

WITH GOD ON OUR SIDE:  
CLERICAL SUPPORT OF SECESSION AND THE CONFEDERATE WAR EFFORT IN  
NORTH CAROLINA

A Thesis  
by  
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Submitted to the Graduate School  
at Appalachian State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS

May 2021  
Department of History

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## **Abstract**

### **WITH GOD ON OUR SIDE: CLERICAL SUPPORT OF SECESSION AND THE CONFEDERATE WAR EFFORT IN NORTH CAROLINA**

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The evangelical generation that fought the Civil War attached significant meaning to the idea that God involved Himself with the fate of nations and individuals. Despite being relatively neglected by modern scholars, many Americans at the time used their religious beliefs to interpret events in politics and on the battlefield. This thesis looks at the contributions that the religious class of North Carolina made to the Civil War, whether justifying separation or speaking of the South's cause as divinely ordained. Using religious periodicals in the state, this research tracks North Carolina's clergy through the secession crisis and shows their transition from Unionists to committed Confederates. Likewise, these newspapers, along with a selection of religious pamphlet literature sent to soldiers, demonstrate the efforts of the state's religious class to promote the war amongst the populace. Sermons from ministers in various denominations across North Carolina also help to explain the reasons why the clergy supported the South's cause.

## Acknowledgements

An old proverb says that it takes a village to raise a child. In a similar sense, young scholars are continually indebted to those that helped foster their growth along the way. Of these individuals, Dr. Judkin Browning furthered my development as a scholar, writer, and a person the most. He spent countless hours critiquing my writing, providing suggestions and ideas, and clarifying my argument. Dr. Browning truly went above and beyond the call of duty, and I am forever grateful for his mentorship. I would also like to thank my thesis committee members, Dr. James Goff and Dr. Tim Silver, for their edits and guidance. Dr. Goff's seminar on religion exposed me to the immense scholarship on Christianity in American history and inspired my interest in the subject. Mr. Ralph Lentz also gave me encouragement during periods of writer's block and frustration, while also asking valuable questions that helped clarify my thoughts. Besides scholarly contributions, I would also like to thank my family and friends. My sister Haleigh, aunt Madeline, and grandparents Jerry and Sandra, all supported me greatly along my educational journey. I cannot thank them enough for believing in me even when I questioned myself. My colleagues in the Appalachian State History Department also provided valuable insights and friendship during the writing process. In particular, I want to thank Samuel Thibault for being a great friend and colleague. During our numerous lunches on King St. and my incessant phone calls, Sam helped clarify my ideas by providing a listening ear. Lastly, I want to thank Fr. Brendan Buckler and St. Elizabeth's of the Hill Country Catholic Church for providing a place for me to worship and follow God. Producing a work such as this is never a solitary endeavor. Only with love, mentorship, and support are these achievements made possible. Luckily, I had all of these things in droves.

## **Dedication**

To Dr. Judkin Browning for his tireless help

and

To my parents -- if you had lived to see this, I know you would be proud

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## Introduction

In February of 1862, Jefferson Davis sent a message to the southern people, announcing that Friday, February 28<sup>th</sup> would serve as a day of fasting, prayer, and humiliation on behalf of the Confederate war effort. Davis's declaration came amid the devastating defeats at Forts Henry and Donelson on the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers. Despite the early military success of the South in 1861, Confederate forces faltered in Tennessee, leading to the surrender of over 12,000 troops alongside the loss of significant strategic positioning. Though facing disaster, the Confederate president found solace in God's will. "We had hoped that the year would have closed upon a scene of continued prosperity," he declared, "but it has pleased the Supreme Disposer of events to order it otherwise." With faith in providence, Davis thought that the fledgling nation could be saved by religious devotion: "Our faith and perseverance must be tested, and the chastening which seemeth grievous will, if rightly received, bring forth its appropriate fruit." If the southern people, Davis argued, gave up their worldly sins, relied upon God, and prayed for military success, He would "perform His promise and encompass us with a shield." Ending his address, Davis implored the "Reverend Clergy and the people of the Confederate State[s] to repair to their respective places of worship to humble themselves before Almighty God and pray for His protection and favor to our beloved country."<sup>1</sup>

Ministers across the South heeded the call from Davis to give sermons on behalf of the Confederacy. On the appointed day, Presbyterian minister R.H. Lafferty delivered a sermon in his church in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. Like Davis, he emphasized the necessity of reliance upon God in the conflict. Indeed, he thought that the southern people

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<sup>1</sup> "Day of Fasting and Prayer," *Biblical Recorder*, February 26, 1862, 2.



had forgotten their Creator, instead putting their faith in worldly generals. After their victory at Manassas, Lafferty contested that “to too great an extent we have forgotten God, and in our prosperity, we have said, I shall never be moved.” Like Davis, Lafferty also interpreted southern defeats as a message from God: “our humility has been a feigned humility, and we have to a great extent forgotten the hand that has been holding, leading, defending, and feeding us. This is ingratitude. God is now chastening us for our sins.” To achieve God’s favor, Lafferty advised piety among the populace, encouraging them to “get low before God to-day, [sic] ... [and] confess our sins, and do it with the firm resolve that, by his grace assisting us, we will forsake sin.” Their prayers, he argued, would help to protect the South’s soldiers and win military battles. Besides appealing to the Almighty, Lafferty likewise asserted that families across the South must perform their difficult patriotic duties. “Although it may touch the most tender chord of our hearts to part with our sons and send them away to the tented field,” he proclaimed, “our affection [sic] for them is not to keep them back from offering themselves for the defence [sic] of our country.”<sup>2</sup>

Unlike many wars of the modern era, the Civil War possessed a deeply religious character. Davis and Lafferty represented a common mindset amongst politicians, and especially clergymen, which portrayed the conflict in providential terms. South of the Mason-Dixon, many believed that God would ultimately decide the outcome of the war, and that His will could be swayed by the piety of common people and soldiers. The southern generals, they contended, only acted as God’s instruments in a greater divine plan. Also unique to the Civil War was the extent to which the clergy supported the conflict. The

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<sup>2</sup> R.H. Lafferty, *A Fast-Day Sermon; Preached in the Church of Sugar Creek, Mecklenburg County, N.C., February 28<sup>th</sup>, 1862*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 5-6, 12.

transformation of the war into a theological battle prompted many Protestant clergymen in the South to align themselves with their new government and promote the war for independence. Ministers from multiple denominations preached before their congregations on the necessity of service to the Confederacy and the justness of the southern cause, while also demonizing their former countrymen.

Despite the significance that the Civil War generation attributed to religion, the subject rarely makes its way into popular or academic histories of the contest. Renowned popular historians Shelby Foote and Bruce Catton produced voluminous accounts of the war without mentioning religion. Though both spared no expense in describing the painstaking details of Lee and Grant's every move, neither felt it necessary to include accounts of the religiosity of the generals or the soldiers. Similarly, James M. McPherson's *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (1988), the current definitive account of the war published for the *Oxford History of the United States* series, hardly mentions religion at all. Though these scholars would acknowledge that religion played some role, it is often relegated to the periphery in favor of the events taking place in the halls of Congress.<sup>3</sup>

In her work entitled *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism* (1988), historian Drew Gilpin Faust argued that religion helped form southern identity, though whether religion operated at the forefront or the periphery of the southern imagination remained unclear. Regardless, Faust's interest in religion paved the way for further study. *Religion and the American Civil War* (1998), a collection of essays edited by Harry Stout, Charles Reagan Wilson, and Randall Miller, re-ignited this discussion by questioning the impact of religion

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<sup>3</sup> Shelby Foote, *The Civil War: A Narrative*, 3 vols. (New York: Vintage Books, 1974). Bruce Catton, *The Centennial History of the Civil War*, 3 vols. (New York: Doubleday Press, 1961). James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

on the war and whether it played a significant role. The editors suggested that scholars made tangential connections between religion and the Civil War, such as Stonewall Jackson's religiosity or biblical defenses of slavery, but these cursory examples failed to create a cohesive religious history of the war. Though they included many thoughtful essays from notable historians, they insisted that many stones remained unturned on the topic.<sup>4</sup>

A plethora of works on the subject since the publication of *Religion and the American Civil War* have answered the call to action. Most notable among these are George C. Rable's *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War* (2010) and Timothy Wesley's *The Politics of Faith During the Civil War* (2013). In the first of these books, Rable establishes that religion helped the population to explain catastrophic wartime events. Scripture, he suggests, "offered meaning and hope to a people in the darkest hours and, at the same time, justified remorseless bloodshed." Religion also "help[ed] explain the war's causes, course, and consequences," thereby creating a "providential narrative of the war." In this view, God played a direct role in human affairs, and His judgment would determine the winner of the conflict.<sup>5</sup> While Rable looks at the perceptions of those fighting and justifying the war, Wesley takes a different approach and shows how both religion and politics were deeply intertwined. Wesley examines the prominent preachers in both North and South and finds that "many church members and religious leaders were ardent flag wavers." More importantly, however, "their zeal did not represent the compromise of their

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<sup>4</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988); Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson, introduction to *Religion and the American Civil War*, ed. Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3.

<sup>5</sup> George C. Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 4, 9.

religious principles” as “Christians imagined themselves patriots because of – and not in defiance of – their religious beliefs.”<sup>6</sup>

The most useful and consequential contribution of the secondary literature is the recognition of the widespread nineteenth-century belief in divine providence. In contrast to the Enlightenment-era belief in a Deist God that merely created natural laws and set the universe in motion, the Civil War generation believed in a God that actively played a role in human affairs. The most useful and thorough treatments of this concept come from Rable’s work and Steven E. Woodworth’s study on the religiosity of troops during the Civil War, *While God is Marching On: The Religious World of Civil War Soldiers* (2001). According to “the doctrine of divine providence,” Woodworth says, God “not only made the world but is presently, positively active in it, producing the good and permitting the evil, all for the accomplishment of His people.” Importantly, the author differentiates the providential mindset from fatalism: “God, unlike the concept of fate, is personal. God also responds to human action, though only according to His will, and He requires certain behavior of human beings, with rewards or consequences based on obedience or the lack of it.” Rable concurred with this estimation, stating that “many Americans believed in a providential God who was also a personal God, a God deeply invested in the fate of nations and individuals.” Though human beings could never ultimately know God’s will or His intentions, ministers often troubled themselves with looking for hints or signs of God’s leaning, often by, as Rable declares, “the relentless ... application of biblical typologies to national problems.” The apparent “justness” of the southern cause, for instance, proved a popular justification for the belief that God would intervene on the South’s behalf. Both authors also importantly indicate

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<sup>6</sup> Timothy L. Wesley, *The Politics of Faith During the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 2.

the widespread extent of this belief. Woodworth argues that “the doctrine of providence ... was central to the religious faith of a vast number of Civil War soldiers,” while on the home front, Rable argues that “from April 1861 on, many northerners and southerners tried to make sense of a brutal war by thumbing through their Bibles, listening to their preachers, and even interpreting battles as a fulfillment of a mysterious, divine plan.”<sup>7</sup>

While these three works provide a much greater understanding of religion’s role in the war effort, they also have their shortcomings. Both Rable and Wesley often focused solely on the sermons of elite ministers. These men, such as Benjamin Morgan Palmer and James Henley Thornwell, largely concentrated their influence on their upper-class congregations composed of southern politicians and slaveholders. Historians have spent less time, however, looking at local and state level contributions to the Civil War effort. Across the South, for example, the large Protestant denominations began publishing religious newspapers during the antebellum period, and they continued during the war. In North Carolina alone, the state had a Baptist-supported paper, the *Biblical Recorder*, and a Methodist one, the *Raleigh Christian Advocate*. Likewise, the printing press in the state capital of Raleigh produced religious tracts and pamphlets written by various denominational ministers aimed at converting the troops. Moreover, historians have generally failed to inquire about local church support for the war. This thesis aims to correct these shortcomings.

Chapter one looks at the stance of North Carolina’s clergy in regard to the secession crisis and how their views changed over time. Focusing mostly on the copious records of the Baptist-operated religious newspaper, the *Biblical Recorder*, the chapter argues that, unlike

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<sup>7</sup> Steven E. Woodworth, *While God is Marching On: The Religious World of Civil War Soldiers* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 27-8, 36, 39; Rable, *God’s Almost Chosen Peoples*, 9, 4, 7.

the clergy of the Deep South, North Carolina's ministers did not immediately support secession. In fact, North Carolina's clergy wrote articles and gave sermons supporting peace and union following the election of Abraham Lincoln. They supported patience amid the secessionist rhetoric gaining popularity in some of the state's secular press. When Lincoln made his call for troops, however, the vast majority of the clergy followed their home state into advocacy for the new southern government. Joining their denominational brethren in the Deep South, North Carolina ministers began mobilizing support for the war effort in both sermons and the press by demonizing the northern government and portraying the South's cause as both noble and divinely ordained. Alongside this, individual churches supported the Confederacy by organizing prayer groups for the war effort and raising money for the soldiers to send them clothing and religious literature.

While chapter one focuses on the religious contributions to morale on the home front, chapter two examines the efforts of North Carolina's clergy to convert Confederate soldiers. Previous scholars have mostly focused on chaplains when studying religiosity in the camps, but this chapter analyzes the religious literature printed in the state capital of Raleigh and sent to soldiers by the various denominations. By playing on themes regarding the punishment of nonbelievers in the afterlife and the happiness of a Christian lifestyle, religious writers hoped to bring the soldiers to the faith. While the ministers authoring the pamphlets cared about the souls of the soldiers, they also thought that a pious army would help win the war. The clergy of the South believed that divine providence controlled all earthly events, which led them to think that God would bless the more religious army with victory. The pamphlets encouraged the men to give up sinful behaviors such as drinking and gambling and convert to God. Similarly, the tracts also tried to keep morale high amongst the

troops with assurances that they fought for a noble and just cause. Likewise, the pamphlets warned of the dire consequences of losing the war, such as political tyranny and social equality for blacks. The chapter closes with a discussion of the effectiveness of the religious literature on the troops. Accounts from soldiers, distributors of pamphlet literature, and chaplains suggest that many men liked the tracts, and they convinced many to convert. Moreover, the widespread availability of the literature combined with America's reading culture made it a more effective means of conversion than the hamstrung chaplaincy.

Chapter three focuses on the reasons why the South's clergy supported the Confederacy. Their decision to do so seems somewhat contradictory considering the traditional American belief in the separation between church and state, alongside the fact that the South's clergy abhorred political preaching during the antebellum years. The chapter first argues that many ministers believed that the Confederacy's cause was inextricably linked to Christianity. This point is demonstrated through the life of Thomas Atkinson, the Episcopal Bishop of North Carolina. Though he held moderate views on slavery and initially opposed secession, he came to support it when North Carolina seceded. His change of heart came about as a result of the idea amongst the southern clergy that northern theologians valued contemporary morals and science over biblical truths. This ideology turned the war into a moral conflict of godliness against apostasy, thereby justifying the southern ministry's entrance into the conflict. Secondly, the chapter also argues that the South's clergy engaged in a form of circular logic inspired by their providential worldview. As the secession crisis unfolded, many ministers began to think that God had ordained political separation for a specific purpose, possibly punishing the North for their liberalized theology. Their belief that God guided the South's actions led them to support the Confederate government and excuse

the actions of the South's political and military leaders. Lastly, the North Carolina denominational structures, along with the state government, began to punish ministers who did not support the Confederacy. Clergymen could be socially isolated, removed from their pulpits, and even arrested for deviating from the Confederate narrative. Though most ministers naturally came to their southern allegiance, the fear of punishment kept many dissenters silent or forced them into supporting the war.

Though largely neglected by Civil War scholars, the church's role in promulgating the war effort should not be overlooked, as churches served as the center of many communities across the South. For many, ministers interpreted earthly events through a religious worldview and instructed their congregants on how Christians should act in response. While the people expected politicians to deceive the populace, the clergyman's views, inspired by godly wisdom, would appear more trustworthy. For this reason, the religious class's support of the war and their dissemination of Confederate propaganda would have significant influence on Christians across the South, justifying and garnering support for the war.



## Chapter 1

### Converting to Secession: Religious Reactions to the Sectional Crisis in North Carolina

“We hold this truth to be self-evident that Governments are established for the security, prosperity and happiness of the people. When, therefore, any Government is perverted from its proper design, becomes oppressive, and abuses its power, the people have a right to change it.” Thus began the report of the Southern Baptist Convention held on May 13, 1861, in Savannah, Georgia. The delegates discussed the current tensions caused by the secession of the southern states and the subsequent fight over Fort Sumter, which occurred the previous month. Instead of espousing neutrality and allowing cooler heads to prevail, the Southern Baptists pledged to “assiduously invoke the Divine direction and favor in behalf of those who bear rule among us.” The church also elevated tensions by demonizing northern actions and intentions, concluding that “the lawless reign of terror at the North, the violence committed upon unoffending citizens; above all, the threats to wage upon the South a warfare of savage barbarity ... ought to excite the horror of all civilized people.”<sup>8</sup>

Scholars have argued that this belligerent stance constituted the consensus mentality held by the vast majority of the southern clergy. In *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (1997), Mitchell Snay argued that religion greatly contributed to the origins of southern sectionalism. Religion, he declared, “invested the sectional controversy over slavery with moral and religious meaning, strengthening those elements in Southern political culture that made secession possible.” Snay tracked this change through the opinions of the elite southern clergy, and he found that there was a “conspicuous consensus” of their views on contemporary issues of morality and politics.

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<sup>8</sup> “Southern Baptist Convention,” *Biblical Recorder*, May 22, 1861, 2.

“The major denominations in the South – Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Episcopalian,” Snay asserted, “differed little in their approach to such sectional issues as slavery, abolition, and the protection of southern rights.” David B. Chesebrough, in *Clergy Dissent in the Old South, 1830-1865* (1996), concurred with Snay’s estimation, arguing that “by the time the war began in April 1861, the southern clergy were nearly unanimous in their support of slavery and secession.” He averred, also, that this came about through a “winnowing process,” whereby clergymen who did not conform to the majority-held views were silenced by the government, their denomination, or mobs of the southern populace.<sup>9</sup>

While these pro-Confederate sentiments became the consensus view for southern churches once the war began, both historians paid little attention to the indecision on the issue of secession voiced by the ministry of the upper-South states. Chesebrough mentioned a few prominent latecomers to secession, including the Virginian Presbyterian minister Robert Lewis Dabney, but his primary focus on elite theologians from the Deep South caused him to neglect the counter-vailing views of many ministers in the border state of North Carolina. While the Deep South religious class immediately adopted the secessionist mantle of their politicians, many of North Carolina’s clergymen, along with its religious presses, initially tried to stay out of political matters and advocated for peace and negotiation between the two sections. In the time between the election of Abraham Lincoln in November 1860 and his call for 75,000 troops to put down the rebellion five months later, North Carolina’s ministers attempted to quell many of the pro-war sentiments in the state. This required them to go against the *rage militaire* that engulfed the populace in some areas of the state.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 2, 8; David B. Chesebrough *Clergy Dissent in the Old South, 1830-1865* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 25.

<sup>10</sup> David Chesebrough, *Clergy Dissent in the Old South*, 22-3.

Before secession, North Carolina's religious press reported northern actions and politics objectively while some of the state's secular press promoted fearmongering and disinformation. Likewise, religious periodicals in the Deep South quickly rallied behind secession, forcing North Carolina's clergy to go against their denominational structures to oppose secession. Ministers writing these columns also espoused opinions that went against the secessionist fervor overtaking much of the southern religious class. Though they remained thoroughly pro-slavery, many religious writers thought the South should remain in the Union. Once North Carolina seceded in May 1861, however, the religious bodies on a local and state level thoroughly endorsed the Confederacy. These ministers supported the war in a variety of ways, including keeping morale high on the home front and raising money and supplies for various aspects of the war effort. Most of the evidence for this trend comes from the North Carolina Baptist newspaper, the *Biblical Recorder*. The state also had a Methodist-supported newspaper entitled the *Raleigh Christian Advocate*, though it ceased regular publication in April of 1861 and only returned periodically throughout the war. That said, the *Advocate* followed a similar trajectory to the *Recorder* while in print, initially supporting moderation but quickly changing its tune once the state seceded. Historians studying this period have found few meaningful differences in behavior between the mainline Protestant faiths during the war. In their studies, most historians have classified Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian denominations together, using evidence from all three to make general points about religion in the South. Therefore, the abundant and well-kept records of the *Recorder* represent the general religious sentiment in North Carolina.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> In the third chapter of this thesis, it will be seen that individual preachers from a variety of denominations supported the interpretation of the war echoed in the *Biblical Recorder*.

