



# Battle Cry

Founded 1961,  
Newsletter of the Sacramento Civil War Round Table  
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<http://sacramentocwrt.com/>



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## President's Message:

We want to thank again SCWRT member Nick Scivoletto's for his comprehensive yet detailed presentation "About Phil Sheridan." The career United States army officer and Union general in the Civil War often sits in the shadows of generals Ulysses S. Grant, Robert E. Lee, William Tecumseh Sherman, and Stonewall Jackson. The feisty "Little Phil" proved willing to take the offensive and impose havoc on Confederate forces in Virginia that ultimately contributed to Confederate Lee's surrender at Appomattox Courthouse in 1865. General Sheridan deserves his time in the sun.

For February's meeting we have the privilege of hearing from Sacramento historian and author William Burg. His topic is "California in the Civil War." An authority on Sacramento history and long-serving board director for the Sacramento County Historical Association, Mr. Burg has authored three local histories. *Sacramento's Streetcars* (2006) documents the evolution of the street car from 1850s thru 1940s. With stories and historic photographs, Mr. Burg's *Sacramento's Southside Park* (2007) chronicles the diverse working class neighborhood ensconced just south of the state's capitol and north of the Old City Cemetery. A more comprehensive history is *Sacramento, Then and Now* (2007). Part of a larger series that includes numerous cities throughout the United States, *Sacramento, Then and Now* chronicles the transformation of a Gold Rush town into a thriving metropolitan region that is home to the state's capitol. For readers intimate with the city's landmarks, they will appreciate viewing historic pictures juxtaposed with the present.

This month's Battle Cry theme is religion and the Civil War. Please enjoy book reviews on American religious historian Mark Noll's *Civil War as a Theological Crisis* and historian George C. Rable's *God's Almost Chosen People; A Religious History of the American Civil War*.

**MINUTES**  
**SACRAMENTO CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE**  
**Wednesday, January 11, 2012**  
**HOF BRAU RESTAURANT, 2500 WATT AVENUE, SACRAMENTO**

**ATTENDANCE – 36**

**MEMBERS – 26**

Robert E. Hanley, President  
Anne M. Peasley, Vice President  
George W. Foxworth, Treasurer  
Ardith A. Cnota  
Mitchell M. Cnota  
James P. Cress  
Jerry C. Cress  
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Scottie Hayden  
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Wayne J. Henley (MAL)  
James C. Juanitas  
Dennis Kohlmann (PD)

Rick A. Peasley  
Horst Penning  
James H. Rathlesberger  
Paul G. Ruud  
Nancy B. Samuelson  
Nicholas Scivoletto  
Richard Sickert  
Roxanne E. Spizzirri  
Brent R. ten Pas (Editor)  
Robert A. Williams  
Silver N. Williams  
Maxine Wollen  
Johns V. Zasso

**GUESTS – 10**

Melinda Diorio  
Sally Draper  
Susan Draper  
Paul Fuller  
Jason “Bear” McCall  
David Richmond  
Linda Richmond  
Larry Spizzirri  
Richard Spizzirri  
Don A. Zajic

1. The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM. by President Bob Hanley. President Hanley led the Pledge of Allegiance.
2. President Hanley welcomed members and guests.
3. President Hanley mentioned the 2011 West Coast Conference and announced that the Orange County Round Table is working on the 2012 Conference.
4. President Hanley then introduced the speaker, Nicholas Scivoletto, a Sacramento CWRT member.
5. Nicholas spoke on “General Philip H. Sheridan.” Sheridan was born in Albany, New York and grew up in Somerset, Ohio. He entered West Point in 1848 but was suspended for a year when he threatened to bayonet a cadet sergeant in reaction to a perceived insult on the parade ground. He graduated in 1853 and three of his classmates were Civil War Generals John Bell Hood, James B. McPherson, and John M. Schofield. Sheridan began the War in the West but came to the East in 1864 when General Grant became General-in-Chief of the Army. After the War, Sheridan was briefly involved with Reconstruction but was relieved of command by President Andrew Johnson because of his actions against Confederates in Texas and Louisiana. During President Grant’s Administration, Sheridan was involved in the Indian Wars and became a full general just before his death in 1888. A full general was equivalent to a four-star general today. Finally, Sheridan was the 9<sup>th</sup> President of the National Rifle Association. Lively questions and answers followed the presentation.
6. President Hanley thanked Nicholas for the talk and carded him before presenting a bottle of wine.
7. John Zasso sold additional raffle tickets and read the numbers.
8. The meeting was adjourned at 8:02 PM.

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS’ MEETING**

9. Immediately after the meeting was adjourned, the Board of Directors had a short meeting. The discussion was the process of holding the Board meeting after the monthly meeting to replace the weekday meeting which has been held two weeks before the monthly meeting. The Board decided to experiment with this process until further notice. As a result, the next Board of Directors’ meeting will be on February 8, 2012, immediately following the regular monthly meeting. The Board meeting is open to SCWRT members and the public.
10. No other issues were discussed.
11. The Board of Directors’ meeting was adjourned at 8:23 PM.

**George W. Foxworth, Acting for Secretary Edie Keister**

**Treasurer’s Report**

The cash balance following the January 11, 2012 meeting was \$1,942.95. Thanks to John Zasso, other members, and guests, the raffle brought in \$91.00. **George W. Foxworth, Treasurer**

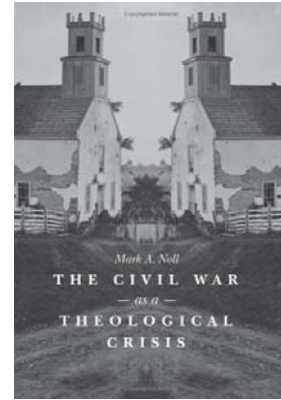


## BOOK REVIEWS



*The Civil War as a Theological Crisis.* By Mark Noll. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006). 199pp.

For antebellum Americans, a belief in divine providence and adherence to Scripture provided purpose and stability in their lives. But, according to Mark Noll's latest book *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, religious leaders in the years leading up to the Civil War were unable to provide a definitive answer on the most difficult question of the period: Does the Bible condemn or condone slavery? Americans were also at odds over the working providential God as both Northerners and Southerners tried to understand the meaning of the war God's role in it. Relying primarily on the writings of nineteenth-century theologians and other religious thinkers, Noll concludes that the clashes over the two issues revealed a theological crisis and resulted in a major turning point in American religious thought. An expansion of the Steven and Janice Brose Lectures he delivered at Penn State University in 2003, Noll's slim volume focuses primarily on the slavery question. He contends that a "fundamental disagreement existed over what the Bible had to say about slavery at the very moment when disputes over slavery were creating the most serious crisis in the nation's history" (29). Indeed, Southerners argued that Scripture sanctioned slavery, while those opposed to peculiar institution insisted that it did not. Noll points out that the supporters of slavery rested on a literal interpretation of the Bible, while abolitionists maintained that slavery violated the spirit of the Bible. Opponents of slavery furthermore contended that Scripture condemned slavery as it existed in America, for the system was riddled with abuses. Thus, the nation's most trusted religious authority, says Noll, was "sounding an uncertain note" on this critical issue (50).



In addition to the slavery question, Noll argues that Americans were also at odds over the workings of a providential God. Before the war, American theologians demonstrated confidence in their ability to fathom the meaning behind worldly events. During the war, both sides claimed that God supported their cause; however, the ways of God had become uncertain. God appeared at times to be "acting so strikingly at odds with himself," especially when it came to battlefield defeats, and for Southerners in particular, the ultimate defeat of the Confederacy (75). This sense of "providential mystery" carried over into the postwar years many abandoned the idea that God controlled worldly events (88). Noll devotes only one chapter to this important topic and leaves the reader wanting to know more.

In order to provide a broader framework, Noll also includes foreign theological commentary, both Protestant and Catholic, on the issue of slavery and the Bible. Although Noll admits that his work here is preliminary, his use of these often overlooked sources makes these two chapters the most intriguing of the book. In short, European and Canadian Protestants as well as Europe's liberal Roman Catholics evinced their intense opposition to slavery. Indeed, they were more opposed to slavery than they were in favor of the North. The second strand of foreign commentary came from conservative European Catholics, who did not categorically condemn slavery, but did criticize the institution as it existed America. But, conservative criticism went much further as Catholics took advantage of the opportunity to underscore the authority of the Church. Catholic theologians pointed out that because of the religious individualism that played such an instrumental role in the creation of the United States and its national culture, there was no

overarching religious authority to offer a definitive statement on the issue of slavery. Thus, America's religious individualism and liberal tradition contributed to a deadlock over slavery.

