

bers, Chesebrough found that more Presbyterian ministers challenged the status quo than ministers from Baptist and Methodist churches, and he reminds readers that the Presbyterian church was the one large evangelical body that did not split before the war over exclusively sectional issues. But if Chesebrough starts down the path of analysis, he leaves it far too quickly, with an abundance of unanswered questions.

There are other puzzles. The author opens the book by favorably quoting James Silver, "Clergymen led the way to secession. . . . As no other group, Southern clergymen were responsible for a state of mind which made secession possible" (p. 1). Later, Chesebrough calls for historians of the nineteenth century to pay more attention to clerical sources, advice that many historians would do well to heed. Yet he suggests that these writings simply served to "reinforce beliefs that are currently and popularly held by giving them divine sanction" (p. 89). Of course, ministers mirrored public sentiment, but did they not also have the power to shape it? As James M. McPherson's *For Cause and Comrades* (1997) has documented, in the Civil War many of the fighting men believed the chaplains' message that the Christian soldier made the best soldier. That message came from neither the politicians nor the generals but from the church.

Chesebrough has done a service to historians of the antebellum South by bringing together the scattered voices of clerical dissent in the Old South. For those interested in this topic, there is no better place to begin.

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*For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War.* By James M. McPherson. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pp. xviii, 237. Appendix, tables, note on sources, notes, index. \$25.00.)

For decades historians have been trying to understand why Civil War soldiers fought. Princeton University Professor James M. McPherson has wondered, too, and his search for an answer is found in his new book, *For Cause and Comrades*.

McPherson bases his study on a selection of 647 Federals and 429 Confederates drawn from some 25,000 personal letters and 259 diaries. He uses age, marriage status, regional origin, occupation, and branch of service in an attempt to mirror the average soldier but admits that his group underrepresents privates and nonslaveholding southern farmers, as well as foreign and black Union troops. McPherson's sampling excludes draftees, substitutes, bounty recipients, deserters, or skulkers. His study focuses on educated, middle- and upper-

class white officers and privates who enlisted early in the war and stayed in service until death, wounds, or Appomattox ended their tenure.

McPherson divides his book into twelve chapters with a preface and an appendix. His preface, first chapter, and appendix concentrate on justifying to readers his selection of sources, addressing problems, and explaining his methodology. The remaining eleven chapters examine what he calls "initial motivation," "sustaining motivation," and "combat motivation."

McPherson concludes that a good number of Civil War soldiers fought for strongly held principles. He dismisses the notion that these men were apolitical mercenaries, hatred-filled fanatics, or disillusioned cynics. He also rejects the argument that Americans in the mid-nineteenth century were more violent or accepted death more freely than modern Americans. Drawing on studies of World War II and Vietnam veterans, he notes the importance of small-group cohesion, peer pressure, leadership, and discipline but sees these factors tied to a strongly held belief system that wove distinctive concepts of citizenship, liberty, community, nationalism, religion, order, honor, masculinity, and racial attitudes into powerful, durable motivators. These men, the ones who first volunteered, saw the most action, wrote more letters, died in greater numbers, believed in what they fought for. McPherson also shows that northerners were not any less driven by patriotism, honor, duty, and religion than southerners. Although there were significant differences in what words meant to each side, McPherson contests that a core group of Civil War soldiers sincerely believed that they fought for a higher, God-ordained "Cause."

McPherson shows great faith in his sources, and despite his careful qualifications and justifications, he contends that he comes closer than any other scholar in taking seriously and listening carefully to the words soldiers used to explain their actions. He tells readers that he allows men to speak for themselves, chiding historians who "read too much between the lines of soldiers' letters" (p. 28) and those who have sought modern parallels in past actions. However, when he finds gaps in the sources, McPherson asks readers to accept his explanations without authoritative evidence to back him up. Existing sources show most Confederate soldiers saying little about slavery, literate black Union soldiers writing mainly for public consumption, and women frequently telling their husbands to come home. Nonetheless, McPherson argues that the majority of southern soldiers supported slavery, the majority of soldiers' wives supported their husbands, and the minority of literate blacks who published letters reflected attitudes of their illiterate black comrades. As McPherson demonstrates, there are always gaps in the written record, and every historian does a certain amount of speculating, whether acknowledged or not.

This study adds a great deal to knowledge of this bloody conflict. McPherson has assembled dramatic words of soldiers who endured combat and has defined what those words meant in a specific time and place. But language can be fluid, emotions can be inexpressible, and motivations to kill are not always explainable.

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*Letters of a Civil War Surgeon*. Edited by Paul Fatout. (1961; reprint, West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 1996. Pp. 174. Illustration, notes, bibliography, index. Paperbound, \$12.95.)  
*Personal Memoirs of John H. Brinton, Civil War Surgeon, 1861–1865*. By John H. Brinton. (1914; reprint, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996. Pp. 351. Appendix, index. Paperbound, \$14.95.)

Published diaries and letters of Civil War doctors often give few details about actual medical work and its relationship to military operations in general. More often they deal with boring aspects of camp life with an occasional morbid amputation scene thrown in. These two classic works, which have again been made available, are exceptions. They are distinctive, as both were written by highly educated Pennsylvanians who had received college degrees before attending well-organized medical schools in Philadelphia. Both were excellent observers who carefully described their various responsibilities and commented as well on the political aspects of the Civil War at both national and military levels.

Major William Watson served for three years as surgeon of the 105th Pennsylvania Volunteers in the Army of the Potomac. His *Letters*, edited by Paul Fatout, detail the work of a senior regimental surgeon and give insight into his interaction with medical and military hierarchies. They are sometimes technical yet interesting and personal since his descriptions were to be read at home. In this collection readers will see the metamorphosis of Watson's hard-fighting unit, which by the end of the war had none of its original officers and few of its original soldiers. The detailed editorial comments maintain continuity and give important perspective on the letters as well.

*The Personal Memoirs of John H. Brinton* outlines the work of a surgeon who served for four years in a variety of important assignments. He was brigade surgeon and acting medical director for Ulysses S. Grant in the West in 1861 and had a long-term association with the general as well. His descriptions of Grant and other military and civilian figures are of great interest. Brinton was a flexible and apparently highly respected military doctor who worked effectively in many different positions. He served as medical director of transportation