“The political heavens are blackening with portentous clouds, which may break fury upon our country,” a minister wrote in the *Biblical Recorder* in November of 1860. “May the God of our fathers and the Guide of our youth instruct our rulers, teach our Senators wisdom and control the passions of our people.” Unlike many of his Baptist brethren in Alabama or Mississippi, this North Carolina minister did not immediately join the ranks of the secessionists. “Though the indications are numerous and strong that many of the Southern States will secede,” he wrote, “we still hope for a reaction.” Similarly, the *Raleigh Christian Advocate*, operated by the Methodist Episcopal Church South, advocated a de-escalation of tensions, reprinting an article from the *Charleston Christian Advocate* which read, “In a matter so momentous as that which now agitates the public mind, passion must not be allowed to govern.” The article also placed faith in the Union: “We have, by the sovereignty of our States, a Government to which we owe allegiance first of all, and that government can and will vindicate our rights and redress our wrongs.” In conclusion, the Methodist minister Rev. Myers of the Charleston paper said that they “consider[ed] the election of Abraham Lincoln as insufficient to justify the present apprehension.” Despite the threat looming on the horizon, the religious class of North Carolina hoped to be a force of reason and discourse that could lead to a peaceful settlement. The columnist in the *Recorder* ended his piece with hope that God would see the country through its present difficulties: “May the Lord rule in Zion and direct the ship of State in the perilous waters.”<sup>12</sup>

This minister’s prayer for peace came as a result of the antagonistic rhetoric expressed by the delegates at the Alabama Baptist State Convention held a few weeks earlier. At that event, the leading clergymen of the state pledged their full support to the secessionist

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<sup>12</sup> “The Crisis,” *Biblical Recorder*, November 29, 1860, 2; “New York Correspondence,” *Raleigh Christian Advocate*, November 27, 1860, 2.

efforts of politicians. Despite their assertion that they generally stood “aloof, for the most part, from political parties and contests,” they thought it was their duty to comment “when issues of the most grave and serious character [were] brought upon the country.” Regarding the newly-elected administration in Washington, they agreed that Alabamians could “no longer hope for justice, protection, or safety ... especially with reference to [their] peculiar property recognized by the Constitution.” Even though Lincoln had not yet been sworn into office or proposed a policy, the Convention hastily issued an ultimatum to war: “We have supposed ourselves entitled to equality of rights, as citizens of this republic. We are not willing to surrender them – even at the risk of life and all that we hold most dear.” The Convention considered itself “subject to the call of proper authority in defence [sic] of the sovereignty and independence of the State of Alabama and her right ... to withdraw from this Union.” The secretary of the meeting then drafted a letter to the governor of Alabama, assuring him that the religious class would support him throughout his resistance to the Federal government: “Should the exigencies of the State demand the services of any or all of the members of the convention, I doubt not you will find them faithful to the pledge they have so solemnly, [sic] and in the fear of God, made to your excellency and to the State.”<sup>13</sup>

The North Carolina minister reporting on the events transpiring in Tuskegee denounced the sentiment of the Convention, instead suggesting that the people of the Old North State follow the views expressed by the Reverend Richard Fuller in a speech before the Maryland Baptist Union Association. The words of Fuller, a Baptist minister and native South Carolinian then residing in Baltimore, stood in stark contrast to the combative tone of the Deep South clergymen. Speaking on the national crisis, Fuller took his inspiration from

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<sup>13</sup> “Baptist State Convention of Alabama all for Secession,” *Biblical Recorder*, November 29, 1860, 2.

Jeremiah 29:7, in which God told the Israelites to pray for the land in which they were held captive: “Seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives and pay unto the Lord for it; for in the peace thereof ye shall have peace.” Fuller addressed his message to the Baptists of the country, whether clergy or laity, imploring them to use their influence as men and women of God to bring the country back together. He admonished those clergymen pushing sectional strife on both sides of the Mason-Dixon, asking them instead “to put forth that vast influence which belongs to a body composed of more than one million communicants ... to allay these present asperities and to rescue all that we hold most dear from the ruin to which it has for some time been drifting.” Not only would secession mean “the destruction of this glorious government,” Fuller averred, but the worldwide cause of Christ would be threatened, as “all the prosperity of our missionary operations, and all of our Christian enterprises [would] be blighted.” Despite the many calls for secession and war, Fuller put his faith in the idea that “the Spirit of Jesus Christ is the spirit of peace, love, and harmony,” and that those who honestly followed the Lord could resolve the controversy. He closed his sermon with a plea for unity in God: “We beseech you brethren, North, South, East, West, that our hearts, our prayers, our aims, our efforts may be combined, that so ... this cup of national grief and bitterness may pass away and this great people, through the mercy of God, may be saved from the untold miseries into which ... they seem about to be plunged.”<sup>14</sup>

Fuller’s unifying message met a warmer reception in the North Carolina religious press than did the news of the Alabama Baptists endorsing secession. In the *Recorder*, for instance, a columnist asked in response to the sentiments in the Deep South, “Is it too late to

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<sup>14</sup> “To the Baptists in these United States of America,” *Biblical Recorder*, November 29, 1860, 2.

ask that his [Richard Fuller's] voice will yet be heard and heeded in his native land [South Carolina]?" Similarly, a writer for the *Raleigh Christian Advocate* voiced alarm at the religious involvement in secession, fearing that the Baptist Church in Alabama was "follow[ing] the ungodly precedents of all the fallen churches of past history" by "coming down into the political arena." Though the author did not deny the right of clergymen to hold political opinions, he thought that meeting in ecclesiastical bodies required them to "attend to ecclesiastical affairs and postpone all political resolutions to a more fitting occasion." Before secession, the North Carolina ministry attempted to distance itself from all talk of secession.<sup>15</sup>

Many religious leaders in the upper-South states collaborated in their efforts to ease political tensions with the gospel. The Baptist ministers of Richmond, for instance, generally held a weekly meeting, during which they discussed various issues affecting their community. Their gatherings after the November election focused on actions they could take to promote unity in the country. In one such measure, they sent out a message to every congregation in Virginia, asking each of them to comply with President James Buchanan's call for a day of fasting and prayer, which would take place on January 4, 1861. North Carolina Baptists co-opted this letter and printed it in the *Biblical Recorder*, asking all clergymen in the state to take part. The message tried to stay out of political entanglements, but the tone unequivocally advocated union and peace rather than secession. Indeed, the note began with a description of the current state of the nation, saying that "section is arrayed against section, party against party, and fanaticism and passion seem likely to usurp the place of reason and patriotism." The church did not condemn either North or South for the affair,

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<sup>15</sup> "The Crisis," *Biblical Recorder*, November 29, 1860, 2; "Coming Down!," *Raleigh Christian Advocate*, December 11, 1860, 2.

though they did argue that each side should “confess [their] sins and the sins of the nation, to humble [them]selves before him, and to implore his blessing on our distracted country.”<sup>16</sup>

The ministers also expressed great trepidation at the thought of the United States dissolving: “Our government, the work of our revolutionary fathers, long the safeguard of our liberties, and the admiration of the world, seems to be on the very verge of disruption – an event fraught with consequences which no mortal can foresee.” The men had faith, however, that God would see them through the conflict: “We are fully persuaded that He is able to calm the agitations of the people, inspire our public men with wisdom and moderation, control the national sentiment, and make our present troubles subservient to the present prosperity of our country, and the advance of His own kingdom.” They hoped that all believers would “suspend their secular business” and assemble for collective prayer in the name of the nation’s health, ending their statement with a blessing, “May our Heavenly Father bless us, and the nation to which we belong.”<sup>17</sup>

Many ministers from across the state heeded this call to prayer. While evidence from individual congregations remains scarce, one report from a church in Onslow County, North Carolina, reported, “Bro. W [Rev. J.M. Wooten] says the church observed last Friday at the chapel as a day of fasting and prayer.” The minister relating the event approved of the church’s actions, saying, “May the God of nations hear the cries of his people and restore peace and order to our Union.” In another account of the observance, one minister went to several services across Raleigh, and recorded larger church crowds on January 4<sup>th</sup> than on Thanksgiving Day of the previous year. He lamented the sectionalism taking place in both North and South, but he thought that the day of humiliation would prove beneficial, as “the

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<sup>16</sup> “A Day of Fasting and Prayer,” *Biblical Recorder*, December 13, 1860, 2.

<sup>17</sup> “A Day of Fasting and Prayer,” *Biblical Recorder*, December 13, 1860, 2.



prayers of true patriots and Christians in all sections” would influence God “to deliver us from existing troubles and avert threatening evils.” T.E. Skinner of a Raleigh-based Baptist church also preached on national healing with the text of James 5:16, “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.” Skinner applied the words to the current condition of the nation, saying that the “country is sadly in need of healing, that this state of things has been brought about by faults mutually committed by different sections.” Moreover, he “urged all to a confession of our faults and earnest prayers for each other and the whole land.” Importantly, Skinner emphasized that both North and South had done regrettable things to escalate sectional strife, but that each side should admit their faults and forgive one another. The author reporting on Skinner’s sermon agreed with the sentiment expressed and hoped that “our rulers, legislators, and people every where [sic] [will] be endowed with such heavenly wisdom as we all so much need in these hours of darkness and peril.”<sup>18</sup>

In the months leading up to North Carolina’s secession, the *Biblical Recorder* also published segments of northern sermons that advocated peace and union. On December 13, 1860, an extract from Rev. Charles Wadsworth’s sermon on Thanksgiving Day in Philadelphia appeared in the paper. In the few paragraphs posted, Wadsworth dealt with the question of whether America could continue to live on as one people or whether separation was inevitable. He declared, “the answer to these questions is obvious. Manifestly we are a single people.” To justify his position, he argued that “the American is as distinct a race as the French, the Russian, or the Turk, and this race has already developed an organic national life.” He continued, “From the Southern gulf to the Northern lakes, and from Atlantic to

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<sup>18</sup> “Union Chapel, Onslow,” *Biblical Recorder*, January 16, 1861, 2; “Day of Prayer,” *Biblical Recorder*, January 9, 1861, 2.

Pacific seas, we are kith and kin and kind of the same old Saxon blood.” His racial treatise on America’s distinct national character allowed him to conclude with a message promoting union, contesting that “[America is] not a conglomerate of States, but a great composite nation.”<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, the *Recorder* published the sermon of Francis Wayland, former president of Brown University and a Baptist minister in Providence, Rhode Island, who worried that the coming conflict would “greatly cripple us in preaching and imparting the Gospel ... [and] withdraw the saving work of the Holy Spirit.” His greatest concern rested with the “prodigious sins ... at work in our nation.” Wayland deeply understood the severity of the crisis, stating that “what is now taking place in our country that the course of things with us as a people for centuries to come may soon be decided.” Concluding that “no one can tell what course it is best things should take,” and that “human wisdom is vanity,” he told his audience that the best course of action for Christians was to put their faith in God. Despite the uncertainty in the country, “one thing can be,” he said, “God can issue this state of things exceedingly to the honor of His Son. And we can ask him to do this. It seems to me we should urge this plea with God. We should urge it continuously in the closet, in the family, and much in the silent uplifting of the heart in all places.” While Wayland’s statement was less overtly political, it did warn of the great calamities to families, the nation, and the Christian cause. The publications of the sermons of Skinner, Wadsworth, and Wayland reveal that unlike the Deep South ministry, North Carolina’s religious class warned of the devastations of war, rather than espousing nation-shattering discourse.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> “Dr. Wadsworth on the Crisis,” *Biblical Recorder*, December 13, 1860, 2.

<sup>20</sup> “Dr. Wayland on the Times,” *Biblical Recorder*, May 1, 1861, 2.

The religious press also remained neutral in their reporting on political events while many other papers resorted to hyperbole and fear-mongering. The coverage of Abraham Lincoln's inaugural address, for instance, differed markedly in North Carolina's *Biblical Recorder* compared to an Alabama Baptist newspaper, *The South Western Baptist*. Concerned with keeping both the institution of slavery and the Union, North Carolina adopted a much more neutral tone. A writer covering the event in the *Recorder* kept his coverage rather short, as he thought that "a religious journalist ... [should] refrain from an expression of [his] views of a purely political document," though he assured his readers that he felt "the magnitude of the crisis which is upon us." The author expressed disappointment that "some passages ... in Mr. Lincoln's address ... have lowered the hopes of many of the most conservative journals in the country," escalating tensions between the sections rather than defusing them. Despite this, he still held out "hope for a reconstruction of the government," whereby the Union could be peacefully reunited. The author of a column in the *South Western Baptist*, however, held no reservations about commenting on political matters. After having "carefully read it," he "pronounce[d] it a Government splitting document – a war speech." "Up to date," the author argued, "the South has done all she could to prevent a collision," though Lincoln, the writer stipulated, was attempting to make war inevitable. Though Alabama's commissioners were currently in Washington negotiating, the columnist advised readers of the *South Western Baptist* to "prepare for the worst." The writer saw no future in which Alabama returned to the Union. "If we are to have peace, let it speedily come, if war" the author defiantly stated, "let it come."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> "The President's Inaugural," *Biblical Recorder*, March 13, 1861, 2; "The Inaugural," *South Western Baptist*, March 14, 1861, 2.

Though the ministers of North Carolina tried to have a moderating influence on the topic of separation, they only wanted the Union to remain if it contained slavery. Amid the political stirrings over secession, the paper published many Biblical and religious arguments in favor of the peculiar institution. The article in the *Recorder* used passages of scripture that directly referred to the main Biblical figures condoning slavery or owning slaves themselves. The author, for example, used Genesis 20:14, “And Abimelech took sheep, and oxen, and menservants and womenservants, and gave them to Abraham.” He then argued that “this text proves that servants (slaves) were transferrable at the will of the owner ... They were his property.” To justify hereditary slavery, the writer pulled from the story of Ham’s curse, in which God condemned Ham’s son, Canaan, along with his descendants, to perpetual servitude. In Genesis 9:25, the Lord stated that “a servant of servants shall he [Canaan] be to his brethren,” though southern theologians could never convincingly make the argument that black Africans constituted Ham’s descendants. Importantly, the writer said that God sanctioned the relationship between slave and master, but not the abuses of the various actors within that institution. He compared the relationship between a master and slave to a household family. While God condoned the family as a sacred institution, with the husband having authority, the Lord would not accept a man physically abusing his wife: “It may be an evil that the relation of husband and wife, parent and child, is abused; but yet the *relation* (emphasis in original) is established by God.” He concluded that every person should act justly in the role that they are given by God. A master should treat his slaves humanely, and

the slave should offer faithful service. “The Prophets and Apostles,” he maintained, “considered this just and equal.”<sup>22</sup>

Once Lincoln issued his call for troops on April 15, 1861, in response to southern rebellion, the pressure toward separation in North Carolina reached a fever pitch. Before the state officially seceded in May of 1861, certain piedmont and coastal areas that heavily relied upon slave labor had already developed a devotion to the Confederacy, with the flag of the southern government flying over the statehouse in Raleigh by the end of April. Moreover, the secular press filled its pages with editorials supporting North Carolina’s secession and war with the United States. The *Raleigh Register* wrote in response to Lincoln’s call for troops, “Let the cry on all sides be ‘To arms! to arms!’ Our sister State Virginia will ... soon be invaded by hordes of Black Republicans, bent on the unholy mission of subjugating the Southern States.” From the *Charlotte Democrat*: “let North Carolina join the Southern Government as soon as possible ... It is too late to talk about holding a National Convention to prevent secession. There are and will be but two governments – a Northern and a Southern one. North Carolina belongs to the latter.” Even the *Weekly Standard*, edited by the Unionist William W. Holden, admitted, “The proclamation of Lincoln is a gross usurpation. He has broken the Constitution. He has assumed and is now exercising undelegated power. He has deceived and would ruin his country.” Though Holden’s paper suggested that the Border States should unite and command peace between the two rabid sections, that message fell on

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<sup>22</sup> “For the Recorder,” *Biblical Recorder*, January 8, 1861, 1; For more information on Biblical defenses of slavery, see Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

deaf ears with most of North Carolina's public. The men of Raleigh were already holding meetings to form companies while their wives took measurements for their uniforms.<sup>23</sup>

Despite nationalistic fervor overtaking many areas of North Carolina, some in the clergy still clung to their vanishing vision that peace could be achieved. Many articles in the *Recorder* continued to blame both sections for being obdurate and refusing to compromise. One author bemoaned that after Lincoln's call for troops, "the heart of the patriot and the philanthropist sinks within him and angels might weep over the ruins of our once great and glorious nation." He mentioned the Confederacy's stubbornness in negotiation, but he also blamed Lincoln for raising tensions by bringing the issue of war to the forefront. He argued that the call for troops had forced the hand of many upper-South politicians, necessitating their vote for secession. The author questioned Lincoln's strategy because he had only compelled more states to secede and join the Confederate war effort. "What then?" asked the author, "Will Mr. Lincoln and his cabinet pursue to the bitter, bloody end their fiendish purpose? Can the madness of fanaticism go so far? We hope not. Surely reason will return in time to revert so dreadful a catastrophe." In the end, this minister wished to take the path that would lead to peace rather than war. In Raleigh, the Baptist minister T.E. Skinner preached on Romans 12:18: "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." He tried to stay as apolitical as a minister could during such times of heightened political awareness. He left the war-making decisions to the politicians, but he also enumerated the immense duties and sacrifices that war demanded of all people, not just soldiers. He spoke of the "excellency of peace and the importance of preserving it, even at the cost of great

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<sup>23</sup> "Military Spirit in Raleigh," *Biblical Recorder*, April 14, 1861, 3; "Progress of the War," *Raleigh Register*, April 24, 1861, 2; "A National Convention," *Charlotte Democrat*, April 23, 1861, 3; "The Border States must Unite and Act!," *Weekly Standard*, April 24, 1861, 1.

sacrifices.” Skinner assuredly supported his new government, though he seemed to express unease at the thought of condoning a bloody war that would send thousands of young men to an early grave.<sup>24</sup>

One of the last and most impassioned calls for peace and moderation to be published in the *Recorder* came on June 26, 1861, less than a month before the first major battle of the war took place at Manassas Junction. The author lamented what he deemed irresponsibility on the part of the ministry of the South: “Who does not feel pained to hear from the lips of men prominent in the Christian church exclamations tinctured with feelings of intense hatred against men and brethren who differ with them, and to hear baptized men talk of war, extermination and rivers of blood with the nonchalance of a Nero or a Caligula?” “Blessed are the peacemakers,” he said, quoting *Matthew* 5:9, and asked, “why should we [the clergy] not be permitted to talk of peace and use our influence for good, without incurring the ill will and animosity of dissentient [sic] brethren.” This minister expected the pulpit to be a place where people could “expect to receive lessons of moderation and forbearance.” However, he lamented, “Even the Christian minister is too often found violating the sacredness of his office,” by “preaching to the prejudices of men rather than to their sensibilities by attributing existing calamities to the sins of one portion of the country and to the iniquities of a party, rather than to the ingratitude, the irreverence and the depravity of the whole people.”<sup>25</sup>

The overwhelming tide of pro-war sentiment gave this unnamed clergyman’s words of rationality little effect. Once thousands of southern men fell on the battlefield to their northern foes, the southern ministry reached a point of no return in their support for the war

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<sup>24</sup> “The State of the Country,” *Biblical Recorder*, April 24, 1861, 2; “Thanksgiving Day in this City,” *Biblical Recorder*, June 19, 1861, 2.

