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Richard Grant Mannion December 2, 2011

The Georgia Clergy, Slavery, and the Defeat of the Holy Confederate Republic, 1863-1870

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Abstract

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In the mid nineteenth-century, various Protestant demoninations began to adopt a scriptural proslavery defense, arguing the institution had been ordained by God for the benefit of whites and blacks alike. As sectionalist tensions mounted, leading to secession and ultimately war, the clergy saw the Confederacy's crusade as a necessary means of defending their peculiar institution and preserving divine will. Evoking the name of God on behalf of the Southern cause, the clergy were firmly endowed with the belief the Confederate Army would experience victory by the hand of providence. The current project examines how the clergy's association between the Southern cause and divine will persisted in the midst of and following the defeat of the Confederacy. Through examining sermons, meetings from religious societies' meetings, and personal correspondances of ministers, it appears the pulpit perceived defeat on the battlefield as chastisement by God. Southerners' failure to uphold their covenant with Him—namely a scripturally sanctioned implenetation of slavery—led to the failure of their independent slave republic. Following the war, clerical thought continued to praise the merits of the Southern cause by romanticizing racial relations in the Old South and the gallantry of the Confederacy's failed crusade. In constructing a nostalgic, "Southern-friendly" memory of the war and sustaining its racist rhetoric even after slavery's abolition, the pulpit contributed in no small part to authoring the mythology of the Lost Cause. The messages preached by the clergy in the wake of the Confederacy's defeat would help shape the racial landscape of the South for a century following the War Between the States.

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"The only purpose which makes a struggle for independence worth the cost of blood and feeling which it always demands, is that it should bring out of its fermenting and convulsed elements an earnest people; a people worthy to live, because sensible of the great trusts and responsibilities which will rest upon it…We have been entrusted with the moral and religious education of an inferior race, made more sacred to us by the events of this war, because we have been made to see what will be their miserable fate should they pass out of our nurturing hands. We have been appointed to preserve upon this continent all that is valuable in morals and legislation and religion. We have been selected to be a bulwark against the worst developments of human nature, fanaticism, democracy, license, atheism. For such purposes God is disciplining and refining us in the fires of affliction, and when he shall perceive that we have been ennobled by our struggle, purified by our sacrifices, exalted by our self-denial—that we have learned to put at their true value wealth, and luxury and show—to distinguish between false pretension and genuine merit—to understand the infinite, absolute, immutable character of virtue…to keep in our eye the religion of Jesus, as we find it revealed in the Scriptures and exemplified in his pure and holy self-sacrificing life—He will give us our deliverance and establish us in this land flowing with milk and honey, as a nation consecrated for His own mysterious yet all-wise purposes."

—Stephen Elliott, Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the CFA

April 8, 1864

Introduction

"Then said David to the Philistine, 'Thou comest to me with a sword and with a spear and with a shield; but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied." – 1 Samuel 17:45

"Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other."[1] The account Abraham Lincoln provides in his Second Inaugural Address of the faith of Northerners and Southerners alike conjures up the notion of the Civil War as a holy war.[2] In the antebellum South, the pulpit sought to promote the idea of Southerners as God's chosen people, favored by providence for their devout reverence and service to The Almighty. The clergy asserted the institution of slavery had been divinely ordained for the South's benefit, and in return God called upon masters to serve as blacks' religious stewards.[3] In preserving the institution of slavery, Southerners were perpetuating the will of God. As hostilities seemed increasingly inevitable with the election of Lincoln to the presidency in 1860 and the secession of seven Southern states that would summarily follow, the clergy began to conceptualize war as a necessary means of defending their divinely bestowed institution and preserving the will of God.

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[1] Michael Johnson, ed, *Abraham Lincoln, Slavery, and the Civil War* (Boston: Bedford, 2001), 321.
[2] For a discussion on the religiosity of nineteenth-century and how it affected American's perception of the War in terms of righteousness and salvation, see Mark Schantz, *Awaiting the Heavenly Country* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008). Also, see Robert Miller's *Both Prayed to the Same God* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2007).
[3] See Richard Fuller & Francis Wayland, ed, *Domestic Slavery Considered as a Scriptural Institution,* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2008).

During the Civil War, the South's military endeavors were often the subject of Sabbath day sermons, during which time the clergy would offer their interpretation of the war through a theological lens. On April 8th, 1864, Episcopal minister Stephen Elliott, Bishop of the Diocese of Georgia, delivered a sermon derived from the biblical narrative of Gideon. On behalf of the Lord, he preached, with only 300 men Gideon delivered his people from the hands of the larger and more powerful Midianite army.[4] Similarly, despite the Confederate Army's substantial deficit of manpower and supplies, by the will of God their nation would reign victorious over the Union. Elliott followed by asserting the Confederate cause to be "a holy one."[5]

Relating their nation's military endeavors to the workings of providence was not uncommon for the Southern clergy, a substantial majority of whom were supporters of the Confederacy.[6] The title of a sermon delivered by Bishop Elliott in September of 1862 epitomizes this divine association-- "Our [the Confederacy's] cause in harmony with the purposes of God in Christ Jesus." From the first shots at Fort Sumter, the pulpit viewed the war as a crusade bent on preserving providential order and ensuring God's plan was carried out, namely the preservation of slavery. As Methodist Bishop George Foster Pierce preached in a discourse given before the state bible convention, Southerners were obliged to defend the Confederacy "because it is His will." [7] Firmly endowed with the conviction God was on their side, the clergy had faith in a Confederate victory from the outset of the war. Given the Confederacy's eventual defeat, then, how did the clergy's

[4] Judges 7:1-9, King James Version.
[5] Stephen Elliott, "A Sermon Preached in Christ Church, Savannah, on Friday, April 8th, 1864
[6] For a study on clerical dissent in the South, see David B. Chesebrough, *Clergy Dissent in the Old South, 1830-1865* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996)
[7] George Foster Pierce, "The word of God a nation's life a sermon, preached before the Bible Convention of the Confederate States, Augusta, Georgia, March 19th, 1862

association with their nation's cause as being consistent with God's will persist? In short, how did they perceive the failure of the Confederacy?

The current study seeks to understand the white Southerners' misunderstanding of the defeat of a nation favored by God. The Southern pulpit's view of the failure of its Confederate nation is available in the sermons, religious publications, and personal correspondences of the Georgia clergy. The majority of the existing sermons from the South during the War Between the States are from the most prominent ministers in the clergy. Also, because of the migratory and itinerant nature of preaching in the Civil War South, each minister who is examined varies in his affiliation to the state of Georgia, yet all have substantial ties to the state. To offer a broader view of clerical sentiment across the state, the current study places heavy emphasis on minutes from religious societies. Sentiment arising in local congregations may have not had the statewide impact some ministers' sermons affected, yet taken as a whole they should offer an accurate gauge of religious sentiment across the state. On the eve of the Civil War, secessionist fervor was strongest in Georgia and other states of the Deep South where slavery was most prominent.[8] Throughout the war, mainstream clerical sentiment in Georgia remained pro-Confederate. Thus examining the beliefs and attitudes of the clergy in Georgia offers an accurate understanding of the nature of pro-Confederate sentiment within the church throughout the war years.

In seeking to gauge clerical sentiment, the religious topography of the South must also be considered. In the antebellum and Civil War-era South, the Baptists and

[8] James Silver, *Confederate Morale and Church Propaganda*, (Gloucester: P. Smith, 1964) see chapter 1. Silver notes evangelicals from the Middle and Upper South, early on, were not as unified in their support of the Confederacy.

Methodists were the two most prominent denominations of Christianity. Yet to compose an accurate and complete portrait of the South's religious landscape, it is crucial also to consider clerical sentiment among the Presbyterians and Episcopalians. Altogether, these four denominations claimed the overwhelming majority of churchgoing Southerners.[9] Each denomination certainly had its ecclesiological peculiarities.[10] Yet with regard to the question of slavery, the defining issue in the antebellum South, clerical sentiment from each church remained consistent throughout the war and in the aftermath of defeat. During the secession crisis and the commencement of hostilities, ministers of these churches hardly differed in their promotion of Confederate nationalism. In their nation's decline and ultimate failure, too, the clergy occupied a nearly identical perspective in offering similar theological explanations of defeat and its implications for the South.

Throughout the initial decline and ultimate failure of the Confederacy, clerical sentiment remained consistent on the prevailing issues of the day. Strongly adhering to the belief that God was on their side, the clergy saw defeat on the battlefield as a manifestation of divine chastisement. The prosperity that God had offered the South, the clergy believed, had led Southerners to stray from their dependence upon Him. As a result, they became greedy and began to pursue self-interested ends that were contrary to divine will. The most palpable manifestation of these spiritual transgressions was the misrepresentation of slavery, which had a scriptural basis that Southerners were not upholding. Ultimate defeat and the abolition of slavery, ministers believed, were a direct

[9] Baptists and Methodists churchgoers alone made up 75% in 1860, see James Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 48; also see Emory Thomas, *Confederate Nation: 1861-1865*(New York: Harper & Row*, 1979*), 21

[10] For an account of how Southerners viewed denominational differences, see Richard E. Beringer, *Why the South Lost the Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 93. Beringer argues interdenominational differences were negligible, suggested, in the words of Emory Thomas, by the "ease and frequency with which Southerners attended services of various denominations."

result of Southerners' sin in failing to reform the institution to more closely fit its scriptural dictates. Though Southerners were being punished and would ultimately suffer defeat, the clergy remained convinced God favored their nation, despite the ravaged and chaotic state of the South in the war's immediate aftermath. Even after the dissolution of slavery, clerical sentiment continued to promote notions of black inferiority and necessity for white guardianship that underlie their justifications of the peculiar institution. In short, in considering clerical sentiment regarding the defeat of the Confederacy, there appears to be several critical continuities even after the war. Proslavery ideology and the romanticization of the Southern cause emanating in the church largely influenced Southerners conceptualization of racial matters in the post-bellum South, as well as their memory of the Civil War.

The Origins of the South's Providential Destiny

"Masters give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven." —Colossians 4:1

Referring to the notion that slavery was beneficial for blacks as well as whites, the term "positive good" was first coined by John C. Calhoun in a speech delivered before the Senate in February of 1837. Calhoun's locution represented an ongoing shift in proslavery thought from the Jeffersonian "necessary evil" argument.[11] Historian Jeffrey Young identifies the genesis of slavery's positive good ideology at the turn of the nineteenth century, during which time a growing antislavery movement coupled with increasing paranoia concerning slave rebellions compelled Southerners to establish a more robust defense of their institution. According to Young, an "ever-increasing numbers of slaveholders" were subscribing to such a notion at least two decades before Calhoun's speech. [12]

[11] On numerous occasions, Thomas Jefferson famously commented "we have the wolf by the ear, and we can neither hold him, nor safely let him go." Jefferson believed slavery was incongruent with the ideals their nation was founded upon, yet he also realized slavery helped build that very nation, and that it served as the foundation of Southern society.

