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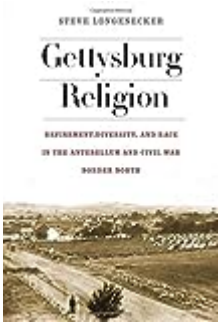

Stephen L. Longenecker. *Gettysburg Religion: Refinement, Diversity, and Race in the Antebellum and Civil War Border North.* New York: Fordham University Press. xiv + 246 pp. $45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8232-5519-1.

Timothy L. Wesley. *The Politics of Faith during the Civil War.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013. 320 pp. $45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8071-5001-6.

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Political Preaching, Refinement, and Diversity: Religion in the Civil War Era

In *The Politics of Faith During the Civil War* and *Gettysburg Religion: Refinement, Diversity, and Race in the Antebellum and Civil War Border North,* Timothy L. Wesley and Steve Longenecker, respectively, offer their contributions to the burgeoning literature on religion and the Civil War. Though not as sweeping in scope as works such as George C. Rableâs *Godâs Almost Chosen Peoples* (2010), both monographs make valuable contributions to the field, although they do not offer interpretations that will surprise historians of the Civil War.

In *The Politics of Faith,* Timothy L. Wesley embarks upon an ambitious study of northern and southern clergyman, both Protestant and Catholic, and their relationships to the state and their congregants before, during, and after the conflict. He concludes that the state did not force major American denominations into reluctant patriotism; rather, many preachers embraced loyalty to the Union or the Confederacy as an extension of their religious belief. Wesley also seeks to revise the perception that church and state were separate in antebellum America; rather, he argues, âmid-nineteenth-century Americans lived in a society in which the religious and the political overlapped almost to the point of amalgamationâ (p. 3). Finally, he argues that clergymen found themselves under a great deal of pressure during the Civil War, not primarily from the state but from their denominational leaders, fellow ministers, and congregants: âstudies of the infringement of civil liberties during the Civil War have underappreciated one of the pervasive forms of repressionâthat which occurred voluntarily within civil societyâ (p. 3).

Wesley appropriately prefaces his study of politics

and religion during the Civil War era by examining the relationship between the two realms in the antebellum United States. Prior to the late 1840s in the North, preachers rarely ventured away from religious subjects into the realm of politics, and they almost always faced criticism when they did so. After the Mexican War, the Fugitive Slave Act, and especially the Kansas-Nebraska Act, more northern clergymen felt compelled to address politics from the pulpit. âPolitical preachers became common,â although their actions still evoked some controversy (p. 19). During the antebellum period in the South, Wesley argues, ministers decried political preaching while simultaneously addressing the issue of slavery, which they deemed apolitical.

Wesley examines the experiences of white northern preachers in four chapters (chapters 2-5). First, he makes a convincing case that âpreachers on the homefront were collectively the most politically determinative force within affiliated American Christianity, the only members of the great church family who exercised significant *yet immediate* authority over othersâ (p. 42). Then Wesley analyzes northern ministers accused of being disloyal, observing that accusations of disloyalty were not simply expressions of party hostility. By accusing someone of treason, Wesley writes, ordinary northerners âinvoked the Constitution with a feeling of ownership that Americans today can scarcely imagineâ (p. 52). A supposedly treasonous minister might be guilty of either an overt expression of disloyalty or an implied act of betrayal, such as not praying for the Union army when asked to do so. Northern preachers who engaged in either type of behavior could face attacks from three sources–the state, other ministers in their denominations, and the public. Criticism of suspected disloyal clergymen became commonplace, contributing to âa nationwide turning away from the effectively blind veneration of the clergyâ (p. 92).

In his final chapter on the northern clergy, Wesley argues that northern clergymen during the Civil War era can be divided into three categories on the basis of their positions regarding religion and politics. The distinctions Wesley makes are useful, although his categories are confusingly named. Advocates of *separate spheres* believed that religion and politics should be kept entirely separate, with no exceptions. Those adhering to the ideology of *separate duty* believed that it was appropriate for ministers to engage in political issues to a limited degree, as they related to spiritual matters. Supporters of the idea of *separate components* argued that religion and politics were not and should not be separated. For these activists, nearly any subject was fair game for the pulpit.

