Clarion Review

Religion

From Pastor to Atheist: A Non-God Way of Life
Larry D. Cartford
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Four Stars (out of Five)

Organized religion is potent and demanding. Too often, churches frighten freethinking intellectuals with dogmatic teachings that do not benefit society, much less fulfill individual needs. Focused on musty ideals, fundamentalist factions of various religious institutions interpret sacred documents with a literalism that turns the educated away in droves. Christianity has been no exception. Even outspoken members of the clergy have stepped forward to halt the continued misuse of the Bible to overpower and manipulate.

From Pastor to Atheist is a revealing look at a former Lutheran minister's ordeal with the church, which also highlights incidents with malicious members of his own congregation. Cartford realized that he could no longer integrate his logical outlook on life with a so-called holy environment. He addresses the formation of human deities, the design of religious texts after-the-fact to enforce the validity of irrational concepts, and the low-class tribalism behind warring groups of diverse creeds. Religion, he believes, promotes the god it creates, instills fear, divides people, and controls behavior. Eternal life is not for a privileged few, but the destiny for everyone, while morality and truth are not private domains. He calls the stories that surround the glorification of gods metafictions.

Cartford's book is concise and enlightening. Its major flaw is poor copyediting, which impacts the quality of his excellent presentation to an unexpected degree. Typos and errors that should have been detected in production make it difficult to stumble through certain sections. Yet his work is straightforward and leaves no question about his philosophical stance unanswered. He makes an impression without resorting to excessive repetition, using an honest, direct approach. "When I entered the ministry, I was filled with dedication, desire, and drive to convert the world to Christianity," Cartford writes. "I ended up trying to convert the church to Christianity."

Larry D. Cartford was a Lutheran (ELCA) pastor for twenty-eight years. He lives in Wisconsin and Arizona. Though he professes himself to be an atheist, what he really seeks is not a void, but an alternative world filled with peace, beauty, and openness. Centered on inherent spirituality, he asserts that truth is known through reason, not revelation. His blunt delivery may offend the sensitive, yet his lucid observations and hard-hitting statements will cause even the most devout Christian to think with careful precision. Cartford's goal is not to alienate, but to prevent established religion from dominating and controlling humanity.

Julia Ann Charpentier