

The Book of Genesis ILLUSTRATED by R. Crumb.
Jonathan Cape 2009.

Those who have fond memories of the subversive and explicit underground cartoon Fritz the Cat in the 1960s will have some idea of what to expect from the book of Genesis as illustrated by Fritz' creator Robert Crumb. The drawings are large, no detail is spared, and the stories from the first of the five books of Moses are explicitly and lovingly depicted in all their violence, sexuality and drama.

In his introduction, Crumb sets out his stall with regard to his own approach to the biblical text, which he believes to be a human document, but acknowledges the help he received from, among others, Professor Robert Alter of whose 2004 translation of the Pentateuch Crumb makes use.

He also states categorically that while his depictions of some much loved stories from the Bible, and much loved figures in several religious traditions, may offend some readers, that is in no way his purpose. He has not set out to ridicule, only to illustrate.

I suspect that this book will have a polarised readership; those who see it as disrespectful, or too explicit, will hate it, those who find opportunities for thinking afresh about familiar texts through Crumb's vivid illustrations will love it.

As Crumb himself says, 'you can't please everybody'!

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh