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Sins of a Nation

Margaret T. Kidd
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VIRGINIA UNITED METHODIST
HERITAGE

A decorative flourish consisting of a thick black line that starts from the right side of the word 'HERITAGE', loops under the 'G', crosses itself, loops back under the 'T', and ends on the left side of the word.

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of The United Methodist Church

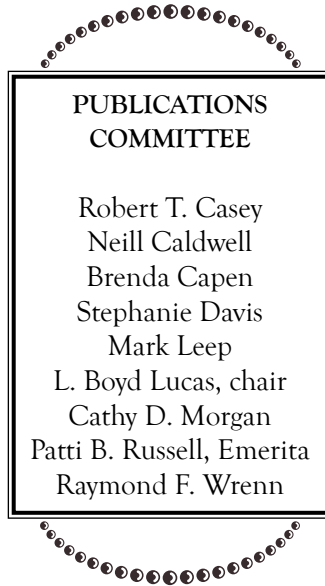
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Stephen S. Mansfield, president

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On the cover: Inset is a photo of Rev. James A. Duncan, pastor of leading churches (including Old Trinity Methodist) and president of Randolph-Macon College; from "The Richmond Christian Advocate", May 26, 1932, pg.27. The church is Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church, South which traces its spiritual lineage back to 1799; from "Richmond City of Churches - A short History of Richmond's Denominations and Faiths", June 1957, pg.41. The building pictured was completed in the 1860s and 1870s with the magnificent steeple added in 1875.



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◆————◆ The Sins of a Nation ◆————◆

BY MARGARET T. KIDD

*Project Archivist for the Special Collections and Archives at the
Tompkins-McCaw Library at Virginia Commonwealth University*

Currently, we commemorate the sesquicentennial of our Civil War. In the 150 years since, thousands of books, essays, and articles have been written on the subject. It seems that every conceivable aspect has been covered.

However, when considering a topic for my Master's thesis, I wondered how religion had played a part in those historical events...especially my own church—River Road United Methodist—which the congregation built in 1859, shortly before the war engulfed our nation. I wondered how that congregation coped, how the minister reacted and spoke on the subject, and if the Church simply followed the events or if it in some way shaped opinions during the war.

These musings led to my thesis, “Putting on the Armor of the Lord: The Role of Virginia Methodists During the Civil War.”

The following chapter explores how Methodist clergy tended to the spiritual needs of their congregations in the context of war. It also discusses the way that the clergy worked to make their ideas on the war and its progression known through newspapers, sermons, addresses, and government-recognized days of fasting and prayer. As the largest religious denomination in the South during the war, the Methodist Church was in a position to offer support and to shape the opinions of the Confederate people. To them the war was not merely a secular event that should be left to politicians and the military. Winning required the intervention of God on their side, and so both the military and civilian populations needed the guidance of the Church. It was important that the people of the Confederacy understood that the path to victory lay in obedience and reliance on God.



What avail will be all our fastings and thanksgivings, if they are unaccompanied by repentance and turning to the Lord?

— REVEREND J. C. GRANBERY¹

Slavery brings the judgment of Heaven upon a country. As nations cannot be punished in the next world, they must be in this. By an inevitable chain of causes and effects, Providence punishes national sins by national calamities.

— GEORGE MASON, AUGUST 22, 1787²

¹ J.C. Granbery, *An Address to the Soldiers of the Southern Armies* (Richmond, VA: Soldiers' Tract Association, 186- [?]), 8.

² Robert A. Rutland, *The Papers of George Mason* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1970), 3:1142.

While the clergy spent much of their time catering to the needs of the soldiers, they did not entirely neglect their civilian charges. Some historians of the religious aspects of the war claim there was little focus on civilians and their spiritual lives.³ This, however, was not the case. While the leaders of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South did focus a great deal on the needs of the soldiers, they also directly engaged civilians on the issue of religion. The clergy felt it was not enough for the people to believe in God. The people had to fully trust God, give thanks, and absolutely repent of all their sins. Only then could God truly help this new county gain its independence. They could not win the war without the intervention of the Lord or so the church tried to convince the people. In addition, the church needed the support of civilians in order to meet the spiritual needs of the soldiers. Without the civilian population's money and assistance many of the missions of the church could not progress.

A great number of articles in the Richmond Christian Advocate (RCA) were aimed directly at those left at home.⁴ Reverend James Duncan, editor of the RCA, used his columns in the paper as a pulpit from which to spread the gospel and instruct all people on matters of faith during the war. Large numbers of the RCA were given to troops in the field, but the bulk of the 6,000 subscriptions belonged to civilians. Editions were passed around to friends and neighbors making the paper's reach quite large, especially when it was the only source of news for some. Reverend Duncan routinely received letters from readers praising the paper and its message. One reader asserted that "your half sheet is perhaps the only newspaper taken by many in the conference and their only means of information as to the great events which are rapidly succeeding each other in our land."⁵

Reverend Duncan probably exerted more influence over public opinion on the war than any other member of the M.E. Church, South in Virginia, or throughout the Confederacy for that matter. Located in the capital of the Confederacy, where he was editor of

³ Beth Barton Schweiger writes in *The Gospel Working Up* (p. 101) that clergy attention was focused on the army, not civilians during the war. Most of the historical analysis of religion during the Civil War focuses on religion in the camp and not on the home front.

⁴ *The Richmond Christian Advocate* was a weekly publication run by the M.E. Church, South and was published in Richmond. It ran for the duration of the war.