Reviewed by Kent T. Dollar, For the *Journal of Southern Religion*

This article can be found at <http://jsr.fsu.edu/Volume9/Dollar.htm>

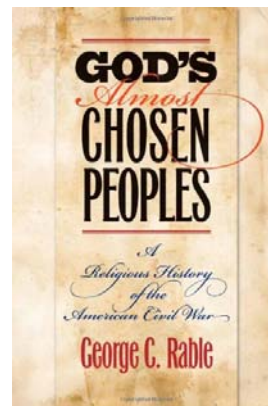


*God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War.* By George C. Rable (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010). Pp. 624.

Interest has steadily been growing among Civil War historians about the role of religion during the conflict. With the publication of a collection of diverse essays entitled *Religion and the American Civil War*, scholars began to appreciate just how understudied the topic really was in Civil War historiography.<sup>[1]</sup> George Rable's *God's Almost Chosen Peoples* is the first scholarly effort to tell a comprehensive narrative of religion and religious experiences during the conflict examining the experiences of Americans of every creed and degree of religiosity in both the North and South. Rable successfully combines the latest findings of the growing field of Civil War religious historiography with his own extensive primary source research to craft an original and valuable addition to our understanding of America's bloodiest conflict.

The comprehensiveness of Rable's wartime religious narrative makes it an extremely valuable reference for almost every religious topic imaginable during the war. Not only does he discuss the extent of religion's influence on camp life and the experience of battle, but he also talks about the role religion played in connections between the home and battle fronts. While Rable shows the important role and influence that major religious figures such as Henry Ward Beecher or Archbishop John Hughes played at the time, his book is not simply a "church history" that

focuses on the clergy or theology. In fact, he strives to recover the religious views and practices of ordinary Americans as well. Though works such as Harry Stout's *Upon the Altar of the Nation* largely focused on the mainline Protestant denominations and pro-war "civil religion" in the United States and Confederacy, Rable does a good job of discussing the views of white Roman Catholics, while also briefly discussing African-American, Mormon, and Jewish religious understandings of the war (5-7).<sup>[2]</sup> Not only does he spend a considerable amount of time explaining differences in opinion and attitudes towards the war by members of different faith traditions, but Rable goes even further and shows how some denominations despite their differing theologies and dogmas came to hold very similar positions concerning the war. For example, conservative Catholics and Episcopalians both prided themselves in doing nothing to break up the country by refusing to agitate the political question of slavery (60-61). He also provides a wealth of evidence that all religious believers across denominational divides shared at the most basic level a common belief that God through his providence took an active role throughout the conflict (397). Rable contends that such overlooked similarities are sometimes just as important for our understanding of religion in Civil War America as continuing theological disputes and differences that even wartime patriotism could not completely eradicate.



Although Rable himself describes his narrative as not primarily a "thesis-driven work," he does, nonetheless, have several key themes that reappear throughout. The most important pattern Rable discovered in his extensive research was the fact that despite their many differences, Americans

demonstrated a “remarkable consistency” in adopting a “providential view of both daily life and wartime events.” Of course, despite this shared understanding of providence, Americans still held “wildly divergent assessments of divine intent” based upon such influences as their occupation, political and national affiliations, denomination, or race. And yet, despite the horrors and hardships of the war, this faith in the active role of providence in Americans’ daily lives was incredibly flexible and resilient in the face of a number of challenges to religion, from religious indifference in the camps, to the shortage of quality chaplains, to the harsh realities of the terror and suffering of the battlefield that challenged the faith of soldiers and citizens alike. Unlike some recent scholars,<sup>[3]</sup> Rable argues that faith in providence endured throughout the war in a remarkable way and was more typical than the loss of faith experienced by such intellectuals as Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. or Ambrose Bierce (7-9, 395).

