

Introduction

“My guilt is great; my heart is hard; my mind is inconsistent.”-Robert Hall Morrison

It is universally accepted that those who are instrumental in its development forever shape an institution of higher learning. Davidson College is no exception. Davidson is a small but prestigious liberal arts college, nestled in the pine-wooded suburbs of Davidson, North Carolina, approximately 35 miles northwest of Charlotte. Its central library houses several portraits of Davidson’s premier educators and leaders. The largest portrait in this collection is of Robert Hall Morrison, under which rests a plaque that reads, “Davidson’s First President.”

In researching this analytical biography, I have found current writings on Morrison to be largely eulogistic, but Morrison was, in fact, more complex. A North Carolina Presbyterian minister, Morrison was also a slave owner and father-in-law to three Confederate generals, yet he opposed slavery and often spouted anti-secessionist rhetoric. He preferred living in the Northern states. However, at the time of North Carolina’s secession, he opted to stay in the South. Morrison expressed sentiments in letters written to family and close friends that together reveal no less than a paradoxical man.

This thesis attempts to explore the contradictions expressed by Morrison in a series of letters, written primarily to a cousin and fellow Presbyterian minister, James Morrison, in the four decades leading to the Civil War. The letters unveil the contradictions that shaped Morrison and his views on slavery, secession and his society. In so doing, the thesis intends to flesh out an historic figure in North Carolina education and southern religion, and provide insights into various and similar contradictions and social issues in the antebellum South through the case study of one man. It examines paths he selected, and reveals Morrison as a fallible man who made strides in the name of education while questioning the inherently southern institution of evangelical religion.

By analyzing the man and his belief system, and dissecting his decisions, I hope to personalize and put him into the context of the secondary literature that exists on these complex issues. In turn, the examination of one figure will both support and contradict some of this literature.

My first chapter begins with a depiction of the eulogized image of Morrison: that of teacher, theologian and a man loyal to the southern cause and the Confederacy. It is important to establish the perception of the man heralded in the halls of Davidson and in the history of southern Presbyterianism.

With this image established, I will present a more three-dimensional portrait of Morrison via a brief biography of his life, family and community. By doing so, I hope to portray a flawed but ambitious man; a man whose mind was occupied by both religion and business; one who came from a middleclass background, then married into the planter elite; an educated man who traveled outside of the South, and one who endured tragedy as well as success. In conjunction, I will examine the environment in which Morrison lived. Such an examination will help demystify an iconoclastic figure, though that figure admittedly resides in the small circles of state, religious and civil war histories. To understand the contradictions and the conclusions that I hope to draw, a brief outline of Morrison's life is required.

In my second chapter, I examine Morrison's role as slaveholder, placing his comments toward the institution against the backdrop of the mounting tensions within the nation in regards to slavery. I will also connect Morrison's comments to his own environment, and to his role as minister and educator.

Moreover, I place Morrison and his ideology in the broader context of the secondary literature that exists in regards to slavery and religion. Morrison is by no means the first slave owner to hold contempt for the institution of slavery. Yet the analysis of Morrison as both slave owner and minister contributes to the abundant literature regarding slavery and Southern religion. One of the critical arguments in

Southern religious history, for example, concerns the position of the church in relation to its support or condemnation of slavery. The literature regarding this subject addresses to what degree the church supported slavery and the planter elite, as well as the source of inconsistencies in the position of the church towards slavery and how these inconsistencies were expressed.

The contradictions surrounding Morrison's attitudes and actions toward slavery parallel his attitudes toward secession as well, and I examine this in my third chapter. Just as slavery permeated Morrison's own home, so the cause for secession was a personal one. The connection to the Confederate cause was strong in the Morrison household. In his correspondence to his family, Morrison frequently expressed concern over the growing support of secession. As with the issue of slavery, Morrison's words contradict his actions. I examine Morrison's attitude toward secession in the context of national events that harden sectional differences and pave the way to civil war. I also explore the relationship between Morrison's contradictions toward slavery and secession with his reaction to the wave of immigration in 19th century America.

This thesis argues that the source of Morrison's contradictions in regards to slavery and secession stem from the innate character of southern evangelical religion. The concept of divine retribution from God for the sins of mankind and the Christian devotion to authority and government stem from the principles of southern evangelical Presbyterianism. Above all, Morrison's faith provided the foundation for his longing for an orderly, pious and Protestant society. For Morrison, this utopian environment would never come to fruition in the face of emancipation, secession and civil war.

CHAPTER ONE

“An extraordinary character has vacated an extraordinary sphere of usefulness and honor.”—A.W. Miller

The funeral for Reverend Robert Hall Morrison was attended by some of the most venerated figures of the former Confederacy. Mrs. “Stonewall” Jackson brought her daughter Julia. D.H. Hill and Rufus Barringer also attended, as did a former North Carolina governor, William A. Graham. In May, 1889, the long benches in Macpelah Church, itself only thirty by forty feet, were filled to capacity as the Rev. A.W. Miller stood in the elevated pulpit and delivered his eulogy for Morrison.¹ “Society suffers in the removal of one of its strongest supports and truest ornaments,” Miller stated. “The Church, bereft of one of its brightest crowns, mourns over an aching void; a void that can never be filled. An extraordinary character has vacated an extraordinary sphere of usefulness and honor.”²

The Presbyterians had come to bury one of their own, one of the most celebrated religious figures in the state. Praised by his colleagues as one of the finest orators, Robert Morrison delivered sermons which could bring his congregation to tears. The St. Louis *Presbytery* proclaimed: “His talents and eloquence had made him widely known in the South. His commanding person, his easy flow of pure and elegant English, his earnest and impassioned delivery, his logical gifts and attainments, his heart all aglow with love for the Savior and the world the Savior came to redeem-these thrilled his congregations everywhere and made him the most popular preacher of the state.”³

¹ “History of Macpelah Church and Auxilliary Work” *Local Church History Program*, (Montreat, NC, 1932), 1.

² A.W. Miller, and D.H. Hill, *Memorial Sketches of Rev. Robert Hall Morrison, D.D.* (Charlotte, NC, 1889), 1.

³ *Ibid*, 12.