<sup>25</sup> “Our National Perils and Sins,” *Biblical Recorder*, June 26, 1861, 1.

effort. They would operate as a supportive wing to the Confederate government, excusing political and military errors before their congregations and in the press. The upper-South ministers finally joined their Deep South brethren by supporting their new nation wholeheartedly.

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North Carolina clergymen that at first dismissed the sectional antagonism of their fellow ministers to the south came to embrace their patriotic role once the war began. They solidified this place at the Southern Baptist Convention in May of 1861, when they pledged to call on God's support for the Confederate war effort. This action should not be taken lightly; divine favor, they thought, encompassed the most powerful weapon they offered the Confederacy. The providential mindset—the idea that God interfered in human affairs and that He would ultimately choose the winner of the war—held sway among the vast majority of ministers. Within this framework, God's choice could be altered based on mass prayer and the piety of His people. The southern clergy organized prayer on a local and national level with the hopes that it would bring God to their aid and change the fate of the war. In this sense, the belief in divine providence gave the South immense confidence and thereby prolonged the war effort due to their insistence that God at any moment would turn the war back in their favor.

Many historians have reached this conclusion regarding the patriotic effort of the southern ministry. David Chesebrough, for instance, argued that “It was the ministers who inspired the South to keep on fighting, to continue the shedding of blood, to perpetuate the carnage, [even] when the cause was obviously lost.” Their methodologies, however, often focus exclusively on elite ministers—what Mitchell Snay called “gentleman theologians”—



with urban denominations that held sway with the ruling class.<sup>26</sup> Less has been said, however, about the state of Confederate support in the religious press and local communities across the South. While the national ministers held disproportionate sway over opinions and events, the broader population of southern people had to back the war effort for it to be successful. If the people did not believe that the goals mandated such a high level of sacrifice, the withdrawal of support could take away soldiers and tax dollars from the war. For this reason, the ministry also kept spirits high on the home front after military losses, assuring their congregations that the war they fought was just and that setbacks only constituted a momentary chastisement from God rather than an outright rebuke of their cause.

From the outset, the ministry recognized the important work of ministers on the home front. One columnist in the *Biblical Recorder* wrote that “a great deal is being said about ministers in connection with the war – a great many of them are volunteering and going into the army.” He thought, however, that “this matter might be carried a little too far,” as “the flocks of Christ [on the home front] should not be left without shepherds in these times that are calculated to try men’s souls.” Clergymen, therefore, had to keep those at home in line with the southern narrative of independence. Churches in local communities played an essential role in keeping morale high during difficult times of war and serving a part in organizing the home front in support of the Confederate cause.<sup>27</sup>

“The road to success and independence, in any undertaking, is rough and difficult,” wrote a contributor to the *Biblical Recorder*, “and the goal can be reached only by patient

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<sup>26</sup> For a general overview of the religious history of the war and a good explanation of the “providential narrative,” see George C. Rable, *God’s Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010). An example of the use of urban and elite ministers comes from Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997). He explicitly focuses on “gentleman theologians” such as Benjamin Morgan Palmer and James Henley Thornwell.

<sup>27</sup> “Ministers and the War,” *Biblical Recorder*, June 19, 1861, 1.

labor and rigid self-denial and after humiliating defeats and disappointments.” The newspaper, edited by Baptist ministers, reassured its readers that the war effort had not become hopeless after the disastrous defeat of Confederate forces at Fort Donelson in Tennessee in February 1862. The writers had to recant after their righteous declaration that God had intervened in the Battle of Manassas on July 21, 1861, and that victory over the apostate North would be imminent. Even after defeat, however, they saw no reason to renounce God’s interference in the conflict. Though the war “will be longer and more prolific of embarrassment and suffering than was at first supposed,” the minister reminded the populace that “no nation has ever played an important part in the world’s theatre without passing through the stern discipline of war.” The author closed the piece with the reassurance that “[God’s] hand is in it all ... leading us through the period of darkness and suffering which are necessary to prepare us for the comforts and glorious light and warmth of the unclouded day.” Indeed, the ministry could turn defeat into a positive outcome by portraying it as “a temporary chastening of the Lord to be followed by a speedy manifestation on our behalf.”<sup>28</sup>

Even through times of great difficulty, the ministry assured the populace that God would side with the South. After the wrenching loss at Gettysburg in early July 1863, the fault fell not with the southern generalship, they argued, but with the insufficient religiosity of the South. One author in the *Recorder* wrote that the populace had become enthralled with the success of their generals, but they “were forgetting that God ... [was] giving his glory to mere human instrumentalities.” Their faith had been misplaced, and the author concluded,

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<sup>28</sup> “The Road to Independence,” *Biblical Recorder*, March 12, 1862, 2. A writer declared that the war would end speedily in “What Prayer had to do with the Victory of Manassas,” *Biblical Recorder*, October 2, 1861, 1; “Cheering,” *Biblical Recorder*, March 26, 1862, 2.

“this is a sin which the Most High will not permit to go unpunished.” Despite the apparent tragedy that had befallen the South in Pennsylvania and along the Mississippi where the garrison at Vicksburg surrendered on July 4, 1863, the *Recorder* assured its readers that the events did not warrant capitulation. Indeed, another column wrote, “The present crisis is not unlike those which every individual, who has achieved any unusual success in life, has had to pass through.” After recounting the fact that life can often give a streak of bad luck that causes someone to doubt their ability to succeed, the author proclaimed, “Our heavenly Father ... generally leads his children through these seasons of adversity and apparent defeat to victory and success.”<sup>29</sup>

The ministry also defended the southern cause by using religious argumentation to shield Confederate political and military leaders from criticism during times of difficulty. In one such column, the author used the existence of divine providence as a justification against criticism. In his view, the “rulers and generals ... are only instruments who can perform nothing for the country’s welfare except as power is given them from above.” Battles, he argued, were often decided by small margins, such as the timeliness of an attack or the changing direction of the wind, and those minor elements could be altered by God through the intervention of prayer. “These events,” the author argued, “though beyond the control of the wisest statesmen or the most skilful [sic] generals, may be controlled by the humble Christian, in his or her closet far away from the scene of action and without any present knowledge of the events occurring.” For this reason, the author asserted that “the success of our country then may, and perhaps will depend more upon the Christians of the Confederacy than upon our rulers.” Similarly, another writer argued that the apparent failures on the part

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<sup>29</sup> “Our Reverses,” *Biblical Recorder*, August 5, 1863, 1; “Faith for Our Country,” *Biblical Recorder*, August 5, 1863, 2.

of military or political leaders could have a greater purpose in God's plan, suggesting that they could be "links ... in the chain of events by which a wise and gracious Providence is leading on to our ultimate and triumphant success." Both writers concluded that southern Christians could best support the war effort by praying for their rulers and generals: "Instead of lifting up against them by distrust and suspicion, the function of true Christian patriotism lies in the fervent effectual prayer which may win to their aid this gift of [divine] power." This providential mentality provided a great source of confidence and comfort to the South during the Civil War, allowing ministers to explain any success as God revealing his preference and any loss as a mere chastisement on the road to independence.<sup>30</sup>

Ministers also kept morale high by attesting to the justness of the southern bid for independence, which usually took the form of exaggerating the "evils" of northern society and Abraham Lincoln. Contributors to the *Recorder* continuously espoused the idea that the North had become a tyrannical state that wished to oppress the South. When the war began, editorials expressly criticized the actions of "Mr. Lincoln" as a tyrant who "seemed to glory in trampling under his feet that constitution which he has sworn to carry out." One writer declared that the northern states are "held by military despotism," because "the right of Habeus Corpus [had been] ... ruthlessly violated." The author concluded that, after a few years of the tyrannical policies of Lincoln, "the South will be the only home of freedom [on the American continent]." Another author insisted that the northern government had become "the government of a few ... appointed in disregard of the constitution and supported in an unlawful manner." These polemics became engrained in the *Recorder*, as they began publishing a column on the third page entitled "From the United States," which disparaged

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<sup>30</sup> "Harsh Criticism of Our Leaders," *Biblical Recorder*, April 16, 1862, 1; "'Thou shalt not speak evil of the Ruler of Thy People,'" *Biblical Recorder*, April 16, 1862, 2.

the northern people and government. One section said that northerners had realized the despotism of their country and that droves fled to Canada and enlisted in the British Army.<sup>31</sup>

While ministers spread fear about the future of American governance, they also made sure that the common southerner knew that the threat of northern “tyranny” affected him as well. A writer reminded southerners that “the South is standing on the defensive and engaged in the holy cause of protecting its own firesides and altars from desolation.” In North Carolina, a writer pointed to Union occupation on the coast as a preview of northern victory, spreading unsubstantiated accounts of the outrages committed by the Union army. This same essay suggested that the North “has made women and children targets for its soldiery and victims of cruel imprisonment and outrage.” Similarly, another column entitled “Yankee Rule in Eastern Carolina” said that southerners living on the coast “are plundered, robbed, and insulted, and carried off to prison” by the American army. Not only would southerners bear the mark of treason, but the entire southern lifestyle would be upended. Writers sent the message that northern rule meant economic instability and social equality for blacks. If the South had stayed in the Union, Lincoln’s policies would “render insecure our firesides and families” and eventually lead to “the admission of Negro equality.” The writer concluded with a generous interpretation of the South’s predicament: “We desire no conquest. We are in arms only to defend our homes and families against the invader.”<sup>32</sup>

According to the *Recorder*, even slaves wanted to do everything within their power to support the Confederate cause. In one instance, the newspaper published a letter from planter William D. Pitt’s slave preacher, in which he recounted speaking to the slaves about their

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<sup>31</sup> “Disenchanted,” *Biblical Recorder*, August 7, 1861, 2; “Various Things – The Northern Government,” *Biblical Recorder*, October 23, 1861, 2; “From the United States,” *Biblical Recorder*, August 27, 1862, 3.

<sup>32</sup> “Desolation of Southern Homes,” *Biblical Recorder*, February 5, 1862, 4; “Yankee Rule in Eastern Carolina,” *Biblical Recorder*, October 8, 1862, 2; “The Present War,” *Biblical Recorder*, July 17, 1861, 1.

master enlisting in the Confederate Army. Telling the story of the Battle of Manassas, the minister “spoke of the wounded and slain in a most feeling manner.” While he gave the speech, “there were to be heard groans and sobbing all around, and to be seen tears flowing freely from many eyes.” After he finished, the slaves rushed to the pulpit, emptying their pockets of whatever money they had to contribute to the war effort, totaling \$5.65. The minister concluded that the “colored” population had expressed more dedication to the war effort than whites. Similar stories involving slave dedication to the Confederacy occasionally appeared in the paper. One such column spoke of Albert, a slave who, the moment he heard that the South had seceded, immediately spent his savings of \$300 on a Confederate bond to help the war effort. Indeed, the apparent commitment of slaves to the Confederate cause made the demands of abolitionists appear preposterous. With this rosy view of slave mentalities, the *Recorder* could, without irony, declare that “the only true friends of the black race are among the Southerners.”<sup>33</sup>

The *Recorder* also tried to organize a national prayer effort in the Confederacy at the beginning of the war. “Let the farmer stop his plow; let the mechanic stay his hand from labor; let the physician pause for a moment from his errand of mercy ... let all business halt and the whole land be still,” read a message to the southern people. During the cessation of work, which was to occur every day at 1 o’clock across the Confederacy, each individual should say a prayer for the southern war effort, and the minister asked each person to “remember his country and its defenders before God.” The author offered this suggestion to replace the act of small communities and churches holding prayer meetings, as the sparsely

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<sup>33</sup> “The Negro and the Soldiers,” *Biblical Recorder*, October 23, 1861, 1; “The Poor African and the Confederate Loan,” *Biblical Recorder*, May 1, 1861, 3; “Second Day,” *Biblical Recorder*, November 20, 1861, 2.

populated South could only draw so many people away from their work during wartime. The first aim of the prayer involved having the South's "prayer energies united," all the people's "petty differences and party feelings ... sifted out." Everyone, in other words, could stop thinking of themselves in material or political terms and instead see themselves as children of God united in a holy cause. Second, the author argued that "it is not presumption to believe that we shall enlist the God of battles in our righteous cause," thereby making the southern soldiers "invincible." To remind the people to partake in the joint prayer, the paper advised all churches, along with any institution possessing a bell, to ring it at precisely 1 p.m.<sup>34</sup>

Though it is unknown how many farmers dropped their plows at one in the afternoon and commenced praying, this does mark the involvement of local churches in support of the Confederacy. Many churches and religious associations across the state began hosting prayer meetings in support of the war effort. The minister of Berea Baptist Church in Buncombe County, for example, wrote to the *Recorder* that "the church entered into an agreement ... to hold a weekly prayer meeting as long as the war continues." The author also hoped "to encourage other churches to do likewise." Alongside individual houses of worship, many church associations adopted resolutions for weekly prayer meetings. The Green River Baptist Association, consisting of twenty-six churches from McDowell and adjacent counties unanimously agreed to begin hosting weekly meetings at their churches. Similarly, the Yoppim Union Meeting, serving Chowan County, recommended each of their churches to speak about "the necessity of humble and earnest prayer to Almighty God in behalf of our soldiers, our country, and the cause of Christ."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> "United Prayer for Our Country," *Biblical Recorder*, July 17, 1861, 1.

<sup>35</sup> "For the Recorder," *Biblical Recorder*, July 3, 1861, 2; "Green River Baptist Association," *Biblical Recorder*, October 30, 1861, 2; "Proceedings," *Biblical Recorder*, April 16, 1862, 1.

A difficulty presents itself, however, in ascertaining what occurred inside church doors, whether in weekly prayer meetings or Sunday sermons. Due to the popularity of extemporaneous preaching in the Protestant sects, few ministers of small congregations wrote down their sermons, though the *Biblical Recorder* does offer a few hints as to the contents of their preaching. Perhaps the best evidence comes from an essay prepared by the Reverend R.B. Jones that he read before the Yoppim Union Meeting, which a member transcribed and sent to the *Recorder* to be published. In the speech, the minister aimed to answer the question, “What is the duty of Christians in the time of War?” Using various scriptural passages, he concluded that Christians had a duty to serve their civil government “unless the government under which they live, should require them to transgress the laws of God.” In his view, Yankee society had become anti-Christian and tyrannical, and that justified the South’s efforts at independence. In perhaps his most polemical point, he said that those who neglected their patriotic duty should be labeled as treasonous. Indeed, “those citizens among us who embraced an early opportunity of swearing allegiance to the Federal Government ... show themselves disloyal to North Carolina and justly forfeit the respect of both Governments and the fellowship of Christians.” Further, “they rest under the condemnation of the scriptures and augment the list of traitors, headed by Judas Iscariot and Benedict Arnold.”<sup>36</sup>

Importantly, the *Recorder* modeled itself as a paper for ministers to learn material for their sermons. The front page of the paper often contained a few articles relating to denominational beliefs or countering common arguments that a skeptic might bring up. While all preachers may not have adopted the sermon of Reverend Jones, the general pro-

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<sup>36</sup> “What is the Duty of Christians in the Time of War?,” *Biblical Recorder*, October 1, 1862, 1.



southern tone of the paper may have inspired polemical sermons that supported the Confederacy. Though the South prided itself on leaving politics out of the pulpit, the North Carolina Baptist State Convention began endorsing it. The groups of ministers came to this decision based on the premise that the South's cause appeared vastly more just than that of the North. To support his claim, a church elder said that "in the Revolutionary War, the preachers did not hesitate to let it be known which side they were on and neither should we." In a similar fashion to their forefathers, he argued that the South fought "in defence [sic] of our dearest rights and liberties." "If there has ever been a justifiable war," he continued, "one in which the men engaging in it could look up to God and confidently pray for His blessing on them, it is the cause in which we are engaged." This elder received great support for his speech, thereby allowing the Baptists of the state to preach an anti-northern message from their pulpits.<sup>37</sup>

While these prayer meetings raised awareness and commitment to the Confederate cause, many also believed that they could alter military events in the field. Stories appeared in the *Recorder* which attested to the power of prayer during battles, such as the account of the "Oglethorpe Rifles" from Oglethorpe County, Georgia. As the bullets whizzed past these soldiers in the first battle of Manassas, their community made sure that "prayers were ascending on their behalf." This group of soldiers helped make up the 8<sup>th</sup> Georgia Regiment, which faced massive casualties in the battle, but the *Recorder* miraculously reported that none of the Rifles had been killed. The author implied that prayer provided the only logical explanation for their survival. Similarly, a romanticized account of the Battle of Manassas portrayed the fight as nearly lost for the South, as the soldiers were "exhausted" and "worn

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<sup>37</sup> "Baptist State Convention," *Biblical Recorder*, November 5, 1862, 2.

down with fighting overwhelming numbers.” “When the conflict was hottest and fiercest,” the author continued, “thousands of Christian congregations . . . were sending up earnest petitions for the success of our cause and the safety of our brave men.” The evidence of God’s intervention appeared overwhelming, and the author hoped that this would lead “to more consistent and earnest prayer for [their] country.” Prayers, in other words, could mean a southern victory or the protection of a son or husband in battle.<sup>38</sup>

With men at war, many of the church’s aids to the war effort had to be fulfilled through women. The ladies of the South often formed into small groups that would knit blankets, socks, and other textiles to send to troops in winter camp. In one instance, the “ladies in Wake Forest” produced seventy-seven blankets and eleven pairs of socks at the behest of their reverend, Jason S. Purefoy, who promptly sent them to the regiments. Women also worried about the spiritual welfare of the soldiers, and that prompted some to organize efforts to send Bibles to the soldiers. The women of Warren County amassed 100 testaments to send to the troops. Some women took their zeal to the extreme, such as a group in Catawba County that heard about a 900-gallon shipment of liquor being sent to the troops that temporarily resided at a local depot. These women, most likely inspired by sermons on the deleterious effects of alcohol on the soldiers, joined together and took hatchets to the barrels and momentarily halted the influence of “King Alcohol” on the troops. While some articles asked women to join medical units to help nurse soldiers back to health, many of their methods of helping the war effort resided in the domestic sphere. Ministers praised those women that maintained their femininity in the face of war, such as those that acted as their “soldier’s intercessor.” “Her prayers,” in other words, could “win to his succor the aids of

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<sup>38</sup> “The Shield of Prayer,” *Biblical Recorder*, October 23, 1861, 1; “What Prayer had to do with the Victory of Manassas,” *Biblical Recorder*, October 2, 1861, 1.

grace.” In this sense, the main role of women involved supporting their male family members through difficulties and providing moral support as they fought for their country.<sup>39</sup>

Local churches also did their part as community organizers that raised money and supplies for the Confederacy. The *Biblical Recorder* often published the minutes of “union meetings,” where a group of Baptist churches in a given geographic area, such as a few adjacent counties, would all meet together. Alongside their usual activities of speeches and prayer, the union meetings also began to fundraise for the spread of Christian literature, also known as colportage, in the camp. In one of their resolutions, the Yoppim Union Meeting declared that they would “appropriate all their funds to the army colportage, in furnishing our soldiers with Bibles and Tracts.” For this effort, they raised \$73, which in 1861, could print over 100,000 pages of text.<sup>40</sup> The newspaper itself also began to take donations, and they would post their collections on every weekly issue. With their meager printing supplies, the South did the best it could to furnish every soldier with religious reading material. A meeting of various denominations in Rowan County, NC, attempted to fix this problem by starting a printing press dedicated to the production of Bibles and religious tracts, though the meagerness of printing supplies probably halted this operation before it attained any meaningful progress.<sup>41</sup>

Religious societies in North Carolina put the money raised by countless small congregations to good use. The printing press in Raleigh produced thousands of pages of

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<sup>39</sup> “Army Correspondence,” *Biblical Recorder*, October 30, 1861, 2; “North Carolina Record,” *Biblical Recorder*, July 31, 1861, 2; “Ladies Demolishing King Alcohol,” *Biblical Recorder*, March 26, 1862, 2; “What Woman has Done and Should Do,” *Biblical Recorder*, March 26, 1862, 1.