Wesley analyzes the experiences of white southern clergymen in two chapters (chapters 6-7). He takes solid aim at the argument that southern clergymen felt guilty about their involvement with slavery and thus did not truly support the Confederate cause. Rather, he argues that southern preachers âbolstered the war effort on the homefront much more than they impeded itâ (p. 122). Wesley provides good evidence that a substantial number of southern ministers contributed significantly to the development of Confederate identity and the sustenance of loyalty to the cause. Although he acknowledges that many Unionists preached and worshipped in the South as well, he argues that churches were largely homogenous and that discrepancies in loyalty occurred primarily on the level of denominational conference, synod, and counsel rather than within individual congregations (p. 135).

Wesleyâs second chapter on the white South depicts southern clergymen who hated the North and openly resisted occupying Union troops, often finding their freedom curtailed as a result. Wesley also discusses Unionist preachers in the South who faced violent reprisals from Confederates for their political views. At times, this chapter seems to contradict the previous one. Wesley declares that southern churches were largely uniform in loyalty by the time the war began, but he acknowledges that sharp divisions existed between churches and within denominational organizations. Did the fact that most of the members of oneâs church were loyal to either the Union or the Confederacy matter in an environment in which most of oneâs neighbors or many of oneâs fellow clergymen might be on the opposite side? One suspects not. The disunity depicted in chapter 7 seems to belie the image of loyal Confederates championing the cause that Wesley paints in the previous chapter.

In chapter 8, Wesley addresses the position of black clergymen in both the North and the South, arguing that âthey were often equal or superior to white ministers in the widespread political influence they wielded within their communities of faith and the degree to which they, as individual men of conviction, maintained their ideological independenceâ (p. 168). His analysis contradicts the argument that âracial upliftâ efforts among African Americans in the post-Reconstruction period were inspired by accommodationist motives. Wesley argues that black clergymen used the rhetoric of uplift during and immediately after the Civil War; it was not a uniquely Gilded Age phenomenon. In addition, such ideas were not conceived in response to whitesâ expectations; rather, âAfrican American preachers during the Civil War sought to prepare all of their brethren and sis-

ters for their coming and long-prophesied day of political and social liberationâ (p. 170). According to Wesley, uplift efforts grew out of the concerns of the black, not the white, community.

Wesley also contradicts the notion that black preachers were unified in their beliefs; he presents evidence that they were divided on questions such as the desirability of colonization and the enlistment of black soldiers in the Union army. Here he may overstate his case somewhat. Although he makes a convincing case for disagreement among black clergymen on these issues, he does not provide convincing evidence that they were as divided as white clergymen during the Civil War. No black clergymen spoke in support of slavery.

In *The Politics of Faith,* Wesley embarks upon a sweeping examination of clergymen and their experiences, including black and white, North and South, all denominations, and all regions of the country. In *Gettysburg Religion,* Longeneckerâs analysis is similarly racially and denominationally inclusive, but it is geographically limited to the community of Gettysburg, which in the end proves to be one of its greatest strengths. Longenecker offers a refreshing and valuable interpretation of small-town religion before, during, and after the Civil War in which the famous battle itself plays an important, but transitory, role. Longenecker writes that he chose Gettysburg because it was simultaneously unique and representative–unique in its racial and religious diversity, but representative of many of the themes that characterized American religion in the mid- to late nineteenth century. He also argues that Gettysburgâs diversity and the way in which its residents dealt with that diversity foreshadowed broad postwar trends.

Three themes unify Longeneckerâs analysis throughout the book–refinement, diversity, and war. He defines refinement as âthe quest for improvementâ and finds it in Gettysburg congregations that built and adorned their churches like never before and linked these physical improvements to personal refinement and elegance: âtaste and manners were Christian goalsâ (pp. 1, 38). Gettysburg provides examples of denominations that wholeheartedly embraced refinement (the Methodists) and that consciously rejected it (the Dunkers). Longenecker identifies the pursuit of refinement in the building of Evergreen Cemetery, the purchase of steeple bells and gaslights for sanctuaries, and the enhancement of church music through the purchase of organs and hiring of choir directors. He notes that these church upgrades came at a cost, leading many congregations into debt to pay for them.