The President of Davidson College, John Bunyun Shearer, also attended Morrison's funeral. Considered the father of Davidson, Morrison legendarily "begged the college into existence." Out of his efforts stemmed the land itself, the original grant of \$30,000 that created the college, and a later grant of \$200,000 that essentially cemented its existence. Reverend Miller's eulogy acknowledged this educational aspect of Morrison's legacy as well. "Had Dr. Morrison accomplished nothing else in life than found Davidson College, he would have left behind an enduring monument and would have been justly considered a benefactor of mankind," he said.⁴ For the post-Civil War southern audience, he added that Davidson's "high standard commands the respect of the whole country, North and South."⁵

Religious and educational communities of North Carolina knew Morrison for his connection to the legacy of the Confederacy, and paid homage to him at the time of his death. His name is frequently found in biographies on Gen. "Stonewall" Jackson. Yet he is mentioned only briefly, and so represents a man revered in some circles and merely footnoted in others. The perception of Morrison that exists primarily stems from the few, but frequently, quoted sources that hold him in the highest regard—a perception of such reverence that forcibly delegates the complexities of the man to archival obscurity.

This revered image rests on the concept of religious piety. Accounts of Rev. Morrison describe a man dedicated strongly to the Presbyterian faith, one who embodied his religious devotion in his personal manner—that of stoicism and piety to the point of rigidity. His congregation was "always perfect, more grave and decorous even than is usual in Presbyterian churches, always noted for their propriety,"⁶ said A.W. Miller.

His presence discouraged levity, and familiarity definitely bred contempt. In memoriam, Miller described Morrison as one who never humored politicking,

⁴ Ibid, 11.

⁵ Ibid, 3.

⁶ Ibid, 13.

or “trimming disposition[s], [those] courting or valuing popular favour, winking at, if not approving of fashionable folly.”⁷

Similar to descriptions of his son-in-law, Stonewall Jackson, Morrison is often portrayed as one who rarely expressed emotion unless it involved religious matters. A man of little humor, Morrison held nothing but scorn and contempt for “blasphemers.” He considered an attack on God as a personal attack on himself. He quoted the Psalmist: “Do I not hate them that hate Thee? And am not I grieved with those that rise up against Thee? I hate them with perfect hatred.”⁸

Those suspected of leading a rather unseemly life did not escape Morrison’s consternation. Toward them, “his demeanor was cold and forbidding, however high might be their social standing or official position,”⁹ wrote Miller.

Morrison also possessed many commonly held characteristics of the classic southern plantation owner. He owned and resided on a 200-acre farm from 1840 until his death in 1889. Visitors frequented the plantation and considered it a place of culture and refinement. “Before the war had desolated our country, his elegant home was the seat of a refined and genial hospitality,” recalled Miller.¹⁰ Morrison’s daughter, Anna, described the residence as “a large, old-fashioned house surrounded by an extensive grove of fine forest trees, on a plantation in Lincoln County.”¹¹ A working plantation, the estate produced crops and iron ore from the effort of Cottage Home’s slave population. All the Morrison daughters married in the front parlor of the home. Thus, Morrison appeared to embody the mindset of the upper elite of southern society—that of the profitable plantation owner committed to the institution of slavery.

⁷ Ibid, 3.

⁸ Ibid, 13.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Miller, *Memorial Sketches*, 13.

¹¹ Mary Anna Jackson, *Life and Letters of General Thomas J. Jackson* (New York, 1892), 89.

However, Robert Hall Morrison did not always reside among the planter elite. Born in 1798, he was one of eight children, the third oldest son of a miller. His father William Morrison, or “Miller William,” ran a mill on McKee’s Creek in Cabarrus County, North Carolina. Descended from the Isle of Lewis in Scotland, his family emigrated first to Pennsylvania and then to North Carolina. William also served in the Revolutionary War. By 1800, William owned three slaves, all of whom were house servants.¹² Robert grew up with a patriotic father and slaveowner, though William remained a member of the middle class.

In 1785, William Morrison married Abigail McEwen.¹³ The youngest surviving child of seven children, Robert Morrison--from an early age--showed an interest in literature and mathematics. He credited his appreciation for education to his mother, Abigail. Robert Morrison’s daughter, Laura, believed the “advanced interest in women’s education” came from Abigail’s influence. Laura wrote, “My father’s mother ... was greatly honored and cherished by him. His admiration for noble womanhood was great.”¹⁴

Though his mother instilled an early appreciation for education in Morrison, evidence fails to explain the source of his interest in theology. Nevertheless, he chose to dedicate his life to religion; in so doing, he longed to pursue religious studies.

At the age of 17, Robert Morrison entered the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. In 1818, he graduated third in his class of 17. His classmate and future President of the United States, James Knox Polk, graduated first.¹⁵ Only one degree, the Bachelor of Arts, was granted at Chapel Hill at that time. Morrison received an informal second degree in literature from the literary

¹² William Perry Johnson and Dorothy Williams Potter, *1800 North Carolina Census, Cabarrus County*. (Concord, NC, 1971), 3.

¹³ Adelia Lore, Eugenia Lore and Robert Hall Morrison, *Morrison Family of the Rocky River Settlement of North Carolina: History and Genealogy* (Charlotte, NC, 1950), 273-81.

¹⁴ Laura Morrison Brown, *Historical Sketch of the Morrison Family* (Charlotte, NC, 1919), 1.

¹⁵ Robert Hall Morrison to Lucy Phillips Russell, Apr. 2, 1956, Presidential Papers of Robert Hall Morrison, Davidson College.

society of the school, whose secretary was Polk.¹⁶ During this period Morrison began to show traits that would characterize his personality: a strong calling to evangelical religion, an appreciation for education and literature, and a drive to excel. Moreover, Morrison began to travel outside of the small community in Rocky River.

From 1818 to 1820, he studied theology under John Robinson, a well known Presbyterian minister in North Carolina, and John Makemie Wilson, the local minister at Rocky River.¹⁷ In 1820, Morrison left the state to attend the College of New Jersey (later Princeton) to continue his studies in theology. However, neither he nor his father could afford the tuition. Two options existed in traveling to New Jersey from Cabarrus County: stagecoach or horseback. Morrison chose to travel by horseback rather than by stagecoach, and sold the animal upon arriving at the school to defray the cost of tuition.¹⁸ He studied at Princeton for a year, and then returned to North Carolina by stagecoach. Princeton had no formal graduate program at this time. Morrison's "masters" degree in theology was an Honorary Degree, bestowed in 1822.¹⁹

Morrison's time in the North is worth noting. After traveling through the New England states and living in New Jersey, Morrison looked on the North fondly and talked of returning to the region to vacation. He wrote to his cousin, James: "I continue desirous to travel to the North. I wish in particular to travel over the States of Virginia Pens. N. York & Ohio. But whether other engagements and other inducements will permit is uncertain."²⁰

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Louise Barber Matthews, *A History of Providence Presbyterian Church, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina*, (Charlotte, 1967), 102.