<sup>40</sup> In mid-1861, \$1 could buy 1500 pages of printing. “Tracts for the Soldiers,” *Biblical Recorder*, July 24, 1861, 2.

<sup>41</sup> “Proceedings of the Yoppim Union Meeting, held with the Church of Christ at Yoppim, December 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>,” *Biblical Recorder*, January 8, 1862, 2; “To the Christians and Patriots of North Carolina,” *Biblical Recorder*, July 17, 1861, 2.

religious literature which religious societies sent across the South attempting to save the souls of the Confederate soldiers. While the piety and prayers of the people on the home front remained important, the southern clergy could not neglect the men in the field. Would God, after all, support an army that engaged in sinful behavior? To the dismay of many clergymen, pleasures of the flesh abounded in camp, with soldiers partaking in cursing, drinking, and gambling. While the chaplaincy sought to curtail the sacrilegious behavior of many soldiers, the Confederacy faced a shortage of army ministers throughout the war. While overseeing a large number of troops, the overburdened chaplains found it difficult to provide religious counsel to all the young men within their regiment. To mend the spiritual crisis in the camps, the denominations organized an effort to produce religious pamphlets aimed at soldier conversion. As we will see in the next chapter, these tracts would prove an essential part of the religious class's efforts to proselytize the army.

## Chapter 2

### “Patriotism and Piety”: Southern Religious Pamphlet Literature during the Civil War

During the height of the Civil War, as the battles between Union and Confederate armies raged on, the Baptist preacher Basil Manly, Jr. proclaimed, “There is another war, however, in which we are engaged with a deadlier foe than the Yankees.” This battle, the South Carolinian maintained, was not fought on the front with guns, but in the hearts and minds of the southern troops. Indeed, Manly along with the vast majority of southern ministers thought that the Civil War constituted “spiritual warfare.” By this, they meant that the actions on the battlefield would ultimately be determined by God, who would choose the most just and righteous side. The Lord, however, had not predetermined the victor; both combatants had the opportunity to gain God’s favor or squander His blessing. How then could the South gain God’s approval?<sup>42</sup> For many religious ministers, the answer lay in the conversion and righteous behavior of the soldiers. Joseph C. Stiles, a Presbyterian minister, implored the servicemen to “put away all your profanities, all your dishonesties, all your intemperance, all your Sabbath breaking, all your straggling, [and] all your desertion” for these actions were “working mightily to strengthen Federal arms, to achieve Federal victories, and to crush the liberties of the people.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Though the North also saw the Civil War as a providential affair, this study will focus solely on the South due to the unique relationship that the ministry developed with the planter class. In short, the southern ministry used the Bible to justify a hierarchical society despite the seemingly contradictory between southern society and the egalitarian evangelical doctrine. This thesis is argued in Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Press, 1997).

<sup>43</sup> Basil Manly Jr., *Halting on This Side of Jordan, or, Shall Your Brethren Go to War and Shall Ye Sit Here?* Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2000; Joseph Clay Stiles, 1863, *National Rectitude, the Only True Basis of National Prosperity: An Appeal to the Confederate States* Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2000; (Stiles as Presbyterian minister) <https://snaccooperative.org/ark:/99166/w6ff4s3q>

A critical mind might be inclined to think that Manly and Stiles's prose about the importance of soldier conversions constituted a mere appearance of holiness rather than a true belief in its efficacy. They did not, however, deliver these messages in sermons to the elites of southern society, but in pamphlets that southern religious societies sent to soldiers. In fact, these organizations produced and delivered hundreds of tracts to the servicemen concerning the status of their souls and the sacredness of their cause. The importance of the production of these writings becomes apparent when, as Drew Gilpin Faust notes in *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism (1989)*, "the South had only one typefoundry, no facilities for printing maps, insufficient numbers of paper mills, and an entire inability to make wood-pulp paper." Even with the scarcity of printing supplies, the South produced millions of pages of religious literature and Bibles. The South also displayed a commitment to the religious well-being of its soldiers by providing salaries for army chaplains. Religion clearly played a role in how southerners defined themselves and the war they fought, though Civil War scholars have only begun to detail the extent to this ideology's reach and impact.<sup>44</sup>

Historians of religion during the Civil War era have made important contributions, but they have also left important primary source documents unexamined. In their works, scholars Steven E. Woodworth and George C. Rable emphasized the importance of the providential mentality to Americans of the mid-nineteenth century. The belief that God controlled all earthly events and rewarded the pious proved instrumental to understanding how the Civil War generation thought about the war and interpreted its events. When assessing the religiosity of the South and Civil War soldiers, however, both historians focus

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<sup>44</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 17; Steven E. Woodworth, *While God is Marching On: The Religious World of Civil War Soldiers* (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 2001), 163-5.

heavily on the chaplaincy. Despite the attention paid to them by posterity, these regimental ministers often had minimal effectiveness on the troops, especially for the many soldiers that did not have one.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, pamphlets could easily be transported by travelling suppliers, making them easily accessible to all soldiers and exhibiting a greater influence on the army. In spite of this, the content and themes of these important messages sent to the soldiers have received hardly any attention from scholars. What messages did religious figures send to the soldiers? In what ways did they contribute to the war effort?<sup>46</sup>

From the reading of a selection of these pamphlets, three themes clearly emerge. First, the writers explained that their cause had a religious significance and that God controlled the outcome of the war effort. With this providential narrative, these writers thought that the religious devotion of the soldiers could sway God's will toward the Confederacy. With this came the second theme, in which ministers exerted significant efforts to convince soldiers to be baptized and live holy lives. While the ministers cared about the souls of the soldiers, they also believed that the legitimacy of their cause relied on a deeply religious army. God, in other words, favored the side which had the more pious army. The writers offered emotional appeals about the fear of hell and the promises of a better life that they hoped would influence soldiers to convert. Finally, many of the pamphlets attempted to boost the morale of the soldiers by focusing on the necessity and importance of the soldiers' sacrifice. The writers warned the soldiers of the tyranny and slavery that would befall them and their families if the Confederacy fell. The messaging of the literature generally resonated with soldiers, as it became popular amongst the troops and inspired many conversions.

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<sup>45</sup> Around half of Confederate regiments did not have a dedicated chaplain, though these regiments would occasionally hear a sermon from a travelling minister, Woodworth, *While God is Marching On*, 148.

<sup>46</sup> George C. Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Woodworth, *While God is Marching*.

Moreover, the pamphlets offered a way for the religious class to influence soldiers beyond the use of chaplains. The abundant printing of these tracts, along with the ease of transportation, suggests that they exhibited a greater influence on the troops than did regimental ministers. Through the writing of these pamphlets, the religious class played a strong role in the promotion and promulgation of the war effort.<sup>47</sup>

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On September 22, 1861, Robert Newton Sledd, a minister of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, gave a speech in a Petersburg, Virginia, church to a group of Confederate cadets departing for war. Sledd made it clear to the soldiers that much was at stake in this conflict, telling them, “You go to avenge no merely private injuries. Your country’s freedom, her dearest privileges, and richest blessings, [and] her God-given rights are in danger.” Sledd spoke to the soldiers about their homes being “invaded,” themselves “dishonored,” loved ones “afflicted,” and the “despot’s chains” clanking “throughout our land.” The minister warned the soldiers of the secular perils that could befall them, but he also attested to the holy significance of their fight, arguing that “the cause of Christ and the interests of religion are involved in this conflict.” Since southerners possessed the more just and holy cause, God would assuredly lead them to independence. Sledd encouraged the troops to have “dependence upon God and . . . submission to the dispensations of His Providence.” God, in other words, “is not an idle and uninterested spectator of the events that are transpiring in our land.” Though Sledd never directly stated that God would guarantee the South victory, his

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<sup>47</sup> Due to the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, all research for this paper had to be completed with online resources. Many of these pamphlets are housed in the rare book collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, but through the effort of many graduate students at the university, they have transcribed some of the pamphlets and published them at <https://docsouth.unc.edu/global/result.html?lcs=Tracts>. My thanks go out to them. The tracts selected for this essay are a selection of 55 pamphlets that the university transcribed and published on this website. Though these are biased towards those printed in Raleigh, they represent a range of opinions from ministers across the South.



views on the anti-Christian nature of northern society and his belief that the southern armies fought “for [their] people and for the cities of [their] God” suggests that Providence would have an easy choice in the conflict.<sup>48</sup>

Sledd’s sermon represents the midcentury evangelical belief in a providential God that played a decisive role in human affairs. A.M. Poindexter further elaborated on this point in his pamphlet entitled *God’s Providence a Source of Comfort and Courage to Christians*. In the tract, he focuses on the verse from Luke 12:7, which said that “the very hairs of your head are all numbered.” Providing some analysis, Poindexter wrote, “Could language be more explicit? Could illustration be more forcible? God adorns the lilly [sic] with its beauty. God garners the good of the wandering sparrow. God numbers the hairs of his people. Yes, God’s hand is every where [sic] and in every thing [sic].” The author rejected the theory of the so-called “watchmaker God” who set natural laws into motion but does not intervene in human affairs. In the evangelical worldview, God cared deeply about the fate of nations and individuals, and this mentality gave a sense of innate justice to the universe. Indeed, the trials and tribulations of life, they argued, served a future purpose that would lead to a just outcome. Even if, for instance, the South lost a battle or a beloved commander, theologians could point to this event as a mere chastisement rather than an outright refutation of their cause. Poindexter furthered this point in a hymn attached to the end of his writings:

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense  
 But trust him for his grace,  
 Behind a frowning Providence  
 He hidesa [sic] smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,

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<sup>48</sup> Robert Newton Sledd, *A Sermon Delivered in Market Street, M.E. Church, Petersburg, Va: Before the Confederate Cadets, on the Occasion of their Departure for the Seat of War, Sunday, Sept. 22, 1861*, Documenting the American South, University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2000 [hereafter cited as Documenting the American South, UNC].

Unfolding every hour;  
The bud may have a bitter taste,  
But sweet will be the flower.<sup>49</sup>

Beyond sermons and writings, hymns provided one of the more common platforms for transmitting the providential message. In the pamphlet entitled *The Colporteur's Commission: A Tract for the Times*, author Henry Keeling provided a number of songs and poems for the soldiers to read aloud in camp. Several of the hymns encapsulated the providential worldview that the ministers preached to the soldiers. In *The Christian Soldier*, for instance, the last verse read,

The world, flesh, and Satan, a mighty host are;  
But Omniscience sees us and favors the just;  
Truth never was vanquished, supported by prayer,  
Our Captain is Jesus, and triumph we must

Similarly, a verse in the *Christian's Patriot Prayer* said,

Incline to us, thy gracious ear,  
O God, attentive to our prayer,  
And hither reach thy mighty arm,  
Our country to defend from harm.

Authors also often attached hymns at the end of their writings, such as in William Royal's *Advice to Soldiers*,

A victory we have,  
Because thou helped us Lord.  
Else we'd been covered by the wave  
And fallen 'neath the sword.<sup>50</sup>

All three hymns presented the idea that God watched over the Civil War with a decided interest in choosing the winner. The first verse, for instance, assured southern

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<sup>49</sup> A.M. Poindexter, *God's Providence a Source of Comfort and Courage to Christians*, Documenting the American South, UNC.

<sup>50</sup> Henry Keeling, *The Colporteur's Commission: A Tract for the Times, In Several Scriptural Hymns*, Documenting the American South, UNC; William Royal, *Advice to Soldiers*, Documenting the American South, UNC.

soldiers of the sacred importance and secular righteousness of their cause. To southerners, the apparent northern abandonment of Biblical authority, and the northern “invasion” provided them with a principled and just cause for separation. Underlying the second and third selections was the idea that the North had greater war-making capabilities, and God presented the only pathway to a southern victory. Alongside this, both the first and second verses make direct references to prayer persuading God to intervene on the South’s behalf. Considering the war effort in a providential manner, ministers sought to guarantee the soldiers that no matter how dire the war effort seemed or how many losses the South suffered, God would rescue them because of the righteousness of their cause. The confidence provided by this mentality could have helped sustain and prolong the war effort after the multiple setbacks the Confederacy faced throughout the war.

To demonstrate the pious behavior that the ministers desired and the ability of God to intervene in human events, some pamphlets employed references to the American Revolutionary War. In *A Few Words to the Soldiers of the Confederate States*, a former serviceman from the Continental Army imparted wisdom to Thomas, a Confederate private. The men first discussed the moral state of the Confederate army, and the veteran emphasized the immoral behavior of the southern soldiers, with drunkenness and gambling occupying much of their free time. When the veteran asked the Confederate private about the chaplain’s opinion on soldier behavior, the young man responded, “We don’t allow such folks to humbug us.”<sup>51</sup>

Taken aback at their lack of piety, the veteran said that during his time in the Continental Army, he had “seen the general’s staff, and the several regimental staffs” along

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<sup>51</sup> *A Few Words to the Soldiers of the Confederate States*, Documenting the American South, UNC.

with “George Washington” “standing with hats doffed, while [the] chaplain offered up ... thanksgivings for our past successes and implored a blessing upon our arms for the future.” Indeed, while the Continental Army faced the bitter cold and hunger at Valley Forge, the veteran said that Washington spent time in the local church “upon his knees and engaged in prayer.” The common soldiers also realized that their freedom rested on the outcome of this conflict, and that conviction, he said, “dr[o]ve us to our knees.” The piety, the old soldier suggested, “did us good, it was a cordial [sic] to our harassed [sic] minds and nerved anew our wearied bodies for battle in our country's cause.” If enough of the Confederate army would convert and pray to God, they both concluded, their “habits of prayer would bring down assurances and consolations above what earth can give.”<sup>52</sup>

Minister Joseph C. Stiles further extrapolated upon the theme of divine providence in another pamphlet entitled *National Rectitude, the Only True Basis of National Prosperity: An Appeal to the Confederate States*. He opened the tract quoting Solomon as saying, “RIGHTEOUSNESS EXALTETH A NATION.” Penning the pamphlet in 1864, Stiles could see that the South had missed many opportunities to achieve victory at both Antietam and Gettysburg. The South’s fate only grew worse as Ulysses S. Grant continued to attack the beleaguered Army of Northern Virginia. Despite their lack of success, the southern ministry refused to consider the possibility that God viewed their cause unfavorably. Ministers instead blamed southern people and soldiers for a lack of trust in God and a reliance on the brilliance of their military commanders. God took away both Stonewall Jackson and Jeb Stuart to promote a reliance on Him rather than human ingenuity. The dire straits of 1864 meant that even the genius of Lee could no longer hope to bring the South its independence. In this

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<sup>52</sup> *A Few Words to the Soldiers of the Confederate States*, Documenting the American South, UNC.

sense, Stiles believed that God chastised the southern people with the hope that they would return to his graces, and only then could the South achieve its freedom. According to this logic, Stiles concluded that only “patriotism and piety” amongst the soldiers and the general populace could lead the South to victory. Though posterity can sense the desperation in his writing, Stiles continued to assure the South that with “the love of country” and the “love of God ... the North [will] be whipped into profound contrition for her most unrighteous and inhuman oppression of us!”<sup>53</sup>

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Understanding the providential mindset of the southern ministry proves essential to analyzing the rest of the pamphlet literature. The idea that the South had to be pious and sanctified to achieve victory made many of the writers focus on conversion efforts in the army. For this reason, officers had to enforce Christian rules in the camp, and the common men had to be baptized. God, in other words, would never support an army that engaged in such frequent cursing, gambling, and drinking as the southern army did. This objective combined with their belief that a Christian soldier engaged fearlessly in battle. If soldiers became religious, one pamphlet maintained, they “would be looked upon as quiet, orderly, [and] cleanly [sic] members of society. They would be obedient and respectful to their officers; friendly, kind, and at peace one with another; would perform their duties, ‘not with eye-service; as men pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing GOD.’” Both of these explanations greatly contributed to the emphasis that the tracts placed on conversion.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Joseph Clay Stiles, *National Rectitude*; Joseph Clay Stiles, *Capt. Thomas E. King, or, A Word to the Army and the Country*, Documenting the American South, UNC.

<sup>54</sup> *A Few Words to the Soldiers of the Confederate States*.

“Get ready,” read the pamphlet entitled “The Great Day of Wrath and of Glory.” “It may be that this day shall be your last. The whiz of a rifle shot, the screech of a shell, and all shall be over.” Later in the pamphlet, the author described the blissful afterlife of the soldier that embraces God, saying that he will “walk upon streets that shine with the lustre [sic] of gold ... shall gaze upon mansions that have been wrought into the transparent delicacy of crystal and resound with the shoutings of the redeemed, [and he] shall stroll through immortal fields and gardens, fragrant with flowers that are fadeless and musical with songs that are unceasing.” For the soldiers that reject the gospel, however, another fate awaits. When he meets his Great Judge, “God shall lay his avenging fingers upon him with a thrill, that shall freeze his existence like a dead man. He shall destroy him because he neglected the day of salvation.” The agonizing punishment for this man’s indolence would consist of “the delicate limbs ... stretched upon an inquisitorial rack. The slender bones ... wedged and pressed between the instruments of death; and the sensitive flesh ... scorched and consumed at the furious burnings of the stake.”<sup>55</sup>

While the belief in hell has dwindled among modern populations, the generation that fought in the Civil War took the concept seriously. In his book on the religiosity of Civil War soldiers, historian Steven Woodworth said that soldiers “believed that this present life was not the conclusion of their existence” and they “thought of hell as something that ... was no joking matter.” The fear of punishment served as a useful tool to convince soldiers to convert. Allusions to eternal punishment surely resonated with soldiers for whom the next battle could be their last.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> John S. Long, *The Great Day of Wrath and of Glory*, Documenting the American South, UNC.

<sup>56</sup> “Religious Landscape Study – Belief in Hell,” Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C. (2020). <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/belief-in-hell/>. According to this survey, only 58% of American adults believe in hell; Woodworth, *While God is Marching On*, 41, 47.

