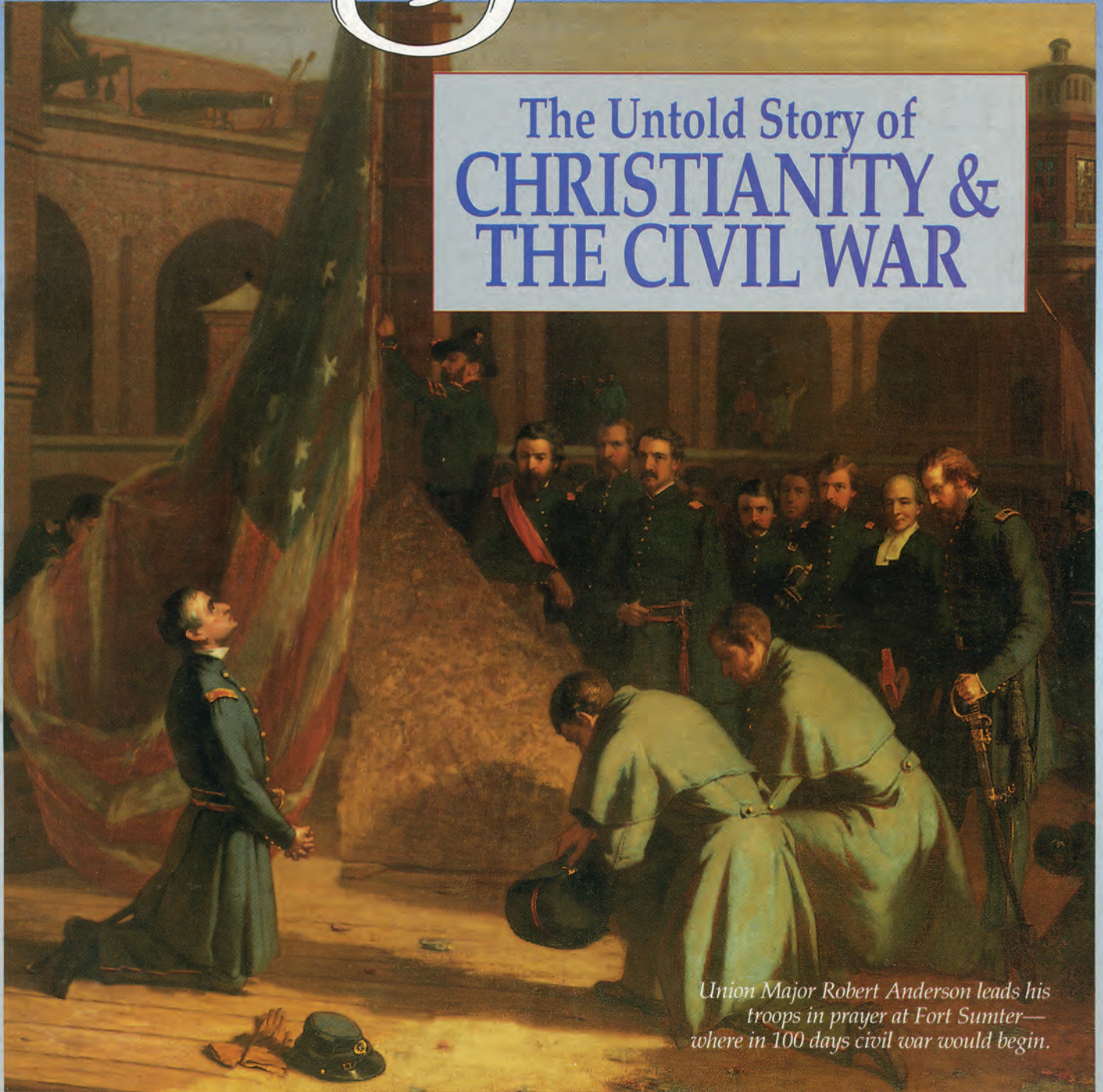


CHRISTIAN HISTORY

The Untold Story of CHRISTIANITY & THE CIVIL WAR



Union Major Robert Anderson leads his troops in prayer at Fort Sumter—where in 100 days civil war would begin.

The Christian Case for Slavery • Lincoln's Unconventional Faith
Secret Religion of the Slaves • Revivals among the Troops

Did You Know?

Little-known or remarkable facts about Christianity during the American Civil War

Major revivals broke out in the Civil War armies. In the Union Army, between 100,000 and 200,000 soldiers were converted; among Confederate forces, approximately 150,000 troops converted to Christ. Perhaps 10 percent of all Civil War soldiers experienced conversions during the conflict.

Abraham Lincoln, though he knew the Bible thoroughly and spoke often of an Almighty God, was never baptized and was the *only* United States president never to join a church.

By 1860, there were nearly 4,000,000 slaves in the United States. One of every seven Americans belonged to another. (Yet most Confederate soldiers didn't own any slaves.)

Before 1830, many leaders in the anti-slavery movement came from the *South*.

Three of the nation's leading Protestant denominations—the Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists—all divided over slavery or related issues. These church divisions fractured political parties, and ultimately helped to divide the nation.

As early as 1818, Presbyterians unanimously declared at their General Assembly that "the voluntary enslaving of one part of the human race by another" is "utterly inconsistent with the law of God." Ironically, however, the same assembly upheld the decision to depose a Presbyterian minister because he held anti-slavery views. And in 1845, the General Assembly agreed that slavery was a biblical institution.

A "Great Revival" occurred among Robert E. Lee's forces in the fall of 1863 and winter of 1864. Some 7,000 soldiers were converted. Revivals also swept the Union Army at that time. Some-

times preaching and praying continued 24 hours a day, and chapels couldn't hold the soldiers who wanted to get inside.

Chapels often were built in soldiers' quarters. In 1864, the Army of Northern Virginia alone boasted 15 chapels. One chapel built by the Army of the Tennessee seated more than 1,000 people.

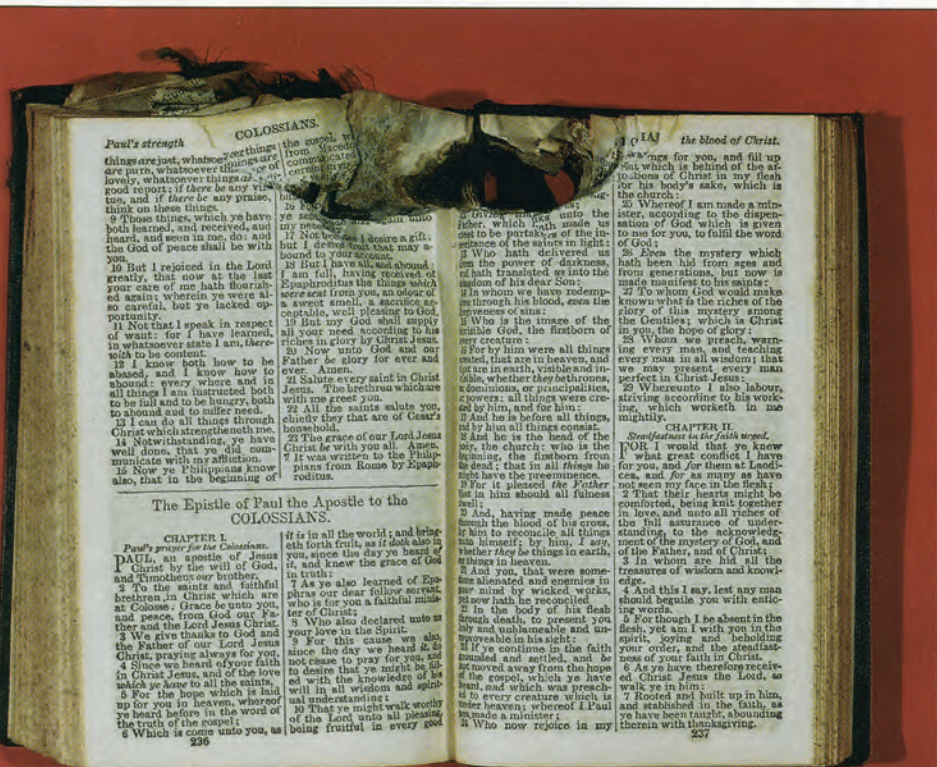
Before the Civil War, it was rare to find chaplains in American armies. During the war, they earned a lasting place.

The Constitution of the Confederate States of America specifically invoked "Almighty God"—unlike the Constitution of the Union. Further, the Confederate Constitution prohibited the foreign slave trade.

Millions of tracts were distributed to soldiers during the war. (Average price: 1,500 for \$1.) The U.S. Christian Commission alone distributed 30 million tracts, including many through a young agent named Dwight L. Moody.

Christians who opposed the war on religious grounds were often persecuted. The Brethren eventually were allowed to be exempted from military service if they paid \$500, but most suffered for their stance. For example,

This pocket-sized New Testament stopped the bullet meant for Confederate A. P. Hubbard of the 4th South Carolina during the battle of Bull Run. The millions of Bibles distributed during the war saved many lives.





John Kline, moderator of the Brethren Annual Meeting, became distrusted because he provided medical aid to soldiers from both armies. Once he was jailed for two weeks, without cause, and in June 1864 he was ambushed and murdered.

Fallen soldiers lie in front of the Dunker Church near Sharpsburg, Maryland, following the Battle of Antietam in September 1862. Ironically, the church belonged to Anabaptist believers who abhorred war and practiced non-resistance. Many church buildings were seized as hospitals and troops quarters during the war. Some were badly damaged or destroyed by shelling.

RIGHT: The Dunker Church today.



Blacks were not allowed to serve as chaplains (or soldiers) until 1863. Altogether, 14 black chaplains served U.S. regiments. One of the best known was H. M. Turner, whose preaching had drawn Congressmen to hear him; he was known as "the Negro Spurgeon."

"more ordinary battles" on Sunday, and William Rosecrans refused to pursue a fleeing enemy force on a Sabbath day. Other generals attributed defeats to the fact they had violated the Sabbath by fighting on that day.

ture Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes.

Abraham Lincoln was the first President to use the phrase, "This nation under God." It inspired President Eisenhower, in 1954, to add the words "one nation under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance.

E. M. Bounds, now famous for such books as *Power through Prayer*, served as a Confederate chaplain. He displayed great courage on the front lines, and he was captured by Union forces at the Battle of Franklin.

Key Civil War generals, including Braxton Bragg, Joseph E. Johnston, and John Bell Hood, were converted to Christ during the war.

Many Civil War generals stood so committed to observing the Sabbath that it influenced their military operations. Stonewall Jackson would fight only

During the war, a chaplain asked a severely wounded youth if he was a Christian. The soldier gasped, "Yes." The chaplain said, "Then you have nothing to fear," and left to die the fu-

Many preachers, especially in the North, felt that through the war the final glorious reign of God would begin. Both sides thought the war would be over in three months. Instead, it lasted four years, until 364,511 Union and approximately 260,000 Confederate soldiers lay dead from bullets and disease. More Americans died in the Civil War than died in all other American wars combined. □

WHAT PBS DIDN'T TELL YOU

More than 12,000,000 Americans watched each episode of PBS's acclaimed series on the Civil War. Filmmaker Ken Burns created a visual feast with gripping illustrations, stirring music and sound effects, and marvelous commentary by historian Shelby Foote and others. *The Civil War* series quickly achieved the highest rating of any limited-episode series PBS had ever shown.

As great as that series was, however, it often overlooked one of the most significant aspects of the war. Religion.

Massive revivals broke out among Civil War soldiers, leading to hundreds of thousands of conversions. In many units, chapels were packed night after night.

Before the war, the religiously motivated abolitionists had made slavery a national issue that wouldn't go away.

Three of the country's largest denominations—the Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists—all split over slavery or related issues. Great southern Senator John C. Calhoun knew that these denominations "formed a strong cord to hold the whole Union together." When they split, he accurately prophesied that "nothing will be left to hold the States together except force."

And how had the nation's 3-4,000,000 slaves endured their years of bondage? Largely through their widely held Christian beliefs.

But PBS, though occasionally touching on something religious, didn't tell us all this. Its expert researchers somehow chose to overlook the important role of religion in the war. It's like overlooking an elephant in your living room.

Not that many other sources will correct the omission. Writes historian Gardiner H. Shattuck, Jr.: "The single aspect of the war that the [National] Park Service has failed to highlight . . . is the impact of religion on the soldiers. Orientation films and shows at visitor centers never note how important religion was. . . . Civil War soldiers gathered in great numbers around campfires to participate in revivals, not just to see minstrel shows."

Christianity during the Civil War—it's a fascinating story. We hope this issue of *CHRISTIAN HISTORY* helps to keep it from being forgotten.

People often ask me, "I love the historical photographs and illustrations in *CHRISTIAN HISTORY*. How do you find them?"

The answer is a person, *Mary Ann Jeffreys*. Months before we publish an issue, Mary Ann uncovers scores of photographs and paintings. She helps select the fifty or sixty that earn the right to be seen by our readers.

Then Mary Ann goes to work again, contacting the museum, archive, or photo collection that holds each image. Will they grant permission for us to use it? Can they supply a suitable photograph or transparency? Many images turn up in Paris or Munich. With the help of FAX and translators, Mary Ann tries to bring them home. All fifty must arrive before our issue ships to the printer.

It's not a task for the timid. But Mary Ann is used to challenges. A missionary to Indonesia for fourteen years, she is a wife and mother of two. In her spare time, she has written and compiled a book: *The Frugal Foto Finder's Sourcebook*, a guide for those who, like her, search for reasonably priced pictures of religious or historical topics.

I could say more about Mary Ann, but I'll let you flip through the issue. Her work speaks for itself.

KEVIN A. MILLER

Mary Ann Jeffreys, *CHRISTIAN HISTORY*'s photo researcher.



Michael Hudson

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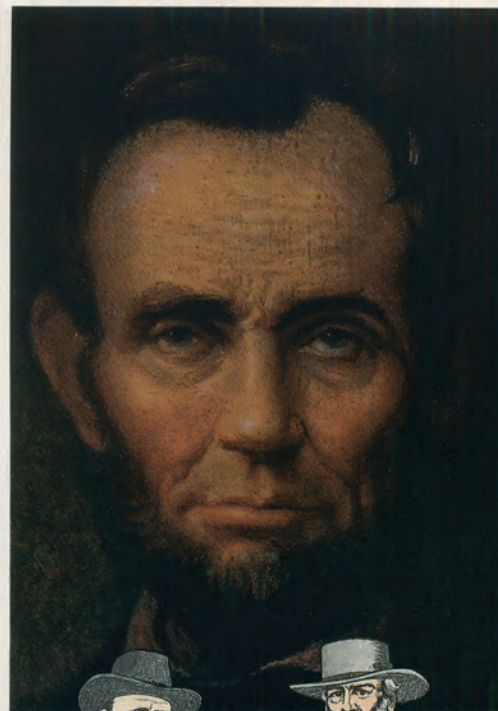
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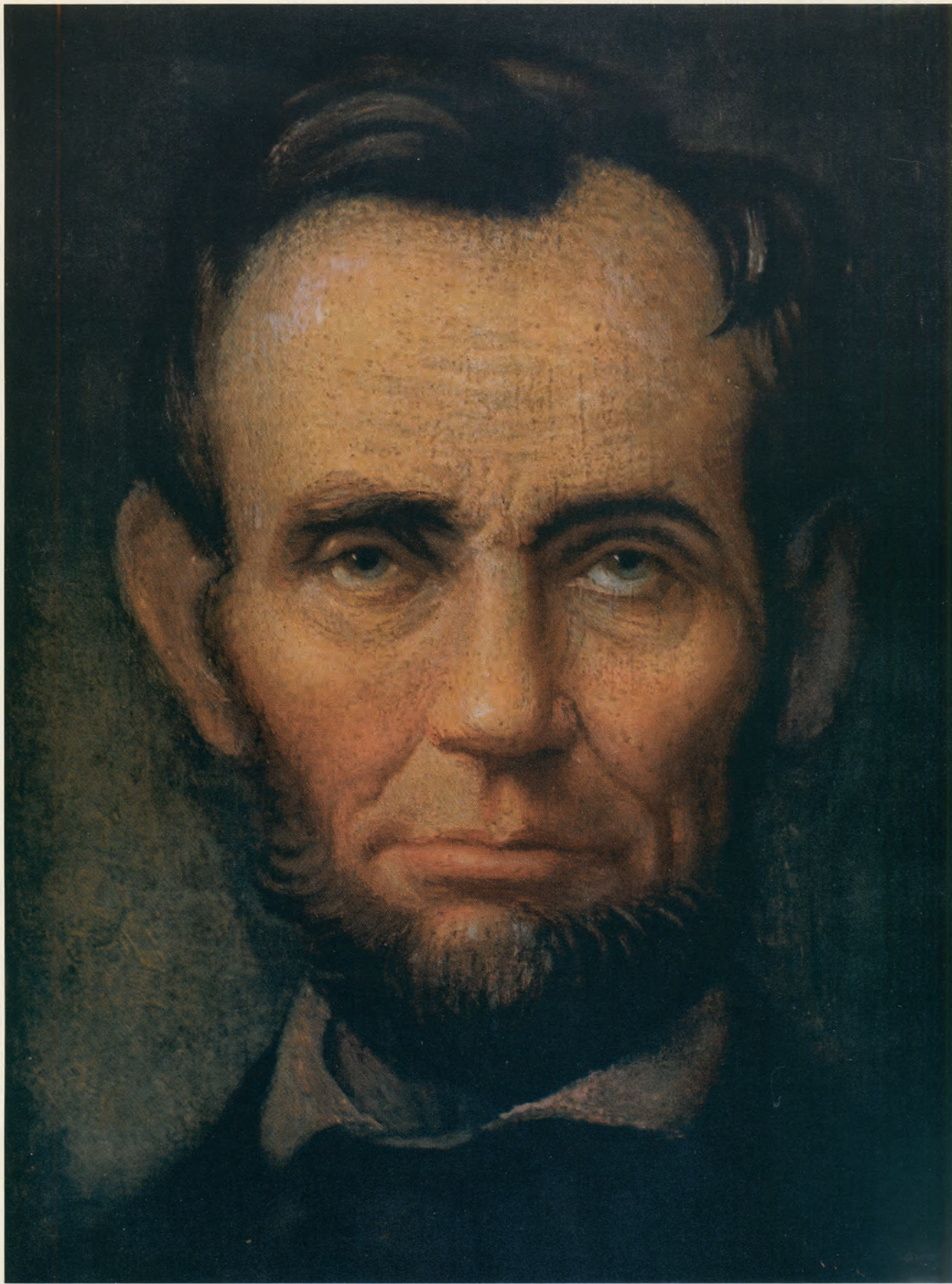
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CHRISTIANITY AND THE CIVIL WAR





From the Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection, courtesy of the Allen County Public Library and Indiana State Museum

THE PUZZLING FAITH OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

*Where was God in this brutal national war?
An unbaptized non-churchgoer
came up with a profound answer.*

MARK A. NOLL

The end of the Civil War in the spring of 1865 began a national discussion that has not stopped 125 years later. What did the war mean? What was its significance to the nation? More momentously, what was its significance to God?

Making no bones about it

Such questions engaged many of those who lived through the bloody conflict. Among those who thought they knew what it meant were many clergymen, some of whom made no bones about saying so.

In the North, Henry Ward Beecher (1813–1887) was the scion of the country's most prominent evangelical family. As pastor of Brooklyn's Plymouth Congregational Church, he enjoyed the most influential pulpit in the land. When he spoke at ceremonies marking the recapture of Fort Sumter, Beecher made clear what he thought the conflict meant in the eye of God:

"I charge the whole guilt of this war upon the ambitious, educated, plotting leaders of the South. . . . A day will come when God will reveal judgment and arraign these mighty miscreants. . . . And then these guiltiest and most remorseless traitors . . . shall be whirled aloft and plunged downward forever and ever in an endless retribution."

In the South, Robert Lewis Dabney

(1820–1898) was almost as prominent as Beecher in the North. A Presbyterian defender of Scripture and of traditional confessions, he was even more orthodox than Beecher. During the war Dabney served on the staff of General Stonewall Jackson; afterward he presided over seminaries in South Carolina and Texas.

Yet from wherever Dabney viewed the conflict, his opinion was the same. The war, he thought, was "caused deliberately" by evil abolitionists who persecuted the South "with calculated malice." When fellow Southerners asked him to soften his views on denominational colleagues in the North, Dabney had only these chilling words: "What! Forgive those people who have invaded our country, burned our cities, destroyed our homes, slain our young men, and spread desolation and ruin over our land?! No, I do not forgive them."

Thinking the unthinkable

In contrast to Beecher and Dabney—and the assumption that only one side enjoyed the blessing of God—stands the odd figure of Abraham Lincoln. At least, he held an odd view in those heated days of sectional strife.

Ministers and theologians, who day and night studied the Scriptures, knew very well where God stood on the war (though, of course, they differed among themselves). We would expect Lincoln, as the Union's president, to be just as partisan as Beecher. We would

assume Lincoln to be just as vituperative about Southern leaders as Dabney was about the North's. Yet Lincoln, though he pondered the ways of God almost as steadily as the professionals of religion, was not so sure.

Admittedly, in his first inaugural address, in March 1861, Lincoln had presented a fairly conventional view of God and the American nation. The "ultimate justice of the people," he said, would prevail, for there was no "better, or equal, hope in the world." Lincoln saw a solution to the national crisis in terms of civil religion: "Intelligence, patriotism, Christianity, and a firm reliance on Him, who has never yet forsaken this favored land, are still competent to adjust, in the best way, all our present difficulty." God, in other words, would stick with the Americans, whose own virtues would lead them out of trouble.

Soon, however, the vicious realities of war began to stir something else in the Northern president. As early as 1862 Lincoln began to think the unthinkable: Perhaps the will of God could not simply be identified with American ideals and the effort to preserve the Union.