¹⁸ Brown, *Historical Sketch*, 4.

¹⁹ Robert Hall Morrison to Lucy Phillips Russell, Apr.2, 1956, Presidential Papers of Robert Hall Morrison, Davidson College.

²⁰ Robert Hall Morrison to James Morrison, Nov.5, 1820, Robert Hall Morrison Papers, University of North Carolina.

His trip via horseback allowed for a slower, more intimate look at the northern states than would have occurred had he traveled by stagecoach. Morrison admitted that the time in New Jersey left a lasting impression on him. “Should I ever settle myself as a minister I have a predilection for the New England States. I have formed ideas of the North probably exalted. Should it be the work of my Master to discover to me a project of usefulness I would by far prefer settling there,”²¹ he wrote James.

In 1821, Morrison resumed his residence in Cabarrus County, North Carolina. James Morrison also followed the call to serve as a minister. Morrison confessed to James that he questioned the state of his own religious devotion and doubted the level of his commitment to the ministry. “I am unworthy—utterly unworthy of the offer and often feel the most appalling doubts. But it is the prerogative of God alone to judge the heart.”²²

On his return to North Carolina, Morrison received ordination. Providence Presbyterian Church became his first pastorate. He admired the devotion of the members of the congregation. “They attend remarkably well. Every Sabbath the house is crowded even by men who have been hostile or very wicked,”²³ he reported to James.

Morrison was popular at Providence, but left the church in April, 1822 after 18 months to accept an offer from a Presbytery in Fayetteville. Indicative of his skill as an orator and of the affluent congregation in the city, Fayetteville offered Morrison \$1200; whereas average salaries for ministers in the Providence area ranged from \$200 to \$400 annually. His voluntary dissolution of his duties created a “commotion” at Providence; but despite his loyalty to his first presbytery, financial gain carried more weight.²⁴

²¹ Robert Hall Morrison to James Morrison, Feb. 12, 1820, Robert Hall Morrison Papers, Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Matthews, *A History of Providence*, 102.

²⁴ Ibid, 105.

Morrison's move to Fayetteville proved lucrative. Besides an increase in salary, Fayetteville offered a larger congregation, and led to an intimate connection to the planter class. In October, 1823, he served as a visiting preacher to a congregation in Hillsboro. Here he met Mary Graham, also a Presbyterian, who was visiting her brother, William.²⁵ On April 27, 1824, less than a year later, Robert and Mary married at Vesuvius Furnace in Lincoln County.

With the marriage, Morrison joined the planter elite. The Grahams were among the largest landowners and slaveowners in the North Carolina piedmont. Joseph Graham, Mary's father and an iron entrepreneur, gained the reputation as a Revolutionary war hero after surviving seven stab wounds in battle. Mary's mother, Isabella Davidson Graham, came from a wealthy family that founded the Catawba River Valley iron industry. By the time of the Morrison marriage, Mary's brother William had already begun his career in the state legislature. A Whig, William Graham dedicated his life to politics. He served as senator, then governor of North Carolina; became Secretary of the Navy in 1850 under Millard Fillmore, and ran on the Whig ticket as the vice presidential candidate with Winfield Scott in the 1852 presidential election.²⁶

Mary had had a luxurious childhood, but her mother died in 1808 when she was only seven. Thereafter, she grew close to her father. Joseph Graham disapproved of the "poor preacher," as he called Morrison. Nevertheless, he conceded to his daughter's wishes for marriage. Just before her wedding day, Joseph Graham gave his daughter \$75, saying, "You had better take this money and buy a piece of furniture, as no doubt you will need it."²⁷ The couple got nothing more from Joseph Graham upon their wedding. Mary then assumed the life of a poor preacher's wife.

²⁵ Robert Hall Morrison to Lucy Phillips Russell, Apr.2, 1956, Presidential Papers of Robert Hall Morrison, Davidson College.

²⁶ Max Williams, "William Alexander Graham," *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, (Chapel Hill, 1986) 2: 337.

²⁷ Ida Briggs Henderson, "Three Sisters Become Wives of Southern Generals," Charlotte Observer, Jan. 4, 1931.

Morrison and his bride remained at the church in Fayetteville until 1827, when he accepted a call to the Sugar Creek Presbytery in Mecklenburg County. He also became the first regular pastor at the Congregation of Charlotte (now the First Presbyterian Church in Charlotte), which he organized from 35 town members at Sugar Creek. His daughter Laura wrote: “His pastorate there was most successful, as during that time he had a large revival and to these churches he ministered acceptable for several years.”²⁸

Though connected to the planter elite, Morrison continued to preach, which in turn dovetailed into his pursuit of quality education. While acting minister at two Presbyterian churches, Morrison noted the lack of trained clergy coming out of the state colleges. In 1835, when he attended Prospect Presbyterian Church in Rowan County, he introduced a resolution to found a Presbyterian college for boys. The congregation accepted the proposal. It commissioned Morrison and another minister, Rev. Robert Sparrow, to raise money for this effort. Backed with the support of the three congregations, the ministers obtained \$30,000 from Presbyterians in the piedmont section of both North and South Carolina.²⁹

The capital secured, Morrison tapped the land wealth of the Graham family. A Revolutionary war hero, and uncle of Mary Graham Morrison, General William Lee Davidson donated 400 acres to the minister’s cause. Construction on the college began, and on March 1, 1837, Davidson College, named after William Lee Davidson, opened its doors.³⁰

With the establishment of the school that would become his legacy, Morrison hired a small faculty. Some 63 students registered for the first academic year. With three faculty members employed, Morrison served both as president

²⁸ Brown, *Historical Sketch*, 7.

²⁹ Robert Hall Morrison to Lucy Phillips Russell, Apr. 2, 1956, Robert Hall Morrison Papers, Davidson College.

