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The Role of Religion in the Civil War

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The Role of Religion in the Civil War

by

Todd Matthew Bensley

A thesis submitted to the Department of History of the State University of New York

College at Brockport in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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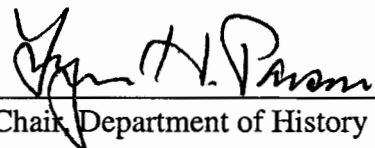
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Table of Contents

Dedication.....	i
Abstract.....	ii
Chapter One: Prelude to War.....	1
Chapter Two: Fighting God's Cause.....	45
Chapter Three: Mustering the Regiment for Prayer.....	87
Bibliography.....	143



Dedication:

This thesis is dedicated to my family for all of their encouragement and help along the way. It is especially dedicated to my wife, Nicole Bensley, and my children, Allison and Jacob, who have sacrificed time and energy to help me accomplish my dream. Thank you!

Abstract:

The Role of Religion in the Civil War

Antebellum America was shaped by the Second Great Awakening, a series of religious revivals that swept across all regions of the United States and affected the lives of all Americans. The evangelical preachers who led the revivals emphasized the need to improve society to prepare for the Millennium, or second coming of Christ. The desire for reform led to calls by many northerners for the abolition of slavery. The abolitionists argued that slavery went against the teachings in the Bible. Supporters of slavery countered this attack by pointing out specific passages in the Bible that seemed to prop up slavery. These arguments led to sectional schisms in the Presbyterian, Methodist and Baptist churches. The breakup of these churches foreshadowed the Civil War. Once the war broke out, religion was used by the soldiers and their leaders to sustain their will to fight. Religion played a significant role in the coming of, and the fighting in, the Civil War.

Chapter One: Prelude to War

The majority of popular books, movies, and documentaries either ignore, or pay very little attention to, religion's role in the Civil War. However, the topic is receiving more attention from scholars of the Civil War. Historian Steven E. Woodworth points out, "Understanding the war and its participants must include understanding the religious concerns that were central to so many of their lives."¹ James McPherson, the leading historian of the Civil War, claims that as a result of the Second Great Awakening, "Civil War armies were, arguably, the most religious in American history."² Therein lays the paradox. While America seemed divided in many ways – geographically, economically, politically, and socially – in many respects, especially culturally, the North and South were very similar. Most important for motivating combat, Americans generally agreed that their nation held a special place in God's Plan. America was the "New Jerusalem," and Americans were the "New Israelites." This theme, though prevalent since the Puritans, was reinforced by the Second Great Awakening, and tested on the battlefields of the Civil War. Some soldiers marched off to war with the conviction that they were fighting God's cause. Others either found faith on the battlefield for the first time, or if they were already religious, their faith was strengthened by their experiences.

Beginning in 1830, the United States was swept up in the Second Great Awakening. The revival of religion was national in scope. Protestant Americans from all social classes, all cultural backgrounds, all political parties, and all regions, were touched by the movement. Recognizing the potential of the revivals to bring

Americans back to religion and to make religion a sustaining force in America, the clergy took advantage of the unique religious culture in Jacksonian America. Given the strongly-held, democratic belief in "the principle of voluntary association," the clergy portrayed the revival as an extension of the associations that Americans were already familiar with: political parties, fraternal organizations, community churches, and local reform societies. The clergy successfully set-up a system whereby, "[c]onverts were gathered into churches, churches were grouped into denominations, and networks of religious organizations spread over the country as parapolitical structures operating alongside the formal legal apparatus of nationhood."³ The clergy saw the Second Great Awakening as a way to bring unity to America in the antebellum period. Yet, historians such as Woodworth and McPherson increasingly single out the religious fervor of antebellum Americans as a central cause and sustaining ideology of the Civil War. While the clergy were right that Protestant evangelicalism had the power to unify antebellum Americans, they neglected to recognize the nuanced, yet powerful, differences between the practice of religion in the North and South.

Kevin Phillips states, "In contrast to the First Great Awakening of the mid-eighteenth century, sternly focused on the First Commandment, the mood of the Second in the Yankee states and regions has been described as Second Commandment Christianity, concerned with loving (or *improving*) thy neighbor."⁴ The revivals that Americans experienced in the first half of the nineteenth century were aimed at improving individuals as well as society. While not everyone in

America was born-again, everyone was affected by the religious fervor in America. Reform in the era was accomplished through private, personal religion, not laws or the help of government. Abolitionists first looked to religious persuasion to end slavery. Their prayers would not be answered however. The leading preacher of the Second Great Awakening, Charles Finney, believed that the focus of religious efforts should be on the individual. He argued that if reformers took care of the spiritual needs of individual sinners, societal problems would be taken care of because each individual would lead a moral life, free from the vices that lurked around every corner, such as gambling, drinking, prostitution and Sabbath-breaking.⁵ Historian James H. Moorhead presents an illustrative parallel between the religious style of preachers who thought like Finney and the process of making bread. He argued that religion "operates upward and outward through the mass of humanity, just as the particle of leaven to which it is likened operates upon the particle lying next to itself, and it upon another, until the whole lump is leavened."⁶ In addition, the cards were further stacked against a religious solution to the slavery issue because, "Unlike most other sins, slavery had a coherent and influential constituency of persons who did not blush to own its cause."⁷ Southern evangelicals' will was steeled by the fact that they could point to specific places in the Bible that supported their cause. Therefore, "the Southern strategy, as Presbyterian Robert Lewis Dabney articulated it, was to 'push the Bible argument continually, drive Abolitionism to the wall, compel it to assume an anti-Christian position.'"⁸ So, while the Second Great Awakening did reach to all parts of the United States, the tendency was to concentrate on the individual, rather

than the societal level. Individuals in the South had long held slaves without developing a moral critique of themselves. The Second Great Awakening's emphasis on individual moral choices merely gave more power to proslavery moralists to decide the issue for themselves. The private emphasis of evangelicalism, coupled with the varying interpretations of the Holy Scriptures, was the crucial point of argument between the North and the South.

The Bible arguments that the southerners pushed were varied, but they generally focused on a small body of evidence from the passages of the Bible – especially the Old Testament. The biblical proslavery argument usually began with the Ten Commandments. In reference to the Ten Commandments southern ministers argued that “the Law of Ten Commands given on Sinai to the Israelites, includes the relation of master and slave in both the Fourth [Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male servant or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you] and the Tenth [You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor] Commandments, and is of perpetual and universal obligation. To deny this is to contradict Christ himself (Matt. 5: 17-19).”⁹ According to John Patrick Daly, some of the most frequently quoted passages were Genesis, 9: 18-27; Exodus, 21: 2-6 and 20-21; and Leviticus, 25: 44-46.¹⁰ Chapter 9 of Genesis relates the story of Noah and his three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. According to this chapter, Noah condemned

Ham's people, the Canaanites, to a life of servitude under Shem. As Daly points out, "Southerners (and northerners) saw Genesis 9 as foreshadowing a sacred history of the United States: antebellum white Americans (Japheth) had enslaved Africans (Ham) and made space for themselves by occupying the tents of Native Americans (Shem)."¹¹ Chapter 21 of Exodus catalogued the purchasing of a Hebrew servant for a term of six years with the servant then having the option to extend the relationship for life. It also talks about the responsibility of masters in relation to the physical punishment of their servants. Chapter 25 of Leviticus discussed the buying of heathen bondmen, bondmaids, and their children, and the fact that the rights to these people were inheritable. According to Samuel B. How, the pastor of the First Reformed Dutch Church of New Brunswick, N.J., "Such servants were not liberated at the Jubilee. Slaves then were property that could be bought, and sold, and owned, and bequeathed as an inheritance."¹² Another minister, "[t]he Rev. Mr. James Smylie, a Presbyterian...[in] Mississippi," said that "To question, whether slaveholders or slave-buyers are of the devil, seems to me like calling in question, whether God is or is not a true witness....'The twenty-fifth chapter of Leviticus clearly and unequivocally establishes the fact, that slavery, or bondage, was sanctioned by God himself...; and that buying, selling, holding, and bequeathing slaves, as property, are regulations which were established by himself."¹³ While these arguments were compelling, proslavery clergy expanded their case after citing these three chapters of the Bible.

Samuel B. How also cited the thirty-fourth chapter of Jeremiah, in particular lines 8-22. He says that in this chapter "slavery is not represented as a blessing, but as a curse....If it had been designed as a blessing God would not have forbidden the Israelites [His chosen people] to make bond-servants of their brethren, while he permitted them to make bond-servants of the heathens; nor would he have so severely resented the conduct of the Jews, who, in the days of Jeremiah, compelled their brethren to continue in bondage longer than seven years."¹⁴ Since 17th and 18th century southerners saw the slaves of African descent as heathens, 19th century slaveholders and their apologists felt justified in keeping them in bondage.

Proslavery forces, like all American Protestants, generally focused more on the New Testament than the Old Testament. The arguments in favor of biblical slavery in the Old Testament needed to find reflections in the New Testament. In their own minds, the southerners thought they found a way to jump that hurdle. Biblical proslavery writers such as Thornton Stringfellow focused on Paul's letters. In Ephesians 6, Paul acknowledged that slavery and Christianity are compatible. Paul's approach created a New Testament link to several Old Testament passages. Proslavery apologists went on to emphasize other passages, such as Luke 7, in which Jesus praises the faith of a slaveholder. "The most popular biblical passage among antebellum southerners," according to historian, John Patrick Daly, "was also from Paul's letters." The passage discusses a letter that Paul wrote to Philemon indicating that he, Paul, had sent the runaway slave Onesimus back to his master. Proslavery ministers felt that this justified the South's stance on the morality of slavery, as well

as the sanctification for the Fugitive Slave Act, which required northerners to return runaway slaves, and the Constitution, which supported slavery through the Three-fifths Compromise.¹⁵ With this link between the Old and the New Testaments established, the southerners then moved on to other parts of the New Testament that they claimed supported slavery.

Taking them in the order in which they appear in the Bible, the first part of the New Testament that they used to justify slavery was 1 Corinthians, 7:2. The initial impression after reading this passage is that it does not apply at all to slavery. It states that “every man should have his own wife, and every woman her own husband.”

However, Samuel B. How gives the context to the argument. He states:

God has not given a law commanding either slaveholding or polygamy. Polygamy, like slaveholding, is an evil, and a result of the fall of man and his wickedness. It is, where it exists, a chief source of degradation, and of many evils to both the man and the woman; but especially to the woman, and is a gross abuse of the power which the man has over the woman. God permitted this evil to exist under his covenant, as he permitted, and as he now permits, some sins and errors to exist in his church, and in individual believers. But slaveholding is no where condemned as polygamy is, Mal. 2: 14, 15, where God complains of the cruelty and treachery of the Jews to the wives of their youth – that is, to their first wives, in divorcing them, and in taking other wives beside them. He calls their attention to the original law of marriage, as designed to be between one man and one woman, for though God could have created many women, he created but one.¹⁶

Thus, the argument came full circle. While polygamy and slavery were attacked by northern evangelicals as evils, only polygamy was condemned by the Bible.

The next New Testament passage that southern ministers invoked to support slavery was Colossians, 3:22. This line tells servants to obey their masters. Slave owners used this line frequently to not only justify slavery to other whites, but also to

indoctrinate their slaves with select, proslavery passages from the Bible. Also from Colossians, this time from 4:1, advocates of slavery emphasized that the Bible mentions the relationship between servants and masters. Likewise, Ephesians 6:5 addressed the same topic. The last of the New Testament passages that slaveholders used was 1 Peter, 18-21. This passage called on servants to “*be subject to your masters with all fear,*” whether or not they treat you well, and that if you do so, God will look favorably upon you because you are following in Jesus’ footsteps.¹⁷ The comparison between obeying slaves and Jesus not only benefited the masters in trying to control their slaves, it also gave comfort to the believing slaves who felt that if they could endure this harsh life, the comforts of Heaven would be extended to them.

While the southerners called upon a straight-forward, literal interpretation of a few, select Bible passages to promote slavery, the northerners used a more nuanced approach to invoke the authority of the Bible in order to denounce slavery. The first line of attack was to counter the proslavery interpretation of Bible passages. In response to the slaveholders’ use of Genesis, 9:18-27, antislavery forces denied the purported lineage of the slaves. An unknown “Citizen of Virginia” proclaimed:

Where the proof of the fulfillment of a prophecy is so very complete and satisfactory, it is useless to go into a long detail of other facts and circumstances still further to expose the falsity of the pretence under consideration. As the posterity of Canaan settled in Asia and not in Africa, there is not only no probability that the Africans descended from them, but the modern Syrians who did descend from them actually reside in Asia now, and are not negroes....That probably more of the posterity of Shem and Japhet[h], such as the ancient Greeks, and Romans, and modern English, Russians, Circassians, &c., have been enslaved or reduced to the condition of property than those of Ham have.¹⁸

Attacking the same passage in the Bible, George B. Cheever, D.D., scorned:

But here you aver that God devoted Ham to perpetual slavery. It is difficult to treat this ludicrous and wicked refuge of oppression either with patience or gravity. For, in the first place, it was not God, but Noah, who pronounced the curse; in the second place, the curse fell not upon Ham, but upon Canaan, whose descendents were as white the Hebrews or ourselves; in the third place, the descendents of Ham, as you claim the Africans to be, have nothing to do with this curse. Your pretended title to curse them is not in this deed; your pretension to a right from heaven to lay this curse upon them, and hold them as your property, is the wildest, vastest most sweeping and diabolical forgery ever conceived or committed.¹⁹

The Reverend Charles Elliott, D.D., put forth yet another argument against the proslavery interpretation of Genesis 9:18-27. He argued, "People who are subjugated and made tributary, must labor in order to pay tribute, and therefore, are the servants of their conquerors. This kind of servitude the Canaanites endured to a great extent. This is evidently the kind of servitude particularly predicted in Noah's curse; and our kind of servitude is not found in this ancient prediction."²⁰ These three countermands of the proslavery interpretation of Genesis, 9:18-27, show the difficulty that the antislavery forces faced. While proslavery southerners could simply pick a short passage, read it literally, and put it forth as an argument, antislavery people had to reach beyond the short passage to prove that, if taken literally, the passage would contradict the "spirit" of the Bible, or, they had to prove that the proslavery forces had misread the passage from the start. Thus, both sides of the slavery debate used Genesis, both sides interpreted it in a manner that reflected the rampant racism of the day, but both of them thought the other side was incorrectly using Genesis.

The debate over Genesis did not end there. Proslavery forces used Genesis, 13:2, 24, and 35:30, 43 to argue “that Abraham’s servants must have been slaves, because they are mentioned in connection with beasts and other property. But if this mode of reasoning be correct, then according to Gen xii. 5, Abraham’s wife Sarah, and Lot his nephew, must have been his slaves also. So according to Ex. xx. 17, and v. 21, all wives must have been slaves or property.”²¹ The attempt here is to carry the proslavery argument to its logical conclusion and thus render it ridiculous. Yet, at the time that this particular interpretation of this passage was attacked, it was not outside the realm of possibility that a large portion of the population would have agreed with the interpretation that wives and slaves were indeed both property.

Antislavery forces also focused sharply on the comparisons between biblical *servitude* and slavery as it was practiced in America during the antebellum period. William Ellery Channing posited, “Paul is said to sanction slavery. Let us now ask, What was slavery in the age of Paul? It was the slavery, not so much of black as of white men, not merely of barbarians, but of Greeks, not merely of the ignorant and debased, but of the virtuous, educated and refined. Piracy and conquest were the chief means of supplying the slave-market, and they heeded neither character nor condition.”²² The Reverend Charles Elliott found, “The treatment which the Hebrews received from the Egyptians, though less oppressive than that which our slaves receive, was, nevertheless, of the same nature which slaves every-where receive.” His fear was that the “judgments of God must sooner or later overtake those who are engaged in the sin of slavery.” He based this assumption on Ezekiel, 22:29,31: “The

people of the land have used oppression, and have vexed the poor and needy; yea, they have oppressed the stranger wrongfully. Therefore I have poured out my indignation upon them: I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath. Their own way I have recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord God.”²³ Antislavery Protestants felt that slavery was the most heinous sin and the one most likely to invoke God’s wrath: “From the prophetic and historical portions of the Scriptures we learn that more ancient nations were threatened and destroyed, for the commission of this sin, than for that of any other, - a most ominous warning to warning to our own nation.”²⁴ Likewise, George B. Cheever warned, “Thus saith the Lord, Ye have not hearkened unto me, in proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother, and every man to his neighbor; behold, I proclaim a liberty for you, saith the Lord, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine, and I will make you be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth. Jer. xxxiv. 17. These words constitute one of the most tremendous thunderbolts of God’s wrath against a nation’s sins ever issued from the quiver of the Almighty....The cause and occasion of it were the attempted establishment of slavery in the land, in place of free voluntary paid labor.”²⁵ These men, as well as others, feared that God’s retribution would not be concentrated exclusively on the South, if northerners were remiss in taking action against slavery.

Another popular argument put forth by antislavery ministers was that “slavery is contrary to the great law of love.” The reasoning being that the Law of Love (Leviticus, 19:18) states, “‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself;’ and, ‘Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.’ Neither color nor race

puts any man out of the category of my neighbor. You would not yourself be made a slave."²⁶ William Ellery Channing concurs, "Now, does not every man feel that nothing, nothing could induce him to consent to be a slave?...Can he pretend, then, that, in holding others in bondage, he does to his neighbor what he would that his neighbor should do to him?"²⁷ Therefore, according to the Law of Love, you are not entitled to make anyone else a slave.

Northern antislavery forces also marshaled Old Testament arguments:

All servants were to be taught the principles of religion, and admitted to all the rights and privileges of divine worship. The master was specially charged to bring his servants with him when he appeared before the Lord. (*See Gen. xvii: 12, and Deut. xvi: 9-14.*)

In the year of the jubilee all servants were to go free. This applied, not only to servants of the Hebrew stock, but to all others. 'Ye shall hallow the year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land, to all the inhabitants thereof.' (*Lev. xxv: 10.*)

Servants were permitted to live together in families, and their domestic relations were held sacred. (*See Lev. xix: 20.*)

The servant who was abused by his master, was to be set free. (*See Exod. xxi: 26, 27.*)

The master who violated the chastity of his female servant, was obligated to marry her, or let her go free. (*See Exod. xxi: 8-11, Deut. xxi: 10-14.*)

The servant who escaped from his master, was not to be delivered up. This regulation alone was sufficient to protect the servant from everything analogous to slavery. This is understood by some as applying only to those servants who escaped from the surrounding idolatrous nations, and sought a refuge among the Jews. But there is nothing in the passage itself, nor in the context, that favors such a construction. It is a meaning brought to the text, and not one deduced from it.²⁸

Thus, everything from not allowing slaves to practice Christianity, to holding slaves in perpetuity, to breaking up slave families by selling individuals, to physically and sexually abusing slaves, and to the enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Act, were all in violation of the teachings of the Bible.

Slaveholders were also charged with violating the Ten Commandments. According to Elliott, "Slavery involves a breach of all the ten commandments. It breaks the first, second, third, fourth, and ninth indirectly, and the other five directly."²⁹ And, "As Dr. [James] Duncan[, a reverend] long since observed, it is certainly a very strange circumstance that the tenth commandment (Ex. xx. 17; Deut. v. 21, &c) should ever have been pressed into the service of human slavery, because that practice is a direct violation or breach of this as well as the eighth commandment – it being impossible for one person to enslave another without first 'coveting,' or eagerly desiring what he knows is not morally and justly his own."³⁰ Yet again, both sides are choosing the same parts of the Bible to emphasize, but they are drawing different conclusions.

Adding to the condemnation of slavery, William Hosmer feels that "more than all, the obligations which the Bible lays upon every man, render slavery an utter impossibility. God claims supreme authority over every man, and has made it the duty of every man to obey him in all things."³¹ Consequently, "[t]he claim of slavery equals the claim of God. It claims the whole man – his soul, body, and strength – all he can possess, all he can acquire."³² No matter what authority the master claims over his slaves, "[t]he master cannot answer for his slave at the Judgment; 'for every one

of us shall give account of himself to God.’ This necessity of answering for himself at the bar of God, obliges every man to act an independent part – and the slave as much as other men.”³³ Following this line of reasoning, everyone will be called upon on Judgment Day to give a rendering of their life, and those who disobeyed the scriptures will be doomed to an eternity in Hell. The implication was not good for the slaveholders.

Dr. Bond, the editor of the *Christian Advocate and Journal*, one of the leading religious press journals, asserted “that the apostles did not make emancipation a condition of Church-fellowship.” In response, Hosmer retorts, “Neither did they make abstinence from any other crimes a condition of Church-fellowship. Nothing is said of murder, perjury, burglary, counterfeiting, and are we to understand that because these are not specifically prohibited, men who commit such things are suitable for Church-membership?...Christianity aimed to establish universal holiness, and it was quite sufficient to lay down the rule, and cite a few cases, as mere illustrations of its application. A system that teaches that it is wrong to steal even the smallest sum, surely cannot be considered as teaching that it is right to steal a thousand dollars. Nor do we need an express rule on the subject. So of emancipation.”³⁴ The Reverend Charles Elliott addressed the same issue. He states, “All the component parts of slavery are condemned by the apostles. What is slavery but a compilation made up of theft, robbery, injustice, oppression, and the like? And what is more clearly forbidden in holy Scripture than these?”³⁵ Again, northern antislavery forces based more on the spirit of the Bible than the literal word.

The proslavery and antislavery biblical arguments would be useless if they fell on deaf ears. In America at this time, this was not a likely scenario. According to the thinking of the time, God played an active role in society.³⁶ This providential ideology, along with fears about a changing, industrializing society, compelled an increase in church membership during this period. Philip Shaw Paludin found that “membership in churches grew in America from one person in fifteen to one in seven.”³⁷ While Steven E. Woodworth, comes up with a similar percentage of church members, he reminds his readers that church *membership* is not the entire equation. He estimates that approximately four million Americans, or about one in seven, were actually members of a church on the eve of the Civil War. But, he cautions that this number does not come close to indicating the total number of people who were attending church. Woodworth says that you have to remain cognizant of the reality that most Protestant churches at the time typically only enrolled adults as members. Given the reality that a large percentage of Americans at the time were not adults, and thus not eligible for membership, strictly focusing on membership numbers is misleading. Even though many of these youth were not eligible for membership, they would be present at church with their parents – and many of them would grow up and go on to become the soldiers who fought in the Civil War. In addition to the youth, there were also large numbers of people who would attend church for an extended period of time before electing whether or not to become members. If you take these two large groups into consideration, then the sphere of influence of the church expands tremendously. Woodworth estimates, “Had all the Protestant Church

buildings in America been filled on any given Sunday morning in 1860, more than two-thirds of the nation's population would have been in attendance."³⁸ With such a large percentage of Americans exposed to the messages of the churches, those messages cannot be ignored when trying to understand the thinking of Americans on the eve of, and during, the Civil War.

