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Presbyterians, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and the Election of 1856

On a gray January morning in 1854, the political calm in the Congress of the United States was broken with a storm of religious protests. The focal point of this dissent was Stephen A. Douglas, Senator from Illinois, and the Nebraska Bill which he had placed before the United States Senate. The alarm had been set off by the "Appeal of the Independent Democrats" which called on the moral forces of the nation to repudiate the action taken by Douglas. "We implore Christians and Christian ministers to interpose," the Independent Democrats urged: "their divine religion requires them to behold in every man a brother, and to labor for the advancement and regeneration of the human race."¹

The appeal was directed at the religious community of the nation and the moral forces of the country responded. The *Journal of Commerce* reported that 3263 anti-Nebraska sermons had been preached in the eastern part of the country during the six weeks following the introduction of the bill in Congress.² The *New York Daily Times* found "all the most influential clergymen" in New York City opposing the bill,³ and the reports from western and central New York revealed an even deeper indignation in that

¹ *National Era* (Washington, D. C.), January 24, 1854. *New York Daily Tribune*, January 25, 1854. *Congressional Globe*, 33 Congress, 1 Session, January 30, 1854, 281-2.

² *Daily Enquirer* (Cincinnati, Ohio), April 6, 1854, citing *Journal of Commerce*.

³ *New York Daily Times*, March 11, 1854.

region. From New York to Wisconsin, Presbyterian clergymen were active in protest meetings. Thomas Skinner, of the Fourth Presbytery of New York, presided over a meeting at Lockport, New York, in which the Fugitive Slave Law and the Nebraska Bill were condemned. William Fuller, of the Presbytery of St. Joseph, Michigan, introduced an anti-Nebraska resolution at a similar meeting in Michigan.⁴

Even in conservative New York City, the Nebraska Bill had no Presbyterian advocates among the clergy and those few who spoke against political involvement did not defend the bill. In a sermon before the Southern Aid Society, Samuel Cox, a New School churchman of Brooklyn, urged his colleagues to leave the Nebraska question alone. "As Nebraska is not the Gospel, not justification by faith, not authorized in our commission . . . let politics on both sides of the Mississippi alone," Cox advised.⁵

Before the Kansas-Nebraska Bill was adopted, petition movements sprang up among the clergy in almost all of the free states. A petition was signed in New York by one hundred and fifty-one clergymen.⁶ Forty-one of the petitioners were members of the New School and seven were Old School Presbyterians.⁷ The New York petition was presented to the clergy of Western Reserve through the columns of the *Ohio Observer*, the New School organ in northern Ohio.⁸ The editor published it in regular petition form ready for signatures and urged other religious journals to follow the example of the *Ohio Observer*.

In an oversimplified interpretation the opponents of the Kansas-Nebraska Act saw it as a clear-cut question: shall Kansas be free or slave? With a confrontation of forces in Kansas, the contest for control of the territory ultimately reduced itself to a physical struggle for dominance. The physical conflict in distant Kansas, however, was distasteful to those who were trained in the traditions of Christianity, particularly as long as another channel of action was available. The birth of the Republican Party as a mass protest against the Kansas-Nebraska Act offered an alternative for those who preferred recourse to civic action. As the Republican Party took shape and challenged the Democratic administration, many clergymen and religious journals found themselves deeply involved

⁴ *New York Daily Tribune*, February 28, 1854. *Detroit Daily Democrat*, February 22, 1854.

⁵ *First Annual Report of the Southern Aid Society* (New York: D. Fanshaw, 1854), 49.

⁶ *New York Daily Tribune*, March 16, 1854.

⁷ New York contained 49 New School and 42 Old School clergymen. Thirteen of the New School petitioners were located outside of New York City.

⁸ *Ohio Observer* (Cleveland, Ohio), March 15, 1854.

in a political issue that they insisted could not be avoided since politics now clearly revolved around a moral issue. Instead of a gradual decline of slavery, as the advocates of the natural rights philosophy had taught, it appeared to be expanding and growing stronger.

The New School opponents of the Kansas-Nebraska measure had long since decided that the peculiar institution suppressed freedom of speech, press, and religious expression wherever it existed. Others in this branch of the Church saw the diffusion of the Gospel through the South as "an instrumentality wisely adopted to melt off" the chains of slavery. Could the missionaries in the South preach the whole Gospel? This had been the question that the missionary conventions of 1842, 1844, 1845, and 1851 hoped to resolve.⁹ Failing to become of one mind on the issue, in 1853 it had been taken up by the executive committee of the American Home Missionary Society and by the New School General Assembly of 1853. The American Home Missionary Society developed a policy of questioning the missionaries concerning their relation to slavery and the General Assembly requested information from the synods in the slaveholding states on the subject of slavery. Both the AHMS and the General Assembly of 1853 insisted that the request for information was only calculated to "correct misapprehensions." The large number of northern clergy who still had misapprehensions about the ability of freedom to survive in a land dominated by slavery viewed the contest in Kansas a struggle for religious freedom. Many felt that free school and churches could not survive wherever the "blighting effects" of slavery touched. They turned to politics to prevent the institution of slavery from spreading to Kansas. The Republican platform seemed to give assurance that Kansas would be preserved as a community in which the whole gospel would be unhampered. "Believing the spirit of our institutions as well as the Constitution of our country, guarantees liberty of conscience and equality of rights among citizens, we oppose all legislation impairing their security," the Republican platform pledged. With the Republican platform built around the idea of freedom, the stage was set for a political contest that appeared to rest entirely on the moral issue of slavery.¹⁰

⁹ *Watchman of the Valley* (Cincinnati, Ohio), June 23, 1842; July 3, 1845. *Minutes of the Presbyterian and Congregational Convention Held at Cleveland, Ohio, June 20, 1844* (Cleveland, Ohio: T. H. Smead, 1844), 16. *New York Observer*, July 5, 1845. *Signal of Liberty* (Ann Arbor, Michigan), June 30, 1845. *Prairie Herald* (Chicago, Illinois), July 1, 1851.

¹⁰ See: Milton Badger to David Smith, January 25, 1853, No. 2130, and other letters, Letter Book, 1852-1853, volume II (Manuscript: American Home Missionary Correspondence, Archives, Fisk University). Hereafter: AHMS Corre-

The moral question of slavery was brought to public attention in 1852 by the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In 1854 Nehemiah Adams, a conservative Congregational clergyman, published *A South-Side View of Slavery*, which defended the institution as a paternal and moral guardianship over the servant. Adams challenged Harriet Beecher Stowe's book with the statement that fiction could not be factual. Adams' book in turn, was questioned by Benjamin Drew's *North-Side View of Slavery* in 1855. Drew permitted the fugitive slaves to tell the story of slavery as it was. When the election of 1856 took place, the discussion of the moral question of slavery was being debated as never before.