While few other writers embraced John Long's fire and brimstone approach, the threat of punishment pervaded their writings. Take, for example, the tract entitled, "Think" by the Rev. J.C. Ryle. In this short piece, he asked the reader, "Do you ever think? You have a soul as well as a body. You must die one day. After death comes judgment." Without describing hell itself, the author put the thought of damnation into the soldier's mind. Similarly, the tract "Are You Ready?" declared, "There is a great event before you: its arrival is certain; but it is utterly beyond your power to ascertain at what hour it will arrive. Ten or twenty years may elapse before its arrival--perhaps not as many minutes." Death, said the anonymous author, will present the soldier "before a just and holy Judge, and introduce [him] to an unchangeable condition of joy or sorrow." Though neither of these pamphlets mention hell explicitly, the realization that death could strike at any moment and send the soldier to the afterlife prompted him to rethink his religious apathy.<sup>57</sup>

Whether explicitly mentioning the torturous nature of punishment or not, these pamphlets still attempted to persuade soldiers through fear. Writers most often employed this tactic by inducing anxiety about the state of the soldier's soul. A popular tract about this topic uses the allegory of the life preserver to convey the point. In the story, a boat journeyed down the Mississippi River, and one of the passengers had the habit of "examin[ing] [his] life-preserver" to "see that it was where [he] could place [his] hand upon it in [an] instant." The passenger, however, dreamed that he was on another vessel on the high seas in the midst of a tempest that threatened to sink the ship. In this vision, he saw the other passengers fretting about their lack of a life preserver. One seafarer said he thought he "could obtain one

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<sup>57</sup> The "Think" piece was included in a pamphlet that contained three different writings. Rev J.C. Ryle, *Think* in Theodore Whitfield, *An Appeal to Backslidden Christians* Documenting the American South, UNC; *Are You Ready* Documenting the American South, UNC.

at any time. But [he] put it off, and now it [was] too late." Another thought his life preserver in a serviceable condition, though upon needing it, he discovered that "the article had once been good, but he had not taken care of it. He had thrown it loosely among his effects, and it had been punctured by a pin." A young man on the journey had previously mocked those with a life preserver, pronouncing "their forethought a waste of money." Filled with fear at the prospect of losing his life, the boy now "address[ed] a gentleman whom he had previously ridiculed, and in a subdued and anxious manner inquir[ed] whether his life-preserver was not capable of saving them both."<sup>58</sup>

Of course, the life preserver represents an allegory for salvation, and the various passengers represent the numerous excuses that ministers would hear as to why soldiers refused to convert. The first and second seafarer represented the "backsliding Christian," who had grown up in a religious environment but eventually came to lose interest in the faith. This person may have even been baptized at some point, but they lived an ungodly lifestyle that jeopardized their salvation. While this individual may say that he believes in God, this person only "creep[s] and hobbl[es] along the narrow way, with scarcely anything of the vigour [sic] of a lively faith or the joy of a confident hope." In his work on religion in the American Civil War, George Rable says that camps were filled with the "religiously indifferent" and those that "questioned their faith." Indeed, many soldiers enjoyed the pleasures of camp life, including drinking, gambling, and swearing, so they did not wish to commit themselves to a Christian lifestyle that abstained from those behaviors. The ministers reminded these young men that their eternal soul would be punished for their conduct in camp. In the pamphlet *How Shall I Live?*, the author said that the "backslider" "travel[s] on

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<sup>58</sup> *The Life Preserver*. Documenting the American South, UNC.



through life doubtfully, not sure whether they belong to God or the devil, whether they are going to heaven or to hell.” Bringing these questions to the forefront, pamphlets reminded those that sinned that “on ... [your life] hangs your eternal destiny.”<sup>59</sup>

Many of the soldiers surely felt that this pamphlet spoke directly toward their unchristian behavior. The idea that a stray bullet or artillery shell could spell eternal damnation urged many to reconsider their lifestyle. In one tract, which recounts the conversation between a religious older man and a young private, the boy said that he had “latterly associated with so many infidels and bad men as to have caught their slang,” and that he accepted the “boasted scepticism [sic] of too many of [his] companions.” The young boy also felt that his sinful behavior had constituted a rejection of “the early lessons taught me by my beloved parents.” In this sense, many of the soldiers knew that their actions would be frowned upon by their family and society, and the ministers attempted to use that guilt as fuel for conversion. Newman Hall’s *Come to Jesus* induces shame, beginning with the passage, “You are a sinner. Guilt, enormous guilt hangs upon you. In God's book all your sins are written down. You cannot get rid of them. Were you to labour [sic] for thousands of years, you could not atone for the least.” While some soldiers rejected this notion, many reflected guiltily on their evenings of card-playing and drinking and chose to be saved.<sup>60</sup>

The third passenger represents another common target of the religious literature – the young man with no thought of death. Though many youthful privates were indifferent to religion, some outright rejected and ridiculed it. Religious writers had the difficult job of convincing these men that they were not invincible, and they could be sent to hell during the

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<sup>59</sup> James B. Ramsey, *How Shall I Live?* Documenting the American South, UNC.

<sup>60</sup> *A Few Words to the Soldiers of the Confederate States*; Newman Hall, *Come to Jesus* Documenting the American South, UNC.

course of the next battle. Of course, the exigencies of war made this message resonate more than in civilian life. In the tract *Motives to Early Piety*, minister Harlan Page assures his young audience that

Death is rapidly approaching. Perhaps this night you will close your eyes to awake in eternity. Thousands have been thus surprised. How many of your companions are gone, never to return. [sic] Their state is fixed. They are now enduring the wrath of God or singing his praises in the paradise above. Whoever you are, you may be assured that death is nigh to you.

The resonance of their message came from its truthfulness. Just as easily as in battle, young, hearty men could succumb to the deadly diseases that ravaged the camps, such as typhoid, dysentery, and diarrhea.<sup>61</sup>

Death's immediacy also shaped another pamphlet entitled *I Have Brought My Little Brother Back*, in which the author told the story of a young man who goes off to war. During a battle, a Yankee bullet "pierced his temples at the beginning of the struggle, and he fell without a word for the stricken ones at home." The boy died immediately, with "no time for one brief prayer. -- At once he was summoned into the presence of the Judge." The writer said that many in the boy's family comforted themselves with hopeful thoughts that he was in heaven, despite the fact he had not been saved. The family argued that the young man died in defense of his country, and that would earn him salvation, a misconception that Steven Woodworth notes garnered significant popularity in the army. The writer assured his audience, however, that military service would not suffice: "O no! There is no comfort here. Earthly comfort there may be. Cause for honest, patriotic pride there may be; but for the other world, comfort, there can be none." Indeed, "The issue with Him is not national, but

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<sup>61</sup> Harlan Page, *Motives to Early Piety*. Documenting the American South, UNC. Though Harlan Page died in 1834, his sermon was reprinted in Raleigh and disseminated to Confederate troops; Judkin Browning and Timothy Silver, *An Environmental History of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 37; Woodworth, *While God is Marching On*, 71.

personal ... neglecting Him, no cause can justify, no death can [a]tone.” The writer makes it clear that not every soldier will be able to experience a deathbed conversion, so they should make assurances of their salvation before that day comes.<sup>62</sup>

One should not think, however, that the entirety of the pamphlet literature attempted to incite repressed feelings of fear and guilt. While the evangelical era still contained elements of fear-based preaching, the ministers also reminded soldiers that the kindness of Christ led to a better human life and held the key to eternal bliss. With the heavy hand of God’s punishment also came the great forgiveness and peace that accompanied His grace. The knowledge of one’s salvation provided a sense of comfort to the soldiers because it relieved many of the psychological pressures that they faced in war. Death mattered less if a soldier believed that his eternal soul would be in heaven. In a sense, their constant worries about death and the condition of their family could be left to God.

“The very first utterance of the new life in Paul was, ‘Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?’” Using the Apostle Paul as an example of a Christian that gives his entire life to God, writer James B. Ramsey told of the magnificent glory that a dedication to God can bring. When Paul said “For me to live is Christ,” he not only pledged his life to his savior, but he also ridded himself of the agony of choice and indecision. Ramsey extrapolates, saying,

When we have done this, and can truly say, “to me to live is Christ;” then shall the sting of sorrow be extracted, all our anxious fears subside, and every lawful joy gain a new and richer zest; mid as we journey on, we shall ever sing; “The Lord, Christ, is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?”

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<sup>62</sup> Washington Manly Wingate, *I Have Brought My Little Brother Back* Documenting the American South, UNC; Woodworth, *While God is Marching On*, 60-63.

With the knowledge of their eternal salvation, the troops could “bear ... onward in the hardest duties and the most perilous enterprises, with a zeal and self-sacrificing courage.”<sup>63</sup>

Indeed, with the rule of a just God combined with the assurance of His grace, what did the soldiers have to worry about? If the serviceman truly believed the preacher’s words, then God would assuredly take care of him were he to perish. Many of the writers recognized the great mental and physical sacrifices that the men went through, and the gospel offered a form of relief. Baptist minister Andrew Fuller<sup>64</sup> sympathized with the soldier in his pamphlet, saying, “I am well aware, that the great concern of persons in your situation, is to obtain peace of mind; and any thing [sic] which promises to afford this, attracts your attention. If this Gospel be believed with all your heart, it will give you peace. This is the good and the old way; walk in it and you shall find rest for your soul.” A belief in Christianity could also ease soldiers’ worries regarding their families. When a soldier left to go to war, his son asked him, “Well, who will be my pa if you don’t come back?” Later, the soldier wrote to his wife, “I know how to answer little Henry’s question. Tell him the Savior will be his pa, if I don’t come back.”<sup>65</sup> With faith in the afterlife and a belief in the innate justice given to the universe ruled by a righteous God, soldiers could relieve themselves of some of the mental burden that war brought.<sup>65</sup>

With the growing mindset that Christianity involved a relationship with God, He could also be someone in whom the soldiers confided on a personal level, as they generally

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<sup>63</sup> James Beverlin Ramsey, *How Shall I Live?*

<sup>64</sup> Andrew Fuller (1754-1815) lived before the Civil War era, but religious societies often reprinted notable sermons that dealt with war and suffering from ministers that had already died and gave them to soldiers. Fuller’s biographical information found at <https://www.wmcarey.edu/carey/fuller/>.

<sup>65</sup> Andrew Fuller, *The Great Question Answered* Documenting the American South, UNC; Even though this incident occurs in a New York regiment, both northern and southern soldiers experienced similar feelings in departing their family. Edward Parmlee Smith, *Incidents in the United States Christian Commission* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1869), 325, quoted in George Rable, *God’s Almost Chosen Peoples*, 181.

lacked an emotional outlet. Soldiers often had to maintain a stoic demeanor despite the intense psychological and physical trauma that they suffered. One minister wrote, “There is a foolish notion, too prevalent among soldiers, that it is unmanly to manifest any feeling under the pressure of bereavment [sic] or mental distress – that it is unsoldierly to exhibit any emotion under the most excruciating pain -- that it is womanly and childish to weep.” Moreover, an anti-religious sentiment manifested in some camps, with soldiers “mock[ing] and derid[ing] it” while many of the officers “laugh at it as an old woman’s tale.” An anonymous pamphlet entitled *Do You Want a Friend?* opens by expressing a solution to the soldiers’ need for companionship:

Do you want a friend, powerful to protect you, rich to supply your wants, kind to sympathize with you, affectionate to feel for you, wise to guide you--a "friend that sticketh closer than a brother;" one to whom you can go at all times, at all seasons, under all circumstances; one to whom you can open all your heart; one who is worthy of all the affection of your soul; one whom you can esteem and delight in; one who is able to satisfy all that craving desire of happiness which you feel--who can assist you when all other friends fail--who can support you in your last agonies, and walk with you through the valley of the shadow of death[?]

In a real sense, God could be someone to whom the soldier could turn when he had emotions that conflicted with those thoughts and feelings expected of him. Events and feelings too raw and upsetting for letters very well could have been mentioned in the soldier’s heart while upon his knees, hoping for relief from God. Whether warning of the fires of hell or the goodness of a Christian lifestyle, the conversion of soldiers proved an essential aim of the pamphlet literature. The great lengths of their efforts reinforce the thesis that they believed that soldiers’ religiosity played a crucial role in deciding the Civil War.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> John Ellis Edwards, *The Wounded Soldier* Documenting the American South, UNC; *A Few Words to the Soldiers of the Confederate States; Do You Want a Friend?* Documenting the American South, UNC.

Despite their devotion to religion, many writers knew that more than a few soldiers would not become ideal Christians and fight for their faith alone. “Everything in war,” Baptist minister Basil Manly, Jr. wrote, “depends on keeping up the spirit of the army.” He continued his argument: “Defeat by overwhelming forces is nothing. Good soldiers can rally and try it again. But if the spirit is broken, whether by treacheries, by hardships and abuse, by multiplied desertions, by discouraging speeches from generals or comrades, failure is almost inevitable.” For this reason, many of the pamphlets also included sections that aimed to heighten the morale of the servicemen. The ministers made sure that the soldiers knew the great stakes for which they fought and that everyone on the home front supported them greatly.<sup>67</sup>

Ministers first had to assure soldiers that they fought for a just cause. The writers followed the western philosophical tradition regarding warfare, which constitutes war as a necessary evil. Aggressive military campaigns are difficult to justify, as they generally serve few legitimate purposes and result in immense bloodshed. An invaded country, however, is forced into conflict by their attackers, which thereby justifies their cause.<sup>68</sup> The pamphlets argued that the North had “invaded” the South with no provocation besides a malignant desire to “oppress” them. As one would suspect, the ministers neglected to mention the nuance of various events such as their secession and the attack on Fort Sumter. The Methodist Episcopal minister Robert Sledd embraced this ideology in his sermon before the troops: “whenever our individual rights are assailed, it is in perfect accordance with the

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<sup>67</sup> Basil Manly Jr., *Halting on This Side of Jordan*.

<sup>68</sup> For a detailed history of European philosophy regarding “just war theory,” see Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip’s War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 105-113.

object of government, and with the purest morality to resist invasion.” God did, Sledd maintained, “ordain for the punishment of evil-doers.”<sup>69</sup>

Rather than use cold logic, many other pamphleteers tried to ignite the soldiers’ passions. Presbyterian minister Joseph C. Stiles asked his audience to consider the “invaded and oppressed condition of our people.” Likewise, a verse in William Royal’s *Advice to Soldiers* stated,

We longed the day to win,  
To drive the invader back.  
Thus we would help a peace to gain,  
The blessing that we seek

In this sense, the pamphlets served as a form of propaganda. The ministers never mentioned the pitfalls of southern morality, such as slavery or its role in causing secession. Instead, the North could be blamed for every aspect of the war, from their apostasy to their “invasion” of the South.<sup>70</sup>

Ministers also reminded the soldiers of the reasons for which they fought. Of the pamphlets sampled for this study, only one made reference to slavery, while most focused their attention on the prize of southern freedom. In the pamphlet *Liquor and Lincoln*, for instance, the anonymous author opened the tract speaking about “Lincoln’s usurpation,” and that “every honest patriot ... freely offers his life and property ... to secure that freedom.” Indeed, another minister stated that the South fought for “the enjoyment of the inherent rights of every virtuous and intelligent people, or the holding of our property, our opinions, [and] our lives.” The idea of fighting for liberty could also be expressed in the many hymns attached to the pamphlets. In *The Soldier’s Bible*, a hymn read,

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<sup>69</sup> Robert Newton Sledd, *A Sermon Delivered in Market Street, M.E. Church*.

<sup>70</sup> Joseph C. Stiles, *National Rectitude, the Only True Basis of National Prosperity*; William Royal, *Advice to Soldiers*.

And when we close this warfare,  
That sets our country free,  
We'll change the sword to plough-share  
That won our liberty.

The idea that southerners fought for freedom surely inspired a feeling of righteousness in their cause. Some pamphlets compared the South's struggle to that of the American Revolution which gave the South's effort at independence a greater legitimacy. With the North's apparent betrayal of the American founding, the Confederates felt justified in their attempts at separation. Even the national seal of the Confederacy pictures George Washington and the Latin phrase "Deo Vindice (With God as our Defender)" beneath it.<sup>71</sup>

Southerners could gain their freedom if they won, but the ministers also warned of the great dangers that came with defeat. In his sermon to the soldiers, Robert Sledd warned them that "our all has been staked on the issue of the struggle; and before us now is naught but the palm of the victor, or the chains of the slave and the doom of the traitor." Alongside their status as slaves in the event of northern victory, everything that southerners held dear would be destroyed, from their homes to their religion:

And now the wild-boar rushes for the[e],  
In frantic fury from the North,  
Our vines and olive trees to spoil,  
Our hearths and temples to defile

Drive back these murderous hosts that come  
To rob us of our land and home,  
And let us still in safety sit  
Beneath our fig trees, near thy feet.

While the southern politicians had been the ones to officially secede, the religious class reminded the common soldier that the treasonous label would be instilled on the entire

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<sup>71</sup> Robert Newton Sledd, *A Sermon Delivered in Market Street, M.E. Church*; William W. Crumley, *The Soldier's Bible Documenting the American South*, UNC; A Physician, *Liquor and Lincoln Documenting the American South*, UNC.



South if they lost. Many pamphlets speculated that the consequences would be dire for the entire South if the North attained victory. Moreover, destruction of the battles and invading armies caused severe consequences on the southern home front during the war. The conflict displaced families, destroyed homes and cities, and upended livelihoods. By reminding them of the grave calamities of the war, the ministry hoped to inspire the servicemen to sacrifice everything for their country.<sup>72</sup>

The writers also assured the soldiers that the southern populace supported their sacrifices. The Methodist minister J.A. Proctor wrote that, on certain occasions, soldiers began to doubt civilian support of the war. When letters became shorter and fewer or the newspapers failed to mention his name, the soldier “concludes that he is uncared for and well-nigh forgotten.” Indeed, the soldier enduring the “snow ... covering the earth” or the “rain pour[ing] down in torrents” without a feeling that he worked to achieve a greater good could question the validity of the war effort and make efforts to escape his military service. Proctor assured his reader that “there are but few in our whole country who are not anxiously concerned in regard to your condition.” Proctor continued, “our people feel a constant solicitude for the brave soldiers who are enduring, and fearlessly facing the dangers of the battle-field, in defence [sic] of Southern honor and Southern rights.” The soldier should be satisfied knowing that “to hear that any of our soldiers are without blankets, or clothing or shoes, sends a pang to every true Southron’s heart.” The people on the home front, Proctor argued, relinquished many material pleasures to help provide soldiers with necessities.

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<sup>72</sup> Robert Newton Sledd, *A Sermon Delivered in Market Street, M.E. Church*; Henry Keeling, *The Colporteur’s Commission*.

Proctor aimed to convince the soldiers that their relatives and countrymen cared greatly for their condition, and that every sacrifice would be made to provide for their well-being.<sup>73</sup>

Many of the affirmations the soldiers received also had a religious theme to them. One tract reminded soldiers, “You go to aid in the glorious enterprise of rearing in our sunny South a temple to constitutional liberty and Bible Christianity.” The pamphlet continued, “And though it may cost us many a tear of sorrow, we bid you God speed in your noble work. Our prayers shall follow you wherever you go.” When the soldier felt lonesome and unappreciated, a hymn featured in James M’Gready’s tract *An Appeal to the Young*, assured him that his family and fellow countrymen prayed for him:

For you the public prayer is made,  
Oh, join the public prayer  
For you the secret tear is shed  
O shed yourselves a tear!<sup>74</sup>

The thought that families and congregations across the South had knelt down in prayer for their well-being could provide momentary perseverance through difficult times. In his sermon to the troops, Robert Sledd even bordered on blasphemy by suggesting that soldiers fighting for the South were religious martyrs:

Be just and fear not;  
Let all the ends thou aim’st at, be thy country’s  
Thy God’s and truth’s; then, if thou fall’st  
Thou fall’st a blessed martyr.<sup>75</sup>

Lastly, the ministers attempted to comfort the soldiers who needed it most – the sick and wounded. In pain and surrounded by death, these servicemen surely felt that they had

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<sup>73</sup> J.A. Proctor, *A Tract for the Soldier* Documenting the American South, UNC; For reference to J.A. Proctor’s as a Methodist clergyman, see “A Noble Offering by a Soldier,” *Semi-Weekly Standard*, September 26, 1862, 2.

<sup>74</sup> Robert Newton Sledd, *A Sermon Delivered in Market Street, M.E. Church*; James M’Gready, *An Appeal to the Young*, Documenting the American South, UNC.