⁵ "Thoughts about the War," *Richmond Christian Advocate*, 6 February 1862.



the RCA as well as the pastor of Broad Street Methodist Church, he rubbed elbows with the elite of the Confederate government. Both Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee frequently attended services at Broad Street even though both were Episcopalians.⁶ Duncan wholeheartedly believed in the Confederacy and its government. He used his pulpit and paper to keep others faithful to the Cause.

At the outbreak of war, Reverend Duncan changed the focus of the RCA from a religious paper to a source of secular news infused with Christian morality and instruction. He directed many of his editorials toward the civilian population encouraging them to support the troops, but more importantly prostrate themselves before God, confess their sins fully, and lead others to God. Only through these actions could the Confederacy be assured victory. Reverend Duncan proposed in his editorial, "The Time to Do Good," that Christians take this opportunity of wartime to spread the gospel to others who may be more receptive to it now during trying times: "Let us not indulge in empty complaints about the times, but accepting the day which God has appointed, give ourselves diligently to the work His providence has assigned us."⁷

As early as February of 1862, Reverend Duncan chastised the people for their flagging commitment to the Cause. He condemned people for falling into a "disgraceful despondency," charging that it was "the duty of every man and woman to contribute to the public confidence." Of course Reverend Duncan never missed an opportunity to lambaste the North as a means of reminding the public just what all this suffering was for. He denounced the North for supporting "white slavery, free love, women's rights, and Negro suffrage." He further vowed that no Christian would kneel at the feet of the "Yankee world, the Black Republicans' flesh, nor Lincolnian representatives of the devil."⁸

Only a few weeks later, Reverend Duncan admonished the people yet again for going around looking gloomy and worried. "Have the people not yet learned that we are actually engaged in war!" proclaimed Duncan incredulously. He told the people when

⁶ Fred R. Chenault, *The Broad Street Methodist Episcopal Church, South and Community House* (Richmond, VA: 1923), 10.

⁷ James A. Duncan, "The Time to Do Good," *Richmond Christian Advocate*, 27 June 1861.

⁸ James A. Duncan, "We Will Never Surrender," *Richmond Christian Advocate*, 27 February 1862.



worry comes they should appeal more fervently to God and they would be provided with a “David for Goliath”⁹

Reverend Duncan constantly reminded his readers to remain faithful and pious. For instance, when he heard troops described as “demoralized” after a defeat, he scoffed at anyone who would use such a term. He urged the people to remember how they felt when the war first broke out: they proclaimed “Victory or Death,” not “Victory or Demoralized.” He repeated his mantra that their cause was just and that “God is with us.”¹⁰

Throughout the war years Reverend Duncan linked Christian fortitude and piety with patriotism and the Southern Cause. One editorial in particular summed up his thoughts on how Christian Southerners should behave. He stated that all Christians were supposed to be self-sacrificing, cheerfully obedient, and willing to commit to a moral cause and added:

*If while struggling in a virtuous cause, they are called upon to suffer loss, to expose their health, to give their money, to bear heavy crosses, they, of all others, should be the last to complain. It is their honor to exemplify patience, fortitude, and the most uncompromising devotion to principle. It would be their shame to be the first to shrink from the furnace of fire when it is heated to test the sincerity of their faith.*¹¹

Reverend Duncan believed that the sacrifice of the Christian civilian should be as great or greater than that of the soldier in the field. Christians have a responsibility and cannot remain “indifferent spectators” at an important time in the formation of their new nation. It was their job to “cheer the faint and teach them not to grow weary in well doing.” He charged them to be the light of the community and from the tens of thousands of Christians, “the fires of the purest and most resistless patriotism must radiate over the land.”¹²

Reverend Duncan also returned time and again to the one weapon that the civilian population possessed: prayer. Prayer was essential to all things, but especially in overcoming the enemy. Earnest prayer to

⁹ James A. Duncan, “Cheer Up,” *Richmond Christian Advocate*, 6 March 1862.

¹⁰ James A. Duncan, “Spirit of the Hour,” *Richmond Christian Advocate*, 1 May 1862.

¹¹ James A. Duncan, “Relation of Christians to the Public Good,” *Richmond Christian Advocate*, 24 September 1863.

¹² James A. Duncan, “Relation of Christians to the Public Good,” *Richmond Christian Advocate*, 24 September 1863.



God surely would bring all that they wanted. Reverend Duncan thought of prayer as a duty of every citizen, which was evident when he titled an editorial, “Pray! Your Country Demands it!” He truly believed in the power of prayer and always reminded his readers the power they possessed in prayer: “While our armies go forth in battle, let us who remain at home continue in earnest prayer. Thus shall we help them and thus shall the Almighty give us the victory.”¹³

Reverend Duncan was also proud of the fact that President Davis felt strongly about prayer. Reverend Duncan condemned the secular press for their “wicked insinuations and half concealed taunts about his [President Davis] confidence in prayer.” Duncan countered with the statement: “We honor his firm reliance upon Almighty Goodness and believe God will display His special interposition in behalf of a Government that continues to call upon the name of the Lord.”¹⁴

Reverend Duncan was not the only one to focus on Christianity and the war. Some were not as cheered as Reverend Duncan by the purity of Southern Christians. Several laypersons wrote letters to the RCA expressing their concerns over the state of religion. Professor Tucker, author of one letter, shared that he felt religion was being neglected. He entreated people to continue taking the religious papers even if money is tight. Tucker explained that, “in ordinary times we might do without religious papers; but the times are extraordinary.” His thoughts on patriotism also were different than that of Reverend Duncan’s. Duncan linked patriotism and Christianity together in his writings and sermons. Tucker argued, “Christians should be prompted by a higher motive than patriotism.” Tucker finally warned that the devil was worse than Abe Lincoln.¹⁵ He probably had a difficult time convincing many Confederates that Lincoln and the devil were not equally evil, if not one in the same. Reverend Duncan would be the most difficult to convince as he vilified Lincoln at every available opportunity.

