

**THE MASTER’S SEMINARY**

**SACRED CONVICTION**

**BIBLICAL AUTHORITY AND THE ROAD TO WAR IN ANTEBELLUM AMERICA**

A FINAL PROJECT SUBMITTED TO:

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### iii PREFACE

*Since what is typically referred to as the American Civil War, a myriad of historical works connected with the defense of the ends for which each side persevered have been launched into the public domain. Regrettably, what has been ignored more often than not are the theological underpinnings which lead both the North and the South into their bloody conflict. Much ink has been spilled on the constitutionality of secession, the Fugitive Slave Act, war crimes committed against Southern civilians, protectionist tariffs, and the abolitionist movement. Unfortunately, the root motivations which lead men to their respective conclusions on matters such as these has largely been either forgotten or grossly misinterpreted. It is the aim of this work to examine the theological presuppositions of the men who wore blue and gray, and to vindicate the traditional*

*Southern position as the position of biblical authority.*

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## ABSTRACT

The War Between the States was a war over exegetical interpretation both of the Constitution and of the Bible. The economic and social reasons for the war can only be understood when subservient to the two basic worldviews of Calvinism in the South and Utopianism in the North. Ultimately, the war was a clash between those who believed in Biblical authority and its hierarchal structure and those who believed in human autonomy and a social ordering consistent with this view.

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CHAPTER 1

“ALL [NORTHERN] GROUND IS SINKING SAND”

In July of 1851—13 years after the “Great [doctrinal] Schism” in the Presbyterian Church—the *Southern Literary Messenger* published portions of a message by the prominent Southern Presbyterian James Henley Thornwell in which he proclaimed,

The parties in this conflict are not merely abolitionists and slave-holders—they are atheists, socialists, communists, red republicans, jacobins, on the one side, and the friends of order and regulated freedom on the other. In one word, the world is the battle-ground—Christianity and Atheism the combatants; and the progress of humanity the stake.<sup>1</sup>

Though Thornwell, The “Calhoun of the Southern Church,” viewed “the prospect of <sup>2</sup> disunion [with] . . . absolute horror,” he also knew that “a peaceful dissolution [was] utterly impossible” in an “age of tumults, agitation, and excitement, when socialism, communism, and a rabid mobocracy seem everywhere.” Eleven years after this prophetic insight, the first official <sup>3</sup>

Jno. R. Thompson, “Slavery As A Moral Relation,” *Southern Literary Messenger* (Richmond, July 1851), <sup>1</sup> XVII edition, 405.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Crowther, *Southern Evangelicals and the Coming of the Civil War* (Lewiston N.Y.: E. Mellen Press, 2000), 30.

B. M. Palmer, D.D., LL.D., *The Life and Letters of James Henley Thornwell, D.D., LL.D., Ex-President* <sup>3</sup> of South Carolina College, Late Professor of Theology in the Theological Seminary at Columbia, South Carolina (Richmond: Whittet & Shepperson, 1875), 478-479.

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shots were fired in what most people know as “The Civil War.”<sup>4</sup>

Thornwell’s characterization of what did become the War Between the States may sound 160 years too early. Most modern American’s view the mid-1800s as a religious time in the nation’s history, not a time when disputes between atheism and Christianity were typical. In one sense this view is correct. As church historian Mark Noll has observed, when comparing the presidential elections of 1860 to 2004, a 300-400% decrease in religious involvement among voters can be demonstrated from the former to latter period. Indeed, the War for Southern <sup>5</sup> Independence came right off the heels of the—so called—Second Great Awakening. Abraham Lincoln himself, though not an orthodox Christian—if a Christian at all —famously noted, “Both <sup>6</sup> [sides] read the same Bible, and pray to the same God.” While all this may be true in a <sup>7</sup> technically broad sense, the primarily orthodox Southerners did not subscribe to such notions. Both sides may have read the same Bible, but they each approached it with a completely

different hermeneutic. Both sides may have used the same terminology in reference to God, but the conception of Him could not have been more different. For all practical purposes, the North was by and large atheistic when it came to the Southern God.

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The term “Civil War” is not the most accurate term to utilize in describing the conflict since it implies a war in which warring factions are attempting to take over the reigns of government. The South was not trying to control the national government, rather it was attempting to assert its right to self-determination embodied in both the Constitution and Declaration of Independence.

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Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 12.

Rondel H. Rumburg, *Was Abraham Lincoln a Christian? A Debate* (Spout Spring: VA Society for Biblical and Southern Studies, 2006).

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Ronald White, *Lincoln's greatest speech : the second inaugural*, Simon & Schuster trade pbk. ed. (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2006), 114.

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### **Theological Liberalism in the North**

As late as 1850, the premier Southern statesman John C. Calhoun, in a speech delivered to congress stated, “The cords that bind the States . . . are [in large part] spiritual or ecclesiastical.”<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, it was these very chords which would eventually snap completely leading directly to war. Historical contemporary Rev. A.A. Porter maintained, “[The] present revolution is the result of their [the church’s] uprising. Much as is due to many of our sagacious and gifted politicians, they could effect nothing until the religious union of the North and South was dissolved, nor until they received the moral support and co-operation of Southern Christians.”<sup>9</sup> Presbyterian Confederate Gen. Thomas R.R. Cobb made the same point in 1862 stating, “This revolution has been accomplished mainly by the churches.” Before 1837, when the first of the <sup>10</sup> denominational splits occurred among the Presbyterians, the widening theological gap between both regions of the country was clearly evident. One of the best ways to observe this divergence is by examining the diametrically opposed reactions each region

possessed toward the flood of

European rationalism and higher criticism that washed up on American shores in the 19 century.

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The North—especially the eastern portion of the region—enacted a policy of acceptance when

it came to secular humanism. Such religious groups as the Unitarians, Transcendentalists,

Quakers, Universalists, and Shakers, as well as utopian schemes such as the Oneida

Community and Brook Farm, found fertile soil almost exclusively north of the Mason-Dixon

line. In 1785,

Richard K. Cralle, *The Works of John C. Calhoun* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1854), 557. <sup>8</sup>

Robert Livingston Stanton, D.D., *The Church and the Rebellion: A Consideration of the Rebellion Against <sup>9</sup> the Government of the United States; and the Agency of the Church, North and South, in Relation Thereto* (New York: Derby & Miller, 1864), 198.

Ibid., 197-198. <sup>10</sup>

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*King's Chapel* in Boston Massachusetts became the first American church to adopt a Unitarian

liturgy. It wasn't long until other regional churches followed suit, "Bishop Burgess has said that

<sup>11</sup> in 1843 there were one hundred and thirty Unitarian Congregational churches in Massachusetts

hardly twenty of which were Unitarian in their origin." 19 century Unitarian minister George <sup>12</sup>th

Willis Cooke informs us that

Of the period from 1826 to 1832, when Dr. Lyman Beecher [father Harriet Beecher Stowe] was settled in Boston, Mrs. Stowe has given this testimony: "all the literary men of Massachusetts were Unitarian; all the trustees and professors of Harvard College were Unitarian; all the elite of wealth and fashion crowded Unitarian churches; the judges on the bench were Unitarian."<sup>13</sup>

There remains no doubt that such developments were a direct reflection of Enlightenment trends

in Europe. Individuals such as Joseph Stevens Buckminster infiltrated Northern universities <sup>14</sup>

ushering in an era of German higher criticism. Harvard University itself went Unitarian with the

<sup>15</sup> election of Reverend Henry Ware as Hollis Professor of Divinity in 1805, an event that "not <sup>16</sup>

J.T. Sunderland and Brooke Herford, "The Bi-Centennial of King's Chapel, Boston.," *The Unitarian: A* <sup>11</sup> *Monthly Magazine of Liberal Christianity*, 1887, 4.

<sup>12</sup>  
Paul E. Lauer, A. M., *Church and State in New England*, II-III X (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1892), 188.

<sup>13</sup>  
G. W Cooke, *Unitarianism in America: a History of its Origin and Development* (American Unitarian Association, 1902), 384.

<sup>14</sup>  
Mark Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids Mich.: Eerdmans, 1992), 98.

Richard Grusin, *Transcendentalist hermeneutics: Institutional Authority and the Higher Criticism of the* <sup>15</sup> *Bible* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 62.

Sam Blumenfeld, "How Harvard Went from Calvinism to Unitarianism," March 1, 2011, <sup>16</sup>  
<http://www.thenewamerican.com/index.php/opinion/sam-blumenfeld/6481-how-harvard-went-from-calvinism-to-unitarianism>.

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only [made it] the seat of liberalism but also, by necessity, the seat of anti-Calvinism." Even the

<sup>17</sup> *First Church in Boston*, founded by John Winthrop, became Unitarian under the guidance of Jonathan Edward's opponent, Charles Chauncy. Both Unitarianism and

Transcendentalism—which had also become extremely wide-spread —share at their core the <sup>18</sup>  
belief that man is innately good and morally perfectible through education and social reform.

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Reason is placed above the Word of God, and man is ultimately devalued as a result. After teaching at institutions of higher learning in the North, English-born Unitarian Thomas Cooper became president of South Carolina College in 1821. James Henley Thornwell, who also taught at the institution—eventually proceeding Cooper as president of the college in 1851—made it a point to oppose Cooper's biblical higher criticism and notion that man was not much different than an animal. Such was the typical 19 -century reaction Southerner's harbored <sup>20</sup><sup>th</sup> towards secular humanists.



In reaction to growing attempts to indoctrinate students against Christianity, the *Evangelical and Literary Magazine*, a Southern publication, encouraged parents to express their own view on religion to their children, distribute apologetic material in public, promote “intelligent men to

S.L. Blumenfeld, *Is Public Education Necessary?* (Devin-Adair Co., 1981), <sup>17</sup>  
[http://www.fredsworld02.com/pdf/Is\\_Public\\_Education\\_Necessary-Sam\\_Blumenfeld-1981-285pgs-EDU.sml.pdf](http://www.fredsworld02.com/pdf/Is_Public_Education_Necessary-Sam_Blumenfeld-1981-285pgs-EDU.sml.pdf)

<sup>18</sup>

C. Singer, *A Theological Interpretation of American History*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1981), 64.

Edward Ayers, *American passages : A History of the United States*, 4th ed. (Boston MA: <sup>19</sup>  
Wadsworth/Cengage Learning, 2009), 323.

C. Dorough, *The Bible Belt Mystique*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 118. <sup>20</sup>

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promote their cause,” support institutions that subscribed to fundamental Christianity, and pray for the integrity of the colleges. In fact, “All Southern institutions of any importance adopted”

<sup>21</sup>

an apologetics program employed by “teachers who were specially trained to present the truths of the Bible as opposed to the skeptical concepts that were being passed around.” As a direct result <sup>22</sup> of this movement, 25-50% of total reading content in primary and secondary education became religious in sentiment. Though we don’t fully know the total extent to which this Christian apologetic movement touched higher education—simply because many of the institutions for higher learning in the early to mid-1800s have since been abolished—we do know of at least 6 major colleges and universities that incorporated *Evidences of Christianity* into their curriculum from the period of 1798 to 1860 half of them adopting the program within ten years of the secession of South Carolina.<sup>23</sup>

The Northern reaction to Enlightenment thinking was much different than the Southern. Not only were radical heresies such as Transcendentalism and Unitarianism becoming

widespread, but even what was considered orthodox Christianity quickly became compromised.

Ironically, Marxist historian Eugene D. Genovese admits that

The political ramifications of southern Christian theology were enormous. For at the very moment that the northern churches were embracing theological liberalism and abandoning the Word for a Spirit increasingly reduced to personal subjectivity, the southern churches were holding the line for Christian orthodoxy.<sup>24</sup>

121-122.

Ibid. 120-

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122.

Ibid.,

120.

Ibid.,

B. Kuklick and D.G. Hart, *Religious Advocacy and American History* (W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1997), <sup>24</sup> 92.

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Historian Gregg Singer refers to this subtle departure in northern churches as the “New England Theology” describing it as, “a mediating position holding to much of the Evangelical position while yielding at other points, particularly in regard to the doctrines of the atonement, divine sovereignty, and justification, in the direction of the Transcendentalist thought.” Old School <sup>25</sup>

Presbyterianism, mainly represented in the South, split over this issue in 1837. Since 1801, when the Northern Presbyterians joined the Congregationalists—the breeding ground for “New England Theology”—to do missionary work in the Ohio Valley, there had been some ambivalence on the part of the denomination’s conservatives. As time progressed and the New School Presbyterians challenged the doctrine of original sin and traditional ecclesiology, the <sup>26</sup> Southern wing became more and more impatient leading to eventual detachment.

### **The Northern Social Crusade**

It is vital to understand that this schism came about as much as a result of doctrine as it did practice. New England author Chard Powers Smith stated, “The number of Yankee leaders in the

Age of Reform probably runs into the thousands, great Puritans whose Grace was in a <sup>27</sup>  
Perception of Utopia potential in the selfless instincts of men and in the amelioration of their  
lot,” eventually took over the Northern sections of the evangelical denominations. To <sup>28</sup>  
Southerners, these modern “reformers” stood more in the tradition of Robespierre than that of

Singer, *A Theological Interpretation of American History*, 65. <sup>25</sup>

Crowther, *Southern Evangelicals and the Coming of the Civil War*, 77-78. <sup>26</sup>

The 19 century definition of “Puritan” did not carry the same positive connotation as it does today in <sup>27</sup>  
Reformed circles.