<sup>75</sup> Robert Newton Sledd, *A Sermon Delivered in Market Street, M.E. Church*.

been forgotten by fellow comrades and their countrymen. In Baptist minister George B. Taylor's pamphlet *In the Hospital*, however, he assured the ailing soldier that "every right thinking [sic] person regards the sick or wounded soldier ... as no less heroic than when marching on or fighting." Taylor also argued that the soldier had not been put in this situation by accident, "Consider, then, that you are where you are, and as you are, by the will of God." The wounded soldier could be comforted by the idea that his ailments would serve a greater good. Likewise, the Methodist preacher John Ellis Edwards contended in his pamphlet to wounded soldiers that "every patriot's heart in our Southern Confederacy beats with a quicker pulse and glows with a warmer devotion to our struggle for independence, at the sight of the brave man ... who has been wounded in the defence [sic] of our cause against an aggressive and despotic power." While pamphleteers wanted to relieve the suffering of those in the hospital, they also may have feared that soldiers recovering from wounds or ailments would avoid returning to the army. Keeping up the patriotic spirit would be vital to keep these men from eschewing their military service.<sup>76</sup>

Pamphlets that remained unread by the soldiers, however, would exert no influence upon them. While some army men had no interest in religion, reports from traveling colporteurs, who handed out these tracts, along with accounts from the soldiers themselves suggest that the troops received the pamphlet literature with great enthusiasm and many clamored for more of it. One display of soldiers' interest came on August 21, 1861, when men from the 1<sup>st</sup> North Carolina sat down for a Wednesday evening prayer meeting. After the worship commenced, the itinerant tract agent announced that he had readings available for the soldiers. The troops subsequently "rushed to [him] by the scores," and the supplier

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<sup>76</sup> George B. Taylor, *In the Hospital* Documenting the American South, UNC; John Ellis Edwards, *The Wounded Soldier* Documenting the American South, UNC.

quickly ran out of both Testaments and tracts, leaving several soldiers “standing with their hands extended.” “It pains my heart,” the man wrote, “when they ask me for the New Testament, and I cannot supply them.”<sup>77</sup>

Running out of religious literature became a common occurrence at the beginning of the war, as the South faced difficulties ramping up its printing industry. The aforementioned colporteur, who only signed his letter as “Adelphos” (meaning Brother in Christ), intended to procure more tracts in Richmond, though presses had problems producing enough to meet demand. A similar shortage occurred in a camp near Suffolk, Virginia (though the regiment is not named). The chaplain received a shipment of literature, and he told the soldiers of their availability after the Sunday service. “As soon as it was announced that they were to be distributed,” he wrote, “the men crowded to my tent.” Within “two or three hours, all the Testaments and most of the Bibles were gone.” Walking around the camp, the chaplain found “many of the soldiers reading them.” He said that the men “were nearly starved for something to read,” and the officers appreciated the literature enough to provide five dollars in donations.<sup>78</sup>

Troublesome printing, however, does not solely explain the empty stores of many colporteurs. Indeed, after the initial difficulties, many presses overcame these challenges, and the Raleigh printer quickly became able to produce 30,000 pages of text per day.<sup>79</sup> Letters from army chaplains and traveling tract agents often spoke of the interest of the soldiers in religious literature. Though some chaplains saw their efforts at evangelism wasted, as some men ignored them or threw the reading material away, soldiers generally received the

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<sup>77</sup> “Army Correspondence,” *The Biblical Recorder*, August 28, 1861, 2.

<sup>78</sup> “Army Correspondence,” *The Biblical Recorder*, August 28, 1861, 2; “Letters from Two Chaplains of N.C. Regiments,” *The Biblical Recorder*, July 17, 1861, 2.

<sup>79</sup> “Letters from Two Chaplains of N.C. Regiments,” *The Biblical Recorder*, July 17, 1861, 2.

literature positively. In one camp, for instance, as the chaplain handed out texts, “the soldiers flocked around to get one apiece ... [even those] who made no profession of religion.” A colporteur also reported to the *Recorder* that while traveling past the 8<sup>th</sup> and 51<sup>st</sup> North Carolina regiments, he “distributed 750 soldiers’ pocket Bibles ... 10,550 pages of tracts, making in all 35,268 pages of religious reading.” The colporteur noted that “not a tract or book was given to a man who did not gladly receive it.”<sup>80</sup>

Letters and accounts of soldiers also attest to the power of tracts to convert them to Christianity. A soldier in the 1<sup>st</sup> North Carolina, for instance, said that he read the tract “Come to Jesus” while stationed in Virginia. He reported that the pamphlet inspired his conversion, and it left such a lasting impact that he “committed all of it to memory.” Hospitals proved especially ideal for the spread of religious ideas, as the wounded and dying soldiers within them often contemplated the state of their everlasting soul. While receiving treatment for his wounds, a soldier from the 3<sup>rd</sup> South Carolina acquired a pamphlet entitled “Casting our Burden on the Lord” by North Carolina Presbyterian minister Joseph Mayo (J.M.) Atkinson. After reading the tract and regaining his health, he stated that it “was ... an instrument of God in his conversion.” “Bullets,” as one officer eloquently explained to a colporteur, “made the boys listen with more seriousness than he ever knew them before.”<sup>81</sup>

During this time of emotional and physical vulnerability, without the social pressures of maintaining an image of manhood, the gospel could resonate in novel ways. Take, for example, the case of Frank Cabaniss of Cleveland County, who in 1863 became seriously injured on the North Carolina coast and was admitted to Goldsboro Hospital. While he

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<sup>80</sup> “Letters from Two Chaplains of N.C. Regiments,” *The Biblical Recorder*, July 17, 1861, 2; “Receipts for Army Colportage,” *The Biblical Recorder*, October 29, 1862, 2.

<sup>81</sup> W. Buck Years and John G. Barrett eds., *North Carolina Civil War Documentary* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 230; “For the Recorder,” *The Biblical Recorder*, July 23, 1862, 2.

initially resisted efforts at conversion, the chaplain and the reading of literature helped bring him to God before death. After the chaplain spent the day speaking and reading to him, Cabaniss experienced a conversion late that evening and the next day told the chaplain that he saw his deceased mother in the hospital and she “brought Jesus with her.” During the night, Cabaniss added, he saw “the fires of hell, and [he] was sinking down into them, but Jesus stretched out his arm and picked [him] up,” thereby “pardon[ing] all [his] sins.” Before his death a few days later, Frank spent most of his time in group prayers, attempting to convert other soldiers in the hospital. “Many of the inmates of the Hospital gathered around the melting scene and heard him talk. All – even the sinners around seemed to rejoice.” Though the level of detail provided in Cabaniss’s case is unique, it was not uncommon for revivals to take place in Confederate hospitals. Frank Cabaniss’s conversion also represents many of the themes of the religious literature – a distinct fear of hell and the worry of eternal punishment cured by the love of Jesus and His ability to forgive and provide comfort.<sup>82</sup>

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The success of the religious literature came as a saving grace to the South, as the chaplaincy’s attempts at making pious soldiers generally left much to be desired. In an unnamed regiment stationed near Drewry’s Bluff, Virginia, a traveling colporteur, who only signed his name as J.M.W., made the case that chaplains did not exert much influence in camp. “At all events,” the writer contended, “they [the soldiers] paid but little attention to the preacher.” Soldiers, he argued, “generally look upon the Chaplain as ‘one of the Officers’ yet having no authority.” After traveling to many regiments, he often saw “the Chaplain of a Regiment preaching to a squad of fifteen or twenty, while others were lolling about their

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<sup>82</sup> “For the Recorder,” *The Biblical Recorder*, May 6, 1863, 2.

tents, and yet others at a game of cards.” Though the lack of religious enthusiasm could come from a variety of places, one article in the *Biblical Recorder* attributed it to second-rate ministers, arguing that many chaplains did not perform their spiritual duties adequately and signed up only to draw a paycheck. The author said that “some chaplains cannot preach; the churches would not have them, and the soldiers do not want them.” Bad habits of the preachers, such as writing boring sermons that failed to resonate and acting stiff and detached toward the troops, were at least partially responsible for a lack of conversions.<sup>83</sup>

Silas J. Fincher, a Baptist minister, observed poor chaplaincy when he visited his son’s regiment camped near Wilmington, NC in 1862. Fincher reported that the camp lacked a religious spirit, as the Episcopalian chaplain “does not go among the privates ... [and does] very little to instruct them and pray with them.” The chaplain’s aloof behavior caused the troops to not have “the confidence in him they otherwise would have.” While visiting, Fincher aimed to change the spiritual atmosphere in the camp. In his short time there, he had the regiment engaging in prayer meetings and “crowd[ing] in and around the door to hear the word read and prayer addressed to a throne of grace for them and their families,” thereby suggesting that seemingly apathetic men truly craved religious engagement. Some soldiers, Fincher maintained “only need[ed] a little encouragement to be very useful in camp.”<sup>84</sup>

Shepherds attempting to lead their flock could not always do so effectively. While poor ministering could be at fault, many chaplains also encountered difficulties enlisting the cooperation of the regimental officer, which as a soldier in the 4<sup>th</sup> North Carolina reported “do not pay that regard to the Sabbath day which all civilized nations should do.” In one

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<sup>83</sup> “For the Recorder,” *The Biblical Recorder*, October 22, 1862, 2; “Some Chaplains,” *The Biblical Recorder*, March 12, 1862, 2.

<sup>84</sup> “For the Recorder,” *The Biblical Recorder*, June 11, 1862, 2.

instance, a traveling minister offered to hold a service for the men, but the colonel had the soldiers “kept busy mustering on the field till [sic] past the usual hour of divine service.” The soldier writing the letter mentioned that none of the work served an urgent purpose, and it could have been done after the preaching. Another example came from a soldier who described his camp experience in an unnamed regiment stationed near Manassas in 1861. Despite his regiment having a chaplain, he said that soldiers in the camp often “drink, curse, and gamble” to excess. “Indeed, so much profanity I have never heard in any place,” he lamented. For the time he had been with the regiment, he had “heard no preaching.” Instead, the soldier had been kept busy by the officer, which meant that he “could not spen[d] the blessed Sabbath as [he] desired.”<sup>85</sup>

Despite the many ill-behaved regiments, a hard-working chaplain and a pious officer committed to evangelism could bring many soldiers to the faith, as exemplified by the 37<sup>th</sup> North Carolina. A soldier from the regiment informed the *Recorder* that their “beloved chaplain (A.L. Stough), with the aid of our esteemed Col. (Charles C. Lee) and others, formed a religious association for the promotion of morality and piety among the soldiers.” The formation of the group took place seven weeks prior to his writing of the letter and since then, 132 soldiers had joined. Despite the continuous rain derailing their larger gatherings, the soldier wrote, “all are engaged in our nightly devotions in our tents to keep up the good word commenced in our ranks.” For many, their conversion produced meaningful changes in their lives. The soldier reported that behavior in the camp improved and “seldom ... [does he] hear the name of our Redeemer taken in vain.” A year later, chaplain Stough wrote to the *Recorder* that fifty-eight men “have made a public profession ... [while] twenty-eight are

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<sup>85</sup> “Letter from the Camp,” *The Biblical Recorder*, July 10, 1861, 2; “Army Correspondence,” *The Biblical Recorder*, August 7, 1861, 2.



received as candidates for baptism.” Besides those men committed to the Baptist denomination, thirteen soldiers joined other Protestant faiths.<sup>86</sup>

The discussion of chaplain quality, however, often discounts the significant number of regiments that did not have a minister at all. From the beginning, the Confederacy faced a shortage of ministers for the troops, and it remained a problem throughout the entire war effort. At the North Carolina Southern Baptist Convention held in November of 1861, Baptist clergymen worried about the religious state of the soldiers. Beyond the lack of Bibles, Elder A.E. Dickinson stated that “at least one half of our soldiers are without the services of a preacher.” Though the situation progressively became better for North Carolina soldiers as the war continued, with the *Recorder* reporting that, in 1863, only fourteen North Carolina regiments remained without a preacher, the sparse and ineffective chaplains could not solely be relied upon to convert soldiers.<sup>87</sup>

The combination of poor chaplaincy with the shortage of ministers produced an interest in religious literature as a remedy to those problems. When debating whether to sponsor colportage as the fighting began, the North Carolina Baptist Convention concluded that the transmission of religious literature remained necessary as many regiments did not have ministers, and in those that did, the chaplain had “too many [soldiers] on his hands.” In practice, some ministers found it difficult to devote sufficient attention to every soldier in need of religious counseling, and the literature could help those who did not receive proper religious instruction. The shortcomings of the chaplain system, in other words, presented a

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<sup>86</sup> “Army Correspondence,” *The Biblical Recorder*, April 16, 1862, 2; “For the Recorder,” *The Biblical Recorder*, May 27, 1863, 2.

<sup>87</sup> “Third Day,” *The Biblical Recorder*, November 20, 1861, 2; “To the Baptist in North Carolina,” *The Biblical Recorder*, June 3, 1863, 1; The number of North Carolina regiments with chaplains fared better than the rest of the Confederacy, only half of whose regiments had a chaplain. Woodworth, *While God is Marching On*, 148.

place for the prominence of religious literature. The tracts could reach the numerous soldiers that had no access to a chaplain and lived in religiously apathetic camps. A sermon by a colporteur and a few pamphlets could lead the regiment on the path to conversion. The itinerant system progressively became more efficient, as the tracts were delivered “through the great kindness of the Express Company to the soldiers without charge.” Through the efforts of these itinerant colporteur, the pamphlets became widespread in Confederate camps.<sup>88</sup>

Most accounts also indicate that men preferred reading about religion to hearing it preached in a sermon. This preference can be attributed to the reading culture that took hold in America around the mid-nineteenth century. Historian James McPherson argues that “Americans were the world’s preeminent newspaper-reading people.” Ministers in the church during the Civil War picked up on this desire, as Elder Dickinson argued at the North Carolina Baptist Convention that men “have been trained to read and have a taste for it ... [as they previously] had their newspapers, periodicals and books.” Soldiers often faced daunting hours of idleness and boredom in camp, and the ministry tried to fill that time with the Bible and religious tracts rather than card playing and drinking. Some of the troops preferred reading as a hobby, as one colporteur reported that he saw “somebody’s son throw away the ‘cards’ to read the proffered tracts.”<sup>89</sup>

Another reason came from the social pressures associated with being religious in the army. One tract agent found it curious that the soldiers treated the chaplain coldly while the colporteur always “me[t] a more favorable reception.” The writer indicated that this could be

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<sup>88</sup> “Third Day,” *The Biblical Recorder*, November 20, 1861, 2; “Two Letters,” *The Biblical Recorder*, May 7, 1862, 2; Yearn and Barrett, *North Carolina Civil War Documentary*, 230.

<sup>89</sup> James M. McPherson, *Crossroads of Freedom: Antietam, The Battle That Changed the Course of the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 48; “Third Day,” *The Biblical Recorder*, November 20, 1861, 2.

partially attributable to the negative social pressures of public religious professions. A soldier seen listening to a sermon may be thought of negatively by his peers, as religion, among soldiers, became associated with a lack of manliness. Moreover, this soldier's acquaintances often engaged in other activities on a Sunday, and he would not want to socially isolate himself. With the tract literature, however, "the reader is usually by himself," and "after reading he will reflect." Reflection, the colporteur argued, "leads to resolves in reformation." In his solitude, the soldier could come to his own conclusions regarding religion without facing fears of social exclusion. Indeed, he may later come to a point in his faith to confidently proclaim the gospel and openly convert.<sup>90</sup>

Writing to the *Biblical Recorder*, a minister to the 43<sup>rd</sup> North Carolina asked if he could receive a shipment of tracts for the regiment. Despite his popularity among the troops, the chaplain still thought that the reading material could provide value. He wrote that the soldiers "like them [the tracts] very much," and he deemed the pamphlets "silent but powerful preachers." This minister's interest in receiving tracts illustrates their usefulness. Though a chaplain may give a thoughtful sermon on Sunday, he could be overwhelmed with responsibilities throughout the week, limiting his ability to counsel the troops. Without this guidance, many soldiers could drift back into sinful habits. The tracts served as a needed adjunct to a successful minister as a way to keep soldiers on the righteous path in the time in between group gatherings. Similarly, tracts could be the only form of religious instruction that some soldiers received, as many regiments fought the war without a chaplain. Soldiers could easily access pamphlets due to the extensive printing and transportation efforts on the part of religious societies in the South, thereby making the tracts more influential than the

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<sup>90</sup> "For the Recorder," *The Biblical Recorder*, August 20, 1862, 2; "For the Recorder," *The Biblical Recorder*, October 22, 1862, 2.

scattered and overburdened chaplaincy. Moreover, the contents of the tracts could prove just as beneficial in conversion as a Sunday sermon. Clergymen writing the pamphlets attempted to convert soldiers by appealing to their fears of punishment in the afterlife, along with the promises of a more fulfilling life through God's grace. While all ministers tried to bring souls to heaven, the southern religious class had another motive. Their belief in the providential worldview, whereby God controlled all earthly events and could be swayed by pious behavior, caused them to believe that a devoutly Christian army would secure God's blessing and achieve victory in the war. The religious class also tried to increase soldier motivation by warning of the dire consequences the South would face if they lost the war. Pamphlets often spoke of the tyranny and slavery common southerners would experience in the event of a northern victory. Overall, the study of religious literature during the war adds a new dynamic to the continued study of traditional sources such as soldier letters and the accounts of chaplains. The content of religious literature provides new avenues for the study of nineteenth century providentialism along with the religious worldview of the Civil War generation.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> "For the Recorder," *The Biblical Recorder*, June 11, 1862, 2.

### Chapter 3

#### “There is no Toryism in a Christian’s heart”: Why the South’s Clergy Supported the Confederacy

“And Jesus answering said unto them, ‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s (Mark 12:17).’” The famous passage of Mark 12:14-17 shows the Pharisees asking Jesus whether they ought to pay taxes to the Roman government, considering they worshipped a higher power above any human institution. Jesus’s response evoked the idea that Christians should not concern themselves with worldly governments and politics. Governments and popular society, in other words, may perform immoral acts that contradict a Christian lifestyle, but true believers must live by their own code of ethics despite what the mainstream culture advocates. The sentiment inspired a form of tolerance among Christians whereby they may live under and pay taxes to a state that does not endorse their religious worldview. Christians themselves could tolerate the state’s mandates, while choosing to live apart from mainstream society, being *in* the world but not *of* the world. Despite southern theologians of the Civil War era knowing this passage and the sentiment which it promotes, they would still become heavily engrossed in the politics of the Confederacy, advocating patriotism and devotion to the secular state as Christian duties. The question arises as to how the learned and principled ministers of the South seemingly abandoned their ideals to support the Confederacy’s war effort.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> All Biblical verses are from the King James Version of the Bible. The change-of-heart of the theologians should not be taken lightly. As pointed out by Eugene Genovese, theologians were some of the most learned individuals of southern society, and it would not be a stretch to consider them the “intelligentsia” of the day. Eugene D. Genovese, *The Slaveholders’ Dilemma: Freedom and Progress in Southern Conservative Thought, 1820-1860* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992), 1-5.

Christine Leigh Heyrman's *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (1997) partially answers this question by revealing the close relationship between the southern clergy and the planter class. She argues that mainline Protestant faiths relaxed many of their egalitarian leanings to better appeal to the hierarchical nature of southern society and thereby win converts. Heyrman's analysis explains how this transformation occurred, but her study ends in the 1830s when the relationship came to fruition. Mitchell Snay's *Gospel of Disunion* (1997) outlines how southern theologians viewed religion's relationship with politics. To them, the two issues constituted separate spheres whereby ministers would focus exclusively on moral topics and refrain from commenting on issues of party politics. They did, however, make exceptions for political topics that contained a moral element. Snay found that, in the instance of slavery, southern clerics thought that "the existence of slavery itself was considered a political, or civil, question. Within the institution of slavery, however, were certain moral issues, such as the relationship between master and slave, that properly fell within clerical jurisdiction." Within this principle, the southern ministry could critique the negative aspects of slavery, such as a master's mistreatment of a slave, but also argue that abolitionists had politicized the pulpit by advocating for the end of slavery as an institution. Snay found that most ministers, especially the most learned, followed these principles even when it became inconvenient, suggesting that they genuinely believed in these distinctions. Though Snay's book remains essential for studying the antebellum religious class, his analysis stops at the beginning of the Civil War where the South's clergy seemingly

abandoned many of their reservations about the politicization of the pulpit to advocate for the Confederate government.<sup>93</sup>

Timothy L. Wesley's *The Politics of Faith during the Civil War* (2013) also helped to explain why clergymen became overtly political. He found that Americans generally had a different view of the relationship between religion and the secular government whereby "the separation of church and state was less pronounced than we imagine today." Indeed, he argued, "Mid-nineteenth-century Americans lived in a society in which the religious and the political overlapped almost to the point of amalgamation." Wesley's analysis fails to explain why many theologians seemingly abandoned their distinction between religion and politics as separate spheres. A thorough analysis has yet to be done on why many Protestant ministers shifted from principled defenders of slavery that abhorred political preaching to sectionalists that defended the Confederacy's many faults.<sup>94</sup>

A thorough examination of the lives of individual ministers and sermons from various denominations in North Carolina reveals three reasons as to their support of the Confederacy. The life of the North Carolina Episcopal Bishop, Thomas Atkinson, displays the first point that many ministers felt a patriotic duty to support their new government. Though he had initially opposed both slavery and secession, he supported the South's cause once his home state seceded. As the war progressed, many ministers criticized northern liberal theology, which they thought abandoned long-held biblical truths in favor of contemporary morality and scientific developments. Their moralization of the conflict, along with the presumption

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<sup>93</sup> Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Press, 1997). Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 10-11.