Other letters poured into the office of RCA. “Daughter of the South” encouraged all to “prostrate themselves before God and cry out as one man” all their sins against God so that God may help them. She also called upon the women of the county to pray for

¹³ James A. Duncan, “Pray! Your Country Demands it!,” *Richmond Christian Advocate*, 28 April 1864.

¹⁴ “Another Call to Prayer,” *Richmond Christian Advocate*, 1 May 1862.

¹⁵ “The Times vs. Religion,” *Richmond Christian Advocate*, 13 March 1862.



their defenders and to help them put their trust in God.¹⁶

Another letter by “True Witness,” pushed a theory that pervaded the consciousness of most of the Methodist clergy: defeats were not necessarily punishment from God nor were victories necessarily a blessing. The author suggested that the Confederacy could not appreciate its independence unless they suffered trials, reverses, and defeats. All their trials are needed, he argued, to help develop the county’s resources, deepen patriotism and lead the people to God. The author felt these struggles were God’s way of purifying the nation and that they would be granted their independence when God was ready for them to have it.¹⁷ Those who felt as “True Witness” probably likened their experience to that of the Hebrews as they wandered through the desert. They had to be made humble and worthy of all that God promised to them.

Not everyone agreed with “True Witness’s” assessment of victories and defeats. Reverend Duncan reprinted a column from the *Thomsville Times* which suggested God is responsible for all the victories in the war so far. The author thought God granted these triumphs because the people had prayed for them and that soldiers who had loved ones praying for them were shielded from harm.¹⁸ Whether God was responsible for victories and defeats became a major topic of discussion especially during fast day sermons, a topic that will be addressed later in this study.

William Irby penned a letter to the RCA in which he contemplated the sins of the nation. He feared that many take a “superficial view of the cause of our nation’s trouble.” His impetus for this statement comes from the sermons, editorials, and conversations in which he had engaged. It was true the Confederacy had experienced a remarkable victory at Manassas and had been successful despite disadvantages. However, Irby believed that the blame for their suffering could not be wholly laid at the feet of the Yankees. God’s hand was in it because the county must be purged and purified. This was similar to the sentiment expressed by “True Witness.” Irby claimed they suffered for their sins and their suffering was God’s retribution. He imagined that some prefer “sickness to the cure,” meaning they prefer sin to righteousness because it is difficult to be righteous. However, it was necessary if they expected God to deliver them. Irby’s cure for their

¹⁶ “In God is our Hope,” *Richmond Christian Advocate*, 1 May 1862.

¹⁷ “God Designs our Good,” *Richmond Christian Advocate*, 29 May 1862.

¹⁸ *Richmond Christian Advocate*, 29 May 1862.

ills was for people to attend church and prayer meetings and to fast weekly to make their prayers more effective.¹⁹

These letters present an overarching theme of sin in the nation that must be purged in order for the country to advance. J.E.J. of Howard's Grove 57th Virginia Volunteers summed it up best: "For God blesses nations and curses them through individuals."²⁰ Each and every individual needed to turn from sin or else the new nation would fail. The best way people could show they were repentant and willing to turn from their sin was to participate in fast day activities.



FAST DAYS

*Independence on our own soil, or freedom in its dust, is the only choice left to us. – Leroy M. Lee*²¹

Fast days, or days of fasting, prayer and humiliation, as they were officially known, represented an important part of the wartime effort for the Confederacy. All citizens were expected to participate so as to cleanse the new nation from sin and show God humility to win His favor. Fast days were not a new idea, but the Confederates embraced the concept and employed it often. Jefferson Davis sanctioned a total of nine official fast days during the war, and other governing bodies and the church declared numerous others.²² These days were intended as a time when the whole of the people could come together for reflection, prayer, and to call out together in one voice to God for guidance and protection from their foes. As James Silver concluded, no agency had more influence over the individual than the church and fast days were a way to reach the largest number of people.²³

¹⁹ *Richmond Christian Advocate*, 23, October 1862.

²⁰ *Richmond Christian Advocate*, 6 March 1862.

²¹ Leroy M. Lee, *Our Country—Our Dangers—Our Duty*, A Discourse Preached in Centenary Church, Lynchburg, VA., on the National Fast Day, August 21, 1863. (Richmond, VA: Soldiers' Tract Association, M.E. Church, South, Chas. H. Wynne, Printer, 1863), 12.

²² James W. Silver, *Confederate Moral and Church Propaganda* (Tuscaloosa, AL: Confederate Publishing Company, Inc., 1957), 64.

²³ Silver, 64.

By November of 1861, the Confederate government had already sanctioned two national fast days. On such days Jefferson Davis made public proclamations. The RCA usually reprinted these speeches. During the November 1861 fast day, Davis implored “the blessing of Almighty God upon our arms, that He may give us victory over our enemies, preserve our homes and altars from pollution and secure to us the restoration of peace and prosperity.”²⁴

Based on subsequent fast day declarations and sermons, it would seem that the Lord responded favorably to the words of Davis and other Confederates. During 1862, fast day sermons reflected what the Confederates believed was God’s intervention into the war on their behalf. Davis’s declaration of another fast day on September 18, 1862, mirrored this opinion. According to Davis this was a day to thank God for “the great mercies vouchsafed to our people, and more especially for the triumph of our arms at Richmond, in Kentucky, and Manassas in Virginia.” He further implored the people pray to God to guide them “safely through the perils, which surround us to the final attainment of the blessings of peace and security.”²⁵

As was the practice, many sermons were preached that September day, but one in particular stood out. Reverend D. S. Doggett of the Virginia Conference of the M.E. Church, South preached one of the most famous sermons given on that fast day. His sermon, *A Nation’s Ebenezer*, delivered in Richmond at the Broad Street Methodist Church, was so well received it was printed and distributed in pamphlet form.