C. P Smith, *Yankees and God* (Hermitage House, 1954), 343. <sup>28</sup>

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Calvin. Southern Presbyterian minister B. M. Palmer told his congregation in 1860 that, “The  
demon which erected its throne upon the guillotine in the days of Robespierre and Marat,  
which abolished the Sabbath, and worshipped reason in the person of a harlot, yet survives to  
work other horrors, of which those of the French revolution are but the type.” Historian  
Edward <sup>29</sup> Crowther sheds some light on Southern sentiment by explaining:

The rage of reform, from “socialism,” to feminism, to abolitionism, like the  
scientific methods of “modernism,” fashioned the forbidden fruits of the belief that  
humanity had  
grown beyond the need for revelation and, now, considered itself better equipped by its  
own reason to reshape the world that God had formed in the beginning. An infidel and  
naive conception of human nature had yielded an unfounded belief in the perfectibility of  
humankind, a concept that now threatened to make the United States into an unchristian  
republic.<sup>30</sup>

Most students of American history will be able to quickly pick up on the radical and varied  
movements both Palmer and Crowther are referring to. After the failed 1848 socialist  
revolutions in Europe, myriads of northern newspapers were taken over by atheistic immigrants  
now banned from their own nations. In the same year, the Quaker led “woman’s rights”  
movement commenced at a Wesleyan church in Seneca Falls New York. Radical abolitionists

like William Lloyd Garrison—who was also a Transcendentalist—circulated propaganda pieces like *The Liberator* from the 1830s through 60s.<sup>31</sup>

It is critical to also keep in mind that these movements were directly linked to belief systems.

The old adage that “Universalists think God too good to damn them, while Unitarians

Frank Moore, *The Rebellion Record*, vol. 2 (532 Broadway, New York: G.P. Putnam, 1861), 5.<sup>29</sup> Crowther, *Southern Evangelicals and the Coming of the Civil War*, 129.<sup>30</sup>

W. D Kennedy and A. Benson, *Red Republicans and Lincoln's Marxists: Marxism in the Civil War*<sup>31</sup> (iUniverse.com, 2007).

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think they are too good to be damned” has more implications than one might think. Mixing the<sup>32</sup> radical notions of the Transcendentalists, Unitarians, and Universalists, who all believed man was basically good, with the “New England [Arminian] Theology,” and then adding in thousands of newly arrived socialist revolutionaries from Europe—all groups sprinkled with a utopian ideal —created the perfect recipe for the northern social reform movements. Even those who still maintained an orthodox Christianity “held to a postmillennial theology [finding it easy] to

cooperate with the Transcendentalists in nearly all of the reform movements.” “Everywhere

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societies sprang up to serve some humane cause.” James Brewer Stewart explains the

<sup>34</sup> phenomenon this way:

Like their eighteenth-century predecessors, powerful evangelists such as Charles G. Finney and Lyman Beecher urged their audiences that man, though a sinner, should nonetheless strive for holiness and choose a new life of sanctification. Free will once again took precedence over original sin, which was again redefined as voluntary selfishness. As in the 1750's, God was pictured as insisting that the “saved” perform acts of benevolence, expand the boundaries of Christ’s kingdom, and recognize a personal responsibility to improve society. Men and women again saw themselves playing dynamic roles in their own salvation and preparing society for the millennium. By the thousands they flocked to the Tract Society, the Sunday School Union, the temperance and peace organizations, and the Colonization Society.<sup>35</sup>

Though sufficient time cannot be given in this work to examine the direct connections between the Republican party, European socialists, the “Woman’s Rights” movement, Abolitionism, and Finneyism, let it be said that a certain uniformity does seem to emerge the more one studies.

“Bacon's American Christianity,” *The Nation* (New York, November 4, 1897), sec. Notes, 358. <sup>32</sup> Singer, A

*Theological Interpretation of American History*, 73. <sup>33</sup>

E.S. Gaustad, *A Religious History of America* (Harper & Row, 1966), 179. <sup>34</sup>

J.B. Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery*, American century series (Hill and <sup>35</sup> Wang, 1976), 35.

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However, to the Southern mind only one thing really mattered. All of these societies and movements believed in an ultimate authority that resided outside of Scripture. To illustrate this truth, let us examine one of the more prominent movements having its start directly before the War for Southern Independence and leading up through the 20 -century. Let us take a brief look <sup>th</sup> at the roots of feminism.

Mathilde Anneke, both a German Forty-eighter and prominent American feminist said, in reference to the “Women’s Rights” campaign, “Reason, which we recognize as our highest and only law-giver, commands us to be free.” Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who later published the <sup>36</sup> alternative *Women’s Bible* in 1895, stated “The Bible and the Church have been the greatest stumbling blocks in the way of women's emancipation.” Susan B. Anthony got even more <sup>37</sup> specific when she maintained that “out of the doctrine of original sin grew the crimes and miseries of asceticism, celibacy and witchcraft; women becoming the victim of all these delusions.” To the casual observer, the “Women’s Suffrage Movement,” as it’s often called, <sup>38</sup> was all about the right to vote. Unfortunately, this thinking could not be further from the truth. The tenets of Women’s “emancipation” go much deeper than a mere right to vote. Their purpose was to overturn the social order by replacing biblical calling with individual desire. Rheta

Childe Dorr proclaimed, “Woman's place is in the Home but Home is not contained within the four

“Odd Wisconsin Archives: Truly Radical Feminist,” Historical, Wisconsin Historical Society, April 4, <sup>36</sup> 2005, <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/odd/archives/001241.asp>.

Barbara Walker, *Man Made God : A Collection of Essays* (Seattle WA: Stellar House Publishing, 2010), <sup>37</sup> 267.

M. D Pellauer, *Toward a Tradition of Feminist Theology: The Religious Social Thought of Elizabeth* <sup>38</sup> Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Anna Howard Shaw (Carlson, 1991), 25.

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walls . . . Home is the community.” Dorr went on to describe a modern utopia ridden of war and <sup>39</sup> controlled by a maternal nature. If one simply reads the *Declaration of Sentiments* originating from the Seneca Falls Convention one can clearly see what was happening. Such policies as “No fault” divorce, the allowance of female in the clergy and law professions, and the obliteration of societal distinctions between men and women were championed. The highly acclaimed <sup>40</sup> Southern theologian R. L. Dabney prophesied that “the only possible result of this movement will be, not the independence and equality of woman, but the substitution of the savage dependence of the slave-concubine, the ‘weaker vessel’ held and abused by brute force, for the benignant order of scriptural marriage.” The “woman’s rights” campaign was not heralded by the <sup>41</sup> evangelical church as some modern interpretations would have us believe, unless what they mean by “evangelical” are Unitarians, Quakers, and liberal Wesleyans.

My purpose in shedding light on the “women’s rights” movement has more to do with the topic of abolitionism than it does the topic of feminism. Yes, the suffragettes were active preceding the *War Between the States*, but it was not their influence that ultimately lead to the war, though a significant amount of overlap does seem to exist between both groups. In fact, their antebellum influence was mainly regulated to the North and didn’t blossom fully until during and after “reconstruction.” This being stated, it is my intention to create an analogous

parallel between what happened in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848 and what took place in South

Rheta Childe Dorr, *What Eight Million Women Want* (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1910), 327<sup>39</sup>

Jeffrey Schultz, *Encyclopedia of Women in American Politics* (Phoenix Ariz.: Oryx Press, 1999), 357-<sup>40</sup> 359

Dabney R. L., "Nature Cannot Revolutionize Nature," October 1, 1873,<sup>41</sup>  
<http://www.dabneyarchive.com/Discussions%20V3/Nature%20Cannot%20Revolutionize%20Nature.pdf>, 323-324.

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Carolina on December 20, 1860. Both abolitionism and "women's rights" have been given charitable treatment in modern historical surveys yet both are deceiving in their impression. Just as women's rights was not simply about the right of women to vote, neither was abolitionism simply about the right of slaves to be free. The Southerner's problem with abolitionism, as we shall see, had more to do with the derivation of ethical authority than it did the actual emancipation of slaves.

## CHAPTER 2

### SLAVERY IN THE CHRISTIAN SOUTH

In Jefferson Davis's post-war memoirs, *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government*, the former president affirms, "To whatever extent the question of slavery may have served as an *occasion*, it was far from being the *cause* of the conflict." Rev. Palmer concurred by laying the<sup>42</sup> conflict's cause at the feet of northern atheism. "This spirit of atheism, which knows no God who tolerates evil, no Bible which sanctions law, and no conscience that can be bound by oaths and covenants, has selected us for its victims, and slavery for its issue." There is no doubt that<sup>43</sup> radical abolitionism played a huge part in driving both Southern secession and Northern aggression, especially in the theological realm. The politician and abolitionist Cassius Clay portrayed the entire institution of slavery as a "crime against man and God." It was this type of<sup>44</sup> extra-biblical dogmatism that eventually lead to the fracturing of American Christianity along the Mason-Dixon line, and in turn—with its analogous political controversies—led to war. In

order to proceed in our understanding of the theological climate that ultimately caused this sectional friction, we must first understand a few things regarding the nature of the “peculiar” institution.

Jefferson Davis, *The Rise And Fall Of The Confederate Government VI* (Kessinger Publishing, 2006), <sup>42</sup> 78.

Moore, *The Rebellion Record*, 5. <sup>43</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Stanley Harrold, *The Abolitionists and the South, 1831-1861* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 84.

### **The Middle Passage**

Unfortunately, there are a great many *a priori* misnomers many modern Americans—including Southerners—tend to accept in regard to the topic of early American slavery. There doesn’t exist the preferred amount of time within this work to deal with every misconception, but a few of them I believe must be surveyed in order to continue to work toward the final thesis. As we shall see, a basic understanding of the contemporary political situation will help us comprehend the theological motivations that undergirded it.

One of the first subjects that must be clarified is the nature of the “Middle Passage.” Of the total number of African immigrants brought to the New World “only 6 percent were brought to the United States,” most of them eventually winding up in the South (especially after the <sup>45</sup> Northern states progressively found the institution to be impractical). This transition took place in what became known as the “Triangle Trade,” in which Northeastern maritime towns—mainly in Connecticut and Rhode Island—would transport and trade southern tobacco and northern rum to different ports along the “Ivory Coast” of Africa. In return, slaves and gold dust would be taken to the Caribbean at which point they would be bartered for different forms of currency and sugar and molasses (in order to continue rum production). Human beings were treated like animals by



<sup>46</sup> the primarily Northern flesh merchants. Close quarters, disease, hunger, thirst, beatings, and death all characterized the journey from the Ivory Coast to the New World. Although “Only a <sup>47</sup>

W.D. Kennedy, *Myths of American Slavery* (Pelican Pub. Co., 2003), 44. <sup>45</sup>

<sup>46</sup>

A. Farrow, J. Lang, and J. Frank, *Complicity: How the North Promoted, Prolonged, and Profited from Slavery* (Random House Publishing Group, 2006), 50.

*Ibid.*, 106-108. <sup>47</sup>

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few New England merchants actually engaged in the slave trade . . . all of them profited by it [and] lived off it.” The significance of this finding rests in an understanding of why Southerners <sup>48</sup> tended to view their Northern counterparts as hypocrites. After the war, former Confederate soldier Robert Catlett Cave sarcastically remarked about a time when “even the pious sons of New England were slave owners and deterred by no conscientious scruples from plying the slave trade with proverbial Yankee enterprise.” If we simply take a survey of one Northern maritime

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center—that of New York City—we can understand the frustration that existed among the accused South. In 1760 New York alone had more than 20,000 slaves in residence. By 1822, <sup>50</sup> slave-grown cotton had become 40% of New York's domestic exports (the North being the nations hub for Cotton mills). “During peak years in 1859 and 1860, at least two slave ships left <sup>51</sup> from New York every month, according to one cautious estimate. Most could hold between 600 and 1,000 slaves. So in each of those years, New York ships might have carried as many as 20,000 new Africans into bondage.” In 1863, the New York Draft rioters killed scores of blacks <sup>52</sup> and set fire to a colored orphan asylum in reaction to Abraham Lincoln’s *Emancipation Proclamation*. How can such findings be consistent with the modern idea that the North was <sup>53</sup> filled with charitable Christians who cared for nothing more than the plight of the Negro? The

R.C. Cave, *The Men in Gray* (Confederate veteran, 1911), 22.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>50</sup>

A. Farrow, J. Lang, and J. Frank, *Complicity: How the North Promoted, Prolonged, and Profited from Slavery*, 214.

Ibid., 215.<sup>51</sup>

Ibid., 122.<sup>52</sup>

Ibid.<sup>53</sup>

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answer lies in the North's economic (and ultimately religious) reason for supporting the "free soil" movement.