In September that year, the North had suffered another disastrous reversal, this time at the Second Battle of Bull Run. Lincoln was considering the radical step of proclaiming the emancipation of slaves in the South. In those circumstances, at one of the darkest moments of the war, he penned the

following "Meditation on the Divine Will." It was written, as his secretaries, Nicolay and Hay, said, "while his mind was burdened with the weightiest questions of his life. . . . It was not written to be seen of men." Here is what Lincoln wrote about the religious meaning of the war:

"The will of God prevails. In great contests each party claims to act in accordance with the will of God. Both may be, and one must be, wrong. God can not be for and against the same thing at the same time. In the present civil war it is quite possible that God's purpose is something different from the purpose of either party—and yet the human instrumentalities, working just as they do, are of the best adaptation to effect His purpose. I am almost ready to say this is probably true—that God wills this contest, and wills that it shall not end yet. By his mere quiet power, on the minds of the now contestants, He could have either saved or destroyed the Union without a human contest. Yet the contest began. And having begun He could give the final

victory to either side any day. Yet the contest proceeds."

Like a figure from Israel's ancient history, Lincoln was arguing with God. But it was no longer a domesticated deity, an American God, but the ruler of the nations. The truth had begun to dawn to Lincoln that this God was not at the nation's beck and call, but the nation at his. His thinking was beginning to diverge from the paths followed by Beecher, Dabney, and the overwhelming majority of his contemporaries.

The stunning Second Inaugural

These notions developed more profoundly as the lists of casualties grew. They reached their climax in words Lincoln prepared for his second inauguration as president in March 1865. That address stands as the most remarkably Christian public statement by any American president.

The critical section of the address, complete with citations from Matthew 18:7 and Psalm 19:9, deserves to be quoted in full:

"Neither [side] anticipated that the cause of the conflict [i.e., slavery] might cease with, or even before, the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces; but let us judge not that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered; that of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes. 'Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!' If we shall suppose that American Slavery is one of those offences which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offence came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a Living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled by the bondman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, 'the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.' "

How could Lincoln point to the commanding sovereignty of a great God, while professional clerics spoke almost exclusively of a "house god" completely in league with the North or the South? How could such a profound grasp of God's grandeur come from an ordinary lawyer and politician, who

The Commander-in-Chief meets with General George McClellan on a visit to Union troops following the Battle of Antietam (Sharpsburg). One day of that battle has been called "America's bloodiest day," and Lincoln took the opportunity to visit seriously wounded soldiers, including Confederates, to whom he offered his hand, saying, "We are enemies by uncontrollable circumstances. . . . I bear you no malice."



Library of Congress/Leib Image Archives

LINCOLN'S LIFE— AND KEY RELIGIOUS STATEMENTS

1809: Feb. 12: born near Hodgenville, Kentucky

1816: Moves with family to near Pigeon Creek, Indiana

1828/1831: Flatboat trips to New Orleans (during which he may have reflected on slavery)

1830: Moves with family to west of Decatur, Illinois

1831: Moves to New Salem, Illinois

1832: Captain of militia in Black Hawk War (sees no action)

1834–1842: Member of Illinois House of Representatives

1836: Licensed to practice law

1837: Moves to Springfield, Illinois

1842: Nov. 4: Marries Mary Todd. They bear four sons: Robert (1843–1926), Edward (1846–1850), William (1850–1862), and Thomas ("Tad"; 1853–1871)

1846: Handbill during Congressional campaign denies rumor that Lincoln has ever spoken against Scripture, "religion in general, or . . . any denomination of Christians in particular"

1847–1849: U.S. Representative from Illinois

1851: During his father's last illness, asks step-brother to urge his father "to call upon, and confide in, our great, and good, and merciful Maker; who will not turn away from him in any extremity."

1854: Passage of Kansas-Nebraska Act (repealing earlier restrictions on slave extension) rekindles Lincoln's interest in national politics

1858: Debates with Stephen A. Douglas in race for U. S. Senate seat from Illinois; employs many biblical references and several times corrects Douglas's inaccurate use of the Bible



"The Almighty has His own purposes": Lincoln delivers his famous Second Inaugural Address on March 4, 1865.

1860: Delivers speech in New York that propels him to forefront of Republican party; May: nominated Republican candidate for president; Nov.: elected president (with minority of popular votes) in election with three other candidates

1861: Leaves Springfield after stirring address at train depot, including these words: "Without the assistance of that Divine Being . . . I cannot succeed. With that assistance, I cannot fail"; Mar. 4: inaugurated president; Apr. 12: firing on Fort Sumter (Char-

leston, South Carolina) begins Civil War

1862: Muses privately that in the Civil War "God's purposes" may be "something different from the purpose of either party"

1863: Jan. 1: Emancipation Proclamation frees all slaves in areas still in active rebellion against the Union; Mar. 30: proclaims national fast and says that as a nation, "we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us . . . and have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own"; Oct. 24: tells delegation of Presbyterians from Baltimore, "I have often wished that I was a more devout man than I am. Nevertheless, amid the greatest difficulties of my Administration, when I could not see any other resort, I would place my whole reliance in God, knowing that all would go well, and that He would decide for the right"; Nov. 19: Gettysburg Address

1864: Tells group of African-Americans who have given him a special presentation Bible, "In regard to this Great Book, I have but to say, it is the best gift God has given to man. All the good the Saviour gave to the world was communicated through this book. But for it we could not know right from wrong. All things most desirable for man's welfare, here and hereafter, are to be found portrayed in it"; Nov.: reelected

1865: Mar. 4: In Second Inaugural Address Lincoln says that both North and South "read the same Bible, and pray to the same God," and also (quoting Ps. 19:9) that even if God should let the war continue until "every drop of blood drawn with the [slaver's] lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, . . . still it must be said 'the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether'"; Apr. 15: dies from gunshot wound inflicted the previous day

—Mark A. Noll

Library of Congress/Leib Image Archives

HEADED FOR HEAVEN OR HELL?

How would Lincoln answer? His political opponent, a famous frontier preacher, wanted to know.

Abraham Lincoln ran for Congress in 1846, and he faced a formidable opponent: Peter Cartwright. Cartwright, a raw-boned, circuit-riding Methodist preacher, was known throughout Illinois. During his sixty-five years of riding the circuit, he would baptize nearly ten thousand converts.

During the intense 1846 Congressional campaign, some of Cartwright's followers accused Lincoln of being an "infidel." In response, Lincoln decided to meet Cartwright on his own ground and attend one of his evangelistic rallies.

Carl Sandburg, in *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years*, tells the story this way:

In due time Cartwright said, "All who desire to lead a new life, to give their hearts to God, and go to heaven, will stand," and a sprinkling of men, women, and children stood up. Then the preacher exhorted, "All who do not wish to go to hell will



Wikipedia

Peter Cartwright, the powerful Methodist circuit rider who in 1846 ran for Congress against a tall lawyer named Lincoln. During his life, Cartwright preached nearly 15,000 sermons throughout the rugged frontier, and he could deal with ruffians if the need arose.

stand." All stood up—except Lincoln. Then said Cartwright in his gravest voice, "I observe that many responded to the first invitation to give their hearts to God and go to heaven. And I further observe that all of you save one indicated that you did not desire to go to hell. The sole exception is Mr. Lincoln, who did not respond to either invitation. May I inquire of you, Mr. Lincoln, where are you going?"

And Lincoln slowly rose and slowly spoke. "I came here as a respectful listener. I did not know that I was to be singled out by Brother Cartwright. I believe in treating religious matters with due solemnity. I admit that the questions propounded by Brother Cartwright are of great importance. I did not feel called upon to answer as the rest did. Brother Cartwright asks me directly where I am going. I desire to reply with equal directness: I am going to Congress."

He went.

during his lifetime was scorned for lack of culture?

There can be no final answers to these questions. But a brief look at the debate over Lincoln's religion, and at the circumstances of his life, can at least provide hints.

Puzzling, unconventional religion

Confusion about Lincoln's religion arises from the multiple ambiguities of his life. On the one hand, Lincoln was, in the words of biographers James Randall and Richard Current, "a man of more intense religiosity than any other President the United States has ever had." On the other hand, Lincoln's faith was not conventional.

As a young man in Illinois, he eagerly read free thinkers like Tom Paine. At the same time, he was a kind of "frontier spiritualist" who believed that signs, dreams, and portents foretold the future. He had no use for Christian creeds or statements of faith, and little use for formal theology. At least early on, Lincoln was probably also a Uni-

versalist who believed in the eventual salvation of all people.

He spoke of God often and in many different ways—William J. Wolf counted thirty-three different expressions, like "Almighty Being" or "Father of Mercies," in Lincoln's *Collected Works*. Yet Lincoln rarely referred to Jesus.

After the death of his 4-year-old son, Edward, in 1850, he regularly attended Presbyterian churches in Springfield and Washington, pastored by doctrinal conservatives. Yet he never became a member of any congregation.

Making religion a political issue

An incident early in his political career highlights the unconventional character of Lincoln's faith. In 1846 he stood for election to Congress from Illinois's Seventh Congressional District [see box above].

The rumor began to spread that Lincoln mocked Christianity and scoffed at religious practice. This amounted to a vital issue since Lincoln's opponent was a Methodist circuit-riding

preacher, Peter Cartwright.

To quiet the alarm, Lincoln published a broadside on his religion that denied any wrongdoing. Significantly, however, it made little claim to anything positive. Here is the key passage of the circular:

"That I am not a member of any Christian Church, is true; but I have never denied the truth of the Scriptures; and I have never spoken with intentional disrespect of religion in general, or of any denomination of Christians in particular. . . . I do not think I could, myself, be brought to support a man for office whom I knew to be an open enemy of, and scoffer at, religion. Leaving the higher matter of eternal consequences between him and his Maker, I still do not think any man has the right thus to insult the feelings, and injure the morals, of the community in which he may live. . . ."

Even as Lincoln recognized the importance of religious propriety for public officials, he made clear that his religion was his own business.

Long-standing debate

Lincoln's manifest trust in God alongside his unconventional piety confounded his contemporaries. A popular early biography by Joseph Gilbert Holland, published in 1866, described Lincoln as a model evangelical gentleman. This greatly upset Lincoln's law partner in Springfield, Illinois, William Herndon, who thought he knew what Lincoln was really like. The portrait in Herndon's biography was much saltier. Lincoln was depicted as a prairie "infidel" who got along very well without the church; an ambitious, even scheming, politician; a man more fond of the bawdy than the Bible, more given to introspective melancholy than to Christian holiness.

Modern studies continue the contrast. In G. Frederick Owen's *Abraham Lincoln: The Man and His Faith* (published in 1976 and reprinted several times), Lincoln appears as a Christian prophet who sustained evangelical convictions throughout his life. By contrast, in Gore Vidal's historical novel *Lincoln* (1984), Christianity is a superfluous veneer that Lincoln occasionally parades for political purposes.

The greatest difficulty in coming to a clearer picture of Lincoln's faith is the fact that his religion does not fit into modern categories. He was not an orthodox, evangelical, "born-again" Christian striving toward the "higher life" (as these terms have been used since the 1870s). But neither was he a skeptical "modernist" with a prejudice against the supernatural and an aversion to the Bible.

Consequently, many conflicting stories about Lincoln lack concrete historical verification. In one, for example, Lincoln made a definite profession of faith; in another he was voicing agnostic opinions to the end of his days in the White House.

Three key influences

But three historical circumstances help explain the nature of Lincoln's religion—with its unusual belief in God's sovereign power—that came to fullest expression in the Second Inaugural Address.

First, Lincoln grew up in a poor dirt-farming family in the upper South and lower Midwest without privilege, position, or much formal education. The world of his upbringing was much closer to the culture of Puritanism than



The war effectively ended on April 9—Palm Sunday. The front page of *The New York Times* declared, "The Work of Palm Sunday . . . Thanks to God, the Giver of Victory." That Friday, Lincoln was shot by John Wilkes Booth. Thus, he was memorialized by many as the "Savior" of the Union struck down on a "Good Friday" for a righteous cause. As one speaker proclaimed, "Jesus Christ died for the world; Abraham Lincoln died for his country." Shown here is the bed upon which Lincoln died. The pillow is stained with his blood.

the culture of narcissism.

Common people were often deeply religious, believing without question in God and the unseen world. Yet they were not much troubled about doctrines, ecclesiastical affairs, or the glorious prospect of the millennium, which then preoccupied some of America's religious elite. Rather, the common people tried to accept their fate, to overcome guilt, to enjoy the fleeting comforts of love and family, to survive the uncertainties of birth, to eke out existence on an often brutal frontier, and to come to terms with the ever-present reality of death.

As with many other such families, Lincoln's had very few books. But it did have the Bible, which Lincoln evidently read with great care. His later speeches and ordinary conversation were peppered with biblical quotations and allusions.

This family history provided the backdrop of Lincoln's religion. It had nothing to do with modern ideas about "finding oneself" or about "God's wonderful plan" for life.

The second circumstance was Lincoln's experience with denominations in the Indiana and Illinois of his youth. He found the harsh infighting among Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Disciples, Universalists, and "village atheists" repulsive. As a consequence, Lincoln several times professed willingness to join a church that required nothing of its members but heartfelt love to God and to one's neighbors.

The competing creeds of the churches were not for him.

The third circumstance was instruction in reality by the coldest master—death. The passing of his mother when he was 9, the death of a beloved sister shortly after her marriage, the death of two sons (in 1850, and at the White House in 1862), the death of several close friends in the early days of the Civil War (*his* Civil War), and increasingly, the heart-wrenching lists of casualties from the battlefields—these left him no taste for easy believism, no escape from the mysteries of God and the universe.

The truly remarkable thing about Lincoln's religion was how these circumstances drove him to deeper contemplation of God and the divine will. The external Lincoln, casual about religious observance, hid a man of profound morality, an almost unbearable God-consciousness, and a deep belief in the freedom of God to transcend the limited vision of humanity.

Such religious qualities are unusual in any age. They were even more rare in the period of the Civil War when, for almost every one else, partisan passion transformed God from the Lord of nations into the servant of North or South. □

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FIREBRANDS AND VISIONARIES

Leading people in religion and politics during the Civil War era

MARK GALLI

JOHN BROWN (1800–1859) *The “monomaniac” or “saint” who waged a holy war on slavery*

By age 55, John Brown had engaged in more than twenty business ventures, such as tanning, land speculating, and sheep herding. Most of them failed, some ending in bankruptcy, two in crime.

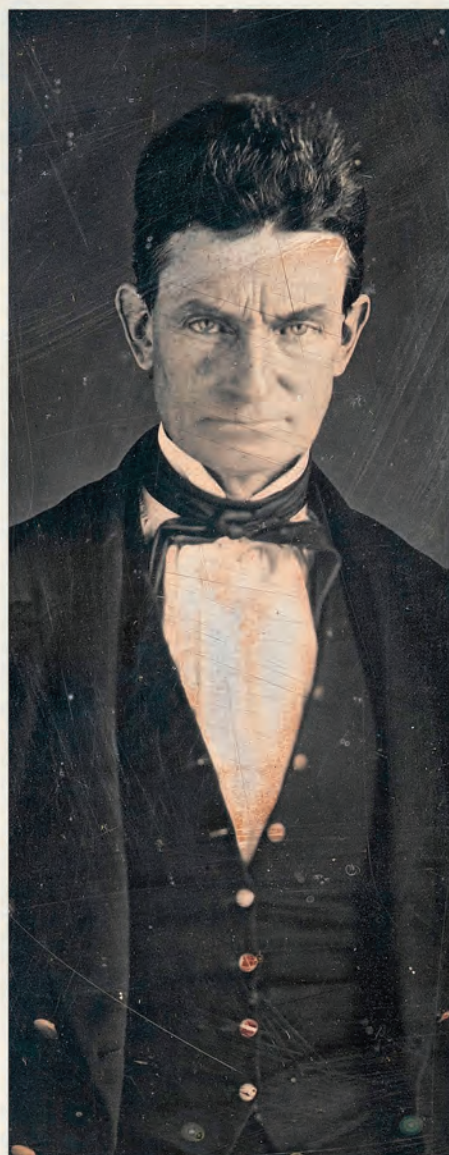
Yet this unstable personality would become a feared monomaniac (in the South) and legendary martyr (in the North). His actions would pour kerosene on the smoldering debate over slavery; soon the nation would be engulfed in the inferno.

Born in Connecticut in 1800, Brown passed his boyhood in Hudson, Ohio. John was raised by a devout Calvinist and abolitionist father and a mother afflicted with mental illness. At age 18, he intended to become a Congregational minister. He instead became a wanderer and business failure. He married twice and fathered twenty children; a few were judged insane.

Throughout his life, Brown was an abolitionist. His barn in Pennsylvania was a station on the Underground Railroad. He lived for a time in a black community in New York. During an Ohio church service, following a sermon on slavery, he stood in the sanctuary and declared, “Here, before God and in the presence of these witnesses, I consecrate my life to the destruction of slavery.”

But he was well past 50 before the idea of freeing slaves possessed him. He became convinced that nothing but bloodshed would free the nation from its sin of slavery. God was leading him to battle.

In August 1855, Brown set out for Kansas in a one-horse wagon filled with guns and ammunition. In Kansas in the 1850s, two parties fought for possession of the new territory’s gov-



Augustus Washington John Brown—Wikipedia

ernment; the winner would determine whether slavery would be accepted in Kansas. Conditions bordered on civil war.

Soon after arriving, Brown led a retaliatory party against pro-slavery forces “to cause a restraining fear,” as he put it. His forces murdered five pro-

slavery settlers in Pottawatomie, Kansas, hacking them to pieces with sabers.

Brown’s final plan, based on visions he’d had years earlier, was to seize a stronghold in the mountains of Maryland or Virginia, where he would gather slaves and arm them. This would touch off a slave uprising, he felt, and slavery would collapse.

From a hideout in the Maryland hills, Brown recruited twenty-one men and collected weapons. On October 16, 1859, he led his little army across the Potomac River to seize the government arsenal at Harper’s Ferry, Virginia. (Ironically, the first person killed in his attack was a free black man.) By morning, he and his men were in possession of the armory and the bridges leading to the ferry. A few bewildered slaves were induced or compelled to join him. But for some reason, he didn’t head for the mountains as planned.

Within a day a company of U.S. marines under the command of Col. Robert E. Lee arrived and assaulted the building. Brown fought with amazing coolness and courage—at one point over the body of his dying son—but finally he was overpowered. He lost two sons in the battle.

Brown was sentenced to death and was hanged on December 2, a month and half after the assault. To the end he maintained, “I believe that to have interfered . . . in behalf of His [God’s] despised poor, was not wrong, but right.”

Some derided Brown as a common assassin. Mrs. Jefferson Davis called him “a pestilent, forceful man” urged on by “insane prejudice.” But many in the North hailed him as a noble martyr. Louisa May Alcott, the author of *Little Women*, noted in her diary “the execution of Saint John the Just.”

FREDERICK DOUGLASS

(1817?–1895)

Spellbinding orator and activist

In 1829, 12-year-old slave Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey secretly bought and read Caleb Bingham's *Columbian Orator*. From it he learned that words could be weapons, that oratory had power. And it is his eloquent oratory that eventually made this slave boy into one of his era's foremost leaders, known to history as Frederick Douglass.

Douglass, the son of a slave mother and white father, was separated from his mother when he was an infant. He saw her perhaps five times in his life, and then only briefly and at night.

When he was 8, he was sent by his master to Baltimore to work as a servant, and there his mistress taught him to read and write. At 21 he escaped to New York by borrowing a black sailor's affidavit of freedom and, to elude slave catchers, by changing his last name. He immediately sent for Anna Murray, a free black of Baltimore, and married her. They had five children in forty-five years of seemingly unhappy marriage (Douglass had one affair, possibly two).

Upon freedom, he also became a licensed preacher in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. Within three years he began a career as an abolitionist lecturer. Once he spoke before an audience that included abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison. Garrison wrote: "There stood one, in physical proportion and stature commanding and exact—in intellect richly endowed—in natural eloquence a prodigy."

Garrison immediately hired Douglass as a full-time lecturer for the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. The

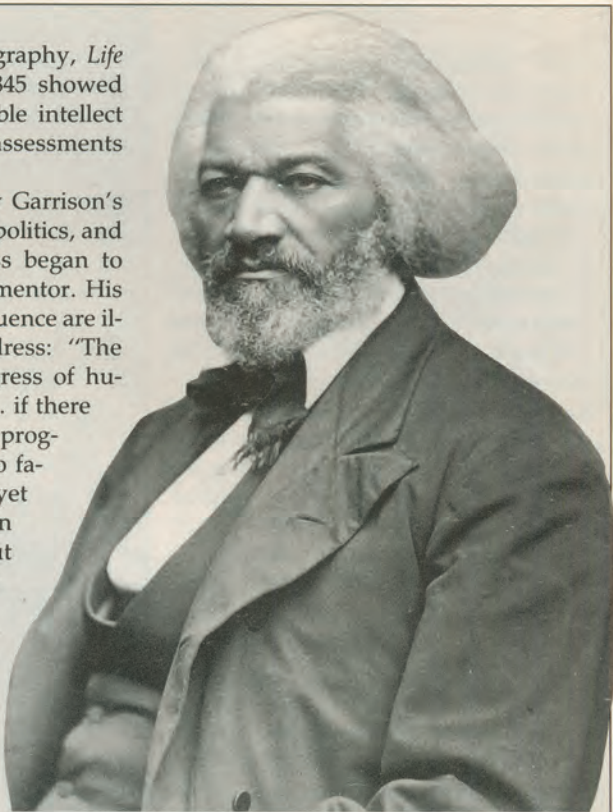
publication of his autobiography, *Life of Frederick Douglass*, in 1845 showed Douglass to be a formidable intellect who could make piercing assessments of slavery.

Increasingly troubled by Garrison's disdain for violence, party politics, and the Constitution, Douglass began to distance himself from his mentor. His new positions and his eloquence are illustrated in an 1857 address: "The whole history of the progress of human liberty shows that . . . if there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation are men who want crops without plowing up the ground; they want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did, and it never will. . . ."

At the outbreak of the Civil War, Douglass helped recruit black troops for the Union Army, enrolling two of his sons (one of whom was a surviving member of the 54th Massachusetts's attack on Fort Wagner, memorialized in the film *Glory*). Eventually 200,000 blacks were enlisted, and they became a major factor in the triumph of the Union Army.

