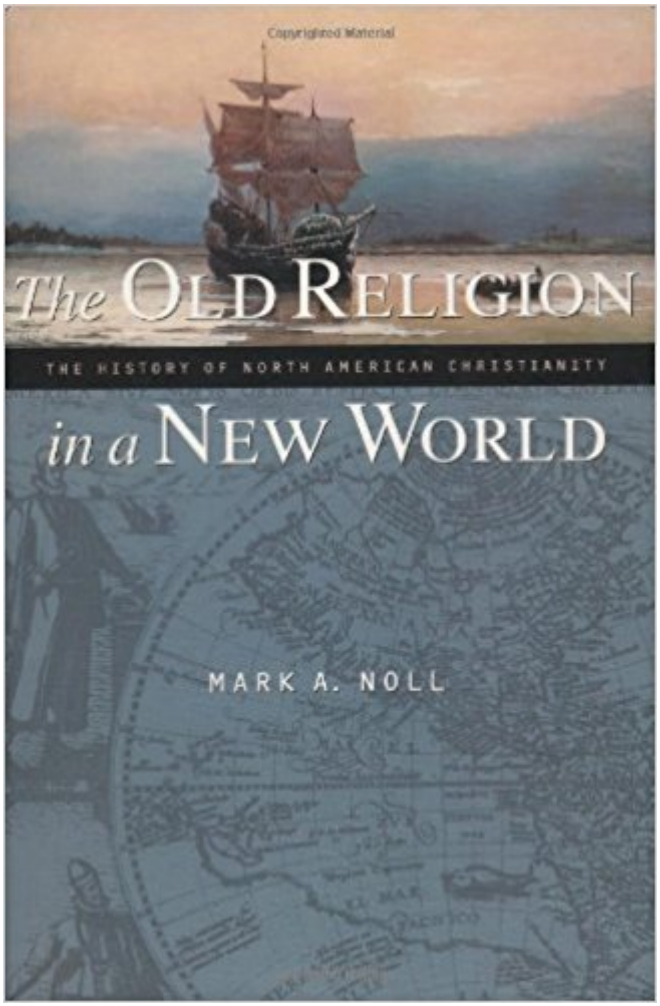
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The Old Religion In A New World: The History Of North American Christianity



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Synopsis

One of our foremost historians of religion here chronicles the arrival of Christianity in the New World, tracing the turning points in the development of the immigrant church that have led to today's distinctly American faith.Taking a unique approach to this fascinating subject, Noll focuses on what was new about organized Christian religion on the American continent by comparison with European Christianity. In doing so, Noll provides a broad outline of the major events in the history of the Christian churches that have filled North America with such remarkable vitality and diversity. He also highlights some of the most important interpretive issues in the transfer of the hereditary religion of Europe to America.

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Customer Reviews

Award-winning church historian Noll (The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind) offers a serviceable and workmanlike introduction to the history of Christianity in North America, primarily the United States. Like other books of this kind (e.g., Sydney Ahlstrom's A Religious History of the American People), Noll's traces the chronological development from the colonial years up until the last year of the 20th century of Christianity after it moved into North America. He provides sketches of events such as the First and Second Great Awakenings, the rise of denominationalism and the beginnings of the Pentecostal movement in the late 19th century. Noll contends that four elements space, race and ethnicity, pluralism, and the absence of confessional conservatism combined to distinguish North American Christianity from its European origins. Although his book focuses mainly on the United States, Noll offers a brief overview of the history of Christianity in Canada and Mexico. As he gazes

into the future of American churches, he volunteers some already well-worn predictions: denominations will continue to erode because Christians will keep seeking community based on shared theological convictions; Pentecostalism will continue to move beyond its institutional setting to pervade a number of diverse Christian communities; the number of Roman Catholics will continue to rise. There are more detailed surveys of American Christianity available, but Noll offers an up-to-date history that explores the contemporary scene and provides some idea of how we got here. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