The Presbyterians, who identified themselves with the Republican cause, were affected by all of the traditional political sentiment that had caused many in the North to oppose the expansion of slavery in 1787, 1820, 1846, and 1850. But their commitment to free territory had a more profound source. They were influenced by the conviction, which had been cultivated for several decades in their domestic missionary societies, that the destiny of their country as a Christian nation depended upon the course taken by the people of the Great Valley. America was ordained for a divine mission to the world, but the extension of slavery to the West would threaten the Christian character of the nation. Thus, slavery must be barred from Kansas so that the nation could be purified. As early as the 1830's many understood the importance of the Mississippi Valley in the future of the nation. J. L. Tracy, a western Presbyterian missionary, wrote Theodore Weld in 1831: "You are well aware of the fact that this western country is soon to be a mighty giant that shall wield not only the destinies of our own country but of the world. 'Tis yet a babe. Why not take it in the feebleness of its infancy and give a right direction to its powers, that when it grows up to its full stature we may bless God that it has an influence?"¹¹ The friends of domestic missions at an early date accepted the belief that character and morals were shaped by environment and especially political and social institutions.

With the rise of the antislavery movement, however, they were made more aware of the ultimate effects of a slavery society as revealed by antislavery literature and propaganda. Slavery was attacked as an institution which corrupted its adherents and

spondence. *General Assembly Minutes (New School)*, 1853, 327-331, 334. Kirk H. Porter and Donald B. Johnson, *National Party Platforms, 1840-1956* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1956), 28.

¹¹ J. L. Tracy to Theodore D. Weld, November 24, 1831, Gilbert H. Barnes and Dwight L. Dumond (editors) *Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimke Weld and Sarah Grimke, 1822-1844* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1934), I, 57.

closed their minds to truth and inevitably undermined the foundations of a free society.¹² Thus, to many it was not simply a question of resisting the expansion of an undesirable labor system, but of preventing the enslavement, if not the Africanization, of the American people, and the destruction of a Christian society in the West. After the Mexican War this became one of the chief themes of home mission conventions. While speaking before an American Home Missionary Society convention in 1849, Albert Barnes characterized the West as a region where "every wind of opinion" had been "let loose" and was "struggling for mastery." The task of shaping a true Christian society required the Christian community to meet the challenge.¹³ By 1850 it was clear to all who opposed slavery that the virgin lands of the West, whose vast resources offered such hope to mankind and for the Christianization of the world, were imperiled by the leprous disease of slavery. A. L. Brooks, a Presbyterian clergyman of Chicago, painted a dismal picture of the crisis confronting the nation during the campaign of 1856: "Give slavery the territories of the West and she is crowned sovereign of the American nation, to hold the sceptre until God's eternal providence shall blot us from the record of the nations; or until rotten with moral and social corruption, we shall become the bane of the world." During the same year Nathaniel P. Bailey, a New School clergyman in Ohio, warned that slavery was a dangerous parasite and a plague that would destroy free society in America. Unless slavery was totally exterminated, he prophesied that it would "soon prove the Angel of Death to this first-born of Christian Republics."¹⁴ Engaged in a contest that would shape the character of Kansas, the churchmen rushed missionaries to Kansas and prepared their congregations for a march on the ballot boxes.

The Presbyterians, however, were not united in a commitment of the Church to either political party. In general the New School strongly favored the Republican Party's position of opposing any expansion of slavery in the territories. The Old School leaned more in the other direction. Neither branch of the Church was evenly balanced numerically in a North-South division. In 1856 there were 87 New School presbyteries in the free states with a total membership of 124,987 and 21 such presbyteries in the slave

¹² For the effects of slavery on freedom of thought see: Clement Eaton *The Freedom-of-Thought in the Old South* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961).

¹³ Albert Barnes, *Home Missions: A Sermon in Behalf of the American Home Missionary Society* . . . (New York: William Osborn, 1849), 16.

¹⁴ A. L. Brooks, *An Appeal For the Right: A Sermon* (Chicago: Daily Democrat, 1856), 8. Nathaniel P. Bailey, *Our Duty As Taught by the Aggressive Nature of Slavery* (Akron, Ohio: Teesdale, Elkins & Co., 1856), 4.

states with a membership of 13,773. There were 92 Old School presbyteries in the free states with 144,888 members, and 56 presbyteries in slave states with 78,867 communicants. Thus the Old School branch was more sensitive to southern feelings. Having closer ties with the South, many Old School clergymen were alert to the dangers of civil war. They proclaimed the ideals of the Prince of Peace which were considered to be at variance with the god of Mars.¹⁵

Although both branches of the Church were deeply committed to Christian benevolence and the redemption of society, the Old School viewed with distrust any efforts to reform outside the confines of the Church's institutions. They were prone to recall their experience with the American Home Missionary Society and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions during the period between 1801 and 1837. They were, therefore, inclined to avoid any connection with voluntary societies, regardless of the soundness, justice or sacredness of their purpose. The New School activists could point to the Church's stand in favor of independence during the American Revolution. They also bolstered this with facts concerning John Witherspoon's political activities during the period of the Revolution. Both groups felt that their position was vindicated by the past.¹⁶ The lines between political involvement and political neutrality, however, did not separate Presbyterians into New School versus Old School groups. Cutting across both major branches of the Church there existed, on the one hand, the theory of a Christian state which advocated a tradition of bearing Christian testimony on political questions. On the other hand, there were many who championed the idea that the civil magistrate was shaped and guided by natural law without regard for the Scripture or the ordinances of the Church.¹⁷ Others felt that the task of the Church was to bring personal salvation, and reform and social evils would be resolved.

Erasmus D. MacMaster, an Old School clergyman, and Albert Barnes, a New School churchman, represented the advocates of the

¹⁵ *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America, From 1838-1858, Inclusive* (New School) (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publications, 1894), 546. *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (Old School) (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publications, 1856), 721. Chester F. Dunham, *The Attitude of the Northern Clergy Toward the South, 1860-1865* (Toledo, Ohio: The Gray Company, 1942), 238.

¹⁶ Gilbert Hobbs Barnes, *The Anti-Slavery Impulse, 1830-1844* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1964), 4-5. James Hastings Nichols "John Witherspoon on Church and State," *Journal of Presbyterian History*, XLII, no. 3 (September, 1964), 166.

¹⁷ Nichols, *op. cit.*, 172.

theory of a "Christian state." To Barnes government was instituted by God. "It has not its origin in man; and is not to be regarded merely as of human arrangement. It is the appointment of the Ruler of the nations. The necessity of government has not grown out of any conventional arrangements of society; nor may it be dispensed with by a conventional arrangement," contended Barnes.¹⁸ Thus Barnes defended the right to probe into matters touching the public interest. "I have not a right to go into my neighbor's dwelling, and discuss and examine the private matters of his wife, and children," he declared, "but everything in which he and I have a common interest may be the subject of the most free and full investigation."¹⁹

Samuel H. Cox, a New School man, and James H. Thornwell, an Old School theologian, adhered to the concept of justification by faith. The apostles had not thought the church "a moral institute of universal good" but a channel of "personal salvation, a doorway to everlasting life," insisted Thornwell.²⁰ The conservative temper, therefore, preferred to let the melting influence of love destroy evil unattended rather than attack the thorny problem directly. Those of the opposite philosophy were convinced that the law of love would not prevail until a society was constructed which was willing to bear a cross for it. The advocates of a Christian state felt the church must intercede in society to create a Christian political environment.