Like Abraham Lincoln, Douglass saw the war as an act of providence and divine justice. God was intervening to destroy an evil, but the nation must suffer and be tested.

In the postwar years Douglass was appointed by President Hayes to the stripped-down post of marshal of the



District of Columbia, and under President James Garfield, he served as minister-resident to the Republic of Haiti.

Two years after the death of his first wife, he married Helen Pitts, a white woman of 45 (Douglass was about 67), for which he was roundly criticized by friends, family, and the nation. Douglass, however, saw the marriage as a blow against racism.

Throughout his life, Douglass gave himself to other causes, like temperance and women's rights. In fact, on the day he died, in 1895, he had attended a convention of women calling for the right to vote.

HARRIET BEECHER STOWE

(1811–1896)

Author of "the book that made this great war"

When President Lincoln met Harriet Beecher Stowe in 1863, he is reported to have said, "So you're the little woman who wrote the book that made this great war!"

Uncle Tom's Cabin may not have caused the Civil War, but it shook both North and South. Susan Bradford wrote, after her state of Florida seceded, "If Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe



had died before she wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, this would never have happened. . . . Isn't it strange how much harm a pack of lies can do?"

Harriet was the seventh of twelve children of Lyman Beecher, the noted revivalist and reformer. In 1832 her father moved the family to the frontier city of Cincinnati, where he became president of Lane Seminary, soon a center for abolitionists. At 25, Harriet married Calvin Ellis Stowe, professor of biblical literature at Lane.

During her child-rearing years, she

read to her seven children two hours each evening and for a time, ran a small school in her home. She described herself as "a mere drudge with few ideas beyond babies and house-keeping."

But a mere drudge she was not. She found time to write, partially to bolster the meager family income. An early literary success (a collection of short stories) at age 32 encouraged her, but she still worried about the conflict between writing and mothering. Her husband, however, urged her on, predicting she could mold "the mind of the West for the coming generation."

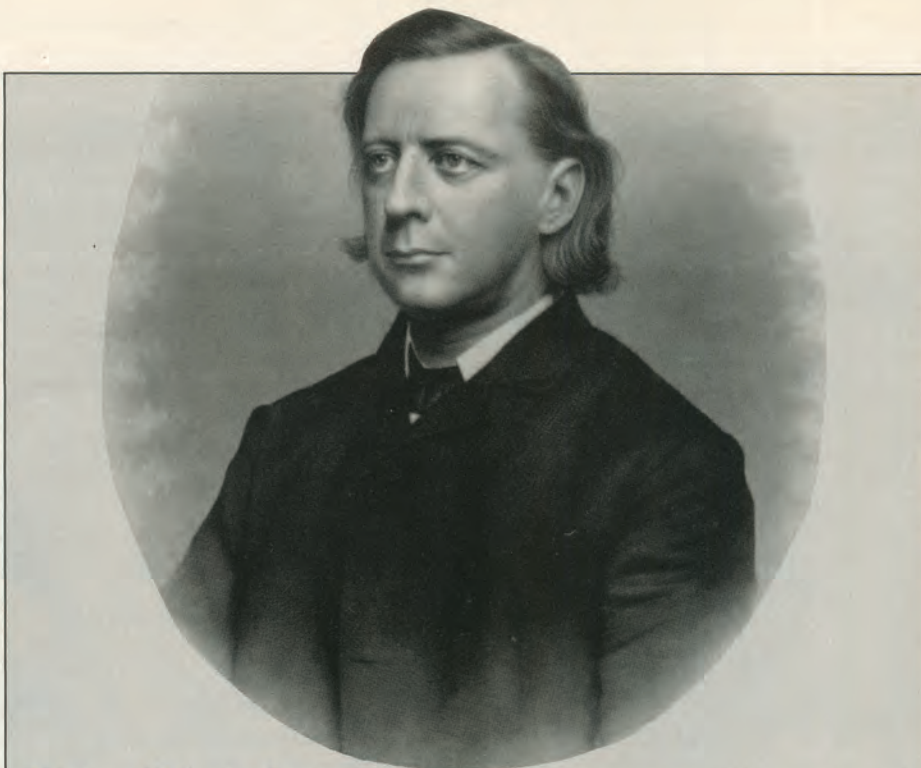
That she did with the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* at age 40. Her only exposure to slavery had been a short visit to Kentucky, but Stowe was deeply disturbed by the Fugitive Slave Act (severe measures passed the year before that mandated the return of runaway slaves without trial). She brooded over how she could respond. Then, during a church Communion service, the scene of the triumphant death of Tom flashed before her.

She soon formed the story that preceded Tom's death. The novel was serialized in the abolitionist newspaper *National Era* in 1851 and 1852 in forty installments, each with a cliffhanger ending. When it appeared in book form in 1852, it sold 10,000 copies the first week and 300,000 the first year. It sold 1,000,000 copies before the Civil War.

Its publication also inspired a reaction from the South: critical reviews and the publication of some thirty anti-abolitionist Uncle Tom novels within three years.

By literary standards, the novel's situations are contrived, the dialogue unreal, and the slaves romanticized. Still, Stowe grasped and communicated the tragedy of slavery. She had the wisdom to pin the blame on the institution, rather than southern men and women, who she felt were merely caught in its claws.

Until her death in July 1896, Stowe averaged nearly a book a year, but *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was her legacy. Even one of her harshest critics acknowledged that it was "perhaps the most influential novel ever published . . . a verbal earthquake, an ink-and-paper tidal wave."



HENRY WARD BEECHER

(1813–1887)

Preacher of God's love who sent rifles to the anti-slavery cause

Another of Lyman Beecher's children, also to become a major player in American life, was born in 1813 and started out as a shy and seemingly stupid child.

Fortunately, the athletic, fun-loving, and resourceful Henry Ward blossomed when he studied at Lane Seminary in Cincinnati. He experienced there a conversion in which, in contrast to the dour theology of the day, he understood that God reached out to people "from the fullness of His great heart" and that Christ's nature was to lift people "out of everything that is low and debasing to superiority." This positive and optimistic theology guided his preaching all his life.

Soon after seminary he was married (to Eunice White Bullare, with whom he had ten children) and then ordained, becoming the pastor of Second Presbyterian Church of Indianapolis. He slowly mastered the art of preaching and began receiving invitations to pastor prominent churches. Eventually he took Plymouth Church of Brooklyn, a Congregational church, in 1847. Here, as one historian has noted, he began a career "which for conspicuousness and influence has probably not been equaled by that of any other American clergyman."

Beecher was one of the most striking

figures in New York: large girth, broad shoulders, and a lioness head with flowing locks. He had a rich voice responsive to every shade of emotion. Never was he at a loss for words. People flocked to hear him, averaging 2,500 a week.

He increasingly used his pulpit to denounce civil corruption, support women's suffrage (the right to vote), and preach against slavery. He counseled disobedience to the Fugitive Slave Law. Though he deprecated John Brown's raid at Harper's Ferry as the act of a crazy old man, he was fiery about the need for action against slavery.

Ironically, this preacher of the unbounding love and mercy of God began urging northerners to migrate to Kansas and by force make it free soil (a territory prohibiting slavery). He said that in Bloody Kansas, Sharp's rifles were a more powerful moral agent than the Bible. He used his pulpit to raise funds to ship rifles—which became known as "Beecher's Bibles"—to anti-slavery Kansas settlers.

In 1874, Beecher was tried in ecclesiastical and civil courts on the charge of committing adultery, though he was never convicted. His disbelief in a literal hell and his ready acceptance of the doctrine of evolution led to his resignation from the Association of Congregational Ministers in 1882. When he died, five years later, 40,000 people viewed his body as it lay in state.

JULIA WARD HOWE

(1819–1910)

She saw "God's truth marching on"

From her early years, the author of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" exhibited interest in things literary. Julia Ward taught herself English, German, French, and Italian, and before marriage she published essays on Goethe.

Her father, a Wall Street banker, was a devout Episcopalian and strict disciplinarian, and until her marriage, Julia was a "zealous Calvinist." At age 23, the diminutive and auburn-haired Julia married Samuel Gridley Howe, a doctor, moral reformer, and head of the Perkins Institute for the Blind. They had six children.

Her husband was fanatically opposed to married women being active in public life. In the 1850s, Julia published two books of poems, albeit anonymously. Her husband was furious.

Samuel and Julia agreed, however, about one thing: slavery must be abolished. She said John Brown's methods "worked against slavery for the Lord." They entertained Brown in their home, and Samuel was one of the "Secret Six" New Englanders who bankrolled Brown's military exploits in Kansas and at Harper's Ferry. Upon Brown's sentencing, Julia said, "His death will be holy and glorious, and the gallows cannot dishonor him!"

Two years later, in the autumn of 1861, she traveled to Washington, D.C. She saw the city teeming with sol-



National Portrait Gallery

diers, orderlies galloping about, ambulances bouncing back and forth, and countless campfires burning. Upon her return, her minister recommended she put "some good words to that tune" of the popular song "John Brown's Body." Julia slept unsoundly that night and woke in the gray of twilight morning. The lines of the poem began to form in her head, and she immediately wrote them down. In February 1862, "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" was published in the *Atlantic Monthly* (she received \$5).

Within months, the words and music were put together, and soon the song caught on—although it never became as popular with the troops as "John Brown's Body." Like many Civil

THE

ATLANTIC MONTHLY.

A MAGAZINE OF LITERATURE, ART, AND POLITICS.

VOL. IX.—FEBRUARY, 1862.—NO. LII.

BATTLE HYMN OF THE REPUBLIC.

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword:
His truth is marching on.

I have seen Him in the watch-fires of a hundred circling camps;
They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damps;
I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps:
His day is marching on.

I have read a fiery gospel writ in burnished rows of steel:
"As ye deal with my contemners, so with you my grace shall deal;
Let the Hero, born of woman, crush the serpent with his heel,
Since God is marching on."

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;
He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment-seat:
Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer Him! be jubilant, my feet!
Our God is marching on.

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,
With a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me:
As he died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,
While God is marching on.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1862, by TICKNOR AND FIELDS, in the Clerk's Office
of the District Court of the District of Massachusetts.

VOL. IX.

10

War songs, it didn't achieve its greatest popularity until after the war.

Throughout the war, Julia continued to speak and write against slavery, and after the war she turned her attention to the women's suffrage movement. In 1907 she became the first female member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. When she died in 1910, the four thousand who attended her memorial service in Boston's Symphony Hall sang the hymn for which she is still famous.

Mark Galli is associate editor of *Leadership Journal* and a consulting editor for *CHRISTIAN HISTORY*.

OTHER KEY FIGURES



Library of Congress/Leib Image Archive

Harriet Tubman (1820?–1913)
The “Moses” who set people free

In 1849 Tubman, a Baltimore slave, escaped to Philadelphia and freedom. She returned in 1850 to guide her sister and two nieces to freedom, and then other relatives (including her aged parents), and eventually between sixty and three hundred slaves. At one time, Southern reward for her capture stood at an astounding \$40,000.

During the Civil War—which she had foreseen in a vision years earlier—she served both as a nurse and a northern spy and scout, securing military information from blacks behind Confederate lines.

Tubman, sometimes called “the Moses of her people,” was a deeply religious woman who never doubted that her actions were guided by God through omens and dreams.

William B. Johnson (1782–1862)
Architect of the Southern Baptist Convention

Converted at age 12, Johnson soon became convinced of a call to ministry. Pastor of various churches, he also served as headmaster of a number of schools.

His interest in missions led him to suggest the inaugural meeting of the General Baptist Missionary Convention and to become its president from

1841 to 1844. A number of Baptists in the South then decided to separate from the Convention, because they were increasingly troubled over the abolitionist leanings and decisions of their northern brethren. Johnson was the leading architect of a new denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention.

The split, as well as the sundering of the Presbyterian and Methodist churches, dealt a psychological blow to North and South. If the churches couldn’t find a peaceful way out of the slavery issue, what hope was there for the country?

Sojourner Truth (c. 1797–1883)
Her name defined her mission

Isabella Baumfree was born a slave to a Dutch master in New York who, after her escape in 1827, granted her freedom. She became a domestic helper in New York City.

At age 46 or 47, she had a vision of God telling her to “travel up an’ down the land showin’ the people their sins an’ bein’ a sign unto them.” This she did, with a new name that defined her mission. She never learned to read or write, but speaking in a heavy Dutch accent, she spread the abolitionist message, using biblical allusions.

During the war she met President Lincoln. After 1865, she worked for the benefit of freed slaves.

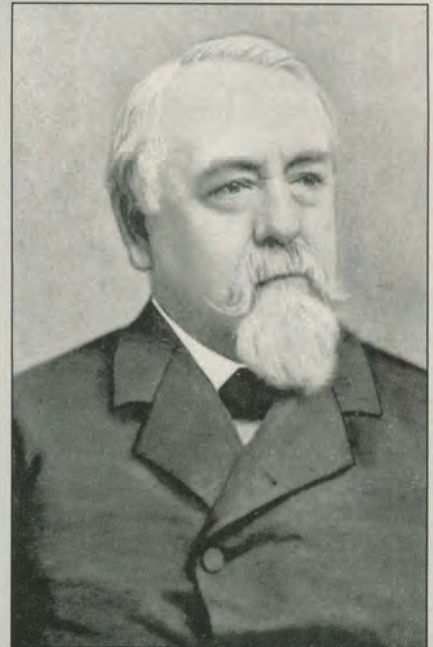
George Hay Stuart (1816–1890)
He financed “ambassadors for Jesus” to the Civil War soldiers

Stuart emigrated from Ireland at age 15. With no formal education, he became a successful Philadelphia banker and dry-goods wholesaler.

In 1861, during an informal convention of the YMCA (Stuart was chairman of the central committee), the United States Christian Commission was born, with Stuart becoming its permanent chairman. It aimed to promote “the spiritual good of the soldiers in the army, and incidentally their intellectual improvement and social and physical comfort.”

The commission used lay people as “ambassadors for Jesus” who followed troops. They preached, held prayer meetings, and distributed Bibles,

tracts, hymn books, hospital supplies, and food. Stuart collected \$6 million and enlisted 5,000 volunteers; distributed were 1.5 million Bibles, 9 million books, and 30 million tracts.



Christ in the Camp by J. William Jones

John William Jones (1836–1909)
Southern army chaplain

“Any history of this army which omits an account of the wonderful influence of religion upon it—which fails to tell how the courage, discipline, and morale was influenced by the humble piety and evangelical zeal of many of its officers and men—would be incomplete and unsatisfactory.”

So wrote chaplain J. William Jones of Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia. Indeed, revivals among Confederate soldiers accounted for about 100,000 conversions.

Jones was ordained in the Southern Baptist Convention in 1860 and was headed for China as a missionary when the war broke out. He enlisted as a private in the Confederate army, but within a year he began serving as a chaplain. Jones, along with other chaplains, ministers, and officers, played a prominent role in a series of revivals that swept Lee’s Army in 1862–63. He later recorded these events in his *Christ in the Camp* (1877).

LET THE NORTH AWAKE!

T. B. M'CORMICK
Will Discuss the Immorality, Illegal-
ity and Unconstitutionality of
AMERICAN SLAVERY,
And the Duty and Power of the General Government
to Abolish it.

IN *Town Hall at Eaton*
AT *7 Oak Hill April 30th 1857*

Mr. M'CORMICK is the Clergyman for whom the Governor of Kentucky made a Requisition upon the Governor of Indiana, charging him with aiding in the escape of Fugitive Slaves. The Warrant was issued and Mr. M'Cormick is thereby exiled from his home. All are respectfully invited to attend.

THE ABOLITIONISTS

Despised and often attacked, they courageously carried the slaves' cause for thirty years. Why have these inescapably Christian men and women been forgotten?

TIM STAFFORD

They were the most hated men and women in America. All across the South, rewards were posted for their lives. Southern postmasters routinely collected their pam-

phlets from the mail and burned them. In the North, these radicals were mobbed, shouted down, beaten up. Their houses were burned, and their printing presses were destroyed. For thirty years, to the very eve of the Civil War, the word "abolitionist" was an insult.

Why are they forgotten?

After the Civil War, abolitionists were lionized. Then, soon, they were forgotten. They still are.

Schoolchildren learn about Lincoln and how he freed the slaves, but the men and women who carried the slaves' cause for thirty years (and who viewed Lincoln through most of his first term as an amoral politician) go nearly unremembered. People know mainly of the abolitionists' underground railroad, which they regarded as a sideshow. Helping escaping slaves did nothing, they felt, to get to the root of the problem. Abolitionists wanted to destroy slavery root and branch, not pick up its fallen leaves.

One reason abolitionists are forgotten is that they were inescapably Christian in their motives, means, and vocabulary. Not that all abolitionists were orthodox Christians, though a large proportion were. But even those who had left the church drew on unmistakably Christian premises, especially on one crucial point: slavery was sin. Sin could not be solved by political compromise or sociological reform, abolitionists maintained. It required repentance; otherwise America would be punished by God. This unpopular message rankled an America that was pushing west, full of self-important virtue as God's darling.

It remains an unpopular message today. Popular American history finds it much easier to assimilate Abraham Lincoln's cautious, conscience-stricken path than to admire the abolitionists' uncompromising indictment of their country's sin. Yet without the abolitionists' thirty years of preaching, slavery would never have become the issue Lincoln had to face.

Radical demands in a racist society

Historians usually set the beginning of the abolitionist movement as 1830, because about then abolition's principal figures—William Lloyd Garrison, Arthur and Lewis Tappan, and Theodore Weld—began their work. Long before, however, Americans had qualms about slavery. Before 1830 nearly everyone, slaveholders included, agreed that slavery should never exist in an ideal society.

The problem was what to do about it. Slavery was important to the economy, both North and South. Americans North and South also profoundly

feared freeing millions of slaves. Most Americans were frankly racist; they believed Africans to be not only inferior but also dangerous if not strictly controlled.

For some time, "colonization" had been the favored scheme of those who disliked slavery. Sending the slaves back to Africa would end slavery and eliminate the threat of African-Americans entirely. America would then be undefiled by an institution that contradicted its Declaration of Independence ("all men are created equal"), and untainted by an inferior race.

But abolitionists said an absolute no to colonization. Seen through the eyes of Christianity, colonization was immoral. What right did white Americans have to force black Americans to leave their native country?

Furthermore, abolitionists regarded colonization as a way of preserving slavery through a pretense of moral intentions. A few slaves might be shipped off to Africa, but the money and willpower to send all African-Americans would never come. Colonization was like a drunkard's vow to quit drinking after just one more drink. William Lloyd Garrison, responding to a Congregationalist minister's preference for a gradual elimination of slavery, asked whether the pastor urged his congregation to *gradually* eliminate sin from their lives.

Abolitionists called their program "immediatism." To the consternation of their opponents—most Ameri-

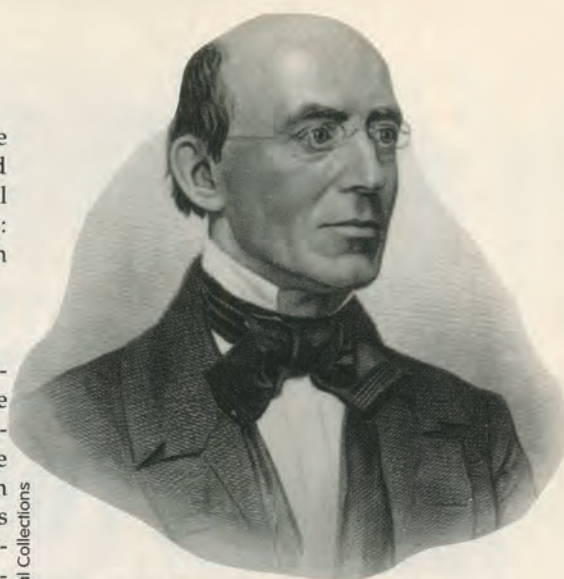
cans—they refused to discuss the problem of what to do with freed slaves. They regarded that as a fatal discursion. Their message was this: First repent of the sin, and then we can talk about what to do.

Not force, "moral suasion"

Quakers formed the core of abolitionism in the early days; they were the only large denomination to have officially banned slave holding. But the movement's dynamism sprang from New England and the territories farther west, newly populated by Yankee farmers. In Boston and its surroundings, Unitarianism had recently all but supplanted traditional Christianity, but elsewhere Yankee Presbyterians and Congregationalists had taken up revivalism. In upstate New York, Charles Finney spurred huge revivals with thousands of converts. Finney preached that genuine conversion would always result in a changed life. Indeed, evangelicals formed a series of societies devoted to reform causes. The American Anti-Slavery Society, organized in 1833, was only one of these. It was, however, by far the most controversial.

Like all such societies, the American Anti-Slavery Society sought to change the world not by force but by "moral suasion." In their official "Declaration of Sentiments" the founding delegates contrasted their methods with those of America's revolution:

"Their principles led them to wage



William Lloyd Garrison founded a radical anti-slavery newspaper, *The Liberator*, in 1831. Always outspoken, once jailed for libel, he wrote, "I will be as harsh as truth, and as uncompromising as justice. On this subject [of slavery], I do not wish to think, or speak, or write, with moderation." He raised passions, but sometimes his anger and arrogance hurt the abolition cause.

