

Huston Horn. *Leonidas Polk: Warrior Bishop of the Confederacy*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2019. 600 pp. \$39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7006-2750-9.

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Since the end of the American Civil War, the stories of the generals who commanded soldiers during the great conflict have fascinated both scholars and general audiences. Historians have indeed dedicated many volumes of text to the principal commanders. One noteworthy figure who generally draws criticism in books about other leaders but commands comparatively few concentrated studies is Leonidas Polk. After graduating from the Military Academy at West Point where he experienced a personal conversion to Christianity, he resigned his commission to serve as a member of the Episcopal clergy. Only the Civil War drew him back into a military uniform. In *Leonidas Polk: Warrior Bishop of the Confederacy*, Huston Horn offers a comprehensive narrative of the life and exploits of the titular figure. Unlike many treatments of Polk, Horn's work is generally sympathetic to the bishop general. Although he does not depict Polk as the greatest commander of the war, the author generally criticizes Polk's opponents more than Polk himself. Ultimately, Horn presents a portrait of Polk as a brave and honest commander who conflicted with conniving fellow generals.

The text follows a chronological narrative divided into twenty-eight chapters of which more than half focus on the years of the American Civil War. Throughout these pages Horn presents a his-

tory that, while centered on Polk, is actually a much broader narrative than many standard biographies. Horn offers incredible detail in the text from descriptions of West Point to the specific units and tactical actions of the Confederate army in the West. Particularly in the later pages of the book, the author takes great care to discuss the actions of many other figures who influenced the war in the western theater. For example, Horn is particularly critical of Braxton Bragg, Polk's commanding general for most of the war, who features prominently in the narrative. He highlights his strategic missteps and challenges his antagonistic attitude toward Polk. Horn also offers vivid pictures of life in the South before and during the Civil War. Because Polk was a priest, planter, and father, the text opens a window onto religion, plantation practices, and family life in the Old South. Polk's wife, Frances Ann Devereux, is an ever present figure in the narrative and much of Polk's personal feelings are drawn from letters to and from Frances. Horn uses all of these disparate facets of Polk to present a sweeping and detailed narrative that orbits around the central figure but encompasses much more than solely his limited perspective.

While the facts of Polk's life are documented throughout the text using both contemporary letters and secondary material, the author refrains

from making many direct assertions or criticisms of the central character. It appears that the author's goal is to present the facts of Polk's life and times and simply let the readers analyze Polk for themselves. Avoiding heavy-handedness is generally a positive approach but refraining almost completely from commentary means that the reader has very little perspective with which to agree or disagree. Upon completion of this text, it is left up to the reader to decide who Polk actually was. One aspect of his life remains especially vague. Polk is particularly noteworthy because he was both an Episcopal bishop and a plantation-holding Confederate general. Horn offers facts about both parts of his life but does not generally explore his mindset or ideology. One of the biggest questions most modern readers likely have about a "warrior bishop" is how he reconciled his religion with his Southern slaveholding lifestyle. Horn almost completely avoids consideration of this topic. If the text were solely a military biography, it might make sense to omit discussion of Polk's socioreligious views, but *Leonidas Polk: Warrior Bishop of the Confederacy* is presented as a comprehensive narrative of Polk's entire life.

Overall, this work offers an inspiring tale of a heroic cadet turned clergyman turned general. The details of Polk's bravery in battle and ability to earn the admiration of his soldiers provide readers with an example to which to aspire. Unlike many other authors, Horn remains very positive throughout his text. This fact is likely due to his own background as a reporter and clergyman. Horn does not approach his subject from the same angle as many of the scholars who have already offered their opinions on Polk. While he clearly demonstrates the love many Southerners had for Polk, he does not provide the same analysis of military decisions or practices as other scholars have of the western theater of the Civil War. Horn also uses Polk to present a detailed portrait of the world in which he lived and the western theater. As a result, the narrative could serve as a point of reference for teachers and students of the antebellum

South and the Civil War. Some Civil War historians may disagree with Horn's sympathetic view of Polk, but few could argue that the text is not a valuable reference to the campaigns of the "warrior bishop of the Confederacy."

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