Another factor shaped the attitude of the people concerning the political contest of 1856. In western New York and the northwest in areas where the Plan of Union operated, many migrating settlers had carried with them, as they moved west, the tradition of multi-establishment. Although the institutional structure of the multi-establishment did not take roots, the tradition encouraged mutual involvement of both church and state in the whole life of society. The areas of the Northwest which were colonized by settlers with a Virginia heritage followed Jefferson and Madison's

¹⁸ Albert Barnes, "The Supremacy of the Law" *The American National Preacher*, XII, no. 8 (1838), 113.

¹⁹ Albert Barnes, *The Literature and Science of America* (Utica, New York: Bennett and Bright, 1836), 22. See: E. D. MacMaster, *The Nation Blessed of the Lord: A Sermon Preached in the First Presbyterian Church, New Albany, July 6, 1856* (New Albany, Indiana: Norman, Morrison and Matthews, 1856), 24.

²⁰ James H. Thornwell, "Report on the Subject of Slavery," presented to the Synod of South Carolina . . . Columbia, South Carolina, 1852, in William S. Jenkins, *Proslavery Thought in the Old South* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1935), 215-6.

complete separation as set forth in the Virginia Act for Establishing Religious Freedom.²¹

The tendency of Presbyterians and other Calvinists to communalize the sin of slaveholding was a significant force drawing many into political involvement.²² The belief in collective guilt inspired much of the controversy concerning slavery in the New School General Assembly, the synods and presbyteries as well as in the missionary conventions. By 1856 this sense of collective sin prompted its advocates to unite in political action to oppose the expansion of the South's peculiar institution. When the war broke out in 1861 most of the presbyteries of the Northwest saw God's retribution arrayed against the nation.

Much of the involvement of the clergymen in the political contest, however, did not come because they sought out a political role. Since the 1830's many rival churches had regularly held a Monday night prayer meeting for the slaves. As slavery was the principle issue in the election contest of 1856, the clergymen who followed this tradition suddenly found themselves enlisted in the political struggle without seeking involvement. The separation of Presbyterians between those who became politically involved and those who remained neutral followed a rural-urban division as much as a New School-Old School classification. Many rural Presbyterians were also prominent in the attacks on the Democratic administration because of the graft and patronage scandals and because of the temperance issue. On the other hand, many settlers in the Northwest who had southern heritage and southern ties defended the position of the Democrats, at least partially, because they resented the moral smugness of the North. Northern virtue, it was rightly felt, was due more to geography than sanctity.

Among Presbyterian laymen at least, previous political affiliation was an important factor in Republican affinity. Many of them had formerly been Whigs, and when the party of Clay and Webster began to die out, they transferred their allegiance to the Republican party. This was not only because they were seeking a new political home, but was also due to the strong antislavery commitment of the northern Whigs which was somewhat similar to the Republican stand. During the 1830's when the national anti-slavery movement began to take shape, it found its first and fore-

²¹ Nichols, *op. cit.*, 172. W. W. Fleming (ed.) *Statutes at Large of Virginia* (Richmond, Virginia: 1823), XII, 81-6.

²² Winthrop D. Jordan *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, Inc., 1969), 299-300.

most advocates among New School Presbyterians who were politically identified with the Whig party.²³

As a result of their prior commitments Presbyterian laymen became deeply involved in the Republican movement during its formative period. When the Republican mass convention met in Pittsburgh on February 22, 1856, in the first national conclave, members of Calvinistic tradition were conspicuous among the delegates. Joseph C. Hornblower, an old Whig and one of the leading New School Presbyterian laymen had aided in laying the groundwork for the organization of the Republican party in New Jersey, but due to his age and failing health, he could not attend the Pittsburgh convention. He, nevertheless, made an effort to exert an influence on the affairs of the national party.²⁴ In a letter to the president of the Pittsburgh convention, he urged the party to unite with all those of whatever political persuasion to check "the further spread of the disgrace and curse of human slavery."²⁵ Hornblower was selected by the New Jersey convention as its only delegate-at-large to the national nominating convention at Philadelphia, and when the convention nominated Fremont, he was one of the three selected to inform Fremont of the nomination.²⁶

Robert M. Riddle, another former Whig and New School Presbyterian layman, used his position as the editor of the *Pittsburgh Commercial Journal* to promote the Republican cause. He was the brother of David M. Riddle, a leading New School clergyman. Robert Riddle was active as a Republican organizer and served as the secretary of a mass Republican convention in September, 1856, which was called to organize support for Fremont.²⁷ William Jessup, also a New School Presbyterian layman and Whig, who had been an officer in a local antislavery society in Pennsylvania before he turned conservative, returned to the antislavery cause by aiding in the birth of the new party in Pennsylvania. At Honesdale, Pennsylvania, a protest meeting was organized in February, 1854, and Jessup made a stirring speech against the Nebraska Bill.²⁸ Jessup and others issued a call for a "People's Meeting" to convene

²³ Gilbert H. Barnes, *The Antislavery Impulse, 1830-1844* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1964), 94.

²⁴ *Daily Pittsburgh Gazette*, June 18, 1856. *Newark Daily Advertiser*, June 14, August 7, 11, September 18, 1856.

²⁵ *Daily Pittsburgh Gazette*, February 26, 1856.

²⁶ *Newark Daily Advertiser*, May 28, 1856. *North American and United States Gazette*, July 10, 1856. *Albany Evening Journal*, July 9, 1856.

²⁷ *Daily Pittsburgh Gazette*, September 16, 1856.

²⁸ William Jessup to James G. Birney, October 17, 1836, Dwight L. Dumond (editor) *Letters of James G. Birney, 1811-1852* (Gloucester, Massachusetts: Peter Smith, 1966), I, 367. *New York Daily Tribune*, February 17, 1854.

at the Court House in Montrose, Pennsylvania, on March 8, to protest against the measure before Congress. In the following November, when the citizens of Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania, met in Montrose to protest the efforts to extend slavery, Jessup was on the committee that drew up resolutions, one of which proposed the organization of a Republican party. In September, 1855, when the first Pennsylvania State Republican Convention convened, he was the chairman. In his address from the chair, Jessup tried to turn the party into antislavery channels. He informed the delegates that they were meeting for the purpose of establishing a party to challenge "the encroachment of tyranny."²⁹ In 1856, Jessup, who like Hornblower had a son serving as a Presbyterian minister, also campaigned extensively in Pennsylvania and New Jersey for Fremont and Free Soil.³⁰

Not all of the Presbyterian laymen who rallied to the Republican cause, however, were former Whigs. Benjamin Franklin Butler had been a Democrat before the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Butler, who served in Andrew Jackson's cabinet, had been a member of the board of directors of the American Home Missionary Society since the early days of its activity. He came to the support of the Republican Party in a call for a meeting in the "Tabernacles" as early as May, 1856. He campaigned in his native New York and during September, Butler was the leading speaker at a Republican mass meeting in Newark, New Jersey. This Old Jacksonian and New School Presbyterian layman was a powerful force in winning over Democrats and the friends of Presbyterian benevolence to the Republican cause by his extensive campaign for the party.³¹

The support of Republican political principles, however, was not limited to the laymen of the Presbyterian churches. The New School clergy in the North Atlantic states were almost invariably committed to the Republican party in 1856. Albert Barnes, "one of the earliest and most logical and solid champions of the cause of Freedom," studiously tried to steer clear of politics, but he consented to deliver the opening prayer before the national Republican nominating convention in Philadelphia.³² William Aikman, of the Sixth Presbyterian Church in Newark, in contrast to

²⁹ *New York Tribune*, February 17, 1854. *The Montrose (Pennsylvania) Democrat*, February 23, 1854. *The Susquehanna Register* (Montrose, Pennsylvania), November 30, 1854. *Independent Republican* (Montrose, Pennsylvania), August 23, 1855. *Pittsburgh Daily Gazette*, September 6, 1855.