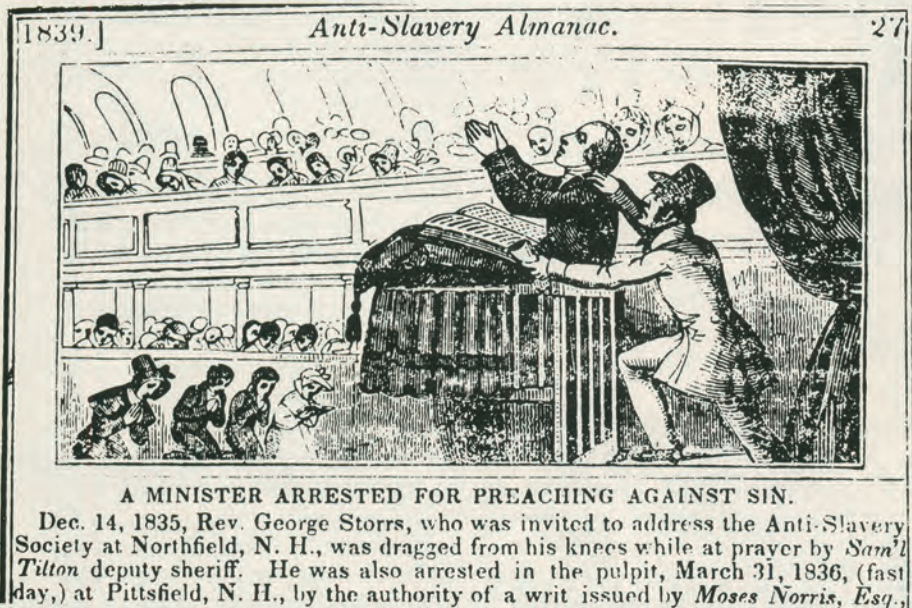
war against their oppressors, and to spill human blood like water, in order to be free. Ours forbid the doing of evil that good may come, and lead us to reject, and to entreat the oppressed to reject, the use of all carnal weapons for deliverance from bondage; relying solely upon those which are spiritual, and mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.

"Their measures were physical resistance—the marshalling in arms—the hostile array—the mortal encounter. Ours shall be such only as the opposition of moral purity to moral corruption—the destruction of error by the potency of truth—the overthrow of prejudice by the power of love—and the abolition of slavery by the spirit of repentance."

Abolitionists repudiated government's power in overthrowing slavery. They saw little value in a coerced repentance, even if it were possible. They believed, furthermore, that the U.S. Constitution gave the government no power to abolish slavery. (On this, later, many changed their minds.)

Garrison: putting power in print

The problem was, abolitionists could not go south to speak to slaveholders about their sin. Abolitionists were in danger even as they formed their new organization in Philadelphia; farther south they would almost certainly be lynched.



Ministers were prominent in the abolition movement—and paid the price for it.

AMERICAN SLAVERY: HOW BAD WAS IT?

*Selections from the most powerful
anti-slavery pamphlet ever written*

American Slavery As It Is, published anonymously by Reverend Theodore Weld in 1839, sold one hundred thousand copies in its first year. Scholar Dwight Lowell Dumond has called it "the greatest of the anti-slavery pamphlets; in all probability the most crushing indictment of any institution ever written."

What made it so powerful? Weld gathered over one thousand eye-witness accounts of slavery's brutality—not only from shocked northerners, but also from reports in southern newspapers. Here are samples.

From Weld's introduction: Two million seven hundred thousand persons in these States are in this condition [of slavery]. They were made slaves and are held such by force, and by being put in fear, and this for no crime! Reader, what have you to say of such treatment? Is it right, just, benevolent? Suppose I should seize you, rob you of your liberty, drive you into the field, and make you work without pay as long as you live, would that be justice and kindness, or monstrous injustice and cruelty? . . .

We will furnish the reader with a few PERSONAL NARRATIVES furnished by individuals, natives of slave states and others . . . facts and scenes of which they were eye-witnesses. . . .

A sample account: Mr. EZEKIEL BIRDSEYE, a gentleman of known probity, in Cornwell, Litchfield County, Conn., gives the testimony which follows:—

"A BAPTIST CLERGYMAN in Laurens District, S.C. WHIPPED HIS SLAVE TO DEATH, whom he suspected of having stolen about sixty dollars. The slave was in the prime of life and was purchased a few weeks before for \$800 of a slave trader from Virginia or Maryland. The coroner, Wm. Irby, at whose house I was then boarding, told me, that on reviewing the dead body, he found it beat to a jelly from head to foot. The master's wife dis-



Peter, a slave in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, shows the scars on his back in this 1863 photograph. An overseer's whipping put Peter in bed for 2 months.

covered the money a day or two after the death of the slave. She had herself removed it from where it was placed, not knowing what it was, as it was tied up in a thick envelope.

"I happened to be present when the trial of this man took place, at Laurens Court House. His daughter testified that her father untied the slave, when he appeared to be failing, and gave him cold water to drink, of which he took freely. His counsel [attorney] pleaded that his death might have been caused by drinking cold water in a state of excitement. The Judge charged the jury, that it would be their duty to find the defendant guilty, if they believed the death was caused by the whipping; but if they were of opinion that *drinking cold water* caused the death, they would find him not guilty! The jury found him—NOT GUILTY!"

Unable to go south personally, abolitionists hoped to send literature. Over thirty years, abolitionists published a huge number of newspapers, tracts, and books, particularly in the early years when Arthur and Lewis Tappan's extremely successful New York business could fund the effort. But little of this literature reached the South, due to postal censorship.

Garrison's paper, *The Liberator*, probably penetrated the South more than any other. It did so simply because southern newspapers could not resist quoting its long, vituperative passages to prove the abolitionists were fanatics.

The Liberator held influence far greater than its small circulation would suggest. Other newspapers came and went, but Garrison's managed to infuriate and enthrall readers more or less continuously from 1831 until after the Civil War. For lonely abolitionists across a vast nation, *The Liberator* proved a constant stimulant. Garrison tended to condemn as a heretic anyone who disagreed with him, and to the distress of other abolitionists his intemperate style showed little imprint of the "power of love." He was, however, unfailingly interesting.

Weld: facing the mobs

Garrison might have made few converts unless others had carried the abolitionist argument in person. Unable to reach the South, abolitionists held countless meetings in the North. They hoped a determined body of northern abolitionists would bring moral influence to bear on the South. Theodore Weld was the leading abolitionist in this mode. He was known as the "most mobbed man in America" because of the furious opposition he faced down in countless towns in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York.

Weld, converted in Charles Finney's revivals, had become one of his chief lieutenants. Wherever Weld went he made a huge impact; every organization wanted a piece of him.

In 1832, while touring Ohio for a reform society, Weld was converted to immediate abolitionism. Shortly thereafter he converted virtually the entire student body of Lane Seminary, in Cincinnati; the students were expelled as a result. Weld then helped found Oberlin College, the first higher institution to admit both women and African-Americans, and moved most of

WHY CHRISTIANS SHOULD SUPPORT SLAVERY

Key reasons advanced by southern church leaders

Many southern Christians felt that slavery, in one Baptist minister's words, "stands as an institution of God." Here's why.

Biblical reasons

► Abraham, the "father of faith," and all the patriarchs held slaves without God's disapproval (Gen. 21:9-10).

► Canaan, Ham's son, was made a slave to his brothers (Gen. 9:24-27).

► The Ten Commandments mention slavery twice, showing God's implicit acceptance of it (Ex. 20:10, 17).

► Slavery was widespread throughout the Roman world, and yet Jesus never spoke against it.

► The apostle Paul specifically commanded slaves to obey their masters (Eph. 6:5-8).

► Paul returned a runaway slave, Philemon, to his master (Philem. 12).

Charitable and evangelistic reasons

► Slavery removes people from a culture that "worshipped the devil, practiced witchcraft, and sorcery" and other evils.

► Slavery brings heathens to a Christian land where they can hear the gospel. Christian masters provide religious instruction for their slaves.

► Under slavery, people are treated with kindness, as many northern visitors can attest.

► It is in slaveholders' own interest to treat their slaves well.

► Slaves are treated more benevolently than are workers in oppressive northern factories.

Social reasons

► Just as women are called to play a subordinate role (Eph. 5:22; 1 Tim. 2:11-15), so slaves are stationed by

God in their place.

► Slavery is God's means of protecting and providing for an inferior race (suffering the "curse of Ham" in Gen. 9:25 or even the punishment of Cain in Gen. 4:12).

► Abolition would lead to slave uprisings, bloodshed, and anarchy. Consider the mob's "rule of terror" during the French Revolution.

Political reasons

► Christians are to obey civil authorities, and those authorities permit and protect slavery.

► The church should concentrate on spiritual matters, not political ones.

► Those who support abolition are, in James H. Thornwell's words, "atheists, socialists, communists [and] red republicans."

—The Editors

the Lane students there.

Weld went on to become famous as an antislavery evangelist. His methods he learned from Finney's revivals. Entering a small town or county seat for a series of meetings, he was usually met with rocks, tomatoes, threats, and sometimes, physical violence. Nevertheless, by the end of one to two weeks of nightly speeches or debates, Weld had nearly always silenced the opposition and converted a sizable part of the town to active abolitionism.

Battle for the churches

Weld went on to train "The Seventy," a group of abolitionist agents supported by the Tappans. The Seventy were sent out like Jesus' disciples to imitate Weld's success across the North. Weld, his voice damaged through constant overuse, retired from speaking but wrote two of the most important and widely distributed books of the abolitionist movement, "The Bible Argument Against Slavery," and "American Slavery As It Is."

In "American Slavery As It Is" Weld amassed clippings from southern newspapers and southerners' testimony to show the cruelty of slavery. Northerners who had little personal knowledge of slavery were shocked.

Harriet Beecher Stowe, who had known Weld at Lane Seminary (her father, Lyman Beecher, was president when Weld was expelled), used "American Slavery As It Is" as her source and inspiration for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The novel made an incalculable impact in creating anti-slavery sympathy when it was published in 1852.

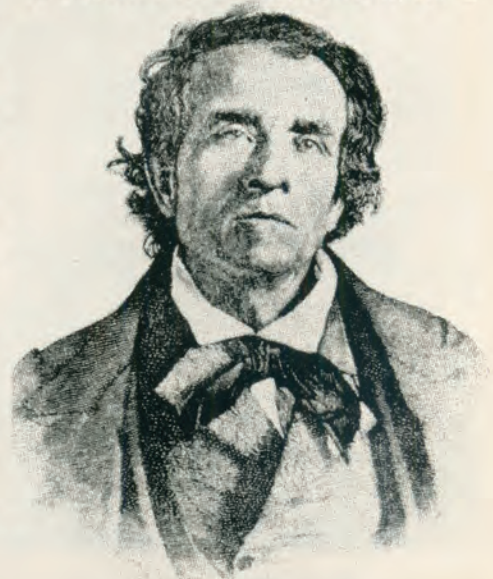
In "The Bible Argument," as it was called, Weld attempted to prove that slavery in the Bible was different in kind from American slavery, for Old Testament slaves had rights and were regarded as persons, while American slaves were property.

The argument was crucial for abolitionists. If southerners could prove that God accepted slavery, the claim that slavery was sin would dissolve. On the other hand, if abolitionists could demonstrate that the Bible condemned American slavery, rather than sanctioned it, they owned a powerful

Theodore Dwight Weld, an apostle for abolition, drew many converts of Charles Finney into the anti-slavery movement. He faced countless mobs. In Troy, New York, the citizens stoned him until he was near death. Weld became the "master authority" among abolitionists, and "he wrote the greatest of the antislavery pamphlets." Yet he eventually left the movement and Christianity.

weapon in the battle to win the churches. Abolitionists expended great energy over this, believing that churches, linked North and South through their denominations, could bring an end to slavery. If slavery was sin, then churches would have to dis-fellowship slaveholders; and slaveholders, abolitionists hoped, would give up slavery sooner than they would give up their church.

Some churches accepted the abolitionist argument and did excommunicate slaveholders. More, however, felt



Library of Congress

that abolitionists were going too far. Abolitionists ended up disillusioned and disgusted by the church's response, and some of them lost their faith. The churches, trying to keep peace at all costs, also failed: the largest denominations eventually split between North and South over slavery.

Finney: foreseeing blood

As time went on, abolitionist optimism withered. The rancor of the debate led Charles Finney, now president of thoroughly abolitionist Oberlin College, to urge Weld and his followers to pull back from abolitionism. Finney wrote in the summer of 1836, nearly twenty-five years before his words would be fulfilled:

"Br.[other] Weld, is it not true, at least do you not fear it is, that we are in our present course going fast into a civil war? Will not our present movements in abolition result in that? . . . How can we save our country and affect the speedy abolition of slavery? This is my answer. . . . If abolition can be made an appendage of a general revival of religion, all is well. I fear no other form of carrying this question will save our country or the liberty or soul of the slave. . . .

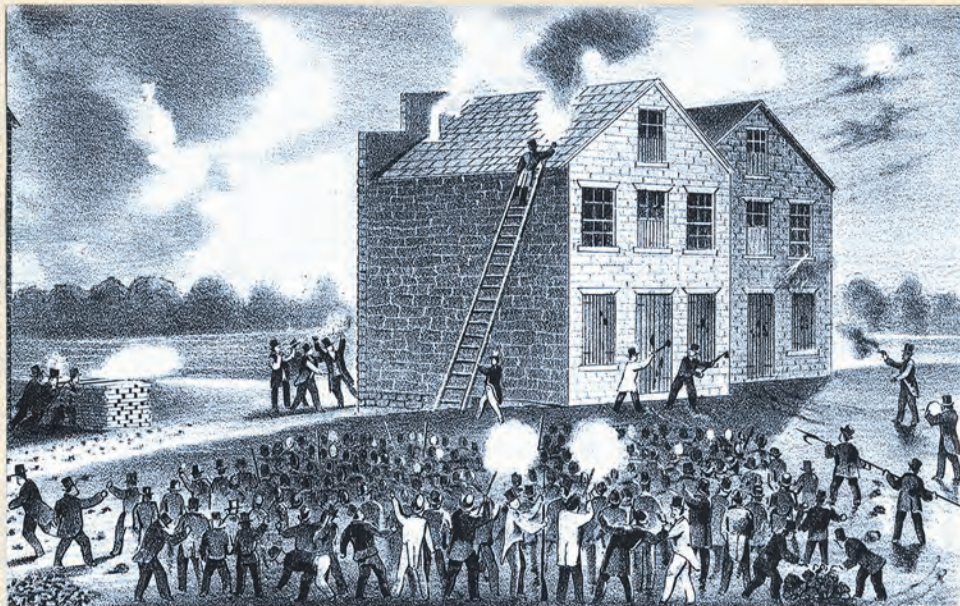
"Abolitionism has drunk up the spirit of some of the most efficient moral men and is fast doing so to the rest, and many of our abolition brethren seem satisfied with nothing less than this. This I have been trying to resist from the beginning as I have all along foreseen that should that take place, the church and world, ecclesiastical and state leaders, will become embroiled in one common infernal squabble that will roll a wave of blood over the land. The causes now operating are, in my view, as certain to lead to this result as a cause is to produce its effect, unless the public mind can be engrossed with the subject of salvation and make abolition an appendage."

Finney failed to convince Weld or any other prominent abolitionist. Like Old Testament prophets, they would tell the truth regardless of consequences. For them abolition had become God's great cause on earth.

Success and failure

Pure abolitionism lasted only through the 1830s. By the end of the decade, the movement was split into two factions. One, led by the cantan-

Tanner, Henry. *The Martyrdom of Lovejoy*. Chicago: Fergus Printing, 1881.



Abolitionists were often attacked and sometimes killed. Because he published an anti-slavery newspaper, Presbyterian minister Elijah P. Lovejoy was "assailed," and his wife frequently had to flee to the attic to escape brick-throwing mobs. Three times his Alton, Illinois, presses were destroyed and dumped into the Mississippi River. In November 1837, while defending a fourth press from the mob shown here, Lovejoy was shot to death.

kerous Garrison, centered in Boston. Many of its leaders had abandoned orthodox Christianity and added causes to anti-slavery: women's rights, pacifism, "no human government" (which called for the end of any form of human hierarchy), and others. The other faction, led by the Tappans and other evangelical moderates, lost much of its potential when the economic collapse of 1837 bankrupted the Tappan brothers. Weld dropped out of abolition entirely in the early 1840s, due to a personal crisis in which he lost his faith and his hope for reform.

At any rate, the abolitionists' success had overwhelmed them. They had begun numbering a few hundred; by 1840 they were thousands, organized into local anti-slavery societies across the North. The movement took on a momentum of its own.

Unable to reach southerners to plead for repentance, abolitionists began to petition Congress to abolish slavery where it had the power: in the District of Columbia, and in newly forming states like Texas or Kansas. A small cadre of abolitionist Congressmen brought slavery into political discourse, and slave-holding states fought back fiercely. The question could not be resolved politically any more than it had been religiously. Northerners became convinced that southerners would never be content until slavery dominated America. Southerners became convinced that they could accept no limitations on

their property rights. In the end no middle ground remained.

Beginning in the 1840s, moderate abolitionists formed a new political party, the Liberty Party. This led to the Free Soil party, which led in turn to the Republican Party. Republicans, including Abraham Lincoln, were certainly not abolitionists. But they promised to limit the South's power over the nation, and the millions that abolitionists had swayed supported them. Lincoln's election led to southern secession, and secession led to war.

The wave of blood that Finney foresaw did indeed roll over the land, and slavery ended, not through repentance and love but through military coercion. By their original criteria of love and "moral suasion," the abolitionists had failed. However, they thanked God when slavery ended, and most of them ultimately supported the Union Army and its Commander-in-Chief, Abraham Lincoln. They saw the war as God's judgment and felt their thirty years of work had been vindicated, if tragically. They had stood for the truth, and faithfully offered Americans a possibility of cleansing from a terrible sin. The offer was refused, and God brought justice by other means: through the payment of blood, which freed the slaves. □

Tim Stafford is senior writer for Christianity Today and author of numerous books including, with Dave Dravecky, Comeback (Zondervan, 1991). He is writing a historical novel on the abolitionist movement.

BROKEN CHURCHES

When slavery divided America's churches

Long before cannons fired over Fort Sumter, civil war raged within America's churches. Three of the nation's largest Protestant denominations were torn apart over slavery or related issues.

What caused the breaks

Before 1830, slavery was an accepted part of American life. But over the next fifteen years, it became so sharp and powerful an issue that it sawed Christian groups in two. Why?

► Cotton production, which depended on slave labor, became increasingly profitable, and essential to the economy, especially in the South.

► During the 1830s, famous revivalist Charles Finney converted thousands of people, many of whom joined the crusade against slavery.

► In 1831, Virginia slave Nat Turner led a violent revolt that killed 57 whites. Southerners feared deeply any attempts to free the millions of slaves surrounding them. That same year, fiery abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison began publishing *The Liberator*. His heated attacks on slavery only hardened southern attitudes.

By 1837, the anti-slavery societies that had existed across the South had disappeared. Southern abolitionists fled to the North for safety.

Southern church leaders began to develop a strong scriptural defense of slavery (see page 24). They attacked the northern abolitionists for their "rationalism and infidelity" and "meddling spirit."

Church bureaucrats tried to keep slavery out of discussion and bring peace through silence. But within eight years, three major denominations had been split apart. Tragically, as historian Sydney E. Ahlstrom has written, "Honorable, ethical, God-fearing people . . . were on both sides."

Baptists

Steps to Division

1839: Foreign Missions Board declares neutrality on slavery.

1840: The new American Baptist Anti-Slavery Convention denounces slaveholding; Baptists in South threaten to stop giving to Baptist agencies.

1845: Home Missions Board refuses to appoint a Georgia slaveholder as missionary.

1845: Alabama Baptists ask Foreign Missions Board whether a slaveholder could be appointed as missionary; northern-controlled board answers no; southerners form new, separate Southern Baptist Convention.

North

Key leader: Francis Wayland, president of Brown University.

Key stands: Refusal to appoint slaveholders as missionaries; dislike of slavery; desire for strict congregational independence.

South

Key leaders: William B. Johnson, first president of the Convention. I. T. Tichenor, later leader of Home Mission Board.

Key stands: Freedom to carry on missionary work without regard to slavery issue; freedom "to promote slavery"; desire for centralized connections among churches.

Baptist
Mission
Conve

Presbyterians

Steps to Division

1837: "Old School" and "New School" Presbyterians split over theological issues. This precedes, and encourages, later full North-South division. Predicts one leader: "The Potomac will be dyed with blood."

1857: Southern members (15,000) of New School become unhappy with increasing anti-slavery views and leave. Ultimately they join Old School, South.

1861: When war breaks out, the Old School splits along northern and southern lines. By 1870, divisions between Old School and New School are healed, but deep geographical divide will last for more than 100 years.

New School (strongest in North)

Key leaders: Lyman Beecher; Nathaniel W. Taylor; Henry Boynton Smith.

Key stands: Moderate interpretation of Calvinistic theology; openness to Charles Finney's new revival techniques; openness to interdenominational alliances; inclination toward abolition.

Old School (strongest in South)

Key leaders: Archibald Alexander; Charles Hodge; Benjamin Morgan Palmer; James Henley Thornwell.

Key stands: Traditional Calvinistic theology; opposition to voluntary societies (that promote, for example, temperance and abolition) because these weaken local church; opposition to abolition.

1837

Methodists

Steps to Division

1836: Anti-slavery activists present legislation at General Conference; slavery agreed to be evil but "modern abolitionism" flatly rejected.

1840: Anti-slavery delegation fails to make slaveholding a discipline issue.

1843: 22 abolitionist ministers and 6,000 members leave and form new denomination—Wesleyan Methodist Church.

1844: Fierce debate at General Conference over southern bishop James O. Andrew, who owns slaves. Resolution declares he must step from post. Angered Southern delegates work out plan for peaceful separation; the following year they form Methodist Episcopal Church, South.

North

Key leader: Orange Scott, abolitionist minister from New England, first president of Wesleyan Methodist Church.

Key stands: Slaveholding a matter for church discipline; abolition.