Many evangelical ideas pervaded the entire nation. As was mentioned previously, most Americans believed that they were God's Chosen People living in God's Chosen Land. Americans saw their nation as "the chosen vessel of the millennium" and that they were "the modern successor to the ancient Jewish state. Herman Melville, far from the orthodox community, indicated the pervasiveness of this sentiment when he observed, 'We Americans are the peculiar, chosen people – the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world.'"³⁹ Providential ideology had reached America with the arrival of some of the first Puritan immigrants. Throughout the colonial period these thoughts remained, but at times they lay somewhat dormant as Americans labored under the yoke of the British government. Once the Americans successfully rejected the British government, they could again focus on creating a heaven on earth. Americans were sure that God had blessed them and given them a special mission. What else would explain how a small force of militia could defeat, or at least fight to a draw, one of the most powerful nations in the world? Americans saw the Revolution as a bellwether for the greatness America was destined to achieve. Later generations would see the Civil War as the second American revolution.

To carry out their mission, Americans believed it was going to be necessary to establish a framework around which the nation was to operate. According to James Moorhead, "This weaving of secular and religious motifs into one holy history became commonplace after independence. From Ezra Stiles's *The United States Elevated to Glory and Honor* (1783) to Philip Schaff's *America* (1855), the advance of God's kingdom was intimately connected with the progress of democracy, and both were believed best exemplified in the United States. As one clergyman put the matter, America was leading the world toward a 'millennium of republicanism.'⁴⁰ And, the world was noticing. In the first half of the nineteenth century there were a plethora of foreigners who toured America to try to gain a sense of the pulse of America. People the world over recognized something special about America. Alexis de Tocqueville is the preeminent example of such commentators.

Tocqueville arrived in America in the spring of 1831. One of his very first observations about Americans was that "Americans were a profoundly religious people, and during his travels he asked scores of ministers and laymen why that was so. He always received the same reply: religion was strong in America because it was necessary, and it was necessary because Americans were free. A society with fixed ranks and privileges controls its members and has no need for religion. But a free society must teach men to govern themselves, and there is no greater inducement to self-restraint than belief in God. 'Despotism,' Tocqueville concluded, 'may govern without faith, but liberty cannot.'⁴¹ Given the apparent inseparableness of religion and politics in America, "What surprised Tocqueville most was that the separation of

churches from state support...had not removed them from the political mainstream; *au contraire*, it had greatly augmented their influence. Religion 'never intervenes directly in the government of American society,' he noted, but it 'should be considered as the first of their political institutions' because it 'singularly facilitates their use thereof.'"⁴² Tocqueville, however, was not the only one to notice the influence of religion on American society.

While Tocqueville spent less than two years in America before he wrote his influential book, *Democracy in America*, "Francis J. Grund, an Austrian journalist, spent ten years in America before publishing *The Americans in Their Moral, Social, and Political Relations*, in 1837." Both men came to similar conclusions about America. After ten years of study, "Grund reported that he had found no village in the United States without its church, no denomination of Christians in any city without its house of prayer, no congregation in any of the new settlements without the spiritual consolation of a pastor.' Such pervasiveness convinced him, as it had Tocqueville, that Christianity was a dynamic force for social cohesion in the United States, affecting not only private behavior but the conduct of public affairs."⁴³ Karl Anton Postl, from Prague, arrived in America in 1823 for a five year journey and "found that beyond all constraints of habit, law, or even patriotism, the tie binding Americans 'beyond the reach of all contingencies,' a tie not 'affected by the workings of ...fancy or by an overruling power, a tie to which, under every circumstance, [they] will shew proper respect and deference' was the Christian religion."⁴⁴ America, it appeared,

could not exist without religion. The religion that Americans overwhelmingly practiced was evangelical Christianity.

In the early part of the nineteenth century conservative theologians, both North and South were united around the issue of evangelical Christianity. Americans were so culturally unified, especially religiously, that it was hard to discern any differences between southerners and northerners when they spoke using religious and moral language.⁴⁵ Neither side wanted to do anything to disrupt the increasing influence of religion in America. Like the Founding Fathers, antebellum theologians tried early on to deflect the controversial issue of slavery. In both cases, those with the power to address the issue deliberately chose to ignore it whenever possible because they were afraid it would tear their constituents apart. Politicians attempted to walk the tight rope by compromising. They founded the nation partially on the shaky grounds of the Three-fifths Compromise and the short-term fix of protecting the slave trade until 1808. Theologians however, by the very nature of their work, were not able to compromise on such weighty doctrinal issues.

Despite the apparent ties that bound Americans together, America by the 1830s was showing signs of divergent trends. While the religious text, the Bible, was the same throughout the land, the use of it was different. This shaped the thinking in both the North and the South. The revival that began in America in 1831 was profoundly critical to the eventual breakup of the Union. Paul E. Johnson credits "Gilbert Barnes, a historian of the antislavery movement writing in the 1930s," with bringing this revival to the attention of scholars. According to Johnson, "Barnes

wanted to explain why, in the 1830s, critics of slavery rejected gradualist techniques, recruited thousands of new supporters, and attacked the South's peculiar institution as a national evil that demanded immediate abolition. He analyzed the rhetoric and tactics of the movement and the sources of its support, and argued convincingly that antislavery immediatism was a direct outgrowth of the revival of 1830-1831."⁴⁶ It was the Second Great Awakening, Johnson feels, "more than any other event, [which] marked the acceptance of an activist and millennialist evangelicalism as the faith of the northern middle class."⁴⁷ The combination of activism and millennialism became a poisonous mixture for relations between the North and the South.

Northerners tended to view God's handiwork and concern for humanity at both the societal and the individual level. Southerners, on the other hand, felt that God was more concerned with operating on the individual level, exclusively. According to Richard E. Berringer, et al, the conclusion that can be drawn from this is that "for the northerner, society needed to be perfected; for the southerner, society, if already as perfect as man could make it, needed to remain stable while each individual worked out his own salvation."⁴⁸ This distinction between the sections of course added to sectional animosity because northerners felt they needed to improve society by abolishing slavery, while southerners felt that as long as they treated their slaves in a Christian-like manner, there should be no concern about their salvation.

This argument extended into the two sections' interpretations of millennialism. Millennialism is the belief that Jesus Christ will rule the earth for a thousand years. Jesus' thousand-year reign is anticipated by Christians as a joyous

divided them by 1861. What seemingly was a non-religious topic – what was the best labor system to achieve American economic superiority – was turned into a religious debate because nearly all Americans felt that Providence would intercede on the side that was righteous. In addition, as Eugene Genovese argues, “The great divergence of southern thought from northern and transatlantic bourgeois thought, including its bourgeois-conservative variant, appeared in the confrontation with the specific nature of freedom and its implications for the present and future, most significantly the conditions of labor.”⁵¹ Northerners believed that their system of free labor was more in line with Christian thought and the ideals that America was founded upon, while the South, using biblical arguments, was certain that their system – although they refused to refer to it as a system at all, but rather a *peculiar institution* – was sanctioned by God, as well as the Founding Fathers.

The North’s rationale for supporting the concept of free labor can best be explained by a close examination of what Max Weber has labeled “the Protestant Ethic.” He claims that “in modern times the Occident has developed...a very different form of capitalism which has appeared nowhere else: the rational capitalistic organization of (formally) free labor.”⁵² The basis of this system is “one’s duty in a calling.”⁵³ In America, this idea became synonymous with the Puritans of New England. The reasoning for emphasizing the calling is because “[c]apitalism cannot make use of the labour of those who practise the doctrine of undisciplined *liberum arbitrium*, any more than it can make use of the business man who seems absolutely unscrupulous in his dealings with others.”⁵⁴ Additionally, “the real moral objection is

to relaxation in the security of possession, the enjoyment of wealth with the consequence of idleness and the temptations of the flesh, above all of distraction from the pursuit of a righteous life.”⁵⁵ Weber claims that the distinction between the North and South goes back to settling of the nation. He says, “The early history of the North American Colonies is dominated by the sharp contrast of the adventurers, who wanted to set up plantations with the labour of indentured servants, and live as feudal lords, and the specifically middle-class outlook of the Puritans.”⁵⁶ Others concur with Weber interpretation. Anthony Giddens, in his introduction to Weber’s book, declares, “The accumulation of wealth was morally sanctioned in so far as it was combined with a sober, industrious career; wealth was condemned only if employed to support a life of idle luxury or self-indulgence.”⁵⁷ George B. Cheever charges, “Indeed the demoralizing effect of this system in making labor disgraceful, where God has made it honorable, and in taking from it its right to a place of nobleness and respect in human society, is worse than its influence in defrauding independent laborers of their just adequate recompense.”⁵⁸ Although he indicates that the reasoning might be too simple, James H. Moorhead says, “Some historians still suggest that fundamental aspects of sectionalism may be traced to a prior intellectual cleavage – an industrious North disciplined in the Protestant ethic set against a ‘lazy South’ unfamiliar with institutionalized Puritan nurture.”⁵⁹

Many Americans lamented this cleavage, and some feared the retribution of God if it was not rectified. Some northerners, however, were not so concerned. The Reverend Sefferenas Ottman of Branchport, New York was one such individual. He

felt the system of human bondage would die soon whether the Union persisted or not. 'In the Union or out of it, Slavery must die. God has written upon it its inevitable doom; and universal civilization has pronounced against it.'"⁶⁰ Horace Bushnell inquired, "'Why should I be contriving the abolition of slavery...when the Almighty Himself has a silent campaign of inevitable doom against it, marching on the awful census tramp of South and North to push it away forever.' Bushnell heard the 'census trap' in the 1860 figures, which proved to his satisfaction that slavery was an unprofitable, decaying institution destined to be floated away by an influx of Northern free labor."⁶¹ Another example is the Methodist clergyman Gilbert Haven: "At the election of James Buchanan...Haven...argued that slavery 'is a bankrupt swindler, who will have to abandon his show of wealth, unless he can extend his villainies....They [the planters] must grow. Land, land, they must have to be rifled of its virgin sweets and then abandoned.' The corollary was plain: resist the monster slave power, and the economic as well as the moral laws of nature will suffocate the beast." Moorhead warns however, "the profitability of slavery continues, of course, to provoke lively debate down to the most recent work by [Robert W.] Fogel and [Stanley L.] Engerman; and the question does not yet appear conclusively settled."⁶² Therefore, historians continue to debate whether or not, left to its own devices, slavery would have withered on the vine.

Like their counterparts in the North, southerners were also heavily influenced by religion and thought that God was on their side. John Patrick Daly attributes this to "[a] generation of ministers [who] prior to 1860 had told white southerners that they

were God's favored people and that slavery was a moral institution."⁶³ Given this assumption, southerners felt that their way of life was justifiable to God and in line with the teachings of the Bible. James Henley Thornwell imparts, "The essential difference betwixt free labour and slave labour is, that one is rendered in consequence of a contract; the other is rendered in consequence of a command. The laborers in each case are equally moral, equally responsible, equally men. But they work upon different principles."⁶⁴ Southerners thought that they had "a perfect labor system."⁶⁵ Southerners were aware of the potential good of free labor. As Daly writes, "southerners celebrated the way free labor effectively taught individuals 'the necessity of labor' and demanded that they build 'character' by pursuing 'constant exertions.' Where the free laborer was moral, he remained productive, and only then did he obtain superiority."⁶⁶ In order for a free labor system to work, the workers needed to be self-disciplined. The South was not willing to concede the success of this system in the North.

Besides a perfect labor system, the South also thought they had a perfect religion. They felt that their brethren in the North were not successfully following the teachings of the Bible. *DeBow's Review* claimed, "In religious sentiment the South stands as a unit. Its pure doctrines are linked inseparably, though not by legal constraint, with the laws of the land. No isms and schisms rankle our hearts. Christ is acknowledged as the common bond of union."⁶⁷ According to Bertram Wyatt-Brown: "Clerical defenders of slavery knew that few outside the South were shaken by their plodding justifications, despite alleged biblical foundations for southern

precedent. In most northern churches, the spirit rather than the letter of the Old and New Dispensations served as an answer to the literal analogies that proslavery clergy drew between Mosaic servitude and African-American bondage.”⁶⁸ This difference in religious practice – interpretation versus literalism – lead to charges and counter-charges of corrupting the Word of God for personal gain. Both sides began to preach that *theirs* was the true religion. Some southerners went so far as to even claim that *they* “were the true descendants of the Puritans and champions of ‘orthodox and evangelical religion.’”⁶⁹ To New Englanders, who were proud of their heritage, this southern claim appeared blasphemous.

The southerners however, did not rest their case with the Puritans. They went on to attack other northern religious practices. Daly says, “Proslavery evangelicals arrived at the most concise diagnosis of the general disease behind northern outbreaks of insanity and greed: ‘Isms.’ Abolitionism was simply the worst manifestation of this impious breed of ‘modern speculation,’ as James H. Thornwell labeled it in 1841. The definitive list of ‘isms’ in the 1850s usually included at least (in order of most frequent appearance) atheism, agrarianism, socialism, Fourierism, Mormonism, red republicanism, communism, and perfectionism.”⁷⁰ Wyatt-Brown adds to that list, “Millerism, Comeouterism, Universalism, or...an American edition of German Rationalism.”⁷¹ Southerners could not understand why northern conservatives could not support their side. Both groups feared liberal theology, Enlightenment radicalism, and the general breakdown of society. While southerners deemed the free labor system of the North responsible for these problems because it “breeds egotism and

extols personal license at the expense of all God-ordained authority," their conservative counterparts in the North were not willing to recognize free labor as the root of the evils of society. Southerners, brandishing their own egotism, argued, "In truth, the South stands virtually alone in the transatlantic world as a bastion of Christian social order because it rests upon a Christian social system. If, as you say, the world needs a social and moral order at once progressive yet conservative, dynamic yet regulated, republican yet immune to democratic demagoguery, then our system, not yours, must be looked to as a model."⁷² This argument was not enough to persuade northerners to support the South's system of slavery. While they might not agree with all that was going on in the North, they were certain that the proslavery religion that the South was promoting was not divinely sanctioned.

In the two decades prior to the Civil War, the animosity between the two sections – North and South – grew. A great deal of the ill will revolved around religion. Most Americans truly believed that America was chosen by God to be the moral lamp for the rest of the world. Therefore, anything that detracted from America's exalted position was looked upon with scorn. Clergy from both sections had a tendency to look down upon the people of the other section. Preachers from both sections felt that the other section represented the worst that America had to offer. Southerners claimed that the North was a lawless territory where everything was accepted on an equal footing. One of the southern religious journals stated, "our societies enjoy profound tranquility so far as doctrinal speculations or pseudo reform of organic principles of government are concerned."⁷³ This kind of strong conviction

was not confined to the South. In what would be a prelude to the coming events, “some Northern clergy looked upon the South as such a distasteful part of the Union that they advocated the Garrisonian position whereby the North should separate itself from the South.”⁷⁴ It was not long before the United States splintered into two rival sections.

Antebellum Americans look to the word of God to justify their political and social views.⁷⁵ A good example is the abolition movement. Although the movement claimed adherents who considered themselves to be irreligious, it was often the adherents who *were* religious who set the tone for the movement.⁷⁶ The most extreme example is, of course, John Brown. According to James H. Moorhead, “Many cheered John Brown as a martyr or at least accorded him the accolade bestowed by Henry Boynton Smith – ‘a conscientious monomaniac’ – but virtually no one was prepared to launch an army into the South or to foment slave insurrection.”⁷⁷ John G. Fee is purported to have said, “‘Let the honest John Browns go down South with money, and an impression can be made upon the slaveholders.’ What was wanted ‘was more John Browns – not of his manner of action, but John Browns with his motives and spirit’ of consecration: not to go with carnal weapons, but with spiritual men who, ‘with Bibles in their hands, and tears in their eyes, will beseech men to be reconciled to God.’”⁷⁸ While many within the abolitionist movement did not claim kinship with Brown, it was not his religious beliefs, but his actions, that they found repugnant.

Most recent scholars of religion and the Civil War emphasize that religion was a strong influence in the culture and politics of antebellum America⁷⁹ There is an important distinction to be made between being the “custodian of the popular conscience” and the progenitor of the popular conscience. Few clergy gain a strong following by being on the cutting edge of religious thought. As George M. Marsden points out, ““The republican ideology demands that denominations follow, rather than lead, their constituencies. If the constituency is significantly divided, as is nearly bound to be the case on crucial social issues, effective denominational reform is impossible. Dissenters from the majority opinion, viewing the church as a free agency, which they have every right to leave, in the face of institutional pressure will simply leave.””⁸⁰ Some clergy were upset with this fact and denounced their fellow clergymen. One such example is the Unitarian minister from Boston, Theodore Parker, who was a strong antislavery advocate. Parker had grown “impatient with his fellow northern ministers for their failure to take a bold and forthright stand against slavery. He accused them of being reflectors of current opinion rather than shapers. ‘Once the clergy were the masters of the people,’ he affirmed, ‘and the authors of public opinion to a great degree; now they are chiefly the servants of the people, and but seldom aspire to lead it, except in the matters of their own craft, such as the technicalities of a sect, or the form of a ritual.’”⁸¹ An unknown citizen of Virginia, writing in 1845, evokes the same lament as Parker. The person says:

To preserve obedience, and prevent disobedience to this great law, the true church is the great worldly agent appointed by God himself, see Matt. V. 13, 16, &c. From the various descriptions given of it in the Scriptures, we find, that by its own constitution it embodies the

elements of all reformatory agencies, being of itself a Bible, Tract, Missionary, Temperance, Antislavery, and Moral Reform Society, and is intended to perform all the functions of these agencies. But the very necessity of them, separate from the church, proves the melancholy fact, that the latter, instead of taking the lead, is following in the track of moral reform!! The pulpit is the place specially appointed by God, from which to attack slavery and other public vices, but it is not used for that purpose, because it has been corrupted by them.⁸²

Although strong in their conviction, Parker and the anonymous Virginian were in the minority when it came to their thoughts on the role of the clergy.

People generally attend churches in which they feel a degree of comfort and familiarity. Since “popular preachers, in particular, are popular because they mirror the opinions, hopes, fears, prejudices, likes, and dislikes of a significant number of people....Sermons...are documents which reflect current thinking, problems, and issues that occupy the attention and emotions of a large number of people.”⁸³ This is just as true when you move away from the cities to the rural areas that may not have had a congregation large enough to support their own preacher. In these “isolated rural areas itinerant ministers often constituted the major source of information about the outside world, and the Bible was the source of the only abstract ideas many people in these areas encountered” which allowed “them an unrivaled power to shape moral discourse.”⁸⁴ So, whether preaching in the city or in the backwoods, clergy helped to shape and reinforce the thoughts of antebellum Americans both North and South.

As it turned out, America’s churches became the bellwether for the nation as a whole. In the first three decades of the nineteenth century, church leaders tried to ignore, or quietly deal with, contentious issues. To do this they attempted to insulate

the church from political matters. Gardiner Shattuck explained, "In order to allow Southerners to manage their secular business without interference from reformers in the North, many Southern evangelicals now argued that the church had no right involving itself with the 'things which are Caesar's.' The state had a God-given sanction to govern only society, and the church had a similar sanction to superintend only the spiritual sphere."⁸⁵ Reflective of this line of thinking, when the Methodist Episcopal Church met in Georgia in 1837, they passed one resolution that said "that slavery, as it exists in the United States, *is not a moral evil*," and a second one that stated, "[W]e view *slavery* as a civil and domestic institution, and one with which, as ministers of Christ, we have nothing to do, farther than to ameliorate the condition of the slave, by endeavoring to impart to him and his master the benign influence of the religion of Christ, and aiding both on their way to heaven."⁸⁶ This line of thinking, although conciliatory, did not appeal to a wide audience.

Instead, the majority of Americans argued that it was within the purview of the churches to discuss the issue of slavery. George B. Cheever, a Doctor of Divinity, claimed, "The people love to hear God's word demonstrating and rebuking the iniquity of slavery; and it is only crooked politicians, and political Christians, and preachers standing in awe of them, who cry out against it, and call it political preaching. This vulgar watchword is losing all its terrors, and begins to be, as it deserves to be, thoroughly despised."⁸⁷ William Hosmer agrees, "[I]t may be said, 'this belongs to Caesar – the Church has nothing to do with the evil.' We deny it utterly. The Church has everything to do with slavery, if slavery is a sin. Caesar

belongs to Christ. Sins of the State are to be reprov'd and extirpated as truly as the sins of individuals. It is not enough for the Church to say, 'it is the State, it is the state,' and deem her own responsibility ended. The State must be rebuked for its wickedness."⁸⁸ In what became a prophetic statement, Hosmer added, "the church must keep her armor on, and push the battle to the gate."⁸⁹

By 1837, the churches began to break apart into sectional factions. Goen finds, "The argument in the churches developed in essentially the same way it would in the political arena: moderates counseled silence for the sake of 'peace' in hopes that the divisive issue would somehow go away; disunionists urged schism for the sake of freedom either to reject or to preserve slavery; and ultraists demanded precipitate action without regard for the social and institutional realities of the situation."⁹⁰ There was, at this time, a growing sense amongst the southerners that "their way of worship and life [were] threatened. Separation was their answer to save their 'purer' faith and 'higher' civilization."⁹¹

The first denomination to break apart was the Presbyterians in 1837. The Presbyterians were the denomination with the strictest emphasis on theology and education.⁹² On the surface the split was between the Old School conservatives and the more liberal New School. But, slavery played a role because, as Daly finds, "Many southern Presbyterians who were sympathetic to New School positions on church issues went with the Old School in the 1837 split when it was clear that most antislavery forces were in the New School faction."⁹³ This fact bore itself out when, after the separation, the Old School basically ignored the slavery issue while "[i]n the

new school the issue of slavery was debated constantly. Several strong resolutions condemning slavery were [eventually] passed, and finally, in 1857, a split between the northern and southern branches of the new school took place.”⁹⁴ The earlier split between the Old School and the New School was more significant as the *first* split than as a schism that reached into many households because at the time the Presbyterians represented approximately 12 percent of the churches in the South. By contrast, the Methodists held approximately 45 percent of the Southern churches and the Baptists 37 percent. In an ironic twist of military terminology, Eugene Genovese comments, “the Presbyterian split of 1837 was a shot across the bow. The direct and heavy fire came in 1844 and 1845, with the formal split in the Methodist and Baptist churches over slavery.”⁹⁵ Even though the Presbyterian split was not statistically significant, its ramifications were monumental.

At the time of the Presbyterian split, many within the denomination feared – correctly – that they may have opened Pandora’s Box. Charles Hodge, an Old School member, “warned that the breakup of the churches could lead to the dismembering of the Union. Like [Amasa] Converse, he blamed the abolitionists; their stigmatizing of slavery as a sin and a crime ‘must operate to produce the disunion of the states, and the division of all ecclesiastical societies....We shall become two nations in feeling, which must soon render us two nations in fact.’”⁹⁶ Furthering the evidence, Goen posits, “On the eve of the pre-Assembly caucus in 1837, William S. Plummer set forth the issue in apocalyptic terms:

Should the Assembly...legislate and decide that slaveholding is a sin...the Southern churches would all feel themselves instructed by the

Apostle Paul to 'withdraw from such' [1 Tim. 6:5]....Thus our church would be rent asunder....Then nothing is left...except to...rend the star-spangled banner in twain....Soon the hostile forces will be marshaled against each other, and the Potomac will be dyed with blood....Can it be that the righteous Judge of all the earth has so dreadful a controversy with the Presbyterian Church of the United States as to give her up to the folly and madness of being the first to hoist the gate and let the flood of desolation roll in?⁹⁷

Many in the Presbyterian Church were certain that retribution would be coming from God. Depending on the person's perspective, retribution would be meted out to either the North, the South, or according to some, both.