### **Racism and the Perpetuation of Slavery**

Today, many Americans think that the South was (and perhaps still is) "racist central" so-to speak, whilst the North uniformly believed in the brotherhood of all men. Nothing could be further from the truth. Again, in the post-war memoirs of Jefferson Davis, the defeated president maintained that the Northern reason for fighting against the "extension of slavery" in the territories was less than noble. Davis writes:

"[The idea of letting slaveholders into the territories] does not, never did, and never could, imply the addition of a single slave to the number already existing. The question was merely whether the slaveholder should be permitted to go, with his slaves, into territory (the common property of all) into which the non-slaveholder could go with his property of any sort. There was no proposal nor desire on the part of the Southern States to reopen the slave-trade, which they had been foremost in suppressing, or to add to the number of slaves. It was a question of the distribution, or dispersion, of the slaves, rather than of the 'extension of slavery.'"<sup>54</sup>

In short, what Davis is saying is this: "The North opposed the constitutional freedom for slave owners to transport their slaves into the territories for reasons other than a concern for the slaves themselves." There is little doubt that the North's disposition towards "Negroes" was hardly morally superior to the South's. In *Democracy in America*, foreign observer Alexis de Tocqueville discovered that "race prejudice seems stronger in those states that have abolished slavery than in those where it still exists, and nowhere is it more intolerant than in those states

where slavery was never known.” Abraham Lincoln himself is often quoted as being “in favor

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Davis, *The Rise And Fall Of The Confederate Government* VI, 7. <sup>54</sup>

A. Tocqueville et al., *Democracy in America*, P. S. Series (HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 182. <sup>55</sup>

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of the [white] race” and having “no purpose to introduce political and social equality between

the white and black races.” Lyman Trumbell, a senator from Illinois, summed up his state’s <sup>56</sup>

sentiment by affirming, “Our people want nothing to do with the Negro.” Historian Mitchell <sup>57</sup>

Snay maintains that “even the most committed abolitionists often had trouble perceiving blacks

as ‘beloved’ brothers” as the historical record bears out. The state laws of the North certainly <sup>58</sup>

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reflected this view, one example being *The Revised Code* of Indiana which declared that:

All contracts with Negroes were null and void; any white person encouraging Negroes to enter the state was subjected to a \$500 dollar fine; Negroes and mulattos were not allowed to vote; no Negro or mulatto having even one-eighth part of Negro blood could legally marry a white person—an act punishable by ten year’s imprisonment and a fine of up to 5,000; any person counseling or encouraging interracial marriage was subject to a fine of up to 1,000; Negroes and mulattos were forbidden from testifying in court against white people, from sending their children to public schools, or from holding any political office. <sup>60</sup>

The question still remains though, “If it wasn’t for the plight of the slave, why did the North

attempt to threaten an institution that had made it so prosperous?” There are many potential

answers and qualifications that can be made, but I know of no testimony more direct and

authoritative regarding this matter than that of Lincoln’s secretary of state William Seward who

explained that, “the motive of those who protested against the extension of slavery had always

really been concern for the welfare of the white man, and not an unnatural sympathy for the

A. Lincoln, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (Wildside Press, 2008), 402. <sup>56</sup>

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T.J. DiLorenzo, *The Real Lincoln: a new look at Abraham Lincoln, his agenda, and an unnecessary war* (Three Rivers Press, 2003), 28.

J.R. McKivigan and M. Snay, *Religion and the Antebellum Debate Over Slavery* (University of Georgia <sup>58</sup> Press, 1998), 148.

<sup>59</sup>

S. Harrold, *The Abolitionists and the South, 1831-1861* (University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 98..

*Ibid.*, 26. <sup>60</sup>

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Negro.” Lincoln echoed this view himself in 1854 stating, “We want them [the territories] for

<sup>61</sup> the homes of free white people. This they cannot be, to any considerable extent, if slavery shall be planted within them,” and again in 1860, “their places [would] be, *pari passu*, filled up by <sup>62</sup>

free white laborers [after the completion of Lincoln’s colonization plan].” Professor and author <sup>63</sup> Lyle H. Lanier sums it up this way: “Because slave-holding was the acid test as to whether a state would remain agrarian or become eventually industrial, the Northern leaders wished that no more

slave states should be carved from the Western territories.” In short, the typical Northerner was

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against the “extension of slavery” primarily in order to keep black labor from undercutting white labor and to dilute the representation of the South. In the words of Rev. James Henley Thornwell, “To exclude slaveholding is . . . to exclude the south.”<sup>65</sup>

### **Plantation Life**

If most Americans examined the conditions slaves lived under during the antebellum period they would be likewise surprised. According to historian John S. Tilley, Frederick L. Olmsted in his work *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States* maintains that, “slaves were probably fed better than any comparable class of other countries. The labor required of house-servants. . . [was] light,

*Ibid.* 22. <sup>61</sup>

A. Lincoln, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* <sup>62</sup> (Wildside Press, 2008), 306.

H. Holzer, *Lincoln at Cooper Union: The Speech That Made Abraham Lincoln President*, Simon & <sup>63</sup> Schuster Lincoln Library (Simon & Schuster, 2006), 273.

<sup>64</sup> Twelve Southerners and S.V. Donaldson, *I'll take my Stand: the South and the Agrarian Tradition*, Library of Southern Civilization (Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 84.

B.M. Palmer and J.H. Thornwell, *The Life and Letters of James Henley Thornwell* (Whittet & <sup>65</sup> Shepperson, 1875), 602.

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that of field-hands not appreciably heavy . . . [and] slave marriages were frequently made occasions, attended by their owners.” This picture of slave life is hardly resembles what we as <sup>66</sup> modern Americans are told to believe through the educational and entertainment industries. Masters that treated their slaves with respect aren’t supposed to exist—but they did.

According to antebellum whites, there were many planters who dealt with their slaves in a humane fashion. Walter Peterson, for example, recalled that in Alabama ‘many slaveholders were kind masters.’ Philip H. Jones of Louisiana asserted that ‘Many owners were humane and kind and provided well for them [slaves].’ According to Amanda Washington, among the planters ‘*Noblesse oblige* was recognized everywhere, and we felt bound to treat kindly the class dependent on us.’ The testimony of the white witnesses is borne out by those of the former slaves.<sup>67</sup>

In the *Slave Narratives*—the cumulative result of two years of in depth interviews surveying over 2,000 former slaves by the *Works Project Administration*—former slaves were able to voice their own opinion on the plantation experience. Noble prize winner Robert Fogel’s work *Time on the Cross*, makes a study of these narratives demonstrating “that nowhere in the Western Hemisphere were slaves better treated and cared for than in the South.” Fogel concluded that <sup>68</sup> “60 to 80 percent of all respondents had only positive things to say about their masters and their life during slave days.” Another way to assess the slave’s quality of life is to look at their rate of <sup>69</sup> population increase. We can do this by comparing the number of live births with the number of deaths. In 1860, the Southern slave population was shown to have increased by 23 percent, while

J. S Tilley, *Facts the Historians Leave Out* (Bill Coats, Ltd., 1993).<sup>66</sup>

J.W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (Oxford University<sup>67</sup> Press, 1979), 71. (263-264)

Kennedy, *Myths of American Slavery*, 91.<sup>68</sup>

Ibid.<sup>69</sup>

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the Northern black population only increased 1.7 percent. If we go back ten years to the 1850

<sup>70</sup> U.S. Census something even more startling emerges. 1 out of every 1,000 white persons was

deaf, dumb, blind, insane, or idiotic. In Northern states, 1 out of every 506 black persons had

the same handicaps. For Southern slaves it was merely 1 in 1,464 persons who possessed such

inabilities. In addition, free blacks in the South shared about equal economic prosperity as did <sup>71</sup>

their Southern white associates, and while “it is true that in non-slaveholding States the blacks <sup>72</sup>

are free in theory. . . In practice their freedom often leads to misery and degradation, and not

unfrequently to oppression from . . . white associate[s].” Rev. Dabney firmly opposed the <sup>73</sup>

charge headed by men such as Transcendentalist William Lloyd Garrison and Spiritualist

Harriet Beecher Stowe in their attempt to paint Southern slavery as a brutal and evil institution

in and of itself; an accusation almost universally believed to this day. Dabney writes in *A*

*Defense of Virginia and the South*

Let it be understood . . . that we are not inquiring into the moral character of that thing which Abolitionists paint as domestic slavery; a[s] something horrid with the groans of oppressed innocence and the clang of unrighteous stripes; a[s] something which aims to reduce a man to a brute, and denies him his natural right to serve his Creator and save his soul. We begin by asserting that these things, if they ever exist in fact, are not domestic slavery, but the abuses of it.<sup>74</sup>

The Southern Christian consensus did not permit the severe abuses painted as “common” by

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U.S. Bureau of the Census, “Population of the United States in 1860” (Government Printing Office, 1864), <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/1860.html> (accessed April 16, 2011).

U.S. Bureau of the Census, “The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850” (Robert Armstrong, Public<sup>71</sup> Printer,

1853), <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/1850.html> (accessed April 16, 2011).

Kennedy, *Myths of American Slavery*, 28.<sup>72</sup>

“Management of Slaves,” *The American Farmer* (Baltimore, September 1846), 77.<sup>73</sup>

R.L. Dabney, *A Defence of Virginia: (and Through her, of the South) in Recent and Pending Contests*<sup>74</sup> Against the Sectional Party, (E.J. Hale, 1867), 98.

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Northern abolitionists. Even Frederick Douglass admitted that, “Public opinion is, indeed, an unfailing restraint upon the cruelty and barbarity of masters, overseers, and slave-drivers, whenever and wherever it can reach them.” Unfortunately, this “public opinion” was out of<sup>75</sup> reach on slave vessels. The disparity in conditions that existed between the middle passage and plantation life can be summed up with these words: “For better or worse, the lord of the plantation had to coexist with his slaves. The slave trader had only to deliver them.” However, I<sup>76</sup> believe there was an even greater reason for this phenomenon, and it has to do with Southern Christianity.

### **Cotton Field Meets Mission Field**

In the early part of the 19 century, the South, as already has been mentioned, maintained a<sup>th</sup> Reformed understanding in the face of the growing threat of European rationalism. As a consequence, while a few Northerners were justifying their interactions with slavery by appealing to pre-Darwinian naturalists, the South was stalwart in its “providential” view of the institution. Though Rev. Dabney perceived the slave trade as an “iniquitous traffick” —as Exodus 21:16<sup>77</sup> affirms with its indiction of man-capture—he likewise held that “we [the people of Virginia] have no cause . . . to lament the condition which Providence had assigned us, in placing this African Race among us.” Dabney’s reasoning was simple. God, in His sovereignty, had<sup>78</sup> exposed a great many nonbelievers to the light of the Gospel thereby bringing good out of evil.

F. Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, (Miller, Orton & Mulligan, 1855), 61.<sup>75</sup>

Farrow, Lang, and Frank, *Complicity*, 108.<sup>76</sup>

R.L. Dabney, *A Defence of Virginia*, 27.<sup>77</sup>

*Ibid.*, 303.<sup>78</sup>

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Dabney asks

was it nothing that they [the slaves] should be brought, by the relation of servitude, under the consciences and Christian zeal of a Christian people, in circumstances which most powerfully enlisted their sense of responsibility, and gave free scope to their labour of love? Let the blessed results answer, of a nation of four millions lifted, in four generations, out of idolatrous debasement, “sitting clothed, and in their right mind;” of more than half a million adult communicants in Christian churches! . . . This much-abused system has thus accomplished for the Africans, amidst universal opposition and obloquy, more than all the rest of the Christian world together has accomplished for the rest of the heathen.<sup>79</sup>

Historian John W. Blassingame explains Dabney’s sentiment by maintaining, “One of the legacies Southern churches inherited from the Reformation was the duty to proselytize heathens.” Many Southern denominations, at the petition of their congregants, launched slave<sup>80</sup> missions efforts toward the middle part of the 19 century in which a traveling preacher would<sup>th</sup> care for the needs of individual slaves on their plantations. In an 1863 address affirmed by<sup>81</sup> ninety-six ministers of the Confederate States of America entitled, *An Address to Christians Throughout the World*, this evangelistic mission was fully and clearly defined.

Most of us have grown up from childhood among the slaves; all of us have preached to and taught them the word of life; have administered to them the ordinances of the Christian church; sincerely love them as souls for whom Christ died; we go among them freely and know them in health and sickness, in labor and rest, from infancy to old age. We are familiar with their physical and moral condition, and alive to all their interests; and we testify in the sight of God, that the relation of master and slave among us, however we may deplore abuses in this, as in other relations of mankind, is not incompatible with our holy Christianity, and that the presence of the Africans in our land is an occasion of gratitude on their behalf, before God; seeing that thereby Divine Providence has brought them where missionaries of the cross may freely proclaim to them the word of salvation, and the work is not interrupted by agitating fanaticism. The South has done more than any people on earth for the christianization of the African race. The condition of slaves here is not wretched, as

*Ibid.*, 281.<sup>79</sup>



Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 71.<sup>80</sup>

Ibid., 94-95.<sup>81</sup>

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northern fictions would have men believe, but prosperous and happy.<sup>82</sup>

Although many northern abolitionists believed the gospel was not being delivered to the slaves through their masters—otherwise in their minds, the slaves would be set free—the historical account demonstrates the exact opposite. “When a committee of South Carolina’s Episcopal Church asked ministers what they taught slaves in 1843, it learned that”<sup>83</sup>

In preaching, the same great subjects seem to have been inculcated, which are insisted on in white congregations, viz. our fall in Adam, and our redemption in Christ—the sinfulness and lost state of man, and the glorious privileges to which the Gospel admits him; the necessity of repentance, faith, and holy obedience. To these subjects are added, as occasion may allow, the peculiar duties arising out of the condition of servants in relation to their owners, fellow-servants and families.<sup>84</sup>

John W. Blassingame likewise affirms

White ministers emphasized oral instruction, memorization, interrogatories, and singing in their efforts to christianize the slaves. Slaves memorized the Lord’s Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and many aspects of the denomination’s liturgy. Ministers, bishops, and masters often questioned the slaves to make sure they understood what had been taught, . . . [and] when it came time to join a church, slaves exercised their own choice, demonstrating their autonomy. Slaves catechized by Episcopalians or Roman Catholics persisted in joining Baptists and Methodists.”<sup>85</sup>

Such testimonies may sound unusual to modern ears. “Masters would share the gospel with their slaves and allow them to choose their own church? Surely if they partook in such actions it was merely for the reason of having greater control over them. Perhaps in addition to the gospel,

Conference of Ministers, Assembled at Richmond, Va., *An Address to Christians Throughout the World*<sup>82</sup> (Parrish & Willingham, 1863), 7.

Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 88.<sup>83</sup>

Convention and Episcopal Church. Diocese of South Carolina. Council, *Journal of the Proceedings of<sup>84</sup> the Fifty-Fourth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church, in South Carolina* (The Diocese, 1843), 38.

obedience to their masters was heavily emphasized?” Such a question can be answered by examining the *Slave Narrative*’s suggestion that “only 15 percent of the Georgia slaves who had heard antebellum whites preach recalled admonitions to obedience.” This despite all the fear<sup>86</sup> stirred up by abolitionist rhetoric designed specifically to instigate slave insurrections. Lest one think that “15%” is still too high a percentage, let us not forget the myriad of sermons aimed at the way masters were to treat their slaves.

Not only were verses such as Col. 3:22, Eph. 6:5, and 1 Pet. 2:18 delivered to encourage slaves to “obey [their] earthly masters” but so were Eph. 6:9 and Col. 4:1 which prodded masters to “give up threatening” and “grant to your slaves justice and fairness.” Southern Episcopal bishop George W. Freeman said, “It is the duty of masters not only to be merciful to their servants, but to do everything in their power to make their situation comfortable, and to put forth all reasonable effort to render them contented and happy.” This principle did not fade in the<sup>87</sup> midst of tough economic difficulty either. In 1851, a Methodist paper, after cotton prices had dropped, told masters not to overwork their slaves. In another 1851 Southern Baptist<sup>88</sup> publication entitled *The Duties of Christian Masters*, Rev. A. T. Holmes exclaims, “Equity pleads the right of humanity . . . and, in the conscientious discharge of duty, prompts the master to such treatment of his servant as would be desired on his part, were their positions reversed.”<sup>89</sup> His reasoning? “The exercise of right and authority on the part of the master, with reference only

Ibid., 89.<sup>86</sup>

Ibid., 269.<sup>87</sup>

Crowther, *Southern Evangelicals and the Coming of the Civil War*, 100.<sup>88</sup>

H.N. McTyeire et al., *Duties of Masters to Servants: Three Premium Essays* (Southern Baptist<sup>89</sup> Publication Society, 1851), 133.

to his interest, uninfluenced by kindness to his servant, must incur the displeasure of Him with whom there is no respect of persons.” Although it is logical that a “planter ordinarily could not<sup>90</sup> afford to starve, torture, or work . . . [his slaves] to death,” it is a Reformed understanding of<sup>91</sup> the sovereignty of God that motivated the Southern Christian to act in a charitable manner. Holland N. McTyeire, a Methodist bishop from New Orleans, confirms this idea when he warns, “As you treat your servants on earth, so will your Master in heaven treat you.” The effects of<sup>92</sup> this missions effort can be seen in the Sept. 1845 edition of *American Farmer*, in an article entitled “Management of Slaves,” by the Barbour County (Ala.) Agriculture Society who reported that

Our laws require us to attend to the happiness of our slaves; and our missionary establishment, with its ample support by us, shows that we acknowledge the obligation on us, to promote the well-being of our slaves. But even more—actual statistical returns show that religion is more prevalent among the slaves of the South than the free blacks of the Northern States, and universal opinion concurs in giving them a higher moral character.<sup>93</sup>

### **The Slave as Human**

In addition to this desire to please God, Southern slaveholders also recognized something just as fundamental from the Scriptures: An African slave was still a human being. It is neither something new nor a coincidence that modern “creation science” flourishes in the Bible belt and not in the North where starting in the 1830s pre-Darwinian scientist “Samuel George Morton,

Ibid., 133.<sup>90</sup>

Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 271.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>92</sup> H.N. McTyeire and T.O. Summers, *Duties of Christian masters* (Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1859), 125-126.

“Management of Slaves,” *The American Farmer* (Baltimore, September 1846), 77.<sup>93</sup>

one of Philadelphia's most eminent physicians, . . . used measurements from his world-famous collection of skulls to show that black people had the smallest cranial capacity of all human types and were doomed to inferiority.” In *Crania Americana*, Morton “presumed that the Bible had <sup>94</sup> been misread. Caucasians and Negroes were too different to both be descended from Adam through Noah. Morton speculated that God must have intervened at the time of the Flood to reshape mankind.” It is no wonder that the Philadelphian scientists most ardent critic, John <sup>95</sup> Bachman, was a Charleston minister.

Morton's disciples Josiah Nott and Louis Agassiz published a 700-page treatise entitled *Types of Mankind* in 1854 which “proved” that blacks were a separate species than whites. Presbyterian Thomas Smyth, another Charleston minister, countered with *Unity of the Human Race* which *The Watchman and Observer of Richmond*, *Southern Baptist* and *Southern Baptist Advocate* carried enabling the work to become widely approved. In Josiah Nott's paper *The* <sup>96</sup> *Mulatto a Hybrid*, “Nott declared that science—not the Bible—must decide the true origins of mankind. . . [proposing] that God must have made separate races of men, just as He had made separate species of animals.” Though there were many men in the North who did not accept this <sup>97</sup> interpretation, the headquarters of opposition lay in the South. Prominent Southern theologian James Henley Thornwell—an opponent of higher biblical criticism as previously mentioned—in a sermon entitled *The rights and Duties of Masters* had this to say about the “race” scientist's

Farrow, Lang, and Frank, *Complicity*, 182. <sup>94</sup>

Ibid., 186. <sup>95</sup>

Crowther, *Southern Evangelicalism and the Coming of the Civil War*, 97-98. <sup>96</sup>

Ibid., 187. <sup>97</sup>

has an equal interest with us in the great redemption. Science, falsely so called, may attempt to exclude him from the brotherhood of humanity . . . but the instinctive impulses of our nature combined with the plainest declarations of the word of God, lead us to recognize in his form and lineaments—his moral, religious and intellectual nature—the same humanity in which we glory as the image of God. We are not ashamed to call him our brother.<sup>98</sup>

And “brother” he became to the majority of families who not only gained from his labor, but frequently freed him and allowed him to attain their level of success. In W. J. Cash’s highly acclaimed book *The Mind of the South*, the author describes plantation culture as a

society in which the infant son of the planter was commonly suckled by a black mammy, in which gray old black men were his most loved story-tellers, in which black stalwarts were among the chiefest heroes and mentors of his boyhood, and in which his usual, often practically his only, companions until he was past the age of puberty were the black boys (and girls) of the plantation.<sup>99</sup>

To this day the impact slaves have had on Southern whites and vice versa can be fully observed. “Southern whites not only adapted their language and religion to that of the slaves but also adapted agricultural practices, sexual attitudes, rhythm of life, architecture, food and social relations to African patterns.” In fact, the relationship between blacks and whites was so<sup>100</sup> intimate that in the 1847 Charleston *Southern Presbyterian Review* it was reported that, “Our children catch the very dialect of our servants, and lisp all their perversions of the English tongue, long before they learn to speak it correctly.” In turn, the reforming effects of the church

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J.H. Thornwell, *The Rights and Duties of Masters* (Press of Walker & James, 1850), 11.<sup>98</sup> W.J.

Cash, *The Mind of the South*, A borzoi book (Vintage Books, 1991), 49.<sup>99</sup>

Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 101.<sup>100</sup>

An Association of Ministers in the Town of Columbia, S.C., “*Southern Presbyterian Review*” I, no. I<sup>101</sup> (June 1847), 90.

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turned the slaves from polygamy to monogamy and from animistic religions to Christianity.

<sup>102</sup> However, for northern abolitionists, this simply wasn’t enough.

Ibid., 161-163.<sup>102</sup>

## CHAPTER 3

### A HIGHER LAW

The North's motivation in opposing Southern culture, as we have already seen, was greatly

connected with “white” economic interest. However, as we shall see, this was merely the tip of a religious iceberg. Historian and member of the “Southern Agrarians” Frank Lawrence Owsley highlights one of the major differences between both regions when he states, “The one [North] was extreme centralization, the other [South] was extreme decentralization; the one was nationalistic and the other provincial; the first was called Federalism, the other State Rights, but in truth the first should have been called Unitarianism and the second Federalism.” Owsley <sup>103</sup> rightly recognizes the fact that religious beliefs in the North determined their political motives, not the other way around. Though “the civilization of the North was coarse and materialistic. . . [and the] South was scant of shows, but highly refined and sentimental,” there existed deeper <sup>104</sup> forces at work than mere economic needs and cultural rhythm. It was the philosophy of Unitarianism—and other Yankee religious movements previously mentioned—with its emphasis on man’s perfectability and the hope of utopia which demanded a centralized government in

Twelve Southerners, *I’ll Take My Stand*, 85. <sup>103</sup>

E.A. Pollard, *The Lost Causes: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederates*. (E. B. Treat & <sup>104</sup> co., 1866), 180.

order to enact reforms and pay for infrastructure projects —two objectives that both <sup>105</sup>

Southerners as a whole and the Christian majority residing in the South thoroughly disagreed <sup>106</sup>

<sup>107</sup>

with. They believed instead that “the structures in society mattered far less than the moral caliber of those operating within society.”<sup>108</sup>

Creating such a government demanded the erosion of “state’s rights,” enshrined in the Constitution, and supplying such a government with the needed resources demanded a large revenue base. For many unorthodox Northerners, such as Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo

Emerson, “socialism [had] . . . done good service.” Unfortunately for Dixie, “the material <sup>109</sup> prosperity of the North was greatly dependent on the Federal Government” and the federal <sup>110</sup> Government in turn was greatly depended on a protectionist tariff which singled out the South as its victim.

### **Northern Religion and the Protectionists Tariff**

In 1816, the Tariff was first introduced as a way to “repay” New England’s manufacturing industry for the hit it took during the War of 1812. International imports were taxed to keep Southerners buying goods produced in Northern factories (unfortunately in turn

DiLorenzo, *The Real Lincoln*, 2. <sup>105</sup>

Twelve Southerners, *I’ll Take My Stand*, 76. <sup>106</sup>

Crowther, *Southern Evangelicals and the Coming of the Civil War*, 9. <sup>107</sup>

Ibid., 35. <sup>108</sup>

R. W Emerson and E. W Emerson, *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: The Conduct of Life* <sup>109</sup> (Houghton, Mifflin, 1859), 97.

United States. War Dept et al., *The War of the Rebellion: a Compilation of the Official Records of the* <sup>110</sup> *Union and Confederate Armies*, (Govt. Print. Off., 1900), 82.

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making it harder for Europe to purchase cotton). Soon however, the Tariff meant much more to the North than simple compensation; it produced the lifeblood of the federal bureaucracy. The 1828 “Tariff of Abominations,” charged by John C. Calhoun to be “unconstitutional,” raised <sup>111</sup> the rate to 41%. Before a compromise could be reached, South Carolina threatened to nullify

<sup>112</sup>

the federal law, instigating a constitutional battle that foreshadowed the War for Southern Independence slightly more than thirty years later.

It is worth noting that “many of those who would soon be the leaders of the Old School Presbyterianism in the South after the division of 1837 refused to support South Carolina and



Calhoun because many of the leaders of this movement were very liberal in their theological outlook.” (Though Rev. Dabney did in a passing comment refer to the tariffs as “unjust.” ) <sup>113</sup>

<sup>114</sup>

This position of course changed as the North began recruiting Scripture-subverting abolitionists to its cause.

By the eve of secession, economist Thomas J. DiLorenzo maintains that “the primary source of federal revenue was tariff revenue.” With the Tariff being the “centerpiece of the <sup>115</sup> Republican program” and the first Republican president, Abraham Lincoln, supporting the <sup>116</sup> “Morill Tariff bill, which proposed raising the tariff rate by as much as 250 percent on some

Dilorenzo, *The Real Lincoln*, 63. <sup>111</sup>

G.E. Croscup and E.D. Lewis, *History Made Visible: A Synchronic Chart and Statistical Tables of* <sup>112</sup> *United States History* (Windsor publishing company, 1910), 62.

Singer, *A Theological Interpretation of American History*, 83. <sup>113</sup>

Dabney, *A Defence of Virginia*, 43. <sup>114</sup>

Dilorenzo, *The Real Lincoln*, 63. <sup>115</sup>

R.F. Bensel, *Yankee Leviathan: The Origins of Central State Authority in America, 1859-1877* <sup>116</sup> (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 73.

