



God's Ambassadors: A History of the Christian Clergy in America (Pulpit & Pew)

E. Brooks Holifield

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In *God's Ambassadors* E. Brooks Holifield masterfully traces the history of America's Christian clergy from the seventeenth to the twenty-first century, analyzing the changes in practice and authority that have transformed the clerical profession. Challenging one-sided depictions of decline in clerical authority, Holifield locates the complex story of the clergy within the context not only of changing theologies but also of transitions in American culture and society. The result is a thorough social history of the profession that also takes seriously the theological presuppositions that have informed clerical activity. With alternating chapters on Protestant and Catholic clergy, the book permits sustained comparisons between the two dominant Christian traditions in American history. At the same time, *God's Ambassadors* depicts a vocation that has remained deeply ambivalent regarding the professional status marking the other traditional learned callings in the American workplace. Changing expectations about clerical education, as well as enduring theological questions, have engendered a debate about the professional ideal that has distinguished the clerical vocation from such fields as law and medicine. The American clergy from the past four centuries constitute a colorful, diverse cast of characters who have, in ways both obvious and obscure, helped to shape the tone of American culture. For a well-rounded narrative of their story told by a master historian, *God's Ambassadors* is the book to read.

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