South

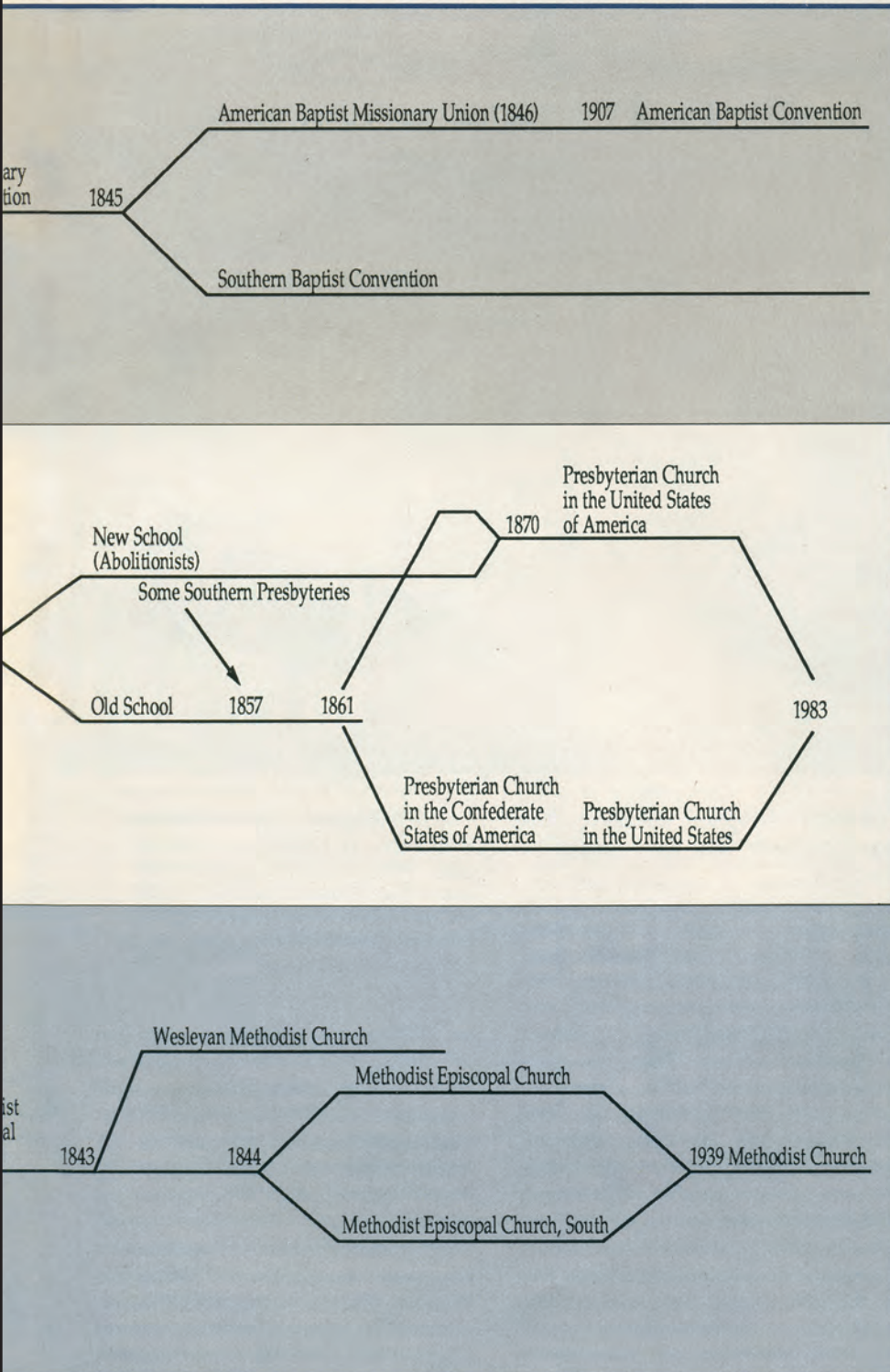
Key leader: James O. Andrew, slave-owning bishop from Georgia. (He acquired slaves through marriage and renounced rights to them, but state law prohibited his freeing slaves). Later bishop in Methodist Episcopal Church, South.

Key stands: Slaveholding acceptable for church leaders; opposition to abolition.

Method
Episco
Church

U.S. BROKEN NATION

...es, what could hold the nation together?



What the breaks caused

Famous Kentucky Senator Henry Clay declared that the church divisions were "the greatest source of danger to our country."

Before 1844, the Methodist Church was the largest organization in the country (not including the federal government). When it divided, a strong cord tying North and South was cut. Indeed, according to historian C. C. Goen, 94 percent of southern churches belonged to one of the three major bodies that were torn apart. Suddenly, in a religious sense, the South was set adrift from the Union.

Civil War Times Illustrated explains that the church divisions "helped crack America's delicate Union in two. ... By severing the religious ties between North and South, the schism bolstered the South's strong inclination toward secession from the Union. It helped bring about a breakup in the national political parties, which splintered into factions.... And the shattering of the parties led to the breakup of the Union itself."

The divided churches also reshaped American Christianity. Important new denominations, such as the Southern Baptist Convention, formed. And Christianity in the South and its counterpart in the North headed in different directions. Southern believers, who had drawn on the literal words of the Bible to defend slavery, increasingly promoted the close, literal reading of scripture. Northerners, who had emphasized underlying principles of the Scriptures, such as God's love for humanity, increasingly promoted social causes.

Only nine years ago were southern and northern Presbyterians reunited. And few observers expect reunion between southern and northern (white) Baptists. American Christianity continues to feel the aftershocks of a war that ended 125 years ago.

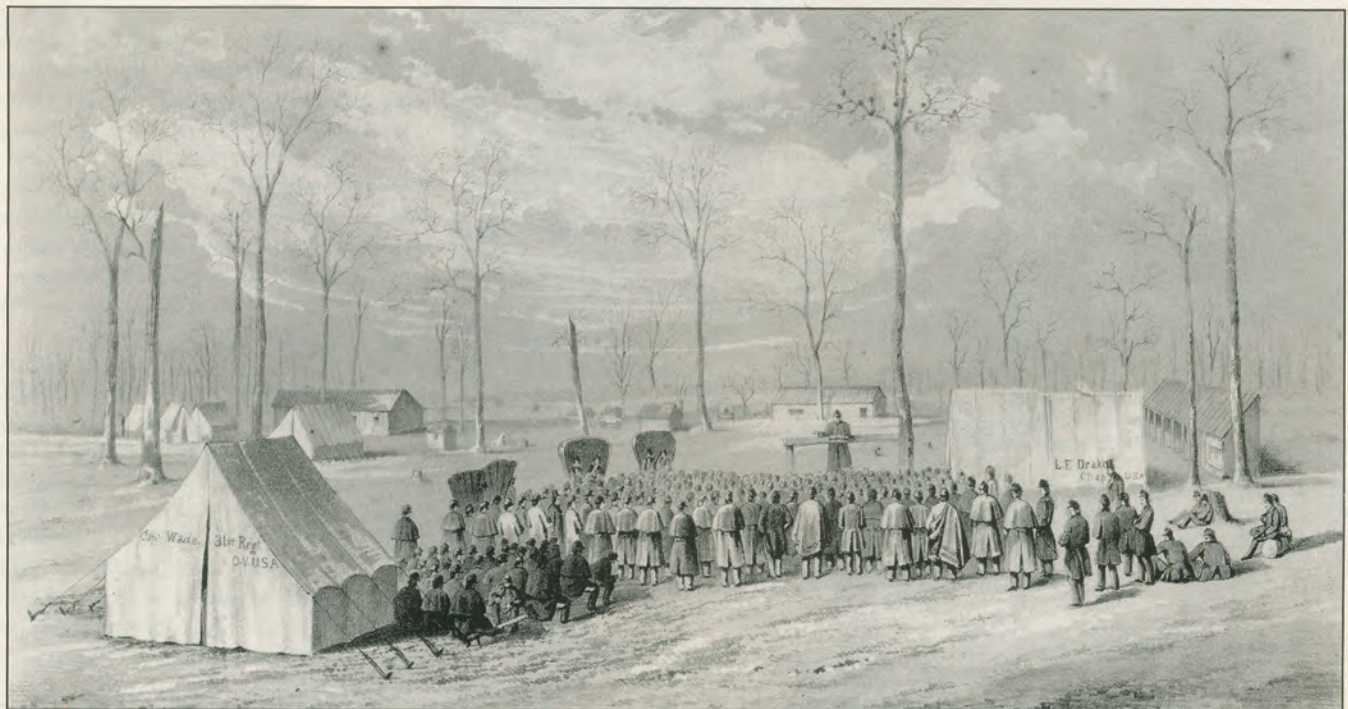
—The Editors

Charts by Joe Ragont Studios, adapted by permission from *Dictionary of Christianity in America* (InterVarsity, 1990).

REVIVALS IN THE CAMP

At first, most Civil War soldiers cared little for religion. But as the bloody war dragged on, hundreds of thousands converted to Christ.

GARDINER H. SHATTUCK, JR.



Library of Congress—Gardiner H. Shattuck, Jr.

Early in 1862, chaplain James Marks pondered how to help the soldiers of the 63rd Pennsylvania Regiment. Bitterness after the defeat at Bull Run gripped the army.

Homesickness and boredom were rife, and cold, wet weather depressed generals and privates alike. Marks made up his mind to lift the soldiers out of their unhappiness and bring their thoughts to a higher, religious plane. Purchasing a tent to hold worshipers, he began a revival season that lasted until the spring. Hundreds of men soon were "born again."

A "tide of irreligion"

In the early stages of the war, revivals like the one Marks led were not the

rule but the exception. Religion did not seem to have left home with the soldiers.

Day-to-day army life was so boring that men were often tempted to "make some foolishness," as one soldier typified it. Profanity, gambling, drunkenness, sexual licentiousness, and petty thievery confronted those who wanted to practice their faith. Christians complained that no Sabbath was observed; despite the efforts of a few generals like George McClellan and Oliver O. Howard, ordinary routines went on as if Sunday meant nothing at all. General Robert McAllister, an officer who was working closely with the United States Christian Commission, complained that a "tide of irreligion" had rolled over his army "like a mighty wave."

The situation changed, however, as the war became more serious and pro-

longed. After the decisive campaigns at Gettysburg, Vicksburg, and Chattanooga in 1863, revivals became a regular feature of Union army life. By that time, tested northern veterans saw the gravity of the military task confronting them. Many sought support in religion.

For instance, in winter quarters at Ringgold, Georgia, before Sherman's attack on Atlanta, scores of Union soldiers were baptized in the Chickamauga Creek, near the site of a recent battle. An army missionary from the

Chaplain Drake preaches to the 31st Ohio Regiment. As historian Howard C. Westwood explains, "Prior to the Civil War, chaplains were relatively rare in American armies. . . . By the war's end their service had proved of such value that chaplaincy had become an enduring institution in American armies."

REPORTS OF THE REVIVAL

The Confederate camp became "a school of Christ."

Two southern clergymen who had been active in the army revivals wrote books detailing the religious life of the Confederate forces.

In 1877, William W. Bennett, a minister who had headed the Methodist Soldiers' Tract Association, published *A Narrative of the Great Revival Which Prevailed in the Southern Armies*. Bennett believed the southern army camp had truly been "a school of Christ," where pious generals like Stonewall Jackson and Robert E. Lee led their men both in battles and in prayer meetings. The "moral miracles" that had taken place among Confederate soldiers were the most magnificent of all time; they truly became the "silver lining" to the dark and heavy cloud of the South's defeat.

Bennett wrote: "In the army of General Lee, while it lay on the upper Rappahannock, the revival flame swept through every corps, division, brigade, and regiment. [One chaplain explained]: 'The whole army is a vast field, ready and ripe to the harvest. . . . The susceptibility of the soldiery to the gospel is wonderful, and doubtful as the remark may appear, the military camp is most favorable to the work of revival. The soldiers, with the simplicity of little children, listen to and embrace the truth. Already over two thousand have professed conversion, and two thousand more are penitent. . . . Oh, it is affecting to see the soldiers crowd and press about the preacher for what of tracts, etc., he has to distribute, and it is sad to see hundreds retiring without being supplied!'

"[Another minister wrote]: 'The cold, mud, and rain, have produced



Wheaton College (IL) Archives & Special Collections

General Robert E. Lee leads soldiers from the Army of Northern Virginia in prayer, in November 1863. At the time, a "Great Revival" was sweeping through the army; 7,000 Confederate troops were converted.

great suffering and sickness among the troops; for we have been entirely without shelter in very exposed positions. . . . In our field hospital we have over 350 sick. . . .

"I never saw men who were better prepared to receive religious instruction and advice. . . . The dying begged for our prayers and our songs. Every evening we would gather around the wounded and sing and pray with them. Many wounded, who had hitherto led wicked lives, became entirely changed. . . . One young Tennessean, James Scott, of the 32d Tennessee, . . . continually begged us to sing for him and to pray with him. He earnestly desired to see his mother before he died, which was not permitted, as she was in the enemy's lines, and he died rejoicing in the grace of God.' "

Published a decade after Bennett's work, J. William Jones's *Christ in the Camp* described what Jones had seen while chaplain to the Army of Northern Virginia.

"On the bloody campaign from the Rapidan to Cold Harbor in 1864," he reported, when the army was constantly in the trenches or on the march, and fought almost daily, Bryan's Georgia Brigade had a season of comparative repose, while held in reserve, when they had from three to five [religious] meetings a day, which resulted in about fifty professions of conversion, most of whom . . . [were] baptized in a pond which was exposed to the enemy's fire, and where several men were wounded while the ordinance was being administered."

—Gardiner H. Shattuck, Jr.

American Tract Society remarked that the soldiers were being united in "one baptism of blood." They had drunk together from the "cup of suffering," and some going off to fight would soon gain entrance into "the church invisible."

In the Army of the Potomac, a great religious excitement appeared during the winter of 1863–64. Numerous brigades erected churches and chapel

tents for prayer meetings. General McAllister said he had never witnessed a better religious feeling among the men. And a reporter for a religious magazine thought the piety of the Union army would win the whole nation to Christ!

The "Great Revival"

Revivals in the Confederate armies may have been even more intense than

among the northern troops. Like their northern counterparts, southerners became noticeably more religious as the war progressed.

Beginning in the fall of 1863, an event later called the "Great Revival" was in full progress throughout the Army of Northern Virginia. Before the revival was interrupted by Grant's attack in May 1864, approximately seven thousand soldiers—10 percent of Lee's



Library of Congress—Leib Image Archives

As shown here, Civil War soldiers often fell into gambling, hard drinking, swearing, and breaking the Sabbath. The revival meetings usually changed that. As one Confederate soldier reported, "Last March . . . my regiment was extremely wicked. You could scarcely meet with any one who did not use God's name in vain. You could see groups assembled almost in every direction gambling. [After a furlough] I returned to my command . . . and to my surprise and delight I found at least three-fourths of my company not only members of the Church of the living God, but professors of religion."

force—were reportedly converted.

Among the troops defending Georgia that same winter, protracted prayer meetings and numerous conversions took place. Private Sam Watkins of the 1st Tennessee Regiment told about ten soldiers who died while they knelt at the mourners' bench. An old tree, which had caught fire from the sparks of a campfire, suddenly came crashing down and crushed the men. Watkins professed no concern at their deaths but was glad their souls had joined "the army of the hosts of heaven."

Even Confederate commanders came forward in this period to accept the Christian faith. General John Bell Hood, crippled by multiple battlefield wounds, was baptized in the fall of 1864. Henry Lay, Episcopal bishop of Arkansas, described the scene: Hood, "unable to kneel . . . supported himself on his crutch and staff, and with bowed head received the benediction." With precious little left, southern soldiers sought spiritual strength from their religious experience.

How many were converted?

Finally, when all the guns fell silent, and the defeated Confederates were dispersed, the northern soldiers who had defended the Union gathered for a last, grand encampment in Washington. Chaplains, agents of the Christian

Commission, and ordinary Christian soldiers recognized this as a providential opportunity to minister to an immense gathering of men. They zealously plunged into the task of saving souls.

A Christian Commission representative compared the final revivals in the Union army camp to the passage of Israel into the Promised Land: "That pillar of fire which had ever gone before us, guiding in a way that we knew not, a way encompassed by difficulties and dangers, but made glorious by the favor of God, seemed now to rest upon every tabernacle and to shine upon every heart. Only a few short weeks did these scenes continue, the order came, the regiments passed away, each to its parent State. . . . And with it closed that work, . . . which had, in the name of Christ, brought healing to many a fainting body, and life to many a perishing soul."

How many soldiers were converted during the Civil War? The best estimates of conversions in the Union forces place the figure between 100,000 and 200,000 men—about 5–10 percent of all individuals engaged in the conflict. In the smaller Confederate armies, at least 100,000 were converted. Since these numbers include only conversions and do not represent the number of soldiers actually swept up in the

revivals—a yet more substantial figure—the impact of revivals during the Civil War surely was tremendous.

Onward Christian soldiers

The soldiers involved in the revivals felt a personal and intensely spiritual experience. Yet the revivals had a social dimension. They encouraged soldiers to abandon such behaviors as card playing or swearing and to adopt the habits of strict Sabbath observance, prayer, and Bible reading.

A disciplined religious life, moreover, was considered useful for a soldier. Since the assurance of eternal salvation removed the fear of death, religious soldiers were presumed to exhibit more heroism than their unconverted comrades. As an anonymous black soldier of the 1st South Carolina (U.S.) Regiment said, "Let me lib wid de musket in one hand an' de Bible in de oder, —dat . . . I may know I hab de bressed Jesus in my hand, an' hab no fear."

The battlefield was "the valley of the shadow of death" to everyone who crossed it, but Christians felt they gained some mastery over its dangers by surrendering their claims to being in control. Stray bullets and cannonballs often struck down even the most wary, convincing pious men that God's inscrutable providence alone protected their bodies and souls. William Russell of the 26th Virginia Regiment recorded this prayer in his diary: "Oh Lord, if we should go into battle, be thou our shield & hiding place. If it is consistent with thy will, that any of us should be killed, may we have a happy admittance into thy Kingdom above."

After the Civil War

The army revivals probably made a more lasting effect on Christianity in the South than in the North.

At the close of the war, the North's religious aspirations for America rose to a peak. The very success the Union enjoyed encouraged northerners to new labors: converting immigrants entering their cities, alleviating oppressive social conditions through a Social Gospel, and bringing the gospel to "benighted heathen" overseas.

At this time, however, traditional doctrines seemed to be under attack. Liberal theologians were thought to be cutting away at Christian orthodoxy and rejecting the idea of a changeless

faith. Amid the materialism and secularism of the Gilded Age, many ordinary Christians in the North fitfully sought reassurance that their beliefs were still true.

Christ in the camp

In the South, on the other hand, little seemed to be left *except* religion. For many years after Appomattox, southern Christians spoke of the spiritual benefits they had gained through adversity. Temporal prosperity made men and women arrogant and seduced them into believing they did not need God. The South's hardship, on the other hand, taught forbearance and Christian humility.

A passage in William Faulkner's novel *The Unvanquished* poignantly captures the mood of southern churches following the war. Faulkner describes Brother Fortinbride, a lay preacher and former soldier. "Victory without God is mockery and delusion," Faulkner's character says, "but . . . defeat with God is not defeat" at all. Religious victory in the midst of temporal defeat was the South's hope in a depressing time.

Baptist minister J. William Jones served as a chaplain to soldiers of the Army of Northern Virginia. In his 1887 book *Christ in the Camp*, he described how the postwar growth of the southern churches began during the army revivals. Jones told about a soldier he had baptized in the army and met again after the war. Though from an affluent family, the soldier had lost everything—his money, his property, even his right arm in battle. When Jones saw him, he was working as a farmer, eking out a meager living. Still, the man wanted no pity: "Oh, Brother Jones, that is all right. I thank God that I have one arm left and an opportunity to use it for the support of those I love."

To Jones, this soldier represented the best about the army revivals. Those who had been converted looked beyond their misfortunes and with a simple faith set to work rebuilding their lives. □

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BEHIND ENEMY LINES

While carrying tracts to Union troops, one preacher was seized by Confederates as a spy.

John Vassar distributed tracts for the American Tract Society among Union troops. As his biography relates, "Uncle John was fifty years old or more, but he kept up with the best. Not only kept up, but often would shoulder for a mile or two the gun or knapsack of some poor fellow ready to give out. . . . After the fight [at Gettysburg] was over, he became separated in some way from our troops, and was captured by Stuart's cavalry.

"When brought into the presence of the general and questioned as a suspected spy, he instantly dissipated the suspicions of the officers by his frank and fearless words for the Master. 'I am working as a colporteur of the American Tract Society, to try

and save the souls of the dear boys that fall around me daily. General, do you love Jesus?"

"The General fenced the question with, 'I know that good old Society, and have no fear of its emissaries.'

"But, my dear general, do you love Jesus?"

"The puzzled officer was relieved by the suggestion of those who had arrested Uncle John, and who were already restive under his close questionings. 'General,' said they, 'take the man's promise that he will not tell of our whereabouts for twenty-four hours, and let us see him out of our lines, or we will have a prayer-meeting from here to Richmond.'

"And so it was decided. He made his way back into the Union lines, and was once more among friends."

—Perry Brown

American Tract Society

*Camp Watson near Manassas
Sept. 1862
For My Dear Brother John:
May God bless my boy
and soon raise him from
his sick bed. — Love
Mother*



To your dear Savior.
THE LONG ROLL.

FELLOW SOLDIERS,

Amid the quietness of the midnight camp we sometimes hear the hasty steps of our returning scouts, as they report, "The enemy is upon us!"

The long roll is instantly beaten, and we all spring to our arms, feeling that the time for action has come.

We have made great sacrifices for our country's good; we are here fighting for our dearest rights—our most sacred privileges.

We all feel that defeat would be ruin, and that we must have victory or death.

But, my dear friends, I come to tell you of the approach of a subtle enemy who is stealing upon you unawares. I come to beat the long roll of alarm to your souls—your immortal souls.

The Stars and Bars flies proudly on this tract for Confederate soldiers. The handwritten note, to a sick soldier stationed near Manassas Battlefield, declares, "May God bless my boy and soon raise him from his sickbed. Look to your dear Savior."

