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The light and the glory pdf full text printable version

This volume of early American history is limited in its scope, covering a period of about 300 years from Columbus through the colonial era, the Revolution, and the Washington presidency. Its purpose, however, is not merely to chronologize these events, but to examine them from a spiritual perspective. Peter Marshall and David Manuel, both Yale alumni, seek to discover our country's earliest spiritual heritage and how it relates to the moral and cultural degeneration they were observing in 1977, and that continues today. While the book is not without its flaws, I think it offers a critically important and often purposefully omitted piece of the historical puzzle regarding the roots of America. The authors begin with Columbus, whose early missionary ardor to bear the light of Christ to the New World was ultimately corrupted by the powerful lures of wealth, prestige and power. Next come fairly detailed examinations of the colonies at Jamestown, Plymouth, Salem and Boston. Of particular emphasis, again, were the spiritual actors, such as the Franciscans, Jesuits, Pilgrims and Puritans. Throughout, the authors provide a quite unvarnished look at the shortcomings of all of these personalities, but also strip away the false images and caricatures of them that are so prevalent in modern scholarship. In particular, they restore some desperately needed balance to the discussion of the Pilgrims and Puritans. The thing that gives this book such strong credibility, as with any good history, is the authors' heavy reliance on primary sources, particularly from Columbus, Bradford, the Mathers, Winthrop, Washington, Adams and many others. Their own writings reveal much about the deep Christian faith of our country's founders, much that is never mentioned or even considered a valid topic of discussion in most modern (i.e., revisionistic) history books. Over and over, the hand of God's providence is highlighted, whether in the survival of the early colonies, or the war for independence, or the unlikely success of the Constitutional Convention. My key criticism of the book, however, is the extent to which the authors presume to tell us what the will of God was or was not in various situations. In so doing, they depart from the demands of the documentary evidence, and thus take what are, in my opinion, speculative leaps that are impermissible for historians. I understand the authors' tendency to surmise such things from surrounding circumstances, but just as I found this kind of speculation to be objectionable in the work of Will Durant, that is equally true here. Still, this history was written by Christians for Christians, and the authors make no bones about that. As a result, they are prone to occasionally slip into sermonizing as they consider spiritual parallels between conditions in the 17th and 20th centuries. The book also ends with a call to national repentance and a reestablishment of the Covenant Way that marked the lives of the first colonials. As a committed Christian, I am comfortable with this perspective because all knowledge is God's knowledge and may be fairly integrated in this way. Secularists, however, will likely find this aspect of the book distracting. Nevertheless, the value of this book for filling in an important gap in most people's historical knowledge cannot be overstated. Want more? Advanced embedding details, examples, and help! Did Columbus believe that God called him west to undiscovered lands? Does American democracy owe its inception to the handful of Pilgrims that settled at Plymouth? If, indeed, there was a specific, divine call upon this nation, is it still valid today? The Light and the Glory answers these questions and many more for anyone interested in the founding of the "great experiment" called America. As you consider our nation's history as a part of God's plan, you will begin to have an idea of how much we owe to a very few--and how much is still at stake. Now revised and expanded for the first time in thirty years, The Light and the Glory is the perfect handbook to our nation's beginnings--and its future. The Authors Did Columbus believe that God called him west to undiscovered lands? Does American democracy owe its inception to the handful of Pilgrims that settled at Plymouth? If, indeed, there was a specific, divine call upon this nation, is it still valid today? The Light and the Glory answers these questions and many more for history buffs. As readers look at their nation's history from God's point of view, they will begin to have an idea of how much we owe to a very few--and how much is still at stake. Now revised and expanded for the first time in more than thirty years, The Light and the Glory is poised to show new readers just how special their country is. 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Jun 17, 2012 Sheryl Tribble rated it it was ok If you consider history to be the study of what actually happened, insofar as we can discover that, and believe that a U.S. history book should at least touch on most major events and offer the most agreed on explanations for things in elaborations (even if the author chooses to include factors not always considered), then this is not a U.S. history book. For instance, the book neglects to mention crucial factors in King Philip's war (like the death -- or even the existence of! -- Wamsutta, and if you consider history to be the study of what actually happened, insofar as we can discover that, and believe that a U.S. history book should at least touch on most major events and offer the most agreed on explanations for things in elaborations (even if the author chooses to include factors not always considered), then this is not a U.S. history book. For instance, the book neglects to mention crucial factors in King Philip's war (like the death -- or even the existence of! -- Wamsutta, and also the land disputes); essentially ignores the French and Indian War, as well as the Christian Tories and pacifists who argued against the Revolutionary War (while discussing at length the biblical position of the supporters), etc. As the authors themselves say, "this book is not intended to be a history textbook, but rather a search for the hand of God in the different periods of our nation's beginnings." If you're interested in that search, this is a fascinating book, although I would say that the authors have some other preconceptions that make their search not so fruitful as they would like to think. The authors embrace the Puritan belief that they were the "New Israel" and that the New World was the "new Canaan" for God's chosen people. The book is postmillennial, in that the authors essentially argue