³⁰ Henderson, “Three Sisters Become Wives of Southern Generals,” 2.

and as a professor.³¹ He taught theology and mathematics and, when required, doled out corporal punishment. Morrison usually included a prayer with the punishment. Though members of his congregation may have enjoyed his preaching, the students who received the punishments were less enthusiastic. Often students requested two lickings and no prayer. Morrison rarely granted those requests.³²

While at Davidson, Robert and Mary Morrison occupied the President's house. Though less spacious than Mary Graham's childhood home, the two-story brick building was larger than the small frame dwelling on Derita Road that the Morrison family occupied when he was pastor at Sugar Creek.³³

Despite Morrison's achievements as a minister and the successful establishment of Davidson College, he endured personal setbacks. He suffered from poor health for most of his life. In 1839, he developed bronchitis. Over the course of the next several months, it worsened severely. Unable to work, he traveled north to Philadelphia to Dr. George McClellan, a recommended physician.³⁴ The doctor failed to improve Morrison's condition, but advised him to visit Rockbridge Alum Springs in Virginia.

In 1839, Mary Morrison still mourned the death of her father, who had died in November, 1836. Rather than stay at Davidson, Mary opted to travel with her husband to Philadelphia, along with their infant daughter, Susan. On their return south, they hired a carriage driver who was intoxicated and fell asleep, and the carriage overturned. As they struck the embankment, Morrison grabbed the baby and threw her to a sandbank, which spared Susan from injury. Mary was bruised, and Morrison cut his head badly, enough to require several stitches.³⁵

³¹ Morrison, "Story of D.H. Hill Tied in with General Jackson," *Charlotte Observer*, Feb. 28, 1954.

³² Chalmers G. Davidson, "First President 'Begged College into Existence'" in *Update*, Mar. 1977, 8.

³³ Chalmers G. Davidson, *Plantation World Around Davidson* (Davidson, NC, 1982) 7-9.

³⁴ Dr. McClellan was the father of Union General George B. McClellan.

³⁵ Brown, *Historical Sketch*, 7.

Moreover, the spa in Rockbridge failed to cure Morrison's bronchitis. In 1840, after three years and 10 months, Morrison retired from his position as president.

No longer a valid occupant of the President's House at Davidson, Morrison constructed a home on the new property that Mary Graham Morrison inherited from her father. In his will, Joseph Graham left his daughter 200 acres in Lincoln County and 60 slaves.³⁶ The newly built three-story house, called Cottage Home, was replete with a library for Morrison's book collection, as well as a working post office. Morrison utilized the slaves that were inherited along with the acreage, and planted cotton, corn, and wheat, and cultivated livestock.³⁷

With this move, the Morrison family relocated to a largely agricultural region. Lincoln County was a small but wealthy community. Most of the 1,038 families earned their living off the land. The abundance of iron ore resulted in a high level of manufacturing for the area as well. In 1840, over 330 heads of household listed manufacturing as their profession, 93 were engaged in mining, and 24 were engineers.³⁸ Despite the high abundance of manufacturing, farming required a substantial slave population to support production. Of the 7,756 people in Lincoln County, 2091 were black, and 2055 were slaves.³⁹

In Lincoln County, Morrison became a farmer and plantation owner, but his identity as a southern planter stems not only from the cotton production and slave population at Cottage Home. Morrison's children are critical to understanding his contradictions regarding secession; through them he is most strongly linked to the Confederacy.

Of the three daughters who married Confederate generals, Anna came to singularly embody the family's connection and commitment to the Confederacy.

³⁶ Record of Deeds, Lincoln County, Vol.39.

³⁷ Morrison, "Story of D.H. Hill Tied in with General Jackson," Charlotte Observer, Feb. 28, 1954

³⁸ William L. Carpenter, *Lincoln County Heritage* (Mareceline, Mo, 1997), 254.

³⁹ Judson Crow, *1850 Census: Lincoln County, North Carolina* (Denver, NC, 1982), 7.

In July 1857, she married Thomas J. Jackson, and they moved to Lexington, Virginia where Jackson was on the faculty at the Virginia Military Institute. After the defeat of the Confederacy, Anna became one of the most celebrated women in the South. Upon her death in 1918, she was accorded a military funeral, a rarity for women at the time. General Jackson's skill in battle earned him military glory, and he remains one of America's most admired soldiers.

Anna remained at Cottage Home with her father through the Civil War and until his death in 1889. She became a primary caregiver of Morrison during the last years of his life as a kidney infection ravaged his system. Morrison rode to his appointments on one of Gen. Jackson's warhorses, Fancy.⁴⁰ For the community at Lincolnton, this was a symbolic image of Morrison's connection to Jackson.

Anna was not the only daughter to marry a Confederate officer. Morrison's oldest child, Isabella, stayed close to Cottage Home after her marriage. Born in 1825, she married Daniel Harvey Hill in 1848, when he was a major in the US Army.⁴¹ In 1855, Hill came to Davidson as a professor of mathematics.⁴² At the outbreak of the Civil War, Hill was superintendent of the North Carolina Military Institute. When North Carolina seceded in May 1861, he joined the Confederacy and was promoted to lieutenant general in 1863. He led North Carolina troops in several campaigns, including the Seven Days' and Antietam. Always outspoken, Hill criticized other Confederate Generals for what he perceived as poor performance. A recipient of several of Hill's criticisms, General Braxton Bragg blamed Hill for failing to pursue the Union Army at the Battle of Chickamauga, after which Hill was removed from command and his promotion to lieutenant general withdrawn.⁴³

⁴⁰ Robert Hall Morrison, "Historical Sketch of Rev. Robert Hall Morrison, By His Grandson, Lt.Col. Robert Hall Morrison," Presidential Papers of Robert Hall Morrison, Davidson College, 5.

⁴¹ Lore, *Morrison Family*, 304.

⁴² Morrison, "Historical Sketch," 5.

⁴³ Hal Bridges, *Lee's Maverick General, Daniel Harvey Hill*. (New York, 1961), 1-5.