³⁰ *New York Herald*, September 23, 1856. *Independent Republican*, March 27, 1856. *Wisconsin Free Democrat*, October 1, 1856.

³¹ *Daily Pittsburgh Gazette*, May 1, 1856. *Newark Daily Advertiser*, August 11, 1856.

³² *New York Tribune*, June 18, 1856.

Barnes openly identified himself as a dedicated Republican. In a sermon before his congregation, he drew a picture of the late events in Kansas clearly delineating "the complicity" of the chief executive "in crushing freedom" in Kansas. He urged as a remedy that the people pray and act "not by armed resistance, but at the ballot box." Daniel W. Poor of the same city denounced the acts of the government and "exhorted his hearers to oppose with all their might the influence which spread evil over the land."³³ Robert Aikman, a Presbyterian minister of Elizabeth, New Jersey, was no less partisan than his New Jersey colleagues. He wrote a letter to the *Jersey Tribune* in which he contended that it was "the duty of the Presbyterians to resist the indefinite extension of slavery, and in the present campaign . . . to array themselves on the side of freedom."³⁴

In New York the same attitude prevailed among the New School clergy. Joseph R. Page, pastor of a New School church in Wyoming County, who did not neglect his duty to instruct his congregation, stated in a speech that every male member of his church was a Fremont man.³⁵ It was so unusual for a New School Presbyterian clergyman to support any other party except the Republicans that when it became widely rumored that N. S. S. Beman of Troy had switched from Fremont to another choice, he felt it necessary to publish a letter to set the record straight:

I have always been for Fremont, because he is the representative of the Freedom Party, and in his election I see the only hope of shutting down the floodgates against foaming surges of the slave power. . . . If anything can be done to wipe out the foul blot from my country for giving up to the curse of Slavery the richest soil of this continent, I wish to bear a part in it.³⁶

It was the violence connected with the Kansas controversy, however, that served as the stimulus which brought many into open political activity. As late as the meeting of the General Assembly of 1853, Edwin F. Hatfield, pastor of a New School Presbyterian Church in New York City, had urged that "God had taken the subject of slavery into His own hands, and there was no need of agitation . . . Let God work, and we will turn our energies to other great enterprise." On the Saturday after Charles Sumner was attacked in the Senate, Hatfield attended a protest meeting in Brooklyn and spoke to several thousand Republicans. He urged them to do their duty and trust in God by electing men to office

³³ *Newark Daily Advertiser*, June 2, 1856.

³⁴ *Jersey Tribune*, November 1, 1856, cited by *New York Post*, November 3, 1856.

³⁵ *Wisconsin Free Democrat*, September 17, 1856.

³⁶ *New York Tribune*, October 31, 1856.

"who would be true to Freedom and their country."³⁷ Although most of the New School clergy had become involved in some degree early in the campaign, it was not until the week before the election that the more cautious considered the political question facing the electorate. On the Sunday before the election, Asa D. Smith, who was said to have preached a "higher law" doctrine "when courage was required," joined his colleagues in New York City by delivering a sermon on the relations of religion to the political question posed by the election of 1856.³⁸ Smith, like Beman and Hatfield, was among the most influential New School clergy in New York.

Not all New School clergy, however, committed themselves on the side of the Republican Party. Samuel Henson Cox of Owego, and recently of Brooklyn, New York, chose the fourth of July to denounce political sermons in a letter to the press. He declared that a minister ought to be well above politics and sectionalism. Cox urged the clergy to refrain from being electioneering busybodies, and concluded by saying he would never "vote or act, or speak for anything, directly or indirectly, that tends to sectionalize the country, or make for civil war or dissolution of the union."³⁹ Another influential New School clergyman, Joel Parker, had made his views clear in 1854. He felt the clergy should stay clear of politics. Parker depicted the Church as the "pure spouse of Christ, a bride adorned for her husband. In stooping to connect herself with civil government, and in endeavoring to exercise her influence through political action she assumes the meritorious adornments of a harlot, and invites contempt."⁴⁰

Few New School men took a stronger position than President Nathan Lord of Dartmouth College who was charged by the *New York Tribune* with denouncing, in one of his classes, the philosophy of the Declaration of Independence and the men who signed it. "The present political uprisings of the people, North and West are rebellions against the dispensations of Providence!" Lord was reported to have said.⁴¹ But no New School clergyman had closer political ties with a leading political figure than A. D. Eddy. He had recently taken over a Presbyterian Church in Chicago where he became closely linked with Stephen A. Douglas. Eddy found

³⁷ *New York Observer*, June 9, 1853. *New York Daily Tribune*, June 2, 1856. *New York Daily Times*, June 2, 1856.

³⁸ Edward B. Coe, *An Address in Commemoration of Asa Dodge Smith*, June 27, 1882 (Concord, New Hampshire: Republican Press Association, 1882), 30. *New York Daily Times*, November 8, 1856.

³⁹ *Journal of Commerce* cited by *Sandusky Weekly Mirror*, August 2, 1856.

⁴⁰ *New York Daily Times*, December 1, 1856.

⁴¹ *New York Daily Tribune*, October 3, 1856.

that "some miserable men" reproached him for his "supposed political leanings" because he always declared himself for Douglas and other Democrats.⁴²

Although the excitement of the campaign swept most of the northern New School clergymen into the ranks of partisanship on one side or another, many tried to remain neutral or occupied a middle ground by speaking in general terms without making a contemporary application or identifying parties. Albert Barnes of Philadelphia came closer to reaching a middle ground among his New School colleagues. In his book, *The Church and Slavery*, published in 1856, he called for an open and full discussion of the subject free from the realm of politics. "By prayer, by patience, by exhortation, by testimony and forbearance mingled with Christian fidelity . . . the work may be done," he assured his colleagues and fellow communicants.⁴³

It was in the Northwest that the Presbyterian Church became most completely involved in the Republican movement. Augustus L. Brooks, pastor of the New School Third Presbyterian Church, Chicago, appealed to his congregation to arouse themselves "from indifference" and "dreaming security." "We need no military ordinance, . . . no government patronage; the executive and the giant wrong are alike vulnerable to the power of the 'ballot box': it is the only artillery a freeman needs to defend his sacred rights: load it well with freemen's ballots, and its booming thunder will shake the last fortress of slavery," he assured his congregation. Brooks repeated the sermon in the Metropolitan Hall before a larger audience. The *Chicago Times* appealed to all citizens to put the stamp of disapproval on such a "base prostitution" of the ministerial office which would inflict a deadly wound upon Christianity and morality.⁴⁴ Robert Patterson, also of Chicago, spoke on the moral aspects of the question of territorial expansion. Although he denounced ministers who made "public and exciting demonstrations of their alacrity in providing weapons to be used in deadly strife of brothers of the same blood with each other," the *Chicago Times* condemned him as a stump orator who reiterated from his pulpit on the Sabbath, "the stale and silly falsehoods" of the anti-Nebraska politician, John Wentworth.⁴⁵ Probably one of

⁴² A. D. Eddy to S. A. Douglas, Chicago, December 29, 1856. (Manuscript: Stephen A. Douglas Papers, University of Chicago).