[12] Jeffrey Young, "Domesticating Slavery: The Ideological Formation of the Master Class in the Deep South, from Colonization to 1837." Ph.D. Thesis: Emory University (1996). Young cites a coalition of Virginia slaves' plan "to rise & massacre the whites indiscriminately," discovered before any rebellion could take place in the summer of 1800 and subsequently termed "Gabriel's Rebellion," as inciting rumors throughout the Deep South that similar uprisings might take place.

In the nineteenth century, Protestant churches would become a bastion of proslavery thinking, just as they became a fixture in Southern society. "Because of Southern piety," historian James Silver explains, the clergy "were leaders of tremendous influence in every community."[13] Yet this was not always the case for the South, conceived of in popular memory as an abode of Protestantism, especially evangelicalism. In *Southern Cross,* Christine Heyrman explains that "evangelicals struggled for many decades to prosper among whites in the South," attaining ascendancy no earlier than the mid 1830's. [14] In the late eighteenth century, evangelical ecclesiology opposed many of society's traditional institutions, namely slavery as well as the South's dominant hierarchies of race, sex, and age. As a result, evangelicals rested at the margins of society.[15]

The origins of evangelicalism's rise in the South can be traced to the Second Great Awakening. Though the movement began at the turn of the nineteenth century, it took three decades for the effects of the Awakening to come to fruition. During this period of religious revival, millions were converted to Protestantism. Heyrman explains the ascension of evangelicals resulted from a relaxation in church doctrines that

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[13] James Silver, *Confederate Morale and Church*, 23.

[14] Christine Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Knopf, 1997), 6; 265. Evangelicalism gained a significant following for the first time in the mid 1830's, when roughly two out of every three Southerners were "adherents" to the Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches. This is in addition to the 25% of Southerners who belonged to such churches.

[15] Heyrman, *Southern Cross,* 265. At the turn of the nineteenth century, evangelical church membership claimed 10% of Southerners. For an alternative point of view, see John Daly, *When Slavery was Called Freedom*, 30. Daly rightly acknowledges, in accordance with Jeffrey Young, the presence of proslavery rhetoric in evangelical circles as early as 1801, but he fails to take into account their scarcity prior to the 1830's in asserting that evangelical moral ideology "attained ascendancy in the South between 1801 and 1831."

conflicted with the rigidly hierarchical Southern "honor culture."[16] By becoming more accommodating to slaveholding whites, particularly planters, the South's hegemonic class, the evangelical church not only gained a larger following but also positioned itself to become a pillar of Southern society.

Out of the Second Great Awakening emerged an idea that greatly impacted clerical proslavery thought and may very well have changed some Southerners' conception of the institution itself-- a literalist interpretation of scripture. Around the time Calhoun coined the phrase "positive good," Southern clergymen were applying this interpretation of scripture to the argument it expounded. In his letter to the editor of the *Christian Reflector*, Baptist minister Richard Fuller sought to "deny that slavery is a moral evil"—a bedrock argument of abolitionists. Citing the book of Leviticus, he claimed such a contention is contradictory to the Old Testament of the Bible:

> Both thy bondmen, and thy bondmaids, which thou shalt have, shall be of the heathen that are round about you; of them shall ye buy bondmen and bondmaids. Moreover of the children of the strangers that do sojourn among you, of them shall ye buy, and of their families that are with you, which they begat in your land: and they shall be your possession. And ye shall take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit them for a possession; they shall be your bondmen for ever.[17]

Fuller and other clergymen claimed that God's support of slavery also appear in the Books of Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Numbers, and Second Kings. The New Testament tolerated bondage as well, he argued, despite arguments to the contrary that "the moral precepts of the gospel condemn slavery." Fuller asserted that Jesus and His disciples "proclaimed and prosecuted a war of extermination against all the most

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[16] See Heyrman, *Southern Cross*; also see *Bertram Wyatt-Brown, The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s-1880s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Caroline Press, 2001)
[17] Leviticus 25:44-46, KJV

cherished passions of this guilty earth, and attacked with dauntless intrepidity all the multiform idolatry around them," yet they "shrank from breathing even a whisper against slavery." Fuller postulated slavery was not inherently evil. It couldn't have been-- God had authorized it. Yet Fuller acknowledged, as Calhoun did, that in the fallible hands of man there existed a possibility for human error in the implementation of slavery. In principle, however, there was nothing inherently sinful about reaping the benefits of a man's labor without contract or consent, so long as the master rendered "unto his servant the things that are just and equal."[18] This idea of reciprocity Fuller expounded on hits at the heart of slavery's positive good defense.

The positive good defense of slavery encompassed what historians have termed the notion of "paternalism," a mutually beneficial reciprocity within the master-slave relationship. The benefits the master experienced in this dynamic are readily apparent—the fruits of his slave's labor. In return, he was to carry out his duties as a religious steward and civilizer of his slave. Slavery placed blacks in a system of bondage that was believed to be an improvement upon the state of nature they previously existed in, converting blacks from savages to servants. The clergy also looked to scripture in justifying their belief in racial inferiority, claiming blacks were the cursed descendants of Ham based on a faulty interpretation of Noah's curse on Canaan.[19] Slavery, ministers believed, served as the means of preserving the natural and divinely sanctioned social order. Though slaves were unquestionably inferior to whites, scripture nonetheless dictated certain rights to slaves. Fuller ambiguously characterized them as entitled to

[18] Richard Fuller and Francis Wayland, *Domestic Slavery Considered as a Scriptural Institution* (New York: Lewis Colby, 1845), 3-7.
[19] Donald G. Matthews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 171. Also see Genesis 9:20-27, KJV

being "well clothed and religiously instructed, and to receive a fair reward for his labor in modes of compensation best suited to his condition."[20] While whites and blacks, masters and slaves alike, were impelled to embrace a singular Christianity, giving them a certain equality in the eyes of the Lord, their earthly status changed in no way. Thus while paternalism and its system of reciprocity afforded slaves some advantage, it did not overturn the power dynamic of the master-slave relationship.

Interestingly enough, the term "paternalism" did not appear in proslavery rhetoric. Instead, white Southerners referred to their role in the notion it embodied as "Christian guardianship." Applied by historians to characterize Christian guardianship, the nomenclature of "paternalism" neglects the obligation masters felt in upholding their duties not only to their slaves, but also to God. In fulfilling their "paternalistic" duties to their slaves, masters were compelled by their belief that slavery was sanctioned by God and white Southerners were chosen as the righteous guardians of the cursed descendants of Ham. As historian Drew Faust explains, "Southerners stood in a relationship of benefit and obligation with God, who had anointed them with both a special status and special responsibilities."[21] God had sanctioned slavery for Southerners' benefit, and in return they were to fulfill the institution as He had intended it. Acknowledging God's sanctioning of slavery, and slaveholders' covenant with Him, one planter commented that slavery was "rendered by his order, for the government of his creatures."[22]

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[20] Fuller and Wayland, *Domestic Slavery Considered as a Scriptural Institution,* 7.
[21] Drew Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 87-88.
[22] James Roark, *Masters Without Slaves: Southern Planters in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Norton, 1977), 198.

A primary responsibility of Christian guardianship was slave proselytization.[23] Compelled to spread the Gospel amongst slaves to ensure their salvation, Georgia planter Thomas Clay organized a missions effort for local slaveholders in his plan entitled "the Moral Improvement of Negroes on the Plantations." He recommended masters hold regular meetings in which they would catechize their own slaves, in addition to hiring experienced missionaries for them and slaves on surrounding plantations that had not yet been saved. Clay spoke out against catechizing the slaves out of only self-interested ends, explaining: "The master must not only provide that his people be religiously instructed, but he must manage them on those very principles he wishes them to govern themselves by."[24] Historian John Boles rightly notes the difficulty induced by a presentist perspective in understanding "how devout whites could define blacks legally as chattel and yet show real concern for the state of their souls."[25] Yet as Thomas Clay's writings illustrate, paternalism was not only used to counter antislavery arguments, in many cases it was internalized by the purporters of the argument. Pious whites understood the judgment seat in the House of the Lord was not segregated. Masters were entrusted with the religious care of blacks, and their salvation was contingent upon that of their slaves. The scriptural defense of slavery hinged on whites' ability as Christian guardians.

Sharing the Gospel with slaves helped validate whites' civilizing initiative towards blacks. Whites adhered to the belief that "the order and discipline bondage

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[23] See Fuller and Wayland, *Domestic Slavery Considered as a Scriptural Institution*; also see John Boles, *Masters and Slaves in the House of the Lord: Race and Religion in the American South, 1740-1870* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988), 11.
[24] Janet D. Cornelius, *Slave Missions and the Black Church in the Antebellum South* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999) 86-87.
[25] John Boles, *Masters and Slaves in the House of the Lord*, 11.

provided" also offered slaves an opportunity to acquire Christianity.[26] Conversely, by introducing the Gospel to bondsmen, ultimately offering them eternal salvation, masters placed themselves in a pseudo-Messianic position of deliverer and redeemer. This provided white Southerners justification for advocating the seemingly contradictory institutions of freedom and servitude. More importantly, whites' embrace of this belief helped strengthen the association between slavery and divine will. Not only had the institution been put in place by God for white Southerners' prosperity, they reasoned, but for the salvation of millions of blacks as well.

The acceptance of "Christian guardianship" as a defense of slavery helped contribute to the formation of a distinctive white Southern self-conception.[27] In the years leading up to secession and war, the clergy would do much to foster and promote this emerging distinctiveness. In his study of Southern identity, James Cobb likens the Southern secession to Italy's political unification. "We have made Italy, now we must make Italians," an official remarked. In a similar fashion, the Southern clergy sought to "make" Southerners.[28] During the war, Southern nationalism emanated most fervently in the church.[29] The clergy braided the Confederacy, slavery, and the notion of God's chosen people tightly together.

