Professors’ Picks

Bob Prichard’s selections in Church History:

Professor Dairmaid MacCulloch of Oxford University has built on his earlier scholarship on the Reformation to produce *Christianity: the First Three Thousand Years* (New York: Viking, 2010) a one-volume general history of Christianity. MacCulloch’s work incorporates a number of elements that are widely shared by contemporary historians: a recognition that Christianity has existed and flourished outside of the Western European world, an acknowledgment of the errors to which Christians are prone, and an interest in transnational connections. Virginia Theological Seminary awarded MacCulloch an honorary degree in 2011. This volume is now used as a text in the basic Church History sequence.

*Wolf Hall: a novel* (New York: Henry Hold and Company, 2009) is the first in a projected three-volume series on the life of Thomas Cromwell by novelist and journalist Hilary Mantel. Cromwell was Henry VIII’s chief adviser from 1535 to 1540, guiding the king to the policy that, while not openly Protestant, was at least sympathetic to some Protestant concerns. This volume is a wonderful change of pace for those acquainted with such portrayals of the Henrician reform as Robert Bolt’s *A Man for All Seasons*. Mantel’s descriptions of Thomas Cromwell and Cardinal Thomas Woolsey are unexpectedly sympathetic, while her portrayal of Thomas More makes no attempt to hide his flaws, such as his active role in persecuting others. Mantel’s second volume in the series, *Bring up the bodies: a Novel* (New York: Henry Holy and Co., 2012), appeared this year, and a third volume will follow.

*This far by faith: Tradition and Change in the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Press, 2012) is the most recent diocesan history to appear in print. David R. Contosta of the history faculty at Chesnut Hill College in Philadelphia served as the editor of work and as the author of the introduction and final chapter. He has lined up an all-star cast of contributors: eight of the nine are current or previous university history faculty members, and among them is Sheldon Hackney, former president and history professor at the University of Pennsylvania, and former chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Together they trace the history of the diocese in a series of ten chapters, spanning the period from 1695 to 2010. The work is a frank look at the successes and challenges of the diocese and should be interesting even to those who are unconnected to the church in Pennsylvania.