*Further sends this Soldier's
tract for . . .*

CHRISTIANITY &

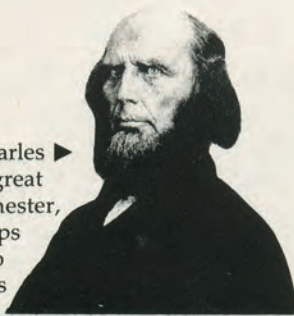
1830s

1830–1831: Charles Finney spurs great revival in Rochester, NY; crime drops and taverns go out of business

1833: American Anti-Slavery Society forms, committed to non-violent moral opposition to slavery

1835: Finney's *Lectures on Revivals* published; Alexander Campbell defines restorationist theology

1837: Presbyterian Church splits into Old and New School branches; Theodore Weld writes *The Bible against Slavery* ►



1840s

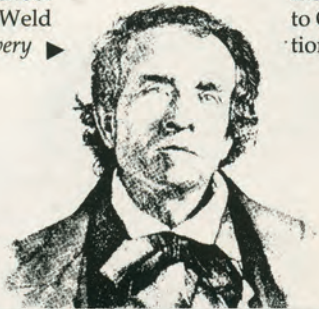
1840: Missionary David Livingstone sails for Africa

1843: William Miller's predicted date for Christ's return passes; Adventist churches begin to form; abolitionists within Methodism separate and form Wesleyan Methodist Church

1844: Joseph Smith, founder of Mormonism, assassinated; YMCA founded

1845: Southern Baptist Convention forms as Baptists separate over slavery

1847: John Humphrey Noyes moves his perfectionist colony to Oneida, NY; Mormon migration to Utah



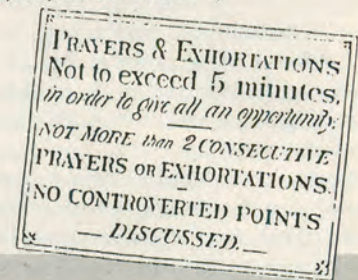
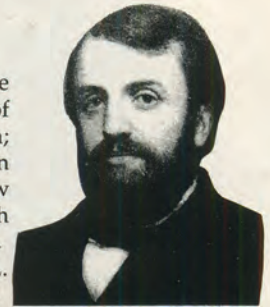
1850s

1854: Immaculate Conception of Mary dogma; Charles Spurgeon comes to New Park Street Church

1855: Dwight L. Moody converted ►

1857: North-South division of Presbyterians completed; Jeremiah Lanphier begins weekly prayer meetings in New York City

1858: China opened to Christian missions; "Third Great Awakening" of daily prayer meetings across the U.S.; estimated 1,000,000 converted ▼



POLITICAL/WORLD EVENTS

1830: Daniel Webster debates states' rights in Senate



► 1831: William Lloyd Garrison launches abolitionist periodical *The Liberator*; Nat Turner's slave revolt

1832: New England Anti-Slavery Society formed; Andrew Jackson reelected

1833: Founding of Oberlin College, abolitionist stronghold and first co-ed college; slavery abolished in British Empire

1833–37: Financial panic in the U.S.

1834: Anti-abolition riots in the North

1836: Martin Van Buren president

1837: Elijah P. Lovejoy, editor of abolitionist paper, murdered; telegraph invented; Victoria queen of England

1838: Underground Railroad established ►

1840: Benjamin Harrison elected president; first postage stamps (3¢)

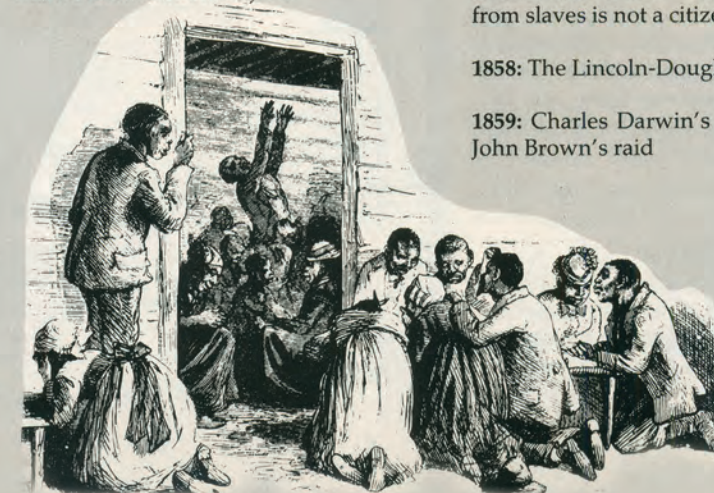
1841: John Tyler becomes president

1844: James K. Polk elected president

1846–48: Mexican-American War

1847: Frederick Douglass launches *North Star* newspaper

1848: Zachary Taylor elected president; Marx's *Communist Manifesto*



1850: The Compromise of 1850 enacted; Millard Fillmore president; U.S. population—23 million (3.2 million slaves)

1852: Franklin Pierce elected president; Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

1854: Birth of the Republican Party

1856: James Buchanan elected president

1857: Dred Scott decision: Supreme Court rules that a "Negro" descended from slaves is not a citizen

1858: The Lincoln-Douglas Debates

1859: Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*; John Brown's raid

THE CIVIL WAR

Dr. Keith J. Hardman is chair of the department of philosophy and religion at Ursinus College, Collegeville, Pennsylvania, and the author of *Charles Grandison Finney, 1792–1875: Revivalist and Reformer* (Syracuse, 1987).

1860–63

1861: U.S. Christian Commission founded; Scripture and tract distribution to soldiers begins (over 11,000,000 the first year)

1862: Revivals begin in regiments from Georgia; Julia Ward Howe writes "The Battle Hymn of the Republic"

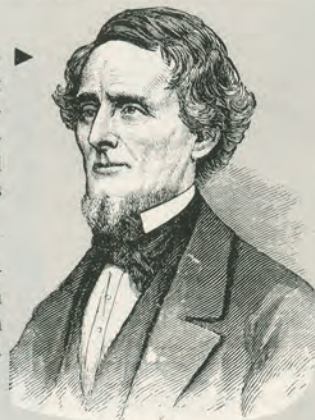
1863: The "Great Revival" throughout the Confederate Army; revivals begin in the Union Army; U.S. Christian Commission reports over 18,000,000 tracts and Scripture portions distributed to soldiers ▼



1860: Abraham Lincoln elected president; South Carolina secedes from Union (Dec. 20)

1861: Jefferson Davis elected President of Confederacy (Feb. 9); Fort Sumter fired upon (Apr. 12); Tennessee 11th and final state to secede (June 8); in first battle of Bull Run (Manassas), Confederates rout Union forces

1862: Union wins control of Mississippi River; Battle of Antietam yields single bloodiest day in American history—22,719 killed, wounded, or missing (Sept. 17)



► **1863:** Lincoln issues Emancipation Proclamation; 50,000 casualties at Gettysburg; Gettysburg Address (Nov. 19); Lincoln proposes national day of Thanksgiving

Photo Credits: Finney, Oberlin College; Moody, Moody Bible Institute; Garrison, Billy Graham Center Museum; Slave worship, North Wind Picture Archives; Tract distribution and Lee's prayer meeting; *Christ in the Camp* by J. William Jones (B. F. Johnson & Co., 1887); Davis, Lincoln, and Appomattox, *Old-Fashioned Patriotic Cuts* (Dover).



1864–69



1864: Revival in General Lee's Army of Northern Virginia interrupted by Grant's attack; "In God We Trust" first put on U.S. coin; Pope Pius IX's *Syllabus of Errors* condemns socialism, liberalism, and rationalism

1865: Estimates of 150,000 conversions in the Confederate Army, and perhaps as many in the Union Army; Hudson Taylor begins China Inland Mission

1867: General Howard helps found Howard Theological Seminary for African-Americans

1864: Lincoln reelected; Sherman's march through Georgia



1865: Lee surrenders at Appomattox (Apr. 9); Lincoln dies (Apr. 15); Andrew Johnson becomes president; 13th Amendment abolishes slavery; Ku Klux Klan organized

1866: First formal observance of Lincoln's birthday; Congress passes Civil Rights Bill

1867: Congress passes 3 Reconstruction Acts; vote given to all males over 21; Russia sells Alaska to U.S.

1868: President Johnson impeached; Ulysses S. Grant elected president; 14th Amendment grants citizenship to African-Americans

FIGHTERS OF FAITH

These Christian generals helped wage the Civil War, and their faith affected how they did it.

JEFFERY WARREN SCOTT
with Mary Ann Jeffreys

ROBERT E. LEE (1807–1870)
*The ultimate general and
the ultimate gentleman*

Robert E. Lee's piety, morality, and compassion were apparent to all who crossed his path. As one historian has written, "Robert Lee was one of the small company of great men in whom there is no inconsistency to be explained, no enigma to be solved. What he seemed, he was—a wholly human gentleman, the essential elements of whose positive character were two and only two, simplicity and spirituality."

A "low church" Episcopalian all his life, Lee received religious training at home. He observed that his mother, who influenced him greatly, was "singularly pious from love to Almighty God and love of virtue." His father, "Light Horse Harry" Lee, had won fame in the Revolutionary War.

At West Point, Lee accomplished a still-legendary feat: he graduated with the highest cadet rank and without a single demerit.

After graduation, Lee married Mary Custis, whose piety rivaled his mother's. They had seven children (all three sons served with high rank in the Confederate Army), and Lee was confirmed with two of his daughters in Christ Church, Alexandria, Virginia, in 1853.

Lee served gallantly in the Mexican War and later became superintendent of West Point. After John Brown's raid at Harper's Ferry, he led the Marines that stormed and retook the garrison.

In 1861, as civil war broke out, Lee was offered chief command of the Union forces. He refused the offer, re-

signed his commission, and soon became a general for the Confederacy.

Though Lee once described the master-slave relationship as "the best that can exist between the black and white races," he advocated gradual emancipation of slaves. When he received slaves from his father-in-law's will, in fact, he released them. But Lee would not succumb to the northern abolitionists' determination to force the issue.

Throughout the war, Lee faced overwhelming Union forces. At first criticized as "Granny Lee" in the South, he soon displayed his military brilliance. At times during the war, his casualties were only about one-third of those in opposing units.

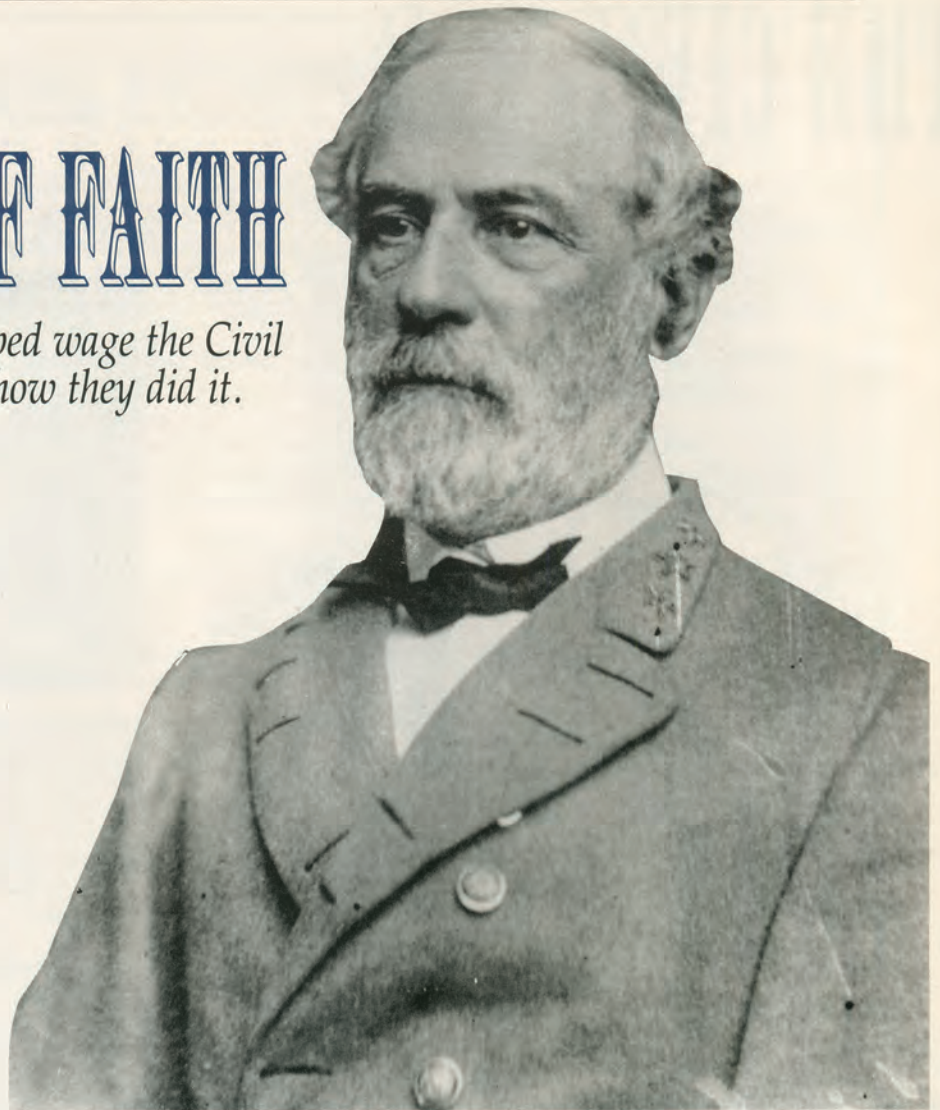
Lee daily read the Bible and prayed, and these lifelong practices were not greatly altered during the war. Unlike his Union counterpart, General Grant, he was noted for self-denial and self-control. He disliked tobacco, hated

whiskey, and drank wine only in small quantities on rare occasions.

Lee conferred often with chaplains and attended their services frequently. Following victory, he offered prayers of thanksgiving to God. After the Seven Days' Battles that saved Richmond in 1862, Lee said he was "profoundly grateful to the Giver of all victory for the signal success with which he has blessed our arms. . . ."

More than once Lee was prevailed upon to lead the funeral service for dead soldiers. He often wrote to the widows of friends who had lost their lives in the war. "But what a cruel thing is war," he said, "to separate and destroy families and friends, and mar the purest joys and happiness God has granted us in this world; to fill our hearts with hatred instead of love for our neighbors, and to devastate the fair face of this beautiful world."

Following the Confederates' defeat, Lee said, "I have fought against the



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people of the North because I believed they were seeking to wrest from the South its dearest rights. But I have never cherished toward them bitter or vindictive feelings, and I have never seen the day when I did not pray for them." Lee applied for restoration of his U.S. citizenship, but the application was mislaid. Astoundingly, it was not found and granted until the 1970s.

Lee became president of Washington College (now Washington and Lee) in Lexington, Virginia. He attended Grace Church there, though sometimes he dozed in services, and he led the church's vestry (board). His son described his religion as "practical" and "everyday."

President Franklin Roosevelt once declared, "We recognize Robert E. Lee as one of our greatest American Christians and one of our greatest American gentlemen." But Lee described himself as "nothing but a poor sinner, trusting in Christ alone for salvation."

"STONEWALL" JACKSON

(1824-1863)

Both in faith and in battle, he would not be moved.

Thomas Jonathan Jackson was as thorough a Christian as he was a soldier. One writer described him: "He lives by the New Testament and fights by the Old."

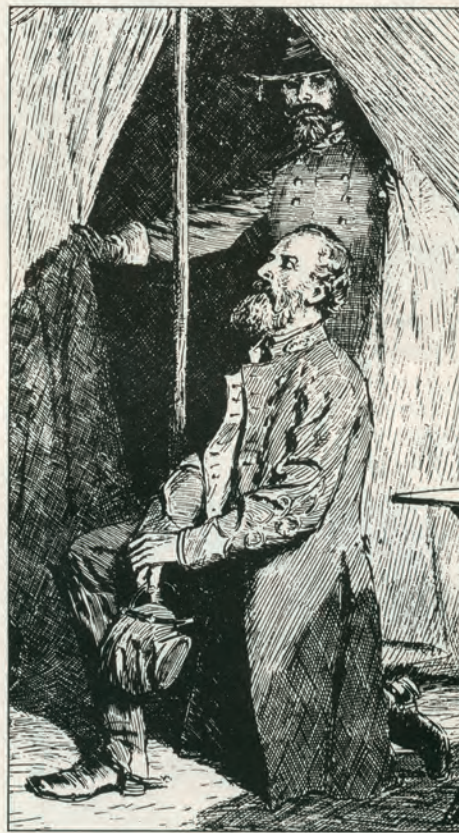
Orphaned at age 6, Jackson grew up poor and uneducated in foster homes. He entered West Point near the bottom of his class, but he graduated seventeenth. The second lieutenant then served in the Mexican-American War.

Following the war, while Jackson was in the occupation force, his superior challenged him to study Christianity. He did, all the while struggling with intestinal problems. He wrote his sister that his digestive problems "were decreed by Heaven's sovereign, as a punishment for my offenses against his Holy Laws and have probably been the instrument of turning me from the path of eternal death, to that of everlasting life." He was baptized at age 25.

Five years later, his young wife and unborn child died, which devastated him but ultimately strengthened his faith. He remarried, and his second wife, Mary Anna Morrison, lived until 1915.

Though baptized an Episcopalian, Jackson became a Presbyterian, and he was a noted tither to his home church. The Jackson family held prayers at seven A.M., and even servants were required to attend. Jackson never waited for anyone, not even his wife, to begin prayers. Following breakfast, Jackson would leave for his teaching duties at Virginia Military Institute (where his students called him "Tom Fool Jackson"). Jackson would return home for Bible study, which he did using a commentary.

Jackson believed that slavery was ordained of God. Strict but kind with his



own slaves, he asked his wife to teach two slave boys to read. He even organized a Sabbath school for African-Americans in Lexington and taught a class for five or six years. "My Heavenly Father has condescended to use me as an instrument in getting up a large Sabbath school for the negroes here," he wrote. "He has greatly blessed it."

In April 1861, Jackson prayed with his wife and his cadets, and then left for Richmond to assume his command. At the Battle of Manassas in July 1861, he took a green infantry brigade and turned the tide of the battle. During the fighting, Brigadier General Bar-

nard E. Bee instructed his men: "There stands Jackson like a stone wall. Rally behind the Virginians!"

The name stuck, and "Stonewall" Jackson soon became Lee's right arm in battle. He daringly moved large numbers of men quickly (some say too recklessly). In one sixty-day period, his troops marched over six hundred miles and fought five major battles and numerous skirmishes.

His military prowess earned him the fear of northerners, who regarded him as "a species of demon," "a fallen angel," and "a cold-blooded rascal." But Jackson never forgot where his abilities came from. After Lee commended his performance at Chancellorsville, Stonewall replied: "General Lee is very kind, but he should give the praise to God."

On the battlefield, Stonewall Jackson maintained his devotional life. According to historian John W. Schildt, "His men saw him stumbling and falling over trees and rocks. They almost thought he had too much to drink. That was not the problem. He was praying with his eyes closed while he walked."

Following every victory, Jackson ordered his chaplains to hold thanksgiving services. He was known to ride through the camps distributing tracts to his soldiers, and he often took part in his troops' religious meetings. Wrote Henry Kyd Douglas in *I Rode with Stonewall*: "And when he had reached the place of prayer, lo, the camp was there. Bowed heads, bent knees, hats off, silence! Stonewall Jackson was kneeling to the Lord of Hosts, in prayer for his people!" Sundays were generally a day of rest. "Deacon Jackson," as his men sometimes called him, hated doing battle on Sunday.

Jackson was rigid and stern, and he fought intensely with his subordinates. Some thought he was insane. But despite the way some writers have portrayed him, Jackson was not a fanatic. It's simply that, in one historian's words, his "primary interests" were "Biblical theology and Christian discipleship."

Because of this, he could declare: "My religious belief teaches me to feel as safe in battle as in bed. God has fixed the time of my death." After being accidentally shot by his own forces, he died on Sunday, May 10, 1863. "I always wanted to die on a Sunday," he said.

WILLIAM PENDLETON (1809–1883)
The chief of artillery who was Robert E. Lee's pastor



Ellenor P. Gadsden Papers, The University Library, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Virginia.

Three years after graduating from West Point, William Pendleton decided to enter the Episcopal ministry, and he was ordained at age 29. In 1853, he became the rector of Grace Church in Lexington, Virginia, where he served until his death thirty years later.

When war broke out, Pendleton reentered the military and quickly became the Confederate chief of artillery. In his first battle, Pendleton commanded four guns, which he dubbed "Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John." He gave the command, "While we kill their bodies, may the Lord have mercy on their sinful souls—FIRE!"

Pendleton served all the way from the First Battle of Manassas (Bull Run) until Appomattox. During the war, he preached often to his troops.

After the war, he returned to Grace Church in Lexington. He looked much like Robert E. Lee, and he counted Lee as his close personal friend. Lee served on the vestry of Pendleton's church.

Pendleton spent the remainder of his life helping the poor. Searching for meaning in defeat, he compared the northern occupation forces to the Romans who persecuted the first-century Christians.

LEONIDAS POLK (1806–1864)
The bishop who fought "the battle of the Lord."

In his final year at West Point, Leonidas Polk read an evangelical tract and converted to Christ. His conversion

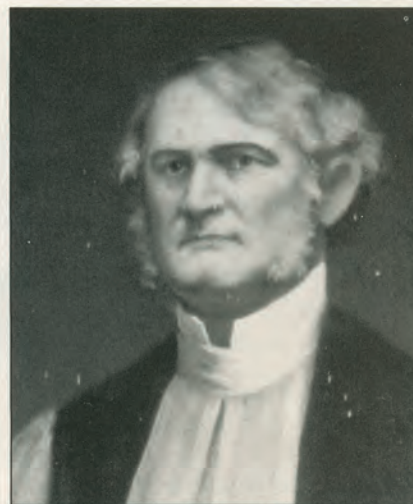
and baptism touched off the first revival in West Point's history.

Receiving his military commission in 1827, Polk resigned it six months later in order to enter Virginia Theological Seminary. He later became the first Episcopal bishop of Louisiana.

In 1861, Polk accepted a commission as a major general in the Confederate Army. Though on leave from his duties as bishop, "the bishop-general" was criticized in the North for serving jointly as churchman and warrior. Southerners saw it differently. "Like Gideon and David," the *Memphis Appeal* proclaimed, "he is marshaling his legions to fight the battle of the Lord."