The origins of a distinctly Southern identity appear to have begun with the rise of sectional hostilities in conjunction with an increasing antislavery movement. In the 1840's, there was a schism over slavery between the northern and southern branches of

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[26] John Boles, *Masters and Slaves in the House of the Lord,* 11.
[27] see Eugene Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 3.
[28] James Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity,* 51.
[29] Emory Thomas, *The Confederate Nation: 1861-1865,* 21; 246.

the Baptist and Methodist churches—the two largest denominations in the South. [30] By 1861 every major Protestant denomination had split along the Mason-Dixon Line. Southerners rightly perceived Northern antislavery sentiment, much of it emerging in the church, as a threat to their divinely bestowed institution. As George Rable notes, the divide caused Southerners to more closely identify with their section.[31]

Clergymen not only emphasized the virtue of the Southern cause, but also slandered the North. Presbyterian minister James Henly Thornwell, one of the South's most prominent and outspoken defenders of slavery, described the North as a society full of "atheists, socialists, communists, red republicans, [and] Jacobins"[32] Methodist minister Whitefoord Smith, a South Carolinian like Thornwell, asserted that abolitionists who attacked slavery had waged a "fight not against us but against God." He declared John C. Calhoun was "our Moses."[33] Such anti-Northern and Southern nationalistic sentiment contributed to the South becoming "not only identifiable, distinctive, and self-aware," as one historian notes, but "also on its way toward regarding itself as pure (purer than the North at any rate) and superior."[34] The clergy were crucial in constructing this newly emerged identity of Southern righteousness, at the center of which was an association between slavery, the Confederacy, and providential destiny. Southerners were akin to the Israelites endeavoring to preserve God's will against the apostate Philistines of the North.

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[30] See C. C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schisms and the Coming of the American Civil War*(Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985)
[31] George Rable, *God's Almost Chosen People: A Religious History of the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010) 27.
[32] Quoted in James Cobb, *Away Down South,* 49.
[33] George Rable, *God's Almost Chosen People,* 26
[34] Quoted in Richard E. Beringer, *Why the South Lost the Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986) 91.

Sectionalist conflict polarized Americans on either side of the Mason-Dixon Line. Richard Fuller noted as early as 1845 that "Compared with slavery, all other topics which now shake and inflame men's passions in these United States, are really trifling."[35] The South's peculiar institution was unquestionably at the heart of the sectionalist controversy, and the clergy were slavery's most vehement defenders. Yet as George Rable reminds us, a decade before secession "the Southern clergy remained staunchly Unionist."[36] The election of Abraham Lincoln to the presidency accompanied by the specter of abolition in 1860 compelled mainstream clerical sentiment to advocate secession.

Throughout his campaign and the beginning of his presidency, Lincoln repeatedly sought to ensure the South of his intentions to leave the institution of slavery unharmed where it existed.[37] Yet many clergymen, like much of the Southern populace, remained unconvinced. Of Georgia's secession convention delegates who were ministers by profession, none favored remaining in the Union.[38] Each of the original seven seceding states made their rationale for disbanding the Union clear—to preserve the South's peculiar institution. Alabama's secession ordinance charged that Lincoln and the Republican Party were "avowedly hostile to the domestic institutions" of Alabama and the South. Under the Lincoln administration, Texas' secession ordinance declared, "the power of the Federal Government is…to be made a weapon with which to strike down

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[35] Fuller and Wayland, *Domestic Slavery Considered as a Scriptural Institution,* 3.
[36] George Rable, *God's Almost Chosen People: A Religious History of the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 27
[37] See Michael Johnson, *Abraham Lincoln, Slavery, and the Civil War: Selected Writings and Speeches* especially Lincoln/Douglas debates, Lincoln First Inaugural Address
[38] Cobb, *Away Down South,* 50. South Carolina's secession was celebrated by the ringing of church bells in Macon; see Richard Iobst, *Civil War Macon: The History of a Confederate City* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1999), 49

the interests and prosperity of the Southern people."[39] The Union's abolitionist onslaught threatened the best interests of master as well as slave; it sought to arrest a prosperity bestowed by God Himself. Because slavery was the foundation upon which the South rested, a threat to it was a threat to the entire society.

Just as secession was a means of defending slavery, so too was it a step towards preserving the will of God. Emphasizing Southerners' divine obligation to defend their peculiar institution, a Methodist minister cited God's covenant with the Israelites enumerated in Deuteronomy 5:29—"O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!"[40] As the children of Israel, Southerners were to uphold their covenant with God by continuing to fulfill their obligation as Christian guardians. Bondage as He intended it provided a means for slaves to gain salvation. Yet the continuation of bondage was no less crucial to their earthly condition. As one minister ominously declared, "the Black race perishes with its freedom."[41] So severe was their racial inferiority that slavery was necessary for their very survival. Servitude was in place to preserve the natural and divine order, to place the menial black race under the custodianship of pious whites. In the mind of the clergy, fighting to preserve slavery was no more than defending the will of God.

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[39] Charles Dew, *Apostles of Disunion: Southern Secession Commissioners and the Causes of the Civil War* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001) 11-12.

[40] George Foster Pierce, "The word of God a nation's life a sermon, preached before the Bible Convention of the Confederate States, Augusta, Georgia, March 19th, 1862; Deuteronomy 5:29

[41] Stephen Elliott, "'Vain is the help of man' a sermon preached in Christ Church, Savannah, on Thursday, September 15, 1864, being the day of fasting humiliation, and prayer, appointed by the governor of the state of Georgia," 1864

Ministers sought to foster the idea of the Civil War as a holy war. God had established the Confederate States of America, an independent slave republic, they argued, to ensure the prosperity of His chosen people. Guided by the Lord of Hosts, the Confederate Army would defeat the Union as punishment for its "practical atheism and national neglect in not…acknowledging His supremacy."[42] From the outbreak of the war, the clergy were certain the Confederacy would achieve victory through divine deliverance. Such confidence led one minister to declare in a farewell sermon to a company of Savannah soldiers bound for northern Virginia: "children of Israel…ye may go to battle without any fear…you may advance, soldiers with the assurance that you will be remembered before the Lord your God, and will be saved from your enemies."[43]

During the war, the clergy interpreted success on the battlefield as evidence of divine favor. In a sermon delivered in July of 1861 following the First Battle of Bull Run, Bishop Stephen Elliott likened the South's victory at Manassas to the Israelites' escape from Pharaoh at the Red Sea.[44] Elliott acknowledged the material advantage of the Union army, yet he was certain it posed no threat divine interjection would not counter. Akin to an archetypal biblical narrative of war, the Confederacy's struggle for independence would require overcoming an adversary of physical and material superiority. Such odds would allow God to demonstrate His omnipotence and receive glory in victory.

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[42] Charles Colcock Jones, *The Children of Pride: Letters of the family of the Reverend Dr. Charles Colcock Jones from the years 1860-1868, with the Addition of Several Previously Unpublished Letters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 102-103

[43] Stephen Elliott, "The silver trumpets of the sanctuary a sermon preached to the Pulaski Guards in Christ Church, Savannah, on the second Sunday after the Trinity: being the Sunday before their departure to join the army in Virginia," 1861

[44] Stephen Elliott, "God's Presence with Our Army at Manassas! a sermon preached in Christ Church, Savannah, on Sunday, July 28th," 1861

Reverend John William Jones, a chaplain in the Army of Northern Virginia, acknowledged God's redeeming hand in the midst of war. Reminiscing on Confederate success in the 1862 Peninsula campaign, he declared: "Christ was on the battle-field as well as 'in the camp,' and…He manifested His saving power…during that bloody campaign."[45] No question God had brought desolation and death upon the South, yet only to make His role in the war all the more evident. The saving power Reverend Jones spoke of led a Baptist counterpart of his in Georgia to declare the series of victories experienced by the Confederate army were, perhaps, unparalleled in the history of the world.[46] In the first year of the war, the clergy's confidence in ultimate victory abounded. The clerical vision of a Southern providential destiny appeared clearer than ever.

Divines' morale surrounding their military's "uniform success" maintained well into 1863. Following the timely defeat of their Northern oppressors, the establishment of a "new Israel"-- an independent slave republic-- loomed on the horizon. Just as the once powerful nations of Syria, Assyria, and Babylon had met defeat in their efforts to conquer God's chosen people, so too would the Union. [47] In 1863, God showed His favor in the Battle of Chancellorsville, in which General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia defeated a force roughly twice its size in Union General Joseph Hooker's Army of the Potomac. The Israelites had triumphed over a numerically superior foe once again.

But the Philistines would not relent. In the summer of 1863, major defeats at Gettysburg and Vicksburg tested the clergy's belief in a victorious conclusion to the

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[45] John W. Jones, *Christ in the Camp, or, Religion in Lee's Army* (Richmond: B.F. Johnson & Co., 1887), 282
[46] Henry Tucker, "God in the war a sermon delivered before the legislature of Georgia, in the capitol at Milledgeville, on Friday, November 15, 1861"
[47] Benjamin Morgan Palmer, a sermon "delivered before the General Assembly at Milledgeville, Ga., on fast day, March 27, 1863"

conflict. Failure forced the clergy to reconcile their vision of a Southern providential destiny with the tribulations of the Confederacy.

Reform

"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."—2 Chronicles 7:14

On a Friday in late August of 1863, the congregation of Savannah Baptist Church was called together in recognition of a state-sanctioned day of humiliation, fasting, and prayer. The service began with the reading of a proclamation from Jefferson Davis. The President of the Confederate States of America called upon his constituency, "a people who believe that the Lord reigneth, and that His overruling Providence ordereth all things," to submit to God and seek His favor on behalf of their suffering nation.[48] Those on the home front were well aware of the recent change in tide of the ongoing war. Only weeks earlier, the army had suffered perhaps its most significant defeat at Gettysburg. The battle claimed over 4,000 Confederate lives with an additional 18,000 either wounded or missing. During the same week, Union troops led by General Ulysses S. Grant besieged the Confederate stronghold of Vicksburg, which subsequently fell on July 4th. As time would tell, these two events irreversibly impacted the direction of the war. The gravity of Gettysburg and Vicksburg would not fully be understood until months--even years-- after the summer of 1863. Nonetheless, members of the clergy recognized

[48] Sylvanus Landrum, "The Battle is God's. A discourse before the congregation of the Savannah Baptist Church, on the day of humiliation, fasting, and prayer," Friday, August, 21st, 1863

both episodes were damning blows to their fledgling republic and the cause it was fighting to preserve.

Failure on the battlefield forced the clergy to explain what appeared to be a lack of divine support. If God truly did favor the South, how might the clergy explain the Confederacy's recent failings? [49] Surely it was out of the question that an ever faithful, omniscient God could have disavowed His chosen people. Instead, as George Rable explains, "Defeat forced conscientious Confederates to consider their own transgressions."[50] Ministers explained the war's reversal of fortune in terms of divine chastisement for the many sins of the South.