Reverend Doggett began his sermon by retelling the story of Samuel and the Israelites gathering at Mizpeh purely for religious reasons. However, the Philistines mistook this for a political gathering and moved to destroy the Israelites. The people had no way to defend themselves, so they turned to Samuel and asked him to call on God. Samuel cried out to God and with His intervention the Israelites won the day. To commemorate this victory and God’s help, they erected a simple stone monument, which Samuel called Ebenezer, the stone of help.²⁶

²⁴ *Richmond Christian Advocate*, 7 November 1861.

²⁵ Excerpts from the September 18, 1862 fast day proclamation, from a copy in the Peyton Family Collection (Mss1 P4686 b76), Virginia Historical Society.

²⁶ D. S. Doggett, *A Nation’s Ebenezer A Discourse delivered in the Broad Street Methodist Church, Richmond, Virginia Thursday, September 18, 1862* (Richmond, VA: Enquire Book and Job Press, 1862), 4-5.



Reverend Doggett used this particular story of Samuel and the battle to represent the Confederate States. The Israelites' faith in Samuel's relationship with God saved them from slaughter even in the face of overwhelming odds. Reverend Doggett believed that this same faith by the Confederates could and had moved God to help them during their trial. Reverend Doggett reasoned that God took sides in human conflict:

Now, if our ideas of God are correct, he must not only feel an infinite concern in what so deeply agitates the human race, but he must interfere. He must also approve, he must take sides with the right, though many of the instrumentalities employed may not be acceptable to Him. ... God has looked down from his throne upon us with paternal solicitude, and according to the rectitude of our cause, we are constrained to conclude that His almighty hand has wrought our deliverance, and to exclaim with equal piety and truth, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." ²⁷

Reverend Doggett was convinced of the righteousness of the Confederate cause and believed that God had and would continue to intervene on their behalf because they were justified in this fight.

There are several examples Reverend Doggett used to support his conclusions about the Lord's involvement on their behalf. The first was the reliance of the people upon God during the struggle thus far. He claimed that there had never been "on so large a scale, such implicit a reliance upon Divine Providence; so general an invocation of the Divine blessing, as there was, from one end of this Confederacy to the other." Because of this reliance upon God, the victories they had won thus far were from God's hands, not their own. Reverend Doggett explained that the intervention of God was apparent because so far the Confederates had been able to triumph over a superior force. The North was infinitely better equipped with manpower and industry to turn out the machines of war, whereas the Confederacy had little more than its conviction that they were in the right. It is obvious to Reverend Doggett that because of the reliance of the people on God as well as their worthy cause, God had blessed them with victories. It could only be through God that they had triumphed because they are fighting an enemy more powerful than they are.²⁸

²⁷ Doggett, *A Nation's Ebenezer*, 8.

²⁸ Doggett, *A Nation's Ebenezer*, 9.

Now that Reverend Doggett had assessed God's involvement, he reminded the people that God must "receive his share of the honor." He warned the people against forgetfulness: "The tendency of our natures is to forget God when the miracles of His Providence have merged into the tranquil current of habitual prosperity." They must never forget what the Lord has done, lest He withdraw his favor. In addition to remembering, the people must also praise God unceasingly, worship Him, and honor the Sabbath. They must guard against the pitfall of trusting to human agency rather than the Divine. Reverend Doggett assured that if the people would do all these things then God "will continue to help us until this great contest shall have ended."²⁹

Nearly a year later, ministers were still convinced of the Confederacy's divine recognition. However, instead of speaking of the glorious victories that the Lord had granted, they must instead buoy the spirits of the people and explain the suffering they now endured. Much had happened in the past year including the Emancipation Proclamation, the death of Stonewall Jackson, the defeat at Gettysburg, and the fall of Vicksburg. After being so sure that God was with them and granting victory after victory, the people must have wondered why they were seemingly forsaken. Reverend I. R. Finley provided his own insight in a sermon entitled "The Lord Reigneth," delivered August 16, 1863, just before the appointed fast day of August 21.

Reverend Finley took a great deal of time explaining the "Divine Rule," and in essence declared: first, the Lord is the ruler of all and this fact is revealed by scripture; second, humans are too limited to understand the plan of God and because God is righteous, just, and infinitely knowledgeable, humans should not fear the trial that must occur and simply trust in God.³⁰ Reverend Finley instructed the people to have proper faith in the doctrine of Christianity. He knew that "in adversity we are prone to look to human sources alone for comfort and for re-edification." However, he warned them that "vain is the help of man." Reverend Finley asserted they must not trust in their own agency, but God's. The people must have faith no matter how "trying the occasional or even frequent reverses and

²⁹ Doggett, *A Nation's Ebenezer*, 12-14, 17.

³⁰ I. R. Finley, *The Lord Reigneth: A Sermon Preached in Lloyd's Church, Sussex County, VA. Sunday, August 16, 1863* (Richmond, VA: Soldiers' Tract Association, M. E. Church, South, Chas. M. Wynne, Printer, 1863), 3-8.

disappointments” may be.³¹ Here Reverend Finley must have been referring to the defeats of the past few months and with his words he hoped to comfort the demoralized people and give them hope that God was still with them.