that the people of the U.S. and God are in a covenant situation, where God expects the people to create a Christian nation that he will ultimately use to lead the whole earth into Christianity. I'm postmillennial myself, but don't agree with any of that. IMHO, these guys are still a good ways outside of solidly Biblical arguments. My first problem with their approach is that Christ himself clearly created and approved a division between Church and State, and the Bible teaches His Church inherits ancient Israel's role. His kingdom is "not of this world," and is made up of believers, not the people of a particular nation. OTOH, the United States is very definitely "of the world" and is made up of Christian believers, believers in other religions, and people who profess no religious belief at all, and has been made of this mixture from the very beginning. The Bible teaches that the Church houses Christ's kingdom on Earth, and however you may draw the boundaries of Christ's church, they are clearly not national boundaries. So separating out a particular nation and using the Bible verses directed at the church to apply particularly to that nation, or even just to the Christians in that nation, is unbiblical. They also neglect to point out that Christians who endorsed the Revolution were thoroughly steeped in some beliefs of their time that disagreed with the Bible. It can be argued that God intended to bring a new understanding of the Bible to the forefront (however these same issues are debated in the Christian church to this date), but it can't be denied that it was the Christians who opposed the Revolution who were standing on the historic Christian understanding of what the Bible had to say, and that those who endorsed the revolution were making a strong break with the historic Christian Church. But none of this appears in The Light and the Glory, because it is less a book about Christians in U.S. History than about the authors' belief that God has set the U.S. aside as his own nation. The authors do not recognize how deep this split is, and spend no time discussing the American Christians who disagreed with the Revolutionaries, much less grappling with the fact that this new understanding of the Bible happens to fit perfectly with the beliefs of their non-Christian fellow revolutionaries rather than with the historic Christian church. The authors, like the Puritans, tend to assume that bad times mean God is punishing people, and good times mean people are being rewarded, and that the way to make things go better when they're bad is to repent. While the Bible does teach that ultimately we will reap what we sow, it also makes plain that many people suffer for the sins of others, and that the wicked often prosper while the good struggle. Sometimes it seems like half the Psalms bewail that precise situation! Job's comforters were convinced Job had done something deeply wicked to bring on such calamities; God told them otherwise. The disciples were convinced someone must have sinned to cause a man's blindness. Jesus corrected them -- the man was born blind not because he or his parents had sinned, but in order to demonstrate the works of God (in his healing, presumably). If obeying God resulted in earthly reward, there'd be a lot fewer Christian martyrs. The idea that God might have blessed the U.S. despite the disobedience of the Founding Fathers (and, Biblically speaking, there were a LOT of disobedient Founding Fathers!) is completely off their radar. The authors get awfully close to implying that Columbus, through his sins, forced God to change his plans, and also poke at the idea that Christians can control God's blessings by jumping through the right hoops. But as Jesus pointed out, if believers aren't doing their job, God has other resources -- "the very stones would cry out." God controls the direction of the king's heart; he doesn't need his followers to accomplish his goals. He clearly prefers to work with and through his followers, true, but at the same time the Bible is full of examples where he uses unbelievers to get things done. So while I tend to agree with Marshall and Manuel that God did intervene in U.S. history, and even agree with some of their specific examples, I'm less convinced they rightly interpret the message (if any) that God was sending through these acts. The Bible tells us that God is our defender and support, so it is not surprising when he acts as such, whether the Christians in question were doing some "great work of God" by forming the U.S. or not. The authors ignore the clear evidence of history that the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were as strongly grounded in the Enlightenment as they are in Christianity, and they make George Washington out to be much closer to Biblical Christianity than he was. Washington was not a classical Deist, in that he believed in an active providence rather than some kind of watchmaker who'd wandered off, but he was not a true Christian either. (I have the edition attributing "Daily Sacrifice" to Washington and offering other quotes he likely didn't say, but as I understand it the later editions removed the false quotes while still not recognizing that Washington wasn't a true Christian). What's astonishing is that they begin the book with a John Adams quote, "I am well aware of the toil and blood and treasure that it will cost us to maintain this Declaration, and support and defend these States. Yet through all the gloom I can see rays of ravishing light and glory. I can see that the end is worth more than all the means." and end with "And if the candlepower of each covenanted Christian were to be joined to the whole, the result would truly be the blaze of glory which John Adams foresaw. America would yet become the citadel of light which God intended her to be from the beginning!" Adams was a Deist who rejected Christ's divinity and the Cross, and he was the President at the time of the Treaty of Tripoli, which in article 11 says, "As the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion". Whatever "blaze of glory" Adams foresaw, we can be pretty sure it's not the one Marshall and Manuel are looking for. The U.S. has always been a strongly Christian nation in the sense that, since the days of the early colonists, Christians have been a large percentage of the population and a powerful source of salt and light. But it has never been a Christian nation of the kind Marshall and Manuel are trying to describe, and there is no Biblical evidence that their version of a Christian nation is even part of God's plan. So while I find this book interesting and worthy of discussion with my older kids, I would never use it as a primary history text. ...more

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