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Steve Longenecker’s *Pulpits of the Lost Cause* is a fine contribution to the literature on the intersection of religion and Civil War memory in the Reconstruction South. Its central argument, based on careful research on ten former Confederate chaplains, is that while there was strong commitment to the central premises of the Lost Cause tradition among former chaplains, it was hardly unified or homogenous. While some participated regularly and enthusiastically in the consecrating rituals of the tradition, others were lukewarm or disinterested. Insisting that there were many versions and uses of the Lost Cause, Longenecker argues that some former chaplains embraced it because they longed for the Old South and slavery, while others put it to use in advocating for a modernized New South. The book’s larger purpose is to add complexity and nuance to the somewhat undifferentiated picture of backward-looking southern clergy offered in Charles Reagan Wilson’s classic *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (1980). “This study discovers that many former Confederate chaplains defied this image,” Longenecker writes of his own work. “A fuller picture of this important Reconstruction niche reveals multiple layers” (p. 3).

Taking his cue from Wilson’s emphasis on the role of former chaplains in forging the religious worldview of the wartime and postwar South, Longenecker reconstructs the lives of ten relatively prominent former chaplains representing four denominations: three Presbyterians, three Episcopalians, and two each from the Methodists and Baptists. In terms of geographical balance, his subjects came largely from the oldest parts of the South, including four from Virginia, two each from South Carolina and Georgia, one from Maryland, and one northern transplant who settled in Georgia before the war. But Longenecker is less concerned with creating a representative sample than with the ability to reconstruct the prewar, wartime, and postwar careers of the ten chaplains. He admits that some chaplains who became prominent Lost Cause advocates, such as J. William Jones, are left out of the study because sources
of their ideas and experiences are incomplete or unavailable.

What emerges from this approach is largely what the author claims in the introduction, a nuanced and at times curious mixture of attitudes toward the Lost Cause. On the one hand, the wartime experiences of former chaplains like John Girardeau and Moses Hoge generated an intense, lifelong commitment to the righteousness of the Confederate cause. As a result, they participated regularly and prominently in the rituals of Confederate memory. The Virginia Presbyterian Moses Hoge, for example, was chosen as the main orator at the 1875 dedication of the Stonewall Jackson statue in Richmond where he summoned his audience to resist Reconstruction in the name of the great Confederate general. Longenecker describes the South Carolina Presbyterian Girardeau as a “classic, unforgiving die-hard” whose longing for the Old South made him not only a public defender of the Lost Cause but also a proponent of violent resistance against the Reconstruction government in his state (p. 77). In 1876, for example, pastor Girardeau publicly blessed the white supremacist rifle clubs that conducted a campaign of terrorism against Blacks and white Republicans.

On the other hand, in many ways, the reactionary attitudes of Hoge and Girardeau are the exception rather than the rule among the group studied in Pulpits of the Lost Cause. For former chaplains like the Virginian Lachlan Vass and the Georgian Atticus Haygood, institutional commitments and the practical benefits of reconciliation tempered their enthusiasm for the most viscerally racist, backward-looking elements of the Lost Cause. Vass, who had served as a chaplain in the Stonewall brigade during the war, was less interested in promoting Lost Cause themes than in building successful Presbyterian congregations in New Bern, North Carolina. Not only did he assist in the creation of a new Black Presbyterian church in the city, but he also supported efforts to train a new generation of Black teachers. Longenecker shows that Vass avoided formal association with the Lost Cause by insisting that political matters should be kept separate from the spiritual work of the church. In the same vein, the Methodist Atticus Haygood found that moderation on issues related to the Lost Cause allowed him to obtain prestigious positions in which northern support and philanthropy were critical ingredients. As president of Emory College and as the general agent of the Slater Fund, a northern charitable organization dedicated to the education of African Americans, Haygood avoided the “die-hard” attitudes of men like Girardeau. While he openly deplored Reconstruction, he also denounced Ku Klux Klan violence and looked forward toward a New South based on racial paternalism and sectional reconciliation.

As can be seen in the experiences of Vass and Haygood, one of the key themes of Pulpits of the Lost Cause is the impact of institution building on attitudes toward the Lost Cause. In chapters 5 and 6, for example, Longenecker explores the attitudes of the former Confederate chaplains who helped to create the University of the South and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The Episcopalians Charles Quintard and William DeBose were key figures in resuscitating the University of the South from its near death during the Civil War, and it soon became a magnet for former Confederate officers in the Reconstruction era. Longenecker argues that while the Lost Cause had a “clear presence” at Sewanee, it was a “low key” version of the tradition (p. 129). He suggests that the ongoing need for northern donors and the postwar reconciliation of the national Episcopal church played a role in ensuring that a less strident version of southern identity prevailed. At Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, a more open Lost Cause ritualism was practiced but the necessity of cooperating with national missionary organizations played a part in muting the intensity of sectional antagonism.
In each chapter, Longenecker includes information on four basic elements: each subject’s early life, their wartime experiences as chaplains, their relationship to the Lost Cause, and their postwar theological beliefs. The research on these four areas is very thorough, and his attention to the former chaplains’ participation in the emerging debate between religious modernism and fundamentalism, especially the chapter on William McKim, is very welcome. But there is no sustained attempt to provide the reader with a causal relationship between these elements. Were chaplains whose wartime experiences were longer or harsher more or less likely to attach themselves to a particular version of the Lost Cause? What is the connection, if any, between southern religious modernism and the racial or memorial politics of the region? Rather than focusing on such causal relationships, the author tends to fall back on description rather than analysis. In the conclusion we are told that “the former chaplains displayed a little bit of everything,” that their theological and political commitments create “a colorful palette,” and that the former chaplains preached a “mostly conservative, occasionally liberal faith from the pulpits of a multifaceted Lost Cause” (pp. 202, 204). Such statements are true, but they leave the reader wishing for a stronger interpretive lens.

There is also some conceptual vagueness that detracts from the analytical dimensions of the book. The term “conservative,” which is employed throughout to describe the political attitudes of the subjects, is overused and insufficiently defined. What appears to have united many of these former chaplains was a desire for order, particularly racial, moral, and ecclesiastical order, which they believed was overturned or at least badly threatened by Reconstruction. The differences between them seem to emerge over their solutions to that perceived disorder with some using the Lost Cause to celebrate the Old South and others to refashion images of the Old South in order to build a modern but still ordered region. There is no doubt that the subjects of this book were conservative men, but the use of more precise terminology might have deepened the analytical reach of the book.

Yet, in the end, Pulpits of the Lost Cause is a real achievement. Not only will students of the Civil War era welcome its contributions to the literature on postwar memory, but students of American religion also will profit from its careful explorations of theological developments in the late nineteenth-century South. The book is delightfully written, well organized, and thoroughly researched.
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