<sup>94</sup> Timothy L. Wesley, *The Politics of Faith during the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 2-3.

that God agreed with their logic, led them to the conclusion that service to the Confederacy meant fighting for God in a crusade against religious infidelity. Secondly, many ministers also engaged in a form of circular logic inspired by their providential worldview. They believed that God had prescribed southern separation in order to preserve a traditional, Christian society against the materialism of the North. The third reason involved the fear of punishment resulting from dissent against the pro-southern view. Denominational structures and state laws--which made the promotion of anti-secessionist beliefs a crime--swiftly punished any public figure that spoke against secession or slavery. Though most clergymen came to their pro-southern conclusions of their own accord, the fear of punishment undoubtedly led many to support the war against their true convictions. Those that opposed the South either had to remain silent or join one of the secret peace societies that formed near the end of the war.

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On May 5, 1861, the Episcopal Bishop of North Carolina, Thomas Atkinson, delivered a sermon to a congregation in St. James Church in Wilmington, North Carolina, expounding on what Christians ought to think about the state's secession and the inevitability of war. He began his sermon by explaining that, in light of Lincoln's call for troops, North Carolina had indeed made the correct choice in seceding from the Union. "When compelled to choose between furnishing troops to subdue her nearest neighbors and kindred, and to open her Territory for the passages of armies marshalled to accomplish that odious unauthorized and unhallowed object," Atkinson said that North Carolina instead "chose the path which affection and interest and duty seems manifestly, and beyond all reasonable question, to require." Atkinson also held no reservations in thinking that the South had the



more righteous cause, saying, “we can calmly, conscientiously, and, I think, conclusively, to all impartial men, maintain before God and man that ... we of the South are in the right.”

Atkinson portrayed the South’s quest for independence as a just cause against the unfettered tyranny of the North, suggesting that the South fought “willingly, but with an unwilling mind,” and that they had an “imperative but painful duty.” Though the South did not want to engage in war, Atkinson maintained, the North’s aggressive policies made it necessary.

Atkinson ended his sermon by arguing that the people of the North only had two choices before them, either they allowed a “voluntary and friendly separation,” or they continued in their “attempt at subjugation.”<sup>95</sup>

By May of 1861, the bishop had thoroughly come to embrace the Confederate cause, though his was only a recent conversion. Indeed, for much of his life, Atkinson had been fairly lukewarm in his support for slavery, and he initially displayed many reservations on the issue of separation. Throughout his life, he espoused the evils and economic disadvantages of the peculiar institution, but he also feared the radical egalitarianism of northern abolitionists. His first display of moderation came when he freed his inherited slaves during his time in divinity school. The second came in 1846 when, after serving at an Episcopal Church in Baltimore for a few years, the Diocese of Indiana elected Atkinson to be their bishop. While mulling over whether to accept the job, the young reverend received a letter from a Virginia native residing in Indiana. Though the friend expressed great interest in seeing Atkinson in the Hoosier state, he added that “the Bishop must be prepared to live and work in a community where the feeling against slavery and slave owners was becoming

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<sup>95</sup> Thomas Atkinson, 1861, *Christian Duty in the Present Time of Trouble: A Sermon Preached at St. James’ Church, Wilmington, N.C., On the Fifth Sunday after Easter*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 6-7.

... inflamed and bitter.” The author of the letter also mentioned that, though he held anti-slavery views, many locals in his town showed disdain for him on account of his southern birth. Atkinson’s interest in the position cooled, and he realized that his moderate views on slavery and his status as a southerner could bring him trouble in his new position. In the end, he decided to refuse the job and stay in Baltimore.<sup>96</sup>

In 1853, Atkinson entered the running to be elected Bishop of South Carolina. As national tensions had reached a fever pitch over slavery during the 1850s, the committee in search of a new bishop demanded a letter from each of their candidates explaining their views on slavery. Atkinson wrote frankly to the Church, stating that he thought slavery ultimately damaged the South, but he did not see a peaceful way to end the existence of the peculiar institution. If it came to a decision between slavery and the Union, Atkinson would have preferred to “let slavery go, and preserve the Union of the States.” Once the members of the convention read the letter, their interest shifted to other candidates that held stronger pro-slavery views. Thomas Drayton, a South Carolina politician and member of the 1853 Diocesan Convention said that the letter constituted the reason why Atkinson did not receive the position. Atkinson realized the quandary his views placed him in, noting, “I was not Bishop of Indiana because I was not sufficiently opposed to slavery; and I was not Bishop of South Carolina because I was not sufficiently in favor of it.”<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Marshall DeLancey Haywood, *Lives of the Bishops of North Carolina: From the Establishment of the Episcopate in that State Down to the Division of the Diocese* (Raleigh, North Carolina: Alfred Williams & Company, 1910), 145-9. Though DeLancey’s book is dated, the primary source material it uses is convincing, and the information provided matches the primary source documents concerning Atkinson that I have discovered. Quote from Joseph Blount Cheshire, *Bishop Atkinson and the Church in the Confederacy* (Raleigh, North Carolina: Edwards and Broughton Printing Company, 1909).

<sup>97</sup> DeLancey Haywood, *The Lives of the Bishops of North Carolina*, 147-9. Joseph Blount Cheshire, *Bishop Atkinson and the Church in the Confederacy*.

Later that year, Atkinson found career advancement and a new home in the Upper South state of North Carolina, accepting the job as Bishop of North Carolina and residing in the town of Wilmington. From here, he quietly attended to the spread of the gospel, including his oversight of the building of the Ravenscroft School in Raleigh, which helped to educate future Episcopal ministers. Atkinson also promoted Christianity among slaves, often traveling to preach on various plantations and encouraging the plantation owners of the state to take responsibility for the spiritual education of their servants. When political tensions reached a heightened state in 1860, however, Atkinson took to preaching on the national crisis, and his friends, who were affiliated with various denominations, printed his sermons and circulated them across the state. Atkinson delivered his first publicly printed address on January 4, 1861, the day of humiliation and prayer appointed by President Buchanan. Importantly, Atkinson had not yet come to embrace the Confederate cause, and his speech reflected his pro-Union sentiments. Though he refused to deal with politics directly, the tone of the sermon suggests that Atkinson preferred the seceded states rejoin the Union and resolve their differences rather than resort to war.<sup>98</sup>

Atkinson began his sermon with a warning: “Just above our heads, in the uplifted hand of God, we see that scourge with which He afflicts Nations, when His anger is hottest against them; we see the fearful scourge of civil war.” Atkinson also alerted the congregants to the horrible devastation that war would bring on the people and their land, asking them,

Have you ever seriously and carefully considered the nature, the adjuncts, the consequences of real civil war? Not theatrical war; not war as painted by poets and novelists, glorious in pride, pomp, and circumstance . . . not war even as decided in a campaign or two, like ours in Mexico, but war in its stern reality, war as known by warriors, war as it empties villages, and fills hospitals, and crowds cemeteries, war as waged between powers which are both strong and both resolute.

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<sup>98</sup> DeLancey Haywood, *Lives of the Bishops of North Carolina*, 151-62.

To give the people an image of the stark reality of devastation, Atkinson used the example of Prussia during the Seven Years' War. The conflict caused a famine in the kingdom, Atkinson warned, and he added that nearly a sixth of the military age males died in the fighting. In some towns, he continued, "no labourers [sic] except women were seen in the fields at harvest time," and in others, "not a single inhabitant remained." Besides the human costs, Prussia became disorganized and failed to function; "the currency had been debased, [and] the authority of laws and magistrates had been suspended." The social costs in the United States' case would be even worse, he warned, as civil wars constituted "the most cruel of all wars," and the fighting of brother against brother would forever damage the country's unity.<sup>99</sup>

Atkinson did believe, however, that God's "avenging hand may be stayed" by the power of prayer. He believed that civil war constituted a divine punishment from God, as He "is never cruel or unjust and never sends sorrows where there have not before hand [sic] been sins." For Atkinson, these sins originated with average Americans, and those behaviors had to be corrected to secure God's blessing. Explaining the sins, Atkinson first said that his generation was "a less religious one than that of the founders of our government." While America grew in material wealth, the people began to lose their reverence toward God. Atkinson put much of the blame for this development on the theology of New England churchmen who, he argued, put their contemporary morals against the law of the Bible: "Say to a man of this sort that the Bible sanctions slavery, and his reply is 'so much the worst for the Bible.' If it contradicts his common sense, or his conscience or his moral intuitions or whatever else he may call his individual judgment and feeling, he disowns it." Atkinson

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<sup>99</sup> Thomas Atkinson, 1861, *On the Causes of Our National Troubles: A Sermon Delivered in St. James' Church, Wilmington, N.C.* Collection of Boston Athenaeum, 4, 5.

traced this idea back to their Puritan legacy, and he argued that it created a certain “independency” from God, thereby angering their Creator.<sup>100</sup>

Atkinson thought that the people of America also had “less respect felt for all forms of human authority.” He did not advocate for despotism, though he did think that societal hierarchies were necessary to have order. Once again, Atkinson segued this premise into a criticism of the North. Their radical individualism, he argued, broke all meaningful social bonds and led to disorder. These sins brought displeasure from God, and he thought that the only solution available to the nation involved repentance and divine intervention. In conclusion, he asked each family to pray and stem “the tide of immorality” engulfing the nation. While Atkinson hoped and prayed for the preservation of the Union, his sermons also revealed his belief that the northern section of the country had largely been responsible for God’s wrath.<sup>101</sup>

In the few short months between January and May of 1861, Atkinson quickly changed his tune regarding southern secession. After the state officially seceded, the bishop advised his congregation at St. James to issue prayers for the Confederate cause. “Let us then earnestly and perseveringly seek the favor of Him without whom our enemies can do us no hurt – without whom not a hair of our heads can fall to the ground.” He told them that they could achieve this through “repentance, national and individual, by fervent, faithful, constant prevailing efforts to keep God’s holy will and commandments and to walk in his holy ways.” As the bishop of a state diocese, Atkinson helped to organize the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Confederate States of America. Once the split occurred, he also began to play an active role in the efforts to convert soldiers. At the beginning of the war, he spent much of

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<sup>100</sup> Thomas Atkinson, *On the Causes of Our National Troubles*, 5, 8, 10, 11.

<sup>101</sup> Thomas Atkinson, *On the Causes of Our National Troubles*, 14-15.

his time in Virginia preaching to various regiments. Once he returned to Wilmington, he recruited many Episcopal ministers to become chaplains for the soldiers. In effect, Atkinson dropped much of his moderation to support the Confederate war effort.<sup>102</sup>

What explains Atkinson's shift from moderate southerner, lukewarm on both slavery and secession, to proud Confederate? Though Atkinson never addressed this concern directly, his printed sermons on the relationship between church and state revealed his belief that churches had a duty to support the secular government. In an address before the Diocesan Convention of North Carolina, he gave a speech addressing the question of whether or not the separation of North and South automatically rendered the Episcopal Church two separate bodies. He argued the negative, suggesting that "Church and State, although both are appointed by God, and both necessary for man, are yet entirely distinct organizations." Though entirely divorced from one another, Atkinson held that Christianity mandated patriotism from its clergymen and citizens: "It is one function of the Church to uphold the State, by its Prayers, and by insisting on obedience to it as a Christian duty." The Episcopal bishop did, however, add one caveat, insisting that "the State is always entitled to our Prayers and our obedience, unless she undertake [sic] to set aside the Law of Christ, in which case, we must obey God rather than man." Atkinson insisted that the Confederacy had stayed consistent with the values of God, so the North Carolina diocese "had no perplexing questions of the sort to settle" about whether to support the southern government.<sup>103</sup>

Atkinson's principle regarding church support for the state, along with the southern clergy's long-held skepticism of northern religion, greatly contributed to their alignment with

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<sup>102</sup> Thomas Atkinson, *Christian Duty in the Present Time of Trouble*, 11-2.

<sup>103</sup> Thomas Atkinson, 1861, *Extract from the Annual Address of the Rt. Rev. Thomas Atkinson, D.D., to the Convention of the Diocese of North Carolina, Holden at Morganton, July 10<sup>th</sup>, 1861*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 6.

the Confederacy. The South's ministry believed that their section had faithfully adhered to traditional Christianity while the North had drifted toward heresy. The North's free labor system and liberal theological innovations had, in their eyes, pushed American society toward disorder and anti-Biblicism. With this view of the North, the southern ministry believed that God blessed their cause and refused to consider that they had wrongly analyzed God's will. With assurances of their righteousness, southern clergymen supported the Confederate government with the utmost confidence. The ministry also promoted the idea that service to the southern government became deeply aligned with Christian duty. In other words, God's apparent endorsement of the southern cause gave the Confederacy added legitimacy in the eyes of the clergy.

Many other ministers of different denominations also began to make a similar connection between the Confederacy and Christianity. John Paris, a Methodist clergyman, delivered a sermon before Brigadier-General Robert Hoke's brigade in February 1864 after the execution of twenty-two Confederate deserters. Paris touted the Confederate narrative, arguing that losing the war would put southerners at the mercy of northern despotism. As white southerners faced political tyranny, they would also "have to endure the deep and untold mortifications of having bands of negro soldiers stationed in almost every neighborhood to enforce these laws and regulations." Paris took his argument a step further than Atkinson, insisting that unpatriotic behavior constituted an affront against God. "The true Christian is always a true patriot," he argued. "Patriotism and Christianity walk hand in hand." Indeed, Paris said that nearly every deserter he knew of had not belonged to a church. "As one that fears God, he [the Christian soldier] knows that if a man is not for his country, he is against it. Hence, there is no neutral ground or position for him to occupy, but to stand

by his country as its fast, unwavering friend ... There is no toryism in a Christian's heart. The two principles cannot dwell together.”<sup>104</sup>

Likewise, R.H. Lafferty, a Presbyterian minister residing in Mecklenburg County, gave a sermon on the duties of Christians during the war. Lafferty stressed the need for the people to maintain their godliness, as he thought that their piety, or lack thereof, could shift God's favor. “Prayer constantly should be made unto God, both in our army and over the land, as a people professing Christianity cannot expect to succeed without this.” Moreover, Lafferty stressed the duty that Christians had to support the army: “Our interests, our obligations, and our dangers are mutual, and therefore we cannot, without guilt, refuse to take part in that strife and struggle in which our country is now engaged.” Another Presbyterian, Joel W. Tucker, included a message to the soldiers which assuring them that “your cause is the cause of God, of Christ, of humanity. It is a conflict of truth with error – of the Bible with Northern infidelity – of a pure Christianity with Northern fanaticism – of liberty with despotism, of right with might.” Tucker's sermon accurately expressed the ideology that overcame many southern ministers that the South represented the only truly Christian civilization on the American continent. The North, in other words, had spoiled the blessing that God gave to America to spread the gospel and liberty throughout the world.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> John Paris, *A Sermon: Preached before Brig.-Gen. Hoke's Brigade, at Kinston, N.C., on the 28<sup>th</sup> of February, 1864, by Rev. John Paris, Chaplain Fifty-Fourth Regiment N.C. Troops, upon the Death of Twenty-Two men, Who Had Been Executed in the Presence of the Brigade for the Crime of Desertion*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 10, 12.

<sup>105</sup> R.H. Lafferty, *A Fast-Day Sermon; Preached in the Church of Sugar Creek, Mecklenburg County, N.C., February 28<sup>th</sup>, 1862*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 15, 14; Joel W. Tucker, *God's Providence in War: A Sermon, Delivered by Rev. J.W. Tucker, To His Congregation, in Fayetteville, N.C., on Friday May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1862*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 11.



After the rapid political developments involving the firing on Fort Sumter, Lincoln's call for troops and the upper South's subsequent secession, Thomas Atkinson proclaimed before his congregation that, "It seems to me that no one, but an Atheist, or an Epicurean, can doubt that it is God who rides in this storm and will direct the whirlwind." Despite anxieties about the coming civil war, his faith in divine providence gave him hope that God would direct worldly events toward a just outcome. Knowing that the conflict would be bloody and require many sacrifices, he urged his audience to "keep constantly before your minds this most certain truth, that whosoever may be the instruments of our present troubles, God is the efficient author of them." Atkinson, like most preachers of the time, believed that God ultimately controlled the outcome of all earthly events, and He arranged these affairs with a specific purpose in mind. Unlike many other clergymen, however, Atkinson did not give assurances that the South would ultimately be victorious. He firmly believed that the Confederacy possessed the more righteous cause, but he also thought that God could have other purposes for the South. "I hope and I believe that God will bless with temporal success the righteous cause," the bishop declared. "He may not, however, for He does not always see fit to make right visibly triumphant." Though Atkinson showed that the providential mindset left some room for interpretation, the general belief that God organized human events to fit a divine purpose deeply altered the way that religious southerners thought about and interpreted the events of the war.<sup>106</sup>

This providential mindset affected how ministers thought about actions on the battlefield. Rather than excellent generalship and material advantages winning a fight, many clergymen thought that commanders only served as God's instruments, leading to the

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<sup>106</sup> Thomas Atkinson, *Christian Duty in the Present Time of Trouble*, 5.

conclusion that battlefield victories resulted from God's blessing as opposed to human ingenuity. Presbyterian minister R.H. Lafferty espoused this mentality in a fast-day sermon in 1862, using the story of Joshua's Biblical conquest of the land of Canaan to demonstrate God's role in war. Reciting the famous story of the fall of Jericho, Lafferty told his audience of the city's nearly impenetrable fortifications and the seeming impossibility of capturing the town. Following God's instruction, however, the Israelites marched around the city once every day for seven days. On the last day, they once again encircled the city and, as instructed by God, the priests blew their horns. After this, the walls of Jericho tumbled to the ground, allowing Joshua and the Israelites to destroy the city and its inhabitants. Lafferty then focused his sermon on Joshua's subsequent attack on the city of Ai. Despite the Israelites' apparent material superiority, they failed to take the town. Dismayed, Joshua prayed, asking why they had been forsaken, and God revealed that a member of the army had greatly sinned. According to Joshua 7:13, God said, "There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel: thou canst not stand before thine enemies until ye take away the accursed thing from among you." It turned out that Zabdi, a man from the tribe of Judah, had taken valuable spoils from Jericho, aiming to enrich himself. Once the Israelites purged themselves of Zabdi, Joshua continued in his victories over enemy armies.<sup>107</sup>

Delivering this sermon amid the Confederate disasters at Fort Henry and Fort Donelson in the spring of 1862, Lafferty extrapolated from the scriptures that southern defeats emanated from the impiety of the people rather than incompetent generalship. He told his audience that "one drunken commander or soldier may bring down the displeasure of God and secure the defeat of our entire army." Lafferty then outlined seven reasons as to why the

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<sup>107</sup> R.H. Lafferty, *A Fast-Day Sermon; Preached in the Church of Sugar Creek*, 3-5.