The next denomination to split over the slavery issue was the Methodists. While the Methodists had, early on, taken an antislavery stance, John B. Boles argues that their desire to become a large, influential denomination forced them to rescind this stance. The Methodists felt "there primary mission was to spread the gospel message to all God's creatures and rightly recognized to be labeled as abolitionists would deprive them of most evangelistic opportunities in the South."⁹⁸ This uneasy peace did not last long however, "Despite the efforts of the centrist ecclesiocrats to suppress the issue, slavery was too all-encompassing to keep off the agenda of the General Conference forever. When the question did come squarely before the General Conference, by a certain perverse logic it was almost predictable that Methodists should react to unreconciled conflict by separating; and given the national extent of their connection, it was equally logical that their separation should set off alarming repercussions throughout the entire political union."⁹⁹ The breaking point came at the General Conference in 1844. At this Conference a debate ensued about the fate of Bishop James Andrew of Georgia. Andrew had acquired slaves through marriage.

The holding of slaves was not illegal, and it did not violate church rules because the rules allowed for the holding of slaves by ministers in states that had laws forbidding manumission. Andrew showed a willingness to resign to quell the controversy. His fellow clergy from the South however, urged him to fight because they “could argue that his slaves were not sought or bought but bestowed, as if by God’s will and not Andrew’s intention.”¹⁰⁰ At this point, both Northern and Southern factions stood their ground. Both sides had come to the conclusion that it was in their own best interest to fight it out, even if the ultimate outcome was a split in the church.¹⁰¹ Since technically Andrew was in the right, the northern Methodists had to take a different approach. Their argument rested on the fact that as a slaveholding bishop, Andrew would not be accepted by northern congregants; therefore, his effectiveness as a church leader would be limited. Goen reports, “After almost two weeks of strenuous debate, the decisive vote came on a resolution stating that since Bishop Andrew’s ‘connection’ with slavery ‘will greatly embarrass the exercise of his office...if not in some places entirely prevent it,’ he should ‘desist from the exercise of his office so long as this impediment remains.’ The resolution was adopted by a vote of 110 to 68 along manifestly sectional lines.”¹⁰² The die was cast. The vote signaled the breakup of the Methodists along sectional lines.

The same foreboding that accompanied the breakup of the Presbyterians began to be reflected by the Methodists as well. On one of the leading religious journals, the *Southern Christian Advocate*, claimed, “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 be once 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.”¹⁰³ Historian, “Clement Eaton...remarked that ‘ever since 1844 when the Methodist church had broken asunder over the slavery question, the mystic bonds of sentiment holding the Union together had begun to snap.’”¹⁰⁴ Despite the pleas for reconciliation, the Methodists in the North and the South went their separate ways.

The last of the major denomination to split over the slavery issue was the Baptists. Like the Presbyterians and the Methodists, the Baptists recognized that the slavery issue was contentious and that if the churches broke up along sectional lines, the Union itself would be threatened. Goen finds, “Taking note of the rising conflict over slavery and hoping to forestall its divisive effects, the Executive Committee of the American Baptist Home Mission Society issued a position paper in February 1841. This circular warned of evil consequences that might come from dragging ‘secular conflicts’ into the churches arena and pled for ‘a union of hearts, even where there may not be entire union of views.’...The committee remarked *en passant* that ‘as patriots, we must cherish religious union as one among the strongest, although not the most prominent, of the bonds that hold together the Union of these States.’”¹⁰⁵ To clear up any confusion about where their northern brethren stood on the slavery issue, Alabama Baptists, in 1844, “addressed a formal resolution to the Acting Board of the General Convention (a small executive committee located in Boston) demanding ‘the distinct, explicit avowal that slaveholders are eligible, and entitled, equally with non-

slaveholders...to receive any agency, mission, or other appointment' under the Convention." Although dismayed at being presented a hypothetical situation based on such a controversial issue, the response was a forthright denial of the southerners' resolution.¹⁰⁶ Norton says, "From this point on relations between southern Baptists and the national structure grew more troubled. In the spring of 1845 enthusiastic delegates from eight southern states and the District of Columbia met in Augusta, Georgia, and organized the Southern Baptist Convention to carry on the benevolent and missionary work of the Baptist churches in the South."¹⁰⁷ The ecclesiastical splits in the churches were complete.

However, the arguments did not end with the issue of slavery. When the churches broke apart there were a number of legal issues that had to be resolved. Charles Reagan Wilson found that even though slavery was a very divisive issue within the churches, "the aftermath of schism made it worse, with ugly fights over who would control church buildings and assets and who would have territorial rights in border areas. The church schisms unleashed angers, fears, and even violence, which further divided the nation's religious people and set the tone for eventual political division."¹⁰⁸ It seemed as if no issue could be settled amicably.

With the splits in the churches complete – and bitter – the sectional churches began to solidify their arguments. They no longer had to concern themselves with being conciliatory. In his study of the causes of the Civil War, John Patrick Daly points out, "Proslavery then became even more popular after 1846, when evangelicals directed their messages to southerners from exclusively southern pulpits," and

consequently, "many southern evangelicals...turned the abolitionists and then the North into heretical bogeymen and fodder for scathing sermons. Evangelicals thereby built the cultural foundations for secession and civil war over the course of the generation prior to 1860."¹⁰⁹ Eugene Genovese concurs with Daly's analysis of the South and adds, "The abolitionists were denouncing southerners, as well as conservative northerners, as 'so-called Christians,' taking for granted that real Christians could neither be slaveholders nor fail to see that slavery was inherently sinful;" and, he concludes, "one after another, the southern divines insisted that their struggle against abolitionists and the free-soilers was nothing less than a struggle between Christ and anti-Christ."¹¹⁰ Although this rhetoric may seem harsh, and even over the top, in the world of religion, people deal with moral absolutes. There is no dealing with the Devil. The mentality often becomes: If you are not with us, you are against us.¹¹¹

So, as 1861 approached, America found itself irreparably divided. The North was certain that God sanctioned their system of free labor. Likewise, the South assured itself that Providence was on their side. If the issue of labor systems had remained strictly political, it would have probably been possible for the two sides to come to some sort of compromise. However, once religion was interjected, there was no compromising. The righteous can never compromise with the infidels. Both sides, of course, labeled themselves as the righteous and the other side as the infidels. While few Americans would argue against the notion that America was the land of God's chosen people, the proper way to fulfill that role tore the Union asunder in 1861. It

would take the sacrifices of hundreds of thousands of Americans, both North and South, to decide the direction in which America was headed. From the sectional rivalries of the antebellum period – which led to the breakup of the Presbyterians, Baptists and Methodists – straight through to the Civil War and beyond, religion played a major role.

Chapter One Endnotes

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- ³ C.C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schism and the Coming of the American Civil War* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), 43.
- ⁴ Kevin Phillips, *The Cousins' Wars: Religion, Politics and the Triumph of Anglo-America* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 358.
- ⁵ Goen, 154.
- ⁶ James H. Moorhead, *American Apocalypse: Yankee Protestants and the Civil War, 1860-1869* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 11-12.
- ⁷ Woodworth, 13.
- ⁸ Goen, 128.
- ⁹; Samuel Blanchard How, *Slaveholding Not Sinful: Slavery, the Punishment of Man's Sin, Its Remedy, the Gospel of Christ* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 109.
- ¹⁰ John Patrick Daly, "Holy War: Southern Religion and the Road to War and Defeat, 1831-1865" *North and South* Sept 2003, Vol 6, Num 6, 38-39; How, 113-114.
- ¹¹ Daly, "Holy War," 36-37.
- ¹² How, 114.
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- ¹⁵ Daly, "Holy War," 36.
- ¹⁶ How, 128.
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- ¹⁸ *A Condensed Anti-Slavery Bible Argument; By a Citizen of Virginia* (New York: S.W. Benedict, 1845, 25.

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- ¹⁹ George B. Cheever, D.D., *God Against Slavery: And the Freedom and Duty of the Pulpit to Rebuke It, As a Sin Against God* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 100.
- ²⁰ Elliott, Vol. 2, 259.
- ²¹ *A Condensed Anti-Slavery Bible Argument*, 36.
- ²² William Ellery Channing, "Slavery," in *Religious Issues in American History*, Ed. Edwin Scott Gaustad (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 161.
- ²³ Elliott, vol. 1, 260, vol. 2, 358.; Cheever, 107.
- ²⁴ *A Condensed Anti-Slavery Bible Argument*, 55.
- ²⁵ Cheever, 72.
- ²⁶ Cheever, vol. 1, 270; Cheever, 94.
- ²⁷ Channing, 162.
- ²⁸ William Hosmer, *Slavery and the Church* (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries, 1970), 47-48.
- ²⁹ Elliott, vol. 1, 310.
- ³⁰ *A Condensed Anti-Slavery Bible Argument*, 38-39.
- ³¹ Hosmer, 28.
- ³² Elliott, vol. 1, 306.
- ³³ Hosmer, 184.
- ³⁴ Hosmer, 181.
- ³⁵ Elliott, vol. 2, 267.
- ³⁶ David B. Chesebrough, *"God Ordained This War": Sermons on the Sectional Crisis, 1830-1865* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 5.
- ³⁷ Philip Shaw Paludin, "Religion and the American Civil War," in *Religion and the American Civil War*, Ed. Randall M. Miller, et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 21.
- ³⁸ Woodworth, 26.
- ³⁹ Moorhead, 43-44.
- ⁴⁰ Moorhead, 5.
- ⁴¹ Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeepers Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 136.
- ⁴² Goen, 29-30.

⁴³ Goen, 30.

⁴⁴ Goen, 28.

⁴⁵ John Patrick Daly, *When Slavery Was Called Freedom: Evangelicalism, Proslavery, and the Causes of the Civil War* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 2.

⁴⁶ Johnson, 5.

⁴⁷ Johnson, 5.

⁴⁸ Richard E. Berringer, Herman Hattaway, Archer Jones, and William N. Still, Jr., *Why the South Lost the Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 93.

⁴⁹ Berringer, et al, 94.

⁵⁰ Moorhead, 9.

⁵¹ Eugene Genovese, *The Slaveholder's Dilemma: Freedom and Progress in Southern Conservative Thought, 1820-1860* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1992), 34.

⁵² Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976), 21.

⁵³ Weber, 54.

⁵⁴ Weber, 57.

⁵⁵ Weber, 157.

⁵⁶ Weber, 174.

⁵⁷ Weber, 5.

⁵⁸ Cheever, 168.

⁵⁹ Moorhead, 110.

⁶⁰ Moorhead, 34.

⁶¹ Moorhead, 93-94.

⁶² Moorhead, 94.

⁶³ Daly, "Holy War," 35.

⁶⁴ James Henley Thornwell, "The Christian Doctrine of Slavery," in *Religious Issues in American History*, Ed. Edwin Scott Gaustad (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 168.

⁶⁵ Daly, "Holy War," 35.

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- ⁶⁶ Daly, *When Slavery Was Called Freedom*, 51.
- ⁶⁷ Daly, "Holy War," 35.
- ⁶⁸ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "Church, Honor and Secession," in *Religion and the American Civil War*, Ed. Randall M. Miller, et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 92.
- ⁶⁹ Daly, *When Slavery Was Called Freedom*, 57.
- ⁷⁰ Moorhead, 97.
- ⁷¹ Wyatt-Brown, 100.
- ⁷² Genovese, *The Slaveholders Dilemma*, 37-38.
- ⁷³ Chesebrough, "God Ordained This War," 193.
- ⁷⁴ Moorhead, 58.
- ⁷⁵ Eugene D. Genovese, "Religion in the Collapse of the American Union," in *Religion and the American Civil War*, Ed. Randall M. Miller, et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 75.
- ⁷⁶ Woodworth, 12.
- ⁷⁷ Moorhead, 93.
- ⁷⁸ Victor B. Howard, *The Evangelical War Against Slavery and Caste: The Life and Times of John G. Fee* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 1996), 126.
- ⁷⁹ Wyatt-Brown, 89.
- ⁸⁰ Goen, 188-89.
- ⁸¹ David B. Chesebrough, *Clergy Dissent in the Old South, 1830-1865* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 88.
- ⁸² *A Condensed Anti-Slavery Bible Argument*, 87.
- ⁸³ Chesebrough, "God Ordained This War," 10.
- ⁸⁴ John Patrick Daly, *When Slavery Was Called Freedom: Evangelicalism, Proslavery, and the Causes of the Civil War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 64.
- ⁸⁵ Gardiner H. Shattuck, Jr., *A Shield and a Hiding Place: The Religious Life of the Civil War Armies* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987), 3.
- ⁸⁶ Elliott, vol. 1, 27.
- ⁸⁷ Cheever, iv.
- ⁸⁸ Hosmer, 199.

⁸⁹ Hosmer, 200.

⁹⁰ Goen, 67.

⁹¹ John B. Boles, *Religion In Antebellum Kentucky* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1976), 137.

⁹² Daly, "Holy War," 39.

⁹³ Daly, 39; Herman A. Norton, *Religion in Tennessee, 1777-1945* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1981), 59-60.

⁹⁴ Norton, 60.

⁹⁵ Chesebrough, "God Ordained This War," 60; Genovese, "Religion in the Collapse of the American Union," 79.

⁹⁶ Goen, 74.

⁹⁷ Goen, 74.

⁹⁸ Boles, 109.

⁹⁹ Goen, 78-79.

¹⁰⁰ Norton, 60-61; Daly, "Holy War," 39.

¹⁰¹ Goen, 82.

¹⁰² Goen, 83.

¹⁰³ Goen, 81.

¹⁰⁴ Goen, 9.

¹⁰⁵ Goen, 93.

¹⁰⁶ Goen, 95.

¹⁰⁷ Norton, 60.

¹⁰⁸ Charles Reagan Wilson, "Religion and the American Civil War in Comparative Perspective," in *Religion and the American Civil War*, Ed. Randall M. Miller, et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 395.

¹⁰⁹ Daly, *When Slavery*, 73, 74.

¹¹⁰ Genovese, "Religion in the Collapse of the American Union," 78, 80.

¹¹¹ Daly, *When Slavery*, 75; Goen, 113.

Chapter Two: Fighting God's Cause

A writer in the *American Theological Review*, writing before the Civil War, framed the upcoming struggle: “Here probably is to be fought the great battle of principles – not merely for ourselves, but for the world; freedom struggling against arbitrary power; learning with ignorance and superstition; and spiritual religion with that which is formal and false.” The writer then claims, “Already we here the roll of the drum, the clangor of the trumpet, and the shout of captains, concentrating and marshalling the hosts.”¹ At the outset, it was apparent that the soldiers’ religion was going off to war with them. The Second Great Awakening made religion a pervasive influence throughout America, but it was especially strong in the South where people were more likely to be orthodox in their beliefs, and more attracted to the lure of revivalism.² Perry Miller points out, however, that Civil War soldiers, regardless of their section, were “all children of the Revival.”³ While the revivals certainly did not bring religion to every American, Miller is right to claim that the Second Great Awakening did shape the thinking of Americans – no matter how religious they were, and no matter where they came from.

As the soldiers marched off to war their heads were filled with religious thoughts – especially the thought that God, and the Bible, sanctioned their cause. These religious thoughts were reinforced by the patriotic, often religion-laden, ceremonies that the soldiers experienced when their units marched out of town. When they arrived at camp, and especially when they saw their first action, the soldiers were

shocked by the horrors of war. As a result, many turned to the comforts of religion to ease their fears. Their letters and diaries attest to this phenomenon.

A key component of Protestant evangelicalism was millennialism. Millennialism was the belief that Jesus will rule the earth for a period of one thousand years. In this time, humans will need to prove themselves worthy of ascending into Heaven on Judgment Day, at the side of Jesus. Within millennialism there are two disparate beliefs. One is the concept of postmillennialism. Postmillennialists believe that the earth must be prepared for the arrival of Jesus. Once societal ills are overcome, Jesus will reappear to lead His followers. The other millennialists are known as premillennialists because they feel that Jesus' reappearance will signal the beginning of the Millennium. While northerners tended to be postmillennialists and southerners tended to be premillennialist, throughout the United States in the antebellum period, nearly all Americans believed that the Millennium was going to begin in America. The coming of the Civil War only reinforced this idea. According to Charles Reagan Wilson, "Millennialism thrives on dramatic events, and the American Civil War fostered such thinking. Northerners came to believe the Union was God's instrument for bringing on the millennium."⁴ This was in keeping with the view held by Americans throughout their history that they were God's new "Chosen People." James H. Moorhead corroborates Wilson's assertion. He says that the northern clergy "viewed the Civil War in apocalyptic and millennialistic terms. The United States as the New Israel was going through the apocalypse on its way to the millennium, the Kingdom of God on earth. The kingdom could come only through

suffering and a clash of arms. 'God was violently turning over the old, corrupt order and was bringing the disparate forces of history to a climactic resolution in one place and time. It has been granted to Americans to fight the definitive battle that would ensure the future happiness of the nation and the world.'"⁵ The South was no less inclined to think the same thing about itself.

The commencement of the Millennium in conjunction with the Civil War, according to Moorhead, "could be intelligible only within the framework of world history. Indeed the logic of millennialism prohibits that any event be merely parochial, for history is not the random exception of economic struggles, dynastic rivalries, or chauvinistic vendettas; it is essentially one struggle between two opposing forces. God and Satan – Christ and Antichrist – are the only real contestants; all others are mere epiphenomena."⁶ Hence, comparisons were drawn between the coming Civil War and the Crusades of long ago. Moorhead concludes, "Virtually without exception, the clergy united with Zachary Eddy, whose conversion from an apostle of peaceful disunion to a drum major in the war effort was complete. 'If the crusaders, seized by common enthusiasm, exclaimed, 'IT IS THE WILL OF GOD! IT IS THE WILL OF GOD!' – much more may we make this our rallying cry and inscribe it on our banners.'"⁷ Not everyone was happy with this spirit of war evoked by the clergy.

This acrimonious fervor which northerners and southerners expressed toward their brethren was disconcerting for some within the religious community such as, "Methodist bishop James O. Andrew, whose ownership of slaves had split the

nation's largest denomination back in 1844, [who] wrote in January 1861, 'the state of the country grieves me...because I fear it will seriously affect the spirituality and the holiness of the church. May God help us.' A few months later he wrote, 'Confederate flags are flying everywhere; may God have mercy on us, and save us from war and bloodshed.'"⁸ Andrew however, was in the minority. Religious men in both the North and the South were proud of the role that they played in the coming of the Civil War.

As the war approached, "[Northern] Protestants hopelessly confused the weapons of the saints with the Union's military power and awaited the first signs of the millennium in the exploits of the Army of the Potomac."⁹ For example, "Aaron Chatterton, a Disciples of Christ preacher in Iowa, had declared: 'I am for war, open war – a war of conquest and extermination, to be prosecuted in the spirit of Him who 'goes forth conquering and to conquer,' and with weapons 'mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.'...Granville Moody of the Methodist Book Concern in Cincinnati wrote to Lincoln's secretary of the treasury, Salmon P. Chase, with instructions to 'read this to the President and the Cabinet,' that merely defensive measures would not do. The aims of war must be to destroy 'the foes of law, order, and mutual rights.'"¹⁰ The Missions Secretary for the Methodist Episcopal Church, North, John P. Durbin, "call[ed] for military action to prevent secession: 'As a citizen I have my opinion of the duty of maintaining the authority of the government, and if I were President of the United States, and any attempts were made, either North or South, to dissolve the Union, if there were ships enough, and men, and cannon, and

powder, and ball enough, I would whip them in.'...The American Baptist Missionary Union...met in Brooklyn on 29 May 1861 and resolved with some asperity that 'what was bought at Bunker Hill, Valley Forge, and Yorktown, was not, with our consent, sold at Montgomery; that we dispute the legality of the bargain, and, on the strength of the Lord God of our fathers, shall hope to contest, through this generation, if need be, the feasibility of the transfer.'"¹¹ These fanatical statements indicate that "the war had broken down distinctions between the sacred and the secular, endowing the arms and policies of the Union with religious significance."¹² The thinking of Northerners sitting in the pews, as well as those who did not commune on Sundays in houses of worship, was shaped by the rhetoric of these clergymen. Northerners, for the most part readily accepted the argument that the Civil War was a holy cause.¹³

With few exceptions, the northern churches in general supported the war and its aims. A good example of this comes from the experience of Will C. Robinson, of Sterling, Illinois, who "was swept up in the excitement following the attack on Fort Sumter. He listened to a sermon in his Congregational church and found it 'running over with patriotism and love to the old Union. It was quite warlike, and proved that every man who fell sustaining the government, fell in a just cause.'" Not long after hearing this sermon, Robinson was moved to join a local regiment, the 34th Illinois.¹⁴ Robinson was not alone. In an innovative study of the diaries of Civil War soldiers, Michael Barton scoured one hundred diaries – twenty-five representing each of four categories: northern officers, northern enlisted men, southern officers, and southern enlisted men – to discover the "core values" that they expressed. Barton finds that

“[t]he most fact about this over-all distribution is that those core values which are often said to be most ‘American’ and characteristic of much of our history – Freedom[31%], Equality[24%], Individualism[24%], and Democracy[10%] – occur least frequently. They are expressed by one-third of the soldiers at most and by as few as one-tenth. Those core values which are expressed most often – Moralism[100%], Progress[79%], Religion[76%], Achievement[69%], and Patriotism[67%] – by two-thirds of the soldiers or more, are not so much ideological concepts as psychological traits.”¹⁵ Barton’s proof bolsters Charles Reagan Wilson’s assertion that religion “was vital during wartime in dealing with the suffering the war brought and in legitimizing each sides’ ideology.”¹⁶ The rhetoric of the soldiers reflected this ideology. Colonel Allen Fahnestock of the 86th Regiment of the Illinois Infantry Volunteers, stated, “The rebels had planted torpedoes in the road to the river and on the opposite side and our men was compelled to find them but we will soon be on the land of the Philistines. We will show them a Yankee cyclone. Later on, Fahnestock reiterated the same theme: “There was a Secesh farmer came and demanded pay for the grass our horses were eating. I told him we had not been paid for 8 months and had no money, we would soon leave his God forsaken country for our homes, it was not our fault that we were in the South.”¹⁷ Southerners, of course would counter that it was the Yankees fault that they were in the South. If the northerners would just allow the South to secede to protect their Bible-sanctioned labor system, there would be no need for war.

Despite the desire of southerners to leave the Union peacefully, the southern clergy were more than willing to bear the blame for bringing about the secession crisis. Illustrative of this mindset was the *Richmond Christian Advocate*. Heralding the formation of the Confederacy, the *Advocate* "announced that the secession movement had been led by intelligent Christian men who were determined to protect their rights and make it possible for the South to live in peace."¹⁸ There was no confusion on the part of southerners about what it was going to take to bring peace to the South.