The clergy looked to scripture in seeking to understand the war's recent turnaround. On the Confederate fasting day in August, Savannah Baptist Church pastor Sylvanus Landrum proposed an explanation for the recent defeats through a sermon derived from the story of Jehoshaphat in Second Chronicles. "How fitly," the reverend noted, "the language falls in with the present state of our affairs." Upon ascending to the throne of Judah, Jehoshaphat had abolished idolatry and promulgated the Law of God throughout the nation, making his kingdom a pious and holy one. Yet the King of Judah had fallen victim to sin and the nation was subsequently invaded by the Moabites, Ammonites, and Meonians. Through the act of secession, the Confederacy had purged

[49] To be sure, the clerical perception of defeat was indeed a lack of favor for the South, as opposed to Northern superiority. Members of the clergy almost uniformly failed to discuss the material advantage of the North, unless invoking Biblical analogies of when God's chosen people, extremely outnumbered, prevailed over the enemy. See Stephen Elliott, "Gideon's water-lappers a sermon preached in Christ Church, Savannah, on Friday, the 8th day of April, 1864;" for an alternative view, see Terrie D. Aamodt, *Righteous Armies, Holy Cause: Apocalyptic Imagery and the Civil War* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2002)

[50] George Rable, *God's Almost Chosen People,* 270

itself of the hedonistic, impious North, thereby achieving righteousness through a path similar to Judah's. Yet also just as Jehoshaphat, the Confederacy had fallen into sin and was facing persecution at the hand of its Union invaders as a result.

Ministers openly struggled with the issue of how a people so blessed by God could stray from His will. In a sermon delivered in August of 1863, Stephen Elliott proposed his explanation for the South's moral decline:

> "The confidence which grew out of continued victory led to presumption and presumption led to security and the feeling of security begat within the community the leisure of wealth…And this making haste to be rich took rapid possession of the minds and hearts of the whole people…Every man became anxious to take part in this game which was to enrich himself, without seeing that it would, most certainly ruin his country."[51]

God had allowed Southerners to flourish for their faithful dependence upon Him, establishing the Confederacy as a vehicle for their continued prosperity. Yet in experiencing good fortune through the successes of slavery and repeated military victories, Southerners had learned to become independent and self-confident, failing to acknowledge the supremacy of The Almighty over their nation. This lack of divine reliance, in turn, led Southerners to pursue self-interested ends contrary to God's will. Such behaviors were detrimental to the Confederate crusade.

The greed that anticipated the South's impending collapse manifested itself in many forms. The most egregious of these spiritual transgressions was the misrepresentation of slavery. Motivated by a desire to exercise a degree of control over their bondsmen that exceeded the boundaries of what Southerners' paternalistic covenant

[51] Stephen Elliott, "Ezra's dilemna [sic] a sermon preached in Christ Church, Savannah, on Friday, August 21st, 1863" ; also see S.H. Higgins, "'The mountain moved, or, David upon the cause and cure of public calamity," 1863

dictated, greed inhibited slaveholders from performing their duties as Christian guardians. In an 1846 essay, a Georgia Baptist minister identified the primary responsibility of Christian guardianship, namely "Our obligation as masters to furnish our servants with the means of salvation." Only through proselytization of the Gospel could blacks inherit Christianity. Yet "they cannot read the word of God," the minister bemoaned; "we are the cause of this inability."[52] Legal statutes in Georgia, as in other Confederate states, prohibited slaves from becoming literate. Such regulations were inspired partly to counter the "incendiary publications" of abolitionists, aimed at inspiring disorder and rebellion among slaves. Whites also feared education and enlightenment through literacy would lead blacks to become discontent with the earthly position they occupied as chattel. Yet such concerns, the clergy believed, should not outweigh whites' obligation as Christian guardians. In a sermon delivered before the Georgia state legislature only months prior to the Confederate decline in 1863, Methodist George Foster Pierce claimed laws barring slave literacy were "adverse…to the will of God and the true interests of humanity." [53] By depriving their bondsmen of the Gospel, masters were effectively holding their slaves in spiritual servitude.

The clergy identified other ways in which whites had neglected to act upon their duties as Christian guardians. In December of 1863, Presbyterian minister Benjamin Palmer indicated masters' "past shortcomings" not only in failing "to give them God's blessed word," but also their inability "to throw the shield of a stronger guardianship

[52] J.S. Law, "An essay on the religious oral instruction of the colored people: prepared in accordance with a request of the Georgia Baptist Convention [sic] and read before that body, May 18th, 1846"
[53] See George Foster Pierce, a sermon "delivered before the General Assembly at Milledgeville, Ga., on fast day, March 27, 1863"

around [slaves'] domestic relations."[54] Divines took issue with masters' regulation of the nuclear slave family. In the slave trade, it was not uncommon for families to be divided and sold as separate commodities, thus garnering higher profits for the former owners. Such practices were a blatant disregard of a sacred form of kinship and a direct consequence of greed. Masters were censured for their involvement in slaves' romantic lives as well. As Mark 10:9 reads, "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."[55] Divines spoke out against the overregulation of slave marriages, such as when masters would prearrange a partnership, as well as the failure to acknowledge marriages, which were considered a holy institution. The practice of manipulating the matrimonial or familial relationships of slaves, whether in pursuit of economic self-interest or otherwise, ran directly counter to God's will. While the clergy embraced an interpretation of scripture that dictated blacks occupy a subservient position in society to whites, they nonetheless maintained bondage afforded certain divine rights to slaves.

Clerical criticism against the abuses of slavery was not prompted by failure in war. In fact, movements originating in the church aimed at reforming the institution had existed decades prior.[56] Yet beginning in the latter half of 1863, ministers increasingly pointed to whites' failed obligation as Christian guardians in explaining the South's lack of divine favor. Nonetheless, even in experiencing defeat the clergy remained convinced of the virtues of slavery.

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[54] Benjamin Palmer, "A discourse before the General Assembly of South Carolina, on December 10, 1863" 1863

[55] Mark 10:9, KJV

[56] See Eugene Genovese, *A Consuming Fire: The Fall of the Confederacy in the Mind of the White Christian South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), especially chapter 1-2

While masters were castigated for their implementation of slavery in practice, the clergy continued to praise the virtues of bondage in principle. Servitude, Benjamin Palmer professed, "is the allotted destiny of this race, and that the form most beneficial to the negro himself is precisely that which obtains with us." It was the South's duty to preserve slavery, for the good of whites and blacks alike. Embracing this paternalistic notion, he commented on the current state of the institution as he saw it: "The Negro race…has never in any period of history been able to lift itself above its native condition of fetishism and barbarism." Yet in the South, blacks were "the best conditioned, the happiest, and I will add, in the essential import of the world, the freest operative class to be found in Christendom."[57] Ministers sought to justify forced servitude to abolitionists, perhaps for the sake of their own consciences as well, by romanticizing the institution as it existed in the South. It was the civil and spiritual advancement slavery offered blacks, after all, that enabled divine favor to be conferred upon the South. Regaining such favor, the clergy reasoned, required the institution be reformed so as to more closely resemble its scriptural dictates.

Though slaveholders received the brunt of clerical indictment, none were immune from blame over the Confederacy's decline. As one minister explained, "From the President of the Confederate States…to the humblest person who is involved in its destiny, each one of us should examine himself and find out, if possible, wherein he has offended God and turned away his face from us."[58] Even in defeat, ministers remained no less convinced the South's mission was in accordance with divine will. Rather than even

[57] Benjamin Palmer, "A discourse before the General Assembly of South Carolina, on December 10, 1863" 1863

[58] Stephen Elliott, "Ezra's dilemna [sic] a sermon preached in Christ Church, Savannah, on Friday, August 21st, 1863"

venture to question the righteousness of their nation's cause, whether the hand of providence truly favored the South, the clergy impelled all Southerners to self-examination in hopes of discovering the sins that had caused God to turn from His chosen people.[59] From the onset of the war, the presence of divine favor had been assumed by the clergy. Only through the misdeeds of Southerners, they reckoned, had their nation fallen from grace.

With a vehemence that rivaled clerical resentment against masters' abuses of slavery, the clergy indicted the Confederate government for its failure to obey the word of God in neglecting the Sabbath. During the war, legal statutes allowed the delivery of mail on Sundays. Such was a travesty, one minister testified, that the Confederate theocracy had failed to uphold one of God's sacred commandments.[60]While other spiritual transgressions recognized by the clergy as contributing to the failure of the Confederacy were not specific to the war or to the South, ministers censured the laity for "sins of the flesh," such as drunkenness, gambling, and profanity, which they believed had increased vastly on the home front during the war. [61]

The blasphemous behavior of the South had inspired divine chastisement on behalf of The Almighty, manifested through military defeat. Relating to the history of God's chosen people through scripture helped ministers interpret, perhaps even personally come to terms with, the current state of the Confederacy. Through the experiences of King David in Psalms 30, a Methodist minister offered his understanding

[59] S.H. Higgins, "'The mountain moved, or, David upon the cause and cure of public calamity," 1863
[60] S.H. Higgins, "'The mountain moved, or, David upon the cause and cure of public calamity," 1863
[61] Richard Nelson Current, ed., Encyclopedia of the Confederacy (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), V3, p.1320

of the South's deplorable circumstances: "God suddenly dimmed the radiance of his prosperity...With waning power, the love of his people was turned to hatred, and their favor to persecution…Deprivations, anxieties, and perils came around him, like the troops of a besieging army." Not unlike, the pastor surmised, the Union Army's besiegement of the South. Realizing he had fallen out of God's favor, the psalmist confessed "Thou didst hide my face, and I was troubled."[62] Such language characterized the distress evident in clerical sentiment following the war's change of course in 1863. The children of Israel had aroused the might of an angry God.