This he did, pushing back Ulysses S. Grant at Belmont and helping lead Confederate forces at Chickamauga. During the battle of Perryville, Confederate General Cheatham advanced, shouting, "Give 'em hell, boys!" General Polk, conscious of the fact he was also an Episcopal bishop, joined in: "Give it to 'em, boys; give 'em what General Cheatham says!"

In *Battles for Atlanta*, Ronald H. Bailey reports that "On his way to battle at Resaca, General John Bell Hood confided his wish to be baptized. About midnight, [Leonidas] Polk went to



Courtesy of University Archives and Special Collections: The University of the South

Hood's headquarters. There, while the one-legged Hood, unable to kneel, leaned on his crutches in the dim candlelight, the portly bishop dipped his hands into a horse bucket of consecrated water and performed the rite of baptism. Then he buckled on his sword and returned to Resaca."

In June 1864 a cannonball struck down the most beloved general in the Army of the Tennessee.

OLIVER O. HOWARD (1830–1909)
"Old Prayer Book" fought for the North—and then for freed slaves.



National Archives

General Oliver Otis Howard was a New England abolitionist who never drank, smoked, or swore. His troops called him "Old Prayer Book."

Howard's brigade was routed at the First Battle of Bull Run. He blamed the Union Army's horrific defeat on its decision to attack on a Sabbath.

Howard, who was widely known as "the Christian soldier," also fought at Antietam, and he was routed by Stonewall Jackson at Chancellorsville. After losing his right arm at the battle of Seven Pines, he mustered humor to say to General Kearny, who had lost his left arm, "I am sorry, General, but you must not mind it; . . . we can buy our gloves together!"

On a Sabbath rest during Sherman's march to Atlanta, General Howard, as he occasionally did, spoke during chapel services. According to a missionary of the Christian Commission, "the General spoke of the Saviour, his love for Him and his peace in His service, as freely and simply as he could have spoken in his own family circle."

Following the war, Howard led the Freedmen's Bureau, a government effort to assist former slaves. He helped to found a university for blacks in 1867. Named in his honor, Howard University stands today, in *The New York Times's* words, as "the largest and most prestigious black research university in America." The general also stirred controversy when he tried to integrate a church.

Howard served as chairman of the

WHAT ABOUT ULYSSES S. GRANT?

He was the Union's leading general and twice president of the United States. But he was no saint.

The Grant family pew sits in the United Methodist Church of Galeana, Illinois, testifying to the religious roots of Ulysses S. Grant. Finding evidence of faith in the general's adult life is harder.

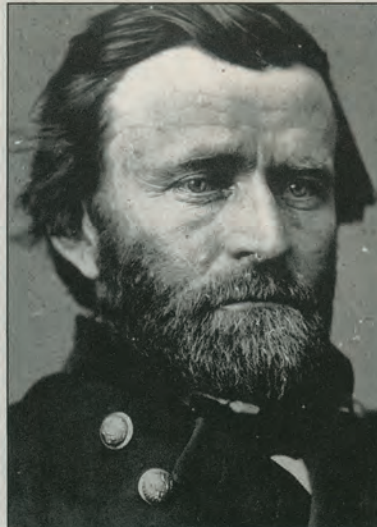
At West Point, Grant (1822–1885) complained that the academy tried to mold cadets into gentlemanly Episcopalians. He resisted.

Grant's wife, Julie, was a devout Methodist. Throughout their marriage it rankled her that her husband never became a churchgoer. He claimed he didn't like the music.

Grant became known for intemperate drinking. The allegations were partially true: he drank too much when he was depressed or away from Julie.

Though passed over by the War Department at the outbreak of the Civil War, Grant eventually rose to the occasion of his life. Regarded by history as a great general, he went on to serve two terms as president.

Grant liked to say he was a verb and not a pronoun. When Lee surrendered to him at Appomattox, he let



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Lee's "men who claim to own a horse or mule . . . take the animals home to work their little farms." He also sent rations to Lee's starving men.

On his deathbed, after a long battle with throat cancer, Grant was rebaptized at the insistence of his friends.

board of the American Tract Society and as superintendent of West Point. In 1869 he presented Bibles to all incoming West Point cadets, a practice that continues today.

GEORGE B. MCCLELLAN

(1826–1885)

On his orders, the Sabbath was observed throughout the Union Army.

George McClellan took command of the Armies of the United States in November 1861. The ambitious "Young Napoleon" was 35 and a newly converted Christian.

The Union had just suffered a great defeat at the First Battle of Bull Run. Some people said the Union was defeated because Federal troops attacked on Sunday morning, dishonoring the Sabbath. McClellan agreed, and he ordered that the Sabbath be observed throughout the Union Army, with services held whenever military demands did not absolutely prevent worship and rest.

However, devotion to God and pop-

ularity with his troops were not enough to make McClellan one of history's great commanders. He was overcautious; he continually overestimated the Confederates' strength, and he was slow to attack. Four months after becoming commander-in-chief, he was demoted by Lincoln; eight months after that, he was ordered to yield his army to General Burnside, go home, and wait for orders. They never came.



National Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

In 1864, McClellan ran against Lincoln as the Democratic candidate for president. Early on, it looked like he might win, but Union military victories boosted support for Lincoln, and McClellan carried only three states. Later, he served as governor of New Jersey.

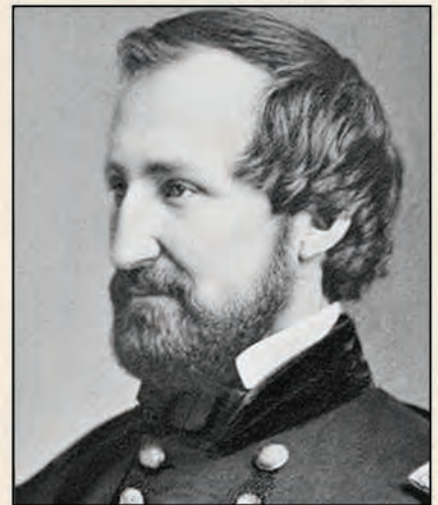
WILLIAM ROSECRANS (1819–1898)

The passionate Catholic wouldn't fight on Sundays.

General Rosecrans led his troops with the motto "[God] never fails those who truly trust." The *New York Times*, however, was not impressed with his dependence on divine guidance. The paper characterized him as depressive and indecisive in battle.

Following the battle at Murfreesboro, Rosecrans refused to pursue the defeated Confederate force, led by General Braxton Bragg, because he wanted his army to rest on the Sabbath.

Though known for drinking and swearing heavily, "Old Rosy" increased the number of chaplains in his



Wikipedia

company. And he often engaged his staff in religious discussions, in one period keeping them up until 4 A.M. for ten nights in a row. He attended Mass every day.

After maneuvering brilliantly in the 1863 Tullahoma Campaign in Tennessee, Rosecrans's forces suffered brutal losses at Chickamauga, "the River of Death." Some 35,000 men fell on both sides in two days' fighting, and the heavy losses effectively ended Rosecrans's military career.

Dr. Jeffery Warren Scott is pastor of Broadman Baptist Church in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio. Mary Ann Jeffreys is editorial coordinator of CHRISTIAN HISTORY.

PREACHING THE HOLY WAR

What did Protestant ministers say about the raging national battle?

JAMES H. MOORHEAD

When the men in blue and the men in gray marched off to fight in 1861, they carried more than rifles and knapsacks. They took the blessing of ministers and other Christian leaders.

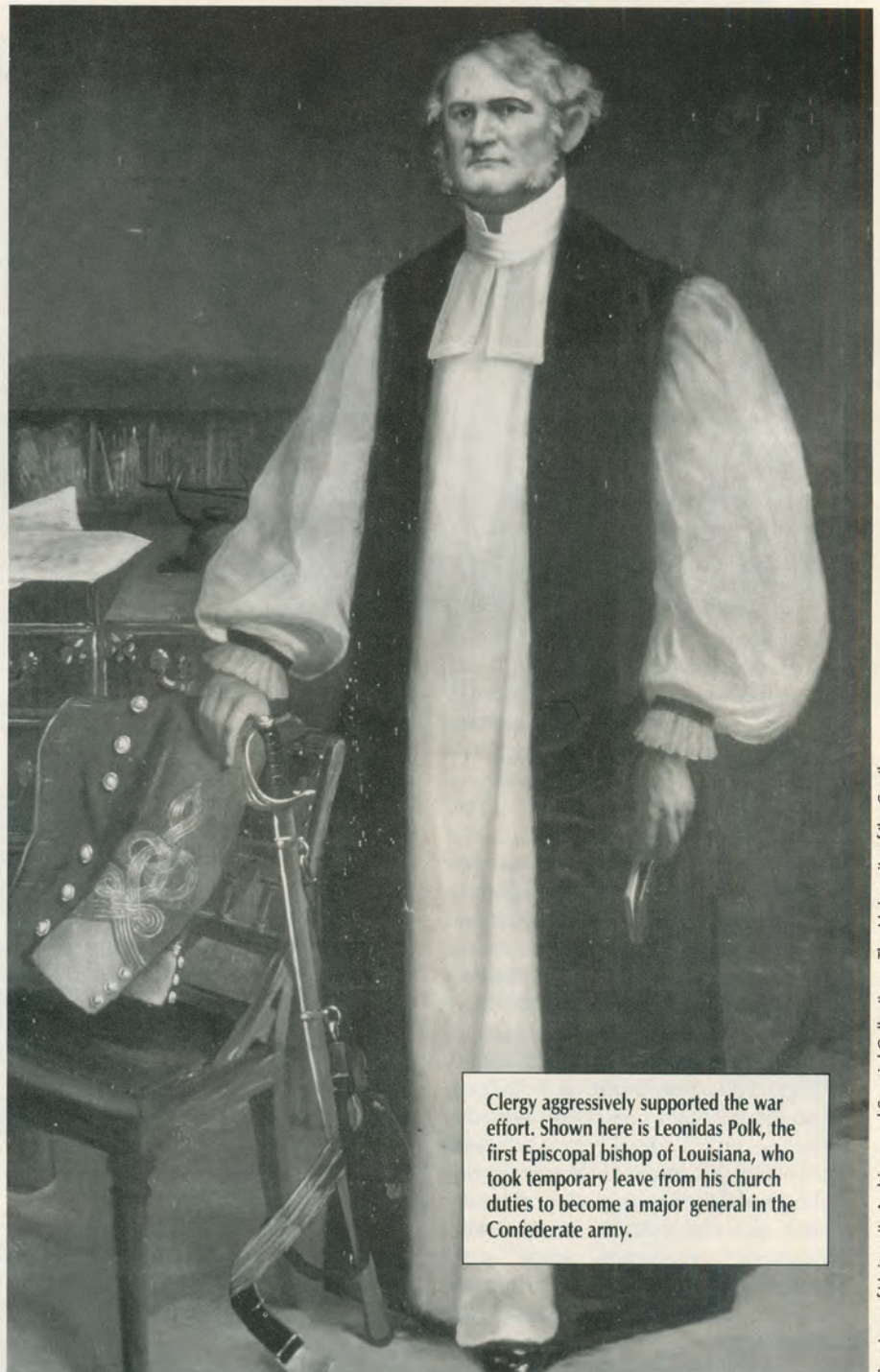
There were, of course, exceptions. Historic peace churches (Mennonites, Brethren, and other Anabaptist bodies) did not endorse participation in the conflict, and disaffected elements in each section of the divided country voiced dissent.

On the whole, though, clergy of North and South found scriptural grounds for ardently supporting their respective causes. They preached that message unabashedly. America in the mid-nineteenth century was a culture drenched in the images of the Bible. The ministers' ability to justify war in the name of the sacred Book did much to mobilize popular support and to maintain that loyalty until bullets and disease had claimed more than six hundred thousand lives.

North: crusaders for God

When the election of Lincoln in November 1860 prompted southern secession, many northern ministers initially advised caution. Those with strong abolitionist convictions argued that departure of the errant states might prove a blessing, freeing the United States from the taint of slavery. The more numerous conservatives, some of whom sympathized with the South, hoped that a show of forbearance would cause the disunion movement to collapse and bring the seceded states to their senses.

When Confederate batteries opened fire on Fort Sumter in April 1861, however, reluctance to coerce the South vanished. The Union had to be pre-



Clergy aggressively supported the war effort. Shown here is Leonidas Polk, the first Episcopal bishop of Louisiana, who took temporary leave from his church duties to become a major general in the Confederate army.

Courtesy of University Archives and Special Collections: The University of the South

served. Lincoln's call for volunteers to suppress the rebellion won nearly universal backing from ministers. The words of a Congregational minister in Northampton, Massachusetts, may fairly stand as the motto of countless other Protestant leaders: "If the crusaders, seized by a common enthusiasm, exclaimed, 'It is the will of God! It is the will of God!'—much more may we make this our rallying cry and inscribe it on our banners."

The Union possessed sacred meaning because the hopes of humankind rested on its preservation. The United States stood in the vanguard of a biblical civilization. Its twin pillars—a pure Protestant Christianity and republican institutions—served as a model for the renovation of the world. If this elect nation were destroyed, said Baptist minister and educator Francis Wayland, "crushed and degraded humanity must sink down in despair."

Many Yankee ministers thought Union soldiers were preparing the way for the kingdom of God on earth. William Buell Sprague, editor of the famed *Annals of the American Pulpit*, predicted that northern success would usher in "a flood of millennial [sic] glory," "the great Thanksgiving Day of the World." When Julia Ward Howe, visiting Washington, D. C., in autumn 1861, awoke one morning near daybreak to pen the familiar line, "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord," she expressed a widespread faith.

South: defenders of a holy cause

Southern clergy also viewed their cause as holy. Several noted ministers, including Presbyterians James H. Thornwell and Benjamin P. Morgan, played a prominent role in the drive for secession. When the conflict began, the clergy justified it as a classic instance of a just war—and more.

The citizens of the new Confederate nation bore a special mission: to set before the world the ideals of ordered liberty, states' rights, and biblical values, all of which Yankees had perverted. Many religious leaders rejoiced that the Confederate constitution—unlike that of the United States—explicitly recognized the nation's dependence upon God. Accordingly, said one minister, "the Southern Confederacy will be the Lord's peculiar people." In the words of another, "the pillar of cloud



by day and fire by night was not more plain to the children of Israel."

Though southerners' "peculiar institution" of slavery seemed increasingly anachronistic in much of the western world, many believed Dixie represented the future. Robert L. Dabney, a theology professor at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond and later adjutant to Stonewall Jackson, contended that the South would save the world from false ideas of "radical democracy." One preacher popular with the troops asserted that God might use the Confederacy to inaugurate the kingdom of God. Although the ideal of millennial mission so prevalent in the North was generally more muted below the Mason-Dixon line, it was by no means absent.

North: eradicate slavery

At the outset of the struggle, the North fought to save the Union, not to end slavery. But on January 1, 1863, Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation and fundamentally altered the character of the war.

Northern churches reflected—and in some cases, promoted—this shift in direction. Initially most ministers were reluctant to support an all-out campaign for abolition, but events convinced them otherwise. During the first two years of the conflict, the North won notable victories in the west; but in Virginia its Army of the Potomac stumbled through successive defeats. Believing the hand of God was in every event, the northern clergy averred that through the defeat of Union arms, God

Mount Calvary Lutheran Church in Sharpsburg, Maryland, suffered heavy damage from artillery fire. Churches stood both literally and figuratively in the middle of the fighting, and their ministers tried to make sense of the war for their parishioners.

had punished the United States for slavery. God had thus signalled that the oppressed should go free.

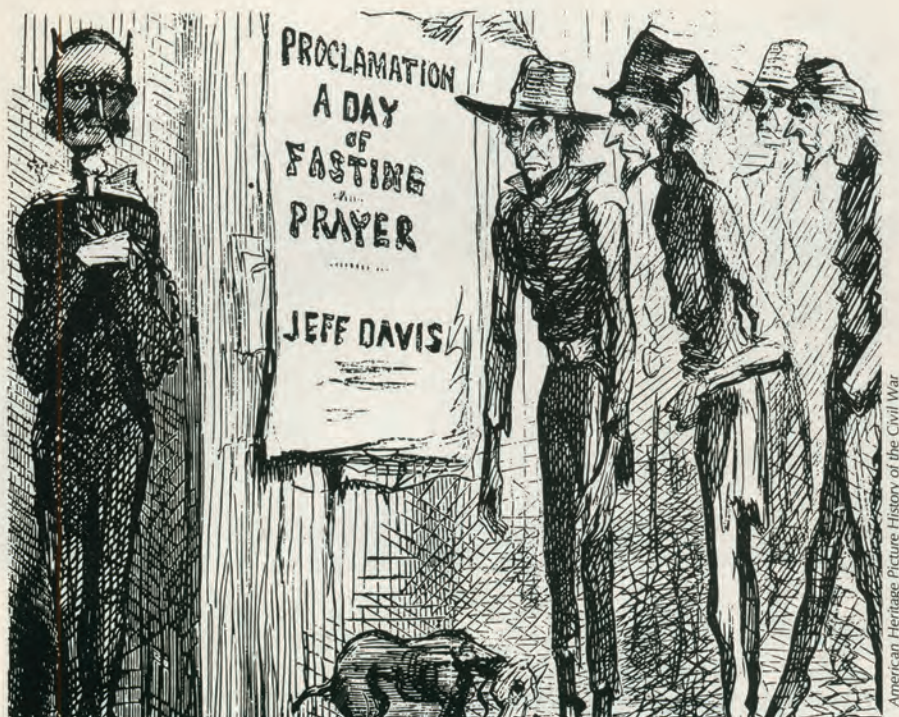
Conversion to this point of view did not proceed at an even rate. Some clergy and church bodies were demanding liberty for the captives in 1861; others did not speak out until well after the Emancipation Proclamation. But early or late, northern Protestants concluded that God wished slavery to die.

South: preserve slavery

With a few notable exceptions, southern ministers believed that preserving slavery was an integral part of their nation's mission. God ordained the institution as the most humane means of relating labor to capital, of protecting an inferior race, and of introducing that race to the blessings of Christianity.

Far from being the oppressors of African-Americans, southerners were their defenders. "We do not place our cause upon its highest level," wrote Episcopal Bishop Stephen Elliott in 1862, "until we grasp the idea that God has made us the guardians and champions of a people whom he is preparing for his own purposes and against whom the whole world is banded."

To demonstrate the moral superiority of the Confederate system, ser-



In this cartoon from *Harper's*, southern citizens already gaunt from hunger look at a proclamation from Confederate President Jefferson Davis (shown with horns at left). During the war, Presidents Davis and Lincoln set aside various days for prayer and repentance.

mons, art, and painting frequently invoked images of contented, loyal slaves. As historian Drew Gilpin Faust has observed, "slaveholders needed to regard slavery as a benevolent institution, appreciated by blacks as well as whites, in order to preserve and propagate their self-image as paternalistic masters."

Proving that slavery was desirable required that abuses within the system be eliminated. Led by such persons as Elliott, Presbyterian Charles Colcock Jones, and Baptist I. T. Tichenor, ministers demanded an end to laws prohibiting slave literacy and limiting slave preaching, for these kept African-Americans from the gospel. Similarly, reformers desired statutory recognition of slave marriages and families.

Although such proposals encountered opposition and were never enacted into law, they did win much favorable comment. Advocates suggested that reform might be necessary to the success of Confederate arms. Southern ministers thundered that God would not bless the Confederacy

until it honored its covenant with God and made bondage fully humane.

Baptism of blood

Presidents Davis and Lincoln designated various fast days during the war. On these occasions, Christians gathered to hear ministers enumerate national failings and to express repentance. Despite regional differences over the sinfulness of slavery, the transgressions named by the clergy were often surprisingly similar in North and South: intemperance, Sabbath breaking, avarice, unrestricted individualism, and lack of loyalty to authorities.

Although fast days sometimes gave the clergy an excuse to damn the enemy, generally each side reflected on its own transgressions. As Charles Jones wrote to his aunt on July 4, 1861: "We have been sinning with the Northern people as a nation for seventy or eighty years, and now we have become two nations, and the Lord may use us as rods of correction to each other."

Protestants hoped that the Civil War might prove a baptism of blood. As Charles Reagan Wilson has pointed out, that phrase recurred frequently in the utterances of Confederate clergy. Even before the first shot had been fired, James H. Thornwell was warning that "our path to victory may be through a baptism of blood." In 1863 an Episcopal rector declared: "A grand

responsibility rests upon our young republic. Baptized in its infancy in blood, may it receive the baptism of the Holy Ghost, and be consecrated to its high and holy mission among the nations of the earth." Through the shedding of blood might come atonement for sin and newness of life.

On the Union side, Horace Bushnell, Congregational pastor in Hartford, Connecticut, explored this theme with peculiar force. Shortly after the northern defeat at Bull Run in 1861, he told his parishioners that more reverses were needed: "There must be tears in the houses, as well as blood in the fields." Only by the path of humiliation and suffering could America purge its dross and attain a new, more nearly perfect identity. But once the ordeal had been passed, he prophesied, the United States would become a true "nation—God's own nation."

For northern clergy, the blood baptism received a final ritual enactment when Abraham Lincoln was struck down by an assassin's bullet on Good Friday, 1865. The president's death symbolized the expiation of national sins. His shed blood—token of all simi-

Many Yankee ministers thought Union soldiers were preparing the way for the kingdom of God on earth.

lar effusions during four years of war—purchased new life for America. As one group of Presbyterians suggested: "He has been appointed . . . to be laid as the costliest sacrifice of all upon the altar of the Republic and to cement with his blood the free institutions of our land."

Lost Cause and legacies

Long after the guns fell silent, some ministers persisted in sounding battle cries. Years after the war, Theodore Munger, a prominent Congregationalist, continued to interpret the war as God's righteous retribution on the wicked South. Similarly, many southerners such as Robert Dabney nursed grudges against perfidious Yankees and

GOD IS ON OUR SIDE

Selections from sermons during the Civil War era

The North

The following words were part of a sermon delivered by Henry Ward Beecher on Thanksgiving Day 1860.