Noll (McManus Professor of Christian Thought, Wheaton Coll.) is the author of the comprehensive A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada. In this shorter work for students and lay readers, he presents both a chronological history and an interpretive analysis of North American Christianity. He is most interested in emphasizing the aspects of that faith that set it apart from its European strain. Interspersed among the chapters of straightforward, well-balanced historical information are insightful interpretive essays dealing with issues like the separation of church and state. The author suggests that the whole American experience, including such aspects as slavery, immigration, and revivalism, has produced a unique and robust form of Christianity readily recognizable even across denominational boundaries. Including helpful notes for further study, this clear overview of a complex subject is recommended for public and academic libraries. C. Robert Nixon, MLS, Lafayette, IN Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Mark A, Noll, a Reformed evangelical Christian and a Professor of History at the University of Notre Dame, has written a textbook introduction and summary in his book The Old Religion in the New World: A History of the North American Christianity to the history of Christianity in North America. He has "provided a broad outline of major events, developments, and occurrences in the history of the Christian churches that have filled North America with such remarkable vitality and diversity." (ix) The primary purpose of the book is to offer an introduction to the history of Christianity in North America while also offering reasons why Christianity in North America is different from Christianity in the "Old World" Europe. While it does give a cursory history of Canadian and Mexican Christianity (giving specific examples when needed and providing a chapter to the subject), the book primarily deals with American Christianity. The bulk of the book is taken up with a succinct history of Christianity in the United States from AD 1482 to 2000. His narrative is not just about Protestant European-rooted Christianity. It has room for Catholics and Orthodox believers, blacks and whites (as well as other ethnicities), conservatives and liberals, clergy and laypeople, and gains and

losses. Noll's history does well at describing how Christianity has affected the history of America and how America has affected Christianity as it moves to the North American Continent. For a cursory understanding of the history of Christianity in America, one would probably be better served, however, in reading Noll's 1992 History of Christianity in the US and Canada (Eerdmans), Noll's America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln (Oxford), Nathan O. Hatch's The Democratization of American Christianity (Yale), Sydney Ahlstrom's A Religious History of the American People (Yale), or the later chapters of Justo L. Gonzalez's The Story of Christianity Volume 2: the Reformation to the Present Day (HarperCollins) for this history. The chapters dedicated to American History in The Old Religion in the New World are at times too concise and selective. While they are worth reading due to Noll's needed nuanced insight, they also leave out important facts. Dr. Noll saves some of his lengthy explanations for his other chapters. For example, he saves the bulk of his discussion on Jonathan Edwards in his theology chapter (chapter nine: Theology) rather than giving a fuller explanation in his history chapters. Dr. Noll's five chapters that do not give a cursory historical account are worth their weight in gold in understanding the uniqueness of American Christianity. They give an in-depth analysis of the American context's affect on certain subjects in Christian history. He has five chapters on certain particulars:1. chapter 1: "From Europe to America" - an overview of the impact of America's situation on Christianity that springs from Europe,2. chapter 9: "Theology" - how American practices shaped theology, especially populace ideas,3. chapter 10: "In the Shadow of the United States - Canada and Mexico" - the contrast to American Christianity provided by Canada and Mexico,4. chapter 11: "The Fate of European Traditions - Lutheran and Roman Catholics" - the impact of individualism and the separation of Church and State on certain Traditions, and5. chapter 12: "Day-to-Day Christian Spirituality and the Bible" - the populace practice of the Christian life. Chapter 1 basically sets up the entire book by explaining why Christianity in America is so different from its European counterpart. Noll's thesis in this chapter is that the American religious environment has allowed Christianity to be so diverse without people going to war, monarchs or despots rising, nor people feeling confined to the old ways. Noll considers pluralism, divisions, and fragmentation significant-and not altogether negative-aspects of American Christianity. He gives a compelling argument that the following reasons have allowed for such diverse expressions of faith: the sheer spaciousness of the land of America, the wide range of ethnicities and cultures (especially the African American culture), freedom of religion that has led to pluralism, and the lack of a confessional conservatism due to liberalism. Noll defines 19th century liberalism as "an affinity for populism, individualism, democratization, and market-making." (p. 23) This chapter does well in reflecting the distinctives