The circumstances surrounding their faltering republic, a declaration from the Damascus religious society in Early County read, were "to be deplored with many tears and much earnest prayer." Yet rather than be discouraged, "we should be prompted to renewed efforts in the discharge of our religious obligations."[63] Requisite to appeasing The Almighty was the repentance of Southerners. Implementing slavery reform and returning to obeying His sacred commandments began with complete submission to God and acknowledgment of His lordship over their nation. "[T]hen, and not till then," a minister assured his church's assemblage in a December 1863 sermon, "will He overthrow our enemies and establish us in the land."[64]

In an effort to preserve morale, possibly to offer themselves reassurance as well, divines maintained a positive tone even through the war's darkest hours. Though God had

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[62] S.H. Higgins, "'The mountain moved, or, David upon the cause and cure of public calamity," 1863; Psalm 30:7

[63] Minutes of the Seventy-Ninth Anniversary of the Georgia Baptist Association, held with Damascus Church, Columbia County, Ga., October 9th and 10th, 1863

[64] Benjamin Palmer, "A discourse before the General Assembly of South Carolina, on December 10, 1863" 1863; also see Sylvanus Landrum, "The Battle is God's. A discourse before the congregation of the Savannah Baptist Church, on the day of humiliation, fasting, and prayer," Friday, August, 21st, 1863

permitted death and devastation among the South, the clergy perceived a more complex providential design in the recent defeats than could be explained by punishment of sin alone. Instead, they believed, God had thrust adversity upon the Confederacy in order to inspire humility in His chosen people. The war would try the South's faith in God. Conversely, how Southerners responded to their current afflictions would test if they were truly worthy of deliverance. If Southerners maintained their faith, one minister confidently declared, God would fulfill the South's "glorious destiny among the nations of the earth."[65]

Despite clerical criticism of the South's recent spiritual transgressions, the pulpit continued to praise the righteousness of the Confederate mission. As a resolution from the Ebenezer Church convention at the end of 1863 explained, "In the series of reverses with which we have met in the last year…the chastising rod of God has been visited upon us, a wicked people." The Confederacy had experienced defeat as punishment for its people' sacrilege, and rightly so. Nonetheless, "we still believe we are on the side of truth and justice."[66] Though Southerners had strayed from God's will, their Confederate nation had been established by the enduring virtues of His design. This belief contributed to the clergy's enthusiastic support and promotion of nationalism. Theology and politics went hand in hand when the clergy preached on the war—one could hardly be discussed exclusive of the other.

Accompanying clerical pro-Confederate sentiment was the continued negative characterization of the North. Divines described the Union as despotic, fanatical,

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[65] Benjamin Palmer, "A discourse before the General Assembly of South Carolina, on December 10, 1863" 1863

[66] Ebenezer

ungodly, and atheistic. One minister likened the tyranny of the North to that of Napoleon.[67] Adhering to an interpretation of the Constitution that advocated states' rights and the legitimacy of secession, the clergy saw the war as an undertaking aimed at the conquest of a separate, innocent people by the tyrannical Union army. Yet aggression against the South was not the North's most egregious offense. Bent on abrogating the prosperity of Southerners, the North targeted the abolition of slavery. In threatening their divinely ordained institution, members of the clergy saw the Union as waging war against God Himself. In an April 1864 sermon, Stephen Elliott plainly stated: "Our maddened adversaries are warring not only against us, but against God."[68] Because slavery preserved the natural and heavenly sanctioned social order, efforts toward its dissolution were considered directly counter to God's will.

During the war, the clerical notion of a Southern providential destiny was inextricably linked with the preservation of slavery. The clergy believed the institution had been ordained by God for the benefit of His chosen people. Servitude also worked to the betterment of blacks, the cursed descendants of Ham, offering them a means through which to acquire civilization in this world and salvation in the next. The clergy equated the Confederate cause, namely the defense of slavery, with preserving divine will. In turn, ministers reasoned, God would deliver the Confederacy for the sake of achieving His purposes. "[I]n the comprehensive scheme of Divine providence," Benjamin Palmer declared, some nations "have an assigned work, and are preserved in being till that work

[67] Stephen Elliott, "Gideon's water-lappers a sermon preached in Christ Church, Savannah, on Friday, the 8th day of April, 1864;"
[68] Stephen Elliott, "Gideon's water-lappers a sermon preached in Christ Church, Savannah, on Friday, the 8th day of April, 1864;"

is done."[69] Even in the midst of military defeat, the continuation of the Confederacy appeared to the clergy as crucial for the fulfillment of God's plan concerning the sustenance of blacks.

For the Confederate cause to truly accord with divine will, it was crucial slavery be amended to more closely resemble God's image of the institution. Ministers believed reform pertaining to slave literacy and to domestic relations were necessary. Abuses in the implementation of slavery, compounded by other sins of Southerners had inspired divine chastisement. In the mind of the clergy, the hand of a jealous and spiteful God had inspired the recent Confederate defeats. Yet Southerners need not be discouraged that their God had forsaken His chosen people. To the contrary, the turnaround in the war in 1863 was evidence God "was manifesting himself to us almost as palpably as he had done" with the Israelites, the clergy declared. Through the affliction of war, Southerners were being humbled in preparation for ultimate success. Maintaining faith was crucial. God "might try severely our fortitude—he might chasten heavily our sins—he might keep us long in the furnace of affliction, but in the end, he would deliver us and justify our trust in him. "[70] For nearly a year following the Confederacy's initial decline, marked by the army's reversal of fortune in the summer of 1863, the clerical vision of a Southern providential destiny remained clear. So long as the children of Israel acknowledged God's supremacy over their Confederate nation, He would establish on their behalf a Kingdom of God on Earth—an independent slave republic.

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[69] Benjamin Palmer, "A discourse before the General Assembly of South Carolina, on December 10, 1863" 1863

[70] Stephen Elliott, "Ezra's dilemna [sic] a sermon preached in Christ Church, Savannah, on Friday, August 21st, 1863"; Such confidence was not uncommon, see Minutes from the Forty-Second Anniversary of the Georgia Baptist State Convention, Held at Atlanta, The 22nd, 23rd, and 25th of April, 1864-- "From every point the indications are cheering, and hope and confidence swell our bosoms as we contemplate the final result"

Reproach

"Therefore hath the Lord watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us…for we obeyed not his voice"-- Daniel 9:14

The Confederacy's final year of existence was characterized by lost reconciliation, utter destruction, and eventual failure. Robert E. Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia's last, undisputable victory came at the Battle of Cold Harbor in June of 1864. From that point on, the nation's military endeavors were marked by an impasse at best, and more often defeat. Combat in the Western Theater wrapped up in mid-December of the same year with one of the Union's largest victories as General George H. Thomas' forces effectively decimated General John B. Hood's Confederate Army of Tennessee in Nashville. In a last ditch effort to protect the Confederate capital of Richmond, Robert E. Lee led an unsuccessful offensive against General Grant's forces near Petersburg in late March of 1865. The fall of Richmond in April came less than two months after Abraham Lincoln refused Jefferson Davis' proposal to send a peace delegation to Washington under the condition the President acknowledge the Confederate States' independence.[71]

Georgia was especially devastated by General Sherman's capture of Atlanta in September 1864 and his subsequent March to the Sea, the most destructive campaign against a civilian population in the Civil War. Capped by the fall of Savannah on

[71] David S. Heidler, et. al., ed., *Encyclopedia of the American Civil War: A Political, Social, and Military History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2000)

December 21st, Union forces leveled a path of devastation through the state, destroying Confederate supplies and dismantling infrastructure.[72] Those on the home front were well aware of their nation's plummeting military fortunes, but beginning in the latter half of 1864 many observed it firsthand. Whether members of the clergy bore witness or merely received word of their nation's downfall, all had to reconcile their vision of a Southern providential destiny with the reality of impending defeat. Rather than even venture to suggest the Lord of Hosts had forsaken His chosen people, ministers continued to explain their nation's misfortunes in terms of divine chastisement. Eventually, the Confederacy would face defeat and emancipation not at the hand of the Union, but of an angry God.

A mandate from a Bulloch County Baptist association in October of 1864 impelled its members to "reflect for a moment and ask the question, why is the Lord's anger kindled against us, and why has the God of Jacob forsaken us and left us to wail, to weep, and to mourn?" For over a year the Confederacy had endured war with little manifestation of divine favor. The clergy remained consistent in their interpretation of defeat as stemming from "the effect of sin, disobedience, and folly."[73] From the misdeeds of God's chosen people had come punishment through military failure. Yet in the final year of war as the reality of defeat approached, the clergy began to consider their nation's spiritual transgressions in terms of contributing to the ultimate dissolution of the Confederacy and its peculiar institution.

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[72] _____., *The New Georgia Encyclopedia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004)

[73] Minutes of the Lower Canoochee Association, in Session with the Lower Lott's Creek Church, Bulloch County, Georgia, October 8th-10th, 1864

In the minds of the clergy, there existed a complex relationship between piety, sin, and the lifespan of a nation.[74] If, early on, ministers saw divinely inspired defeat as a test of Southerners' trust in God, the final year of war was evidence their faith had not persisted through adversity. Instead, experiencing repeated military failure had negative implications on Southerners' religious morale. Ministers conceived of the relationship between piety and the Confederate downfall as such: the spiritual transgressions of God's chosen people inspired divine chastisement through defeat which, in turn, created a deficit in religious morale. As Southerners' piety suffered from their nation's failings, they continued to lose faith and thus stray from the will of God. The most palpable form of this phenomenon was embodied by masters failing to reform the institution of slavery. Ministers also pointed to Southerners' indulging in sins of the flesh, characterized generally as engaging in a hedonistic, decadent lifestyle brought on by the prosperity God had granted them through slavery. The fall of the Confederacy would take the form of a downward spiral, as the nation's demise coincided with its people' decline in religious morale, as expressed through a lack of piety. The beginning to the end of the Confederacy was marked by a widespread decline in the state of religion.

Clerical sentiment regarding the South's lack of piety reached a morbid level in the final year of the war. Reminiscing on the Georgia Methodist Conference of 1864 (held in January of 1865), Methodist minister, writer, and historian George G. Smith commented "Methodism in Georgia never presented a gloomier aspect than at this

[74] See Sylvanus Landrum, "The Battle is God's. A discourse before the congregation of the Savannah Baptist Church, on the day of humiliation, fasting, and prayer," Friday, August, 21st, 1863; Jeremiah 5:6-31, Leviticus 26:1-19, Hosea 5:1-7

conference."[75] The cause of divines' sorrowed spirits lay with their congregations. Their lack of piety was hindering the clerical vision of a Southern providential destiny. Divine favor was absolutely crucial for a Confederate victory, the clergy believed, especially given the nation's unfavorable military circumstances in late 1864 going into1865.

Minutes from the Columbus Baptist Association in September of 1864 provide an illustration of the pulpit's discouragement. A report delivered on the state of religion lamented the "general indifference to public worship," revealed by only 50% attendance of church services; prayer meetings were being disregarded almost entirely by the congregation. The report also bemoaned the inability of Sunday Schools to educate younger generations as well as a significant drop in offering donations as evidence of the "most deplorable" state of religion.[76] A Clay County Baptist association shared similar sentiments in November of the same year, asserting "our churches in the main are in rather a cold condition."[77] Methodist minister Atticus Haygood sought to explain the lack of public religiosity in terms of individuals' "hindrance of the gospel," which had reached unheralded proportions by the turn of 1865.[78] In the clergy's mind, there existed no question as to the effects of the war on Southerners' faith, or to the impact of Southerners' unrepentant sin on the final outcome of the war.

