

Institution: The University of Oxford
Unit of Assessment: UOA33
Title of case study: Promoting a historically informed understanding of Christianity.
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Diarmaid MacCulloch's lifelong research in Church History led to the momentous undertaking of a one-volume <i>History of Christianity</i> (2009). Reviewers agreed that it was not merely a masterly presentation of an immense amount of data but also broke new ground in its novel take on the historical narrative of this religion. This work alerted BBC producers who contracted MacCulloch for a series of six one-hour-long episodes. The series was screened twice on BBC4 in November and December 2009, on BBC2 in January 2010 and on BBC4 again at Easter 2010. It was subsequently issued on DVD in European and US formats. Discussions of the work in the media and extensive viewer feedback testify to its impact on the cultural life in the UK and internationally. Released viewer figures for the TV series and sales figures for the DVD are indicative of the impact MacCulloch's work has had on economic prosperity.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Diarmaid MacCulloch FBA, University Lecturer in the Theology Faculty since 1995 has since 1997 held the Title of Distinction of Professor of the History of the Church. His comprehensive one-volume treatment of <i>The History of Christianity</i>, published in 2009 (US edition 2010) tackles the enormous challenges presented by the two-thousand-year history of this global religion; it combines the highest academic standards with wide accessibility. While the substantial focussed reading and writing for the project were undertaken between 2005 and 2009, the work represents the culmination of a four-decade academic career in church history informed by MacCulloch's own specialist research in Reformation history and his unique perspective as long-time co-editor of the world-leading <i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>. MacCulloch's research was embedded into a rich research environment in both theology and history including regular research seminars. The Faculty of Theology gave him special leave to complete this project.</p> <p>The book's innovative scholarship rests with its application to the whole of Christianity's history of a perspective that has more recently gained ground in much specialist scholarship. The narrative consciously takes leave of traditional teleologies that inscribed into the very origins of Christianity a seemingly inevitable trajectory leading towards its medieval and modern, Catholic and Protestant, realisations in Europe. Instead, MacCulloch's account privileges parts of the Christian story that were either ignored or marginalised within the traditional paradigm. His work gives appropriate attention to ancient Christianities in Africa and the Middle East and presents their story in a way that accentuates the less central, even secondary status of western Christianity in the formative stages of Christian expansion. Christianity, it turns out, was for much of its history an eastern as much as, if not more than, a western religion. This realisation casts in a new light the worldwide spread of Christianity during the past 150 years. In his treatment of this latest phase of Christian history, MacCulloch is equally concerned to present Christianity in its global dimensions, emphasising its presence in a variety of cultural contexts and the plural forms of theological, ritual and spiritual expression that ensue from it. It is this constant emphasis on the ecumenical, multicultural character of the religion throughout the two millennia of its history that makes MacCulloch's work a fitting church history for the early 21st century.</p> <p>Yet the book's significance lies in its style of presentation as much as its contents. It is the product of applied research: a reflection for the wider public of rapidly changing specialist academic perspectives on the Christian past, looking beyond the confessional-based stories which Churches have told about themselves. Its scholarly value cannot be detached from its aim to rekindle an interest in, and to foster knowledge of, Christian history anew and in a way appropriate for our own time. The research was from the beginning undertaken with an eye on its potential impact on cultural life in Britain and globally, but touching on education and public discourse as well.</p>

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

1. **Book:** D. MacCulloch, *A History of Christianity: the first three thousand years* (Allen Lane, 2009): pp. xviii + 1162 (UK hardback Allen Lane 2009: ISBN 9780713998696; UK paperback Penguin 2010 ISBN 9780141021898; US hardback Viking ISBN 9780670021260; US paperback Viking ISBN 9780143118695; Audiobook Gildan Media 2010 9781596595545): 46 hours, 35 minutes in extent. [Submitted for REF2, N02]
2. Peer review, carried out by the publishers, involved complete readthroughs of the draft text by Prof. Eamon Duffy FBA (Cambridge) and Prof. Craig Harline (Brigham Young) and section readthroughs by Dr James Carleton Paget (Cambridge), Dr Sebastian Brock FBA (Oxford), Canon Hugh Wybrew (Oxford), Dr Andrew Chandler (Chichester), Prof. Miri Rubin (Queen Mary, London), Professor Andrew Pettegree (St Andrews) and Prof. John Wolffe (Open University). All made valuable comments and suggestions, but none of them suggested that the treatment was other than authoritative and original, as well as forming an accurate reflection of the current state of research in the field.
3. Archbishop Rowan Williams FBA: 'MacCulloch's treatment of Augustine is just one instance of the excellence of this book. He is fair, remarkably comprehensive, neither uncritical nor hostile; what is more, he shows an extraordinary familiarity with specialist literature in practically every area' (*The Guardian*, 19/09/09).
4. Prof. Frank Kermode FBA: 'He speaks on all subjects with learned and affable authority.' (*London Review of Books*, 25/03/10).
5. Prof. Eamon Duffy: 'Diarmaid MacCulloch, one of the best historians writing in English, has tackled with verve the gargantuan task of telling the story of the world's largest faith community over the whole of its history' (*Seven (Telegraph)*, 11/10/09)
6. Award for the UK edition: the Hessel-Tiltman Prize (2009) for the best non-fiction book of historical content (<http://www.englishpen.org/prizes/hesseltiltmanarchiveandhist/>)