Rable, however, is not reluctant to criticize what he believes are the shortcomings of mid-nineteenth century Christian theology. He, like Harry Stout, is often critical of Americans’ providential interpretations of events, and Rable argues that “religion undoubtedly helped sustain morale and lengthen the war” (8). Indeed, he posits that this faith in providence engendered a “dangerous fatalism” that was apparent among religious Americans regardless of denomination, discouraging both “moral and political imagination” that might have resolved the conflict with compromise rather than bullets and led to the “conviction” for many that “God’s views... coincided with one’s own” (49-50). This argument raises the question of how unique this kind of theological outlook was to the Civil War or to the United States during this time period. Perhaps our understanding of religion’s role during the American Civil War would be helped by putting it into comparative context with religion’s role during other contemporary conflicts such as the Mexican-American War or the Franco-Prussian conflict. Susannah Ural’s *The Harp and the Eagle*, for example, sets the stage for the Civil War experience of the Irish-Catholic community by discussing their service in the Mexican War and the prejudices they faced at home and in the army. Her research persuasively shows that many of the issues facing Irish-American Catholics during the Mexican War, as well as a desire to prove their loyalty and dispel

religious intolerance by serving in the war, were almost exactly the same as those they faced during the Civil War. Charles Reagan Wilson’s essay comparing the American Civil War to the seventeenth-century English Civil War and the twentieth-century Spanish Civil War is another excellent model for comparative inquiry, as it gauges the relative importance of religion as a factor in the American conflict.<sup>[4]</sup>

Future religious historians of the war may debate Rable’s critical assessment of Civil War-era Americans’ providential outlook, but they will not dispute the great debt that all scholars owe Rable for writing this comprehensive and comparative study that invites rather than precludes further research on the subject of Civil War-era religion. Rable himself calls for more work to be done on particular subjects such as American Catholicism, and he pointedly refers to his project as *a* religious history and not *the* religious history of the Civil War (5). Rable’s book, nonetheless, still stands above all others as *the* book on religion during the Civil War. *God’s Almost Chosen Peoples* represents a remarkably thorough accomplishment in exploring the lives of religious, irreligious, and indifferent Americans during the Civil War, and it will rightfully be appreciated by every Civil War student, scholar, and enthusiast.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson, eds., *Religion and the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).<sup>[2]</sup> Harry Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War* (New York: Viking, 2006).<sup>[3]</sup> Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001); Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 193-209.<sup>[4]</sup> Susannah Ural Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle: Irish-American Volunteers and the Union Army, 1861-1865* (New York: New York University Press, 2006); Charles Reagan Wilson, “Religion and the American Civil War in Comparative Perspective,” in *Religion and the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 385-407.

William Kurtz, *University of Virginia*

This article can be found at

<http://www.essaysinhistory.com/review/2011/50>



## FOR FURTHER READING

Harry S. Stout. *Upon the Altar of the Nation; A Moral History of the Civil War.* 2006.

Miller, Stout, Wilson, editors. *Religion and the American Civil War.* 1998.

Steven E. Woodworth. *While God is Marching On; The Religious World of Civil War Soldiers.* 2001.

Daniel L. Fountain. *Slavery, Civil War, and Salvation: African American Slaves and Christianity, 1830 – 1870.* 2010.



## DID YOU KNOW?

The original name proposed for the State of West Virginia was Kanawha. In August 1861, pro-Union western Virginians took steps to separate from the remainder of Virginia and create a new state known as Kanawha. Their constitutional convention met and in 1862 sent Congress a constitution for the new state, but with the proposed name changed from Kanawha to West Virginia. West Virginia was admitted to the Union as the 35<sup>th</sup> state on June 20, 1863.

In California, Levi Welch, a West Virginia native, wished to commemorate his boyhood home by naming a new settlement Kanawha in Glenn County. The post office was established on January 31, 1871, but discontinued on June 9, 1879. The early pioneer village was located 4 miles west of Willows on State Highway 162. The name lives on, however, with the Kanawha Water District based in Willows, California.



## UPCOMING SCHEDULE

### March 14

"Wade Hampton's Beef Raid," by Ted Savas

April 11 - Pending

May 9 - Pending

June 13 - "Footsteps of the Cal 100 - a Pictorial Journey," by Tim Karlberg

July 11 - "About General Butler," by Tom Lubas