Failure of God's chosen people to heed the clergy's message to repent and reform obfuscated the clerical vision of a divinely established, independent slave republic. Had

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[75] George Smith, *The History of Georgia Methodism from 1786 to 1866* (Atlanta: A.B. Caldwell, 1913), 328
[76] Minutes from the Thirty-Sixth Annual Session of the Columbus Baptist Association Held at County Line, Talbot County, Ga., September 24th-26th, 1864
[77] Minutes of the Bethel Baptist Association, held at Cotton Hill, Clay County, Georgia, Saturday, November 5th, 1864
[78] in Harold W. Mann, *Atticus Haygood: Methodist Bishop, Editor, and Educator* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1965), 49

Southerners sought atonement for their spiritual transgressions, divine favor would have been rightly restored to their nation's military. Instead, they would face the wrath of a vengeful God. In a personal correspondence penned September of 1864, George Foster Pierce confessed: "I cannot see through the gloom of the times, and dread the discipline of heaven in this matter. God pity us and help us. "[79]

Southerners' disobedience of The Almighty continued to bewilder divines. Seeking understanding on the national punishment of a defiant people, the clergy consulted scripture. Stephen Elliott proposed the sins of the South were not necessarily worse than those of other nations, but because Southerners were betraying such immense blessings from God, their spiritual transgressions warranted greater punishment. Divine chastisement was geared towards "the punishment…of an arrogant people, who were ascribing their prosperity and their material power, not to his loving kindness and divine mercy, but to their institutions."[80] In effect, Southerners were willing to reap the benefits of slavery without fulfilling their obligation as Christian guardians, thereby failing to acknowledge God's supremacy over their nation and the institution He bestowed upon it. Though in the final year of the war, the pulpit remained a fervent critic of slaveholders. In January of 1865, the Georgia Methodist Conference met to petition the state legislature to consider reforming institution, especially the marital relations of slaves.[81] Amending slavery to more closely fit its scriptural dictates, requiring masters to fully engage in their paternalistic covenant, was crucial in atoning for perhaps the South's most nefarious sin

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[79] George G. Smith, *The Life and Times of George Foster Pierce, D.D., LL.D. Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Sparta: Hancock Pub. Co., 1888), 486

[80] Stephen Elliott, "'Vain is the help of man' a sermon preached in Christ Church, Savannah, on Thursday, September 15, 1864"; also, see Luke 12:20

[81] *Southern Christian Advocate*, XXVIII, January 19, 1865

and regaining divine favor. Backed by Governor Joseph Brown, the state legislature sought to effect change in laws involving slave literacy and domestic relations. Such attempts were of little avail, however; the end of the war would come before any substantial reform measures could be enacted.

Despite loudly condemning the spiritual transgressions of Southerners, clerical sentiment unrelentingly praised the virtues of the Southern cause. Ministers unceasingly lifted up the merits of slavery. Even in the midst of defeat, the clergy remained convinced preserving a divinely sanctioned system of forced servitude was in the best interest of humanity. The February 1865 edition of the *Southern Christian Advocate* captured this conviction: "All of us believe that slavery is a providential institution, that it rests upon Christian ground, that we are solemnly responsible for its guardianship, and that its uses, if rightly employed, are mutually advantageous to slaveholder and slave."[82] The foundation of the Southern cause was the Christian representation of slavery. In preserving and maintaining the institution, whites were fulfilling God's will by acting as the religious stewards of the cursed descendants of Ham. Sanctioned by God, slavery could not be sinful. Yet the very premise upon which the scriptural proslavery defense was based allowed for the institution's corruption. Mandated by God to be implemented by the inherently flawed hand of man, slavery had the potential of corruption. In the minds of the clergy, Southerners were crusading for a righteous cause. Yet by committing an egregious sin in misrepresenting slavery, the South would inevitably face punishment.

[82] in Alfred M. Pierce, *A History of Methodism in Georgia, February 5, 1736- June 24, 1955*(Atlanta, North Georgia Conference Historical Society, 1956), 154

In a September 1864 sermon, Baptist minister John Landing Burrows explained the concept of divine chastisement as it related to a nation in terms of corporate theology. The reverend recognized the relationship between sin and punishment, acknowledging, "It is universally true, that national judgments have been drawn down by national sins...the sins of people are directly visited with Divine judgments." Yet Burrows offered a further distinction. Whereas God would offer judgment on the deeds of individuals in Heaven, there was no afterlife for a nation; therefore, its "transgressions must be punished in this world or never."[83] The rhetoric of Burrows implies a critical distinction between the sins of the Confederacy and those of Southerners. The latter had been ordained as the children of Israel, entrusted with the civil and religious protection of blacks in a system designed for their prosperity. Yet as a people composed of a nation, the Confederacy had committed national sins against God. Even in the midst of defeat, the clergy believed Southerners maintained God's favor. Yet their collective sin threatened the disbandment of their Confederacy, a nation instituted by God as a vehicle to attain further prosperity for His chosen people. Such a distinction will be crucial in considering clerical pro-Southern sentiment following the war, as we will see later.

For the remainder of the war, the pulpit promoted notions of Southern righteousness; for example by praising the merits of slavery and frequently drawing comparisons between Southerners and the Israelites. Divines also persisted in negatively characterizing the North. In personal correspondence addressing Sherman's siege of Atlanta, George Foster Pierce wrote: "We are all sad over the fall of Atlanta. The mere loss of the place is not so much, but the moral effect is against us. The Philistines will

[83] John Landing Burrows, "Nationality Insured! Notes of a sermon delivered at the First Baptist Church, Augusta, Ga., September 11th, 1864"

rejoice."[84] Depicting the North as the Kingdom of Philistine reflected divines' perception of Southerners as the children of Israel, as well as their belief in the Civil War as a holy war-- a crusade against Israel's most infamous enemy. Sherman as well as Union generals Grant and Butler were slandered by ministers for being fanatical, tyrannical, and excessively cruel. Yet the Union's Commander-in-Chief was undoubtedly the most despised Northern figure. Speaking on the election of Abraham Lincoln to a second term in office in 1864 and its implications for the Confederacy, Stephen Elliott declared:

> "The election of Lincoln is a necessity for our deliverance... We need his folly and his fanaticism for another term; his mad pursuit of his peculiar ideas. It is he that is ordained to lead his people to destruction; to force them into conflict through the arbitrariness of his decrees. His re-election will give him fresh courage and additional madness…he will pursue the war with redoubled fury, until at least satiated with misrule, the sober thinking men of the North will perceive, that submission to him is utter and perpetual ruin.'"[85]

It is hardly surprising that Lincoln was the foremost object of clerical derision. As the foremost opponent of the Confederacy and slavery, Lincoln was combating the will of God Himself. Aside from his politics, Lincoln was an irreligious man. A heathen, the clergy believed, was unfit to rule the devout and virtuous South. Led by Lincoln, the atheistic North composed of its "short-sighted philanthropists of the world," according to Elliott, regarded "themselves to be wiser and more merciful than God."[86] By contrast, Elliott argued, the South defended the will of God. Persisting until the final shots of the war had ceased, such anti-Northern rhetoric evidences efforts to promote Confederate nationalism through emphasizing the righteousness of the Southern cause.

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[84] George G. Smith, *The Life and Times of George Foster Pierce,* 485-86

[85] Stephen Elliott, "'Vain is the help of man' a sermon preached in Christ Church, Savannah, on Thursday, September 15, 1864"

[86] Stephen Elliott, "'Vain is the help of man' a sermon preached in Christ Church, Savannah, on Thursday, September 15, 1864"

In the final year of the war, the apparition of a Confederate defeat could be readily perceived from the pulpit. Yet all hope was not lost. The clergy continued to urge Southerners to repent for their spiritual transgressions. Reforming the institution of slavery was crucial, as was turning away from a self-indulgent lifestyle and, instead, pursuing an existence promoted to furthering the Kingdom of God in the South. The clergy believed that Southerners could still send a message to God acknowledging His supremacy over their struggling republic. As a result, the Lord of Hosts would offer deliverance to the Confederate Army. In the words of John Landing Burrows in September of 1864, if Southerners took heed and repented, "As sure as God's word is true, we should be established as an independent, prosperous and happy nation."[87] Genuine and humble repentance would lead the God of Jacob to establish a new Israel in the South—an independent slave republic.

Late into 1864, ministers expressed hope in ultimate victory. George Foster Pierce remained confident in discussing the military endeavors of the Confederacy in July: "Our army is unbroken. The evacuation of Atlanta was the result of a manoeuvre *[sic]* rather than a defeat, so that Hood is still ready and able to fight…I think Sherman can be compelled to capitulate in forty days."[88] Pierce understood God operated in mysterious ways, and so the conventional logic of military strategy did not necessarily apply in such a situation. Guided by the hand of The Almighty, the Confederate Army would stifle Sherman in Tennessee, sparing Georgia. Stephen Elliott expressed similar confidence months later. God's grand plan, he believed, did not include granting slaves

[87] John Landing Burrows, "Nationality Insured! Notes of a sermon delivered at the First Baptist Church, Augusta, Ga., September 11th, 1864"
[88] George G. Smith, *The Life and Times of George Foster Pierce,* 486

liberty. At least for the foreseeable future, the descendants of Ham would remain in servitude under the guardianship of whites. To protect blacks, Elliott reasoned, God must also protect their captors.

On April 9, 1865, Robert E. Lee convened with Ulysses S. Grant in the parlor of Wilmer McLean's house in Appomattox to sign papers of capitulation, thereby surrendering the Army of Northern Virginia and effectively ending the war. Deliverance in war by the hand of The Almighty would not come. Yet the clergy remained no less convinced of the righteousness of the cause their nation fought to preserve. And their vision of a Southern providential destiny did not entirely preclude military defeat. As early as 1863, Methodist reverend S.H. Higgins preached that victory was not necessarily indicative of divine favor.[89] To be sure, an omnipotent God could intervene at any point for His purposes. Those plans were simply beyond human conception. The timing of God, ministers reminded the laity, did not always coincide to man's convenience. A circular letter seeking to assure its followers read, ""The Lord, has through all ages, wonderfully preserved His poor and afflicted people, even under their sorest trials and sharpest afflictions."[90] In scripture, deliverance is often offered only after much hardship and suffering. "Seasons of defeat and disaster had come and would come again," historian George Rable reminds us, "but then the Lord would deliver those who remained steadfast." Stephen Elliott understood the biblical notion of achieving righteousness through suffering, and ultimately redemption. Foreshadowing clerical sentiment in the

[89] S. H. Higgins, "The mountain moved, or, David upon the cause and cure of public calamity," 1863. This understanding was conveyed by members of the laity too, as evidenced by the writings of General William Nelson Pendleton: "God has not vacated His throne nor will He except for wise purposes, permit iniquity to triumph ultimately." See George Rable, *God's Almost Chosen People,* 273

[90] [90] Minutes of the Lower Canoochee Association, in Session with the Lower Lott's Creek Church, Bulloch County, Georgia, October 8th-10th, 1864

post-war years, he declared in September of 1864 that "the invasion of our State is not so great a calamity as many feel it to be; individuals may suffer deeply, but the State may be elevated immeasurably; our fields may be sown with blood and desolation, but the harvest may be one of national character which shall bless us for long generations."[91] The clergy sought to assure Southerners that their time would come. Suffering through the afflictions of war would prepare the children of Israel to inherit their proper lot.

