

The Civil War Between Mother and Son

by Con Chapman

When I was a boy I had a board game of the Civil War
that I would play, spread out on the floor.
It was “educational,” unlike Monopoly or Clue,
so it wasn't easy to find someone to play with you.

But my mom would; she'd even agree to be the Grey
every time, because I always wanted to be the Blue.
The nuns at school taught that each child was, like you
yourself, made in the image and likeness of God.
That, I thought, was mysterious—odd;
a thing I wonder about to this day.

To them, though, all innocence cloaked in black and white,
it explained everything. The South was wrong;
perhaps, they implied, that's why God made the North strong.
I went along, thinking only one side could be right.



But my mother didn't care; her people, she told us, were "f.f.v." —
first families of Virginia, she'd leave the North to me.
She'd rack up early victories at Fort Sumter and Bull Run.
I had the factories, she had only the farms.
Every time I'd wear her down from the strength of arms
or else she'd let me win. Either way, it was a sad sort of fun
to beat your mother's people and all they stood for, wrongly.
In Catechism class a lay teacher told us you had to be
baptized in the one true church,
which would have left my mom in the lurch.



So I asked, what about the souls of those who'd never see
a baptismal font, who'd never feel the flow of holy water
on their foreheads? What about those slaughtered
in holy wars, who never knew Christ died for them on Calvary?

meaning to say, without speaking it aloud, what about my mother?
These things will be answered in heaven, came the indifferent reply
of one unable to unravel the knots in dogma that reason ties,
in the strings on which we play mystic chords of memory with each
other.