THE SOUTHERN STATES . . . have organized society around a rotten core,—slavery: the North has organized society about a vital heart,—liberty. . . . They stand in proper contrast. God holds them up to ages and to nations, that men may see the difference. Now that there is a conflict, I ask which is to yield? . . .

The truth that men cannot hush, and that God will not have covered up, is the irreconcilable difference between liberty and slavery! Which will you advocate and defend? . . .

The secret intentions of those men who are the chief fomenters of troubles in the South cannot in anywise be met by compromise. . . . What do those men that are really at the bottom of this conspiracy mean? Nothing more or less than this: Southern empire for slavery, and the reopening of the slave-trade as a means by which it shall be fed. . . . Their secret purpose is to sweep westward like night, and involve in the cloud of their darkness all Central America, and then make Africa empty into Central America, thus changing the moral geography of the globe. And do you suppose any compromise will settle that design, or turn it aside, when they have made you go down on your knees, and they stand laughing while you cry with fear because you have been cozened and juggled into a blind helping of their monstrous wickedness?

They mean slavery. They mean an Empire of Slavery. They don't any longer talk of the evil of slavery. It is a virtue, a religion! . . . You cannot compromise with them except by giving up your own belief, your own principles, and your own honor. Moral apostasy is the only basis on which you can build a compromise that will satisfy the South!

The South

These words were delivered by J. W. Tucker, Presbyterian minister in Fayetteville, North Carolina, in May 1862.

WE SHOULD PRAY TO GOD to give success to our cause, and triumph to our arms. God will defend the right. . . .

Our cause is sacred. It should ever be so in the eyes of all true men in the South. How can we doubt it, when we know it has been consecrated by a holy baptism of fire and blood. It has been rendered glorious by the martyr-like devotion of Johnson, McCulloch, Garnett, Bartow, Fisher, McKinney, and hundreds of others who have offered their lives as a sacrifice on the altar of their country's freedom.

Soldiers of the South, be firm, be courageous, be brave; be faithful to your God, your country and yourselves, and you shall be invincible. Never forget that the patriot, like the Christian, is immortal till his work is finished.

You are fighting for everything that is near and dear, and sacred to you as men, as Christians and as patriots; for country, for home, for property, for the honor of mothers, daughters, wives, sisters, and loved ones. 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.

In such a cause victory is not with the greatest number, nor the heaviest artillery, but with the good, the pure, the true, the noble, the brave. We are proud of you, and grateful to you for the victories of the past. We look to your valor and prowess, under the blessing of God, for the triumphs of the future.

From *God Ordained This War: Sermons on the Sectional Crisis, 1830–1865* edited by David B. Chesebrough (University of South Carolina Press, 1991). Used by permission.

longed for a “retributive providence” that would obliterate the Union.

But most people gradually transformed earlier convictions. Southerners often admitted that the preservation of the Union had ultimately been for the best. They found ways, however, to salvage honor and meaning from defeat. Through Confederate memorial days, statues of fallen heroes, and an outpouring of literature, they surrounded the defeated South with an aura of sentimental nobility. Playing down the role of slavery in the conflict, advocates of the Lost Cause converted Confederate warriors, especially Robert E. Lee, into pious men

The Confederate constitution—unlike that of the United States—explicitly recognized the nation's dependence upon God.

who had reluctantly taken up arms to fight for the right as they understood it. In a haze of moonlight and magnolias, the Confederate great thus were transfigured into romantic heroes whose virtues might be appreciated even by former enemies.

Many clergy wished to bury the acrimony of the past. In the process, the deeper moral issues of the 1860s were often trivialized or obscured. African-Americans paid the price.

Victor and vanquished soon tacitly agreed to end Reconstruction without securing the political rights of the former slaves. As North and South tentatively clasped hands, epidemic lynching, the gutting of civil-rights legislation, and the creation of Jim Crow laws took place. Surely this outcome fell far short of the moral rebirth that Protestants had hoped would follow their baptism of blood. □

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THE SECRET RELIGION OF THE SLAVES

They often risked floggings to worship God.

ALBERT J. RABOTEAU

By the eve of the Civil War, Christianity had pervaded the slave community. Not all slaves were Christian, nor were all those who accepted Christianity members of a church, but the doctrines, symbols, and vision of life preached by Christianity were familiar to most.

The religion of the slaves was both visible and invisible, formally organized and spontaneously adapted. Regular Sunday worship in the local church was paralleled by illicit, or at least informal, prayer meetings on weeknights in the slave cabins. Preachers licensed by the church and hired by the master were supplemented by slave preachers licensed only by the spirit. Texts from the Bible, which most slaves could not read, were explicated by verses from the spirituals. Slaves forbidden by masters to attend church or, in some cases, even to pray, risked floggings to attend secret gatherings to worship God.

His own experience of the "invisible institution" was recalled by former slave Wash Wilson:

"When de niggers go round singin' 'Steal Away to Jesus,' dat mean dere gwine be a 'ligious meetin' dat night. De masters . . . didn't like dem 'ligious meetin's so us natcherly slips off at night, down in de bottoms or somewhere. Sometimes us sing and pray all night."

Master's preachin', real preachin'

Slaves frequently were moved to hold their own religious meetings out of disgust for the vitiated gospel preached by their masters' preachers. Lucretia Alexander explained what slaves did when they grew tired of the white folks' preacher: "The preacher came and . . . he'd just say, 'Serve your masters. Don't steal your master's turkey. Don't steal your master's chickens. Don't steal your master's hawks. Don't steal your master's meat. Do whatsoever your master tells you to do.' Same old thing all the time. . . . Sometimes they would . . . want a real meetin' with some real preachin'. . . . They used to sing their songs in a whisper and pray in a whisper."

Slaves faced severe punishment if caught attending secret prayer meetings. Moses Grandy reported that his brother-in-law Isaac, a slave preacher, "was flogged, and his back pickled" for preaching at a clandestine service in the woods. His listeners were flogged and "forced to tell who else was there."

Slaves devised several techniques to avoid detection of their meetings. One practice was to meet in secluded places—woods, gullies, ravines, and thickets (aptly called "hush harbors"). Calvin Woods remembered preaching to other slaves and singing and praying while huddled behind quilts and rags, which had been thoroughly wetted "to keep the sound of their voices from penetrating the air" and

then hung up "in the form of a little room," or tabernacle.

On one Louisiana plantation, when "the slaves would steal away into the woods at night and hold services," they "would form a circle on their knees around the speaker who would also be on his knees. He would bend forward and speak into or over a vessel of water to drown the sound. If anyone became animated and cried out, the others would quickly stop the noise by placing their hands over the offender's mouth."

A description of a secret prayer meeting was recorded by Peter Randolph, who was a slave in Prince George County, Virginia, until he was freed in 1847: "The slave forgets all his sufferings, except to remind others of the trials during the past week, exclaiming: 'Thank God, I shall not live here always!' Then they pass from one to another, shaking hands, and bidding each other farewell. . . . As they separate, they sing a parting hymn of praise."

Two extremes

Many slaveholders granted their slaves permission to attend church, and some openly encouraged religious meetings among the slaves. Baptisms, marriages, and funerals were allowed to slaves on some plantations with whites observing and occasionally participating. Annual revival meetings were social occasions for blacks as well as for whites. Masters were known to



The Historic New Orleans Collection

For slaves, religious activities often had to be held at night. As shown in "Plantation Burial" by John Antrobus, burials often couldn't be done until after the day's work. The funeral service might not be held until a rest day several weeks later. Even then, holding a funeral service for a slave required permission from the master, which was not always given.

enjoy the singing, praying, and preaching of their slaves. Nevertheless, at the core of the slaves' religion was a private place. For no matter how religious the master might be, the slave knew that the master's religion did not countenance prayers for his slaves' freedom in this world.

The religious format varied from plantation to plantation for the slaves. Former slave John Brown depicted two extremes: "Sunday was a great day around the plantation. The fields was forgotten, the light chores was hurried through, and everybody got ready for the church meeting. It was out of the doors, in the yard. . . . Master John's wife would start the meeting with a prayer and then would come the singing—the old timey songs. But the white folks on the next plantation would lick their slaves for trying to do like we did. No praying there, and no singing."

Some masters did not allow their slaves to go to church and ridiculed the notion of religion for slaves because they refused to believe that Negroes had souls. Others forbade their slaves to attend church because, as an ex-

slave explained, "White folks 'fraid the niggers git to thinkin' they was free, if they had churches 'n things."

Boisterous baptisms

Accompanied by song, shouting, and ecstatic behavior, baptism—especially for Baptists—was perhaps the most dramatic ritual in the slave's religious life. "De biggest meetin' house crowds was when dey had baptizin'," noted a former Georgia slave. "Dey dammed up de crick on Sadday so as it would be deep enough on Sunday. . . . At dem baptizin's dere was all sorts of shoutin', and dey would sing 'Roll, Jordan, Roll, De Livin' Waters,' and 'Lord, I'se Comin' Home.'"

Dressed in white robes and attended by the "brothers and sisters," the candidates proceeded "amidst singing and praises" to the local pond or creek, symbol of the river Jordan, where, according to Baptist practice, each was "ducked" by the preacher. Sometimes the newly regenerate came up from the baptismal waters shouting for joy at being made new in the Lord.

Recollecting the baptism of his mother, Isaiah Jeffries has left a description which conveys something of the excitement and the sense of new beginning which "baptizings" brought to many slaves: "When I to be a big boy, my Ma got religion at de Camp meeting at El-Bethel. She shouted and sung for three days, going all over de plantation and de neighboring ones, inviting her friends to come to see her

baptized and shouting and praying fer dem. She went around to all de people dat she had done wrong and begged dere forgiveness. She sent fer dem dat had wronged her, and told dem dat she was born again and a new woman, and dat she would forgive dem. She wanted everybody dat was not saved to go up wid her. . . . My Ma took me wid her to see her baptized, and I was so happy dat I sung and shouted wid her. All de niggers joined in singing."

Slave preachers

Presiding over slave baptisms, funerals, and weddings was the slave preacher, leader of the slaves' religious life and an influential figure in the slave community. Usually illiterate, the slave preacher often had native wit and unusual eloquence.

Carefully watched and viewed with suspicion, the preacher had to straddle the conflict between the demands of conscience and the orders of the masters. Anderson Edwards reflected on the difficulty he experienced as a slave preacher in Texas: "I been preachin' the gospel and farmin' since slavery time. . . . When I starts preachin' I couldn't read or write and had to preach what massa told me and he say tell them niggers iffen they obeys the massa they goes to Heaven but I knowed there's something better for them, but daren't tell them 'cept on the sly. That I done lots. I tell 'em iffen they keeps prayin' the Lord will set 'em free."

By comparison with other slaves, some preachers were privileged characters. One former slave from Alabama remarked that "Nigger preachers in dem times wuz mighty-nigh free." As long as he didn't interfere with other slaves' work, he [the slave preacher] was allowed to hold services whenever he wished, and frequently he traveled to neighboring places to conduct prayer meetings. It was from the preacher, this relatively mobile and privileged slave, that the rest "first heard of the Civil War." During the war he offered whispered prayers for the success of the Union Army.

"What wonderful preachers these blacks are!" exclaimed one correspondent from Georgia to the editor of the *American Missionary*: "I listened to a remarkable sermon or talk a few evenings since. The preacher spoke of the need of atonement for sin. 'Bullocks c'dn't do it, heifers c'dn't do it, de blood of doves c'dn't do it—but up in heaven, for thousan and thousan of years, the Son was saying to the Father, 'Put up a soul, put up a soul. Prepare me a body, an I will go an meet Justice on Calvary's brow!'" He was so dramatic. In describing the crucifixion he said: 'I see the sun when she turned herself black. I see the stars a fallin from the sky, and them old Herods coming out of their graves and goin about the city, an they knew 'twas the Lord of Glory.' "

Were the slave preachers a force for accommodation to the *status quo* or a force for the exercise of slave autonomy? On the one hand, the slave preacher was criticized by former slaves as the "mouthpiece of the masters." On the other hand, some slave preachers preached and spoke of freedom in secret.

The weight of slave testimony suggests that the slaves knew and understood the restrictions under which the slave preacher labored, and that they accepted his authority not because it came from the master but because it came from God. They respected him because he was the messenger of the gospel, one who preached the word of God with power and authority, indeed with a power which sometimes humbled white folk and frequently uplifted slaves.

For a black man and a slave to stand and preach with eloquence, skill, and wisdom was in itself a sign of ability



Ironically, Christianity, the religion of their masters, was widely accepted by slaves. Some slaveowners encouraged and even participated in slave-led church services. However, often the slave preacher was expected to be the "mouthpiece of the master," preaching against rebellion and stealing chickens. Many slave preachers, though, would deliver "real preachin'" in secret meetings at another time. After the Civil War, the "invisible" faith of the slaves became visible in many new congregations and associations, most of them Baptist, Methodist, or Holiness.

and talent which slavery's restrictiveness could frustrate but never completely stifle.

Spirituals

Unable to read the Bible for themselves and skeptical of their masters' interpretation of it, most slaves learned the message of the Christian gospel and translated it into songs in terms of their own experience. As John Dixon Long observed, "Many of them could state the cardinal doctrines of the gospel in the language of song." It was in the spirituals, above all, that the characters, themes, and lessons of the Bible became dramatically real and took on special meaning for the slaves.

Drawing from the Bible, Protestant hymns, sermons, and African styles of singing and dancing, the slaves fashioned a religious music which expressed their faith in "moving, immediate, colloquial, and, often, magnificently dramatic terms." Spirituals are too often seen simply as words and notes printed on a page. What must be recognized is that they emerged as communal songs, heard, felt, sung and often danced with hand-clapping, foot-stamping, head-shaking excitement.

Conversion

In 1901 W. E. B. Du Bois wrote a classic essay, "Faith of the Fathers," in which he distinguished the three characteristics of the slaves' religion as being the preacher, the music, and the frenzy or shouting. He might well have added a fourth characteristic, the conversion experience.

The experience of conversion was essential in the religious life of the slaves. For the only path to salvation lay through that "lonesome valley" wherein the "seekers" underwent conversion, an experience which they treasured as one of the peak moments in their lives.

The typical conversion experience was preceded by a period of anxiety over one's salvation which lasted for days or even weeks. Josiah Henson, at the age of 18, was struck by the words of a sermon he heard, "Jesus Christ, the Son of God, tasted death for every man; for the high, for the low, for the rich, for the poor, the bond, the free, the negro in his chains, the man in gold and diamonds." Henson recalled, "I stood and heard it. It touched my heart and I cried out: 'I wonder if Jesus Christ died for me.' "

Of his conversion George Liele wrote:

CHRISTIANITY AND THE CIVIL WAR

"I was convinced that I was not in the way to heaven, but in the way to hell. This state I laboured under for the space of five or six months. . . . I was brought to perceive that my life hung by a slender thread, . . . and I found no way wherein I could escape the damnation of hell, only through the merits of my dying Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. . . ." Abandoning himself to prayer, Liele found relief and "felt such love and joy as my tongue was not able to express. After this I declared before the congregation of believers the work which God had done for my soul. . . ."

At the center of the evangelical Protestant tradition, the tradition which slaves increasingly made their own, stood the experience of conversion.

Other beliefs

Some slaves rejected Christianity and preserved their traditional African beliefs or their belief in Islam. Other slaves accepted Christianity of a different type—Catholicism. Relatively few slaves, mainly concentrated in southern Louisiana and Maryland, were Roman Catholics. According to a generous estimate, the number of black Catholics, free and slave, at the time of emancipation was one hundred thousand [out of approximately four million]. The predominant religious tradition, then, among the slaves and their descendants in the United States was evangelical Protestantism.

Comin' into Canaan

Slaves believed that God had acted, was acting, and would continue to act within human history and within their own particular history as a peculiar people, just as long ago he had acted on behalf of another chosen people, biblical Israel. Moreover, slave religion had a this-worldly impact, not only in leading some slaves to acts of external rebellion, but also in helping slaves to assert and maintain a sense of personal value—even of ultimate worth. That some slaves maintained their identity as persons, despite a system bent on reducing them to a subhuman level, was certainly due in part to their religious life. □

Dr. Albert J. Raboteau is Henry W. Putnam Professor of Religion and chairman of the religion department at Princeton University. He is author of *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (Oxford, 1978), from which this article is excerpted by permission.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY asked Dr. Charles Reagan Wilson to recommend books that creatively explore Christianity during the Civil War era. Dr. Wilson is professor of history and Southern studies at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi. He is also author of *Baptism in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865–1920* (Georgia, 1980).

► William W. Bennett, *A Narrative of the Great Revival Which Prevalled in the Southern Armies* . . . (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen & Haffelfinger, 1877). The author, who led the Methodist Soldiers' Tract Association, describes prayer meetings and conversions.

► James Farmer, *The Metaphysical Confederacy: James Henley Thornwell and the Synthesis of Southern Values* (South Carolina, 1982). Though not exactly a full biography of this important southern leader, the book covers well Thornwell's role in religion and politics.

► Drew Gilpin Faust, "Christian Soldiers: The Meaning of Revivalism in the Confederate Armies." *Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 53 (1987). A scholarly examination of religion among the southern troops.

► C. C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schisms and the Coming of the Civil War* (Mercer, 1985). A clear look at the controversies that, in Goen's words, "set Northern and Southern Christianity on divergent courses."

► Victor Howard, *Religion & the Radical Republican Movement* (Kentucky, 1990). A good recent work.

► J. William Jones, *Christ in the Camp; or, Religion in Lee's Army* (Richmond: J. W. Randolph & Eng-

lish, 1880). A chaplain in the Army of Northern Virginia gives eyewitness accounts of revival.

► John R. McKivigan, *The War against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches, 1830–1865* (Cornell, 1984). Describes the tumultuous move toward abolition in the North.

► James H. Moorhead, *American Apocalypse: Yankee Protestants and the Civil War, 1860–1869* (Yale, 1978). Details well the widespread belief that northern success would usher in "the coming of the Lord."

► Robert Manson Myers, ed., *The Children of Pride: A True Story of Georgia and the Civil War* (Yale, 1972). An engrossing collection of letters by Charles Colcock Jones, Sr., an influential Presbyterian minister from Georgia. Jones defended slavery, yet evangelized the slaves, gaining the title "Apostle to the Blacks."

► Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (Oxford, 1978). A fine social history.

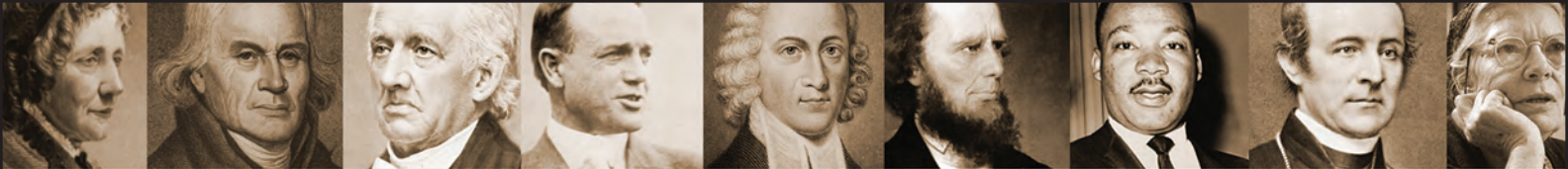
► Gardiner H. Shattuck, Jr., *A Shield and a Hiding Place: The Religious Life of the Civil War Armies* (Mercer, 1987). Describes the significant and varied religious experiences of Civil War troops.

► William J. Wolf, *The Almost Chosen People: A Study of the Religion of Abraham Lincoln* (Doubleday, 1959). Still one of the best studies of Lincoln's religion.

Editors' Bonus Recommendation: For a packet of facsimiles of evangelistic tracts used during the Civil War, send a donation to: Mission for Jesus Christ, P. O. Box 2915, Merrifield, VA 22116.



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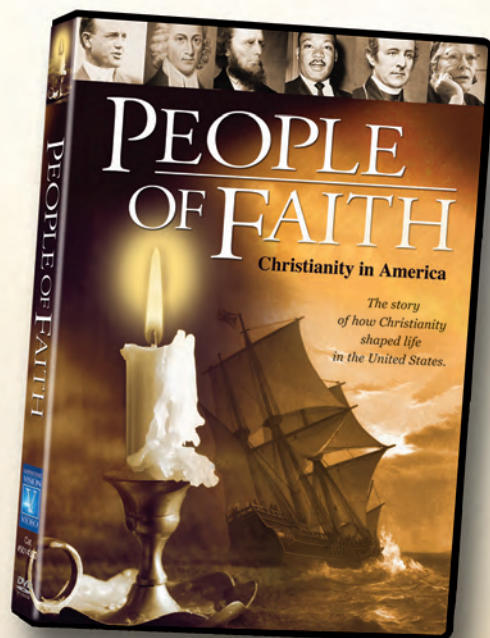
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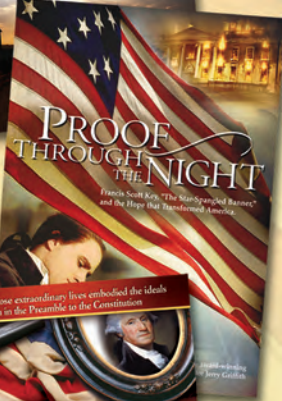


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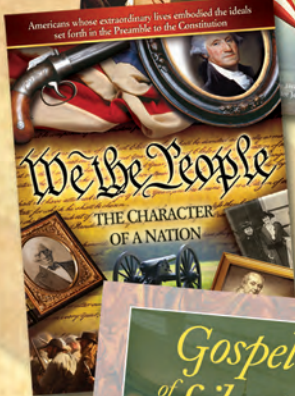


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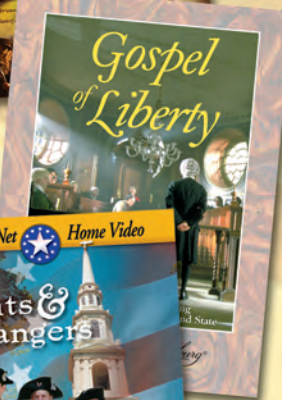
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