

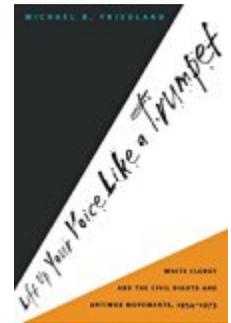
# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



**Michael B. Friedland.** *Lift Up Your Voice Like A Trumpet: White Clergy and the Civil Rights and Antiwar Movements, 1954-1973.* Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1998. x + 326 pp. \$25.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8078-4646-9; \$59.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-2338-5.

Reviewed by James R. Sweeney (Old Dominion University Activist Clergy)  
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In *Lift Up Your Voice Like A Trumpet* Michael Friedland has written a thoughtful, well-balanced assessment of the role of white clergy in the civil rights and antiwar movements. Although the events he discusses are familiar, the involvement of white clergy has received too little attention. Friedland's book fills a gap in the historiography of the 1960s. Writing in a style noteworthy for its clarity and economy of words, he provides valuable insights into those ministers, priests and rabbis who abandoned their comfortable lives to make a moral witness, sometimes at considerable risk.

Friedland's book is in a sense a collective biography. He paints word portraits of such nationally known figures as Yale University chaplain William Sloane Coffin, Jr., radical priests Daniel and Philip Berrigan, Abraham J. Heschel, rabbi and professor at Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City, Eugene Carson Blake, Stated Clerk of the United Presbyterian Church of the U.S.A., and Robert McAfee Brown, a Presbyterian minister and a professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York. Friedland is equally skilled at bringing to life lesser known individuals who labored in the often hostile South. A good example is Father Maurice Ouellet, a Catholic priest, who was in charge of a hospital for blacks in Selma, Alabama in 1965. As the only clergyman who publicly supported the civil rights movement in Selma, Ouellet became "a marked man in the community" (p. 117). Ultimately, the exhausted cleric was ordered to leave the diocese by his bishop.

Friedland's tone is, for the most part, not judgmental. He concedes that northern clergy could take actions in regard to civil rights that southern clergy could not.

Most northern clergy who were social activists were insulated from pressures by their positions as bishops, seminarians, the faculty of divinity schools and campus chaplains. In other words, they were not accountable to individual congregations. The author also states that, although some southern clergy were paralyzed by fear or indifference, others, such as the Baptist Will D. Campbell, "emphasized the reconciliatory aspect of their vocation as much as, if not more than, their prophetic one" (p. 9). Few activist clergy receive censure in these pages. The brothers Berrigan, who gained notoriety in the antiwar movement, are an exception. Often Friedland finds arrogance in their words and actions. The Berrigans' attempts to escape imprisonment by going underground raised questions about the validity of their claim "to be authentic practitioners of civil disobedience and nonviolence" (p. 197). Friedland also mentions Philip's call for continued celibacy of priests and nuns in the Catholic Left as part of a "revolutionary life style" (p. 224) while he was engaged in a romantic liaison with a nun. Such hypocrisy, however, is by no means typical of the clerical activists.

Friedland makes a distinction between the institutional church and the activist clergy. He believes that the churches' excessive concern about their own well-being and, in some instances, their racist attitudes caused their failure to meet the challenges posed by the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War. The influence of white clergy, however, on both movements was significant. Friedland concludes that it is "unlikely that either movement would have achieved the impact it did without clerical participation" (p. 251).

In five crisply written chapters the author takes the reader from the *Brown* decision to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Clerical involvement in civil rights increased significantly in 1963, a year which began with a National Conference on Religion and Race in Chicago. Friedland stresses the importance for both the civil rights and antiwar movements of the rise of “a new spirit of interfaith cooperation demonstrated markedly by the Second Vatican Council and various proposals for Protestant denominational unity in the early 1960s” (p. 8). For example, Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish seminarians held an uninterrupted vigil at the Lincoln Memorial from April 19, 1963, until the civil rights bill was passed in late June 1964. Ecumenical efforts were especially important in the Midwest as clergy and lay-people pressured their senators to invoke cloture and end the southerners’ filibuster of the bill. “Perhaps most importantly,” Friedland concludes, “these ecumenical efforts showed that growing numbers of white clergymen, nuns, and lay persons, saw civil rights as a moral issue” (pp. 76-77).

The spring of 1965 was the high point of the clergy’s involvement in the civil rights movement. The voting rights demonstrations in Selma, Alabama were the catalyst. Some dropped what they were doing, went to the nearest airport without even a change of clothes and answered Dr. King’s call to come to Selma and join in a Ministers’ March to Montgomery. This strong sense of moral responsibility cost James Reeb, a Unitarian minister from Boston, his life. Friedland believes that the clergy’s support was a significant factor in the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

The climax of the civil rights movement was by no means the end of clerical activism. As Friedland puts it, “there was no putting the genie ... back into the bottle” (p. 138). The major escalation of the American role in Vietnam during the summer of 1965 caused many clergy to become concerned about the war. Nonetheless, the number of clergy participating in antiwar demonstrations was far less than those who had marched for civil rights. Friedland writes that the antiwar movement had different problems on a different stage (Washington D.C. and the universities) with issues less clear cut than those facing the civil rights movement. Tactical and organizational lessons learned in the struggle for civil rights were applicable to the antiwar movement. For Catholics and Jews, Vietnam presented special difficulties. The Catholic church’s strong stand against communism made it difficult for bishops to sanction priests’ antiwar activity. Jews worried about the effect their antiwar activity might have

on the Johnson Administration’s commitment to Israel.