⁴³ Albert Barnes, *The Church and Slavery* (Philadelphia: Parry and McMillan, 1857), 166-7.

⁴⁴ A. L. Brooks, *An Appeal For the Right: A Sermon* (Chicago: Daily Democrat, 1856), 16-7. *The Weekly Chicago Times*, September 25, 1856.

⁴⁵ *Daily Democratic Press*, September 18, 1856. A. T. Andreas, *History of*

the most pointed charges delivered to any congregation by a New School minister was that rendered by O. H. Newton in his sermon, "The Influence of Southern Slavery Upon the Republican Government of the United States." As pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church of Delaware, Ohio, he lectured his congregation on their duties as citizens:

The oppression of this system is no longer confined to the African race, but the free men of the North are being crushed by its tyrannical power . . . I regard the present struggle between slavery and freedom as involving our dearest right, both as citizens and as Christians . . . I . . . feel that there is a solemn responsibility resting upon every person, that ought to be discharged in the fear of God. . . . I call upon you . . . as Christians, as philanthropists, as lovers of freedom, to act in this critical hour, in accordance with the great principles of right. . . . I believe God calls upon us to throw beneath our feet, that slave power, which has so long controlled our nation. . . . Let the noble sons of the North present an undivided front against the slavery of the South. . . .⁴⁶

In the Northwest it was the missionaries of the domestic missionary societies that became the most effective agents of the Republican Party. A Presbyterian missionary in Wisconsin saw the "contest for the presidency" as a "great struggle between freedom and slavery."⁴⁷ Another in Illinois was convinced that the people were "opening their eyes" due to his lectures on the crisis before the nation. He felt it to be his duty and privilege to do what lay in his power "to promote a correct religious sentiment" on the issues before the electorate.⁴⁸ A Presbyterian missionary in Morrow County, Ohio, preached regularly against the aggressions of slavery and urged the people to vote as the Lord would approve.⁴⁹ A minister serving the American Home Missionary Society in Yellow Springs, Ohio, preached a strong election sermon which was published. It only offended one family, in the congregation, which was of "the Democratic faith," he informed the secretaries of the AHMS.⁵⁰

Chicago From the Earliest Period to the Present Time (3 vols., Chicago: A. T. Andreas, 1884), I, 418. *Weekly Chicago Times*, September 25, 1856.

⁴⁶ *Delaware (Ohio) Gazette*, August 8, 1856.

⁴⁷ A. A. Overton to the Secretary of the American Home Missionary Society, Muscoda, Wisconsin, August 15, 1856. American Home Missionary Society Correspondence (Manuscript: Fisk University). Hereafter: AHMS Correspondence.

⁴⁸ H. D. Platt to Secretaries, Brighton, Illinois, August 1, 1856, AHMS Correspondence.

⁴⁹ Henry Shedd to Secretaries, Mt. Gilead, Ohio, October 3, 1856. AHMS Correspondence.

⁵⁰ Samuel D. Smith to Milton Badger, Yellow Springs, Ohio, November 17, 1856, AHMS Correspondence.

The judicatories of the Presbyterian Church in the West also spoke up on the political question. The Synod of Western Reserve regretted the tone of the discussion and weakness of the measures taken by the Church at St. Louis in 1855 at a time "when the whole moral sentiment of the city and country was outraged by the violence of the slave power invading and proceeding to sack peaceable settlements. . . ." ⁵¹ The Synod of Peoria "contemplated with sorrow and shame the efforts made by the supporters" of slavery to enlist the Federal Government for the extension of the system into the new territories." It is the duty of Christ's ambassadors . . . to declare and apply the principles of God's word with all boldness, as the rule of life for citizens, rulers and nations," stated the synod report without reservations.⁵² When the Synod of Michigan met, however, it was necessary for the members to override the report of the business committee in order for the synod to deliver a testimony on the "outrages" in Kansas. The Synod of Michigan was asked by some of its presbyteries to express an opinion on the question of the extension of the system of servitude. The chairman of the business committee, George Duffield, reiterated the former testimony of the synod and urged prayer to "remove the evils" and "avert . . . the bloodshed and horror of a civil war." But such a conservative counsel did not prevail. Substitute resolutions were introduced from the floor denouncing the "outrage" against Senator Charles Sumner and the attacks on freedom in Kansas.⁵³ After these resolutions had passed, Duffield wrote in his diary: "I endeavored to lead them to consider the impropriety of mixing themselves up with politics, but stood alone." ⁵⁴ Thus, the violence in Kansas and Washington brought about a reaction and a response in the judicatories of the Church as well as in the pulpit. Following the assault on Sumner in the Senate Chamber, almost every presbytery in the New School Church in the Northwest denounced the attack on freedom of speech, condemned the Democratic Party and the "Slave Power," or expressed sentiments against the extension of human bondage into the territories.⁵⁵

⁵¹ *Central Christian Herald*, October 9, 1856. Records of the Synod of Western Reserve (Manuscript: Archives of the Synod of Ohio, Wooster College), II, (1846-1867), N. S., (September 22, 1856), 227.

⁵² *Chicago Daily Journal*, October 15, 1856.

⁵³ *Minutes of the Synod of Michigan* (Detroit: H. Barnes, 1856), 12-3, 19-20.

⁵⁴ George Duffield's Diary, 1832-1861 (Manuscript: 5 vols., Public Library, Detroit, Michigan), VI, (1856-1858), (June, 1856), 15.

