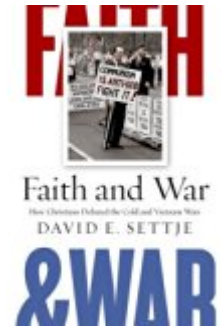


**David E. Settje.** *Faith and War: How Christians Debated the Cold and Vietnam Wars.*  
New York: New York University Press, 2011. 256 pp. \$39.00, cloth, ISBN  
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Christians spanning the conservative-to-liberal theological spectrum both supported and criticized the Cold and Vietnam wars, yet until recently few scholars have tried to tackle that daunting subject in a comprehensive manner. In *Faith and War*, David E. Settje flays open that full debate, illustrating how it exposes religious aspects of the broader culture war. Numerous books have highlighted the actions taken by various religious individuals and institutions in response to the Cold and Vietnam wars.[1] Settje lends his laser-like focus not to the actions but rather to the conceptual rationales of religious positions, providing us with a concise, readable, classroom-worthy intellectual history of why diverse Christians thought and believed as they did. By dealing with both the Cold and Vietnam wars, he illustrates how perspectives on the first were reflected in positions on the second, and in turn how views of Vietnam affected those on other Cold War hotspots. His discussion extends into the mid-1970s, well beyond the 1945 to 1965 period that has drawn much overdue attention of late.[2] Contrary to assumptions that

Christian opinion on Vietnam shifted considerably with time, Settje asserts that many liberal and conservative Christians maintained fairly steady positions on both wars from 1964 to 1975; both had already established what they believed with respect to the domino theory, the question of whether Communism was monolithic, the containment policy, and the primary responsibility of the church in the world when President Lyndon B. Johnson first deployed American combat troops to Southeast Asia. Moderate centrist groups were more likely than either liberals or conservatives to elucidate views that did evolve over time, generally toward greater criticism of both wars. Though Settje's use of case studies and selective time periods constrains his coverage somewhat, he has produced a succinct survey of religious ideas on Vietnam-era foreign policy for scholars and students alike.

Settje employs a case-study technique for gauging views across the theological and ideological Christian divide. On the liberal front, he uses the *Christian Century* and the United Church of

Christ (UCC) as lenses into a worldview driven predominantly by a theology of “human improvement,” including social justice (p. 18). By 1964, many liberals rooted in the ecumenical movement had already grown skeptical of simplistic views of Communist power and the efficacy of militaristic containment. They measured their faith’s relevance by its ability to be the justice-seeking and peace-making hands of Jesus in the world. Thus, they cared about the earthly conditions of others, not just their souls. On the conservative side, the Southern Baptist Convention and *Christianity Today* become Settje’s vehicles for accessing commonly held evangelical views, which were informed often by what promoted or hindered God’s great commission of proselytization. Whenever Communists persecuted Christians and blocked the advance of missionaries, such incidents served as a principal and consistent motivator of evangelicals to support battles against the Reds. The expansiveness and atheism of Communist governments inspired further evangelical support for U.S. military confrontation of them. Evangelical arguments on these wars foreshadow the emergence of the political “silent majority.” Settje probes diverse Catholic journals, such as *Commonweal*, *Catholic World*, *Catholic Digest*, and *America* to capture the range of Catholic perspectives that predominantly moved, in varying degrees and speeds, away from the unquestioning anti-Communism that characterized much Catholic opinion in the early 1960s.

Perhaps the most interesting group Settje explores, given its freshness as topic, is the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME). The AME’s conflicted responses to the Cold and Vietnam wars were motivated largely and unsurprisingly by race, he says. The AME’s theological conservatism, missions focus, and anti-Communism, combined with its practical desire to remain on President Johnson’s good side given his support of civil rights legislation, often led the AME to back Johnson’s Vietnam policies as they shifted from aggression to diplomacy. However, when Richard

Nixon entered the Oval Office, the politically active AME became increasingly critical of White House policies on the war. Unlike Johnson, Nixon cared little about black issues, and the AME found its sympathy for youthful impatience regarding racial justice and peace growing in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Settje uses a sampling technique as well to focus his review of primary sources to time periods that capture key shifts in war policy and peak moments for war-based commentary. These include August to December 1964, January to December 1968, April to July 1970, and September 1972 to February 1973. His methodology is effective for tracking broad trends in thinking for liberals, moderates, and evangelicals on the Cold and Vietnam wars. Examining the full time period or incorporating more groups might not have affected his argument significantly. Nevertheless, he misses things that might be important to some scholars. For example, the views of hard-core fundamentalists, whose opinions echoed through the pages of the *Christian Beacon* and Carl McIntire’s American Council of Christian Churches, and which often painted their evangelical brethren and presidents as too wimpy on Communism, are not easily seen or distinguished from evangelicals in this book. White Protestant moderates also receive less focus; however, Settje’s first book, *Lutherans and the Longest War: Adrift on a Sea of Doubt about the Cold and Vietnam Wars, 1964-1975* (2007), explores them thoroughly and can serve as a fine companion volume here. Additionally, the ramifications of events that fell between his selected time periods often get bypassed. This includes the 1967 scandal with Catholic Relief Services, which allowed its material aid to be co-opted by the South Vietnamese army, and which inspired considerable introspection and discussion across the Christian community about church collaboration (intentional or not) with the nation’s war efforts.

The beneficial fruit of his methodology lies in a tight, easily digested, classroom-friendly, and rich in examples volume, which serves its core mission well while giving scholars new insights into understudied groups, like the UCC and AME. Additionally, its coverage of religious responses to governmental foreign policy actions that were coterminous with the Vietnam War is amazingly broad and helpful contextually. I know of no other book that provides such a fine survey of religious views on the larger Cold War, and how these affected or reflected those on Vietnam, from 1964 to 1975. It demonstrates successfully how religious debates on foreign policy infused and reflected those happening more broadly within American culture.

#### Notes

[1]. For a focus on individuals, see, for example, Michael Friedland, *Lift Up Your Voice Like a Trumpet: White Clergy and the Civil Rights and Antiwar Movements, 1954-1973* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), as well as numerous biographies of such activists as Daniel and Phillip Berrigan. For volumes more attentive to religious organizations, see as examples Rick Nutt, *Toward Peacemaking: Presbyterians in the South and National Security, 1945-1983* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994); Mitchell K. Hall, *Because of Their Faith: CALCAV and Religious Opposition to the Vietnam War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); 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, 2006); and Jill K. Gill, *Embattled Ecumenism: The National Council of Churches, the Vietnam War, and the Trials of the Protestant Left* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011).

[2]. See as examples William Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960: The Soul of Containment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Jason W. Stevens, *God-Fearing and Free: A Spiritual History of America's*

*Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); and Jonathan P. Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex: America's Religious Battle against Communism in the Early Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

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