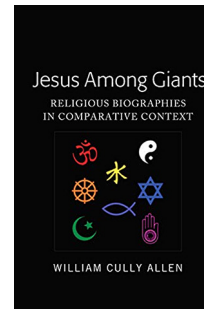


Book Review

William Cully Allen,
Jesus Among Giants:

Religious Biographies in Comparative Context
New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2019. ix-142 with index

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The author held the position of Associate Professor of Asian Religions at Temple University between 2001-2011 and has published books on Taoism and debate in Sanskrit literature. As the title suggest, Allen discusses the founders and beliefs of major world religions/philosophies and then provides a brief comparison to the teachings of Christ. Considering his work in Asian religions, it is understandable that Allen discusses Mahavira, Buddha, Krishna, Confucius, Laozi, Moses, Muhammad, ending with Jesus.

Smartly using the same outline to discuss each religious figure, Allen begins by situating the founder in his socio-political context to give readers a sense of the culture and issues that gave rise to the religion. Allen then provides a summary of the texts associated with the founder followed by relevant biographical information. He may mention that some questions of a historical-critical nature exist amongst some scholars regarding the historicity of certain aspect of the founder and his faith. None of these questions are explored to any depth and are likely mentioned simply to make the reader aware of a concern. Interestingly, the author does not mention any historical-critical issues in regard to Islam. The next major section is devoted to the founder's teachings. Allen identifies key pillars of the founder's beliefs and provides a non-critical explanation

that endeavors to be understandable to western readers. Each chapter ends with a section devoted to what Christians can learn from each of the respective religions.

At only 142, 6x9 inch pages the book is best understood as a primer for the study of Asian religions from a comparative religion's perspective. Though not a specialist in comparative religions, it certainly appeared to this author that the major highpoints of the respective religions were covered. Christians, at least Biblically informed ones, will wince at some of the statements Allen makes about Christ. For example, Allen calls Jesus an ascetic (p. 13) like Buddha. While true Jesus did not accumulate wealth, that is different than being an ascetic particularly given that Jesus was accused of attending dinner parties (Mt 11:19). Nevertheless, Allen gets Jesus mostly right (i.e. Messiah) but not to the extent that Jesus saw himself as God.

Allen is a clear writer so that readers as young as high school age should be able to apprehend the material. Thus, I think that the text is suitable for consideration as a text for community colleges and those interested in starting their journey of understanding other religions.

