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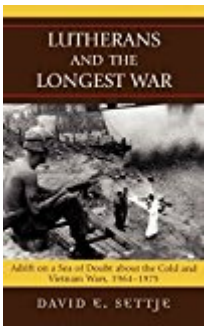

David E. Settje. *Lutherans and the Longest War: Adrift on a Sea of Doubt about the Cold and Vietnam Wars, 1964-1975.* Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007. x + 219 pp. $55.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7391-1531-2.

Reviewed by Jacqueline Whitt

Published on H-War (April, 2008)

For all that has been written about the Cold War, the Vietnam War, and American religion in the 1960s and 1970s, few books are dedicated to topics that examine all three closely. Even among those, laudatory examinations of religious dissent against war, or alternatively, jeremiads of how the Cold War co-opted religious beliefs and language, proliferate. Seth Jacobs's recent work about American religious culture and U.S. policy toward Ngo Dinh Diem and Anne Loveland's work about evangelical Christians and the U.S. military are notable exceptions.[1] David Settje's work, *Lutherans and the Longest War* contributes substantially to a more complex understanding of the relationship between religion and warfare.

Settje's book stakes out two primary goals. First, as a denominational history, the book seeks to understand the Cold War's and Vietnam War's legacies on American Lutheranism. Settje is clearly comfortable with this literature and genre; he is an associate professor of history at Concordia University, which is affiliated with the Lutheran Church. Second, as a broader history of religious responses to the Cold War, the book proposes that Lutherans offer scholars an excellent lens through which to view "average" Americans' responses to the Cold and Vietnam Wars because Lutherans held views all along political and theological spectrums--from liberal and ultra-conservative extremes to the moderate and conservative middle. Settje rightly notes that the so-called silent majority--those who voiced neither vociferous dissent to or fervent support for U.S. policy in Vietnam--have been all but ignored by scholars, which limits our understanding of both the wars themselves and Americans' responses to them.

Settje first lays out the general contours of the American Lutheran political and theological landscapes, identifying four dominant worldviews (liberal, moderate, conservative, and ultra-conservative) and roughly correlating them with major branches and organizations of the Lutheran Church (e.g., the Lutheran Church in America, the American Lutheran Church, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, the Lutheran Council in the U.S.A., and smaller groups such as the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Lutheran Peace Fellowship). After laying out the historical

context for the study, Settje moves to a discussion of "Lutheran Assessments of Global Communism" that focuses on Lutherans' responses to the Soviet Union and Red China in the 1960s. Lutherans of all political and theological orientations were deeply suspicious of the communist behemoths and deeply concerned about the fate of Christians in these countries and their satellite states. The primary disagreement came over the United States' appropriate course of action. Conservative Lutherans argued for resisting contact with the "demonic forces" of communism and lobbied for the eventual destruction of the communist powers, whereas moderate and liberal Lutherans tended to advocate working from within to facilitate change, and entering into dialogue with Christians and others within communist borders. Regardless of their policy positions, Lutherans remained convinced of an international communist threat, denounced communism, and vilified the states that practiced it.

On the issue of internal communist threats, however, Lutherans were deeply divided. The McCarthy-era communist hunts provided evidence and fodder to conservative and ultra-conservative Lutherans who remained convinced that communists and fellow-travelers lurked around every corner. They read pernicious motives into any attempts to liberalize church doctrine or engage in ecumenical work. Liberal and mainline clergy, whether communists or communist dupes, played into the Soviet and Chinese efforts to infiltrate and undermine the United States. Liberal and mainline sympathies with black civil rights activists and the emerging anti-Vietnam coalition did nothing to persuade conservative Lutherans otherwise. Liberal and mainline Lutherans also saw an internal threat, but for this group, McCarthy's accusations and hearings convinced them that the threat was not imminent. As the Lutheran church divided over the perceived extent of an internal communist threat, it also began to come apart--roughly along the same lines--over issues of biblical higher criticism, and debates over modernism versus fundamentalism.