Born in 1833, Eugenia Morrison married North Carolina lawyer Rufus Barringer in 1854. Barringer joined the Confederacy at North Carolina's secession and rose to the rank of brigadier general. Barringer knew Dr. Morrison for well over a decade. Like the Davidson students who endured his sermons with whippings, Barringer did not care for Morrison's sermons. He wrote in August 1842, "I went to church and heard a bad sermon from Morrison."⁴⁴ He wrote again in November of that same year, "I went to the Presbyterian Church and heard Mr. Morrison preach a long, tautological sermon."⁴⁵ Contrary to the perception of Morrison as an orator and theologian, obviously not all enjoyed his preaching. Eugenia and Barringer resided in Charlotte until Eugenia's death of typhoid fever in 1858.⁴⁶

Morrison was very attached to his children. Joseph's grandson recalled Morrison's affection for children, "I remember him quite well as I was 9 ½ years of age when he passed away. He loved children. Like few of his day, he never wore a beard, but as was customary he only shaved once a week on Sunday morning. We children were required to kiss him and I remember how bristly his beard was at the end of the week."⁴⁷ A family friend, Mary Johnston Avery, explained why Morrison never performed the marriage ceremony at the weddings of the Morrison girls. "[He] could not trust his emotional nature enough to marry any of his daughters."⁴⁸ His daughter Eugenia's death came as a severe blow, yet this was not the first child Morrison had lost. In 1838, two daughters, Sarah, age three, and Elizabeth, 18 months, died of diphtheria in the same week.⁴⁹ Morrison's grief led him to question momentarily his devotion to God. He wrote his cousin and asked him to pray for his wellbeing: "Pray for me often &

⁴⁴ Rufus Barringer Diary, Aug. 14, 1842, Rufus Barringer Papers, University of North Carolina.

⁴⁵ Ibid, Nov. 27, 1842.

⁴⁶ Lore, *Morrison Family*, 306.

⁴⁷ Robert Hall Morrison letter to Lucy Phillips Russell, Apr. 2, 1956, Robert Hall Morrison Papers, Davidson College.

⁴⁸ Mary Johnston Avery, "When Stonewall Jackson Went A-Wooing," Alphonso Calhoun Avery Papers, University of North Carolina, 5.

⁴⁹ Lore, *Morrison Family*, 281.

earnestly for I need wither to have spiritual life command in my soul or to have it greatly invigorated to get along I fear that I am altogether deceived in religion.”⁵⁰

The third child, Harriet, suffered from poor health and had low resistance to disease as a child. As a consequence, she spent a fair amount of time in her father’s library.⁵¹ In 1869, Harriet, or “Lottie,” became the first woman to obtain a U.S. patent for an architectural design for hexagonal homes.⁵² She married James P. Irwin, the only son-in-law of Morrison who did not serve in the Confederate military. A purchasing agent for the Confederacy, Irwin earned a better salary than that of a teacher. For many years, Mary Graham Morrison approved only of James Irwin as a proper son-in-law for a Morrison daughter because of his income. Mrs. Morrison said of her daughters: “Yes, Isabella married Hill, Eugenia married Barringer, Anna married Jackson, and Lottie married Mr. Irwin.”⁵³

Morrison’s remaining two daughters also were connected to the Confederacy. Born in 1838, Susan Morrison married Alphonso Avery in February 1861, just before the outbreak of war. Avery rose to the rank of major by the close of the war.

The youngest daughter, Laura Morrison was born in 1840 and married John E. Brown.⁵⁴ He became a colonel and then a state supreme court judge.

Morrison’s connection to the Confederacy also proved evident in the service of his sons. Born in 1826, the oldest son William served as a major. He died six months after the war from effects from exposure.⁵⁵ Upon his son’s

⁵⁰ Robert Hall Morrison to James Morrison, July 3, 1838, Robert Hall Morrison Papers, University of North Carolina.

⁵¹ Kathy Neill Herran, “Woman Architect Blazed Train in 1800’s Charlotte” Charlotte Observer, Feb.2, 1997, 16M.

⁵² Emma Cothan McMahan, “Morrison Sisters Make History,” Charlotte Observer, Sept.7, 1954, 23.

⁵³ Davidson, “You Forgot Mr. Irwin,”.5.

⁵⁴ Lore, *Morrison Family*, 307-309.

⁵⁵ Morrison, “Sketches,” 5.

death, Morrison sought comfort in Bible scriptures, yet his “energies were crushed” as he mourned his son.

Joseph Graham Morrison served as a captain on Stonewall Jackson’s staff. Wounded four times during the Civil War, Joseph contracted tuberculosis from exposure. He regained his health after four years in California and returned to North Carolina in 1869. Morrison’s third son, Robert, also served as a captain. After the war, he became a physician.⁵⁶ Mary Graham gave birth to their last child, Alfred, at the age of 42.⁵⁷ He was only 15 when the war ended. Like his father, he became a minister. He died of typhoid at age 26.⁵⁸

Shades of Morrison’s connection to the Confederacy reverberated through all of his children—not merely through his daughters. Cottage Home, and its slave population, cemented the image of Morrison as a planter and slaveowner. Davidson College secured Morrison’s legacy as an educator and as a leader in furthering the creed of the Presbyterian faith.

The more intimate examination of Morrison’s life proves the cold yet revered image of the man inaccurate. In the face of personal loss and self-introspection, Morrison questioned his commitment to religion. Though formal in public, he could be overcome by emotion, particularly over events regarding his children. A member of the planter elite by 1840, his roots stemmed from the middle class. Thus, Morrison embodied opposing images of sanctimony and imperfection. Perhaps no issue represents Morrison’s duality better than the issue of religion and slavery.

⁵⁶ Miller, *Memorial Sketches*, 4-12.

⁵⁷ Lore, *Morrison Family*, 281.

⁵⁸ Morrison, “Sketches,” 4.

CHAPTER 2

“I have long looked upon Slavery as a traffic in itself detestable and justified by no principle either of nations or of nature. Their condition is truly one of a most lamentable nature”—R.H.Morrison

One of the most polemical questions remains to what degree religion supported slavery in the South. To better understand Morrison’s paradoxical position toward slavery, one must first become familiar with some of the significant historical literature in this regard. In so doing, Morrison’s placement within these historical debates, and the sources of his contradictions, become evident.

The history of Southern religion burgeoned in the 1960s and proliferated in the late 1970s with new insights provided by historians such as John Blassingame, who introduced new concepts concerning religion within slave communities. Samuel S. Hill and Donald Mathews contributed much to the study of Southern religious history. In *Southern Churches in Crisis*, Hill compared the Southern evangelical practices to the North and its more puritan tendencies. He determined that, owing to terrain, isolated pockets of populations, and dependence on agricultural systems, Southern evangelicalism became more of an internal revelation for the individual. In the South, salvation came from within, whereas the North tended to be more communal in religious activities. Matters of God took on social projects more readily in the North. These uniquely Southern characteristics of evangelical religion hindered efforts of religious leaders to create social movements against slavery.⁵⁹

Donald Mathews’ prolific works also articulated how Southern religion was distinct from that of the North. He argued that Southern evangelicalism, by its own character, limited the impact it could have on the slave system. Because of its focus on the internal salvation, Southern evangelicalism was, from its inception, restricted from changing the social constructs around which it evolved and from which it stemmed.