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items,” South Carolina had had enough. <sup>117</sup>

Former U.S. ambassador James Williams wrote in 1862, “It would appear to be an error to suppose that the manufacturers [Northeasterners], as a class, are in reality endeavouring to achieve the destruction of the institution of slavery. They only seek, through a protective tariff, to divide with the planters [Northwest] the earnings of slave labour.” While a significant portion <sup>118</sup> of the North did not really care one way or the other whether the South kept slaves or not, they did find it convenient “to borrow the language of the abolitionists and [clothe] the struggle in a moral garb” when necessary. Confederate journalist Edward A. Pollard exclaimed <sup>119</sup>

The North naturally found or imagined in slavery the leading cause of the distinctive civilization of the South, its higher sentimentalism, and its superior refinements of scholarship and manners. It revenged itself on the cause, diverted its

envy in an attack upon slavery, and defamed the institution as the relic of barbarism and the sum of all villainies.<sup>120</sup>

This idea that “slavery was a sin” seemed to justify the plundering of the South who, after all, needed the government to make them better citizens due to their slave-system. Educator Francis Wayland expresses this sentiment in an 1865 letter to President Lincoln in which he exclaims, “It has been a war of education and patriotism against ignorance and barbarism.”<sup>121</sup>

In short, the North needed the South in order to finance its utopian-sized central government. In addition, one of the common traits of Northern religion, the belief in human

Dilorenzo, *The Real Lincoln*, 63.<sup>117</sup>

Williams, *The South Vindicated*, 59-60.<sup>118</sup>

Singer, *A Theological Interpretation of American History*, 84.<sup>119</sup>

Pollard, *The Lost Causes*, 48.<sup>120</sup>

H. Barnard, “The American Journal of Education,” *Library of American civilization* (1865), 815.<sup>121</sup>

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autonomy, threatened social institutions featuring a hierarchal structure such as traditional patriarchy and slavery. Historian Edward R. Crowther comments

As the structural force of modernization and the intellectual force of transcendentalism created threats to southern society, their specific offspring, abolitionism and industrialization, brought intellectual challenges to the southern political and moral economies. Preachers, especially, found the romantic notions of human perfectability a threat to their theological order. In their construction of things, patriarchy represented God’s way of arranging a society stained by sin.<sup>122</sup> It is lamentable that most historians simply do not connect the dots between religion,

government, and economics when it comes to the war, leaving most students to either insist that it was only about “state’s rights” or—more often the case—that it was only about slavery. Indeed, both topics served as the pallets on which the struggle was painted, but neither answer really addresses the religious worldview behind the struggle. Southern clergyman understood

this. This is precisely how Methodist preacher J. W. Tucker could tell his Southern audience that, “your cause is the cause of God, the cause of Christ, of humanity. It is a conflict of truth with error—of Bible with Northern infidelity—of pure Christianity with Northern fanaticism.” In <sup>123</sup> order to understand this fanaticism we must turn our attention to the religious nature of the slavery debate.

### Slavery Debated

In 1845, a debate was held in Cincinnati Ohio between two local Presbyterian ministers. The topic of the debate was whether “slave-holding [was] in itself sinful, and the relationship between master and slave, a sinful relation?” For many Northern Presbyterians the question

<sup>124</sup>

Crowther, *Southern Evangelicals and the Coming of the Civil War*, 52. <sup>122</sup>

O.V. Burton, *The Age of Lincoln* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008). <sup>123</sup>

J. Blanchard and N. L. Rice, *A Debate on Slavery* (W.H. Moore & co., 1846). <sup>124</sup>

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had already been answered. The Presbyterian minister from Indiana, Rev. James Duncan, stated quite concretely in his 1840 publication *A Treatise on Slavery* that, “In the whole volume of Divine providence, there is no one thing which shows the absolute necessity of a hell, more than the practice of involuntary, unmerited, hereditary slavery.” Clearly the impact of abolitionism <sup>125</sup> was no longer relegated to the mere musings of Transcendentalists, Unitarians, and Quakers. It was now infiltrating the mainline denominations and “providence” was being redefined to coincide with its cause. A sizable minority of Northern Congregationalist and New School Presbyterians had, by the time of the Cincinnati debate, made the decision to “make slave holding a bar to christian [sic] fellowship, on the ground, that it is a heinous and scandalous sin.” It was in this context that abolitionist Rev. J. Blanchard and “traditional <sup>126</sup> emancipationist” Dr. N. L. Rice publically jousted. Author Walter D. Kennedy comments <sup>127</sup>

regarding Blanchard's performance that "in more than twenty-four hours of debate, the Radical Abolitionists' view could not be maintained. . . Rev. Blanchard used all his time in opening the debate and yet did not once address the theme of the debate" instead focusing on the purported<sup>128</sup> abuses within the chattel system. The closest thing resembling a moral argument maintaining the idea that slavery was in and of itself sinful came when Blanchard stated,

Abolitionists take their stand upon the New Testament doctrine of the natural equity of man, the one-bloodism of human kind; and upon those great principles of human rights,

J. Duncan, *A Treatise on Slavery* (American Anti-Slavery Society, 1840), 119.<sup>125</sup>

Blanchard and Rice, *A Debate on Slavery*, 194.<sup>126</sup>

I am calling those who believed in the progressive abolition of slavery "traditional emancipationists" and<sup>127</sup> those who believed in the immediate emancipation of slavery "abolitionists." The latter term also signifies a belief in the idea that slave-holders ought to be punished for their involvement in the "sinful" practice.

W.D. Kennedy, *Myths of American Slavery*, 71-72.<sup>128</sup>

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drawn from the New Testament, and announced in the American Declaration of Independence, declaring that all men have natural and inalienable rights to person, property and the pursuit of happiness.<sup>129</sup>

Notice that the appeal being made does not directly address the issue at hand. It also implies a "general" morality flowing from the principles of the New Testament and the Declaration of Independence rather than a clear statement based upon specific passages in Scripture. Rice picked up on this and decidedly focused on the issue of the debate—the issue that ended up splitting America's denominations—"Is slave-holding in and of itself sinful?" Rice's views regarding the perpetuation of the institution were one and the same with the overriding opinion of the South. He states, "In denying that slave-holding is in itself sinful, I do not defend slavery as an institution that ought to be perpetrated. . . . I desire to see every slave free; not nominally free, as are the colored people in Ohio."<sup>130</sup>

It is worth noting that "as of 1827, there were more than four times as many anti-slavery societies in the South as in the North." The rise of abolitionism in the North though, with its

<sup>131</sup> view that slave-holders should be punished and emancipation should happen immediately, rendered the situation inverse by the time of the war. However, this did not mean that Southerners—even the less than 5% of whites who owned slaves—were not ultimately <sup>132</sup>

A. Himes, *The Sword of the Lord: The Roots of Fundamentalism in an American Family* (CreateSpace, <sup>129</sup> 2010), 54.

Blanchard and Rice, *A Debate on Slavery*, 33-34. <sup>130</sup>

T. E Woods, *The Politically Incorrect Guide to American History* (Regnery Pub., 2004), 42. <sup>131</sup>

(J. H Franklin and A. A Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans* (Knopf, <sup>132</sup> 1994), 139.) It should be noted that the perception of this figure changes when we look at it from a familial standpoint instead of per capita standpoint. According to *The South Vindicated*, “one family out of three own slaves,” though about half of these families owned under 10 slaves each. (J. Williams and J. B Hopkins, *The South Vindicated* (Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, & Green, 1862), xxxii.)

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opposed to the institution being perpetuated indefinitely. Robert E. Lee himself stated after the war that the extinction of slavery had “been long sought, though in a different way, and by none has it been more earnestly desired than by citizens of Virginia.” Southerners, and other <sup>133</sup> religious conservatives, were not therefore blind to the abuses inherent in the slave-system.

Though life in America may have been substantially better than life in Africa, this still did not negate the horrors of the Middle Passage or justify—however rare it was—the physical and emotional abuses slaves underwent; though the slave’s quality of life—as has already been discussed—was much better than his Northern counterpart. In fact, “there is overwhelmingly convincing evidence that a substantial number of Southern slaveholders never rested easy with their black species of property.” In the late 1850s Southerners wanted the slave trade stopped

<sup>134</sup> because of its association with man-capture which Paul had indicted in 1 Tim. 1:9-10. They reasoned that “The mild, humane system of slavery in the Southern states with the atrocities of the slave trade, . . . [brought] on the one the odium that attaches to the other.” This is why <sup>135</sup> inherent in the Confederate Constitution is a ban on the slave-trade and an allowance for each individual state to ban the chattel system in its own time and way. “The perception that the <sup>136</sup>

evils of slavery could be diminished by the civilizing influence of Christianity was to be the hallmark of the South's opinion about the institution."<sup>137</sup>

H. A White, *Robert E. Lee and the Southern Confederacy, 1807-1870* (G. P. Putnam's sons, 1897), 447.<sup>133</sup>

Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 79.<sup>134</sup>

Crowther, *Southern Evangelicals and the Coming of the Civil War*, 106.<sup>135</sup>

<sup>136</sup>

Constitution of the Confederate States of America, section 9, the importation of negroes . Avalon Project. Accessed 2 May 2011; [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th\\_century/csa\\_csa.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/csa_csa.asp).

James Ronald Kennedy and W.D. Kennedy, *Was Jefferson Davis Right?* (Pelican Pub. Co., 1998), 15.<sup>137</sup>

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Far from defending the institution of slavery as it was, Rice's goal was to defend against the unbiblical and arbitrary assertions of his opponent who "had attempted to appeal to the sympathies of the audience rather than making Biblical arguments to support the Radical Abolitionists theory that slavery in itself is sinful." Rice charged, "I do not remember that the gentleman provided one argument to prove slave-holding in itself sinful unless he intended his appeal to the Constitutions of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois to be so considered. . . [Yet] they are not the rule of our faith or of our morals." Dr. Rice then proceeded to show the arbitrary nature of Blanchard's position by surveying biblical passages concluding that a form of the system was in fact endorsed by God and to call something sinful which God Himself had not called sinful was an affront to His moral nature. "And can we believe that if slaveholding were in itself sinful, God could have entered into a covenant with Abraham, requiring him not to liberate his slaves, but to circumcise them?" Rice interrogated. "Even the law of Moses," he affirmed, "permitted the master to enforce obedience by chastisement [a characteristic not common to mere servants]." When "A centurion came to Jesus in Capernaum, told him that his servant, (douos, slave,) . . . was very ill, and besought him to heal him. What was the Saviour's reply? Did he denounce him as a man-stealer, a robber?" Likewise, "Paul and Peter Teach us, as plainly as language can

teach, that there were in many of the churches, as at Ephesus and Colosse, both masters and

W.D. Kennedy, *Myths of American Slavery*, 71-72. 78. <sup>138</sup>

Blanchard and Rice, *A Debate on Slavery*, 36. <sup>139</sup>

*Ibid.*, 262. <sup>140</sup>

*Ibid.*, 131. <sup>141</sup>

*Ibid.*, 389. <sup>142</sup>

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slaves; and they give such directions to both, as cannot apply to employers and hired-servants.”<sup>143</sup> Although this is just a small sampling of the lines of argumentation employed by Rice, it can be seen that such statements were biblical in their character. Throughout the decades preceding the war these same arguments occurred over and over between abolitionists and their more conservative rivals.

### **Hath God Said?**

Abolitionists who somehow tried to get beyond the Bible, or reinterpret it to match the their agenda became the real issue that drove orthodox Christians in the South especially to react in strong ways. It was truly a disagreement over ultimate authority. Who got to decide what constituted a sin? God or man? The abolitionist perspective not being rooted in Scripture was therefore viewed as the philosophy of “atheism.” Lyle H. Lanier sums up this period of history in his contribution to the famous work *I’ll Take My Stand*. He writes,

The South threw up a defense mechanism [against abolitionist attacks]. The ministers searched the Scriptures by day and night and found written, language which could not be misunderstood, a biblical sanction of slavery. . . . Partly as a result of this searching of the Scriptures there took place a religious revival. . . . The South became devoutly orthodox and literal in its theology. But the abolitionists were not willing to accept scriptural justification of slavery. There was an attempt to prove the wrongfulness of slavery by the same sacred book, but, finding this impossible, many abolitionists repudiated the Scriptures as of divine origin. Partly as a result, the North lost confidence in orthodoxy and tended to become deistic.<sup>144</sup>

“Deistic” as they were at the root, the abolitionists forged ahead with their assertions that slavery was morally evil. According to historian Mark Noll

Ibid., 473.<sup>143</sup>

Twelve Southerners and Donaldson, I’ll Take My Stand, 81.<sup>144</sup>

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Foremost in this group [of abolitionists] was William Lloyd Garrison, who in 1845 paid homage in the *Liberator* to Thomas Paine for providing him with intellectual resources for getting beyond the Bible. . . . So inclined, Garrison no longer had any difficulty with biblical passages that seemed to countenance the legitimacy of slavery. . . . Garrison’s move was audacious and courageous, but his willingness to jettison the Bible if the Bible was construed as legitimating slavery was too radical for most of his fellow Americans.<sup>145</sup>

Harriet Beecher Stowe also had the same problem being “intimated [with] the cynical conclusion, which would become more common among secularists after the Civil War, that the Bible was easily manipulated to prove anything with regard to a problem like slavery that readers

might desire.” Therefore, “the significance of Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* for the biblical

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debate over slavery lay in the novel’s emotive power,” not in its scriptural exegesis. While<sup>147</sup> many Northerners bought into Stowe’s arguments—to the point in which Lincoln referred to her as “the little lady who started the big war,” Southerners were not willing to for the simple reason that they “rejected romantic notions and human feelings as the source of religious knowledge.”<sup>148</sup> Stowe’s father Unitarian Rev. Henry Ward Beecher “conceded, a defense of slavery could be teased out of obscure, individual texts of Scripture, but surely the defining message of the Bible was something else entirely.”<sup>149</sup>

