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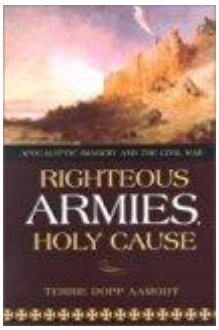
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Terrie Dopp Aamodt. *Righteous Armies, Holy Cause: Apocalyptic Imagery and the Civil War.* Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2002. x + 288 pp. $35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-86554-738-4.



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Published on H-South (December, 2002)

A Cosmic Catastrophe

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Apocalyptical imagery is ever present in the American religious psyche. The publication of the tremendously popular *Left Behind* series of Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins reveals that there is yet much interest in the belief in history's sudden end. The twenty-first century is not the first in which the American populace viewed the present calamities as a sign of the end--the nineteenth century also experienced such religious fervor and sensitivity. Terrie Dopp Aamodt, an American Studies professor at Walla Walla College in the state of Washington, writes of the American civil conflict much like Homer's *Iliad* in which both sides claim the power of the deity to bring them victory. In international struggles, the two combatants are often of different religions. In such contests, the battle is between national deities. The War Between the States became a contest between two very similar peoples who worshipped the same deity in much the same way as their opponents. Both claimed that God was on their side, and if they lost, then it was such a cataclysm as to bring about the end of the world. The apocalyptic imagery dotted both the intellectual and spiritual landscapes by way of the "visual, literary, and polemical contexts; in the productions of accomplished painters, facile cartoonists, poets, song lyricists, novelists, slaves, slave owners, and preachers" (p. x).

The author became intrigued with the subject after reading Garry Wills's *Inventing America* in which Wills discusses Julia Ward Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic." The power of the song's lyrics became vivid to her for the first time, which led her to read Edmund Wilson's *Patriotic Gore*, which goes into rather much more detail about Howe's song and its meaning. Equally surprising to Aamodt was the intensity of such feeling by Confederate writers and lyricists. "A recurring motif for American mythmakers, particularly in times of crisis or national self-doubt has been the Apocalypse," writes the author. So, "the process of interpreting cataclysmic events in terms of the earth's violent end explained the otherwise inex-

plicable and placed America in a special role of prophetic fulfillment" (p. 3).

What made apocalyptical thinking prominent in the middle of the nineteenth century was the revivalism that preceded it. The early camp-meetings with their emotionally charged preaching about dying unprepared or missing the call of God upon Christ's return caused the imagery and proclamation that the end was close at hand to burn into the consciences of antebellum people. Even more interesting was the way apocalyptical thinking influenced the Confederate, Union, and slave viewpoints. The Union viewed the war through the religious eyes of Holy War against the peculiar institution. The Confederates analyzed the war as one against fanatics and paganism. The slaves yearned that it would bring about the long awaited year of the Jubilee.

Rightly, Aamodt sees apocalyptic thought as related to millennialism. Evangelical theologians have long debated the signs of the times--both then and now. Postmillennial interpreters believed that Christ would indeed come again, but sometime in the very distant future. Wars and conflicts would come before He instituted the thousand-year reign of peace on earth. The premillennial thinkers stressed that Christ could come at any time, and that He would deliver His own from the clutches of the Antichrist and, afterward, judge both His and the unrepentant. The premillennial view based the doctrine of eschatology (last things) on the coming consequences when the Great Judge appears. Hence, "because supernatural forces were believed to be at work in this war, literature and art often portrayed the enemy as diabolically inspired" (p. 11).

Aamodt, trained in American Studies, included fifteen art selections to demonstrate the point. The artworks, all created during the war era, range the gamut of human emotion. The enemy is portrayed as demonically energized, and the defenders of the cause as righteous and holy. In the appendix are forty-two selections of poetry from both ideological and racial perspectives. The wisdom of including such sources cannot be denied, in that they magnify the point of the work, which is that the war would result in a bitter end for one side or another.

At war's end, the South's attitude had not changed. "Defeat had not diminished the righteousness of the cause" (p. 137). The victorious North returned to prewar liberalism, because in the mind of the northerners "God did not bring the victory in the way Northerners had expected, and their growing uncertainty about his involvement in their affairs, along with the aggressive secularism and acquisitiveness of the late nineteenth century, eroded away their confidence" (p. 138).

Civil War buffs will find the work balanced and the themes clearly explained. An example is chapter 5, entitled "The Southern Cromwell and the Northern Moses," in which General Stonewall Jackson (the Cromwellian) is compared to Lincoln as the image of the great liberator of the Exodus, thus demonstrating the way civilians viewed their heroes in biblical and historical terms. Etched into the minds of both sides were the images of these great men: the pious Jackson and the humble, cerebral rail-splitter, who had sojourned on the backside of the prairie for just that hour.

Aamodt's narrative is short, only one hundred forty-eight pages, but is tightly written and balanced in interpretation. Particularly helpful are the fifteen prints, paintings, and sketches from the period, and her expert analysis on Harriet Beecher Stowe's ***Uncle Tom's Cabin*** and Julia Ward Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic." The paintings reflect both saintliness and demonization of the two sides. The poetry and lyrics in the appendix reveal the spiritual soul of the wartime people. Poems by Melville, such as "Stonewall Jackson Wounded at Chancellorsville" (representing the Northern view), the pro-Jackson "Stonewall Jackson's Way" (found on a dead Confederate soldier) and "Day of Jubilee" (by a

Thomas Peck, a "Negro counter band") are representative of the forty-two lyric selections in the appendix.

New readers to the genre of Civil War religious studies, buffs who previously read only battle or leader books, undergraduate history majors, or those unfamiliar with evangelical apocalyptic views might be overwhelmed. New vocabulary such as jeremiad, postmillennialism, premillennialism, and apocalyptic are commonly used by seminary professors, evangelists, and pastors, but others might not readily grasp the central themes because of this lack of previous knowledge.

The highly specialized nature of Aamodt's book is not a detriment. The monograph is helpful in the study of the period and its religious orientation. Aamodt's work will join a host of other narratives on variations on the same theme, most of which have appeared in the last ten years. Aamodt's work offers a unique perspective to our understanding of theological thinking during war.