Award for the US edition: The Cundill History Prize (2010)

(<http://publications.mcgill.ca/reporter/2010/11/british-historian-diarmaid-macculloch-takes-home-2010-cundill-prize-in-history/>), which is the world's largest monetary prize devoted specifically to history.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

MacCulloch's 'rare combination of encyclopaedic learning and lucid writing' (Sir Ian Blair in *The Mail on Sunday*, 6/12/09) has been the major factor facilitating the impact of his research on Britain's media production, its cultural and intellectual life, and in particular its public discourse about the religious and cultural heritage of Christianity in today's world. In the specific case of *History of Christianity* this quality attracted BBC filmmakers who approached MacCulloch during the early phase of his work on the book with the proposal for a TV series on its basis. The result was an inhouse BBC Religion and Ethics production, with the Executive Director Jean-Claude Bragard. In the course of their collaboration, MacCulloch's original research project became closely aligned with the production of the accompanying TV series [i]. The process of interleaving filming with writing the book resulted in the growth (with editorial encouragement) from a third of a million to half a million words.

MacCulloch's book has enjoyed an unusually wide and diverse readership; up until now well over 120,000 copies have been sold worldwide [1]. In addition an audio version is available in the US and the book has been translated into Dutch, Korean, Romanian, and Spanish with planned versions in German, Italian, Mandarin, and Russian. Gordon Brown, whilst Prime Minister, listed the book as his bedtime reading [ii]. Adam Gopnik, contributor to the *New Yorker* and jury member for the Cundill History Prize, commented that 'If any book could truly fulfill the charge of the Cundill Prize – to make first class history more potent to a wide reading public, and above all to remind us that history, even three thousand years worth, matters – this one does' [iii]. That MacCulloch's ideas have provoked extensive discussion in the British and American public is further evidenced by the large number of his speaking engagements directly relating to the book, such as literary festivals (Woodstock Literary Festival; Hay on Wye); individual lectures and public events (LSE Forum on Religion; Politics and Prose Bookshop, Washington DC; PEN Trust, London Book Fair);

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public events in church settings (in Oxford, San Francisco, Pasadena, CA, and Dallas, Texas); and events geared to schools. Before an invited audience of Scotland's faith leaders, including the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Kirk, Archbishop Mario Conti and the Episcopal Primus, and BBC staff, MacCulloch held a conversation with Prof. Mona Siddiqui at Pacific Quay, Glasgow, on 17 May 2010: 'Interpreting Christianity through its history: how the religious past shapes the religious present', organised by BBC Scotland.

The TV series has further served to disseminate the fundamental ideas contained in MacCulloch's research and to secure their impact on the public understanding of Christianity. Responses emphasized the innovative take on the subject. Richard Klein, Controller, BBC Four, says: "A *History Of Christianity* is engaging, stimulating and, above all, informative, offering the ultimate guide to the origins of the biggest religion in the world. It also demonstrates the BBC's commitment to offering landmark religious programming". Executive Producer Jean Claude Bragard adds: "It's a privilege working with Diarmaid MacCulloch – he is the leading international authority in the history of the Church." [iv] Reviewing the first episode, the *Guardian* wrote, 'MacCulloch's fresh way of thinking and thorough research upturns long-held views on how we typically view the major religion of the west.' [v] Many viewers' reactions simply acknowledged the need for a novel, historically ambitious presentation of Christian history and expressed their appreciation for the way this was achieved: 'The presenter made me fascinated with a subject that I hadn't really thought a lot about before - excellently done.' 'Absolutely brilliant - informative and interesting - it really helps people to understand the background and meaning and history of Christianity.' 'Top-notch - intelligent, beautifully presented & with great visuals, even witty on a very erudite subject' [v]. The series won Best TV/DVD documentary at the Christian Broadcasting Council Media Awards ('documentary television at its very, very best') [vi] and the Radio Times Readers' Award [vii].