There were likewise many abolitionists who didn’t want to completely throw the Bible or the Constitution—a document Garrison maintained was “a pact with the Devil” —out<sup>150</sup>



Ibid., 42.<sup>146</sup>

Ibid., 43-44.<sup>147</sup>

Crowther, *Southern Evangelicals and the Coming of the Civil War*, 16.<sup>148</sup>

Ibid., 44-45.<sup>149</sup>

<sup>150</sup>

B. Schechter, *The Devil's Own Work: The Civil War Draft Riots and the Fight to Reconstruct America* (Walker & Company, 2007), 38

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altogether. They attempted instead to eisegetically interpret both documents according to their own taste. Some of the more sophisticated abolitionists such as New York Congregationalist George Cheever who published *God Against Slavery* “labored diligently . . . to show that Old Testament ‘bondmen’ and New Testament ‘servants’ were not slaves at all,” a charge<sup>151</sup> unfounded upon a detailed look into biblical languages as Nathan L. Rice, using exegetical interpretation and citing “all commentators, critics, and theologians of any note,” made<sup>152</sup>

abundantly clear in his debate with Jonathan Blanchard. In 1861, Henry Van Dyke, the pastor<sup>153</sup> of Brooklyn Presbyterian, expressed in a sermon entitled *The Character and Influence of Abolitionism!* that

Abolitionism leads, in multitudes of cases, and by a logical process, to utter infidelity. . . One of its avowed principles is, that it does not try slavery by the Bible; but . . . it tries the Bible by the principles of freedom. . . . This assumption, that men are capable of judging beforehand what is to be expected in a Divine revelation, is the cockatrice's egg, from which, in all ages, heresies have been hatched.<sup>154</sup>

Rev. Van Dyke was responding to assertions such as the one made by Presbyterian abolitionist Albert Barnes who wrote in *The Church and Slavery*

There are great principles in our nature, as God has made us, which can never be set aside by any authority of a professed revelation. If a book claiming to be a revelation from God, by any fair interpretation defended slavery, or placed it on the same basis as the relation of husband and wife, parent and child, guardian and ward, such a book would not and could not be received by the mass of mankind as a Divine revelation.<sup>155</sup>

Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*. 31-32<sup>151</sup>

Blanchard and Rice, *A Debate on Slavery*, 319.<sup>152</sup>

*Ibid.*, 319, 383-388.<sup>153</sup>

H. J.V Dyke, *The Character and Influence of Abolitionism!* (H. Taylor, 1860), 29.<sup>154</sup>

A. Barnes, *The Church and Slavery* (Negro Universities Press, 1857), 193.<sup>155</sup>

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It should come as no surprise that not only was Barnes tried by the church for his unorthodox views on original sin and the atonement, but he also made “higher criticism” popular to the public through his biblical commentaries. Van Dyke’s reaction to Barnes was potent. He states, “When the Abolitionist tells me that slaveholding is sin, in the simplicity of my faith in the Holy Scriptures, I point him to this sacred record, and tell him, in all candor, as my text does, that his

teaching blasphemes the name of God and His doctrine.” Leonard Bacon, a Congregationalist

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from Connecticut, hit the nail on the head in 1846 when he said, “The evidence that there were both slaves and masters of slaves in the churches founded and directed by the apostles, cannot be got rid of without resorting to methods of interpretation which will get rid of everything.”<sup>157</sup>

Essentially, he was accusing abolitionists of being irrational. Thornton W. Stringfellow, a Virginia Baptist preacher, pointed out the unchristian nature of such argumentation when he challenged,

If slavery be thus sinful it behooves all Christians who are involved in the sin, to repent in dust and ashes. . . Sin in the sight of God is something which God in his Word makes known to be wrong, either by perceptive prohibition, by principles of moral fitness, or examples of inspired men, contained in the sacred volume. When these furnish no law to condemn human conduct, there is no transgression. Christians should produce a ‘thus saith the Lord’ both for what they condemn as sinful, and for what they approve as lawful, in the sight of heaven<sup>158</sup>

Edward Crowther summarizes the Southern position with the words

Having concluded that a literal reading of the infallible scripture sanctioned slavery, they determined that no other interpretation of the Bible existed. When some abolitionists

Dyke, *The Character and Influence of Abolitionism!*, 7. <sup>156</sup>

L. Bacon, *Slavery Discussed in Occasional Essays, From 1833 to 1846* (Baker and Scribner, 1846), <sup>157</sup> 180.

<sup>158</sup>

D.G. Faust, *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830-1860*, Library of Southern Civilization (Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 138.

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countered that the spirit behind the biblical passages called for an ethic counter to slavery, southerners questioned the way in which abolitionists read scripture. And the southern evangelical knew that even Satan could quote scripture, and decided that abolitionists were merely malefactors trying to make the teachings of Jesus conform to their own infidel philosophy<sup>159</sup>

All exegetical interpreters were doing, simply put, was appealing to Thomas Thompson's argument concerning slavery from a hundred years prior: "open the Bible, read it, believe it." .

<sup>160</sup>

The abolitionists on the other hand, were trying to appeal to something they deemed nobler attempting to become "more merciful than God himself . . . affecting a philanthropy more pure and all embracing than that of Jesus Christ." They were in effect, "trampling the Constitution <sup>161</sup> and the Bible alike under their feet," while they "impiously appeal to a higher law than is found in either, to sanction their enormities." Noll concludes, "The primary reason that the biblical <sup>162</sup> defense of slavery remained so strong was that many biblical attacks on slavery were so weak." <sup>163</sup>

Crowther, *Southern Evangelicals and the Coming of the Civil War*. 97. <sup>159</sup>

Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*. 33 <sup>160</sup>

J.R. McKivigan and M. Snay, *Religion and the Antebellum Debate Over Slavery* (University of Georgia <sup>161</sup> Press, 1998), 319.

W.B. Cisco, *Wade Hampton: Confederate Warrior, Conservative Statesman* (Brassey's, 2004), 48. <sup>162</sup> Ibid., 40.

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## CHAPTER 4

### BE YE SEPARATE

In the decade preceding the War Between the States the tone of the debate changed from one of reasoned discussion to one of utter castigation. You might say it was the northern abolitionists who started such rhetoric in 1831 when the immediate emancipators rose up in force, but by the time the 50s rolled onto the scene, many Southerners were matching the <sup>164</sup> abolitionist's denunciations of the South with denunciations of their own. As early as right after "1830," John Blassingame tells us, "the rising tide of threats against and mob attacks on antislavery ministers made the clergy more cautious. The more outspoken critics abandoned their Southern pulpits for Northern ones." In a letter featured in the *Presbyterian Witness* of <sup>165</sup> Knoxville in 1856, Rev. Dr. Frederick A. Ross—an advocate of compensated emancipation—denounced abolitionists with these words <sup>166</sup>

Ye men of Boston, New York, London, Paris,—Ye Hypocrites—Ye brand me as a pirate, a kidnapper, a murderer, a demon fit only for hell. . . Ye gabble about the sin of

slavery, and then bow down to me, and buy and spin cotton, and thus work for me as truly as my slaves! O ye fools and blind, fill ye up the measure of your folly, and blindness, and shame! And this ye are doing. Ye have, like the French infidels, made

Crowther, *Southern Evangelicals and the Coming of the Civil War*, 71. <sup>164</sup>

Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 81. <sup>165</sup>

Compensated emancipation was the idea that the slaves ought to be freed but if is to happen immediately <sup>166</sup> it ought to be done in such a way that the slaveowner is compensated for his slaves, an investment he will not be getting a return on. Otherwise, if all slaves were to be freed at once it would devastate the economy for both the white and black man .

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reason your goddess, and are exalting her above the Bible; and, in your unitarianism and neology and all modes of infidelity, ye are rejecting and crucifying the Son of God.<sup>167</sup>

Whether this type of language was justified or not, it was certainly becoming more common as Southerners became completely outraged over abolitionist intrusions into their daily lives.

### **Religious Politics vs. Political Religion**

It is worth remembering that Southern men had a much different take on the responsibility of government in comparison to their Northern counterparts. First and foremost, Southerners tended to be inclined more toward a divine command—"Theonomic" in the modern <sup>168</sup> vernacular—outlook. A Methodist editorial noted that "government, or civil control, regulated by law, had its origins invariably in superior force, rather than in unanimity of opinion on the part of the subjects of government." In an 1861 sermon, James Henley Thornwell stated, "Civil <sup>169</sup> government is an institute of heaven, founded in the character of man as social and moral, and is designed to realize the idea of justice. . . . As the state is essentially moral in its idea, it connects itself directly with the government of God." Presbyterian preacher Thomas Smyth told his <sup>170</sup> congregation in the preceding year that

To make it [the pulpit] the means of instructing Christians in the Christianity of their political relations, is simply to accomplish one of the ends for which it was intended. The

F.A. Ross, *Slavery Ordained of God*, Library of American Civilization (J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1857), <sup>167</sup> 76-77.

Theonomy simply means, “God (*theos*) is the law (*nomos*)” (P. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, University <sup>168</sup> of Chicago Press, 1973), 85.)

Crowther, *Evangelicals and the Coming of the Civil War*, 82. <sup>169</sup>

F. Moore, *The Rebellion Record*, *The Rebellion Record: Supplement* (Putnam, 1861), 56. <sup>170</sup>

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same may be said of the religious press. The connection between true religion and sound politics is very intimate. The well-being of the one is the well-being of the other; the corruption of the one is the corruption of the other; the decay or the revival of the one is the decay or the revival of the other; and it is therefore proper that the public mind, in its political aspirations, should be brought under the influence of those principles which alone can rectify political opinion.<sup>171</sup>

Though the ministers of the South were fully aware of their duty before God to teach their flocks how to be politically involved in a Christian manner, they likewise understood that the government’s responsibility before God occupied a wholly separate jurisdiction. This is why Smyth mixed his political comments regarding the necessity of the pulpit with the warning, “To convert the pulpit into an instrument of political agitation is most certainly to invade its sacredness; and they who do so, seldom fail to reap in disappointment the fruits of their indiscretion.” This doctrine of spherul authority allowed the Presbyterian synods of South <sup>172</sup> Carolina and Georgia to affirm, at their December 1834 meeting, that “slavery is a political institution, with which the Church has nothing to do, except to inculcate the duties of master and slave, and to use lawful and spiritual means to have all, both bond and free, to become one in

Christ by faith.” Southern clergymen therefore “did not endorse candidates for office, but in

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the exercise of discussing biblical text or providing southerners with moral instruction, they inculcated their audiences with definite notions about government.” Hence, it wasn’t only the <sup>174</sup> fact that religious abolitionists went beyond biblical authority that bothered Southern

clergymen.

An Association of Ministers in the Town of Columbia, S.C., “National Righteousness,” *Southern Presbyterian Review* XII (1860), 25.<sup>171</sup>

*Ibid.*<sup>172</sup>

G. Thompson and R.J. Breckinridge, *Discussion on American Slavery*, (I. Knapp, 1836), 76.<sup>173</sup>

Crowther, *Southern Evangelicals and the Coming of the Civil War*, 82.<sup>174</sup>

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It was also the fact that the North had confused the responsibility of the church with the responsibility of the state. A sizable consensus of Southern ministers “regard[ed] abolitionism as an interference with the plans of Divine Providence.” Quoting from 1 Tim.1-5, which<sup>175</sup> encourages Christians to separate themselves from those who teach not in accord with Scripture, the Southerners declared, “This is what we teach and obedient to the last verse of the text, from men that ‘teach otherwise’—hoping for peace—we ‘withdraw’ ourselves.” Thus, when a<sup>176</sup> modern student of history asks the question, “Why were not the Southern pulpits endeavoring through political means to eradicate slavery as their Northern counterparts were?” the answer comes in the form of their governmental philosophy, not their position on slavery. Even if Southern preachers did feel so inclined they would not have thought it their duty to leave their sphere of authority for one to which they held no jurisdiction. The abolitionists, as we have seen and will see, did not harbor any sympathy with this position.

### **Invasion of the Abolitionists**

It is important to recognize, however unified their goal, that northern abolitionism was essentially comprised of two wings—an evangelical and non-evangelical. The evangelical wing consisted of Arminians inspired by Charles Finney and his perfectionism while the non-<sup>177</sup> evangelical wing was made up of the more potent Unitarian, Transcendentalist, and Quaker

affiliations. While there did exist a significant amount of overlap, the evangelical prerogative  
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Conference of Ministers, Assembled at Richmond, Va., An Address to Christians Throughout the World <sup>175</sup> (Parrish & Willingham, 1863), 8.

Ibid. <sup>176</sup>

Singer, *A Theological Interpretation of American History*, 74. <sup>177</sup>

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mainly harnessed in the form of missions efforts in the South, and the non-evangelical endeavors were more directed toward the publication of a myriad of abolitionist newspapers and the promotion of slave insurrections. Let us now explore how abolitionist beliefs were practically imposed on the South in the years preceding the war.

