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Last's "The Seven Deadly Virtues" (Book Review)

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on the subject. Lambert’s goal in this particular volume is to address problems he sees in the work of people he labels “Christian Right ‘Historians.’” There is much to agree with as well as much to disagree with in Lambert’s book.

I agree with Lambert’s efforts to admonish Christians who have often taken quotes out of context in order to support various claims about the religious beliefs of the Founding Fathers. Lambert discusses a handful of Christians who label themselves historians, but focuses the majority of his disdain on David Barton. Lambert is right to confront any Christian knowingly misrepresenting history in order to prove a point, but Lambert’s reasoning will leave the Christian reader frustrated at times. Because Lambert writes from a non-Christian worldview, he makes statements without realizing that they indict him just as much as the people he writes against. One foundational assertion Lambert makes is that “one who sees the world through a Fundamentalist prism cannot interpret the past as anything but a Christian narrative” (p. 24). Lambert announces this as if he can interpret the past correctly because he is not brainwashed by Christianity. He decries any Christians interpreting history in a manner reflecting “their own values and principles” but has no issue interpreting history in light of his.

Lambert’s work leans toward heavy popular but not quite academic. I would assert that the scholarship would have been enhanced greatly by more citations than presented. Lambert is to be commended in defining terms for people who may be unfamiliar with certain terminology. This volume is certainly not a premier treatise but it would benefit any reader wanting to understand how the non-Christian popular historian presents his case.


Reviewed by Kristin A. Vargas, Assistant Archivist, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, TX

This humorous collection of essays on virtue was conceived and edited by Jonathan V. Last, conservative commentator for the Weekly Standard, author of What to Expect When No One’s Expecting and numerous articles such as “The Threat to Religious Liberty,” “Virtues, Past and Present,” and “Comic Relief.”

This book is a compilation of 17 different essays, each written by a different author in defense of a virtue, i.e., fortitude, justice, integrity, etc. The book itself is classified under the heading of “humor” but despite the tongue-in-cheek tone used by its
various authors, each essay does give at least one good, serious reason why the reader should consider its virtue worth the moral effort.

For instance, in his essay on chastity, Matt Labash makes an incredibly good case for the unpopular concept of abstinence. The chapter is both laugh-aloud funny and the most awkward piece to read in the entire book (if colorful descriptions of the porn industry are not your normal daily fare).

Not all of the authors give as good an argument as Labash. I found Rob Long’s chapter on justice less than persuasive and James Lilek’s on simplicity downright boring, but each author’s style is different and what speaks to one reader may say something else to another. The great thing about The Seven Deadly Virtues is that one does not need to read it in a linear fashion beginning to end, but can pick and choose what essay most interests one at the moment. It is a light, easy read and worth the time spent for the chuckle, but don’t get the wrong idea. Students of ethics and philosophy will be pleased when Jonathan Last quotes heavyweight philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre (p. 9), Andrew Stiles references C. S. Lewis in his call for temperance, and other essayists remind us of the words of St. Paul, St. Augustine, and other towering figures in the history of Christianity.

Overall, I would recommend this book to students because it’s rare to find a humorous contribution to the topic of virtue that is not tearing down morality, but instead gives compelling reasons why we should all strive to be better people.


Reviewed by Mary Ann Buhler, Director of Library Services, Manhattan Christian College, Manhattan, KS

I found this book difficult to relate to my faith journey. Rev. Aldredge-Clanton believes that the use of masculine names in reference to God is behind many of the problems in the world. She divides her book into ten parts, describing various people (mostly women) who are active in fields related to feminist theology. Some of the sections deal with gender equality, racial equality, caring for creation, creative worship, etc. The featured people come from all faith backgrounds: fundamentalists, to Presbyterians, to Roman Catholics. What they all have in common is a desire to remove all references to the masculine forms of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Various terms used for God are “Godde,” “Goddess,” or “Mother;” for Jesus, “Sophia;” and for the Holy Spirit, “Wisdom.”