "The Structure of the Genesis Flood Narrative and Its Implications," *Origins* 6 [1979]: 8-29.)

The question of Atlantis is handled by Stiebing with equal reserve. He discusses various concepts for Atlantis' location and *floruit*. His basic conclusion is that in the absence of direct and substantial physical evidence for Atlantis we must remain circumspect with regard to our zeal concerning the existence of such an ancient and fabulous place. He also warns that we must be careful not to draw overmuch on Plato, our principal extant ancient source on Atlantis.

In dealing with cosmic catastrophism in historical times, Stiebing is once again relatively even-handed. He observes that many of these concepts are based on a single-minded interpretation of myths from different periods. Often such overriding interpretations cannot be justified. Instead, many people seem to believe that their overall assessment will somehow justify itself—i.e., "the end will justify the means." However, this approach

almost invariably ends without means of any sort. Furthermore, it would seem prudent for persons who have spent so much time in looking up these stories to know also a little about how and when they were written. Building catastrophic theories on the basis of a single reductionist interpretation of all myths is surely precarious. However, it must be stressed that while many of these myths are not necessarily "recollections of a fallen sky," some of them may be so.

Stiebing continues with an evaluation of Velikovsky's restoration of ancient history. This section was augmented by Stiebing's recent article in *BARev* 11 (July/August 1985): 58-69, dealing with this same question as well as other "restorations" of ancient history and stratigraphy.

In dealing with the remaining parts of Stiebing's book I have only a few minor criticisms. First, in referring to the function of the pyramids of Egypt, Stiebing uncritically accepts them as tombs. To date, however, no completely unambiguous *in situ* burials of a Pharaoh have yet been found in a pyramid from the earliest periods. This, to be sure, we are told is due to grave robbers. However, the fact that some Pharaohs had two tombs and some had two pyramids does not commend this view without qualification. Certainly, some other factors can have motivated these massive projects (see, e.g., Kurt Mendelssohn, *The Riddle of the Pyramids*, for another tentative possibility). Stiebing's questioning of the relationship of Old and New World pyramids by citing differences in construction and building material is not immediately decisive either. One would expect that availability of materials would have some bearing on construction material and methods. However, Stiebing's arguments concerning the chronological disparity between these Old and New World pyramids must be considered decisive until explicitly challenged with respect to the dating techniques themselves.

Stiebing concludes his book with an expression of hope for a concerted effort at narrowing the communication gap between scholars and the public that may "make people less intellectually unwary than they have been heretofore" (p. 175). He wishes to believe, thereby, that popular theories will "become much less popular in the future" (*ibid.*). While agreeing with the overall thrust of this most timely tome, I would rather suggest that our *desideratum* to be that meaningful interaction between scholars and the general public render improvements with respect to these popular ideas, so that the deficiencies in method and attitude could be remedied. This procedure of meaningful interaction would give people a better idea of the problems associated with their favorite concepts so that interested individuals would either re-evaluate their ideas in the light of criticisms or take those criticisms to task (or best of all, that some might do both). Ideally, this could develop into a situation of reciprocal enrichment.

However, as Stiebing notes, the failure to communicate can have unpleasant consequences, as in the Evolution-versus-Creation controversy. Academic issues should not be determined by plebiscite. However, neither

should the general public be treated as if they were from some sort of cult group (i.e., as being present only to pay and pray without questioning). Certainly, better communication is a commendable alternative to either of these options. It is in this regard that Stiebing's clearly written book is to be recommended to people of all backgrounds. Hopefully, it will be an inspiration to other scholars to produce marketable material for general consumption in addition to their usual scholarly articles. Stiebing is to be commended for his efforts to close this "communication gap" between scholars and the general public.

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Walton, Robert C. *Chronological Background Charts of Church History*. Academie Books. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986. [xi pp.] + 84 Charts + [10 pp.]. Paperback, \$8.95.

Chronological Background Charts of Church History contains a wealth of historical detail in both table and diagram format. The book's spiral-bound pages are in 8½" by 11", and a number of the entries span two facing pages. Unfortunately, there is no commentary or "running text" as such, nor are there explanatory notes. Also, the publication lacks page numbers.

For the most part, the charts are serviceable and fairly reliable. The wide selection of material from the Early Church to the twentieth century makes it evident that, as the author states in his Preface, his "greatest challenge lay in taking a vast amount of information and reducing it to some orderly form" for classroom use (unnumbered Preface page). Earle E. Cairns, in a brief Foreword, has summarized the book as presenting "the significant facts of the past in useful charts and diagrams so that the student can see what facts are important and what their relationship is to the story of the church. The book will be a useful supplement to classroom text and lectures, supplying information on the who, what, when, where, and how of church history. It will also be useful to the general reader who desires a brief survey of the important data of church history" (unnumbered Foreword page).

Indeed, Walton has reduced a vast amount of material into an orderly form, and surely there is value in this for students in the classroom and for others with a basic knowledge of church history. I would disagree with Cairns, however, in seeing usefulness for the "general reader who desires a brief survey of the important data of church history." The material is too fragmentary for that, and much of it would probably confuse the un-knowledgeable reader.