Southerners believed there could be no peace without war. Reflecting this reality, many religious-minded groups spoke in terms of bloodshed. For example, "the newly organized Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America urged its members to 'put your treasures in the lap of your Country; throw your stout arms about her...if need be let your blood flow like water.' As if in response, Georgia Baptists unanimously resolved 'not to be behind any class of our fellow citizens in maintaining the independence of the South by any sacrifice of treasure or of blood.'"¹⁹ Hailing the efforts of fellow Virginians, "*The Central Presbyterian* announced proudly that 'Virginia's gallant sons...have sprung forward to the defense of their insulted Mother; assured that they are contending for the most sacred rights, and for the dearest interests for which patriot soldiers ever drew the sword.'"²⁰ Charles Reagan Wilson finds, "For the mass of southerners, the war was about freedom, the freedom of whites to control local institutions, to resist government interference, and to pursue economic opportunity."²¹ Religious southerners were

primed by their faith, and they “expected visible evidence of God’s finger in material events equal to that in the Words of His revelation. Their obsession with economic statistics, prosperity and future development reflected an attempt to fathom Providence and to ascertain that their society was a natural expression of virtuous evangelical individualism;” and, it might be added, that their counterparts in the North were not.²²

Adding to their feelings of righteousness, and strengthening the bonds of southerners, “[r]eligious proslavery ideas unified southern identity and morale with a seamless set of causes and motivations for combat.”²³ As John Patrick Daly argues, “The South had preached and unified behind evangelicalism and prewar sectional rhetoric both before and more completely than the North. The experience of war also hit home more widely in the South and raised to a fever pitch southerners’ prophetic beliefs about the future they had so long assumed they would control.”²⁴ Millennialism was one of the most popular lines of thinking. David B. Chesebrough finds a commonality between the warring sides. He says, “As did Northern ministers, Southern clergy also saw the Civil War in millennialistic terms.” He cites as an example the May 1861, statement by the Baptist Special Committee on the State of the Country which “emphasized that the administration of Jefferson Davis was contributing to the transcendent Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.”²⁵ Wilson concurs with both Daly’s and Chesebrough’s interpretation. He says, “Both northerners and southerners, in fact, recognized the potential significance of the Civil War in fulfilling America’s destiny of witnessing to the world. The evangelicals in

both sections thought American democracy would influence the world, but the issue was whether it would testify for a slave civilization or a free one."²⁶ This idea was expressed from the outset and it reached to all levels of participants. Alf Fries, a southern soldier, wrote in a letter dated August 21, 1861: "I am of the same opinion as Uncle Henry, that the millenium is close at hand, when such men become so patriotic, as the Press represents them to be."²⁷ Fries' lament reflects the worries of many who would bear the brunt of battle.

However, this outpouring of patriotism from the religious community heartened the political and religious leaders at the forefront of the secession movement. Governor Francis W. Pickens of South Carolina, "praised the clergy and the laity of all the Southern churches for their 'fervor and religious zeal in our cause....They have made it a holy war.' In like vein, Thomas R.R. Cobb, a Presbyterian elder from Georgia and a general in the Confederate army, acknowledged gratefully that the Southern 'revolution' had been accomplished 'MAINLY BY THE CHURCHES.'...Cobb referred glowingly to the Confederacy as the 'GRAND CREATION' of the church, 'the creature of her prayers and labors.'"²⁸ A member of the Military Commission in the Confederate House of Representatives, William Porcher Miles, "testified near the end of the war that 'the clergy have done more for our cause, than any other class....Not even the bayonets have done more.'"²⁹ Many who have studied the Civil War have drawn the same conclusion.

Right from the first days of volunteer enlistments early in 1861, until the final weapons were laid down in 1865, the experiences of soldiers were augmented by

religion. As part of the inculcation process that undoubtedly touched soldiers like Will C. Robinson and Allen Fahnestock, many a local regiment was sent off by its community in grand fashion. Once a local unit was assembled – often by one of the local leaders – it was paraded in front of the community as they headed out of town. Prior to the parade and all its patriotic gestures, the soldiers and their community would be treated to rousing patriotic speeches, prayers for the safety of the troops, and often, sermons by the local preachers. Some of these sermons were subdued. Albert R. Sabin of the 9th Vermont Regiment recorded one such occurrence. In a letter to his local paper, dated June 19, 1861, he wrote, “[A]t 5 o’clock religious services of an impressive and appropriate kind were held in the camp [Camp Underwood, Burlington, Vermont]. The exercise comprised the usual prayers, the singing of a beautiful hymn, and a thoughtful, instructive discourse by the Rev. Dr. Witherspoon of the 1st Methodist Church here, on the subject, ‘The Christian Soldier.’”³⁰ Others however, were fierier in nature. For example, preaching in a Congregational Church in New Hampshire to fresh Union recruits in October 1862, “the Reverend William Gaylord predicted a glorious destiny for America once the war was ended. ‘Oh! what a day will that be for our beloved land, when carried through a baptism of fire and blood, struggling through this birth-night of terror and darkness, it shall experience a resurrection to a new life, and to a future whose coming glory already gilds the mountain tops. That day of future glory is hastening on. That day of a truer and deeper loyalty to God and to country – that day when the oppressors rod shall be broken, when the sigh of no captive spirit shall be heard

throughout all our fair land....The day of the Lord is at hand!”³¹ As a final touch, many ceremonies were capped by a presentation of Bibles to each of the members of the unit. When religious leaders had been beaten to the punch in delivering Bibles, they looked for ways to supplement the previous gifts. In a separate letter to the “home press,” Albert R. Sabin reflects, “Testaments having been previously distributed to the regiment, the Rev. D.H. Buel, on behalf of his denomination (Episcopalian) announced the distribution of the common Prayer Book in a very thrilling, eloquent and patriotic address.”³² These Bibles and common Prayer books became for some of the soldiers a treasured link to a past life that was to be no more. For others it was a protecting light from the ills of camp and the dangers of the battlefield as well as an inspiration to fight.

Like their counterparts in the North, southern soldiers were indoctrinated from the outset of the war. Historian, Steven E. Woodworth claims, “Aside from pride and aggression, the supposed Northern sin most commonly mentioned by Southerners at the outset of the conflict was religious fanaticism.” He then notes the irony: “It might seem odd for men to march off with religious zeal in their hearts and weapons in their hands to defend the true faith while at the same time decrying religious fanaticism, but so it was.”³³ Religion was important to the Civil War on a grand scale as well as on the individual level, from the outset of the conflict to the very last days. As Charles Reagan Wilson points out, “If religion had thus paved the way for war, it was vital during wartime in dealing with the suffering the war brought and in legitimating each sides ideology.”³⁴ While many historians tend to focus on the religious fervor

prior to secession, John Patrick Daly posits, "The greatest and most revealing burst of proslavery propaganda came not with secession and the Confederate declaration of independence, but rather as the troops assembled to march to war. The gusto with which religious leaders North and South proselytized their region's war efforts bordered on righteous hysteria and unreflective sanctification of bloodshed."³⁵ Representative of this hysteria is a quote from a sermon given on September 22, 1861, by the Methodist minister R.N. Sledd. Speaking to a group of Confederate cadets from Petersburg, Virginia, he was quoted as saying in his peroration, "Nay, but the Ammonites are upon us with their strange gods. They would dispel the delusion. They would dissolve the charm. They would undermine the authority of my Bible. You go to contribute to the salvation of your country from such a curse. You go to aid in the glorious enterprise of rearing in our sunny south a temple to constitutional liberty and Bible Christianity. You go to fight for your people and for the cities of your God."³⁶ Other southern clergy sang the same tune.

The leader of South Carolina College, a Georgia Methodist minister named Augustus B. Longstreet, "hailed the beginning of the war as a crusade, the cause of God himself: 'Gallant sons of a gallant State, away to the battle field, with the Bible in your arms and its precepts in your heart. If you fall, the shot which sends you from the earth, translates you to heaven.'"³⁷ According to William G. Brownlow, this line of preaching was commonplace. He "noted in 1862 that one often heard 'secession chaplains, and other clergymen, teach soldiers from the pulpit, and assure the relations of soldiers in the event of their death, that the *cause* in which they fell,

battling for the independence of the South in opposition to the Vandal hordes of the North, constitutes a passport sufficient to introduce them to all that exceeding weight of joy at God's right hand!"³⁸ Like their enemies in the North, many southerners took this preaching to heart. In fact, they tended to do so more than their counterparts in the North. This is reflected in their diaries and letters. Studying these sources from both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line, Michael Barton revealed that while 68% of northerners mentioned religion, 84% of southerners did likewise.³⁹ The reasons for discussing religion, and the ways in which they reflected it, were numerous.

On both sides soldiers feared that either they, or their comrades, had not led a pious life. Since the Second Great Awakening emphasized the need to live a righteous life, many soldiers feared that if they fell on the battlefield, they were headed for eternal damnation. Likewise, they worried for their cause. Northerners and southerners both believed that God would give the victory to the righteous. Therefore, when things looked bleak, they tried to infuse their camps with religion by reading their Bibles, holding prayer meetings, and even participating in revivals. The impetus for their religiosity was their experiences within the military.

What they saw in the camps, and experienced on the battlefield, shocked the senses of the majority of the soldiers. Studying the religious thoughts of Civil War soldiers, Steven E. Woodworth found that "Many Christians in both North and South were encountering in the ranks of the new volunteer regiments what to them seemed disconcerting numbers of irreligious compatriots."⁴⁰ Offering an explanation for this phenomenon, James I. Robertson says, "War inevitably dented the faith of many Civil

War participants. Leaving the restraints of home and loved ones, and then cast as soldiers in a novel environment that alternated between apathy and loneliness on one hand to excitement and danger on the other, invited a wandering from the straight and narrow.⁴¹ Besides the lack of restraints and fighting boredom, Bell Irvin Wiley credits “the urge to experiment with the forbidden...and the utter inadequacy of religious and recreational facilities for soldiers of the sixties,” as contributing factors in the moral backsliding of many of the Civil War soldiers.⁴² He claims that there were, however, some opportunities that were not taken advantage of by the soldiers. For instance, “In the knapsacks of many, if not most volunteers a Bible, donated by a mother or a sweetheart, was tucked away....[During the first couple years of the war] Testaments collected dust from disuse; many were lost or thrown away. In some quarters the faithful few who persisted in their devotions were scorned as weaklings. One soldier reported that a man of his encampment found reading the Bible was apt to be hailed with such remarks as ‘Hello, parson, you must be scared. I don’t think there will be any fighting soon,’ or ‘Hello, parson, what time did you expect to start a revival.’”⁴³ As the war dragged on, and more and more soldiers were killed, many of the soldiers’ attitudes toward religion would change. While much of the wickedness that reigned in the camps would never go away, the revivals later in the war did help ameliorate some of the wickedness. This was not the case early on, however.

Out from under the watchful eye of their families and communities, Civil War soldiers felt less restrained and they were willing to engage in activities that they may be shunned for back in their hometowns. With death staring them in the face, some

soldiers seemed to want to live life to the fullest before they were slain on the battlefield. Many of these soldiers chose to ignore the Bible teachings that they heard growing up. Most were raised on the idea that God took an active interest in individuals' lives. This "amnesia" concerned some of their fellow soldiers who would waste away the monotonous hours in the camps writing letters home and transcribing their thoughts in diaries. These letters and diaries are an invaluable source of information about life in the camps.

While there were certainly those who ridiculed others for their religious ways, there were times when "Civil War soldiers complained about immorality in camp. One called his friend, 'A very moral young man, which is a considerable rarity in the army.' Another wrote home that 'Young men who were temperate and moral at home and many of them religious are brought in contact with all the vices of camp life and the good influences of home forgotten. This has a more ruinous effect upon human society than all that are killed upon the battle field.' Another said that in the army, 'everything corrupt, low, vulgar and debasing in our corrupt nature is rampant.' And another said, 'I must confess that I had seen but little of the wickedness and depravity of man until I joined the army.'"⁴⁴ Early in the war, Alfred Fielder "wrote, 'I find there is more infidelity in the army than I had imagined. Many of the officers and men deny the special providence of God or that prayers will avail in temporal affairs.'"⁴⁵ This was equally true of soldiers on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line.

The lack of morality wore on the more religious soldiers. One such soldier urged his family: "'I hope when you go to pray you will think of me,' wrote a

discouraged Tar Heel in 1862; 'I am a pore Harted sinner and never expect to Be no other way as long as I do remain Hear for agrivation is my Brexfus, Dinner and supper.'"⁴⁶ For some of the soldiers, disregard of the Sabbath was one of the worse offenses to their religiosity. Charles M. Blackford, who served under the leadership of Robert E. Lee, recorded in his diary July 7, 1861: "Sunday, strange to say, is the day upon which most military movements commence. I never get up on Sunday morning without expecting orders to move somewhere before night."⁴⁷ Issuing a similar sentiment, William W. Stringfellow wrote in his diary on July 31, 1864: "Marched leisurely along. Eight miles to Dacksville where we went into camp early in the afternoon. I do not approve of so much traveling on the Sabbath."⁴⁸ Sabbath-breaking was a common theme in soldiers' diaries and letters.

Yet, some soldiers chose to reflect an optimistic viewpoint toward the ills of camp life and the lack of morals on the part of their fellow soldiers. Despite the gambling, swearing, drinking, and prostitution, they saw the possibilities presented to those religious men who could get their moralizing messages into the camps. One Illinois soldier wrote home in 1862 stating, "I can not see any reason why men can not be religious in the army, for there is no plase in the world whare there is the disaplin there is here....You perceve we are in the very best mode to rise in the scales of morrels. My constant prayer is, 'Save us in this dredful war from the moral miasma'"⁴⁹ James T. Miller of the 111th Pennsylvania Infantry also tried to put a positive spin on the situation. In a letter dated February 19, 1862, he comments, "[I]n regard to religion in Camp it is the roughest and wickedest place i ever..saw yet i find

some who are trying [to] live as we shal all wi[s]h we had when we come [to] die.”⁵⁰

These soldiers were in the minority.

More typical of the thoughts of the majority of soldiers was “a Minnesotan who marched with Sibley against the Indians in 1863 [who] noted in his diary a short time after the expedition got under way: ‘I must confess that I have seen but little of the wickedness and depravity of man until I Joined the Army.’ In similar vain, an Illinois soldier reported from Corinth, Mississippi, after Shiloh: ‘If there is any place on God’s fair earth where wickedness ‘stalketh abroad in daylight,’ it is in the army....Ninety-nine out of every hundred are profane swearers...hundreds of young men...devote all their leisure time to [gambling].”⁵¹ Some soldiers clearly felt that they were a part of that one percent who was doing the right thing. They saw the wicked camps as their own personal moral testing ground. If they were truly religious, as they had claimed, then their faith would not waver in the face of so many temptations.

Assuaging the fears of his sister, Ira Pettit of the Eleventh U.S. Infantry emphatically stated, “I do not nor will not yield to the many evil influences which surround us.”⁵² Richard Gould, also trying to ease the mind of *his* sister, told her, “I try to serve the Lord but it is [a] hard place I tell you, go where ever you will, you will hear some swearing or lying. You must pray for me. I will try and pray for myself.”⁵³ His brother William sounded a similar note. He writes, “This is a barren place, as it were, to serve the Lord. I am indeavoring however to love the God of my Father & to serve him too. But I must confess in an unsteady and unfaithful way. I

read as many as 2 chapters in the Testament every day and spend much of my time in singing & meditating on God & heaven.”⁵⁴ James T. Miller was interested in conveying to his family the variety of ways in which he planned to honorably represent his family in the conflict. Writing to his father, he enjoined him to “tel Mother that although i have become a soldier i have not forgot to be a man and i intend by the grace of god to do my duty to my country and my God and by his grace i will not give her or you any reason to blush for your son but i will try to do my duty in all pl[a]ces so that i shal have no reason to blush when i again meet you.”⁵⁵ An amalgam of interests coalesced in the camps. Steven E. Woodworth finds, “Increased interest in religion and, on the part of some, devotion to Christ continued to coexist with much open practice of sin on the part of others within the camps of all the armies.”⁵⁶ As Bell Irvin Wiley reminds us, “Many soldiers deplored the conviviality [of drinking] and some took refuge in spiritual contemplation. But the number of these who resorted to the Bible seems less than those who sought the bottle.”⁵⁷ The wishes and actions of the devout were not enough to overcome the desire of many for vice.

Besides writing home to assure their families that they had not fallen prey to the evils of camp life, Union and Confederate soldiers throughout the war sent messages home to try to comfort their families. Some soldiers reminded their kinfolk about God’s divine intervention. Writing to his sister back in New York, a corporal in the 74th New York try to calm her fears by stating that “all our lives are in the hands of God and...he can save from danger those who put their trust in him, tho’

encompassed by hosts of enemies.”⁵⁸ Theodore Upson, who accompanied Sherman on his march to the sea, told his family, “Do not worry about me; I shall try to do my duty as faithfully and well as I am able to do it, and I feel sure that the same kind Father who has cared for me so far will do so till the end.”⁵⁹ Likewise, when a soldier did fall in battle, many times the death was attributed to the fact that God chose to call him home at his appointed time. Showing maturity beyond his years, “an eighteen-year-old soldier in the 35th Pennsylvania tried to console his family after his older brother in the same regiment had been killed at the battle of Dranesville in 1861: ‘His time was set by the Almighty Man. He was due to die, and if he hadn’t been killed in the battlefield he might have died in the hospital or some other place. I think our time is all set when we shall die and before we want to die, and it makes no difference where we are.’”⁶⁰ Given the horrible death that many soldiers died in the hospitals, perhaps if God had set his time for death, He was being merciful letting him die on the battlefield. A lieutenant in the 8th Kansas also subscribed to this doctrine. ‘What little Presbyterianism I have left,’ he wrote to *his* fiancée in 1862, ‘makes me something of a fatalist. I am in the hollow of God’s hand whether on the Field, in my Tent, or in your parlor.’”⁶¹ Some soldiers even reassured their families that *their* prayers from the home front were having an affect on the safety of their beloved soldier. “‘I know your prayers were going up to God the very day’ of Shiloh, wrote a lieutenant colonel in the 54th Ohio, and thus, ‘the God of Battles...stretch[ed] forth his protecting arms.’”⁶² It is often difficult to understand where the soldiers’ true faith ends and his desire to calm the fears of his family begins.

Although not nearly as harsh as Jonathan Edward's viewpoint in "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," that God dangled people over the fires of Hell like a spider dangling from its web, just waiting for God to decide when to release the sinner into eternal damnation, Civil War soldiers held a similar viewpoint in that they placed their life in God's hands. What He wanted done, would be done. This fatalism appeared on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line. A North Carolina private, Jonathan F. Coghill reflected this idea in a note to his family: "I love you all for I know that you love me and I love my country too it has called me fourth to proteck you and I will do my best for you and my country and I pray that god may proteck me and defend me wherever I go."⁶³ A fellow North Carolinian, William Wagner wrote to his wife in the spring of 1861: "Dear Wife if we do git in a fite all we can do is to trust God above us and try an fite thru the best way we can but I hope to God we may be sucesful whar Ever we go."⁶⁴ Yet another native of North Carolina, W.H.S. Burgwyn, assured his family in a letter dated May 3, 1863, that he "read the lessons for the day in the Prayer Book + Bible."⁶⁵ Later that year, Burgwyn had the fortune of showing some of his family in person that he was keeping the faith. His diary entry for December 23, 1863, records, "Accompanied by Mother and two youngest brothers to church today + for the first time attended the Communion Table."⁶⁶ This opportunity brought comfort to the whole family.

Most powerful were the letters that dying soldiers dictated to their fellow comrades. Drew Gilpin Faust finds, "Soldiers seemed often to invoke names of kin in messages of reassurance – about their certainty of salvation and of meeting them once

again in 'a better world than this.' 'Write to mother,' implored a dying soldier, 'and tell her she must meet me in heaven. I know I am going there.'" He continued on, "Tell my mother...I have stood before the enemy fighting in this great and glorious cause."⁶⁷ Even when the soldier did not have time to utter his last words, his comrades often wrote to the family to reassure them of his ultimate destination. Faust says, "When Civil War condolence letters enumerated evidence of the deceased's Christian achievements, designed to show his eligibility for salvation, the writer often included details of the soldier's military performance, his patriotism, and his manliness. In a letter to the widow of a comrade who had died the preceding day, T. Fitzhugh reported all the customary information: her husband had been resigned to death, was conscious of his fate, and sent his love to his wife and children. But he also added that the soldier had 'died a glorious death in defence of his Country.'⁶⁸ Throughout the war soldiers on both sides sent similar messages home to try to comfort their families, or the families of a fallen comrade.

The fatalism that soldiers expressed in their letters and diaries was reinforced by their experiences on the battlefield. As Gardiner Shattuck points out, "The continuing closeness and threat of death...forced thousands of soldiers to reflect on God's control over human destinies and enabled them to turn to religion for meaning in the midst of the events of the war." Using a letter from a soldier to solidify his argument, Shattuck adds, "As a letter from a soldier in the 129th Michigan stated in its homely fashion, 'Iff there is any place a person ought to lade a criston life heare is the place, for a person dont know what time he will be cald up for to feave this world of

trouble.”⁶⁹ Some soldiers needed to be reminded of the presence of God in their lives. Consequently, “following the call of duty from one’s country reminded men of their religious calling as well,” which was then bolstered because, “facing danger in battle encouraged them to place their reliance on God throughout that experience.”⁷⁰ Perhaps being overly optimistic, James I. Robertson claims, “For a majority of the soldiers...war and its uncertainties led to an affirmation of faith....[For example,] Carroll Clark of the 16th Tennessee confessed: ‘We were cut off from home Communication & had not much hope of ever meeting again the loved ones at home...I thought of earthly home sweet home and cried.’”⁷¹ Some soldiers strongly believed in God’s divine intervention and wrote home to remind their family of it. A lieutenant from South Carolina proclaimed to his fiancée, “‘God rules all things’...and it ‘would be very unsoldierly in me to beg that my life be preserved. So I trust all to him having little to say in the matter.’”⁷² While it is certainly hard to question the faith of this soldier, it must be remembered that not all soldiers who partook in religious practices were actually religious, or seeking to become religious. Many of the “conversions” would be short-lived. Once back in the relative safety of the camp, they would continue their wicked ways.