The most important clerical organization opposed to the war was Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Vietnam (CALCAV). Its ecumenical leaders were Rev. Richard Neuhaus, a Lutheran, Rabbi Heschel, and Father Daniel Berrigan. As Heschel put it, “To speak about God and remain silent on Vietnam is blasphemous” (p. 185). CALCAV sponsored an Education-Action Mobilization in Washington, D.C. in late January 1967 which included speeches, workshops and meetings with government officials. CALCAV favored disciplined, moderate protest in an effort to attract the middle class. By the spring these efforts were winning support, even among Catholic bishops.

Frustrated by their lack of progress, many leaders of CALCAV turned to more militant tactics by the summer of 1967. Robert McAfee Brown and William Sloane Coffin called for acts of civil disobedience. In response CALCAV published a Statement on Conscience and Conscription which demanded a wider definition of conscientious objection. Manifestos and legal demonstrations seemed increasingly irrelevant to individuals such as Coffin and the Berrigans. In late October Philip was arrested for pouring blood on draft files in Baltimore. Daniel was arrested during the demonstration at the Pentagon, and Coffin and others were arrested for conspiracy to counsel violations of the draft law. In May 1968 nine members of the Catholic Left led by Philip Berrigan broke into the draft board office at Catonsville, Maryland, and burned draft records with homemade napalm in the parking lot. According to Friedland, “Few were more impressed with the actions of the Catonsville Nine than the participants themselves” (p. 208). By that time both Berrigans had resigned from CALCAV. That organization held its third Washington Mobilization in February 1969. Attendance was down, but radicalism among the members increased. There was also much attention to issues other than Vietnam, a portent of the disparate issues to which the Left would devote its declining energies in the 1970s.

Richard Nixon was a wily foe who put the antiwar movement on the defensive. Religious groups and individuals participated in the Vietnam Moratorium of 15 October 1969 and the two-day National Mobilization in mid-November. They reacted strongly to the killings at Kent State and the invasion of Cambodia. Nixon’s Vietnamization policy, however, was bringing the troops home. He had also reformed the draft and was pledging to end it. The consequence for the antiwar movement was a loss of focus and intensity. In January 1973 Henry Kissinger

and the North Vietnamese negotiator signed the Paris accords which finally extracted the United States from the Vietnam morass. Friedland writes that the antiwar movement had achieved its goal: "The Vietnamese would be able to settle their affairs themselves. For most Americans, clergy included, the 1970s would be a time of coming to terms with the upheavals that the nation had undergone in the past decade" (p. 236). Friedland believes it is more difficult to assess the effectiveness of the clergy in the antiwar movement than in the civil rights movement. Yet he agrees with those who believe that many of them made a contribution to ending the war by making the antiwar movement appear legitimate to a middle-class constituency which disdained the Radical Left. From a moral standpoint, however, "effectiveness was immaterial" (p. 252). Success or the absence of it was not what made the activist clergy significant. "What made these individuals important in both religious and historical terms was their very act of witness, their willingness and determination to back up their religious convictions with action" (p. 252).

In an epilogue Friedland traces the white clergy's involvement in reform up the mid-1990s. Some activist clergy began to realize in the 1970s that if the churches devoted themselves mostly to secular and social problems and not to issues of personal morality and saving souls they could become, in Friedland's words, "social service agencies with altars" (p. 239). Others devoted themselves to new issues such as ecumenical housing programs and homosexual rights. Daniel Berrigan con-

tinued to protest nuclear weapons as he had done for over thirty years. Ironically many of the tactics used by the civil rights and antiwar movements were adopted by evangelical Christians and other conservatives in their protest against legal abortion.

Friedland has produced a well-researched book that adds to our understanding of both the civil rights and antiwar movements. He has worked in manuscript collections, newspapers, and periodicals and conducted interviews with several clerical activists. His bibliography also includes sixteen pages of books and articles. It is difficult to find fault with Friedland's monograph. He might have devoted more space than a passing mention to Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, a conservative Catholic and a pioneer in television ministry, who issued a dramatic call for a complete withdrawal of U.S. forces from Vietnam in 1967. Was Sheen unique among conservative white clergy? How did he reconcile his position with his staunch anticommunism? Friedland's book would have benefited by the inclusion of some illustrations, but if the publisher had to choose between photographs and an old-fashioned complete bibliography he/she made the right choice.

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