arising from the American context and goes far to explain how Christianity is different in this context. The chapter on American Theology does well in explaining that most of the theology of the U.S. stems from or has been in competition with European theology. Noll explains that it is in the American context, however, that science and the scientific method were allowed to outshine Christian doctrines more so than in the European context. Populace doctrines were also allowed to grow, especially dispensational premillennialism and charismatic teaching (which Noll erroneously calls Pentecostalism). Noll gives a plethora of protestant and Catholic examples of American theologians who contributed to Christianity. Most of his writing, however, is given to Jonathan Edwards's American approach to theology and his writings. In chapters 10 & 11, Dr. Noll writes about the contrast between the U.S. and Canada and Mexico and the contrast between European Traditions and American denominations. Noll gives a great cursory history of Mexico effectively showing the impact of its Roman Catholic roots compared to the British Protestant roots in America. Canada does not get an as in-depth history. Dr. Noll does show, however, how Canada and America are different, especially in their political secularizations. He also explains that every European tradition has had to deal with "America's liberal, democratic, commercial, mobile and individualistic values." (p. 235) Noll demonstrates that Lutherans and theologians like Schmucker, Krauth, and Walther have different answers on how to deal with the American context. Lutheran denominations like the ELCA and the Missouri Synod are formed in response. It was Catholic schools and higher education, and especially their emphasis on Neo-Thomism (a return to scholasticism and the classics) that have made Roman Catholicism a success in the U.S. These contrasts to the American denominations and Canada and Mexico's history to America are probably not found in other textbooks. Dr. Mark Noll's chapter called "Day to Day Christian Spirituality and the Bible," was eye-opening, especially his treatment of the American use of magic, even in conservative Christianity. Noll suggests that certain patterns of American life and behavior can be distinguished in history. He lays out five areas: the use of magic in the midst of formal religion; serious ethics that stresses the Golden Rule and discipline; the rejection and the embrace of material objects used in worship; devotional spiritual readings; and the consistent use of a "canon" of Protestant hymnody. Noll makes a great point in stating that "of all ancient religious authorities carried to the New World, only the Bible was exempted from America's profound suspicion of the past." (p. 267) He gives a cursory history of the Scripture's prominence in American history and politics. This chapter is a fine preliminary survey of popular Christian practices. Dr. Mark A. Noll's book, The Old Religion in the New World: A History of the North American Christianity, traces the developments of American Christianity while emphasizing the aspects of that faith that set it apart

from its European counterpart Noll provides a great succinct textbook for students, but because its purpose is to be brief, it disappointedly leaves out some subjects. The rise of the influence of megachurches in America, the creation of Bible Colleges, and the impact of authors such as Francis Schaeffer & C.S. Lewis are absent. Dr. Noll, being an intellectual, also places too much emphasis on intellectualism, especially when he lists theological influences. Overall, however, this book gives excellent insight into the history of Christianity in America. There are more detailed surveys of American Christianity available, but Dr. Noll's insights on the American context are worth the read.

I read Mark Noll's first foray into this subject, his 1992 History of Christianity in the US and Canada. I thought it was good, but a little too academic and scholarly for most people.This book is a tight condensation of what appeared in that previous volume, plus a good deal more about African-American Christian history, as well as Mexican Christian history.The thesis of the book seems to be how the separation of church and state in the USA made it possible for many different kinds of Christianity (and of other sects) to flourish.We read about the influential preaching ministry of George Whitefield and thr writings of Jonathan Edwards in the 1740s and how their ministries impacted thousands of people for Christ.We learn about the indefatigable ministry work of Francis Asbury, who started Methodist study groups and congregations all through the states.We learn about Harriet Livermore, the first woman to preach the word in the US Congress.We also see how the black community drew strength and inspiration from the biblical narratives, both during and after the slavery years.We see how Catholicism has had a tremendous influence in Mexico and in Canada.We also see the formidable influence of Pentecostalism, both in the USA and in Mexico.I appreciated the afterword's mentioning of the some of the influences that impacted American Christianity: The slavery issue, the first amendment which guaranteed that the government would not pass legislation with respect to the establishment of a religion, the ministries of Edwards, Whitefield, and other revivalists, and the westward expansion.One way this excellent book could be strengthened would be the addition of material about the impact of postmodernism on biblical Christianity. Perhaps there could also be added sections on the influence of Rick Warren, Bill Hybels, and other evangelical megachurch pastors.This book is great, and it will help you to get a sense of the lay of the land as you seek to learn more about what God has done and what others have done in His name, both good and bad.

This is one of the best surveys regarding American Christianity that I've found. Noll is accessible but scholarly and objective in his presentation of history.

Lots of facts, good read

Excellent read for a better understanding of Cristianity in American history!

as expected

The book just didn’t seem to read smoothly, almost like the author was trying to force the content together from a larger source of content. If the author knows a significant amount but cannot put it together coherently, then don’t publish the book.

In this fascinating book, Professor Mark A. Noll of Wheaton College in Illinois traces the evolution of the various Christian denominations throughout American history. The bulk of the book is taken up with the history of the United States, examining the past very well, and present trends excellently! Following this, the author has 4 chapters that look at certain particulars: theology in America, the Church in Canada (good) and Mexico (excellent!), the fate of European traditions-Lutherans and Roman Catholics, and day-to-day spirituality and the Bible.Overall, I thought that this was a simply fantastic book! I found the authorÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s analysis to be both fascinating and convincing. Also, I must say that I have not seen a look at recent trends that could compare. So, as you might expect from all of this gushing, I loved this book, and highly recommend it to you!

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