In a similar vein, the actions of the soldiers in the camps could often be interpreted in more than one way. Many times, soldiers who appeared to be seeking the message of God were in fact simply trying to fight the boredom of camp life. A great deal of the soldiers’ time in the service was spent in the camps, especially in the winter when there were few campaigns. So, “whether in camp or in hospital, soldiers

often found themselves bored and were eager for whatever reading material they could get. What an observer in the Confederate camps in western Virginia during the first winter of the war expressed, could just as easily be applied to the North. He noted, 'the soldiers here are starved for reading matter. They will read anything. I frequently see a piece of newspaper, no larger than my hand, going the rounds among them.'"⁷³ In a like vein, "Charles Ross of the 11th Vermont...once noted in his diary: 'Have been reading all day in a book I got of the Chaplain. It is a history of Missions on the Haley island in the north sea.'"⁷⁴ Bell Irvin Wiley agrees with this interpretation of the desperation of Civil War soldiers for reading material of any kind. He says of the Union forces, "religious periodicals and tracts, distributed by earnest individuals and by organizations such as the Christian Commission, were more widely read by soldiers than civilians. This was not because of a greater spiritual interest in camp, but was due rather to a greater dearth of other types of literature."⁷⁵ Besides reading religious tracts and the Bible, soldiers often fought the boredom of camp life by attending religious services. Although he overstates the presence of religion in the camps – it "was ubiquitous wherever the armies fought and camped [and] [t]here were constant religious meetings and camp revivals" – Philip Shaw Paludin correctly states, "Some simply found the meetings a welcome change from camp monotony; it was fun to gather and sing and talk and listen....And yet there was a hard-core faith as well as social diversion forged here."⁷⁶ Dr. John Francis Shaffner, Sr., who served with the 33rd and 4th Regiments from North Carolina, sent a letter to his future wife dated June 22 and 23, 1861 to inform her that "At the solicitation of the Orderly, I

have consented to attend Church today at Danville, [Virginia]. The men generally intend going, but whether they be urged by a desire for worship or by curiosity, you will be as able to determine, as your humble correspondent.”⁷⁷ There were certainly those who went to the services to hear the message, and those who came for the entertainment.

Even though some of the people who attended these services were not very religious, the rituals of Protestant evangelical religious services helped to knit a self-supporting (emotionally) community of believers within many camps.⁷⁸ It appears that for some, their attendance at church was an attempt to maintain the routine that they were used to back home. This idea is reflected in the writings of the soldiers. W.W. Heartsill matter-of-factly states, “Sunday, and heard a good sermon.”⁷⁹ Later in the conflict, after the revivals swept through the Confederate armies, Heartsill records, “To day is Sunday and the boys are turning out for church in town. Camps are unusually quiet.”⁸⁰ Steven E. Woodworth draws this conclusion, “the frequent...references to the *lack* of religious services points up the fact that a large percentage of the soldiers, probably a majority, were accustomed to attending religious services every week in civilian life” [emphasis added].⁸¹ Edwin Weller, reflecting the uncertainty of military life, wrote to his sweetheart back home, “There is to be preaching in a church about a mile from camp next Sunday. I intend to go if the Rebs do not drive us out of our camp before that time.”⁸² Union Sergeant Hamlin Alexander Coe echoes a similar sentiment, “After retiring from the church, we proceeded to a saloon, had a dish of oysters, then returned to camp with the

determination that, if I remain here until another Sabbath, I shall go to church again.”⁸³ As happens in all wars, a routine is hard to maintain given the transient nature of armies.

Not everyone was enamored with the religious services in the camps – or in the towns. Some objected to the zealotry of the message. As James I. Robertson notes, “Many soldiers, especially officers, did not take kindly to hellfire sermons with their threats of eternal damnation. ‘There is of necessity solemnity enough here without any shadow of yielding to it,’ commented a lieutenant in the 13th New Hampshire. A Wisconsin colonel, after listening to a long ‘prophecy of doom,’ levied a verbal blast at the chaplain. ‘I don’t want any more of that doctrine preached in this regiment. Every one of my boys who fall fighting in this great battle of liberty is going to Heaven, and I won’t allow any other principle to be promulgated to them while I command the regiment.’”⁸⁴ Others could not tolerate the noise associated with some of the more zealous meetings. Confederate surgeon Spencer Glasgow Welch, writing to his wife, complained, “While I write I hear Chaplain Beauschell preaching at a tremendous rate...I should prefer to hear some ludicrous old negro preacher, for that would afford me some amusement.”⁸⁵ Welch was not alone in these sentiments. A member of the 21st Alabama wrote, “It seems to me...that wherever I go I can never get rid of the Psalm-‘singers’ – they are in full blast with a Prayer meeting a few rods off.”⁸⁶ Some soldiers were driven to action to quiet the constant din of the religious services that pervaded some camps from time-to-time. James I. Robertson recounts what happened in one such case:

Night after night during one wintry period, gunners in the Surry Light Artillery of Virginia gathered in a sergeant's tent for prayers and hymn-singing. To every song the men shouted a fervent refrain: 'Scotland's burning! Cast on water!'

Several battery members grew tired of the monotonous noise. The next evening, as the faithful soldiers extolled: 'Scotland's burning! Cast on water!' down the chimney of the tent's fireplace came a large bucket of water. The water extinguished both the fire and the singing as smoke sent worshippers scurrying from the tent. 'Cast on water!' was not heard again in the battery.⁸⁷

Others realized the error of their ways, but were unwilling to change their ways. For example, W.W. Heartsill admitted that the word of God did not always hold his attention, even on the Sabbath. He laments, "to day is Sunday and perhaps besides reading my Bible I can-not better employ my time than by writing a short sketch of the life of a peculiar character at this post."⁸⁸ As Bell Irvin Wiley reminds us, "Many soldiers deplored the conviviality [of drinking] and some took refuge in spiritual contemplation. But the number of these who resorted to the Bible seems less than those who sought the bottle."⁸⁹ For many in the camps, temptation was not tempered as it had been when their families and communities back home could and would scrutinize their lifestyles.

Many soldiers could not rectify the seeming dichotomy between religion and war. They did not understand how a religion that preached, "Love thy neighbor," and "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those that trespass against us," was compatible with war. Consequently, "[s]ome men scorned faith after witnessing the hell of battle or experiencing the loss of messmates and friends."⁹⁰ Representative of this line of thinking, "A New Yorker [who] felt war and religion to be at odds,"

commented, “There is something inconsistent in fighting the enemy and attending divine service.”⁹¹ As Earl J. Hess informs his readers, “The sword of God had two edges. Whereas the first one provided incentives to pursue the war, the second one offered a serious obstacle to killing. The Sixth Commandment posed a problem for devout Christians who took up arms to suppress the Southern rebellion. The result was ambivalence in the minds of many Northern soldiers about the deed that all tacitly agreed was necessary to save the Union.”⁹² Indicative of this ambivalence, Lieutenant Francis Riddle of the 93rd Colored Infantry, claimed, “The spirit of war originates in sin’....The only way a good man could engage in war was if his ‘spirit and motive’ were strong enough to ‘give character to his calling, dignify his manhood, exalt his deeds, and make him a factor for good or evil in society.’”⁹³ Likewise, “John Russell of the 21st Illinois was fully aware of the dangers attending combat but was not afraid. “I firmly believe that every Rebel deserves death yet I have no desire to kill them if it was possible to avoid it consistent with the just demands of our country.’ But the ‘present deplorable state of affairs’ made him willing to shoot and kill in order to save the country.” In a related process of thinking, “New Hampshireman Charles Paige, combined God’s will with the patriotic demands of the nation to justify killing. A devout Christian, Paige reminded himself of ‘His Eternal truths and principles of justice’ so that he could hold on to a God-ordained reason for shooting Rebels.”⁹⁴ Consequently, “For a majority of the soldiers...war and its uncertainties led to an affirmation of faith similar in sentiment to Abraham

Lincoln's observation: 'I have often been driven to my knees by the realization that I had nowhere else to go.'⁹⁵ This desperation is evident in many soldiers' writings.

When they were thrown into the heat of battle, many of the soldiers who scorned religion in the camp, experienced a conversion, albeit sometimes only temporarily, when in the thick of the fight, for as one private in the 24th Georgia wrote, "If a man ever needed God's help it is in time of battle."⁹⁶ Accordingly, "There were few atheists in the rifle pits of 1861-1865....[This] sentiment [was] echoed...by a private in the 25th Massachusetts: 'I felt the need of religion then if I ever did.'⁹⁷ John Patrick Daly draws this conclusion: "The evangelical ideal of character – with its constant battle to curb one's instinct, to submit to God, and to contemplate death and judgment – not only served to motivate the Southern cause but was also a key to the performance of soldiers in battle."⁹⁸ The same could certainly be said of northern soldiers as well. Drawing a parallel between the Second World War and the Civil War, James M. McPherson states, "Religious faith 'did not impel the individual toward combat but did serve the important function of increasing his resources for enduring the conflict-ridden situation of combat stress.'⁹⁹ Soldiers also saw their religious beliefs as a way to bolster their bravery. If you knew that upon your death you were going to a better place, the fear of dying subsided. Confederate soldiers, who were more homogeneously Protestant, looked to their leaders for religious inspiration. They "noted that those of their commanders whose spirituality was most ardent were those who possessed, in the words of a southern artilleryman, 'the most intense spirit of fight.' Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, and J.E.B. Stuart,

with their fervor for combat and their equanimity under fire, seemed to demonstrate that God bestowed courage directly on those of great faith."¹⁰⁰ These southern soldiers were "certain, in the words of a South Carolinian, that God's 'unseen hand' had carried him safely through a furious battle. A Louisiana sergeant, Edwin Fay, the target of Federal balls that narrowly missed, did not 'believe a bullet can go through a prayer,' for faith is a 'much better shield than...steel armor.' The common understanding was that the more complete the soldier's faith, the greater would be God's care."¹⁰¹ Certainly, not everyone was struck with religion while fighting, but there is a plethora of examples of those who did experience some sort of conversion.

Perhaps the most interesting example of a soldier who was temporarily overcome with religious emotion was a Virginia artilleryman whose position was about to be overrun by a large contingency of Federal troops. James I. Robertson recounts the story:

[He] dropped to his knees and prayed: 'O Lord, drive them back! O Lord, drive them back!' Gunfire roared as the battle began. A few moments later, the man arose partly and asked : 'Boys, are they coming or going?'

'Coming!' was the reply.

The gunner knelt quickly, and with even more intensity, he intoned: 'O Lord, drive them back! O Lord, drive them back!' He soon asked again: 'Are they coming or going?'

'Coming!' his comrade exclaimed.

Both sides were firing furiously as the man dropped to his knees a third time and begged: 'O Lord, drive them back!' Desperation was in his voice as he asked once more if the enemy was were coming or going.

'The Yankees are going!' his comrades now shouted.

Whereupon the devout worshipper became a 'son of mars,' sprang atop the earthworks, and yelled defiantly: 'Come back here, you cowards! Come back here! We'll whip you!'¹⁰²

It appears that for some, religious faith was supplemented by a generous dose of practical actions. One can never be sure that faith alone will protect you.

Many a soldier hoped it was not too late to save his soul. "I am not the Same Man, Spiritually, that I was' before fighting at Fort Donelson and Shiloh, wrote a corporal in the 2nd Iowa. 'My only fear is that I am almost too late...but with God's help I will come through all right – at least I will try.'"¹⁰³ Another soldier, Charles Gould worried not only for himself, but for his comrades: "This war is a great evil, expensive to the Government, and causes the hasty death of many who I fear are as yet in sin. If I am called to die here I hope to be at peace with my God and meet my friends in heaven, but I need a great change witch I hope to obtain through the mercys of God and the merits of Christ."¹⁰⁴ The writings of many of the Civil War soldiers lend credence to the idea of battlefield conversions.

For many of the soldiers their battlefield conversions turned into a more sincere conversion and they began to recognize the need for religion amongst their fellow soldiers. For example, "In the Western theater, Lieutenant Albert T. Goodloe of the 35th Alabama Infantry understood the reason for this receptivity: 'Death was staring us in the face all the time, a perpetual reminder of the final judgment in the presence of God.' Randolph Fairfax, a private in the Rockbridge Artillery, made the point explicit: 'My only trust in such times of danger is that I am entirely in God's

hands.”¹⁰⁵ To quell the fears of those left at home “a devout private in the 38th Tennessee who fought at Shiloh” claimed that he “continually raised my heart to him, in prayer, and in the thickest of the fight, I envoked His protection.”¹⁰⁶ Again, it must be noted that there were many degrees of religiosity amongst Civil War soldiers. Some were very sincere in their religious convictions while for others it was expedient in time of war.

While not everyone turned to religion as a result of their experiences in the war, it is easy to understand why many of them did turn to religion. The promise of a better life after the death of the body was reassuring to many soldiers. In addition, given the uncertainties of the battlefield, and the fact that it was often hard for the soldiers to understand why their comrades were falling all around them while at the time they left the battlefield unscathed, made many soldiers contemplate the existence of a higher power. An account in a contemporary newspaper, the *Charleston Courier*, discussed “how and why combat soldiers ‘got religion’:

‘There is something irresistible in the appeal which the Almighty makes when he strikes from your side, in the twinkling of an eye, your friend and comrade....Every man unconsciously asks himself, ‘whose turn will come next?’...In this respect the recent battles have done more to make converts than all the homilies and exhortations ever uttered from the pulpit. A man who has stood upon the threshold of eternity while in the din and carnage of the fight, has listened to eloquence more fiery and impressive than ever came from mortal lips.’¹⁰⁷

Although this letter was referring to Confederate soldiers, it certainly would apply to soldiers of the North as well.

The soldier's first engagement often brought forth these feelings more than any other. Never being battle-tested, these new recruits had certainly heard the war stories regaled by their more experienced comrades, but nothing could prepare them for being shot at by someone whose intention is to kill them. "William O. Wettleson describes his first engagement thus: 'Strange feelings come over one when he is in battle and bullets are whizzing around one....It is a wonderful place for one who believes he is a Christian to test his faith.'"¹⁰⁸ Many other soldiers possessed similar feelings. For example, a private in the 100th Pennsylvania, found his belief reaffirmed and strengthened by his experiences. He "carried a well-thumbed Bible while under fire nearly every day for a month in the Wilderness campaign, [afterwards he] wrote to his sister that, despite his Christian upbringing, 'I never knew the comfort there is in religion so well as during the past month. Nothing sustains me so much in danger as to know that there is one who ever watches over us...I shall be a better Christian if I get home for having served in the army.'"¹⁰⁹ The promise of a better life in Heaven had a tranquilizing effect on the nerves of those who truly believed.

James McPherson discusses, "Bodily death held no terrors for the true believers because it meant entry of the soul into a better world where it would live in peace and happiness with loved ones for eternity."¹¹⁰ A recent convert, "the color bearer in the high-casualty 86th New York came to the Lord after he was twice wounded. On the eve of the final assault at Petersburg on April 2, 1865, he wrote in his diary: 'Jesus owns me, O, how sweet to feel that if we fall on the field of strife, we only fall to rise higher and more perfect bliss than this world can give. My object is to

live for Heaven.”¹¹¹ The feeling of being overcome with religion helped to soothe the nerves of many Civil War soldiers, both North and South. As historian James I. Robertson points out, “Along with uncertainties of courage were guilt feelings about past sins. Most soldiers of that day regarded God, final judgment, and eternal hell as very real things. Men might enjoy earthly pleasures when they were available, but with battle imminent, hundreds of soldiers sought to get their lives in order through intense reading of the Bible, fervent prayers, and whispered supplications. Time and again, men would swear loudly that they would never drink, gamble, curse, or whore again if the Almighty would just get them through this particular engagement.”¹¹² Echoing these sentiments, Gerald F. Linderman says, “Those of less substantial faith often promised greater attentiveness to religious prescriptions in return for divine intervention. Bargaining with God, soldiers approaching battle threw away their decks of cards and vowed that if they were allowed to live they would never again gamble or utter a profane word or smoke a pipe, that they would control their tempers or carry to the spring all their comrades’ canteens or share food with others or go to services or live moral lives or declare publicly for Christ or become ministers.”¹¹³ The obituary of William James Dixon of the Sixth Regiment of South Carolina Volunteers reflects the transformation that many of the soldiers went through. It reports that Dixon “had not entered the army as a believer, though he had always ‘maintained a strictly moral character.’ Several battles, however, impressed him with ‘the mercy of God in his preservation,’ so that before his death at Chancellorsville he had ‘resolved to lead a new life.’”¹¹⁴ Another soldier, a private in the 33rd Mississippi, writing to his

wife stated, "Christians make the best soldiers...as they would not fear the consequences after death as others would."¹¹⁵ A good example of this is the thoughts of a soldier who incurred a severe wound at Gaines Mills: "I was not only unafraid to die, but death seemed to me a welcome messenger. Immediately there came over my soul such a burst of the glories of heaven, such a foretaste of its joys, as I have never before experienced. The New Jerusalem seemed to rise before me...I was wholly unconscious of any tie that bound me to earth."¹¹⁶ This soldier obviously felt that he had prepared himself for the moment of his death.

Letters and diary entries written after battles frequently attested to the fact that being in the thick of the fight often focused the soldiers' minds on religion. "A private in the 114th Ohio assured his father that 'I am trying to live a better man than I was at home I see the necessity of living a christian here where thy ar dropping all around you.' Men dropped all around a soldier in the 4th Delaware at Cold Harbor. 'In that dreadful place,' he wrote a week after the battle, 'I resolved to forsake my evil ways and to serve god. I have done so and I pray the allmighty to forgive me and make me pure from sin.'¹¹⁷ The din of war was often accompanied by the tranquility of religious thoughts.

Trying to gain any edge they could over their enemy, as well as their own fears, "many thought of their faith as a special source of bravery; religious belief would itself endow one with courage."¹¹⁸ The rationale for this was that while "[o]ne could not always tell, of course, if one's faith were sufficient to ensure survival...[at least] with the outcome resting with God, soldiers felt relieved of a burden that would

otherwise inhibit heroic action. 'Leave all to Him' was a formula on which many drew for battle courage."¹¹⁹ It was not unusual to see then, "on the eve of battle[,] numbers of men who sought to shore up their courage by attempting to reinforce their religious faith." This reaffirmation of faith even reached the likes of General George Armstrong Custer who, "by consigning himself to God's keeping...was made brave."¹²⁰ Similarly, "a Protestant soldier of the 47th Illinois was equally certain that the Bible enjoined courage: The soldier's 'standard of manhood is high, and he found it in the Book his mother gave him: 'If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy faith is small.'"¹²¹ This was all idle talk until the soldiers' faith could be put to the test in battle.

The soldiers' bravado about martyrdom was to be expected *before* a battle, but it was "quite another to maintain that belief during or after a bloody engagement. Many soldiers clung desperately to thoughts of God while bullets flew over their heads and dimly seen lines of Confederates began to appear in their front. This was the elemental role that religion played in the soldier's ability to hold on. It steadied his emotions at a critical time and provided a rock on which he based his courage."¹²² Steven E. Woodworth provides a similar assessment: "The frequent references in soldiers' letters and diaries to the comfort of their hope of salvation leave no room for doubt that this affected their morale – both their willingness to remain in the ranks, forgoing desertion, and their readiness to go into battle again when ordered."¹²³ This made it possible for the soldiers to endure the harsh realities of war: long periods of time away from loved ones, monotonous weeks spent in the camps, deprivation, and

the constant threat of death from disease or battle. Undoubtedly, the leaders of both the Confederacy and the Union recognized the special role of religion in their Civil War Armies.

Chapter Two Endnotes

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- ¹ James Moorhead, *American Apocalypse: Yankee Protestants and the Civil War, 1860-1869* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 19-20.
- ² Michel Barton, *Goodmen: The Character of Civil War Soldiers* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1981), 9.
- ³ Perry Miller, quoted in C.C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schism and the Coming of the American Civil War* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), 23.
- ⁴ Charles Reagan Wilson, "Religion and the American Civil War in Comparative Perspective." in *Religion and the American Civil War*, Ed. Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout and Charles Reagan Wilson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 399.
- ⁵ James Moorhead, quoted in David B. Cheseborough, "*God Ordained This War*": *Sermons on the Sectional Crisis, 1830-1865* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 88-89.
- ⁶ Moorhead, 53.
- ⁷ Moorhead, 41.
- ⁸ Steven E. Woodworth, *While God is Marching On: The Religious World of Civil War Soldiers* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 118-119.
- ⁹ Woodworth, x.
- ¹⁰ C.C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schism and the Coming of the American Civil War* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), 176-77.
- ¹¹ Goen, 176.
- ¹² Moorhead, 126.
- ¹³ Goen, 177-78.
- ¹⁴ Earl J. Hess, "Holding On," in *The Civil War Soldier: A Historical Reader*, Ed. Michael Barton and Larry M. Logue (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 477.
- ¹⁵ Michael Barton, *Goodmen: The Character of Civil War Soldiers* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1981), 24, 25.
- ¹⁶ Wilson, 395.
- ¹⁷ Allen L. Fahnestock, "Diary". North Carolina State Archives, 73, 86.
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- ¹⁹ Goen, 173.
- ²⁰ Goen, 173.

²¹ Wilson, 396.

²² John Patrick Daly, *When Slavery Was Called Freedom: Evangelicalism, Proslavery, and the Causes of the Civil War*. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 104.

²³ Daly, 143.

²⁴ Daly, 148.

²⁵ David B. Chesebrough, *"God Ordained This War": Sermons on the Sectional Crisis, 1830-1865* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 226.

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²⁷ Alf Fries, Letter in the Papers of Dr. John Francis Shaffner, Sr. North Carolina State Archives. Call number: PC. 247.

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³⁰ Donald H. Wickman (Ed. and compiler), *Letters to Vermont: From Her Civil War Soldier Correspondents to the Home Press, Vol. 1* (Bennington: Images of the Past, 1998), 36.

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³⁵ John Patrick Daly, "Holy War: Southern Religion and the Road to War and Defeat, 1831-1865," *North and South* Sept 2003 Vol. 6, No. 6, 42.

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⁴¹ James I. Robertson, *Soldiers Blue and Gray* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 172-73.

⁴² Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank: The Common Soldier of the Union* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 248.

⁴³ Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Johnny Reb: The Common Soldier of the Confederacy* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1943), 174.

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⁵³ *Dear Sister: The Civil War Letters of the Brothers Gould*. Compiled by Robert F. Harris and John Niflot. (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1998), 47-48.

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⁵⁸ James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 66.

⁵⁹ Theodore F. Upson, *With Sherman to the Sea: The Civil War Letters, Diaries and Reminiscences of Theodore F. Upson*, Ed. Oscar Osburn Winther (New York: Kraus Reprints, 1969), 105.

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- ⁷³ Woodworth, 163.
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⁸⁵ Spencer Glasgow Welch, *A Confederate Surgeon's Letters to His Wife* (Marietta, GA: Continental Book Co., 1954), 40-41.

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⁸⁹ Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank*, 32.

⁹⁰ Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank*, 173.

⁹¹ Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank*, 173.

⁹² Hess, 478.

⁹³ Hess, 478-79.

⁹⁴ Hess, 479.

⁹⁵ Robertson, 173.

⁹⁶ McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 63.

⁹⁷ McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 63.

⁹⁸ Daly, *When Slavery Was Called Freedom*, 144.

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¹⁰⁰ Gerald F. Linderman, "Embattled Courage," in *The Civil War Soldier: A Historical Reader*, Ed. Michael Barton and Larry M. Logue (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 438.

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¹⁰² Robertson, 173-174.

¹⁰³ Robertson, 63-64.

¹⁰⁴ *Dear Sister*, 9.

¹⁰⁵ Watson, 30.

¹⁰⁶ Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank*, 64.

¹⁰⁷ Watson, 30.

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- ¹¹² Robertson, 217.
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- ¹¹⁴ Faust, "The Civil War Soldier," 501.
- ¹¹⁵ McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 68.
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- ¹¹⁸ Gerald F. Linderman, *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), 8.
- ¹¹⁹ Linderman, *Embattled Courage*, 9.
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- ¹²¹ Linderman, *Embattled Courage*, 10.
- ¹²² Hess, 477.
- ¹²³ Woodworth, 249.

