

First Chaplain of the Confederacy: Father Darius Hubert, S.J.

A. James Fuller

University Indianapolis, afuller@uindy.edu

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Review

Fuller, A. James

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Jeffrey, Katherine Bentley. *First Chaplain of the Confederacy: Father Darius Hubert, S.J.* Louisiana State University Press, 2020. HARDCOVER. \$45.00 ISBN 9780807173374 pp. 192

In this slim-but-significant book, independent scholar Katherine Bentley Jeffrey adds tremendously to our understanding of the religious life of the Civil War Era. The small volume makes several important contributions to the literature. First, it provides a definitive biography of Father Darius Hubert, the first cleric to be officially appointed a chaplain in the Confederate forces. Second, it offers a view of a working Roman Catholic priest in the South before, during, and after the Civil War. Third, it adds to the growing literature on religious life in the military during the war by analyzing Hubert's career as an army chaplain for more than four years (appointed in May of 1861, he did not return home from service until July of 1865). Fourth, it explores the ways in which this Catholic priest became part of the Lost Cause as he fostered both a pro-Southern memory of the war and a desire for reconciliation.

Born in Toulon, France, in 1823, Hubert became a Jesuit priest and joined the North American mission of that order in 1848. He moved to Louisiana, where he served as both a parish cleric and a teacher in the years before the Civil War. Hubert illustrated the ways in which slavery was so deeply entwined in Southern life, including the Catholic Church. He experienced nativism and the anti-Catholic bias of the Know Nothings but also struggled with internal problems within the Church.

When the war began, he joined the Confederate Army and was the first clergyman to be given the official post of chaplain. He marched off to Virginia with the First Louisiana Infantry Regiment and spent the war years in the Army of Northern Virginia. Much to the shock and dismay of some of his fellow Catholic chaplains, he gave up his priestly garments and wore a uniform. Doing so was symbolic of his work as a chaplain, as Hubert truly lived and suffered with his fellow soldiers. In addition to tending to the spiritual needs of the soldiers, he also tried

to help the sick, wounded, and dying. Like many other chaplains, Hubert served ecumenically, winning the trust and praise of many Protestants as well as Catholics. When religious revival swept the Confederate camp in the winter of 1862-63, Hubert embraced the renewed devotion and attention to spiritual matters while also working to maintain the distinction of Catholicism. Wounded slightly at Gettysburg, he stayed at his post until long after Appomattox, remaining in Richmond, Virginia until the summer of 1865.

In the post-war era, Hubert returned to Louisiana, taking up residence in New Orleans during the tumultuous years of Reconstruction. He served as a parish priest and an educator at the city's Jesuit College. He witnessed the violence of resistance to Reconstruction firsthand during the 1866 race riot in the city. As the years passed, Hubert became an advocate of the Lost Cause, but did so in a way that separated him from other Southern clergyman who stridently sanctified the pro-Confederate memory in religious rhetoric that raised its heroes to sainthood. He did not preach fiery sermons about how God would help the South to rise again, or write paeans to Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee, and Stonewall Jackson (although he knew and admired all of them during and after the war). Instead, he became well-known for his deeply-emotional prayers at the funerals of Confederate veterans and at the dedication of memorials until his own death in 1893. Rather than aggressively asserting Southern rights, Hubert's version of the Lost Cause emphasized reconciliation and healing. In many ways, then, he foreshadowed the ways that Civil War memory would develop nationally in the early 20th Century.

Engagingly written, this brief biography is an easy read that will appeal to both scholars of religion in the Civil War and those interested in Catholics in the South. Thus, the book should be considered for assignment in classes at both the graduate and advanced undergraduate level. Fascinating insights into the lives of individual enslaved persons in the early pages will intrigue those who study slavery, while Civil War buffs will appreciate the detailed account of the work of army chaplains, and historians of the post-war period will find much to ponder about Reconstruction and the creation of the Lost Cause.

*A. James Fuller is a Professor of History at the University of Indianapolis. He is the author or editor of six books, including *Chaplain to the Confederacy: Basil Manly and Baptist Life in the Old South* (2000) and *Oliver P. Morton and the Politics of the Civil War and Reconstruction* (2017).*