⁵⁹ Samuel S. Hill, *Southern Churches in Crisis* (New York, 1967), 43.

Mathews wrote, “They [evangelicals] were given sovereignty only over their internal life; beyond that, their role, dictated by race, sex, and power, defined how their Evangelical commitment would be lived. Long before the Missouri Compromise or William Lloyd Garrison, Gettysburg, or Appomattox, the Southern Evangelicals learned the meaning of defeat.”⁶⁰

In *Baptized in Blood*, Charles Reagan Wilson argued that Southern evangelical churches as a whole supported slavery and secession. Religious leaders, in conjunction with other leaders of the community, stressed the advantages of a society based on slavery. Ministers portrayed the system of bondage as a worthy institution, in that it offered Christianity to blacks. Clergymen used passages from the Bible to support the institution of slavery itself. Southerners then used the Bible as a defense against attacks by abolitionists and as a tool to criticize the industrialized North. “The pro-slavery argument leaned more heavily on the sanction of the Bible than on anything else,” according to Wilson. “Ministers cited biblical examples of the coexistence of Christianity and slavery, quoted Old Testament approvals of slavery, and interpreted a passage from Genesis to mean that blacks were descendants of the sinner Ham and destined to be forever bondsmen. By 1861 Southern churches, like other regional institutions, thus laid the basis for secession.”⁶¹

In *The Ruling Race*, James Oakes articulated that the planter elite earned forgiveness for the sin of slavery via obsequious behavior toward the evangelical church. Oakes, in turn, portrays the position of the church as oscillating from a position of condemnation to that of mollifying the guilt of the planter class. In his chapter entitled “The Convenient Sin,” Oakes quotes several masters who longed for an end to slavery, including Charles Pettigrew, who wrote, “I sincerely wish there was not a slave in the world.” Oakes articulated the plantation owner’s sense of guilt, which the evangelical church appeased through exonerated from God via daily worship and confession. Oakes

⁶⁰ Donald Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago, 1977), 78.

⁶¹ Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens, GA, 1980), 4.

argued that religion provided a means for the planter to cleanse his psyche of the guilt of slavery, and in so doing, allowed slavery to continue.⁶²

John Boles also depicted Southern religion as being both subservient to, and condemning of, slavery. In his chapter, “The Discovery of Southern Religious History,” in *Interpreting Southern History: Historical Essays in Honor of Sanford W. Higginbotham*, Boles states: “Essentially subservient to the slaveholding interests, evangelical clergy generally accepted the status quo even when they were unwilling to defend it in the abstract.” He argues that the flaws of the evangelical movement are illustrated most clearly through the prism of slavery.⁶³

With a wide scope and rich detail, Anne C. Loveland’s *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 1800-1860* provides a picture of the diversity of ministers’ responses to slavery. Loveland examined the reasoning and motivation of evangelical ministers’ reaction to slavery, or lack thereof, by compiling brief examples of opinions of many church leaders during this period. Like Mathews and Hill, Loveland accredited the construction of evangelical religion as being one of the factors for contradictions in its treatment of slavery. A significant component to evangelical belief stems from the concept of punishment of mankind for sin. The retribution of slavery would come, and only through the seeking of forgiveness of sin could there be any real salvation for man. Loveland stated, “As political and sectional controversy accelerated, as worldly conformity increased, as their calls to repentance proved unavailing, evangelicals took an increasingly pessimistic view of the prospects of their country. The crisis of 1860-1861 would come as no surprise to them. They were conditioned to look for divine retribution.”⁶⁴

Though the role of evangelical religion varied in regards to supporting the institution of slavery, evangelicalism transformed a variety of denominations throughout

⁶² James Oakes, *Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York, 1982), 208.

⁶³ John B. Boles and Evelyn Thomas Nolen, eds., *Interpreting Southern History: Historiographical Essays in Honor of Sanford W. Higginbotham* (Baton Rouge, 1987), 532.

⁶⁴ Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge, 1980), 129.

the North and South in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. In turn, a critical component to understanding Morrison lies in the revivalism that shook the Presbyterian Church during this same period.

In 1741, the “New Light” schism occurred within several denominations. The New Light movement grew out of the Great Awakening and “revived” a more experimental interpretation of Christian life. “New Sides” embodied the New Light movement within the confines of the Presbytery. “Old Sides” rejected the New Side faction and organized the Old Side Synod of Philadelphia. Both sides advocated traditional Calvinist doctrine, which emphasized the interpretation of the Bible through the Holy Spirit. According to the religious historian Samuel S. Hill, “Calvinist doctrine ascribes to the belief that church and state should cooperate in building a holy society, and that individuals should embody righteous behavior in daily life.”⁶⁵ However, the New Side represented a more revivalist wing of the Presbyterian faith. They preached conviction of sin, teaching that Christ required moral obedience and personal holiness. Old Side ministers held orthodox theology above Christian living.⁶⁶

The foundation of Morrison’s theological education rested on the New Side dogma of Presbyterianism. In 1747, four New Side pastors—3 from New Jersey, and one from New York—founded the College of New Jersey (Princeton) to educate their ministers. The school utilized the persuasion of revivalism through daily prayer meetings and through emphasis on the conscience of the individual, from which came salvation.⁶⁷ Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker, author of *Princeton, 1746-1896*, emphasized the influence of the New Side ministers in the education of Princeton students. “It was to be a college for the New Lights, controlled by New Lights. They were resolved that all or most of the trustees should be of like faith with themselves, so that they could control the policies of the institution.”⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Samuel S. Hill, “Religion and Politics in the South,” *Religion in the South*, ed. Charles Reagan Wilson (Jackson, MS, 1985), 148.

⁶⁶ Philip N. Mulder, *A Controversial Spirit: Evangelical Awakenings in the South* (Oxford, 2002) 3-10.

⁶⁷ George P. Schmidt, *Princeton and Rutgers: The Two Colonial Colleges of New Jersey* (Princeton, NJ, 1964), 46.