Reverend Finley continued to portray the Confederacy as an innocent victim of the Northern aggressors. He claimed they were just and holy, but that there must be some transgression in the souls of the people. Comparing them to the Israelites, Finley contended that they “cannot stand before thine enemies until ye take away the accursed things from among you.” The Israelites had to remove their “Babylonish garments and ill-gotten money” before they could find favor with the Lord. Finley raised the question of how was the Confederacy to succeed if the Lord “hath a controversy with us?” Again, as many Methodist ministers had implored before, he pleaded with the people to “repent individually and nationally of our sins and transgression ... We gain nothing and imperil everything with our delay.”³²

Now that Reverend Finley had dispensed with the typical formula of the fast day sermon exhorting the people to turn from sin and trust in God, he offered another idea. He observed that throughout history when it seemed the world was headed for terrible things, God had lifted up an individual, family, or nation to take control and save all from ruin. Reverend Finley believed the time had come again when God would lift up a nation to save all. After running through a list of candidates including the North, Great Britain, and South America, all of whom he deemed unworthy, he concluded that the Confederacy must be this nation. Nowhere else, according to Reverend Finley, was there such a convergence of natural and industrial resources coupled with a people “intelligent, chivalrous and highly endowed with the capacity for self-government.” Reverend Finley proclaimed that God was lifting them up to be a light unto the world, especially for “Ethiopia.”³³

It was here that Finley stated his belief that the people were called upon to minister to the slaves and eventually to the whole of Africa. He thought that part of the reason they had been drawn into war was so they could “contend for the privilege of obeying our God-given hest.” He also explained that the war had brought about a better understanding between master and slave and had placed their

³¹ Finley, 10-11.

³² Finley, 12-14.

³³ Finley, 17-18.



relationship “upon a nobler and more stable basis by the mutual discoveries of truth and duty.” In short, the Lord had brought about this war to raise up and discipline the Southern people for the task of being a light and Christianizing influence for the world, especially to the Africans.³⁴

This particular sermon demonstrated a change on two different points. First, this exemplified the change in Southern Methodist attitudes regarding slavery. Back when the church split between North and South in 1844, Southern ministers felt that slavery was a moral evil, but not a sin, so they must endure it because it was a part of the society in which they lived. Now during the war years, they advocated it as a divinely-sanctioned institution, the proper order of humanity. Second, this sermon also showed a break in the way the ministers, at least in Virginia, talked about the war.

When they were winning, the sermons were based on those battles and how God had intervened on their side. When they began to lose more than win, the ministers, such as Finley, dealt more in abstract concepts than in concrete reality. They told their congregations that they were being prepared for something more, or were suffering to be made worthy for their ultimate triumph.

Fast days were not just a function of the civilian life, but also an important part of camp life. Robert E. Lee released a general order about the August 21, 1863, fast day that covered many of the same themes as the Methodist ministers did. He may have borrowed some of these themes directly from Reverend Duncan since Lee was reported to have attended his church on many occasions. Lee wrote that:

We have sinned against Almighty God; we have forgotten his signal mercies and have cultivated a vengeful, haughty and boastful spirit ... We have relied too much on our own arms for achievement of our independence. God is our only refuge and our strength. Let us humble ourselves before him.

He took these days as seriously as the ministers, even going so far as to suspend “all military duties except such as are absolutely necessary.”³⁵ Lee, like everyone else, was still reeling from the disaster at Gettysburg. A fast day, when they could all humble themselves before God and ask forgiveness for their sins, could help cleanse them and get the country

³⁴ Finley, 18-19.

³⁵ Copy of General Order Number 32, August 13, 1863, Petyon Papers, Virginia Historical Society (Mss 1 P4686c 1262).



back on track.

These fast day rituals may have been useful in drawing together the population for a day, but maintaining that spirit proved much more difficult. Just as ministers were forever trying to keep their flock from backsliding into the fires of hell between Sundays, they had a difficult time keeping them from doing the same between fast days. In the article, "Maintain the Spirit of the Fast Day," Reverend Duncan found himself admonishing those who feast and drink the day after a fast. He felt this was not the way to commune with God whose favor they were trying so desperately to gain. Reverend Duncan urged those in authority to keep people in check, to keep the Sabbath, and to "let profanity be checked by general order, as Washington prohibited in the army."³⁶

Instructions on how to conduct oneself on a fast day also appeared with regular frequency in the RCA. Reverend Duncan often reminded readers of upcoming fast days and prompted them with instructions such as that the day "be kept with special strictness and solemnity."³⁷ Reverend Duncan also tried to put a positive spin on recent losses by directing citizens to receive in humble thankfulness the lesson which He has taught in our recent reverses, devoutly acknowledging that to Him, and not to our own feeble arms, are due the honor and the glory of victory; that from Him in His paternal providence, come the anguish and sufferings of defeat, and that whether in victory or defeat, our humble supplications are due at his footstool.³⁸

Other faithful Methodists also sent in their own ideas about the keeping of a fast day. A letter from J.E.E. attempted to educate fellow members on how to pray during a fast day. Each individual, in addition to humbling themselves and repenting, needed also to pray for the Confederacy. They should pray for the generals and that God grant them wisdom in preparing for battle and pray for the success of the army at every point. This author believed that prayer needed to extend beyond the home and to all parts of the Confederacy. Only then could they be successful.³⁹

Another letter from "Layman" expressed a similar sentiment. He was angry with those who forgot during public prayer to pray for the Confederacy and its defenders. He, like J.E.E., deemed it important

³⁶ "Maintain the Spirit of the Fast Day," *Richmond Christian Advocate*, 6 March 1862.