[91] George Rable, *God's Almost Chosen People,* 274

Redemption

"And they shall know that I am the Lord, when I shall scatter them among the nations and disperse them in the countries." – Ezekiel 12:15

In the minds of the clergy, failure of the Confederate nation and destruction of its peculiar institution had been inspired by the spiritual transgressions of Southerners. The most significant of these misdeeds was failure to reform the institution of slavery. A sermon delivered shortly after the war captured the clerical perception of defeat. Hebrews 12, the theme of the sermon, spoke of a covenant with God christened by the blood of Christ. Continuing to struggle with the war's outcome, the clergy sought to explain defeat in terms of Southerners failing to uphold their covenant with God. As Hebrews 12:28-29 reads "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire."[92] The children of Israel failed to uphold their paternalistic covenant by misrepresenting their divinely ordained system of bondage. Recognizing military defeat as chastisement and repenting by implementing proper reform to the institution, the clergy believed, would have helped restore divine favor to the Confederacy. But Southerners had failed to heed such divine messages. Rather than properly attribute their prosperity to the grace of God, masters developed a self-confidence that led to a hedonistic, self-indulgent lifestyle. As a result, the Confederate republic that had been

[92] Minutes of the Eighty-First Anniversary of the Georgia Baptist Association held with Bairds Church, Oglethorpe County, October 6th, 7th, and 9th, 1865; Hebrews 12:28

established by The Almighty for His chosen people had been destroyed along with the institution of slavery.

The clerical perception of the Confederate downfall was shaped by divines' understanding of national sin and punishment as told through the scriptural narratives of the original descendants of Jacob. As the children of Israel, the clergy believed the national sins of Southerners were fittingly punished by the destruction of their independent republic. In the Old Testament, God authorized the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar domain over the entire world in order to act under His agency. As punishment for the Israelites' practice of idolatry, God arranged the conquest of the Kingdom of Judah and exile of the Israelites by Nebuchadnezzar.[93] Southerners had also committed idolatry. By failing to reform slavery, instead operating under the motives of economic and other self-interested ends, masters had become worshippers of gain. Accordingly, God had ensured the dissolution of their Southern "new Israel."

A theme repeated throughout scripture is God's abiding faithfulness towards His chosen people. Despite the destruction of their nation, the clergy were confident Southerners had not fallen out of divine favor entirely. Nor, they believed, had God sanctioning defeat on their nation been meaningless. As a Methodist minister observed, "The four terrible years had not been without a blessing"[94] Defeat would humble Southerners and better prepare them to serve the purposes of God. Even in their nation's failure, the clergy remained steadfast both in their support of the fallen Confederacy and in their confidence about the future God had in store for the South. Recounting the

[93] Daniel 2:36-38; Jeremiah 25:8-9
[94] George G. Smith, *The Life and Times of George Foster Pierce,* 330

experiences of George Foster Pierce following defeat, a Methodist historian noted: "He had hoped for victory and independence; God had not seen it best that it should be…He did not, then or afterward, change his views of the justice of the Southern cause, nor believe that the victory of arms is always a proof of divine favor."[95] Sentiment such as Pierce's was common within the clergy. The war had decided the fate of the Confederate republic and the institution of slavery. Yet defeat hardly changed the mind of the church as to the righteousness of the cause their failed nation represented, at the heart of which was the master-slave dynamic.[96] Following the war, divines abandoned their scriptural defense of servitude. Yet the pulpit continued to promote the notion of black inferiority by clinging to the curse of Ham.[97] While the war decided whites would no longer hold blacks in physical servitude, ministers continued to emphasize the spiritual obligations of masters towards their former bondsmen.

The end of the war caused the clergy to sentimentally reflect upon fabricated notions of racial harmony in the Old South. As one authority of the church in the post-bellum South notes, "paternalists…nostalgically praised the harmonious race relations of the antebellum period."[98] The construction of such memory took place not long after war's end. In 1869, a proclamation of the Georgia Methodist Convention, South read: "In the long past no church was so devoted to the spiritual interests of the colored man, as the Southern Methodist Episcopal Church." Addresses from the same conference romanticized slave missions during the war, claiming former slaves "anxiously desire to

[95] George G. Smith, *The Life and Times of George Foster Pierce,* 489
[96] See Gene Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll,* 3; Genovese argues masters and slaves could not define themselves without the other
[97] Genovese, *A Consuming Fire,* 80; Southern clergy also relented with their criticism of the Northern free labor system following the war.
[98] Charles R. Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980), 101

be again placed in a position in which they can feel that they are in connection in some way with us."[99] The perception of blacks' spiritual dependence upon whites hardly coincided with reality. In fact, following the war a substantial majority of freedmen fled white churches.[100] Yet such testimony illustrates not only a clerical romanticization of antebellum Southern slave society, but also a belief in black inferiority that necessitated the continued caretaking of former bondsmen on behalf of their masters. The pulpit celebrated and continued to promote the paternalistic spirit of the Old South, and in going forward it adopted a much more explicitly racist rhetoric.

In the minds of the clergy, whites were still bound by the divine obligations of paternalism. Even without slavery, Southerners were serving the purposes of God by proselytizing to blacks. Reflecting on the South's post-war conditions, an observer noted that just as "the church had done her duty" to slaves in the past, so too did God intend for whites to continue serving as the religious stewards of the descendants of Ham. Such Christian guardianship was integral to blacks' salvation.[101] Reverend Josephus Anderson went so far as to draw the comparison between whites Christianizing mission towards their former bondsmen to that of Jesus and His disciples scouring the world as fishers of men.[102]

Clerical motivation for advocating the paternalistic responsibilities of whites was not entirely benevolent. To be sure, the clergy were convinced as to the necessity of

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[99] Minutes of the Georgia Methodist Church Conference, South, 1869

[100] See Charles Lincoln, *The Black Church in the African-American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), especially chapters 2-3; also, see Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Church Beginnings: The Long-Hidden Realities of the First Years* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2004)

[101] W.B. Hill, "Semi-centennial exercises Memorials of Methodism, in Macon, Georgia, from 1828 to 1878, held at Mulberry Street Church, Dec. 5th to 8th, 1878," 39

[102] *Southern Christian Advocate,* 3/23/1866

Christian guardianship over blacks. Yet this belief stemmed in no small part from the idea that the freedmen were incapable of functioning as productive members of society, as well as lacking the intellectual aptitude requisite to receiving the Gospel independently. A history of Methodism in Georgia recounted the freedmen's tumultuous, yet hardly surprising, reaction to liberty and the need for white intervention.[103] As the self-proclaimed social and spiritual custodians of blacks, the pulpit sought to head the initiative. The most practical and beneficial means for the continued civilizing and adjustment of blacks into free society, divines believed, was religious education. An address from the 1870 South Georgia Methodist Conference indicating the need for circulating Bibles to freedmen illustrated the rationale behind the clergy's call for ecclesiastical catechizing. Without the influence of the Gospel, the report warned, blacks "will soon lapse into barbarism."[104] The church realized efforts at propagating the word of God to blacks was beneficial for their salvation; yet also of significant importance was the role of religious education in preserving Southern society and racial hierarchy. Long after war and the abolition of its peculiar institution, the Southern pulpit was bent on promoting black inferiority.

Though the war ended slavery, it could hardly decide blacks' position in society as freedmen. Indeed, immediately following the war racial tensions radiated to a significantly greater level than in the Old South, where racial hierarchy was more clearly defined. The aftermath of defeat left the South in a state of social, political, economic, and religious flux, which in turn presented a problem to white Southerners seeking to

[103] Alfred M. Pierce, *A History of Methodism in Georgia*, 157
[104] Minutes of the South Georgia Conference of the M. E. Church, South 1870

maintain their racial hegemony. As Josephus Anderson of the S*outhern Christian Advocate* explained:

> "Southern society presents a most difficult problem. We have two varieties of the human race, dissimilar in almost every respect, and yet living together in the enjoyment of freedom and legal rights. They are unlike in color, national distinctions, social peculiarities, grade of civilization, religious characteristics, and mental training… In their present condition they constitute a dangerous and troublesome element of society and there can be but little hope of harmony, peace and safety while they remain as they are."[105]

Anderson sought desperately to advocate for racial stratification. Curiously, his appeal contained little, if any, theology. Such arguments were not uncommon in the postwar South, as ministers defended existing racial hierarchy by largely ignoring scripture, incorporating instead their personal, secular social views.[106] Tracing the progression of proslavery thought during the antebellum and Civil War eras through the clergy's appeal for continued racial hierarchy following the abolition of slavery illuminates a continuity in clerical sentiment. The same racist logic that underlie the logic of slavery was employed in the pulpit's argument for white hegemony in the post-bellum South.

In considering other aspects of clerical sentiment during and after the war, there appear to be further continuities. The clergy's vision of a Southern providential destiny also remained unclouded despite defeat. As master rhetoricians, the clergy's nomenclature was deliberately and carefully calculated. Nowhere is ministers' facility as wordsmiths better illustrated than in their invocation of the word "ultimately"—frequently used to describe the time table upon which God would operate in offering His favor to the severely afflicted South. In the face of defeat during the war, the faith of Southerners hinged on the belief God would ultimately intervene. Such discourse

[105] *Southern Christian Advocate,* 3/23/1866
[106] See Eugene Genovese, *A Consuming Fire,* 93

continued post-war, yet it took on a more immediate tone. "Prosperity and peace have returned faster than we dreamed," the *Southern Christian Advocate* proclaimed in November of 1865. Only a firm conviction that divine favor was truly present among God's chosen people could explain such a confident (and phantasmal) declaration, given the desolated and forlorn state of the South in the war's immediate aftermath. No doubt, the war had inspired reflective admiration at the might of an angry and jealous God, yet it had also evinced jubilation and hope looking forward: "today, revived in spirit and renewed in energy, Providence is working within us."[107] The message of redemption advocated by the church and widely accepted by the Southern laity is vividly displayed in an 1872 art print entitled "The lost cause." The picture depicts a Confederate veteran paying his respects to two fallen loved ones, casualties of the war, at a makeshift graveside on a riverbank. In the dusk the sun sets—a metaphor representing the sun setting on the Confederacy. Yet in the sky above radiates a cross, formed from the Confederate stars and bars, signifying heavenly redemption and eternality of the Southern cause.[108] Rather than dwell on destruction and defeat in the war's immediate aftermath, the pulpit continued to uplift the virtues of the fallen Confederacy and its lost cause. Whereas the pulpit offered messages of reproach and the necessity for repentance during the war, in defeat clerical sentiment shifted its tone to emphasizing redemption.