Chapter Three: Mustering the Regiment for Prayer

Throughout history, leaders, both civilian and military, have always looked for ways to keep morale high throughout a war. While victories on the battlefield go a long way in boosting morale, this boost is very often fleeting. One small setback and the soldiers begin to question the abilities of their leadership, the righteousness of their cause, and their ability as individuals to sustain the will to fight. Soldiers on both sides during the Civil War had these same concerns. For the Union soldiers this concern was prevalent early on in the war as battles such as First Bull Run showed them that the Confederates were not going to be a push over, and that their initial beliefs that they would be home by the end of the summer of 1861, gave way to the reality that this war may take months, or even years, to settle the question of the South's right to secede from the Union. Union soldiers continued to have their doubts about the ultimate outcome of the war until the battles of Vicksburg and Gettysburg in 1863. These battles bolstered the morale of the Union soldiers because they were victorious; and, it was precisely these battles that pushed Confederate morale to a low point. The South never recovered militarily from these two decisive victories, yet Confederate soldiers found the will to fight for two more years. For many of them, the sustaining influence was their religious beliefs. They were still certain that they were God's soldiers, fighting His cause, and that although He may be punishing them for their sins, their guilt would ultimately be cleansed by the blood flowing on the battlefield.

The exuberant feelings that religion evoked did not go unnoticed by those at the top of the military chain of command, both North and South. While not all generals were religious, there were a number of God-fearing generals on both sides of the conflict. Their religiosity showed through as they were about to take their men into battle. They would sometimes preach to their men, and other times they would leave the spiritual guidance of their men to others such as the chaplains who attended the religious needs of the Union and the Confederacy, and extra-military organizations like the North's Christian Commission. The usefulness of religion to their cause was also appreciated by Presidents, Lincoln and Davis. Both men frequently evoked the help of God by calling fast days and using religious terminology in their rhetoric. The emphasis on religion did not go unnoticed by the enlisted men. They generally responded positively to the message and the writing in their diaries and letters attest to this verity. By the war's end, revivals had swept through Union and Confederate camps and reshaped the thinking of many soldiers.

Upon viewing the congregation of the church he was attending – which was mostly soldiers – General Frank Paxson was moved to comment, “Men like these, however gloomy the future may be, look to it pleasantly and happily, contented to receive whatever of good or ill God has in store for them....The future is stripped of its gloom and becomes all bright, beautiful, and happy. To such men death is no enemy, but a messenger expected from God sooner or later, and welcome as the quick path to a holier and happier life. With such soldiers in our army...we might bid defiance to all the boasted numbers and strength of our enemies and feel sure of

victory.”¹ While Bell Irvin Wiley reminds his readers that “[s]ome officers manifested indifference toward religious activities, and a few openly opposed them,” he goes on to report that the “great majority of leaders approved of spiritual exercises.” Both presidents, Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis, tried to invoke the help of God by calling periodic fast days and encouraging both civilians and soldiers to piously observe them. Even before he became President of the Confederacy, Davis, in his address before Congress announcing his resignation upon the onset of hostilities, expounded, “I therefore feel that I but express their [Mississippians] desire when I say I hope, and they hope, for peaceful relations with you, though we must part. They may be mutually beneficial to us in the future, so they have been in the past, if you so will it. The reverse may bring disaster on every portion of the country; and if you will have it thus, putting our trust in God, and in our firm hearts and strong arms, we will vindicate the right as best we may.”² Thus became the pattern for the short-lived Confederacy. They would prepare for war, execute it to the best of their abilities, and pray that God was on their side.

James I. Robertson finds, “The Confederacy became noteworthy for its reliance on God as an ally. Not merely in sermons and church publications, but in the Confederate Constitution, presidential proclamations, and generals’ announcements of victory, thankfulness to the Almighty was a dominant theme.”³ The South was proud of its religious heritage, and southerners were not afraid to express it. Dutifully, “[s]oldiers...generally tried to keep the days of religious observance declared by [President Davis].”⁴ In a somewhat humorous anecdote recorded in the diary of

Charles M. Blackford, he writes, "This is Friday and the fast-day ordered by the President [Davis]....To name one day as a fast day is most amusing since almost any given day is a fast-day for all, whether citizen or soldier....This is the evening of the fast-day, and nothing has been done in the city, nor in our office. I never have seen such a day so devoutly kept by every class of the community."⁵ While this was a moment of comic relief for a single soldier, the business of war was very serious, especially when the South began to lose the upper hand in the conflict.

As the Battle of Shiloh approached, Confederate General A. Sidney Johnston addressed his troops with the following message: "The eyes and hopes of eight millions of people rest upon you. You are expected to show yourself worthy of your race and lineage; worthy of the women of the South, whose noble devotion in this war has never been exceeded at any time. With such incentives to brave deeds and with the trust that God is with us, your general will lead you confidently to combat, assured of success."⁶ The juxtaposition of men of war and religion was sometimes unsettling to the soldiers. Blackford recounts, I went to church today and heard the Rev. General Pendleton preach a very good sermon. His avocations were curiously mixed in his apparel. The gown covered up his uniform entirely except for the wreath and stars of a general on his collar which peeped out to mildly protest against too much 'peace on earth' and the boots and spurs clanked around the chancel with but little sympathy with the doctrine of 'good will towards men.'⁷ Colonel Allen L. Fahnestock, fighting with the 86th Regiment of the Illinois Infantry Volunteers, was cognizant of this type of awkward concurrence, and he was also aware of the faith of

some of the southern military leaders. Upon hearing of the death of General Leonidas Polk, one of the most well-known "fighting parsons," Fahnestock recorded in his diary on June 14, 1864: "General Polk killed, a great loss to the rebels he claimed to be a Christian reformer, and a rebel to his country and its Flag does not speak well for a man of God, and peace, and Love of Mankind."⁸ Despite Fahnestock's uneasiness with the mixture of war and religion, his northern leaders were just as culpable.

Historian Steven E. Woodworth points out, "For obvious reasons, military authorities were eager to promote the idea that God would favor the Union cause. For this reason, along with sincere piety on the part of many leaders, formal religious observances were sometimes held in the Army."⁹ Of course, their job of equating the Union's cause with God's cause had ostensibly been taken care of by the various churches prior to war. In addition, soldiers received reminders. In Boston, in 1862, the Massachusetts Sabbath School Society published a *Soldier's Diary and Book for Leisure Moments*, which included many patriotic and religious teachings as well as a small space for soldiers to keep a diary. An example of the mixing of religion and government is witnessed in the following quote taken from the book: "Whilst just government protects all in their religious rights, true religion affords government its surest support."¹⁰ With messages like this ubiquitous in the camps, it is no wonder that "[r]eligion lay very close to patriotism in the minds of a great many Union soldiers." Further proof comes from the experiences of members of "the Sixty-seventh Indiana [who] sometimes drifted across the line from the expression of one to the expression of the other. 'It was not infrequent,' wrote R.B. Scott, 'when a rousing

sacred meeting was at its highest pitch that a tune would be switched off into an outburst of patriotism, when the very walls would tremble and roof shake with the soul-stirring strains' of patriotic music."¹¹ It was this juxtaposition of religion and patriotism that moved leaders like Abraham Lincoln to use religion to its fullest potential in supporting the Union's cause.

While many consider Lincoln to be an irreligious man because he did not attend regular services in any church, his writings and speeches reflect a different reality. Throughout his time in office, he deftly used religion to bolster the Union cause. Yet, it seems that his religious feelings went deeper than simply promulgating religion to gain support for the war effort. His reflections on religion began with his "First Inaugural Address." In the Address he inquires, "Why should there not be a patient confidence in the ultimate justice of the people? Is there any better or equal hope in the world? In our present differences, is either party without faith of being in the right? If the Almighty Ruler of nations, with his eternal truth and justice, be on your side of the North, or on yours of the South, that truth and justice will surely prevail by the judgment of this great tribunal of the American people."¹² This amiable tone, whereby he does not seem to be choosing sides in the conflict, wanes as the speech goes on. Taking a more decidedly northern viewpoint, he comments later on in the speech, "If it were admitted that you who are dissatisfied hold the right side in the dispute, there still is no single good reason for precipitate action. Intelligence, patriotism, Christianity, and firm reliance on him who has never yet forsaken this favored land are still competent to adjust in the best way all our present difficulty."¹³

Putting his beliefs in the righteousness of the Union's cause into action, on May 4, 1861, Lincoln issued General Orders Number 15 and 16. These orders "stipulated that colonels of both the regular and volunteer regiments must appoint a chaplain for their units, and that the minister so chosen had to be elected by the vote of the officers of the regiment."¹⁴ Thus, he commingled the prevalent feelings of Americans' about religion *and* democracy. Many Americans, as Alexis de Tocqueville found in his tour of the United States in 1831, felt that the only way that America could maintain its democratic institutions was by utilizing the restraining influence of religion. The Second Great Awakening was the perfect foil to unchecked democracy because the revivals focused on preparing individuals for salvation, which meant they were expected to lead a pious life, free from sin. So, it was only natural that when it came time to assign a chaplain to each of the regiments, that the men of the regiment would be called on to select whom they felt would best serve their religious needs. Religion in America was seen as a morally restraining force, yet many Americans may have rejected a religion that did not in some way reflect their democratic beliefs.

In addition to making sure that each regiment had their own chaplain, Lincoln, throughout the war, "declared a number of days of fasting and prayer or of thanksgiving, as seemed appropriate," most of which were adhered to by the soldiers and their commanding officers.¹⁵ An example of this appears in a letter James T. Miller wrote on April 15, 1862. He writes, "[W]e got an order from the secretary of war ordering the Chaplains of the regiments to have divine service on last Sunday at

noon to return thanks to the Almighty for his blessing on our arms and we had the regiment paraded under arms to hear a sermon from our C[h]aplain and he gave us a good sermon.”¹⁶ Lincoln’s support of religion was a vital component to keeping morale high amongst northern troops. This support of the North’s religious views included northerners’ view that slavery was immoral.

In fact, one of the most decisive turning points in the war did not come with the firing of cannons on the battlefield, but rather with the stroke of President Lincoln’s pen in the White House. Proving that sometimes the pen is mightier than the sword, Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. As many historians have pointed out, the Proclamation profoundly affected how other nations viewed the struggle in America. By making the war at least partially a war to end slavery, Britain and France, two nations who were considering siding with the Confederacy, were effectively held at bay because the people of those nations would not tolerate fighting on the side of a nation that was trying to perpetuate slavery. Just as important to the success of the Union cause was the support of northerners who were expected to bear the burdens of the war. In issuing the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln redefined the civil struggle as a war for freedom as well as for the Union and in the process made the northern effort into a millennial crusade, with crusaders shaped by evangelical rhetoric that came to be affirmed by nonevangelicals as well.”¹⁷ Anticipating the effects that emancipation would have on the nation, Lewis Tappan, writing at the outset of the war, enjoined, “It can be safely said, that after emancipation, the fee simple of the land in the Slave States would be worth a vast

deal more than the present value of the land and negroes. Add to this the peace, prosperity, and amicable relations that would prevail throughout the whole country, and especially the blessing of the Almighty upon the nation, which would surely be the result, and what patriot or Christian will not labor and pray for immediate emancipation?"¹⁸

After the Proclamation was issued, the Reverend Marvin Richardson Vincent, of Troy, New York, preached in a Thanksgiving Day sermon, "The evils we combat, have been growing for eighty years, and are not going to disappear at our word. They will die hard, and it is well; for God is testing our worthiness to enjoy the boom of liberty, by asking how much we love it, how hard are we willing to fight for it, how much are we willing to sacrifice for it: and if we shall do this work like men, if we shall fall in with God's manifest design to purge our national anthem, singing with ever bolder emphasis, until the palmetto groves, and the still lagoons, and the snowy fields of cotton, now no longer King, shall be stirred with the voice of thanksgiving."¹⁹ That same Thanksgiving, in Boston, another preacher intoned, "What connection has our war with this consummation [of the Millennium]? The progress of the promised grace has subdued its first enemy, idolatry. This destroyed man's allegiance to God. It must subdue the second enemy, which is man's hostility to man. This hostility assumes civic and social forms. It is monarchic, Slavic, disuniting. Against these, march democracy, unity, fraternity, every man the equal and the brother of every man. To gain this victory we are now contending....All governments based on the few, by the few, and for the few, are hostile to the

government of Christ, and must be abolished before his Glory fully comes.”²⁰ Sounding as much the preacher as the president, Abraham Lincoln in his “Second Inaugural Address,” preached that while both sides looked to the same God for support, only one side’s wishes could be granted since their wishes were diametrically opposed – the North wanting restoration of the Union without the sin of slavery, and the South wanting to enjoy their freedom from the Union, and with that their system of labor. For all his eloquence, Lincoln, of course, could not devote much of his time intoning to the masses. The majority of the religious work done on the behalf of the Union was done by others.

The first in this line were the commanding officers. Being a practical man, “[w]hen U.S. Grant assumed overall command of the Union forces in the western theater, he ordered that [Christian] Commission delegates should have free and unhindered access to his troops. Since this order coincided with an intense revival among Northern soldiers at the time of the Chattanooga campaign, Grant was probably aware of the effect of the revivals in strengthening the confidence of his units, and he understood well the need for positive gestures to boost further the morale of his army.”²¹ Grant’s support of religion trickled down to the lower ranking officers as well; and, soldiers were cognizant of which leaders supported religion and those who did not.

In a letter home, Wilbur Fisk noted, “Col. Whiting is a praying man and a consistent Christian, which, though rare, is in no sense a mean commendation for an officer in the American army.”²² Hamlin Alexander Coe expressed the idea that

perhaps some leaders had ulterior motives, or at least were inconsistent, in their desire to practice religion. He writes, "We have remained here all day simply because the Colonel in charge of us is religious, and it is against his principles to transact business on the Sabbath; but he can get drunk and fight without smiting his conscience a bit."²³ Another soldier, Theodore Lyman who was a part of Sherman's March to the Sea, conveys, "To-day is Sunday, which is marked by General 'Seth' shutting up shop and obstinately refusing to talk with sundry officers who deem it a good leisure day to go over and consult on private interests. 'Sir!' says 'Seth'...Sir! The Pres'dent of these 'Nited States has issued a proclamation, saying nothing should be done Sundays; and Gen'l Merklellan did the same, and so did Gen'l Hooker; and you wanter talk business, you've got or come week days."²⁴ Some officers, when compelled by circumstances to fill a void left by the lack of a chaplain, preached to their soldiers. Dunham G. Burt of the 1st Vermont Light Artillery/Battery F, 1st U.S. Artillery, recorded the following in a letter to the local newspaper back home: At 11 o'clock a.m., we were called on deck, where a meeting was held, prayer was offered, and Lieut. Mason of Co. F, St Albans, read a sermon. This is the first divine service since we came on board, and this is the fourth Sunday."²⁵ Other officers were also pressed into religious service by circumstances.

Allen L. Fahnestock's diary entry for November 1, 1863, remarks, "Sunday morning clear and cold. In the afternoon the battery on Old Lookout Mountain opened on us with two guns, one a rifled 14 Pounder the shells fell all around us. One struck a small tree, a soldier was leaning against the tree, cannon ball cut the tree off

close to the ground and rolled the soldier down the hill, he was not hurt. I mustered the Regiment for prayer.”²⁶ A few officers, such as Granville Moody, came into the military service already having served in religious roles. Like Fahnestock, in times of adversity he would gather the troops to pray. Albert A. Nofi reports, “In keeping with its reputation for devoutness, on December 31, 1862, as the [74th Ohio] regiment prepared to go into action, Moody gathered his men together for a prayer. As they bowed their heads, the good colonel began, ‘Now boys, fight for your country and your God...’ At that moment a tremendous volley of Confederate musket balls snapped by overhead, interrupting the colonel but overshooting the gathered men, so that they suffered nary a single injury. Colonel Moody paused hardly an instant before adding, ‘...and aim low!’ With that, the regiment went into action.”²⁷ Religion was often invoked by leaders as a battle approached.

Military leaders on both sides, however, also tried to allow for observance of the Sabbath. Generals from the North and the South often reminded their commanding officers not to interrupt Sunday services if at all possible. This does not mean however that the armies were idle on Sundays. There were often troop movements on Sundays, but the officers tried to postpone them until after the church services were complete, or they tried to reach their destination in time for an early evening service. This attempt, when successful, pleased the chaplains of the North and the South. But, the officers were not necessarily setting aside time for the chaplains to do their work for benevolent reasons alone. Wiley says, “The encouragement given by officers to the work of chaplains derived in great part from

their own spiritual inclination. But they undoubtedly attributed to religious influence a salutary effect on the rank and file, particularly in such practical matters as discipline, morale, and conduct under fire."²⁸ None of this is surprising given the history of religion in America, especially since the advent of the Second Great Awakening in the three decades leading up to the Civil War, and the religious rhetoric spewed from the northern and southern pulpits and the religious press at the commencement of hostilities.

Although there were times when the military brass stepped in to provide religious services, the majority of that work fell to the chaplains. Steven E. Woodworth finds, "Chaplains were the most numerous, visible and direct representatives of organized religion in the camps."²⁹ Bell Irvin Wiley, speaking about the Union, agrees, "Religious activity centered about the chaplains, one of whom was authorized for each regiment, for specific army posts and, after May 1862, for general hospitals."³⁰ Despite authorization to stock the armies with chaplains, "a shortage of army chaplains existed from at the beginning of the hostilities and became worse as the struggle continued. In a phrase, the army and the churches together demanded too much. Not enough clergymen existed to meet the demands in military service and, at the same time, maintain church organizations on the homefront."³¹ Indicative of the problem were the figures put out by the U.S. War Department in June 1862: "of 676 regiments in the field, only 395 had chaplains on official assignment; and of that number, 29 were absent on detached service while another 13 were absent without leave. Fully a third of the Federal regiments had no chaplain."³²

The soldiers' letters and diaries reflected this reality. Wilbur Fisk writes, "A week ago yesterday we had the rare entertainment of church service, the first we have enjoyed since in camp near White Oak Church" nearly two months previous.³³ Due to the shortage of chaplains, many regiments had to share the services of chaplains. On June 5, 1864, Hamlin Alexander Coe recorded in his diary, "Most of the boys went to church, or rather to hear a sermon from a chaplain of another regiment. I was too busy to go."³⁴ The South was in a similar predicament.

Consequently, religious services took a while to get a foothold in the Confederate camps. Gardiner Shattuck explains, "Unlike the United States government, which recognized the value of providing spiritual care for soldiers through its support of military chaplains, the Confederacy intentionally excluded the chaplaincy from the original organization of its army" because some leaders felt the clergy was incompetent and would better serve the Confederacy as soldiers. Other simply felt that it was not the government's business to support ministers.³⁵ The need for soldiers is reflected in the fact that despite the presence of one hundred clergymen "in the Army of Tennessee in 1863, only half of that number held chaplains' posts."³⁶ Steven E. Woodworth speculates that an additional reason for the South's reluctance to appoint chaplains was "perhaps as a result of the South's long-professed aversion to any religious input in the things of this present world."³⁷ As was seen in chapter one, the southern mantra, when it fit their cause, was that "the church had no right involving itself with the 'things which are Caesar's.'"³⁸ Eventually, southern leadership capitulated to the soldiers' demands for chaplains. However, given the

shortage of fighting men on the Confederate side, the chaplaincy also experienced a shortage. As late as 1863, the "C.S. Chaplains Association reported...that half of the southern units were without a minister."³⁹ The total number of Confederate chaplains who served in that capacity is estimated to be slightly above 700 men.⁴⁰ But, it must be remembered that not all 700 served at one time.

Despite the respectable pay, \$80 a month for Confederate chaplains and \$100 a month for Union chaplains, "for a number of reasons, chaplains as a group had difficulty in obtaining security, requisitions, and recognition."⁴¹ Hence, the "chaplaincy service, especially in the first stages of the war, did not always attract men of ability and devotion. Most of the accomplished clergy...were reluctant to abandon the peaceful security of civilian positions for the hardships and perils of army life."⁴² Therefore, initially, nearly anyone who showed up and volunteered was accepted. As a result, a "[l]ack of scruples characterized a number of the early army ministers. A Wisconsin chaplain displayed the basest conduct by boarding in a brothel while his regiment camped in a field. One cleric was court-martialed for stealing a horse; another deserted with ninety dollars in regimental funds; [and] a third entered a stud-poker game in the camp of the 2nd Connecticut Artillery one evening and promptly cleaned out an entire company."⁴³ In an attempt to stop these types of men from entering the Union forces as chaplains, "[a]n Act of August 3, 1861, as amended on July 17, 1862, provided that no person should be appointed a chaplain who was not a regularly ordained minister and endorsed by his denomination

or by at least five ministers of his faith..."⁴⁴ Over time, the poor ministers tended to be culled from the chaplaincy.

Those that remained did not have it easy. They had to endure most of the hardships that the other soldiers face. In addition, they had to walk a fine line when it came to pleasing the enlisted men and officers. James I. Robertson asserts, "The respected Holy Joes willingly made sacrifices for their flock. Chaplain Scandlin was known to carry as many as three muskets on a march so that a like number of soldiers could get momentary relief....The Reverend John F. Moors of the 52nd Massachusetts was of the same mold. During a long and hot advance, he agreed to carry a soldier's blanket on his horse. Others rapidly made the same request. Soon little more than Moor's head was visible above the saddle. Good-natured cheers came from the ranks: 'The chaplain is well barricaded! The rebels can't hit him! Nothing short of a shell can reach him!' Moor laughed along with the men."⁴⁵ Confederate clergymen "labored under severe military restrictions. The clergyman had no standard uniform and his rank was at best a quasi-official position. A chaplain received the rations of a private rather than an officer; he could not draw government forage for his own horse but had to purchase it with whatever money he had; he was not even entitled to issues of paper and ink, even though he had to write out sermons."⁴⁶ These rough conditions did not make it easy to attract clergymen. One who served as a clergyman, and reflected the frustration, was "Chaplain John S. Paris of the 54th North Carolina in 'Stonewall' Jackson's corps [who] begged a fellow clergyman back home to give assistance. 'Can you not find a man who will volunteer as a chaplain in some of our

regiments in this Corps? Here are fifteen regiments from North Carolina without chaplains. I am the only one in my Brigade...Such a life is rough.”⁴⁷ This shortage led a Georgia officer to complain that despite his efforts to secure a chaplain, his troops had gone five months without a sermon. Exasperated, another officer, “General John B. Gordon, wrote a Presbyterian newspaper to ask why there were so few preachers in the army. ‘Was it that they did not wish to cast pearls before swine? Whole groups seldom hear a sermon. Send more ministers!’”⁴⁸ One of the soldiers in the ranks, W.W. Heartsill reflected the rarity of having a minister in the camp in his diary entry on March 8, 1863: “We are very fortunate in having a Minister in the 24th Tex. he preaches every Sunday.”⁴⁹ At times, the men on both sides were desperate for good quality preachers. As time passed, and the bad preachers were weeded out, when the soldiers were lucky enough to hear a preacher, the sermons were generally satisfying.