⁶⁸ Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker, *Princeton, 1746-1896* (Princeton, NJ, 1946), 135.

Despite its Northern location, a significant number of Princeton's students in the late 18th and early 19th centuries originated from Southern plantations.⁶⁹ Young men then pursuing the Presbyterian ministry were required to have a college diploma. Aspiring ministers at the time needed to complete three years at a Presbyterian seminary. Princeton, Virginia's Union Theological Seminary in Richmond and the Columbia Theological Seminary in Columbia, South Carolina, trained many of these young ministers.⁷⁰ A distinguished school, founded by a signer of the Declaration of Independence, Princeton maintained its popularity among Southern border state people. Moreover, students from the Southern states remained at Princeton until the outbreak of civil war.⁷¹ As sectional tensions hardened in the 19th Century, New Side Presbyterians inculcated anti-slavery and emancipationist sentiment in many students.

Thus, in the first few decades of the 19th Century, as slavery emerged as a moral, social and political issue, Morrison pursued this evangelical Presbyterian ideology, and attended one of the premier institutions that furthered the New Side rhetoric.

Upon his 1820 return to North Carolina from Princeton, Morrison wrote to his cousin James on the commitment of Southerners to their religious principles. In February 1820, he confided to James that he regarded the level of religious zeal of his North Carolina parishioners as lacking the passion of the North. "The state of religion immediately in this part of the country is as cold as ever. People attend—People behave—And many I think pray fervently and feel the power of religion—but I hear there are many like Ezekels hearers."⁷² In particular, he compared the South's religious commitment to the New England cradle of the Great Awakening. He continued, "I am anxiously looking and longing for a shower of divine grace in the South." Though revivals spread rapidly in the South, Morrison questioned the dedication of society to these religious movements.

⁶⁹ Wertenbaker, *Princeton*, 19.

⁷⁰ Ernest Trice Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South* (Richmond, 1963), 1:277-279.

⁷¹ Wertenbaker, *Princeton*, 266.

⁷² Robert Hall Morrison to James Morrison, Feb. 12, 1820, Robert Hall Morrison Papers, University of North Carolina.

In this same letter to James Morrison, he acknowledged the establishment of Sunday schools for blacks in the Rocky River community. “Respecting Sunday Schools for the Blacks we have two in Rocky River. Some in Poplar Tent and also in Sugar Creek,” he noted.⁷³ The conversion of blacks to Christianity coincided with the missionary zeal of evangelical religion, yet no evidence exists that would indicate Morrison’s direct involvement with the establishment of the schools. From this remark, then, his commitment toward the education of blacks remains unclear. Though he viewed the South with a discerning eye, this raises questions as to Morrison’s commitment to changing the inherently southern social structures, i.e. the education of blacks. Certainly, some southerners advocated Sunday schools for blacks, including Stonewall Jackson.⁷⁴ Yet this letter illustrates that Morrison’s conviction on this point remains indefinite.

By 1820, a national event occurred which addressed the issue of slavery and its expansion into new territory. The 1820 introduction of the Missouri Compromise on the American political scene presented a seemingly feasible solution to this divisive issue. The admission of Missouri as a slave state had threatened to upset the balance of equal representation between slave and free states in Congress. The Missouri bill passed the House but failed in the Senate. A bill to admit Maine (formerly part of Massachusetts) as a free state passed the House in 1819. In 1820, the two bills were joined as one in the Senate, along with a clause that slavery be prohibited above the 36° 30’ parallel, and guaranteed states south of the parallel would be slave. Henry Clay, a Whig, had much to do with its passage. The compromise restricted the expansion of slavery until 1854.

In July 1820, Morrison addressed the Missouri Compromise in a letter to his cousin, James. “The decision upon the Missouri question in Congress will have a mighty influence whether for or against the traffic. I discover it excites a great deal of attention and am happy to see some of our greatest men oppose the admission of slaves into new

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ James I. Robertson, Jr., *Stonewall Jackson: The Man, the Soldier, the Legend* (New York, 1997), 167.

territories. That it is constitutional is certain and that it is expedient no Christian will deny.”⁷⁵ He believed slavery an abomination that would be eliminated by the spread of the Christian faith, “It gives me pleasure to believe [slavery] is a system too harmful in its nature to withstand the mighty triumphs of Christianity we happily witness traversing the world at the present day.”⁷⁶ Thus, Morrison advocated the passage of the Missouri Compromise. Yet in the same letter he articulated that the Compromise would fail to ultimately resolve the problem of slavery. He supported it in its attempt to end growing sectionalism, but doubted it could serve as a viable solution to problem. “The public mind of the Southern States is not yet prepared for the ulterior measure to which we must resort completely to emancipate the blacks,” he wrote to James.⁷⁷ Morrison supported efforts to resolve the slavery question, yet he repeatedly returned to the condition of southern society, its inability to concede to a more Christian way of living, as the ultimate barrier to resolving the slavery issue.

In his letters, Morrison’s repeatedly returned to the South’s failure to live a devout Christian life. While at Providence Church, his first parish, he felt compelled to write again to his cousin on the activities of Northern revivalists. In 1821, he noted: “The Northern States appear a scene of revivals... There are as great men in the South except the influence given by peculiar circumstances.”⁷⁸ He failed to articulate the specific “peculiar circumstances”, but he later questioned again the motivation of his parishioners. In November of the same year, he worried over the religious commitment of the South. “It is one thing to want sincerely a revival of religion and another to want it for proper motives,” he wrote to James. “Pride and thirst for applause are the first motives & moving cause of petitions. Truly it is the very time when the churches in the Southern States should arise and enquire what is the cause of such slumber & stupidity. I hope I have a few people around with me to pray for a revival.”⁷⁹ Morrison supports Donald

⁷⁵ Robert Hall Morrison to James Morrison, July 15, 1820, Robert Hall Morrison Papers, University of North Carolina.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Robert Hall Morrison to James Morrison, May 17, 1821, Robert Hall Morrison Papers, University of North Carolina.

⁷⁹ Robert Hall Morrison to James Morrison, Nov.5, 1821, Robert Hall Morrison Papers, Ibid.

Matthews' theory concerning "how the [Southern] evangelical commitment would be lived."

