

### Catholic Confederates: Faith and Duty in the Civil War South

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## Review

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**Kraszewski, Gracjan.** *Catholic Confederates: Faith and Duty in the Civil War South*. Kent State University Press, 2020. Hardback. \$45.00. ISBN 9781606353950

Gracjan Kraszewski sets out to provide an “exclusive look at Southern Civil War Catholics” (xvii). He justly complains that despite some recent works which touch on the subject in various ways, Catholics have still not been given their proper treatment. His book thus “calls attention to the fact that Southern Catholics are important components of the scholarly conversations in Civil War Religious studies as well as within the larger, more general, history of Catholicism in America” (xix). Through focusing on the work of certain Catholic bishops, clergy (especially chaplains), nuns, and a few lay people, this work highlights how “thoroughly immersed Southern Catholics were in the Confederacy’s culture, politics, and war” (xix). As a result, using a theory of “Confederatization,” Kraszewski claims that unlike the wider population of American Catholics who never fully reconciled their Americanness with their Catholicism in the nineteenth century, southern Catholics did accommodate well to the Confederacy.

This book begins with an analysis of southern bishops’ attitudes to secession and the foundation of the Confederacy. Focussing on Bishop Patrick Lynch of Charleston, South Carolina, who challenged Archbishop “Dagger” John Hughes of New York in what became a public spat over secession, southern bishops were loyal to the Confederacy. Even border state bishops, such as Martin Spalding of Louisville, Kentucky, exhibited some Confederate sympathies. Kraszewski, however, seems a little too sanguine on the balance southern clerics found between religion and politics. For example, he states: “Political commentary was not heard during the Mass and the political counsel given outside of Mass was often presented in negative or passive formulations” (5). Yet, Bishop Lynch welcomed Confederate military units into his cathedral, blessed their flags, and encouraged them publicly to fight for the Confederate cause. He, and other Catholic bishops, were quick to have *Te Deums* sung at Mass for Confederate victories too. The sacral and secular lines were very hazy indeed.

Similarly, Catholic chaplains often blurred their duty to God and the soldiers to whom they ministered. The most notorious was Father John Bannon of St. Louis who became chaplain to the Confederate Missouri Brigade. He travelled and camped with his men and became so close to them in the siege of Vicksburg that he helped fire a cannon at Federal forces. Kraszewski describes Bannon's action as "a remarkable, even scandalous, testament to his zealous Southern partisanship" but quickly moves on. Here we clearly see Bannon choosing the Confederacy over his vocation, a position he would reiterate later in the War.

Kraszewski is on stronger ground when he focuses on the work of Catholic nuns in the Confederacy. They were primarily motivated by the Christian service and sought to help where they could. They did trojan work for the Confederate Medical Corps and drew the admiration of Catholic and non-Catholic alike. Other prominent Catholics became wider Confederate heroes too. Bishop William Henry Elder of Natchez, Mississippi, was lauded throughout the South for his refusal to pray for President Lincoln from the pulpit or take an oath of allegiance to the United States. These positions led to his arrest. Kraszewski provides a fresh look at the controversy, making a strong case that religious principle rather than latent Confederate sympathies (Elder was from eastern Maryland), drove his stance.

The book concludes with an examination of important diplomatic work conducted on behalf of the Confederacy by Fr. Bannon and Bishop Lynch. Bannon left the Confederate army for Ireland on an official mission to halt Federal recruitment there while the Confederate State Department sent Lynch to encourage official recognition of the Confederacy from Napoleon III or Pope Pius IX. Bannon had some success touring the country with the blessing of the Irish prelate, Paul Cullen, but Lynch had very little. The Pope explicitly refused to recognize the Confederacy even if the pontiff did address Jefferson Davis as an "Illustrious President" (126). Lynch ultimately spent his time writing and publishing a futile defense of slavery for Europeans which he had published in French, German, and Italian (though never in English). Kraszewski rightly highlights that whatever measure of success they had, both Bannon's and Lynch's assignments indicate the acceptance of Catholics as an integral part of the Confederate project. Lynch's defense of the Confederacy and slavery indicated him as "a typical Confederate Southerner" which made him "undifferentiated" from his non-Catholic Confederate compatriots (128-29).

A problem arises, however, when Kraszewski tries to make Lynch represent "the majority of Southern Catholics" (129). Lynch was hardly typical at all. Though born in Ireland, he came to South Carolina as a baby and was raised on a farm which used enslaved people. Indeed, he became a slaveowner himself and, along with running his diocese and

helping the Confederacy during the Civil War, kept a lively correspondence with his brother who managed his “property” on a plantation near Columbia, South Carolina. Most southern Catholics, outside of Louisiana, were poor immigrants or the immediate descendants of them. They did not have the deep-rooted commitment to “southern institutions” and the Confederacy that the likes of Lynch did. Apart from some soldiers, such as the diarist John Dooley, son of a slave-owning Irish merchant, the laity do not play a major role in this book. Understandably, Kraszewski has focussed on those who left the greatest records either in correspondence or diaries, but an examination of the wider Catholic population in the South would provide a more nuanced view of Confederatization. For many Catholics, like those who deserted the Confederate army at the first sign of action, or those who accepted, even embraced, Federal occupation, Confederatization was quite shallow indeed. Some were even outright Unionists, such as James Whelan, the Bishop of Nashville, Tennessee. These Catholic dissenters, however, do not get a mention in this book.

Similarly, there could have been more refinement of this concept of Confederatization. It’s no wonder Bishop Lynch became an ardent Confederate, but why did the Irish-born-and-raised clerics James Sheeran and John Quinlan? Both, like the pro-Union Bishop Whelan, had spent their formative American lives in the North. Indeed, Quinlan was a protégé of Archbishop of Cincinnati, John Purcell, the only truly abolitionist bishop among the American episcopate. Understanding their *process* of Confederatization would have been very interesting but their becoming Confederates is just presented here as something almost natural not requiring full explanation. Finally, what happened to Confederatization when there was no more Confederacy? There is a nod to the realities of Reconstruction in the conclusion, but no discussion of Catholic participation in the Lost Cause and no mention of one of the Cause’s leading advocates, the former Confederate chaplain, Fr. Abram Ryan. To be fair, Kraszewski sees his book as a beginning, “starting long-overdue conversations” (141). For initiating these conversations he is to be commended, but he has missed an opportunity to explore fully why the majority of southern Catholics made the choice, or not, to become fervent Confederates.

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