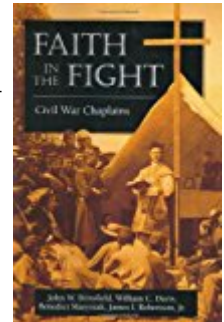


**John W. Brinsfield, William C. Davis, Benedict Maryniak, James I. Robertson Jr., eds.** *Faith in the Fight: Civil War Chaplains*. Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 2003. xi + 256 pp. \$29.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8117-0017-7.



**Reviewed by** James Baugess (Humanities Department, Columbus State Community College)

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## **Military Ministry in Blue and Gray**

The American Civil War yet seizes the imaginations of historians and general readers the world over. Many social, cultural, and military historians would agree with the editors' assertion that for most soldiers on both sides "religion was the greatest sustainer of morale during the Civil War" (p. viii). The nearly 3,700 Army chaplains were responsible for that morale boost. Despite the brevity of this work, the census of chaplains recorded is the most comprehensive to date.

This book grew out of the efforts of scholars working independently, but after their works became known to one another, elected, under the auspices of the Virginia Center for Civil War Studies, to meet for the purpose of combining their findings into one volume. The editors included as much information on each chaplain as possible, even incorporating details from "obscure church records" (p.ix). As a result, they included all but two unpublished examples from both Union and Confederate chaplains.

Benedict Maryniak, author of the Union chaplain essay, an independent scholar, lifelong student of the war, and President of the Lancaster, New York Historical Society, compiled meticulous statistics, concluding that the average Union chaplain was thirty-nine years old, a Methodist, and served a little over a year. Some of the information consisted of trivia or humor, such as the tallest, shortest, oldest, and youngest chaplains in the Union armies. This not to say that Maryniak's narrative is light-hearted. He offers data on the length of time chaplains served, the number of Army clergy, and listed heroic dead among the ministers who died on the field while serving. It is obvious that Maryniak harbors a dislike of the evangelical chaplains, which is unfortunate, because both armies contained substantial numbers of evangelical soldiers and chaplains. Maryniak displays his contempt in one particularly glaring example when he questions the motives of many in the northern branch of the Young Men's Christian Association for organizing the United States Christian Commission. He reveals his contempt by

questioning the motives of evangelicals in organizing the United States Christian Commission when he declares it consisted of nothing more than the "disdainful answer" to the more theologically liberal United States Sanitary Commission (p. 28). Fortunately, the essay on Confederate clerics lacks Maryniak's tone.

Colonel John W. Brinsfield, a United States Army Chaplain, and an instructor at the Army Chaplain's school at Fort Jackson, South Carolina wrote the account of the Confederate chaplains and their service, but included most of his statistical information in the notes rather than in the narrative. Like their Union counterparts, Brinsfield finds that most Confederate chaplains were Methodists, but at least half of them were slightly younger, though at least thirty years of age.

The section of the book entitled "In Their Own Words" contains excerpts from the chaplains who served in the war, giving readers some insight into their wartime experiences. The section begins with the testimony of a Confederate chaplain, Baptist Ransdell W. Cridlin of Virginia, transcribed in 1910. The Confederate portion, aided further by snippets from several chaplains, enriches the testimony of Cridlin. William R. Eastman's 1911 address, entitled, "A Yankee Chaplain Remembers," presents the Union chaplain perspective, but unfortunately, portions from diaries of other Union clerics are not included. The information contained in this tiny work is too sparse to be of much use for those who are familiar with its subject, but for those interested in a more in-depth or scholarly analysis, there are other compilations, edited diaries, memoirs, or monographs about the religion of the war. Since 1980, many works have appeared that offer a detailed treatment of wartime religion and the military chaplaincy. Numerous books and articles have appeared on the topic of Civil War religion. The best recent works are Eugene D. Genovese's, *A Consuming Fire: The Fall of the Confederacy in the Mind of the White Christi-*

*an South*, and Randall Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson's, *Religion and the American Civil War*. Additional scholarly books include Steven E. Woodworth's excellent, *While God is Marching On: The Religious World of Civil War Soldiers*, and Terrie Dopp Aamodt's, *Righteous Armies, Holy Cause: Apocalyptic Imagery and the Civil War*.

There is little analysis or commentary in this work, but as the editors declared at the outset, their work serves as a resource for further study. The roster alone is a tremendous help to those who want to find information on a particular chaplain. Despite its basic utility however, the finished product suffers from the lack of an index and comprehensive bibliography. A brief essay on the religion of the period would have strengthened the text. American religious history is a dynamic and rich field, and placing the characters in the American religious tradition of the mid-nineteenth century would have given the narrative more depth. Nevertheless, the information included is informative and helpful in understanding both the impact of religion upon the soldiers and the service of the chaplains who ministered to them. As promised by the editors and authors, *Faith in the Fight* stands as an excellent place to begin the study of religion in both the Federal and Confederate forces. It is an adequate survey, especially helpful before delving deeper into the subject of Civil War military chaplaincy as described in Sidney J. Romero's *Religion in the Rebel Ranks* and Warren B. Armstrong's, *For Courageous Fighting and Confident Dying: Union Chaplains in the Civil War*.

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