Besides conducting church services and holding prayer meetings, chaplains were expected to perform baptisms and burials, tend to the sick and wounded, and comfort the dying.⁵⁰ With such a heavy workload, and the added stress of the hardships that they had to endure – often times living with the same deprivations as the common soldier – James I. Robertson finds, “The unpretentious men who in the main filled most chaplain posts in the Civil War were genuinely motivated, filled with both patriotism and righteousness, and able to bring a sense of caring to a war atmosphere of callousness....Chaplain Alexander Betts of the 30th North Carolina embodied the spirit of these field ministers when he extolled: “God help our men to

fight! Have mercy on those who are to die!”⁵¹ Out of all the duties that chaplains performed, perhaps the most important, according to Steven E. Woodworth, was comforting the dying.⁵² Colonel W.W. Stringfield, of the Thomas’s Legion NCT, felt that fighting wickedness in the camps was one of the more important functions of the chaplains. He recorded in his diary on August 2, 1864: “Brother James preached for my command at 8 AM to day. at 10 Major Bell _ formerly of Gen Stuart’s Staff preached to our Brigade, at night the Chaplain of 36 va. preached in the village. The clergy seem to be a little aroused. I am glad of it. For oh the wickedness in camp. I am making a poor effort to do right. but it is a struggle against a Swift opposing current. May Heaven protect and sustain me + return me uncorrupted to those I love.”⁵³ To accomplish the end that Stringfield stressed, the theme of the preaching varied, depending upon the outcome of recent battles.

When the war was going well, “chaplains stressed that it was because the men were keeping the faith. If they were losing, it was a temporary setback caused by sinfulness. The ministers rationalized protracted reverses by comparing the current plight to the tribulations faced by the Israelites of old as they struggled toward the Promised Land.”⁵⁴ An overzealous “Alabama chaplain, whose patriotism momentarily exceeded his piety, closed a cam meeting by praying that the Yankees’ moral sensibilities might be awakened by the roar of our cannon and the gleam of our bayonets and that the stars and bars might soon wave in triumph through these beleaguered states!”⁵⁵ The chaplains reached out to the soldiers wherever they were needed.

Chaplains who were laboring for the Lord in the war knew where to set up shop to be able to cull the most converts. Many chaplains worked the hospitals where the wounded often were receptive to their message, especially if they were severely wounded – or severely bored by an extended stay in the hospital. Historian Steven E. Woodworth says that a number of soldiers were converted because they “were impressed with the peace and happiness of dying Christians among their fellow soldiers.” He recounts that “on [one] occasion when a Christian soldier died in an army hospital in the summer of 1862, obviously happy and without fear, a number of those present were deeply impressed. One remarked, ‘I never prayed until last night; but when I saw that man die so happy, I determined to seek religion too!’”⁵⁶ An enterprising Confederate chaplain stated, “Strange as it may appear to some...scores of men are converted immediately after great battles. This has become so common that I as confidently look for the arrival of such patients as I do for the wounded.”⁵⁷ One such Confederate soldier proclaimed from his hospital bed, “When I was at home, I was wild and wicked, but since I have been in the army, I have tried to change my life, and since I have been wounded I have been able to trust my soul in the hands of God, and I feel that if he should call me to die, all will be well.”⁵⁸ Chaplains tried to do their job whenever possible, mindful that if they upset the commanding officers, life for the chaplain would be difficult.

The chaplains were mindful that they were in a war zone and that sometimes religion had to take a backseat to the safety and well-being of the soldier’s physical needs. Consequently, “the leading religious service in camp took place on Sunday

afternoons so as not to interfere with morning duties and inspections. Such meetings were generally outdoors in front of a tent or in the woods. Listeners either stood or sat on logs and boxes in irregular fashion. A barrel, camp stool, or caisson served as the altar.”⁵⁹ When time would permit, and if there was enough interest, religious services would predominate on any give Sunday. Sergeant Henry Brantingham recorded in his diary on September 7, 1862, “Religious services in the woods at 9 A.M. by Revd Mr Taylor of Freehold + 3 P.M. by a member of the Camp. The day passed off as quiet as could be expected under the circumstances. In the evening had singing, prayer + exhortation in our Barrack__ had a very solemn meeting. Henry Giles asked prayer for himself + family__9 P.M. called roll and retired.”⁶⁰ William Wiley reported, “We marched 18 miles and encamped in the pine timber. That night we had prayer meeting in the woods, God’s first temple. Chaplain McCullough spoke a short time to the men.”⁶¹ Whether for solitude, for protection, or to commune with nature, the woods were a common place to conduct religious services.

Soldiers often reflected upon the efforts of their chaplains. Herman A. Norton says, “Soldiers spoke not of attending worship or participating in church services, but of ‘going to preaching.’”⁶² The preaching that they heard was typically scrutinized by the soldiers. There are many accounts in the diaries and letters of Civil War soldiers of the religious services that they attended. For example, “On July 16, 1862, James Wamell of the 5th Georgia Cavalry wrote in his diary: ‘Preaching at 4 o'clock by the Rev. Mr. Paine. Sermon not very consoling to the friends of those who has fell on our battle fields. after role call Mr. Paine made a speech, I suppose, on the crisis of the

day in which he informed us that he would have been a capt. In the confederate army if he would & his health would have admitted, also that he was willing to be in the confederate service for 20 years rather than be sub[ju]gated. How unfortunate it is so many Patriots are in such bad health.”⁶³ Besides their preaching, chaplains were also evaluated by the soldiers on their willingness to rough it with the soldiers. Therefore, “[e]xcessive absenteeism from the ranks also brought complaints about chaplains....Confederate John Sale sneered that the rarely seen chaplains in his brigade ‘are so careful of their precious bodies that they can take none for souls which is their business.’”⁶⁴ One chaplain, who desired to ease his own situation on a march by commandeering a civilian’s horse, had a pointed exchange with the regimental commander who inquired where he found the horse:

‘Down the road there,’ the chaplain replied.

Angrily the colonel told the chaplain to return the horse.

Protesting strongly, the chaplain sought to justify what he had done by stating: ‘Why Jesus Christ, when He was on earth, took an ass whereon to ride to Jerusalem.’

The colonel snapped back: ‘You are not Jesus Christ; that is not an ass; you are not on your way to Jerusalem; and the sooner you restore that horse to its owner, the better it will be for you.’⁶⁵

Chaplains like this one who appeared to be most concerned with their own comfort, tended not to last very long in the service. Many chose to desert, especially when the bullets started flying. “In the last named class was the chaplain of the 3rd Alabama. A member of that regiment once wrote: ‘We got into a little row with the Yankees a few days ago and our parson, deeming, no doubt, that ‘discretion was the better part of valor,’ took to his heels when the shells commenced flying and I have not seen him

since.”⁶⁶ Luckily for the South not all of their clergy acting in such a cowardly fashion.

There were a number of southern clergymen who stood up against the North with honor. One of the more fervent examples is “a Louisiana minister who defied Northern ministers to set foot in the South:

I am one of five ministers, of three different denominations, in a single company [of the Confederate army], armed for the defence of our rights and liberties, three of whom are between 50 and 60 years old. And I tell you in candor, and in the fear of God, that if you or any of the *brethren* who have urged on this diabolical war, come on with the invading army, I would slay you with as hearty a good will, and with as clear a conscience, as I would the midnight assassin.... You are my enemy, and I am yours.⁶⁷

Officially, chaplains were supposed to stay out of the fight. Feeling it their duty to assist in any way possible, “many of them nevertheless went to the front lines, reassured the men with prayers and words of encouragement, gave aid to the fallen, and often displayed incredible bravado.... Federals assaulted a Confederate camp as the southerners were preparing breakfast. Chaplain Abner Hopkins of the 2nd Virginia leaped up from the campfire, grabbed a frying pan and, using that utensil as a weapon, rallied his brethren.”⁶⁸ Some other chaplains went even further. For example, Isaac T. Tichenor, an Alabama chaplain, recorded this episode at Shiloh: “[W]e were under crossfire... from three directions. Under it the boys wavered. I had been wearied and was sitting down, but seeing them waver, I sprang to my feet, took off my hat, waved it over my head, walked up and down the line, and, as they say, ‘preached them a sermon.’ I reminded them that it was Sunday. That at that hour all their home folk were praying for them... I called upon them to stand there and die, if need be, for

their country. The effect was evident. Every man stood his post, every eye flashed, and every heart beat high with desperate resolve to conquer or die.” Tichenor himself was credited with “killing a Federal Colonel, a major, and four privates.”⁶⁹ There were other courageous chaplains besides Tichenor. One such chaplain was William P. McBryde who, after participating in one skirmish, “found bullet holes in his shoe, haversack, the back of his coat, the front of the vest, his sleeve, and his Bible – yet he was not wounded.”⁷⁰ A kind Providence must have been protecting him. “The Reverend T.L. Duke of the 19th Mississippi,” has the distinction of being “the only Confederate chaplain cited for gallant conduct in the Official Records.” He distinguished himself at Chancellorsville where he “remained in front of his regiment with his musket during the series of engagements and mainly directed the movements of the skirmishes of that regiment.”⁷¹ By the end of the war, there were more than fifty chaplains recorded as casualties in the war. One of those chaplains, “A.G. Burrow of the 30th Mississippi returned to camp after a skirmish with a four-inch gash in his skull.” The description of Burrows as he entered camp was indicative of the plight of many under-supplied Confederate soldiers. One of the clergy who survived the attack stated, “It was winter and bitter cold...The wounded chaplain had no overcoat. His other coat was thin and ragged. All his clothing was worn out.” The Mississippi clergyman succumbed in the field, ‘his devotion to his God and his country’ having ‘cost him his life.’” Another minister, the “Reverend George L. Winchester died from fatigue after struggling to minister daily to two different regiments.”⁷² The life of the chaplains was wrought with danger and sacrifice.

The chaplains certainly would not have been as successful at taking care of the spiritual well-being of the soldiers if they did not have the help of others. Steven E. Woodworth reports, "The churches and such Christian organizations as the various Bible societies could attend to these souls by sending the armies Bibles, tracts, and preachers, and many in both North and South proposed to do so."⁷³ Consequently, many denominations that had been focusing their missionary efforts overseas prior to the outbreak of the Civil War, shifted their emphasis to missions closer to home – in the Civil War camps. In addition to these missionaries, colporteurs supported the efforts of the chaplains. These people were typically "[e]mployees of religious denominations or benevolent societies [whose]...primary duty was to distribute Bibles and tracts to the soldiers." Like the chaplains, "[t]hey were often visible in or near hospitals, where they found a 'captive' and usually more eager reception for their materials."⁷⁴ All of this work needed monetary support. It is estimated that the American people gave well over 200 million dollars to the various war-related charities.⁷⁵

As the figures reflect, taking care of the religious needs of the soldiers was an expensive proposition. At the top of the list for soldiers was the Bible. The Confederate demand for Bibles was so high that "[c]haplains and colporteurs alike scoured every outlet to keep soldiers supplied with testaments. Yet there were never enough to meet the demand," especially as the war dragged on and the Union blockade became more effective.⁷⁶ The aforementioned colporteurs were employed by various religious organizations to disseminate a variety of written materials

besides the Bible. James I. Robertson categorizes the publications into three varieties. The first “were official church organs” such as the Richmond-based *Religious Herald*, which was, according to Robertson, by far “the largest of such publications and had the greatest influence of all the many Baptist periodicals.” The second category of publication in Robertson’s accounting, is “[p]eriodicals specifically produced for servicemen...[which] were basically tracts in newspaper form.” The third category of religious publications, “and by far the largest of the categories were religious tracts....Hundreds of such pamphlets were delivered weekly to the armies” and nearly all of them preached about the ways of salvation. According to Robertson, the “most popular of all was an eight-page leaflet, *A Mother’s Parting Words to Her Soldier Son*...[which] called on a son to uphold liberty, freedom, and Christian values; and it did so with such effectiveness that over 250,000 copies went into the Confederate armies.”⁷⁷ “Colporteurs and missionaries claimed that the tracts always met with eager receptions and were highly conducive to improved behavior,” but the soldiers expressed a variety of opinions of the tracts.

Examining the soldiers’ writings, Robertson concludes, “Some officers resented the tracts because they felt that the repeated references to death, judgment, and hell unnerved the fighting man and made him unreliable in battle.” This is in contrast to earlier evidence that showed that religion tended to calm the nerves of the soldiers. Others complained because, as one soldier put it, he was “being deluged ‘with a plethora of religious tracts while I for weeks lay prone upon an army cot.’” However, a member of the 17th Mississippi was confident that the troops ‘generally

receive them thankfully & read them with profit to their morals.”⁷⁸ Likewise, W.W. Heartsill, in his diary wrote, “This evening a Cumberland Presbyterian Minister visit our prison and distributed a Testament to each man; that would accept one. they are thankfully received and will be; we hope, profitably read by many of the soldiers.”⁷⁹ The efforts of individuals like this Presbyterian minister went a long way in providing for the spiritual well-being of the Civil War soldiers.

However, all of the efforts of these individuals, both North and South, were dwarfed by the efforts of the Christian Commission. The Christian Commission was, by far, the organization that received the most money, and did the most for the soldiers from a religious perspective was the Christian Commission. The impetus for the establishment of the Christian Commission came from the Board of Directors of the New York City YMCA. Meeting on May 21, 1861, they discussed how best to serve the religious needs of the soldiers. Six days later, ‘The Army Committee of the New York Young Men’s Christian Association was established....Committee members visited camps, distributed tracts, and held spiritual meetings.’⁸⁰ Through the efforts of Vincent Colyer and George H. Stuart, interest grew, resulting in a “call for a meeting to be held in New York on November 14-15, 1861.” It was at this meeting that the Christian Commission was officially formed.⁸¹ At its commencement, the Commission was a loose network of individuals interested in ministering to the troops. In fact, early on they tried as much as possible to work through the chaplains already assigned to the armies by the government. Eventually however, their efforts became more systematized and regimented.⁸² Astoundingly, “the commission in 1864

alone dispensed over 569,700 Bibles, 4,815,000 hymnals and psalm books, plus 13,681,000 pages of religious literature. It encouraged men to write home by distributing free paper and stamps. Dozens of its minister-representatives went into the field to provide assistance and material benefits.”⁸³ The efforts of the Christian Commission were supported by two auxiliaries: the Ladies Christian Commission which held fairs to raise awareness and money; and the Youths’ Christian Commission which asked children “to send ‘housewives’ (sewing kits) and moralistic letters to the soldiers.”⁸⁴ An excerpt from one of the letters that was held up as a model for others, and was even printed as a tract entitled *Little Lizzie’s Letter*, is indicative of the messages conveyed: “Do you kneel down and say your prayers? If I were you I would not care if the other soldiers did laugh; God will smile upon you.”⁸⁵ Messages like this one that soldiers read as they prepared to face the uncertainties of the battlefield were powerful.

Many of the soldiers seemed to appreciate the efforts of the Commission. One such soldier was Wilbur Fisk. On a few occasions he mentions the efforts of the Christian Commission in his letters home. In a letter dated November 29, 1863, he reports, “One week ago today we had divine services in our regiment, held by Mr. Chandler, from Brattleboro. As we have no chaplain of our own, and consequently very meagre religious privileges of any kind, it was quite a rarity to hear anyone preach. He is connected with the Christian Commission, and in anticipation of a battle, had come out here to act the part of the Good Samaritan to the suffering.”⁸⁶ The next spring he announced, “I believe the soldiers like these Christian

Commission delegates better than they do the regular army chaplains.” He felt that most soldiers thought the chaplains were there for personal gain, whereas, the delegates of the Christian Commission had the well-being of the soldiers foremost in their minds.⁸⁷ Another soldier, a Pennsylvanian also “praised their efforts: ‘Close to the rear of the battle line, often amidst the crashing of shells and the smoke of battle, these devoted men carried fuel and water to keep their vessels of hot coffee full and steaming; and with hands tender as a woman’s, fed the hungry, staunched the blood, and bound up the gashes...These priests of God, Catholic and Protestant, asked no questions of the sufferer, but simply obeyed the divine precept to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and bind up the wounds of both friend and foe.’”⁸⁸ This statement is particularly powerful given the fact that in the United States at this time there was a strong anti-Catholic bias. But, apparently the Christian Commission performed their duties so well that soldiers were willing to embrace a more ecumenical spirit.

Even many people outside the army recognized the work of the Christian Commission. Henry Boynton Smith said of the Commission, “it ‘stands out alone in the records of civilization and Christianity. More thoroughly than any other institution it has carried the spirit and principle of Christianity to the battle-field...It is a new chapter in Church History.’”⁸⁹ In another resoundingly positive portrayal of the efforts of the Commission, “Senator J.R. Doolittle told a gathering of friends of the commission that its work ‘demonstrates that at this hour Christian prayer and influence upon earth is greater, more potent, more beneficent, than at any other period since the Saviour appeared.’”⁹⁰ Perhaps all this high-minded praise was the result of

the Christian Commission practical outlook. As James Moorhead says, "Although its fundamental motivation was religious, the commission never forgot, in the words of [George H.] Stuart, that 'there is a good deal of religion in a warm shirt and a good beefsteak.'"⁹¹ This attitude of do whatever works best to get the religious message to the soldiers paid dividends as the war progressed.

But, all of the efforts by the various religious workers did not seem to work early in the war as the soldiers were unfettered from the restraints of home life. Consequently, what Bell Irvin Wiley concludes for the "[t]roops who wintered at Cumberland Gap in 1861-1862," holds true for many other troops as well. Wiley says these troops "were not sufficiently interested in religious services to provide shelter for them. Concerning the general attitude of these men a chaplain said, 'Very few of the commissioned officers were religious. The large proportion of these the soldiers were wicked and many were reckless. For more than a year very few manifested any desire to become Christians save the sick and wounded.'"⁹² As a result, Wiley says, "Some of the ministers who accompanied volunteer outfits to camp became so disheartened by the general spirit of desuetude that they despaired of their missions and went home. 'Mr. Allen is going to quit the army,' a Mississippian wrote in December, 1862; 'he says it is an uphill and discouraging business preaching to Soldiers - I think so too - He hears nothing but the worst of language, his ears are greeted hourly with oaths.'"⁹³ However, as the war raged on the chaplains who had not left in despair began to witness a change in the soldiers' desire for religion.

The efforts of all the various religious organizations and individuals fostered an outpouring of religious fervor that helped at times to spur revivals throughout the Union and Confederate armies. Steven E. Woodworth gives most of the credit for these revivals to the soldiers themselves. He argues, "Chaplains and missionaries eagerly strove to add to the impetus of the revival movement, but they were not its source or even its indispensable channels. Its origins could be traced much more in the soldiers themselves, and even the prolonged absence of a chaplain could not stanch their intense interest in spiritual things."⁹⁴ Gardiner Shattuck attributes the army revivals to the overall revival movement at work throughout the United States in the nineteenth century. He especially gives credit "to the so-called 'businessmen's' revival of 1857, which had begun in several major cities and then spread throughout the country just prior to the war." One soldier, Wilbur Fisk, did not think that the revivals were particularly extraordinary. He expresses this belief in a letter: "Some who have been with us and seen how easily great results are obtained, have called it a revival, when really it is not a revival, it is only what can be done anywhere in the army, at any time by the same means."⁹⁵ Some historians however, take issue with this summation. Woodworth claims, "The Great Revivals of 1862 and 1863 changed the nature of the Civil War armies. In part, it undid some of the coarsening and going astray that had led many devoutly raised youths into sin during their first months in the army. In part the revivals went beyond even that, converting many who had not previously taken Christianity seriously."⁹⁶ While the North experienced these revivals, it was in the southern camps that the revivals were especially strong.

The predominate reason for this fervid revivalism in the South was the fact that as the war progressed, it became more and more evident that the South was headed for defeat. Partially to ameliorate the mental anguish of being on the losing side, and in an attempt to reverse their misfortunes by honoring the One who could bring them victory, the Confederates "periodically countered the horrors of war with the faith of religious revivals."⁹⁷ Drew Gilpin Faust finds, "From the Fall of 1862 until the last days of the Civil War, religious revivalism swept through Confederate forces with an intensity that led one southerner to declare the armies had been 'nearly converted into churches.'"⁹⁸ Bell Irvin Wiley attributes four factors to the intensity of the revivals in the Confederate camps. The first factor is the success of southern religious organizations to get their message to the soldiers. The second factor is what Wiley labels, "the character of the southern soldiery. Most wearers of the gray came from communities where the church was fervid, aggressive, and influential, and where revivals were common." The third factor deals with the setbacks that the south was enduring on the battlefield. Wiley says, "A fourth and final factor contributing to revivalism was the increasing prospect of death which confronted soldiers as the war went into its last years."⁹⁹ James I. Robertson concurs with Faust on the timing of the commencement of the revivals, and Wiley on the reasons for the revivals, in the southern armies. He says, "The revival movement in the armies began at a time when Confederate morale had just suffered the twin blows of defeat at Sharpsburg, Maryland, and Perryville, Kentucky. In the autumn and winter of 1862-1863, an ecumenical outpouring burst forth in General Robert E. Lee's encamped army in

Virginia.” So tremendous was the religious outpouring that “[President] Lincoln began worrying that ‘rebel soldiers are praying with a great deal more earnestness...than our own troops.’”¹⁰⁰ Reporting on the revivals, one “Confederate described the December 1862 revival in his division as ‘one great Methodist Camp Meeting – they build log fires, sing, pray and preach, and when they ask for the morners they come in hundreds some falling on the ground crying for mercy.’ Three months later, a private in the 13th Georgia wrote his sister: ‘God is reviving his believers. The Soldiers amid hardships and privations are now more zealous for the Cause of Christ, Than our Christian friends at home. It would do you good if you could hear the tap of the drum for meeting and see the Soldiers gather for the Meeting.’ In the Western theater, a chaplain in General Braxton Bragg’s army reported forty conversions nightly over a two-week period.”¹⁰¹ A Confederate private, “wrote from camp in Caroline County, Virginia: ‘We are having a glorious time about now...we commenced a protracted meeting in this Brigade about four days ago...General Jackson (God Bless him) has given us the privilege to be exempt from Morning’s Drill in order that we may attend preaching...we have two sermons each day & although we have no church to worship in we all sit around on the ground and listen to the sweet sound of the Gospel.’”¹⁰² These soldiers were desperate for any glimmer of hope.

