Clarion Review

Religion

Christianity: Lifeblood of America's Free Society
John A. Howard
CrossBooks
978-1-61507-858-5
Five Stars (out of Five)

Christianity continues to be a hotly contested subject in the United States. There are disputes ranging from its relevance in the lives of Americans today to whether it should have any role in government policy. In *Christianity: Lifeblood of America's Free Society (1620-1945)*, John A. Howard examines Christianity's early influences on the country and documents shifts away from the original ideals in an effort to determine if corrective measures are needed.

Howard believes that many Americans have either forgotten or are unfamiliar with the Christian principles ingrained in the country's formation. Accordingly, he begins by providing a basic overview of the teachings of Jesus Christ, such as loving your enemies and service to others. Having established a theological baseline, Howard weaves a Christian thread through American history, from the founding of Plymouth Colony through World War II.

Howard skillfully describes the early difficulties faced by the pilgrims and the importance of faith in their survival and eventual successful colonization. Next, he explores the importance of eighteenth-century preachers, the unyielding morale of the Continental Army, and the formative years of the young nation. Howard then moves to an insightful examination of the enormous impact of George Washington, the religious foundations of educational institutions, and the increasing departure from Christian fundamentals in the early decades of the twentieth century. The moral decline he perceives in literature and education is given special attention.

Howard masterfully balances historical information and theological perspectives. His presentation and discussion of Christianity is direct and forceful without being preachy. Historical material unveils interesting and powerful examples without getting bogged down in irrelevant and boring details. One of the strengths of the narrative is the author's liberal use of the writings of many of the people he discusses, allowing their thoughts to reinforce his points.

Howard concludes with an appeal to Americans to return to the nation's Christian

heritage. “Americans today face their own wilderness that is as all-encompassing and dismaying as the wilderness that confronted the colonists. The new wilderness is a cultural one in which pagan standards of behavior have supplanted the standards of Christendom.” He then offers a final word of hope: “If Christian Americans can learn to spread messages of their faith, naturally, frequently, amicably and with no whiff of superiority, as George Washington did, then the doors may be opened to a renewal of Christendom sooner and more easily than might seem possible.”

Howard’s smooth and well-paced writing style and his ability to convey his passion for seeing his fellow Americans re-embrace the Christian principles of past generations makes Christ *ianity* a must read for believers and nonbelievers alike.

Jeff Friend