⁵⁵ Synod of Cincinnati: *Central Christian Herald*, November 13, 1856. Nathum Gould, "History of the Ottawa Presbytery" (Typescript: McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago, n.d.), 182. Records of the following: Synod of Peoria, 1843-1859 (Manuscript: McCormick Theological Seminary), I, 225, 264-265. Synod of Wabash, 1851-1869 (Manuscript: Office of the Synod of Indiana,

After the lawlessness reached a climax in May and June, the Presbyterian journals took up the discussion of political issues to a degree that departed from their tradition of remaining non-partisan. The New School *Genessee Evangelist* informed its readers that all men were responsible for the laws and institutions of the country and the proper use of his suffrage rights. The minister had the same responsibility as any other citizen for a just and moral government. "Every minister of the Gospel is one of the people," continued the editor, "and he does not and cannot, by being a minister, annul his obligation to society, or free himself from the duty of doing all in his power, and by every means not opposed to the Bible, to promote and secure good order, sound morality, and the highest good, temporal, spiritual and eternal. . . ." ⁵⁶ The *Preacher and United Presbyterian* of Pittsburgh, organ of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, also took up the political question, "The super-human energies now put forth to make involuntary human slavery a permanent and universal institution of our Government—all conspire to warn us that we are rapidly approaching a crisis which has no parallel since the adoption of our Federal Constitution," predicted the editor. ⁵⁷ The *Free Presbyterian*, of Yellow Springs, Ohio, journal of the Free Presbyterian Synod, saw a similar crisis in the near future. "Revolutions never go back, and if the slave power is met and defeated on its own ground, as it will be by the election of Fremont, other triumphs of freedom must inevitably follow. If the Slave power now triumphs in the election of Buchanan, either the entire continent will be covered with slavery or 'blood even to the horses' bridles' will flow to wash out its stains," prophesied the editor. ⁵⁸

The New School *New York Evangelist*, which came out for Fremont because "the only question at issue was the restriction . . . of slavery within its present bounds," viewed the sectional crisis as an irrepressible conflict. The two systems of freedom and slavery were as "reconcilable as fire and ice," explained the editor. "The last great struggle is upon us," he exhorted, "and we can no more avoid the responsibility and the consequence of it, than we can escape the Providence of God. It cannot be right for any Christian man to withhold, or trifle with his vote." He prophesied that the final conflict between the two ways of life was close at

Indianapolis), 71. Presbytery of Elyria, 1842-1863 (Photostat record of Manuscript: University of Chicago), 287. Records of the Presbytery of Portage, 1843-1863 (Manuscript: Presbytery of Cleveland), 276.

⁵⁶ *Genessee Evangelist* cited by Dixon (Illinois), *Telegraph*, October 11, 1856.

⁵⁷ *Preacher and United Presbyterian* cited by the *Independent Republican*, October 2, 1856.

⁵⁸ *Free Presbyterian* cited by *Independent Republican*, October 2, 1856.

hand. "The co-existence of two such anatonistic principles as freedom and slavery each striving to give form, and shape, and direction to our national progress, must sooner or later bring on a life and death conflict. . . ." ⁵⁹

A more conservative position was taken by the cautious *New York Observer* and the New School *Christian Observer* of Philadelphia. The *New York Observer* urged the Church to avoid political involvement. The editor, Samuel I. Prime, implored that prayer for the country was the "chief service of Christian patriotism." "God has a perfect view of what would constitute the best well-being as a nation," he added.⁶⁰ When a clergyman preaches politics, he is "false to the souls of his charge. . . . He seeks to pervert their minds to his own views of a subject on which he has no right to instruct them," declared the *New York Observer* as the campaign of 1856 matured. Echoing sentiments common in the Democratic press, the editor felt there was no baser abuse of trust than when a minister "converted his pulpit . . . into an engine of political influence."⁶¹ The *Christian Observer* charged that the ministers who entered the political arena were falling into ultra and gross mistakes and were perverting their office, character, and influence.⁶² The *North American and United States Gazette* also of Philadelphia, challenged this philosophy. "The business of clergymen is to deal with sin" wherever found, in high places or in low, the editor insisted.⁶³ The sinner could not be reformed or converted by denunciation replied the *Christian Observer*. "It is not then the main office of the pulpit to denounce the sins of men, but to hold up Christ in all his offices and in all relations to God and men," added Amasa Converse, editor of the *Christian Observer*.⁶⁴

The liberal *American Presbyterian* which was started in September, 1856, in Philadelphia, to challenge the views of the *Christian Observer*, remained silent on politics during the few weeks that were left in the campaign, and the *Presbyterian Banner and Advocate* avoided any commitment other than a guarded condemnation of the attack upon Charles Sumner. *The Presbyterian*, organ of the Old School in Philadelphia urged its patrons not to bemoan themselves "over the threatening aspects of the affairs" of the nation or to spend their time as mere spectators if they were

⁵⁹ *New York Evangelist* cited by *Democratic Press* (Chicago), September 3, 1856.

⁶⁰ *New York Observer* cited by *Belleville* (Illinois) *Advocate*, March 8, 1854, and *New York Herald*, July 27, 1856.

⁶¹ *New York Observer*, July 24, 1856.

⁶² *Christian Observer*, July 10, 1856.

⁶³ *North American and United States Gazette*, July 11, 1856.

⁶⁴ *Christian Observer*, July 24, 1856.

to do anything to avert the evil. "It is high time that we had learned more fully the need of prayer, and its efficacy as a remedy for a disordered state of public health," warned the editor. The readers were reminded of "the apostolic injunction to pray for men in authority."⁶⁵ While the *Christian Observer*, *The Presbyterian*, and the *New York Observer* urged the efficiency of prayer or neutrality as the proper stance for the Christian institution, the Old School periodicals, the *Princeton Review* and the *Presbyterian Magazine* simply kept silent on the issues involving slavery and the election.

Rather than put all their faith in prayer alone, the Presbyterian journals of the Northwest counselled political action as a requirement of Christian citizenship. The *Presbyterian of the West* and the *Central Christian Herald*, the Old School and New School organs in Cincinnati, had been outspoken on the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854.⁶⁶ Two years later both were absorbed in ecclesiastical questions relating to the slavery controversy: the *Central Christian Herald* was involved with the problems of the domestic missions churches,⁶⁷ and the *Presbyterian of the West* was concerned about the conflict over the relation of the seminaries to the sectional question.⁶⁸ Yet both found time to speak out in strong language concerning the political contest. The *Presbyterian of the West* declared that it held free soil views and informed its readers that since men and measures were made at the ballot box, the Christian voter's religion required him to take a "deep and solemn interest in politics."⁶⁹ The *Central Christian Herald* echoed the sentiments of the *Presbyterian of the West* and warned the Christian voter that he would be held to a solemn account for the manner in which he employed the franchise vested in him.⁷⁰ The *Presbyterian Witness*, organ of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church in Cincinnati, insisted that morals should be a part of politics which should be elevated to a place where it would be "the handmaid of religion."⁷¹

The southern Presbyterian Old and New School journals were generally silent on the political issues.⁷² The Old School Louis-

⁶⁵ *Presbyterian Banner and Advocate* (Philadelphia), June 17, 1856. *The Preacher and United Presbyterian*, July 16, 1856, citing *The Presbyterian*.

⁶⁶ Victor B. Howard, "The Anti-Slavery Movement in the Presbyterian Church, 1835-1861," Ph.D. Dissertation, Ohio State University, 1961, 194.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 242.

⁶⁸ Victor B. Howard, "Slavery and A Seminary For the Northwest," *Journal of Presbyterian History* (December, 1965), 233-7.

⁶⁹ *Presbyterian of the West*, July 3, 1856.

⁷⁰ *Central Christian Herald*, July 31, 1856.

⁷¹ *Central Christian Herald*, July 31, 1856, citing the *Presbyterian Witness*.