Settje's most compelling claims come toward the book's conclusion and deal with the specific legacies for Lutheranism in the mid to late 1970s. According to the author, the most important legacy of the Cold and Vietnam Wars was that fatigue over constant and sometimes rancorous infighting led Lutherans to paper over serious theological and political divisions in the name of reconciliation. As the Vietnam War escalated and then wound down, Lutherans also faced serious internal divisions over issues of biblical criticism, the ordination of women, ecumenical cooperation, and splintering denominational bodies. Settje argues that "the discussion about the Vietnam War became a convenient way to move away from some of this tension because it was a secular issue to which few tied deeply held religious convictions. If the religious issues would not go away, at least they could attain reconciliation regarding war and foreign policy" (p. 183). Ultimately, Lutherans left unresolved issues of how to deal with divisions over American foreign policy and international affairs.

Historians of American religion will quickly recognize the title's allusion to Jon Butler's monumental study of American Christianity, ***Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People*** (1992). Butler set out to trace the widespread, national, and multi-faceted Christianization of the United States in its first three centuries, and Settje implies that his work might have similarly broad implications: If "Lutherans" can, in fact, serve as proxies for the "American people," Settje's analysis would necessitate a reconsideration of Cold War era Christianity and the mainline/evangelical divide of the 1980s. Settje writes, "This investigation simultaneously offers the perspective of one cross-section of Americans who often remain hidden from historic memory: 'the silent majority'.... While studies have scrutinized the far-left/anti-war movement and the far-right/conservative

resurgence of the 1960s, few have delved into Americans whose ideological bent lay somewhere between these extremes" (p. 1). While Settje's declarations about the state of the field ring true, it does not always follow that Lutherans and Lutheranism, per se, have particularly privileged perspectives for illuminating these issues, and Settje never addresses with enough specificity the characteristics of Lutheran Christians that made them like or unlike other major Protestant denominations. Lutheranism, even for its political and theological diversity, retained a fair amount of geographical and liturgical specificity that was not broadly representative of the American public.

For military historians, Settje's book fits comfortably--though not perfectly--within the realm of "war and society" studies that examine issues on the homefront. What the book lacks in engagement with specific military actions or policies is made up for in the specificity and abundance of (primarily civilian) Lutheran voices talking about the Cold War anticommunist struggle and the Vietnam War. They offer a variety of perspectives on the Cold and Vietnam Wars that are easily overlooked in the national mainstream press or even in the national religious press. Settje carefully charts the guiding assumptions of both pro- and antiwar camps on major issues that divided the nation during the Vietnam War by examining four specific ideas: the communist/nationalist nature of the Vietnamese revolution; Vietnam's relationship to international (monolithic) communism and the domino theory; Christians' responsibilities to obey and respect government; and Americans' responsibilities to support American military personnel. By comparing these four categories, Settje suggests an important schema for organizing discussion of homefront support and dissent that does not revolve around strictly military policies but instead around broad cultural and social norms. Expanding an analysis of homefront reactions based on these categories to include other religious groups and people (and nonreligious institutions and people as well) would almost certainly be a welcome and worthwhile undertaking.

On final analysis, Settje's book opens significant questions as to the best way to uncover the "silent majority's" voices on the Cold and Vietnam Wars. Though his contention that American Lutherans offer an obvious site for such a study does not bear all the weight Settje would like, his approach and careful reading of sources are admirable. ***Lutherans and the Longest War*** is an excellent contribution to the genre of denominational studies and a useful starting point for exploring broader issues of religious assent, ambivalence, and dissent during the Cold War.

Note

[1]. Seth Jacobs, ***Cold War Mandarin: Ngo Dinh Diem and the Origins of the American War in Vietnam, 1960-1963*** (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006); Seth Jacobs, ***America's Miracle Man in Vietnam: Ngo Dinh Diem, Religion, Race, and U.S. Intervention in Southeast Asia*** (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Anne Loveland, ***American Evangelicals and the U.S. Military, 1942-1993*** (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996).

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Citation: Jacqueline Whitt. Review of Settje, David E. *Lutherans and the Longest War: Adrift on a Sea of Doubt about the Cold and Vietnam Wars, 1964-1975.* H-War, H-Net Reviews. April, 2008.

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