³⁷ *Richmond Christian Advocate*, 19 March 1863.

³⁸ *Richmond Christian Advocate*, 30 July 1863.

³⁹ *Richmond Christian Advocate*, 26 March 1863.



to pray for the entire Confederacy and not merely themselves. “Layman’s” letter also demonstrated that the average person felt as confident in the power of prayer as Duncan and other ministers of the Methodist Church. “Layman” wrote, “Our cause is just and righteous, and we can confidently appeal to God to give us the power to drive our enemies from our soil and disappoint them in their wicked purpose of subjugation and desolation.”⁴⁰



A TWO-FRONT WAR

During the war, the South was assailed by twin foes, one more obvious than the other. The Confederacy, of course, was in a desperate struggle with the North, but it also was at odds with some of its own citizens. The South faced great problems with extortionists, speculators, and croakers. Civilians and soldiers alike felt the pinch from exorbitant prices and scarcity of goods. Adding to their misery were the woeful comments and the dire predictions of the so-called “croakers.” An article circulating during 1862 even classified these groups along with the United States government and its people as enemies of the Confederacy. The article labeled speculators and extortionists as “the pimps and operators in money who seek to depreciate the currency of the government.”⁴¹ Methodist ministers, rather than remaining silent on this issue, lashed out at those who made the war more difficult because of their greed and negative perspectives.

As early as 1861, an article in the *Richmond Christian Advocate* condemned the practice of extortionists. Jason Andrew of Emory & Henry College wrote an article, which first appeared in the *Nashville Advocate*, speaking of the terrible price gouging that was taking place. He commented that he was “glad to see the secular press taking up the subject and hope that the religious press and the pulpit will lift up one earnest and continuous appeal against these nefarious doings till the Shylocks mend their ways or quit the country.”⁴² Ministers certainly railed against the acts of extortion, but as prices continued

⁴⁰ “The Duty of Praying for our Country,” *Richmond Christian Advocate*, 1 May 1862.

⁴¹ *Richmond Christian Advocate*, 10 July 1862. Article reprinted from the *Memphis Appeal*.

⁴² “Extortioners Taking Advantage of the Necessities of War,” *Richmond Christian Advocate*, 14 November 1861.



to soar it appears their tirades had little impact on this front other than to make the guilty parties squirm a little in the pew.

A fast day sermon given a few days after Finley's sermon discussed earlier in this study provides insight into how one minister chose to attack this issue. Reverend Leroy M. Lee delivered more of a bitter, political diatribe than a religious sermon. He focused less on the abstract concept of whether God was preparing the South for ultimate glory and chose instead to focus on the enemy within. Reverend Lee laid out his displeasure in "Our County - Our Danger - Our Duty."⁴³ As to be expected, he was very angry with the North and the situation that had been thrust upon the South. He claimed the South was in no way responsible for the war and made no preparations for such when the decision was made to leave the Union. The South, according to Reverend Lee, was not engaged in war for territorial gain, conquest, or to infringe on the right of others, but simply wanted its independence.⁴⁴ He also advanced a state's rights argument, which would become a mainstay of post-war Southerners looking to justify their allegiance to the Confederacy. Reverend Lee maintained that the states created the government of the United States and delegated power to it, reserving powers for themselves. He claimed that "in domestic matters it [the State] was sovereign, and independent of the United States," therefore, "any one of these States, or several of them acting in concert or all of them together, could at any time, according to their own will and pleasure, withdraw, and take back to themselves the powers they had delegated to the General Government."⁴⁵

Reverend Lee contended that since the South did not start this war, it also could not stop it. His rationale was that only those who began the war could stop it and that "compromise would be treason against truth, county, and God. Peace, however desirable, is impossible without independence and is only to be acquired...from the bloody hand of war." The "unholy" aims of the North would make it inevitable that Providence would intervene on the Confederate's side. Reverend Lee proceeded to list Northern atrocities including the declaration of medical paraphernalia as contraband of war, the destruction of food stock, the stealing and inciting of slaves, and the North's calculation

⁴³ Lee, Leroy M. *Our Country—Our Dangers—Our Duty, A Discourse Preached in Centenary Church, Lynchburg, VA., on the National Fast Day, August 21, 1863*. Richmond: Soldiers' Tract Association, M.E. Church, South, Chas. H. Wynne, Printer, 1863.

⁴⁴ Lee, 8.

⁴⁵ Lee, 5-6.

of the South's fighting population and resources with plans to exhaust both without a thought of how many of their own they kill in the process. Reverend Lee asserted these horrors would cause suffering for the noncombatant population, which basically amounted to genocide. With such evil staring them in the face, Reverend Lee concluded that only a "coward at heart, or a traitor in soul can wish for peace at any other price than war, fierce, bloody, protracted war."⁴⁶

Thus far Reverend Lee's comments were not unexpected. He had framed his arguments and outrages against the North much as had other ministers. The most notable difference was his lack of religious context. He began his sermon with text from Nehemiah, but soon began to stray from religious commentary on current events. Usually when commenting on political or secular matters, ministers tried to do so from a religious standpoint. Reverend Lee did very little of this. He moved even further from conventional sermons when he added another twist to his discourse. He explained what he believed was the real danger confronting the South. The danger was not from the North. Reverend Lee insisted the North's resolve was weakening. This assumption was confirmed to him by the increasing ruthlessness against noncombatants and the employment of black soldiers, which he viewed as a sign of desperation. Reverend Lee surmised that the real danger was from within their ranks.⁴⁷

Reverend Lee was extremely concerned with the "accursed greed of gain which seems to have seized the entire producing and commercial population of the country." He referred to this as covetousness, which he translated in religious terms as idolatry that resulted in the worshiping of things rather than God. This was bad enough in normal times, but in times of war, this act caused "weakness and discontent" in civilians and the army and became "a political or civil crime and may be justly regarded as treason against the country."⁴⁸

Reverend Lee cited examples of this "weakness." First, men who at one time were great patriots had become blinded by greed and no longer flocked to the army as they did early in the war. This had led the government to turn to conscription. It had also led men to leave the army because their families were unable to care for themselves. Reverend Lee blamed this on the speculators and extortionists who hoarded everything from food, clothing, and munitions to create de-

⁴⁶ Lee, 10-11.