⁷² *Daily Cincinnati Gazette*, September 23, 1856.

ville *Presbyterian Herald*, however, threw its weight in the balance against political participation by the clergy. "Religion is a pure heaven-born maid of noble mien and serene countenance. She stands upon a lofty elevation of truth and goodness, and love . . .," declared the editor, William Breckinridge. The Church could bring order out of confusion if not involved, he explained in language that was completely in accord with the views of the upper South. N. L. Rice's Old School *St. Louis Presbyterian* admitted that "religion must always influence, more or less, the legislation of the country; but it will do so by extending amongst the people sound views and principles. . . ." ⁷⁴ No Presbyterian journal in the deep South entered fully into the political contest. *The True Witness* of Mississippi urged its readers not to put their hope "in politicians, barbecues, or enthusiastic party meetings" but in God who "hitherto guided and blessed" the nation.⁷⁵ While the southern Presbyterian journals refused to be drawn into debate on the political issues, the Democratic press of the North answered with a quill that was dipped in acid. The activities of the northern clergy and the pronouncements of the religious journals called forth denunciations of the most hostile nature. The clergy were condemned for prostituting their sacred station and the religious journals were declared to be staffed by a band of professional liars.⁷⁶

The attacks of the secular press, however, were primarily directed at the New School clergy when they denounced Presbyterians. The clergy of the Old School had stronger ties with the South and did not take such a forward position as the New School men. Even here the vast majority spoke in favor of the Republican position if they raised their voice or broke their silence.⁷⁷ Hugh S. Fullerton was an Old School clergyman who rallied to the Republican cause. This staunch old abolitionist, of the Presbytery of Chillicothe, participated in the political campaign of 1856, and was happy to hear principles accepted without reservation for which he had been threatened with mob violence in the same communities twenty years before.⁷⁸ Another Old School clergyman who spoke out on the sectional controversy was E. D. MacMaster of Indiana. Although he was already under attack and was charged with being an abolitionist, MacMaster did not hesitate to take a stand on the political question of 1856. "A system too bad to be named in the Constitution shall not under that Con-

⁷⁴ *St. Louis Presbyterian*, July 5, 1856.

⁷⁵ *St. Louis Presbyterian*, October 2, 1856, citing *True Witness*.

⁷⁶ See: *New York Journal of Commerce*, September 3, 1856, and *Chicago Weekly Times*, July 3, 1856, as examples.

⁷⁷ See: O. H. Newton's sermon, *Delaware Gazette*, August 8, 1856.

⁷⁸ *Presbytery (Cincinnati)*, September 9, 1863.

stitution . . . be nationalized; nor a system which holds men and women to be goods and chattels, be extended into territories consecrated to freedom." On another occasion he explained to the congregation of the First Presbyterian Church at New Albany, Indiana, that in the crisis posed by the presidential election Christians should free themselves "from all party entanglements. . . . No consideration of expediency, of interest, of peace, of profit, not grounded upon justice and equity" should warrant "disobeying God's law."⁷⁹ The conflict in Kansas and the political contest of 1856 also caused the Old School western judicatories to return to a discussion of the concern of the Church with the evil of slavery, but only two presbyteries denounced the Kansas-Nebraska Bill and the extension of slavery to the territories.⁸⁰ The Old School Synod of Missouri, however, called for a day of prayer on the last day of October due to the alarming state of things which had brought the country to the point of sectional strife.⁸¹

A few Old School clergymen spoke against political involvement. It was rumored, however, that since the Democratic Party candidate, James Buchanan,⁸² was an Old School Presbyterian, many of the Old School men would quietly vote for him.⁸³ N. L. Rice of St. Louis, a native of Kentucky, opposed agitation of the slavery question, but he also denounced violence in Kansas and Washington.⁸⁴ Charles Wadsworth, an Old School clergyman of Philadelphia also denounced political preaching as having no justification in Scripture or tradition.⁸⁵ Still stronger language, however, was used by Aaron Burrow, pastor of the Pittsburgh Cumberland Presbyterian Church in denouncing political sermons as "a crime against God and Man."⁸⁶

Like prominent New School laymen such as Hornblower and Jessup, several Old School men entered actively into the campaign,

⁷⁹ E. D. McMaster, *The True Life of a Nation* (New Albany, Indiana: Norman, Morrison, and Matthews, 1856), 45-7. E. D. McMaster, *The Nation Blessed of Lord*, 24.

⁸⁰ See: Howard, "The Anti-Slavery Movement . . ." *op. cit.*, 204.

⁸¹ *New York Daily Times*, November 1, 1856. *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, October 30, 1856.

⁸² W. U. Hensel, "A Pennsylvania Presbyterian President: An Inquiry into the Religious Sentiments and Character of James Buchanan, Fifteenth President of the United States," *Journal of Presbyterian History*, IV, no. 5, (March, 1908), 203. Philip S. Klein "James Buchanan—Selfish Politician or Christian Statesman?," *Journal of Presbyterian History*, XLII, no. 1, (March, 1964), 1.

⁸³ *The Circleville Watchman*, October 14, 1856. *The Democratic Citizen* (Lebanon, Ohio), July 17, 1856.

⁸⁴ *The Presbyterian Magazine*, VI, (July, 1856), 313. *Journal of Commerce* cited by *Iowa City Republican*, August 30, 1856.

⁸⁵ *St. Clairsville Gazette and Citizen*, (St. Clairsville, Ohio), August 7, 1856.

⁸⁶ *Cumberland Presbyterian* cited by *Daily Ohio Statesman*, October 29, 1856.

but usually on the side of the Democrats. William Cooper Alexander, son of Archibald Alexander, the first professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, was the nominee for governor on the Democratic ticket in New Jersey. The nominee, a lawyer, had two brothers serving as professors at Princeton Seminary at the time the campaign was being waged. Benjamin Nott, a Democratic judge, toured western New York speaking for the Democrats. He was the son of Eliphalet Nott, a Presbyterian minister and president of Union College.⁸⁷

The evidence is clear that the New School Presbyterians were more active in the interest of the Republicans than the Old School. But there was no conflict based on politics within the ranks of Presbyterianism that tended to alienate the Old School and New School. The attitude of the two main branches of the Church concerning ecclesiastical policy toward slavery and church membership was far more important than politics in causing estrangement. The *Presbytery Reporter* of Alton, Illinois, weighed the position of the two main branches of the Church in 1856 and stated:

There is in certain quarters an impression, that the Old School body is, in regard to the question of slavery, on a truer and safer position than the New School. . . . If the great design of a church is to avoid all agitation and to keep in the routine which worldly men shall call safe, expedient, judicious, then the Old School may have all that praise which it asks. Meantime what shall we say of its oldness? Will not the discerning say it has put on the old man which is corrupt?⁸⁸

The difference between the New and the Old School was not that the New School was committed to the new political movement and the Old School opposed it, but that the Old School was essentially neutral in its public pronouncements though probably not in its private actions. The Old School took the conservative view that politics was a necessary intrusion into the harmonies of life that should best be avoided. Politics was in a realm in which conflict, self-interest, and the pervasiveness of power, all came out in the open. The Old School had specifically committed itself to avoid conflict that involved the slavery question in 1846. The question was to be dealt with at the synod level with charity and understanding rather than by denunciation, and a studied practice had been adhered to by the Old School in avoiding the civil questions of slavery as in the domain of civil government rather than the church.