Longenecker defines his next theme–diversity–broadly, including ethnic, racial, and doctrinal diversity. Gettysburg proves to be a good place to study these topics; it contained sizeable German and African American populations. Free blacks accounted for 8 percent of Gettysburg residents, a higher percentage than in most northern towns. For a small community, Gettysburg also demonstrated doctrinal diversity, containing Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, German Reformed, Dunker, Catholic, and African Methodist Episcopal Zion churches. Longenecker traces the debate over language (English versus German) in several churches attended by German immigrants and examines differing attitudes towards revivalism and slavery among Gettysburg denominations. The bookâs most illuminating analysis regarding diversity is Longeneckerâs examination of Gettysburgâs AME Zion church. Although a small congregation (40-50 people) with a very limited budget due to the poverty of its members, it operated entirely independently from any white oversight and commanded the loyalty of most blacks who attended church in Gettysburg. Longenecker points out that this pattern is very unlike the membership patterns he found in nearby Maryland, which allowed blacks much less independence. In Maryland, predominantly white churches contained a much higher percentage of blacks than predominantly white churches in Gettysburg (which counted hardly any blacks among their members). Longenecker writes that the trend evident in Gettysburg would eventually appear across the Border North: âBlack religion, independent but barely, was especially characteristic of the Border North and would soon be the national pattern for a long timeâ (p. 127).

Regarding the impact of war, Longenecker writes that Gettysburg âreligion â¦ felt change, but modestly rather than fundamentallyâ (p. 131). He traces the experiences of Gettysburg churches before, during, and after the battle, as they rebuilt their physical structures and their organizations. With the exceptions of St. Paulâs Lutheran, which closed, and the AME Zion church, which shrank substantially, Gettysburg churches recovered rather quickly: âin 1864, the impact of the battle on local religion was barely discernibleâ (p. 157). Churches which had engaged in the pursuit of refinement before the battle continued to do so. Longenecker argues that some churchgoing women did experience a change in status after the battle. Christ Church Lutheran and Gettysburg Presbyterian women traveled to Philadelphia to raise money to repair and improve their churches, an

activity which they would not have been permitted to do before the war. Longenecker also identifies a closer relationship between church and state developing in Gettysburg during and after the war, which connects his work to analyses of the development of civil religion such as Rableâs *Godâs Almost Chosen Peoples* and Harry Stoutâs *Upon the Altar of the Nation* (2006). Ultimately, Longenecker argues that the changes war wrought to religion in the town were minimal.

Longeneckerâs style is engaging and his prose elegant. His satisfying monograph is enlivened even more by the inclusion of what he calls *divertimenti,* brief vignettes throughout the text highlighting the stories of individual Gettysburg residents or families whose lives exemplify the themes of refinement, diversity, or war. Well worth the read for both advanced scholars and graduate students, *Gettysburg Religion* would also be accessible and interesting to advanced undergraduates.

The author of just about any book on the Civil War must answer the question of what changed–if anything–as a result of the war. Wesley and Longenecker agree that the war brought only modest change to American religion. In the North, Wesley argues, the Civil War did lead to a decline in the prominence of white ministers, which fueled the postwar secularization of northern society. In this he agrees with a number of other scholars, such as Mark Noll.[1] Wesley argues, however, that black and southern white clergyman retained their prominence in the immediate postwar years. With the exception of a possible slight increase in the status of women and the expansion of civil religion, Longenecker argues that âthe Civil War may be less the watershed in religion than in other areasâ (p. 176). Although not offering any new or surprising conclusions, *The Politics of Faith During the Civil War* and *Gettysburg Religion* offer several new perspectives on topics that have long preoccupied Civil War historians.

Note

[1]. Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

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