The Congregationalist turned Atheist Elizur Wright, an editor for many abolitionist publications, stated in 1833 that “It is the duty of all men . . . to urge upon slaveholders immediate emancipation, so long as there is a slave—to agitate the consciences of tyrants, so long as there is a tyrant on the globe.” The most outspoken and famous “agitator” came in the <sup>178</sup> form of the Transcendentalist William Lloyd Garrison’s newspaper the *Liberator* which ran from 1831 until the end of the war. “The cry of . . . Garrison that slavery was a crime and the slave holders were criminals” put the South on a firmly defensive footing. Frank Lawrence Owsley <sup>179</sup> gives us a more specific look into the rhetoric contained within the publication’s pages.

The slave master, said Garrison, debauched his women slaves, had children by them, and in turn defiled his own children and sold them into the slave market; the slave plantation was primarily a gigantic harem for the master and his sons. . . Ministers of the gospel who owned or sanctioned slavery were included in his sweeping indictment of miscegenation and prostitution. In short, Garrison and the anti-slavery societies which he launched, followed soon by Northern churchman, stigmatized the South as a black brothel. . . They [slave owners] were cruel and brooding tyrants, who drove their slaves till they dropped and died, who starved them to save food, let them go cold and almost naked to save clothing, let them dwell in filthy pole pens rather than build them comfortable cottages, beat them unmercifully with leather thongs filled with spikes, dragged cats over their bodies and faces, trailed them with bloodhounds which rent and chewed them,—then sprinkled their



wounds with salt and red pepper. Infants were torn from their mothers' breasts and sold to Simon Legrees [slavetrader from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*]; families were separated and scattered to the four winds. . . Such charges, printed in millions upon millions of pamphlets, were sent

B. Lundy, *Genius of Universal Emancipation* (B. Lundy, 1833), 186. <sup>178</sup>

Twelve Southerners, *I'll Take My Stand*, 79. <sup>179</sup>

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out all over the world. Sooner or later, much of it was accepted as true in the North.<sup>180</sup> This despite the fact that Garrison “was completely ignorant of the South and of negro slavery.”<sup>181</sup>

It was radicals like Garrison who absolutely horrified the South. The law itself had no restraint on their mission—a mission willing to use any means possible as exemplified in the case of John Brown. Jefferson Davis and other Southerners harbored “great offense” at abolitionist William H. Seward’s comment that there existed a “higher law than the Constitution” rooted in a Creator who remained, practically speaking, unrevealed in the pages <sup>182</sup> of Scripture. Garrison even “had the courage to publicly burn the Constitution for its tolerance of slavery” calling it a “covenant with Death” and “agreement with Hell.” It looked like, from <sup>183 184</sup> the Southern point of view, that whether it came to the Fugitive Slave Act, the Dred Scott decision, or the right to take slaves into the territories, whenever Yankees lost they criticized the rules. Charleston minister Thomas Smyth described, “They have a zeal of God, but it is not according to knowledge. . . They substitute opinion for truth, dogmatism for doctrine, philosophy (falsely so called) for religion; and, adopting as a maxim the jesuitical dogma that the end sanctifies the means, they stop at nothing.”<sup>185</sup>

Ibid., 79-80 <sup>180</sup>

Ibid., 79. <sup>181</sup>

S.A. Douglas et al., *The Nebraska Question* (Redfield, 1854), 27. <sup>182</sup>

J.B. Stewart, *William Lloyd Garrison at Two Hundred: History, Legacy, and Memory*, David Brion Davis (Gilder Lehrman) Series (Yale University Press, 2008), 121.

J.J. Chapman, *William Lloyd Garrison* (Moffat, Yard and company, 1913), 172.<sup>184</sup>

Thomas Smyth, "The War of the South Vindicated," *The Southern Presbyterian Review* XV, no. 4<sup>185</sup> (April 1863), 480.

It would have been one thing if such rhetoric was never practically applied, but time proved otherwise. After the death of the terrorist John Brown, who had attempted to start a slave insurrection at Harper's Ferry Virginia with the funding of at least six prominent abolitionists; Garrison had the nerve to offer him a martyr's eulogy. Unitarian minister Ralph Waldo<sup>186</sup> Emerson went further by stating that when the abolitionist/terrorist John Brown was hanged he would "make the gallows as glorious as the cross." Julia Ward Howe, also a Unitarian and<sup>187</sup> author of the *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, referred to John Brown as "a very noble man, who

should be in one of the many mansions of which Christ tells us." The South was appalled. Here

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was convicted murderer being hailed by abolitionists as a messianic figure. It didn't help things any that slave insurrections had always been a fear among some in the South. Thomas Jefferson "toyed with the idea of gradual emancipation" until the Haitian rebellion which hardened him against it. Nat Turner's 1831 rebellion in Virginia, which killed<sup>189</sup> over 100 people, was a very interesting case. Turner had a kind master, the ability to read, and became a Baptist preacher. Unfortunately, he "felt inspired by a vision to kill every white<sup>190</sup> person he could find." Historian J. W. Blassingame tells us once again that<sup>191</sup>

L. Copeland, L.W. Lamm, and S.J. McKenna, *The World's Great Speeches* (Dover Publications, 1999),<sup>186</sup> 299-301.

S.D. Carpenter, *Logic of History* (S.D. Carpenter, 1864), 69.<sup>187</sup>

L.E.H. Richards, M.H. Elliott, and F.H. Hall, *Julia Ward Howe, 1819-1910*, (Houghton Mifflin<sup>188</sup> Company, 1915), 179.

Ibid., 23-24.<sup>190</sup>Ibid. 24.<sup>191</sup>

Although information is limited, it is possible to draw a portrait of the antebellum black rebel leaders. For the most part, they were young, literate, married, charismatic men. Finding sanctions for their bloodletting in the Bible, inspiring the faint-hearted with apocalyptic visions from the Scriptures of God delivering the Israelites from the hands of their oppressors, the leaders convinced the blacks that slavery was contrary to the will of God and that He commanded them to rise.<sup>192</sup>

It was right after Turner's rebellion, when the Virginia legislature had been on the brink of enacting a plan to free and deport slaves, that instead, a law was passed barring slaves from receiving an education "so that they could not preach an unholy gospel, as Turner had done."<sup>193</sup>

Though this law was widely ignored, most notably by "Stonewall" Jackson who ran a Sunday school for both slave and free blacks teaching them to read and write, it only poured fuel on the<sup>194</sup> fire by giving ammunition to abolitionists who criticized the law. Still, many Southerners in the wake of Brown's raid had vocalized their faith in the loyalty of the slaves given their unwillingness to join the uprising. One North Carolina Presbyterian stated, "As a class, they<sup>195</sup> [slaves] are faithful, generous, and affectionate, and their attachment to their masters is above suspicion." History has somewhat vindicated this view considering the lack of slave uprisings<sup>196</sup> during the war when men were not on their plantations to maintain order. Therefore, it wasn't so much the slaves themselves that the South mistrusted, rather it was more the Northern abolitionist's ability to stir them up. "Turner and Brown helped convince Southerners that they

Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 221<sup>192</sup>Crocker, *The Politically Incorrect Guide to the Civil War*, 23.<sup>193</sup>Ibid., 24.<sup>194</sup>

Crowther, *Evangelicals and the Coming of the Civil War*, 176.<sup>195</sup>

Ibid.<sup>196</sup>

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had no friends in the North.” Thus, the fear of a “slave uprising”—especially a Northern<sup>197</sup> instigated one—was a common topic of discussion within the Davis presidency.<sup>198</sup> While evangelical abolitionists, in contrast to their more secular comrades, were more orthodox in their language about God, their basic theology wasn’t really all that different and neither was their rhetoric. Wesleyan Missionary Daniel Wilson believed the South to be the “land of whips & chains & mobs,” while his colleague Jesse McBride maintained that “slaveholders<sup>199</sup> could not be Christians nor gain salvation.” In fact, “Horse thieves, he said, were angels<sup>200</sup> compared to them.” AMA missionary John C. Richardson threatened Southerners by claiming,<sup>201</sup> “there are 40 thousand [blacks] in Canada training daily and they will come down here & cut your throats (a comment which incited a Kentucky mob to form, though no violence occurred)”<sup>202</sup>

One of the key differences that set the evangelical abolitionists apart was a rigid legalism that foreshadowed the Fundamentalist movement. “Economic exploitation, sexual license, gambling, drinking and dueling, disregard for family ties—all traits associated with slaveowning—could easily be set in bold contrast with the pure ideals of Yankee

Crocker, *The Politically Incorrect Guide to the Civil War*, 24.<sup>197</sup>

J. Davis et al., *The Papers of Jefferson Davis: 1862*, The Papers of Jefferson Davis (Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 143, 197, 263, 346, 516.<sup>198</sup>

Harrold, *The Abolitionists and the South*, 93<sup>199</sup>

Ibid. 94<sup>200</sup>

Ibid.<sup>201</sup>

<sup>202</sup>

V.B. Howard, *The Evangelical War Against Slavery and Caste: The Life and Times of John G. Fee* (Susquehanna University Press, 1996), 104.

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evangelicalism.” “Northern evangelicals simply had to ensure that its citizens became good<sup>203</sup> Christians and that residual evil customs and corrupt social systems, like slavery and drunkenness, were eliminated. To realize its mission as a righteous republic, the United States could no longer sanction slavery.” The doctrine of decisional regeneration—a doctrine not<sup>204</sup> characteristic of Southern evangelicalism —was carried into every facet of life. It was<sup>205</sup> essentially a “social gospel” that looked to both the church and government to enact its reforms on individuals. “Thornwell, Dabney, and their contemporaries” rightly “saw in abolitionism a threat to Calvinism, to the Constitution, and to the proper ordering of society.”<sup>206</sup>

One can only wonder what the outcome would have been if the evangelical abolitionists kept their movement contained in the north where it wouldn’t have affected the Southern Calvinists. Unfortunately, this is not at all what happened.

In 1839, Massachusetts minister Charles T. Torrey, in a letter to another reverend asked, “What say you to a New Missionary Society, to ‘evangelize the slaveholders’ and their slaves?

whose missionaries shall preach that ‘the laborer is worthy of his hire?’ . . . who shall in spite of slavery and its bloody laws, teach the slaves to read the Bible, and then put Bibles and tracts into their hands.” Such an idea attempted to harness the gospel in an attempt to “overthrow<sup>207</sup> slavery”, as fellow abolitionist and pastor Joshua Leavitt proclaimed. By the late 1840s<sup>208</sup>

Stewart, *Holy Warriors*, 42-43.<sup>203</sup>

Crowther, *Southern Evangelicals and the Coming of the Civil War*, 8.<sup>204</sup>

Ibid., 42.<sup>205</sup>

Singer, *A Theological Interpretation of American History*, 86.<sup>206</sup>

J.C. Lovejoy, *Memoir of Rev. Charles T. Torrey* (J.P. Jewett & Co., 1847), 68.<sup>207</sup>

Harrold, *The Abolitionists and the South*, 85.<sup>208</sup>

Torrey's call was answered when the "the American Wesleyan Connection, the AMA [American Mission Association], and the American Baptist Free Missionary Society (ABFMS) each initiated measures to spread antislavery religion in the South" and abstain from Christian<sup>209</sup> fellowship with slaveowners and their churches. Their goal, in the words of the Wesleyan<sup>210</sup> abolitionist Luther Lee, was "to send anti-slavery missionaries to the south, or aid in supporting those whom God in his providence may rise up in that land of whips and chains and gags, to preach deliverance to the captives, and the opening of the prison door to them that are bound."<sup>211</sup>

Such organizations were typically comprised of missionaries characterized by being young, influenced by Finney's millennial theology, primarily from the North—especially the burned

over district—and many were Oberlin students. Oberlin College in Ohio—who's president was

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Charles Finney—became a major driving force behind abolitionism's "mission's" movement.

After Theodore Weld, one of Finney's proteges, incited an 1834 student revolt at Cincinnati's

Lane Seminary in favor of immediate abolitionism, the administration attempted to "[suppress]

<sup>213</sup> the Students' Anti-Slavery league; and in consequence 51 students left Lane and went to

Oberlin" making it the educational "center of abolitionism." Oberlin thus became the factory<sup>214</sup>

<sup>215</sup> producing emissaries of the abolitionist gospel—a gospel wholly different than what

Southerners

Ibid.<sup>209</sup>

Ibid., 87.<sup>210</sup>

Ibid., 88.<sup>211</sup>

Ibid., 90.<sup>212</sup>

Ibid., 56.<sup>213</sup>

L.F. Post, *The Public* (Louis F. Post, 1901), 807.<sup>214</sup>

Harrold, *The Abolitionists and the South*, 90.<sup>215</sup>

were use to.