⁸⁷ *Daily Union* (Washington, D. C.), September 6, 1856. *Atlas and Argus* (Albany, New York), October 1, November 1, 1856. The two sons of Archibald Alexander who were professors at Princeton in 1856 were James Waddel and Joseph Addison Alexander.

⁸⁸ *The Presbytery Reporter*, October, 1856, 324.

The less conservative New School Presbyterians had been the main supporters of the antislavery societies during the 1830's. After the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the New School men were prone to accept the abolitionist's identification of the enemy of the nation and Christian society as the "Slave Power." The indigenous nature of the slave power was considered a serious threat especially among those who were convinced of the millennial destiny of the nation under the special providence of God. It was considered to be a great moral truth that the toleration of sin leads to corruption and that aggression grows by submission. Thus the "Slave Power" must be met and resisted. The existence of a "Slave Power" became one of the chief themes of New School sermons and judicatory resolutions, and the faithful were called on to meet the threat of the "Slave Power" conspiracy.⁸⁹

The New School men also were driven by a commitment to the stewardship of God's domain. Among Presbyterians they were the directors and managers of the numerous benevolent societies that existed in antebellum America. They believed that God chose not to intervene directly to make sinners walk in righteous paths, but rather that He appointed guardians of the nation's conscience to reform the sinners. Since slavery was the great national sin, it was the great moral work that they were called on to perform.⁹⁰

To many New School men the failure of the North to resist the aggressions of the "Slave Power" indicated that a moral bankruptcy existed in public life. The jeremiad sermons were necessary to purify public life and to check the moral erosion that threatened American institutions. Some saw the amorality of political parties, which condoned bargains with the slavery forces and permitted political corruption, as a greater threat than that which came from the southern institution. The purification sermons would not only bring morality to politics but would also serve notice that there could be no compromises with evil.

Whether New or Old School, however, the image of the South in reference to the gospel was a significant factor in determining the stance of the individual clergyman during the election of 1856. Many were convinced that the gospel was corrupted and the clergyman became an apostate when in contact with slavery. Their

⁸⁹ For examples, sermons, and resolutions in which the existence of the "Slave Power" was brought to the attention of New School adherents, see footnotes 46 and 51. There is, however, no evidence that there was a "Slave Power" as envisioned by many northerners. See: James A. Rawley, *Race and Politics* (Philadelphia, 1969), 266.

⁹⁰ Clifford S. Griffin, *Their Brothers' Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800-1865* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1960), x-xi.

response was to quarantine the South so that the evil would not contaminate the land of freedom. They, therefore, became firmly committed to the Republican Party. Others were inclined to see slavery as an evil that must be terminated as speedily as possible, consistent with the true interest of all concerned. They reasoned that this could only come about by being brought in contact with the purifying influence of Christianity. They had confidence in the efficiency of the Scriptures, and felt the gospel was free to exert its influence in the South. It was believed that the extension of the institution would tend to diffuse and weaken it, and they were convinced that God in His providence would open the way for the removal of the evil. These individuals tended to be neutral in the political contest or identified with the Democrats and recoiled from the agitation of the Republican Party.⁹¹

Despite the extensive Republican ground swell that took place throughout the North, the Democratic Party still carried the election. But the results of the election showed the expansion of a new party which had grown within two years to a close contender for control of the government. That the Republican Party was able to carry all of New England, New York, and all of the Northwest except Illinois and Indiana was due in a large part to the influence of the churches. The years from 1854 to 1856 were the season in which the clergy planted the seeds for a harvest that would be ready for reaping during the next national political contest. But the churches contributed to the ultimate crisis of 1861 by injecting a highly charged and dogmatic atmosphere into the more compromising sphere of political dealings. This, however, they could not well avoid without nullifying their purpose for existing.

The strong sectional position that was taken by the Presbyterian journals and clergymen during the election campaign of 1856 added fuel to the passions that had been stirred up by the New School General Assembly action in May at Schenectady where the Church ruled that the Assembly had the constitutional power to remove slave-holders.⁹² This action was viewed gravely by the South due to the fact that the General Assembly which met in Buffalo in 1853 had requested that the southern judicatories send up information concerning the status of slavery in their churches. During the same year the American Home Missionary Society had requested that the mission churches provide the society's executive committee with similar facts.⁹³ As the political struggle became

⁹¹ Robert Baird, *Religion in America* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1856, 1970 reprint), 299-303.

⁹² *General Assembly Minutes*, 1956, 197-211.

⁹³ *General Assembly Minutes*, (1853), 327, 331-4. *Home Missionary*, XXV, No. 11, (March, 1853), 266-9.

more bitter, the resentment growing out of the Assembly action of 1853 and 1856 caused the New School men and churches in the South to be pushed into a stronger defense of slavery. They were forced to try to live down the reputation of the New School Church as an abolitionist institution. Slavery was defended as a biblical institution by many of the leaders in the South.⁹⁴ The antislavery Presbyterians were convinced that the Democratic Party's victory in 1856 foreshadowed the doom of the free church, free speech, free labor, and schools in Kansas if not in the entire Mississippi Valley. This attitude caused the western judicatories to return with renewed vigor to the slavery controversy in the General Assembly, and to demand that the Church be immediately cleansed of any relation to the southern institution. Within six months after the election of 1856 the American Home Missionary Society separated from the slaveholding churches, and the southern synods withdrew from the New School Church. The political campaign of 1856, therefore, contributed to the final phase in the New School controversy over slavery.⁹⁵

The controversy that arose as a result of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, however, had far greater implications for the church. As a result of the attack made on the institution of slavery in the last decade of the antebellum period, the churches plowed the ground from which the Social Gospel would spring. By the time of the Civil War the conviction had become commonplace that society must be regenerated through the power of a sanctified gospel and all the evils resulting from greed, alcohol, and slavery could only be done away with by a transformation of the whole social order.⁹⁶

In 1861 when the Civil War broke out the majority of the Old School forces demanded a loyalty oath of their southern colleagues. Although Charles Hodge entered a protest which stated, "the doctrine of our Church is that the state has no authority in matters purely secular and civil," he conceded in January, 1861, in the *Princeton Review* that there were occasions "when political questions rise into the sphere of morals and religion."⁹⁷ For the New School men the occasion was the election of 1856, and 1857. For the Old School majority it was the result of the election of 1860 and the Civil War.

⁹⁴ F. A. Ross, *Slavery Ordained of God* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1857), 65.

⁹⁵ *General Assembly Minutes, 1857*, 403-6. *Report of the American Home Missionary Society, 1857* (New York: John A. Gray, 1857), 127-9.

⁹⁶ Timothy L. Smith, *Revolution and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), 161. Chester F. Dunham, *The Attitude of the Northern Clergy Toward the South 1860-1865* (Toledo, Ohio: The Gray Company, 1942), 35-6.

⁹⁷ *Princeton Review*, XXXIII (January, 1861), 1.