Although major campaigns at Vicksburg and Gettysburg diverted attention away from the revivals, once the battles were over – both disastrous defeats for the Confederacy – “religious awakenings far more intense began in the autumn of 1863

and spread through both major theaters of war. Southerners now perceived the punishment of God at work in their military reversals. Moreover, with the war nowhere near an end, death lurked closer to the soldiers.” This overwhelming feeling was expressed by a “regimental correspondent to...a Baptist newspaper: ‘There have always been among us some pious men, but until that time nothing like a general revival or even seriousness. The regiment had just returned from the disastrous Pennsylvania expedition, and a few days before had the closest and most desperate encounter with the enemy that they had ever had. The minds of the men were fresh from scenes of danger and bloodshed and were forced thereby to contemplate eternity, and in many cases, to feel the necessity of preparation.’”¹⁰³ The sense of hope among the religious soldiers is reflected in a letter that a captain in the 8th Alabama wrote to his wife. In the letter, he stated, “No better place in the world for serving God than in the army....If you could have been with our company four months ago and could be with it now you would be highly pleased with the change.”¹⁰⁴ However, as James M. McPherson states, “[A]fter Gettysburg, the fall of Vicksburg and Port Hudson, and the debacle at Missionary Ridge, the dark specter of defeat hovered over the Confederacy.”¹⁰⁵ Yet, southerners were not ready to give up. Many saw the revivals as “a pledge of God’s intent to save the Confederacy. Surely the righteousness of all the newly converted soldiers would so cleanse the Southern cause that God would now see fit to grant them victory. ‘While we have such men as these and fight in a holy and just cause we need have no fears of being enslaved by so brutal and cruel enemies as those against whom we are fighting,’ Reuben A. Pierson

wrote to his father.”¹⁰⁶ Gardiner H. Shattuck portrays the southern belief that the revivals were a signal of God’s favor toward the southern cause as a cruel hoax. He says. Revivalism among the Confederate forces in Virginia reached its peak in the summer of 1864, but by this time, the revivals had an unusual and critical effect on the performance of the troops in battle....The revivals functioned in this milieu as a symbolic cushion against defeat, for the disasters befalling Lee’s army only strengthened the belief of religious soldiers that the South would receive victory through the will of God alone.”¹⁰⁷ Without the revivals, it is likely that the South’s will to fight would have been broken earlier and the war ended sooner – saving thousands of lives. Yet, even if someone had the foresight in 1864 to recognize the reality that the South’s cause would go down to defeat, the revivals had taken on a life of their own, and the only thing that could stop them at the time, albeit briefly, were the battles.

The revivals, both North and South, brought much needed comfort to the soldiers on the battlefield. Because of their new-found, or rejuvenated, religiosity, many soldiers were better able to face the vicissitudes of military life. Like the Christian soldier who died in the hospital “obviously happy and without fear,” the comfort of religion could also be found on the battlefield as soldiers sensed that they, or a comrade, were about to take their last breath. Theodore F. Upson relates, “I found William Sharp terribly wounded and with but a short time to live....He knew he had to die but did not seem to worry about that so much, but whispered that he wished he had been a better boy, that he had not been as good as he ought to have

been. I tried to say something to comfort him, told him it would be made all right; that God would take all things into account. He wanted someone to pray with him....Sick Billy was dying, so I just dropped down by his side and asked God to take care of all his wayward boys and help this one who so badly needed help.”¹⁰⁸ While not a trained preacher, Upson was cognizant that what a fellow soldier nearing death needed most was the reassurance that he was going to a better place.

Soldiers did not exclusively call for God’s special providence when they were at death’s door. Many asked for, and expected, His divine intervention in good times and bad. They looked for His all-powerful hand on three different levels: protecting the individual, swaying the outcome of the battle, and ultimately bringing about the success of their wartime aims. James M. McPherson found, “some soldiers...were wary of theological unsoundness if they implored God for protection. That was up to Him. The purpose of prayer was to cleanse the soul, not to shield the body.”¹⁰⁹ A Confederate soldier from Maryland wrote, “I do not think that I have any right to pray for exemption from physical harm in the discharge of my duty as a soldier...but only [for] protection from moral wrong and that I may always be prepared to die, come what may.”¹¹⁰ It appears however that these soldiers were in the minority because “no other aspect of the Civil War soldiers’ thought about God is more frequently repeated in their writings than this belief in God’s superintending care of His creation.”¹¹¹ More in line with the thinking of most Civil War soldiers was “an officer in the 6th South Carolina [who] told his wife in 1862 that ‘I used to feel a great dread’ of death in battle, but he now believed that ‘the Almighty does what is best for

those that love him...You have no idea what a tower of strength this reflection is to me.' A private in the 11th Georgia who had been wounded three times expressed himself in 1864 'joust as willing to go in' as ever because, as he put it earlier, 'i trust in god to Protect me in the Battle field if he sees Proper that i should get kild no living man can help it and if it is not his will that i should get kild i don't Care for the Balls.'"112 Reid Mitchell finds, "American Christians were particularly prone to attribute escape from death in battle to providential intervention, the result of prayer and devotion."113 This care had an awesome effect on many of the soldiers. For example, "'I have not Received as much as a sratch,' R.F. Eppes wrote after the Seven Days Battle. 'Surely God has been with mee hee has kept me in the hollow of his hand Surely he has heard these heart pleadings of those near and dear ones at home for the Fervent Effectual Praits of the Writious availeth much.'"114 Pennsylvania soldier, Milton Ray, also thought that God would answer the prayers of his kinfolk. Writing to his sister he pleads, "'I hope that you may continue in earnest prayer for the preservation of my life if it is God's holy will that I should be spared. If it is his will that I should sacrifice my life for my country then the Lord Jesus will receive my spirit. Pray that I may be a faithful soldier of the cross and of my country.'"115 In a similar fashion Peter Wilson of the 14th Iowa, "declared: 'I see no reason to dread the future...I trust that the Almighty hand that has kept me in health thus far will keep me still in safety although much danger may be before me. If it is God's will that I find my grave in the South I hope to be ready. Let it come when it may, I am determined to do my duty and come home honorably or never.'"116 Without the

underpinning of religious faith, many soldiers would not have been able to face death so stoically.

James Connolly, who spent three years in the Army of the Cumberland noted, "My destiny is in the hands of a just God, and while I hope to avoid rashness, I still expect to do my whole duty."¹¹⁷ Samuel Cormany explained to his wife that although he was working to make himself better, he resigned himself to God's will, "I long to be thoroughly robust so as to be better able to do my duty as a Soldier – and to be a more thorough going Christian, so my influence would always be helpful to my comrades – and so as to be better prepared for what may await me – My trust in Him who alone knows what is for me and my Darlings good, in time and Eternity."¹¹⁸ In an effort to encourage his sister, who had the added burden of worrying about several brothers fighting in the war, William Gould prodded, "Well, Hannah, pray on, sing on, press on & upward. Thy prayers will yet be answered & thou shall see if God wills the return of thy brother who so nobly left all that is near & dear on earth to go & fight the battles of God & liberty, & if we meet no more on earth we, I hope, may make an unbroken family in heaven."¹¹⁹ God's omnipotence took on an even stronger meaning for many of the soldiers whose comrades were being struck down around them in battle. Hence, "the faith of Christian soldiers gave a special edge to their fatalism. God ruled the world; not even a sparrow could fall without His knowledge. 'I know He watches over all,' wrote a lieutenant in the 5th New Jersey, one of a good many Quakers whose patriotism and antislavery beliefs overcame their pacifism. 'Our fate is in His hands.'"¹²⁰ Likewise, "A sergeant in the high-casualty 61st Pennsylvania

who had survived a half-dozen battles wrote in January 1863 that 'I have prayed to God to forgive me my sins & keep me from danger. I do in my heart beleave he has heard them as I am satisfied after the fight at Fredericksburgh that by faith and prayer you can accomplish many things.'"¹²¹ Henry A. Kircher, a recent immigrant who nonetheless felt strongly about the cause for which he was fighting, was baffled by his good fortune, "I just can't comprehend how I and so many others came back unscathed. Now I believe, by God, that no bullet is for me."¹²² Many soldiers in both the North and the South were just as steeled by this conclusion as Kircher.

According to James I. Robertson, "Faith in God became the single greatest institution in the maintenance of morale in the armies. To the devout soldier, religion "was the connecting link between camp life and home. As he prayed and sang hymns of praise, his thoughts could not help but wander to his home church wherein he felt a mother, a father, a wife, or a child might be united with him in asking for his speedy return.' Furthermore, many soldiers North and South agreed with Louisiana Sergeant Edwin Fay, who did not 'believe a bullet can go through a prayer' because faith was a much better shield than...steel armor."¹²³ In keeping with the idea of transcendent prayers, "Tennessee infantryman Jim Parrot informed his wife: 'God has bin my sheal and I hope that he will be until I dy what has been the Cauze of him being my friend [is that] I have ask him for his blessing you rote to me that you prade for mee I do believe that God has ancered your parers for he has blest me in every thing and I request you to Continyou to ask god far to extend his blessings to wards us as a family if we shal never sea each other a gain in this life I hope that we will meat in

heaven where there is no war.”¹²⁴ Some soldiers believed that nothing on the battlefield happened without God’s guidance.

This belief in providence helped them to face the mental strains of battle. “‘Do you not know that the path of every ball is directed by our kind father,’ a Confederate navy lieutenant wrote his fiancée before going into action against the Union fleet below New Orleans, ‘and that no harm can come near me except by His special permission?’”¹²⁵ This belief was taken to the extreme by the “Reverend R.L. Dabney ...in a sermon to Stonewall Jackson’s troops on the march from the Shenandoah Valley to Richmond before the Seven Days’ Battles: ‘you need not be trying to dodge shot or shell or Minnie. Every one of those strikes just where the Lord permits it to strike, and nowhere else, and you are perfectly safe where the missiles of death fly thickest until Jehovah permits you to be stricken.’”¹²⁶ The same battle witnessed a strange spectacle of faithful soldiers. As James I. Robertson recounts: “[T]he Reverend Joseph Clay Stiles addressed a large contingent of soldiers near the front lines. The men were on their knees, eyes tightly closed, as Stiles offered a prayer. Without warning a Federal battery began firing into the area. ‘Faith and devotion were not strong enough to prevent my opening my eyes and glancing around,’ one soldier confessed. The other men refused to be distracted – until the shells got closer. Then the praying soldiers ‘felt it would be wise and well to supplement the protection of heaven by the trees and stumps of earth, if they could find them, and so they were actually groping for them with arms wide extended but eyes tight closed, and still on their knees.’”¹²⁷ In a similar vein, “William Poague, an officer in Virginia’s

Rockbridge Artillery...[said that] while 'the good Lord [shields] our heads in the hour of peril,' Confederates would be wounding and killing Yankees, making inevitable the enemy's defeat on the field."¹²⁸ W.W. Heartsill commented, "With hearts [heart] felt thanks to an ever watchful, merciful God, who has protected me through the dangers of the past three days; I close my eyes in sleep."¹²⁹ The tranquility of knowing that God was there in his time of need to protect him, allowed Heartsill, and many of his fellow comrades, to find a bit of peace amidst the chaos of war.

Understandably, most soldiers tended to concern themselves with God's divine intervention on an individual basis. However, there were also a number of them who looked to God to sway the tide of battle. Civil War soldier, and future president, James A. Garfield admitted, "No man can predict with certainty the results of any battle however great the disparity in numbers. Such results are in the hand of God."¹³⁰ Mary Abigail Dodge, in a widely disseminated tract about courage, states, "I can understand that very ignorant Atheists should be hopeless regarding this war. But people who have a knowledge of this world's history on the one side, or of God on the other, are without excuse. True, leaders may be incompetent, generals may blunder, avarice, jealousy, greed, and all manner of selfishness, may seem to push our cause on to certain shipwreck; but do you suppose that the Lord God Almighty is going to be stopped in his course by the non-arrival of a pontoon bridge?"¹³¹ Southerners held a similar view. Gardiner Shattuck observes, "True to the traditions of Reformed theology that nurtured so many Christians in the South, clergymen believed that every military victory their armies won was a result of God's bestowing

his favor on those who kept his laws.”¹³² Throughout the war Union and Confederate soldiers remarked about God’s role in battles.

Marking the significance of the battle of Gettysburg while at the same time paying homage to God’s role in the Union’s success, James T. Miller, a soldier from Pennsylvania, proclaimed on August 3rd, 1863, one month after the battle, “We have thouroly [thoroughly] flogged the best army the rebels ever had and the one with which they boasted that they were a going to over run Maryland and Pennsylvania take Harrisburg and Philadelphia Baltimore and Washington and dictate their own terms of Peace on our own soil but thank God that the bloody field of Gettysburg changed their tune from a strain of triumph boasting to one of howling despair and instead of a confident forward march into Pennsylvania they comenced a sneaking cowardly retreat to the Mountains of Virginia closely folowed by our victorious army.”¹³³ Later that year, writing in his diary after the Battle of Chattanooga, Allen L. Fahnestock, records, “Our hearts beat fast. Not knowing who would be successful and win the day but the God of battles upheld the Stars and Stripes and sent the rebels to the rear.”¹³⁴ From the other side of the Mason-Dixon Line, Charles M. Blackford, who served in Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia, wrote to his wife, “There will be a fight today or tomorrow. I pray God we may be victoriously spared.”¹³⁵ Blackford who, as a Confederate was on the side with the smaller numbers, tried to believe that numbers did not matter but it was difficult. This is shown in his letter of May 3, 1864: “Grant is certainly concentrating a large army against ours. If we defeat him the military strength of the enemy will be broken, and we must have peace. God, in his

mercy, grant us a victory! Officers and men are confident of success. I am so also, but sometimes I find my fears giving away to the force of numbers. Their army is twice as large as ours.”¹³⁶ This disadvantage did not make the Episcopal bishop and Confederate chaplain, Henry Champlin Lay falter in his belief of a southern victory.

Gaining passes from a number of Union officers to go through the Union lines on a trip to the North in 1864, Lay had the opportunity to meet up with Generals Meade and Grant. Within Lay’s presence, the generals discussed the ease with which they could call up 300,000 to 500,000 volunteers. In response, Lay “replied to Genl Mead that I had been taught to pray ‘Thou givest not alway the battle to the strong.’ True the presumption, coeteris paribus, was in favor of strength: but war was a confession that reason and argument had failed: it was an appeal to the solemn arbitrament of God himself, and he did not judge according to numbers.” Lay then recorded Meade’s response: “‘Both parties, I doubt not, very sincerely expect the Divine interference: but I have yet to find reason for expecting that that interference will be on your side.’”¹³⁷ Meade was right in his assertion that people on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line were asking for God’s help for their side. One soldier, “a North Carolinian[,] made this supplication: ‘Oh Lord, we have a mighty big fight down here, and a sight of trouble; and we hope, Lord, that you will take the proper view of the matter, and give us the victory.’”¹³⁸ Another North Carolinian, Dr. John Francis Shaffner, Sr. jotted in his diary December 26, 1862, “But we have had abundant reason to be thankful at this festive season, not only because it tis the anniversary an natal day of One who betokens mercy, forgiveness, benevolence, and

peace, but also because the Lord, who is the God of Battles, has looked with favor upon his children of the stubborn South.”¹³⁹ W.W. Heartsill tersely stated just before going off to fight, “may the God of battle give us the victory.”¹⁴⁰ Recognizing that not everyone was religious, Shaffner wrote in his diary, “That which the Christian calls ‘Providence’ and the man of the world ‘Good Luck’ was evidently on our side and assisted us in repelling the invaders in a great rout.”¹⁴¹ Whether soldiers called it providence or good luck, they all seemed to recognize that their fate was not really in their own hands.

Many soldiers found the lack of control over their own destiny very disconcerting because no matter what they did during the fight, their fate was sealed by some higher, mysterious power. Yet, it was exactly this same thought that brought comfort to many Civil War soldiers. Despite the reality that they did not control their destiny, the battlefield for them was not as chaotic as it seemed. Some omnipotent power was controlling everything. Those that attributed their faith to Divine Providence, and not merely good luck, felt assured that God’s Plan was right no matter what it called for: survival or death. This was because the religious soldiers believed that their ultimate destination after death was to the Kingdom of God.

Nearly all Civil War soldiers fought with the conviction that God was on their side and would in the end, grant victory to their country. Horace B. Hooker, recounting a story in his diary, proves that both sides thought their cause was righteous. He writes on November 31[?], 1862, “I took out a party of 10 men foraging. We went to a rich old planters house and the ‘old lady’ came out to receive

us. After talking to her a few minutes she remarked, 'I hope that Bragg will have you in irons before long, and he will for the Lord helps those whose cause is just.' I thought it would be a good time to quote Napoleons remarks to her so I said 'the Lord helps those who help themselves' and at once gave the boys orders to catch all the poultry on the place and anything else that we wanted for present use."¹⁴² Later in the war, James A. Connolly gloats, "we are all in the highest glow of victory, happy as lovers in their honeymoon, and ready to follow Sherman and Thomas to the ends of the Confederacy, for the 'God of Israel' is wielding his sword in our behalf and we know no such word as fail."¹⁴³ Another soldier observed, "The sun set clear and bright, too lovely for the scenes about us, but such are the horrors of war. Will God forgive men for such work is a question I often ask myself, but I receive a silent reply and utter my own prayer for the safety of my poor soul and my country."¹⁴⁴ Mary Abigail Dodge appeared to be a little cautious as well. She says, "True, we cannot be sure that He is on our side, but we can at least be sure that we are on His. We talk of our country, and it is ours – just as Paul's house was his. The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof. The country belongs to God. It was His when a forgotten people held it – His when it passed into the hands of the Indians – His when our fathers dwelt here, and His to-day. If the Lord can afford to let it go, I rather think we can. If his cause be better served by giving it over a while to dead men's bones and all uncleanness, it shall be given. Possibly, God sees that the only way by which we will be led to the truth is a *reductio ad absurdum*."¹⁴⁵ She then adds, "Whether we fail, or whether we succeed, His plans never fail. Sooner or later, by us or by somebody else,

the earth shall be redeemed, and Christ shall reign.”¹⁴⁶ By late 1864 when the results of the war began to seem evident, many Northerners latched on to anything that appeared to confirm their ultimate triumph.

Connolly jubilantly declared in a letter from October 22, 1864: “I have heard the election news and I’m happy. Ohio, Pennsylvania and Indiana have proven themselves worthy homes of the soldiers they have sent to the field. Thank God for it! He is giving our old flag victories with ballot as well as with the bullet.”¹⁴⁷ At the end of the war, Lieutenant William Thompson Lusk of New York stated, “slavery has fallen, and I believe Heaven as well as earth rejoices.”¹⁴⁸ Northerners persistently held the belief throughout the war that God had aligned the stars in their favor. Much of this belief came from the stories of the Bible. These were, of course, the same stories that southerners were interpreting as being in their favor.

The southerners, like their northern counterparts, drew on the example of the Israelites for inspiration. Richard E. Beringer, et al, espoused the idea that “the Old Testament frequently portrayed a God of war, who helped the Israelites defeat the Amalekites, Canaanites, and Philistines (in aggressive war it might be added). Would He not do as much to destroy the Yankee (or Confederate) Philistines in these latter days?”¹⁴⁹ Likewise, writing in “the spring of 1861, Tennessee Presbyterian William H. Vernon put it bluntly: ‘In all contests between nations God espouses the cause of the Righteous and makes it his own....The institution of slavery according to the Bible is right. Therefore in the contest between North and South, He will espouse the cause of the South and make it His own.’”¹⁵⁰ These ideas were reflected in many

soldiers' writings. Case in point: "‘You have no idea,’ [a Mississippi soldier] wrote his wife, how I loath a soldier’s life. The more I se of it, the more I hate...the low flung camp jest, the disgusting, nauseating obscenity universally indulged in by soldiers.’ On another occasion he said, ‘I abhor [such society] from my inmost soul – one unceasing tide of blasphemy & wickedness, coarseness and obscenity...Is it possible that God will bless a people as wicked as our soldiers? I fear not.’"¹⁵¹ Despite the widespread wickedness that some reported on, most Confederates still saw the South’s cause as God’s cause.

W.W. Stringfield penned on January 1, 1864, "Soldiers as a general thing are plucky but above all I have an abiding faith in the Justness of our cause + consequently in the help of Him who doeth all things w[e]ll."¹⁵² As the war was drawing to a close, and the outcome became inevitable, "Southern soldiers in the West seemed to shift the reliance that they put on God – trusting him no longer as a giver of worldly success, but as a guarantor of spiritual victory instead Joel Haley of the 37th Georgia, for instance...turned to his faith to sustain his spirits. ‘The situation at present I do not profess to comprehend,’ Haley admitted. ‘I trust that *He* who doeth all things well, will deliver us in due time if we do our whole duty.’"¹⁵³ Proving that at times the news did not travel fast during the war, W.W. Heartsill laments in a letter dated ten days *after* Lee’s surrender to Grant at Appomattox Courthouse, "Our beloved Lee is threatened with overwhelming numbers, and may be forced to surrender. Yet to a just God we will look for aid, and through His Omnipotent power we will yet triumph. It is indeed a bitter ordeal through which He is leading us to

independence, but Oh how sweet that liberty, when obtained by bleeding hearts, and tears of anguish.”¹⁵⁴ The defeated Confederates had held out hope to the bitter end that God was on their side and would grant them the victory.

Prior to the Civil War, the United States was relatively homogenous when it came to religion. The antebellum generation was raised on the Second Great Awakening. Despite this homogeneity, civil war ripped asunder the Union in 1861. Throughout the war the experiences of soldiers were similar no matter what side they were fighting on. Both armies' soldiers felt they were fighting God's cause to make America the "New Jerusalem." They both received support from the religious communities of their sections; soldiers from both sides endured the same hardships in the camps and experienced the same battlefield conditions. Confederate and Union soldiers even wrote similar messages in their diaries and letters. As the war raged on both sides experienced religious revivals that helped sustain them during the struggle. Yet, despite all of these similarities, the Civil War continued for four long, bloody years.

Religion played a crucial role in the coming of the Civil War as well as in the execution of the war from the individual private, right up through the ranks of military and civilian officers, and mushroomed out to encompass what seemed to be entire armies. Steven E. Woodworth finds that the Confederacy claimed 100,000 converts, or approximately ten percent of their soldiers.¹⁵⁵ For the Union side, Gardiner Shattuck finds, "the best contemporary estimates of the total number of men converted in the Union forces in the Civil War placed that figure between 100,000

and 200,000 – approximately five to ten percent of the total number of individuals actually in service during the conflict.” He cautions however, “Since this number includes only *conversions* and not the involvement of men who were either already Christians or interested spectators at the revivals, even it is an inadequate measurement of the fervor that swept through the Northern armies.”¹⁵⁶ The true numbers on both sides will never be known because, as James H. Moorhead points out, “One must ...allow due consideration to the promotional character of the literature emanating from the front; stories of success surely recruited more support than did accounts of failure. Yet if the army never became the vast chapel of prayer that reports indicated, the sheer bulk of testimony partly validates the assessment of the anonymous delegate who wrote in the spring of 1864: ‘Probably no army, in any age, has ever witnessed such outpourings of the Spirit of God as our own armies have experienced.’”¹⁵⁷ No doubt, religion played a vital role in keeping the Union and Confederate forces focused on the task at hand. It also bolstered their confidence in battle as well as their confidence that their side would be victorious. Without religion, the Union’s and the Confederate’s tasks would have been much more difficult.

Chapter Three Endnotes

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- ³ James I. Robertson, *Soldiers Blue and Gray* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 172.
- ⁴ Steven E. Woodworth *While God is Marching On: The Religious World of Civil War Soldiers* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001) 245.
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- ⁸ Allen L. Fahnestock, "Diary". North Carolina State Archives. Call no. MfP 12.
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²² Wilbur Fisk, *Hard Marching Every Day: The Civil War Letters of Private Wilbur Fisk, 1861-1865*. Ed. Emil and Ruth Rosenblatt (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 11.

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²⁶ Allen L. Fahnestock, "Diary". North Carolina State Archives, 10.

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