

## [Davis on Kraszewski, 'Catholic Confederates: Faith and Duty in the Civil War South'](#)

Review published on Saturday, November 21, 2020

**Gracjan Kraszewski.** *Catholic Confederates: Faith and Duty in the Civil War South*. The Civil War Era in the South Series. Kent: Kent State University Press, 2020. Illustrations. xxiii + 196 pp. \$45.00

(cloth), [ISBN 978-1-60635-395-0](https://www.amazon.com/dp/9781606353950). 

**Reviewed by** Emily Davis (Loyola University of Chicago) **Published on** H-Nationalism (November, 2020) **Commissioned by** Evan C. Rothera (University of Arkansas - Fort Smith)

**Printable Version:** <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showpdf.php?id=55442>

Gracjan Kraszewski outlines the three historiographical goals of *Catholic Confederates: Faith and Duty in the Civil War* in the introduction: to expand Catholic Civil War scholarship, provide a southern view of American Catholicism, and add to works on Confederate loyalty. Kraszewski achieves each goal as he breaks away from the ethnic boundaries that usually define studies of Catholics during the Civil War. *Catholic Confederates* argues that “Southern Catholics were deeply committed to the Confederate nation” and that this produced Confederatization (p. xviii). “Confederatization” emphasizes a national identity above other identities and demonstrates the high level of integration Catholics achieved within Confederate society. Kraszewski uses Confederatization as a thread between the chapters exploring Southern Catholics’ relationships with the Confederacy. The book ultimately challenges the Americanization theory of Catholic history. It did not take the election of President John F. Kennedy to integrate Catholics into American society since Catholics within the South were already seamlessly integrated. Given how much scholarship generally emphasizes the concurrent nativism occurring in the North, this new take about the ease of Catholic integration into Southern society raises the question of what made the Confederacy different.

Each chapter of *Catholic Confederates* uses characters to highlight broader points about Southern Catholics. The individual experiences of bishops, priests, lay soldiers, and religious sisters drive home the points made by Kraszewski. Not as much has been written about lay women, but information about their experiences can be gleaned from the letters between married couples. The first chapter examines how bishops reacted to the early years of secession and war from 1860 to 1861. Four Southern bishops serve as characters for this chapter. Throughout their writings, bishops emphasized spiritual concerns over political ones, but that did not prevent them from expressing support for the young Confederate nation. Bishop Patrick Lynch of Charleston, South Carolina, supported the Confederacy from the beginning while Bishop William Henry Archer, whose territory included all of Mississippi, consistently emphasized spiritual matters over political ones, even as he slowly expressed statements that Mississippians should be loyal to their new nation. Catholics were part of the community before the Civil War and had to grapple with its implications like other Southerners.

The following two chapters examine Confederatization and Catholicism on the battlefield. They center on chaplains and soldiers during the years 1862 to 1864. Kraszewski focuses on three

chaplains and three lay soldiers in each chapter. The author deliberately chose this approach as a way to study the thousands of Catholics within the Confederate army. Kraszewski is clear that he would like to have “quality” primary source material to provide “a documentary-style window into the life of the Catholic-Confederate soldier and chaplain” (p. 26). Father John Bannon is one of the most exciting characters Kraszewski introduces. Bannon technically served as a Catholic chaplain during the Civil War and was forbidden by the church from using weapons. But, while stationed in Vicksburg, Mississippi, Bannon joined the Confederate soldiers in an artillery team while still performing his role as a chaplain. He balanced fighting with spiritual guidance. This demonstrated how successful Confederatization was: Bannon was a devoted Confederate willing to risk his life and a devoted chaplain seeking to save souls. He saw no reason these commitments could not function together.

Lay Catholics fighting in the war shared this same devotion to church and state. Soldier John Dooley kept a journal throughout his time in the Confederate army. Dooley’s Confederatization is evident through his voluntary enlistment and eagerness to join the fight. Like many other Confederates, Dooley expressed his respect for Robert E. Lee. His journal provides insights to the man’s spiritual life. Dooley prayed the rosary and attended camp prayer meetings with Protestants, while also quietly developing his interior spiritual life. In fact, Dooley entered the Society of Jesus after the war ended but did not live to ordination. What these two chapters ultimately reveal is the ordinary nature of being Catholic and Confederate. Regardless of whether a person was a chaplain or soldier, these dual identities were not at odds with each other.

The fourth chapter, “The Ambiguities of Peace: The Bishops during the War,” returns the reader to leadership within the Southern Catholic Church. Kraszewski examines documents for subtle pro-Confederacy language. Bishops urged peace in a way that favored the Confederacy. When Bishop Patrick Kenrick of Baltimore died, Catholic bishops in the North and South expressed sadness at his passing and communicated about who the replacement might be. Catholicism rose above state lines, yet the Confederate nation’s desire for recognition from other national states centered attention on the Vatican. Pope Pius IX stated his willingness to mediate peace during the war. This chapter also explores the issue of race by looking at some of the views bishops held. Bishop Elder held paternalistic views of slavery, and while these bishops “were authentic in spiritual matters [it] does not excuse their position on slavery” (p. 85).

The book shifts briefly to the lives of religious sisters serving as nurses during the Civil War. This short chapter demonstrates the Confederatization of Catholic sisters through their apolitical approach to the war. Soldiers respected these women and Protestant men often expressed shock that these nurses could be part of the same Catholic Church they feared. Sisters’ apolitical reaction and willingness to operate within the boundaries of the Confederacy, while serving wounded on both sides, demonstrated their Confederatization. This chapter feels lighter than the others in terms of evidence and argument. While Kraszewski illustrates well the women’s lives, readers are left desiring more information about their experiences.

The Confederacy made its final attempt for international recognition. Bishop Lynch, the fully Confederatized individual from chapter 1, traveled to Rome on behalf of the Confederacy. Other priests, such as the fighting Father Bannon, journeyed to Ireland to garner Irish support for the Confederacy by demonstrating how Northerners treated Catholics poorly. Bannon’s trip met with

more success than Bishop Lynch's. The Vatican secretary of state informed Lynch that the Vatican recognized him as a bishop, not as a Confederate emissary. The pope also expressed concern for the lives of slaves and their future freedom. Lynch responded with a pamphlet on slavery that "painted a classically paternalistic image of the master-slave relationship" and demonstrated how Lynch fully believed in the Confederate view of slavery (p. 128). This is Kraszewski's best section grappling with race, slavery, and the Catholic Church. Ultimately Pope Pius IX refused to choose one side over the other but supported Catholics internationally.

*Catholic Confederates* provides a great resource for expanding contemporary understanding of nineteenth-century Southern Catholicism and a fantastic example of how using individuals' lives illustrates the past.

**Citation:** Emily Davis. Review of Kraszewski, Gracjan, *Catholic Confederates: Faith and Duty in the Civil War South*. H-Nationalism, H-Net Reviews. November, 2020. **URL:** <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=55442>

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).