James W. Laine. *Meta-Religion: Religion and Power in World History.* Oakland: University of California Press, 2014. Pp. 304. Paper $34.95.

In *Meta-Religion,* James W. Laine, Professor of History of Religion at Macalester College, focuses on how religion and politics affect one another and how religion has been viewed throughout history. He points out that many textbooks do not convey the impact religion has had in history, because they address merely what is thought to be good and noble about religions. To Laine, religion plays a key role in politics and power in that it helps "create worlds" based on beliefs and faith. The term he uses most is "meta-religion," which he defines as how each empire or nation came up with a basis for organizing and managing multiple religions in a common political community. While trying to avoid a Eurocentric view, the focus is on the unique relationship religion has with politics in empires and nations throughout the world. *Meta-Religion* is organized into three chronological sections, ranging from 330 B.C. to the present day.

Laine starts with the Macedonian Alexander the Great and the Indian Ashoka Maurya, continuing on to the empires of Rome and China, and concluding with the rise of Islam. With early exposure to new religions, empires were more apt to accept different religions. The empire of Alexander the Great did not force a particular faith, instead ideologies from each region were incorporated. The "Islamic Millennium" from 700-1700 A.D., started with the rise of the Arab empire to the early modern period of the three Great Muslim Empires: the Safavids of Persia, the Ottomans of Turkey, and the Mughals of India. It was at this time that empires began to imagine a single ideology to proclaim as the "One True Religion."

The third and final section spans the mid-1500s to the present day. Here Laine explores a wide array of empires and polities, ranging from Europe, France, India, Pakistan, Israel, Iran, China and the United States. Some revolutions were sparked by religious rivalries. Every political party used religion to assert their dominance. But in an age where many long lasting religions were practiced, politicians needed to establish a peaceful balance. Through the power of language, terms that declared a "truth" to people reflected rights for all people, not just to those of a specific religious faith.

Laine relies heavily on secondary sources, but also includes writings, speeches, and teachings from key figures of each era. He highlights the understandings and impressions each ruler had on religions, demonstrating how decisions were impacted in each empire and nation. Each section of *Meta-Religion* contains a dense overview of history spanning several hundred years. Laine does well, however, to provide historical background and clarity to ease those unfamiliar with the topics into each section. His attention is more on religions and their relations to power and politics, therefore elements such as economics do not play a big role. *Meta-Religion* is well researched and organized in an approachable manner, but it is repetitive, as several comparisons of empires and religions are similar. However, Laine does so purposefully to make sure the reader has a clear understanding of the relationship between religion and politics. This would be a great addition to anyone who wants to expand their knowledge of different religions and their importance in the politics of empire and nation building. It is also a foundational text for World historians.

Michael Todd