⁴⁷ Lee, 13-14.

⁴⁸ Lee, 14-15.



mand and then charged exorbitant prices for these items. Because of this horrendous greed, soldiers had suffered cold and hunger, but the privations of their families were more than the men could stand. All these problems were a cause of “embarrassment” to the Confederate government, as it could not efficiently carry out a war with all these problems. It was unfair and unwise for the government to have to fight two wars at the same time, one against the Northern aggressors and one against those who sought personal gain at the expense of the Confederacy. Reverend Lee argued that this was not a war for the government, but rather a war for the people.⁴⁹

Reverend Lee went on to chide those who had not put faith in the currency of the Confederacy and instead tried to depreciate its value: “Our currency is good enough for all patriotic and honest purposes: as good as gold as a means of defeating and destroying our foes: and better to us than gold, since it does not stimulate the thieving proclivities of our enemies as gold would do.” He called it wickedness to do anything but support the monetary unit of the country and failure to uphold it could lead to their downfall.⁵⁰

Of course the list of troublemakers would not be complete if it did not mention the press. Reverend Lee took aim at the press for “imperiling our rights and liberties.” He conceded that differences in opinion exist and that during peacetime it was acceptable to express these differences. However, in times of war such dissent should not be tolerated. For better or worse, the government was the face of the people and “deserve our respect and confidence.” According to Reverend Lee the war was already “a drain on the hopes and hearts of the people.” Why exacerbate their condition with attacks upon the government which do nothing more than to cause further despondency on the part of civilians. In Reverend Lee’s words the press should be:

*A united and cheerful press, sustaining the government, strengthening the timid and feeble, encouraging the desponding, buoyant in its own vigorous spirit and immeasurable powers, throwing the blessed sunlight of its own valorous hope among the passing shadows of the war...hope for brighter and better times tomorrow, this is the wise policy of the press.*⁵¹

⁴⁹ Lee, 16-17.

⁵⁰ Lee, 18-19.

⁵¹ Lee, 20-21.



He concluded his sermon by laying responsibility at the feet of the people.

*If we fail, it will not be from the lack of resources in our country; not from any defectiveness or inefficiency in our government; not from insufficiency or lack of courage in our armies; nor from the want of intelligent and skillful generals to lead them to victory...our dangers are amongst ourselves.*⁵²

Reverend Lee believed if they lost the war it would be because of a “defective patriotism” stemming from people’s selfishness and greed.⁵³ Covetousness, that wretched sin, would be their undoing unless they could master these impulses and have a true patriotism. In a rare mention of the deity, Reverend Lee asserted that “God has other ends in this war than to gratify the selfish lust for wealth.” However, Lee, unlike other ministers, does not elaborate on what the “other ends” may be.⁵⁴

Reverend Lee, when speaking of the demoralizing influence of the press, was not alluding to his fellow Methodist, Reverend James Duncan. Duncan used his position as editor of the RCA to deliver harsh criticism to those he felt were a destructive force in the county, whether because they spouted doom or profited from the misery of war. He also printed articles and letters from others who spoke out against such behavior.

In one of Reverend Duncan’s more mild statements in March of 1863, he encouraged those who planted cash crops, such as cotton and tobacco, to abandon them for the time being and devote their land to food production. Reverend Duncan stated some men believed the war would be over soon and they hoped to benefit from the profit of these crops. Duncan supposed that the war might last longer than these people thought and food production was vastly more important in these times and necessary to sustain the troops as well as the civilians. He wanted those who planted cash crops to realize that there was greater good in raising food than in lining their pockets.⁵⁵

It is interesting to note that Reverend Duncan assumed the war would drag on despite his belief that God was with them and they

⁵² Lee, 21.

⁵³ Lee, 22.

⁵⁴ Lee, 22.

⁵⁵ “Raise Something to Eat,” *Richmond Christian Advocate*, 5 March 1863.



would ultimately be victorious. He was not so entrenched in his beliefs that he could ignore the signs around him. Or perhaps Reverend Duncan was reflecting what he was hearing from the Confederate government. After all, Reverend Duncan resided in the capital city and was well connected with prominent members of Confederate society. About a week after Reverend Duncan's appeal appeared in the paper, the Confederate Senate called for action identical to Reverend Duncan's, resolving that the "President should issue a proclamation to dissuade the people of this country from further cultivation of cotton and tobacco and to enjoin upon them the production of grain by all means at their command."⁵⁶

A few weeks after these two items appeared in the paper, an event occurred which solidified some of the fears of both Reverend Duncan and the Confederate government. On April 2, 1863, a group of women went before Governor John Letcher of Virginia to ask for food and aid. The women had decided this course of action the night before and also determined that they were willing to take what they needed if their request was not met. Food was scarce, prices out of control, and they needed help. The governor basically turned his back on them. Now forced to turn to drastic measures, the crowd swelled in number and quickly turned into a mob. There were likely more than 1,000 participants in the riot, mostly women. Women, men, and children broke into stores and took food, and some stole items such as clothing and shoes. Accounts of the riot vary on whether it was President Jefferson Davis or Governor John Letcher who restored order. It is likely that both addressed the crowd at different times and the most credible accounts indicated it was Governor John Letcher who gave the crowd a five-minute warning to disperse or he would have the guard open fire.⁵⁷