There is no doubt the gospel preached by the evangelical abolitionists was not the traditional Gospel of orthodox Christianity. The American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (AFASS) declared in 1850, upon hearing of the success of Rev. John G. Fee in forming an anti-slavery church in Kentucky, “[It] shows that the Gospel can be thus preached in slave States.” In the <sup>216</sup> words of historian Stanley Harrold

This was not the gospel preached regularly in the South or in much of the North. From the 1830s onward, abolitionists denounced what they called a proslavery gospel that either ignored the issue of slavery or actively denied that Christian principles favored emancipation. In contrast, they preached what they called a ‘whole,’ ‘pure,’ or ‘free,’ gospel, emphasizing Bible precepts that non-abolitionists avoided.<sup>217</sup>

One missionary expressed his intention “to go to the far South, to pronounce that Gospel which proclaims liberty to the captive, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.” To <sup>218</sup> Southerners, it was sin that Christ freed humanity from, not physical slavery. The evangelical abolitionists were so intent on their erroneous definition of the Gospel that they maintained non slaveholders who attended churches with congregations partially comprised of slaveholders, were in sin.<sup>219</sup>

Lest someone think that the evangelical abolitionists were simply trying to recruit Southerners to the power of their arguments, let us examine the testimony of one slaveholder in North Carolina who told missionary Jesse McBride, “You have ruined my slaves; I can’t do a

Ibid., 89. <sup>216</sup>

Ibid., 92-93 <sup>217</sup>

Ibid., 93. <sup>218</sup>

Ibid., 94. <sup>219</sup>

thing with them.” Hence, their mission was more than winning a debate and progressively <sup>220</sup>

changing a community—it was built on the idea of incitement. “[They] knew that their efforts depended on agitation for success. They designed their churches . . . to provoke dissension in neighboring congregations and to develop a corps of comeouters.” The missionaries would <sup>221</sup> target slaves, attempt to get them into their churches, and then preach their right to be free essentially encouraging them to disobey or escape from their masters. One missionary saw <sup>222</sup> himself as “excit[ing] the slaves” in the same way that “Moses and Aaron excited the minds of the oppressed Hebrews.” Of course, “knocking on doors” and running church services was not <sup>223</sup> all they did. Literature distribution was perhaps the main weapon used to stir up dissension. In 1835, mass abolitionist mailings to the South, referred to as the “postal crisis,” served as the first step in getting Southern ministers involved in the immediate abolition debate. Again from <sup>224</sup> 1843 to 1861 Northern antislavery publications flooded the South (One missionary estimated <sup>225</sup>

that by 1859 “twenty millions of tracts” had been distributed. ) this time causing a colder

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reaction mainly due to the fact that many AMA missionaries were simultaneously actively assisting slaves in escaping their masters (recall the fear Southerners harbored of a “slave revolt”). Such “agitators” were increasingly being mobbed, jailed, and forced to leave Southern

Ibid., 97. <sup>220</sup>

Ibid., 94. <sup>221</sup>

Ibid., 93, 99. <sup>222</sup>

Ibid., 103. <sup>223</sup>

Crowther, *Southern Evangelicals and the Coming of the Civil War*, 71. <sup>224</sup>

Harrold, *The Abolitionists and the South*, 95. <sup>225</sup>

Ibid., 95. <sup>226</sup>



## Denomination Fragmentation

As hopefully the reader is already aware, Northern deviation was not acknowledged as atheism on their own part. Unitarians, Transcendentalists, Quakers, Wesleyans, and the Northern denominational factions legitimately thought they were doing the will of God as communicated to them through conscience and emotional conviction. What they were not doing however was interpret the Word of God in a strict, literal, and grammatical-historical way. Any time the Scriptures were used to support radical abolitionism they were eisegetically rendered. This type of thinking didn't invade overnight in one fell swoop. Instead it took over one denomination at a time.

The Presbyterians were the first major denomination to divide in 1837 right after the “postal crisis.” In 1787, the denomination had maintained that while slavery wasn't necessarily a sin, it was acknowledged that one day when “Providence shall open the way for it” slaves would hopefully be set free. Because of the South's view on civil government, as already mentioned,<sup>228</sup> the denomination did not take any political stand other than affirming, by 1830, that “ministers to negroes wouldn't focus on [their] civil condition.” However, after the threat of immediate<sup>229</sup> emancipation arose in the early 1830s accompanied by Nat Turner's revolt and the “postal crisis,” Southerners became highly defensive of the slave system. The synod of South Carolina

Ibid., 99-101 <sup>227</sup>

<sup>228</sup>

Presbyterian Historical Society and Historical Foundation of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches, *Journal of Presbyterian History* (Presbyterian Historical Society, 1902), 217-218. Ibid.,

70. <sup>229</sup>

affirmed that

Slavery had existed from the days of those good old slaveholders and patriots, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; that the existence of slavery is not opposed to the will of God, and [that]

whosoever has a conscience too tender to recognize this relation as lawful, is righteous over much, is wise above what is written . . . and leaves the infallible word of God for the fancies and doctrine of men.<sup>230</sup>

Right before the great schism, James Smylie, clerk of the Mississippi Presbytery, got into a public debate with Gerrit Smith, who was a prominent abolitionist and member of the “secret six.” While Smylie did affirm the fact that slavery could potentially be a sin if practiced unbiblically, he made known the South’s position when he quipped, “The proper relation [of slave to master] is not charged with evils any more than marriage is charge with adultery.” At<sup>231</sup> the time however their existed many “New School” Presbyterians who could not accept this, and while the “division was not entirely along abolitionist and pro-slavery lines, one group [New School] drew to its ranks a preponderance of the Church’s abolitionists while the other [Old School] found its strength in the anti-abolitionist faction.” Historian Gregg Singer notes,<sup>232</sup>

After 1840 [Old School Presbyterians] . . . took a very strong stand against Abolitionism as a movement, not because it was opposed to slavery per se, but because of the philosophy and theology which it represented, and because they clearly saw that if this radicalism were to gain the supremacy in the national government, then there must certainly come in its wake a radical political and social program which would threaten the established order and constitutional government for the nation as a whole.<sup>233</sup>

While the 1837 schism was only partially over abolitionism (it was mainly over the 1801

Crowther, 72.<sup>230</sup>

Crowther, *Southern Evangelicals and the Coming of the Civil War*, 73.<sup>231</sup>

<sup>232</sup>

Bruce C. Staiger, “Abolitionism and the Presbyterian Schism of 1837-1838,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* (1949), 391.

<sup>233</sup>

Singer, *A Theological Interpretation of the United States*, 84.

Plan of Union between Congregationalists—influenced by Transcendentalism—and New School Presbyterians to do joint missions work in the Ohio Valley ), in 1857 and 1861, both Northern<sup>234</sup> and Southern wings of the Old and New School denominations split within

themselves, this time completely over the issue.

In the *Book of Discipline*, which codified the religious duties of the Methodists, slavery was said to be a “great evil.” However, at the 1816 general conference it was “ruled that Methodists who resided in states where emancipation was illegal or fraught with hardships for the manumitted slaves were not bound by the Discipline’s anti-slavery dicta.” Slaveholders<sup>235</sup>

like William Capers and Evan W. Winans were able to work within this system, that is, until

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1836 when Northerners showed their lack of approval for electing Capers to the position of bishop simply because he owned slaves. The following year Capers still called for unity within

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the denomination despite what had happened. He wrote in the *Southern Christian Advocate*,

In the present state of the country, we believe it to be of the utmost importance to the country itself that the churches be kept together. Let the bonds once be severed which hold the churches of the North and South together and the Union of these states will be more than endangered, it will presently be rent asunder.<sup>238</sup>

In effect, Capers had just predicted the War Between the States. Regrettably, not everyone shared his mediating spirit. William A. Smith called for a new denomination in light of Capers

Ibid., 81.<sup>234</sup>

Crowther, *Southern Evangelicals and the Coming of the Civil War*, 62.<sup>235</sup>

Ibid., 62-63.<sup>236</sup>

Ibid., 65.<sup>237</sup>

C.C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schisms and the Coming of the*<sup>238</sup> *American Civil War* (Mercer University Press, 1985), 81.

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mistreatment, a call which would be answered less than a decade later. First, the Wesleyan<sup>239</sup>

Church broke off in 1843 denouncing slaveholding as intrinsically sinful and becoming the main driving force behind abolitionist missionary efforts in the South from 1847 onward. The next<sup>240</sup> year, when Bishop James Osgood Andrew received slaves by marriage without freeing

them, Northern Methodists called for his suspension though his actions did not violate any Methodist statute. As a result William Capers and a band of Southerners seceded from the denomination to form their own. By this time Capers attitude had changed significantly. He exclaimed, “We denounce the principles and opinions of the abolitionists in toto. . . We consider and believe that the Holy Scriptures . . . do unequivocally authorize the relation of master and slave.”<sup>241</sup>

The fragmentation of the Baptist church resembles the Methodist schism quite a bit. They were both over the same issue—the North’s dismissal of slaveholding members—and both occurred in the same year. Just like Methodists and Presbyterians, most Baptists in the late 1700s generally viewed slavery as a political issue and not a religious one. They taught the biblical responsibilities of slaves to masters and masters to slaves. In 1822, a freed slave by the name<sup>242</sup> of Denmark Vesey attempted to execute slaveholders in Charleston and instigate a revolt. One slave later testified that “he studied the Bible a great deal and tried to prove from it that slavery and bondage is against the Bible.” In the wake of this failed attempt the president of the Baptist

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Ibid.<sup>239</sup>

Harrold, *The Abolitionists and the South*, 87.<sup>240</sup>

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G. Thompson and R.J. Breckinridge, *Report of the Discussion on American Slavery* (D. Prentice & Co., 1836), 91-92.

Crowther, *Southern Evangelicals and the Coming of the Civil War*, 65.<sup>242</sup>

J. H Franklin and A. A Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans* (Knopf, 1994),<sup>243</sup> 141.

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State Convention of South Carolina, Dr. Richard Furman, assured the governor that

The Convention are particularly unhappy in considering, that an idea of the Bible's teaching the doctrine of emancipation as necessary, and tending to make servants insubordinate to proper authority, has obtained access to any mind. . . Several of these [Vesey’s followers] were grossly immoral, and, in general, they were members of an irregular body, which called itself the African Church, and had intimate connections and

intercourse with a similar body of men in a Northern City, among whom the supposed right to emancipation is strenuously advocated.<sup>244</sup>

Thus distancing Baptists from any participation in radical abolitionism, Furman affirmed the Biblical teaching.

Had the holding of slaves been a moral evil, it cannot be supposed, that the inspired Apostles . . . would have tolerated it, for a moment, in the Christian Church. . . They would have. . . required, that the master should liberate his slave in the first instance. But, instead of this, they let the relationship remain untouched, as being lawful and right, and insist on the relative duties.<sup>245</sup>

As the abolitionist threat became more and more potent, other groups of Baptists from the South became outspoken. The Alabama Baptist convention of 1835 maintained that

“certain individuals, mostly residing in the Northern part of the United States, calling themselves abolitionists, but who are properly called . . . fanatics, have formed themselves into societies, for the purpose of interfering with the relation of master and slaves.” There activities were “inconsistent with the gospel of Christ.” Abolitionists will “oppress the slave, . . . arm the assassin to shed the blood of the good people of our State; and . . . alienate the people in one State from those in another, thereby endangering the peace and permanency of our happy Republic.”<sup>246</sup>

Mississippi Baptists likewise denounced in 1837 “the movement of the abolitionists at the North [as] . . . misguided and impolitic, and . . . calculated . . . to detract from the social, civil, and

J.R. Young, *Proslavery and Sectional Thought in the Early South, 1740-1829: an Anthology* (University <sup>244</sup> of South Carolina Press, 2006), 235-236.

Ibid., 231. <sup>245</sup>

Crowther, *Southern Evangelicals and the Coming of the Civil War*, 74. <sup>246</sup>

religious privileges of the slave population.”<sup>247</sup>

When missionaries James Huckins and William Tyron were found to be slaveholders in 1843, anti-slavery Baptists demanded that the Triennial Convention board investigate them. By <sup>248</sup> 1844 the battle lines between the North and South were firmly drawn at the triennial gathering

of the American Baptist Missionary Union where James Reeve was denied entry to the national board for owning slaves based upon the view that missionaries had to manumit slaves before being accepted. It was this action that precipitated Georgians and Virginians to establish the <sup>249</sup> Southern Baptist Convention the following year. At this point the Great Lakes region Baptists <sup>250</sup> had already started their own abolitionist convention; now it was the South's turn to start their <sup>251</sup> own decidedly anti-abolitionist denomination.

Ibid., 74. <sup>247</sup>

Ibid. <sup>248</sup>

Ibid. <sup>249</sup>

Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, 36. <sup>250</sup>

Ibid. <sup>251</sup>

## CONCLUSION

I trust that it has been adequately argued that the dissensions which lead to the “American Civil War” were not simply between abolitionists and slaveowners, nationalists and Constitutionlists, Republicans and Democrats, or capitalists and socialists. On the contrary, the war was over something much more profound. It was a split encouraged by religious

differences—between eisegetical interpreters and exegetical interpreters, between autonomists and those holding to “Thus saith the Lord,” between Arminians and Calvinists—between earthly utopia and the prospect of heaven. Ignoring what America’s religious leaders were saying leading up to secession and Northern invasion is a mistake of the grandest measure. In order to understand history it must be viewed through the eyes of not only economists, politicians, and social activists. For Christians everything must be viewed through the lens of a religious worldview, “For as [a man] thinketh in his heart, so is he.” The war was essentially between

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two worlds—a world in which man creates an earthly paradise, and a world in which men wait for a heavenly paradise. This is the major error of humanism, and though it seems to be morally upright when beaming in the robe of abolition, the 20 century has proven otherwise.

Once the <sup>th</sup>

authority of God’s Word is left behind there is no standard for what man deems to be either moral or immoral causing situations that will never lead to true peace or perfection. Utopia will

Prov. 23:7 KJV <sup>252</sup>

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have to wait. In the words of James Henley Thornwell “[It is when] we are prone to feel ourselves at home in this world when things go smoothly, that the Lord finds it necessary to cross us and disappoint us, in order that we may know that this is not our rest.”<sup>253</sup>

Crowther, *Southern Evangelicals and the Coming of the Civil War*, 30.<sup>253</sup>

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