Confederates had lost so many battles of late. Many of these encompassed personal sins among the people including overindulging in alcohol and cursing while others focused on the failure to show gratitude and reliance upon God for their victories. Lafferty attributed many of the South's military failures to the secular press for putting too much faith in Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson rather than in God. Other ministers also focused on the importance of southern piety and reliance upon God in their sermons. Joseph Mayo Atkinson, a Presbyterian minister and brother to the Episcopal bishop, thought that the South held a similar position to the biblical David in his fight against Goliath. Like David, the South would require divine assistance in its conflict. Before his fight against a stronger opponent, David placed the fate of his life in God's hands, saying, "He [God] will deliver me out of the hands of this Philistine" (1 Samuel 17:37). "Some trust in chariots, some in horses," Atkinson said, "but we will remember the name of the Lord our God."<sup>108</sup>

Similarly, the providential mindset also led many ministers to think that the war held a sacred purpose. The North Carolina ministry participated in the days of fasting and humiliation proscribed by the Union by preaching on the evils of separation, pleading and praying before God to avert the conflict. Prayer, they believed, "touche[d] the nerve of omnipotence," but God had seemingly ignored their pleas for peace and Union by allowing Lincoln to make his call for troops, thereby making war nearly inevitable. From here, the question arose whether God had a divine purpose for the war. If God had ignored the prayers of the majority of Americans and allowed the Upper South to secede, then separation and war must then have a purpose which God proscribed. A column in the Methodist-supported

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<sup>108</sup> R.H. Lafferty, *A Fast-Day Sermon; Preached in the Church of Sugar Creek*, 8; Joseph Mayo Atkinson, *God, the Giver of Victory and Peace. A Thanksgiving Sermon, Delivered in the Presbyterian Church, September 18, 1862, Raleigh, N.C.* Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 13.

newspaper, the *Raleigh Christian Advocate*, accurately expressed this providential ideology. “Most wars,” the minister argued, “are judicial punishments for the wickedness of a nation.” “Often,” he continued, “nations ... are allowed to execute His purpose upon another, and nations are sometimes divided to scourge each section.” Though the author recognized the “political degeneracy, official corruption, fraud, trickery, and moral degradation” going on in both sections of the country, he thought that the South possessed a duty to carry on the legacy of America that the North was continuously abandoning. “Yet we cannot doubt,” he said, “that God has a mission for our country, yet unaccomplished. Upon this land rests the responsibility and the duty of spreading the light and enlarging the area of civil and religious liberty.” To this writer, God wanted the South to separate from the degeneracy of the North in order to carry on the American legacy.<sup>109</sup>

Once North Carolina’s separation had become divinely ordained, the anti-northern sentiment harbored by many southerner ministers came to the forefront. Some interpreted the war as a punishment for the North because they put their faith in material prosperity over Biblical morality. This mentality gave southern ministers confidence and moral superiority over the North, which allowed them to speak ill of their former countrymen. The sermon of Presbyterian Joseph Mayo Atkinson expressed this mentality. Opening his address, Atkinson said that “we wholly misunderstand the real significance of this revolution if we fail to discern His hand and His counsel in all that has been done, or, with high providence, permitted to be done.” Atkinson pointed out that God’s wisdom had put “to shame the confident predictions of the wise,” though he then, apparently without irony, proceeded to predict God’s will. “So far as it may be permitted to man to interpret [sic] it, the great purpose

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<sup>109</sup> Joel W. Tucker, *God’s Providence in War*, 10. “The Duty of All,” *Raleigh Christian Advocate*, April 29, 1861.

of God would appear to have been to exalt his own glorious sovereignty in debasing the pride of material power and illustrating the supremacy of moral forces.” By this, Atkinson meant that God favored the “moral” civilization of the South over the free-labor system in the North. According to historian Eugene Genovese, southern intellectuals and theologians believed that black laborers would be unable to compete in a free market of labor against whites, eventually leading to a life of destitution for the black race. Therefore, the only humane alternative involved slavery, in which slaveholders provided all the material needs of the laborers. Due to the supposed humaneness of the South’s slave system, Atkinson believed that God chose to favor the South.<sup>110</sup>

Likewise, the assurances of divine favor on behalf of the South allowed ministers to rationalize battlefield developments. Atkinson delivered his sermon in a Presbyterian church in Raleigh after the repulse of McClellan’s peninsular campaign, and the subsequent victory at the Second Battle of Manassas in the summer of 1862. These victories, according to Atkinson, revealed the hand of God in the conflict. God had guaranteed the victory of the colonists against the British crown, and Atkinson maintained that He would do the same for the American South. Indeed, he argued that, in the Civil War, “the hand of God is more bare, more open, more visible in that which is now in process of consummation.” Explaining the South’s early misgivings, Atkinson contended that the defeats during the spring of 1862 “were as truly merited in their intent as our recent splendid successes.” He continued, “It was a humiliating but needful part of our education as a people. It taught us our prostrate dependence on Him who, sitting on the circle of the Heavens, hath appointed to the nations

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<sup>110</sup> Joseph Atkinson, *God, the Giver of Victory and Peace*, 7-8. Genovese, *The Slaveholders’ Dilemma*, 60-2.

of the earth the bounds of their habitation and rules with absolute sway over the councils of Cabinets and the events of battles.”<sup>111</sup>

In a similar sense, the American government that they had defended and supported until April of 1861 became an evil state that wished to subdue and tyrannize the South. In the sermon of Lutheran minister Daniel I. Dreher, for instance, he contended that “the United States had elected a fanatical party ... upon a certain political platform inimical to the South.” Likewise, Dreher argued that the Union had been at fault for a decade before the conflict, arguing that the Constitution “had been violated again and again, without either shame or remorse, and for which there was no redress.” Moreover, the North’s devious plot to subdue the South continued after Fort Sumter, and “the bombardment ... under the circumstances, was not just cause for Abraham Lincoln to declare war upon her.” This allowed Dreher to conclude that the North wished to subjugate the South, for which northern politicians only needed a pretext. Dreher’s sermon revealed a providential mindset that inserted a moral element into the war. While the fighting started because of political differences over nation-defining questions, the ministerial class turned the conflict into a war of good versus evil, those in favor of God and those who opposed Him. This undoubtedly increased devotion to the war effort, and it increased the stakes of the conflict. In the religious worldview, losing the war not only meant losing one’s honor but submitting their country to enemies now defined as apostates.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Joseph Atkinson, *God, the Giver of Victory and Peace*, 8. Ironically, Atkinson delivered this sermon one day after Confederate defeat at Antietam, though news of Lee’s failed invasion had not yet reached the public.

<sup>112</sup> Daniel I. Dreher, *A Sermon Delivered by Rev. Daniel I. Dreher, Pastor of St. James’ Church, Concord, N.C., June 13, 1861. Day of Humiliation and Prayer, as per Appointment of the President of the Confederate States of America*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 7.

Not every minister initially supported the secessionists, but the pressures on those that dissented became so strong that most followed Bishop Atkinson's lead, and embraced the Confederacy. In his book on religious opposition to slavery and the Civil War in the South, historian David Chesebrough describes a "winnowing process," whereby ministers in the antebellum period who disagreed with slavery increasingly left the South after facing open hostility toward their beliefs. He argues that the South grew increasingly defensive about their societal model due to abolitionist attacks and the growing material power of the North. Beginning in the 1830s, southerners began to openly suppress viewpoints, whether secular or religious, that spoke negatively of slavery. Over time, the social pressure overwhelmed anti-slavery preachers, and many left the South to preach elsewhere. By the time the war began, Chesebrough argues, "those who criticized and dissented from the stance of the dominant southern culture and society had to a large degree been weeded out." A few dissenters remained, however, and the war exacerbated the efforts to suppress nonconformist views, as they could now be considered treasonous. Together, both church and state attempted to quell anti-Confederate sentiment. Ministers that spoke negatively of the Confederacy could face removal from their positions as preachers by the denomination or the congregation. Likewise, the state of North Carolina made it a criminal offense to advocate for peace or reconciliation, leading to some instances of criminal prosecution of clergymen. These threats of punishment undoubtedly led many ministers to support the war or stay silent despite the reservations they may have had. For those that still wished to sue for peace and union while avoiding public scrutiny, they joined underground peace societies that formed during the war.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> David Chesebrough, *Clergy Dissent in the Old South*, 48-9.

Eli Washington Caruthers, a Presbyterian minister in Greensboro, prayed before his congregation in 1861 for many of the newly enlisted Confederate soldiers, asking that they “might be blessed of the Lord and return in safety,” though he added that the men were “engaged in a bad cause.” Caruthers’s comments inspired intense backlash from his congregation, and the stressful arguments forced the frail 68-year-old minister to retire. Since he made the comments early in the war and quickly withdrew himself from the conflict, he escaped social attacks and lived out the rest of the war in relative obscurity, dying in 1865. After his death, his family discovered a manuscript in his papers entitled, “American Slavery and the Immediate Duty of Slaveholders,” which argued against the holding of the black race in perpetual servitude, Caruthers had concluded from his historical study that blacks did not constitute an inferior race. Looking at ancient civilizations, he argued that, during antiquity, blacks were “the superior race ... [and] the admiration of the literary and scientific community.” According to the preface, Caruthers said that he never sought to publish the manuscript because it “would not have been tolerated in any of the Southern States.” The backlash Caruthers faced from his congregation forced him to remain silent throughout the war, and it also sent a message to other anti-Confederate preachers that a similar fate could befall them.<sup>114</sup>

The religious press could also viciously attack Unionist ministers, such as Marble Nash Taylor, a Methodist preacher from Hatteras, North Carolina. Located on the eastern coast of the state, Taylor’s small community quickly fell under Union occupation. From here, Taylor organized an effort to establish a provisional Union government on the land under occupation. On November 18, 1861, Taylor led a convention in which Unionist

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<sup>114</sup> David Chesebrough, *Clergy Dissent in the Old South*, 64-5.



representatives from forty-five counties across North Carolina deemed the Confederate government null and void. Though the group adopted “ordinances ... [which] declared all states offices vacant [because] the incumbents whereof have disqualified themselves to hold them by violating their official oaths to support the Constitution of the United States,” the convention had no means to enforce this law except in the lands controlled by Union troops. In his statement, Taylor also expressed the pressure and fear which many Unionists felt to comply with the Confederate government. “The good and loyal men of North Carolina have been for months past [sic] without any domestic Government which they were bound to respect, and the apparent consent of a large majority of the citizens to the armed powers of the revolutionists and traitors, who have unwarrantedly arrogated the governing authority of the State, has not been a voluntary and cheerful acquiescence, but a compelled and protesting submission to a military despotism.” Unfortunately for Taylor, he did not coordinate these efforts with Washington, rendering his government mostly a matter of political spectacle.<sup>115</sup>

Taylor received a quick rebuke in the Baptist-affiliated newspaper, the *Biblical Recorder*, for his professed Unionism. Along with the recently established provisional government in northwest Virginia, the column alerted its readers North Carolina now had a Union-favored government controlling part of the state. “Hatteras, sandy, storm, ocean-beach Hatteras, is the capitol. And ‘Marble Nash Taylor’ is the Governor.” The writer described Taylor as “an apostate Methodist preacher,” who they falsely thought “piloted the Yankees and betrayed the Confederate garrison into the hands of the enemy.” Tongue-in-cheek, the newspaper added that the Union-favored convention “collected a few fishermen about Cape Hatteras, [and] formed a government for North Carolina.” From there, the paper wrote,

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<sup>115</sup> “Provisional Government,” *The Biblical Recorder*, January 8, 1862, 4. Marble Nash Taylor, “Proclamation to the People of North Carolina,” November 20, 1861, <http://hd.housedivided.dickinson.edu/node/38467>.

Taylor “sent from his fishermen subjects’ members to his Master Abe’s Congress.” Lastly, the author, somewhat taken aback at the Unionist presence in North Carolina, asked, “Why has not King Abraham formed a Provision Government for South Carolina at Port Royal?” The author then concluded that Lincoln could “find no Marble Nash Taylor, nor any traitorous fishermen on the coast.” “But let him take some big buck nigger,” the columnist suggested, “and make a Marble Nash Taylor of him, and the rest of the niggers be his subjects. Will not the King condescend to act upon this suggestion?”<sup>116</sup>

In May of 1862, Lincoln officially installed New Bern native Edward Stanly as military governor in North Carolina, ending Taylor’s imaginary reign as the leader of Union-occupied territory. Luckily for Taylor his home on Hatteras remained under Union control for the remainder of the war, thereby protecting him from any Confederate retaliation for his renunciation of their divinely sanctioned cause. Those in Confederate territory, however, could come to face graver consequences than being expelled from their denomination or having an insulting column written about them. The Presbyterian minister James Sinclair, for example, faced grave renunciations for his apparent anti-Confederate sympathies. Acting as a chaplain in the army, Sinclair assumed responsibility of a small unit of Confederate troops during the Battle of New Bern on March 14, 1862. Sinclair alleged that he received an order to surrender to Union troops yet reports from his superiors insisted that Sinclair received no such command. Assuming that he surrendered out of cowardice, the army began an investigation of the affair. Suspicious of Sinclair’s sympathies, General William Whiting relieved him of his chaplaincy and officer position while overseeing the case.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> “Provisional Government,” *The Biblical Recorder*, January 8, 1862, 4.

<sup>117</sup> Sinclair described his case in a lengthy letter written to William W. Holden, which Holden then published in *The Weekly Standard*, “For the Standard – *Salus populi suprema est lex*,” *The Weekly Standard*, January 6, 1864, 3.

While Sinclair did not mind being kicked out of the army, he did expect to hold onto a ministerial position at home, but the label of coward and traitor followed him there. When he returned to his Presbyterian pulpit, he learned that the accusation of treason had tarnished his social standing within his community. “With the foul stain of falsehood resting on my garment,” Sinclair attested, “the people composing the membership of that church would not sit in their pews to hear me preach.” Ministers within the church hierarchy also demanded that he clear his name before he resumed his ministerial duties. Sinclair affirmed that he believed in the Confederate cause and was a “States’ right man,” but his appeals fell on deaf ears with the general public. He then resorted to writing letters to Jefferson Davis and General Whiting begging to have his case resolved, as his lack of a profession caused suffering for him and his family. Likewise, Sinclair’s poor reputation followed him into the post-war era as well. After joining the Freedmen’s Bureau, he spoke before Congress in 1866, saying of his native state: “I could not live there just now ... I know it is utterly impossible for any man who was not true to the Confederate States up to the last moment of the existence of the Confederacy, to expect any favor of these people as the State is constituted at present.”<sup>118</sup>

A few months after North Carolina officially seceded, allegiance ceased to be solely a social matter as the state made laws against Unionist sentiment. In November of 1861, North Carolina passed “An Ordinance to Define and Punish Sedition,” which stated,

Be it ordained that if any person in this State ... shall maliciously and advisedly endeavor to incite the people to resist the government of this state or the Confederate states ... or maliciously and advisedly terrify and discourage the people from enlisting into the service of this State or the Confederate States ... every such person being legally thereof convicted ... shall be adjudged guilty of a high misdemeanor, and shall be fined and imprisoned at the discretion of the court.

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<sup>118</sup> “For the Standard – *Salus populi suprema est lex*,” *The Weekly Standard*, January 6, 1864, 3.

In this case, ministers that harbored anti-Confederate sentiment could be subject to legal prosecution. Similarly, Governor Zebulon Vance provoked contempt for Unionists and deserters during an address delivered in Raleigh in May of 1863. Of those that opposed the Confederacy, Vance threatened their ability to peacefully reside in North Carolina after the war: “If permitted to live in the State at all, you will be infamous. You will be hustled from the polls, insulted in the streets, a jury of your countrymen will not believe you on oath, and honest men everywhere will shun you as a pestilence.” To the loyal Confederates of the state, Vance asked for their help in locating and punishing those that opposed the war: “I therefore appeal to all good citizens and true patriots in the State to assist my officers in arresting deserters, and to frown upon all those who aid and assist them. Place the brand upon them and make them feel the scorn and contempt of an outraged people.”<sup>119</sup>

The law, however, could rarely prosecute ministers to the full extent, as this act often resembled the very tyranny that the South had pledged to defeat. With that being said, the state of North Carolina did prosecute the Presbyterian minister R.J. Graves for the contents of a sermon delivered in 1862. The dispute started when a throat condition prevented Graves from preaching to his small congregation in rural Orange County. Unable to be healed by southern treatments, the Confederacy approved him to see a throat specialist in New York City. Upon his return with a healed voice, Graves gave a sermon to his congregation about the North and its condition, as many congregants wondered whether northern people favored war or peace. Graves spoke candidly and told the congregation that the North did not appear ready to falter, as some in the press had claimed. Some congregants interpreted Graves’s

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<sup>119</sup> 1861, *An Ordinance to Define and Punish Seditious*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Zebulon Vance, 1863, *Vance’s Proclamation*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

words as an approval of the North and its readiness to fight, and Confederate authorities soon arrested him on suspicion of treason. Jefferson Davis soon transferred Graves to be tried in North Carolina at Governor Vance's behest, and he received a trial in Hillsborough, North Carolina. Despite Graves behaving rather oddly during his trial, often changing his story, the prosecution could not bring together a conviction based on the meager amount of evidence. Graves returned to his pulpit, and presumably, his not guilty verdict cleared him of any accusations of treason among his peers. Even though the prosecution failed, Grave's arrest most likely inspired fear in ministers that harbored anti-Confederate sentiments, forcing them to speak positively of the southern government or refrain from public comment about the war.<sup>120</sup>

The open suppression of ministers who questioned the Confederate government led committed dissenters to join secret societies that aimed to subvert the southern administration and aid the Union. Many of these organizations sprung up near the end of the war, and they often lacked substantial documentation, which makes ascertaining their influence difficult. In 1864, however, state authorities discovered a few members of one such organization called the "Heroes of America," including a Baptist minister named Orin Churchill of Chatham County. The Raleigh-based *Daily Conservative* claimed that the group had allegedly attempted to deliver information to the Yankees. The paper also included a statement from Churchill himself, but it served as an attempt to clear his name rather than an actual confession of guilt. As a "poor, deluded soul," Churchill "went into this unholy thing and for a short time thought it was all right." "But thank God," he said, "my eyes were opened ...

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<sup>120</sup> David Chesebrough, *Clergy Dissent in the Old South*, 66. Sean A. Scott, "My Conscience Has Been Void of Offense": A Tale of Alleged Treason during the Civil War," *The North Carolina Historical Review* 93, no. 1 (2016): 1-27.

[and] I at once declared non-fellowship with the concern.” Churchill ended his statement by assuring his audience that he was a “loyal man and always have been” alongside his assurances that he would cast his vote for Zebulon Vance rather than the Unionist, William W. Holden. Churchill’s vague statement paid off, and a trial could not be brought against the members of the Heroes of America due to a lack of evidence. While Churchill’s true feelings remain unknown, the fact that he resorted to joining an underground peace society, rather than professing his Unionism publicly, shows that the state and denominational structures had successfully forced anti-Confederate voices to remain hidden. While the number of dissenting clergymen remained rather small, the fear of losing their livelihood or being labeled a traitor undoubtedly forced many moderate ministers into the Confederate camp.<sup>121</sup>

William G. Brownlow, a Methodist minister and politician in Tennessee during the Civil War and Reconstruction, argued that, after the firing on Fort Sumter in 1861, “the clergy of the South – without distinction of sects – men of talents, learning, and influence – have raised the howl of Secession, and it falls like an Indian war-cry upon our citizens from their prostituted pulpits every Sabbath.” In their sermons during the war, ministers not only garnered support for the war effort, but they also largely gave moral significance to the fighting. Ministers across the South argued that the war encompassed a fight between Christianity and heresy, with political separation representing the only way to stem the tide against northern materialism and blasphemy. Moreover, the religious class’s assurances of the divinely ordained nature of their cause gave ministers, along with their congregations, confidence to fight even when the war seemed hopeless. To protect their holy and righteous cause, the denominations, along with the state government, suppressed dissenters who

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<sup>121</sup> Chesebrough, *Clergy Dissent in the Old South*, 62-4. “Treason Stalks Abroad – The Conspiracy Exposed!!!,” *The Daily Confederate*, July 6, 1864, 1.

opposed the war. The quote from Brownlow also shows that many Americans at the time saw religion as a primary cause of the war. That fact appeared obvious to many during the Civil War, though it has been lost on some modern historians. Many historical works in recent years have shored up deficiencies in the scholarship, but religion remains a somewhat specialized topic in the Civil War historiography that generally favors traditional political approaches. Religion, however, must play a part in understanding the war if historians are to understand the war through the eyes of those who lived it.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> William G. Brownlow, *Sketches of the Rise, Progress, and Decline of Secession* (Philadelphia: George Childs, 1862), 111-112, in David Chesebrough, *Clergy Dissent in the Old South*, 2.

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### **Vita**

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