



12-1-2017

Cox's "The religious life of Robert E. Lee" (Book Review)

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Recommended Citation

Huckaby, Charles (2017) "Cox's "The religious life of Robert E. Lee" (Book Review)," *The Christian Librarian*: Vol. 60 : Iss. 2 , Article 91.

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Book Reviews



Cox, R. D. (2017) *The religious life of Robert E. Lee*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 336 pp. \$26.00. ISBN 9780802874825

Nearly one hundred and fifty years after his death, Robert E. Lee remains a controversial figure. Professor of history R. David Cox notes in *The Religious Life of Robert E. Lee* that Lee's "debated legacy" began at the moment of death and has never been unanimously agreed upon. After all of these years and countless volumes concerning Lee, both directly and indirectly, what is the value of yet another book on Robert E. Lee? Frankly, Cox covers territory in his work that no one has heretofore.

While previous biographers have acknowledged Lee's influence by religion, none has explored this influence thoroughly. Cox, the former rector of the R. E. Lee Memorial Episcopal Church in Lexington, Virginia, strikes an even balance of understanding Lee, pointing out, "If one must not make too much of Lee as a student of faith, neither must one make too little of him as a person of faith, for faith was central to his character – so central that it redirected his life, especially in defeat." Cox's portrayal of Lee presents a convictional, yet sometimes inconsistent, leader.

Taking his chapter titles from phrases in the *Book of Common Prayer*, Cox explores the intersection of Lee's faith with various facets of his entire life including his position on slavery, his entry into and exit from the Civil War, and his post-war labors. Cox adroitly explains the history of Anglicanism and the Episcopal Church in Virginia in a way that adds insight to Lee's faith without being dense. Relying heavily on personal correspondence and other primary documents throughout the book, Cox's insights into Lee's life are not to be taken lightly. Even as this controversial man continues to be discussed so many years after first rising to the attention of the American people, anyone interested in better understanding Robert E. Lee can read this book with great profit.

Reviewer

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