What ministers preached following the war is important, but the silences in their messages are as well. In looking forward to what God had in store for His chosen people, perhaps in order to cling to their vision of a Southern providential destiny, divines rarely spoke publicly on the war. In a sermon delivered shortly following the Confederate

[107] *Southern Christian Advocate*, 11/30/1865
[108] See Appendix II

defeat, Baptist minister J.L. Blitch essentially ignored his former nation's military endeavors and ultimate failure. Instead he offered praise to the crusading Confederates by emphasizing what awaited them in Heaven for their efforts to uphold God's will.[109] Realizing the South's affliction at the hand of the North may not be completely over, Blitch reminded his congregation of the Israelites facing captivity by the Egyptians for over four hundred years. Yet God's chosen people "were comforted by their firm belief in the promise that God would deliver them…Like them, amidst the afflictions of His kingdom and the prevalence of its despicable enemies, you may console yourselves with the full assurances of its final victories." Defeat was hardly an indicator that God had forsaken His chosen people. To the contrary, a much greater destiny awaited the South. As to what his nation's future entailed, Blitch offered little in the way of tangible prediction, yet he urged his congregation to keep faith in The Almighty. The reverend closed with a prayer: "Onward! Christ is your salvation, And your death is victory." Even in defeat, the South was destined to remain "our Redeemer's Kingdom."[110]

[109] J.L. Blitch, "Thy Kingdom Come, A sermon preached to the Aberdeen Church;" also see Mark Schantz, *Awaiting the Heavenly Country: The Civil War and America's Culture of Death*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008) and Drew Faust's This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War, (New York: Knopf, 2008)

[110] [110] J.L. Blitch, "Thy Kingdom Come, A sermon preached to the Aberdeen Church;" Minutes of the Eighty-First Anniversary of the Georgia Baptist Association held with Bairds Church, Oglethorpe County, October 6th, 7th, and 9th, 1865

Conclusion

"For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth"-- Hebrews 12:6

The cost of the South's failed rebellion was calamity and destitution. As a means of dealing with the trauma of defeat and the radical changes of Reconstruction that would follow, Southerners began to foster their own memory of the war, what would come to be known as the mythology of the Lost Cause.[111] Through art, literature, and ceremonies that would take on a religious significance, Southerners romanticized "the nature of antebellum Southern society and the institution of slavery…the causes of the Civil War, the characteristics of their wartime society, and the reasons for their defeat."[112]

The Lost Cause had countless interpretations, shifting over time and essentially taking on the meaning of each individual Southerner who internalized it in trying to posit an acceptable explanation for defeat. Yet as historian Charles R. Wilson notes, "The most profound and lasting interpretation of the myth of the Lost Cause was the religious one…the myth of the Crusading Christian Confederates."[113] Even in defeat, the Confederacy could be celebrated for fighting to preserve the will of God, to ensure their slave republic's providential destiny. Through this association the faith of post-bellum Southerners became inextricably linked to the Lost Cause, resulting in the formation of a

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[111] The nomenclature of "Lost Cause" comes from the title of an apologist history of the Confederacy written in 1866 by Edward A. Pollard—see *The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederates* (New York: E.B. Treat, 1866)

[112] Gary Gallagher, *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 1

[113] Charles Wilson, *Baptized in Blood*, 37

distinctly Southern civil religion-- an "amalgam of Protestant evangelicalism and Southern romanticism."[114]

Through examining clerical sentiment in the midst of and following the defeat of the Confederacy, the current study hopes to urge consideration as to the church's role in the genesis and development of this Southern civil religion, as well its impact for a century following the War Between the States. The clergy's role in the Lost Cause has has not gone unnoticed by historians. Yet it does appears to have been somewhat distorted, namely the level of consciousness associated with the church's attempt to rewrite Southern history. Gary Gallagher believes the Lost Cause was authored as a deliberate attempt at justifying the actions of the South, as well as to put a positive spin on the Confederacy's failure, all in hopes such a history would be promulgated to future generations of Southerners.[115] David Blight also offers undue emphasis to the deliberateness of the Lost Cause architects. He considers the Lost Cause as "nothing less than a political movement, a quest for thought control aimed at shaping regional and national memory of the war."[116] In considering the evolution of clerical sentiment in the early years of defeat, even looking back to the antebellum era, we behold the strength of the clergy's faith in a Southern providential destiny. Notwithstanding the spiritual and emotional anguish brought on by defeat, this vision persisted well after 1865. [117]

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[114] Gary Gallagher, *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History,* 186
[115] Gary Gallagher, *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History,* 1
[116] David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 282
[117] see Charles Wilson, *Baptized in Blood*; also see H. Smith, *In His Image, But*…Racism in Southern Religion, 1780-1910 (Durham: Duke University Press, 1972). Both authors see a continuity in clerical sentiment from wartime to post-war; for an alternative view, see Genovese's, *A Consuming Fire*, especially chapter 3.

Following the war, it is likely the continued celebration of the Confederacy and romanticization of the Southern cause was the result of a collective cognitive dissonance suffered by the clergy rather than by a deliberate or conscious effort. As men of God, who devoted their lives to propagating their faith, the impact of defeat on a nation they perceived as favored by providence was undoubtedly traumatic. Accepting the idea the Lord of Hosts had forsaken His chosen people would surely have had serious consequences on ministers' faith. Many clergymen could not reckon with such a scenario. Instead, by maintaining their belief in a righteous Southern cause and perceiving defeat as evidence of divine chastisement, their faith could be spared. The clergy may very well have actively sought to reshape history through the promotion of a civil religion romanticizing the South and a noble Lost Cause. Yet it was a religion they themselves deeply adhered to.

April 9, 1865 is widely recognized as the date signifying the end of the Civil War. Yet it also marks the commencement of another conflict—the war of historical memory and legacy. Led by the clergy, the South would prove victorious in this endeavor. The church's praise of the "Immortal Confederacy" ensured the peculiar Southern civil religion they fostered would last long after the Confederacy's demise. Characteristic of its antebellum predecessor, the post-bellum South would be defined by white supremacy and racial bigotry for a century following the War Between the States. The social and political landscape of the civil rights era South cannot be fully understood without looking back a century earlier, nor can it be understood without considering the role of the church.

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Southern Christian Advocate

Church Proceedings

Minutes of the Georgia Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South held in Columbus, Ga., Nov. 25-Dec. 3, 1863.

Minutes of the Lower Canoochee Association : in session with the Lower Lott's Creek Church, Bulloch County, Georgia, from the 8th to the 10th of October, 1864.

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Minutes of the South Georgia Conference of the M. E. Church, South 1868-1870

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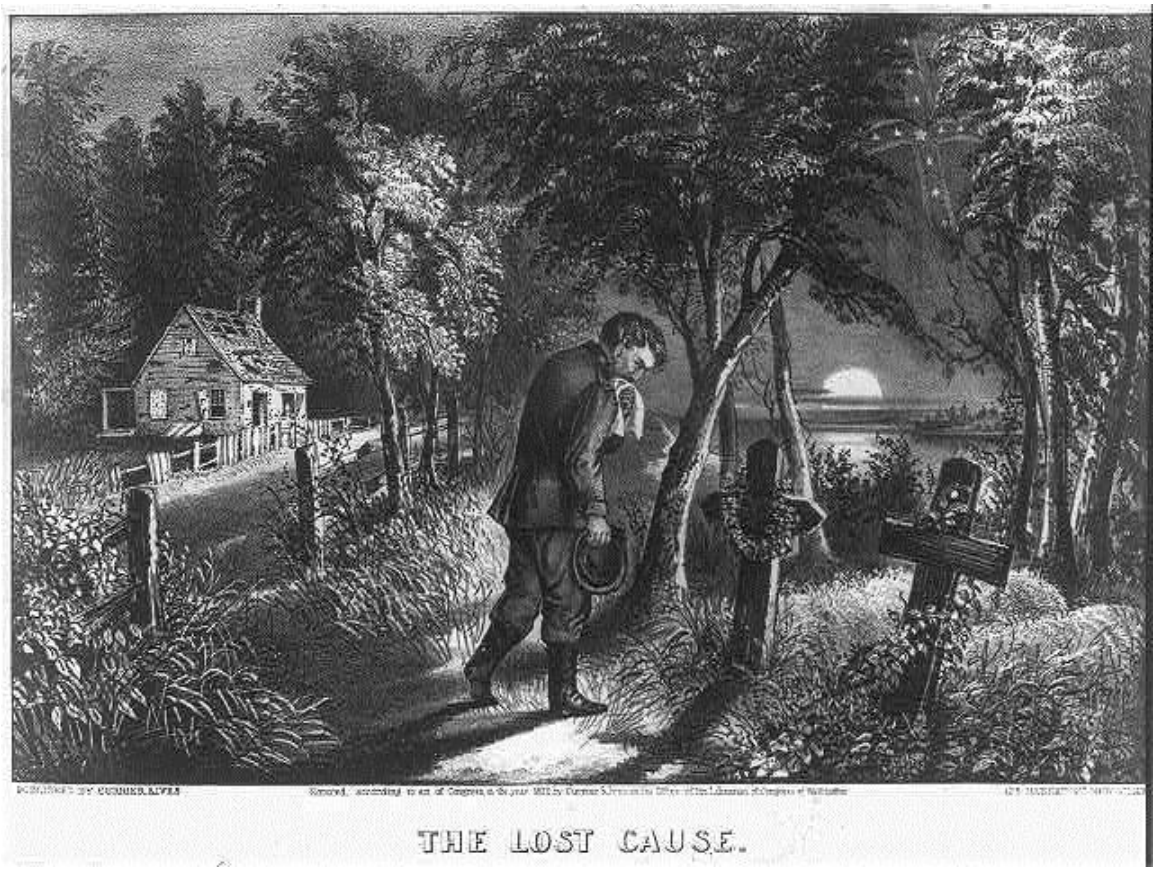
APPENDIX I



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