The series has also had economic impact as it contributed to the BBC's success as a worldwide leader in the production of documentaries. The series was watched by a total of roughly 1.5 million UK viewers (BBC TWO and BBC4 figures combined). In terms of audience profile (figures are for the BBC4 screening):,

1. Age Group: 10% were 16-34, as compared to 7% for the genre average; 20% 35-54 compared to 18%; 66% 55+ compared to 72%;
2. Social Grade: from AB group 41% as opposed to genre average of 28%; c1 23% cf 25%; c2 15% cf 20%; de 22% cf 27%
3. Gender: 46% male cf 43% genre average; 54% female cf 58%.

The documentary has since been marketed on DVD (last sales figures from the BBC are roughly £200,000 gross) [2].

On 13 November and 11 December 2009, MacCulloch undertook two four-hour sessions on a dedicated message board, discussing the series with viewers at the beginning and end of its run. Questions and comments covered a remarkable range of issues raised by the programmes, from the presenter's own religious stance to discussion on the future direction of Christianity, Biblical authority, the dark side of Christian misuse of power in history, and the question of Christian complicity in the Nazis' exercise of power in the Holocaust [viii].

During its original broadcasting, *History of Christianity* elicited considerable and regular reporting in the print media (all national daily and Sunday broadsheets reviewed every single episode) [ix] and considerable viewer feedback to the producers and to MacCulloch personally, demonstrating the value of the series to the lives of a wide ranging audience:

- 'Now I have a better understanding for religious people in general, and thanks to your series [...] I have a deeper understanding for the role of religion in the lives of people.' (PhD student medicine, University of Uppsala).
- 'I'm teaching a new survey of Christianity this semester [...], and plan to use your BBC series liberally. It's really terrific, and unique in actually having someone as presenter AND writer who knows what he's doing.' (Professor of European History, Brigham Young University) [3].
- 'The youth association of the two congregations of the Assyrian Church of the East in Melbourne decided to view an instalment of your documentary each week over the next few

weeks as part of our bible studies and history programme' (Student, Assyrian Church of the East residing in Melbourne, Australia).

- 'It is two years since I first saw your television series on the history of Christianity. I hadn't appreciated how much I had taken in of your presentation until I found myself quoting you in a recent essay for my lay ministry training' (Student Lay Minister, Staffordshire) [4].
- 'I've just watched your BBC-4 documentary *The History of Christianity* for the 2nd time. I want to thank you very much for such wonderful work. I [...] have recommended your documentary to all of my students. Those who have watched it are equally impressed by your even-handed approach to the subject.' (Lecturer in Classical Languages and Literature, Graduate School of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing) [5].
- 'I am not a Christian, and find myself generally hostile to all forms of organised religion. [...] In light of my feelings about religion, I appreciate your impartiality and balance all the more. For me, and for many others, it is easy to approach the subject of religion from a default position of hostility. However you [...] tread the line perfectly between faith and critique.' (Correspondent from, Bologna, Italy).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Testimony

[1] Correspondence with Publishing Director, Penguin

[2] Email from Production Executive, Religion & Ethics, BBC Television (13 May 2013)

[3] Email from Professor of European History, Brigham Young University (24 August 2012)

[4] Letter from Student Lay Minister (9 October 2011)

[5] Email from Lecturer in Classical Languages and Literature, Graduate School of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing (19 July 2012)

Other evidence sources

[i] TV Series: *Diarmaid MacCulloch's A History of Christianity* (six-part documentary series, BBC4/BBC2, 2009/10): MacCulloch both presenter and writer. Produced as a DVD by the Open University, UK and Ambrose Productions, USA. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00ntrqh>

[ii] Gordon Brown: Radio Times interview with Caitlin Moran, 15 April 2010.

[iii] Press release on 14 November 2010: <http://www.mcqill.ca/cundillprize/cundill-prize/past-winners>

[iv] From the BBC4 press release:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2009/04_april/07/christianity.shtml

[v] A History of Christianity Digest, compiled by the BBC 29 December 2009. Available on request.

[vi]

<http://www.christianbroadcastingcouncil.co.uk/1kit/cbc/MediaAwards2010/tabid/8727/Default.aspx>

[vii] <http://www.sandfordawards.org.uk/main.php?s=36&p=15>

[viii] <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/mbreligion/F2213240?thread=7142271>

[ix] E.g.: http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/culture/books/non_fiction/article186370.ece or <http://www.historytoday.com/paul-lay/diarmaid-macculloch-story-birth-death-rebirth>