It would seem that both Reverend Duncan and the government knew this kind of riot could happen or why else would they call for greater food production? However, instead of showing sympathy for participants in the Richmond Bread Riot, civilians who under normal circumstances would never resort to crime, Reverend Duncan chose to scorn them in his newspaper. The members of the mob were of various backgrounds, but for the most part they were middle-class, law-abiding women; however, Reverend Duncan identified the par-

⁵⁶ *Richmond Christian Advocate*, 12 March 1863.

⁵⁷ Michael B. Chesson, "Harlots or Heroines? A New Look at the Richmond Bread Riots" *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 92 (1984): 143-149.



ticipants as “a few vagrant women and thieves who attempted to make the impression that they were needy people suffering for bread.” He claimed they robbed only one or two stores not of bread, but of dry goods and fancy articles. He concluded by assuring that the poor of the city are amply provided for, and “nobody who deserves to live is in any danger of starving in Richmond.”⁵⁸

Reverend Duncan tried to minimize the implications of the riot to the outside world by making only a small mention of the riot and portraying its participants as the dregs of society. Rumors of the riot would surely reach other areas of the Confederacy and even the North, potentially causing demoralization among the troops and civilians while confirming to the North that its tactics were working. Those who read his article might actually believe it was only a few criminals involved in the disturbance. At the same time his words also made it seem as if there were adequate supplies for the poor. The newspapers had been ordered by the military to make no mention of the riots in their publications, but the RCA and other publications such as the *Richmond Examiner* circumvented this demand.⁵⁹ Perhaps since Reverend Duncan was outspoken on behalf of the Confederate government and his article downplayed the seriousness of the riot, they simply overlooked his writing on the subject. John Moncure Daniel, editor of the *Examiner*, was not a proponent of Confederate administrations, but since he described the participants as “highway robbers ... and a mob of idlers” he, too, helped lessen the implications of the riot.⁶⁰

Other ministers also noted the debilitating effects of speculators upon the morale of the troops. William Gaines Miller, a chaplain with the 46th Virginia Volunteers, stated that early in the war all were concerned with the welfare of the troops and prayed fervently. However, now “sympathy and patriotism have given away, in a great measure to speculation and extortion; and these crimes which have assumed alarming proportions, and become a national evil.” His greatest sorrow was that men who previously were “leading spirits in the Church of Christ” are perpetrating these acts. He urged all of the faithful to try to improve the home front situation for the sake of the soldiers’ morale, as this ungodliness at home has affected them greatly. He also made the obligatory request for continued support of

⁵⁸ *Richmond Christian Advocate*, 9 April 1863.

⁵⁹ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988) 618.

⁶⁰ Chesson, 137.



the Soldiers' Tract Society.⁶¹

The soldiers in the field certainly noticed how some ruthless men took advantage of the current war. One felt it so acutely that he wrote a scathing letter to the RCA in which he noted he was saddened to see that so many who professed Christian beliefs had lapsed "into the indulgence of the most abominable sins and wickedness." He singled out a "certain class of men" who had "no regard to the results of this noble struggle for independence" so long as it does not interfere with their accumulation of wealth. He also scorned those who would snatch back the "bread of life" from mouths of widows and orphans "for the sake of a few dollars and cents." However, the soldier still had faith that those "thousands who have not yet bowed to the knee to Mamon, in whose bosoms burns the pure and holy fire of patriotism." It is in these persons and in the Almighty that the soldier believed they would find their way and win the war.⁶²

In the end no amount of prayer or fasting could help the Confederacy to win. The ministers rarely wavered in their resolve and convictions publicly, but by the close of the war, the civilian population was bitter and resentful. Prayer and penitence would not get crops planted, put food on the table, or bring their men home any sooner. The Richmond Christian Advocate continued throughout the war, but by 1864 it was finding it difficult to print because of paper shortages.⁶³

Still Duncan, in spite of the warning signs all around him, refused to acknowledge how desperate their situation had become. Ministers such as Duncan, Doggett, and others used their positions not only to bring the word of God to the people, but also to influence people's opinions on the war. Misguided though their aims may have been, these men made an extraordinary effort, but learned a valuable lesson about trying to fit their agenda into a religious framework.

In the end the ministers and the faithful of the Methodist Church and other denominations were mistaken in their belief that God was with them. God did not intervene on their behalf to help them triumph over the "Yankee Aggressors." Instead, they were defeated and left with an uncertain future. Even though the war was a failure, the church did experience some success despite all its limitations. The church managed to provide a spiritual network for the soldiers and boosted morale for both the soldier and the civilian for the better part

⁶¹ *Richmond Christian Advocate*, 25 December 1862.

⁶² "The Hope of Our Country," *Richmond Christian Advocate*, 11 October 1863.

⁶³ *Richmond Christian Advocate*, 7 January 1864.



of the war. As explained during an M.E. Church South council meeting, the Solders' Tract Association turned the camp from a "school of vice" to a "school of virtue, of salvation." Many men in camp learned to read and write and became Christians.⁶⁴ Since the church measures its success in its ability to make disciples, it could take heart in knowing it brought many to God. †

⁶⁴ *Richmond Christian Advocate*, 23 June 1864.