Morrison wrote in March, 1822, concerning a letter he had received from James' brother, Elam, also a minister, who attended a revival camp in the North: "I had a letter from Elam stating he had attended a great revival near Princeton. When shall we see an outpouring in the South? O When? The Southern church must raise itself if it rises. We must begin to work for our selves & for posterity. I am a great friend to Princeton, but it will never rouse the South to sufficient exertion in the mighty cause."⁸⁰

In September 1822, Morrison confessed to James: "I have long looked upon Slavery as a traffic in itself detestable and justified by no principle either of nations or of nature. Their condition is truly one of a most lamentable nature."⁸¹ Morrison challenged the morality of slavery, and in turn questioned the architecture on which southern society rested.

In addition to the Missouri Compromise, Morrison pinned his hopes for ending slavery on The American Colonization Society. Begun in the winter of 1816-1817, and located in Washington, DC, the society aided and encouraged free blacks to settle in Africa. It received indirect aid from the federal government, but only 11,000 freed blacks relocated to the colony of Liberia. The society failed to receive support from abolitionists or black Americans. Both groups saw the colony as an inadequate means of ridding the United States of blacks. Slavery would not be resolved via colonization.⁸²

He advocated the Colonization Society to James in November, 1822. "I discover with pleasure that the Colonization Society is about starting an expedition destined near Sierra Leon. This Society I have ever reviewed as important. It strikes me that it will be

⁸⁰ Robert Hall Morrison to James Morrison, Mar. 18, 1822, Robert Hall Morrison Papers, Ibid.

⁸¹ Robert Hall Morrison to James Morrison, Sept. 9, 1822, Robert Hall Morrison Papers, Ibid.

⁸² Amos Jones Beyan, *The American Colonization Society and the Creation of the Liberian State: A Historical Perspective, 1822-1900* (Lanham, 1991), 3.

in time the channel by which our country will be drained of its slaves.”⁸³ He continued to turn to God to provide possible alternatives to the institution, and faith that slavery stood in opposition to God’s will.

Throughout the 1820s, then, Morrison oscillated between condemnation for slavery and the belief that it could never be removed from the fabric of the South. His repeated comparison between Northern and Southern evangelicalism supports Loveland’s portrait of southern religious leaders who foresaw divine retribution for those who failed to live a truly Christian life.

The 1836 death of Joseph Graham brought tremendous change for Morrison, in that he inherited a sizeable estate. By the end of the 1830s and throughout the 1840s, Morrison developed his skills as a farmer. Once again, the question of slavery arose in Morrison’s letters.

In June, 1837, Morrison expressed to James his frustration with market prices of goods, and derided his brother in law’s purchase of slaves at such a high price. “Dr. Whitherspoon ... bought Negroes at Genl. Graham's sale to the amount of \$8,000 ... Now negroes [are] 1/3 of the prices he gave and all his crop nearly 200 Bales unsold. At that 45 Negroes sold for the enormous sum of \$21,000.—At this time they would perhaps not bring one half of it—Some men sold as high as \$1800 & even \$1900.”⁸⁴ Morrison emphasized the exorbitant cost of purchasing slaves in 1837—a comment rather lacking in the moral condemnation he expressed in the early 1820s.

In another letter written in 1837, Morrison discussed his experiments concerning silk production with James. “I have purchased no property during these nominal prices except 50 acres of land near to the College & a small farm adjoining my Lincoln plantation. I am fond of something new in wh[a]t little I do think about farming and have become a warm friend of the cultivation of Silk.” His interest in silk addressed both

⁸³ Robert Hall Morrison to James Morrison, Nov. 28, 1820, Robert Hall Morrison Papers, University of North Carolina.

⁸⁴ Robert Hall Morrison to James Morrison, June 17, 1837, Robert Hall Morrison Papers, Ibid.

a moral and economic dilemma. “I have no doubt but it might become a most interesting & profitable business in this whole country & drive Slavery before it. It w[ould] Be a splendid business for the South without slaves. Cotton & Rice cannot grow without Negroes—Why pay 20 millions nearly to Foreign Countries for Silk?”⁸⁵ He searched for a potential alternative to slavery via the cultivation of silk, a less labor intensive crop than cotton. Again, rather than emphasizing a moral condemnation, Morrison’s comments toward bondage took on a more entrepreneurial tone, in that it would be “a profitable business” for the South to be devoid of slavery.

Morrison predicted that he would always be suffering from debt from farming, but in particular, from the heavy reliance on cotton production. In an 1842 letter to James, Morrison lamented over the needs demanded from the production of cotton. “I have nearly all my corn housed and over 20,000 lbs. of cotton gathered. Cotton is the only thing farmers can sell, and that truly is a heavy business. It really seems that money can not be commanded for any thing the farmers can raise— You can do much better with wheat in yr. country, than we can with cotton.”⁸⁶ Yet he believed the crop to be permanently embedded in the economic fabric of the South. “We have too much overlooked everything for cotton & this has failed to reward cultivation,” he said to James in 1845.⁸⁷

As Morrison remained engaged in cotton production, he continued to utilize slave labor. His experiments with silk production repeatedly failed, and by 1842, he ended his attempts in this regard. Cotton remained the primary crop produced at Cottage home throughout the 1840s and 1850s. Rather than utilize free labor for cotton cultivation, slavery remained an essential part of Morrison’s life and economic survival, if not prosperity.

One could argue that the gradual retreat from Morrison’s condemnation of slavery over the first half of the 19th Century is symptomatic of his change from preacher to

⁸⁵ Robert Hall Morrison to James Morrison, Apr. 16, 1837, Robert Hall Morrison Papers, Ibid.

⁸⁶ Robert Hall Morrison to James Morrison, Nov. 12, 1842, Robert Hall Morrison Papers, Ibid.

⁸⁷ Robert Hall Morrison to James Morrison, Apr. 4, 1845, Robert Hall Morrison Papers, Ibid.

planter. Yet slavery had always been a part of Morrison's life. He owned slaves before Mary Graham received a part of her father's land and slave population. In 1821, Morrison himself inherited a slave, Mary, from his father. In 1824, Mary, a year older than Morrison, married Bagwell, and Morrison then purchased Bagwell. Mary and Bagwell produced four sons.⁸⁸ Thus, by 1840, Morrison had purchased one slave, and brought six to the plantation in Lincoln County.

Moreover, Morrison despite the gradual increase in cotton production, the slave population did not increase during these decades. In 1840, 66 slaves lived at Cottage Home, the highest number of slaves owned by Morrison. In 1850, the number dropped slightly to 58, and in 1860, the slave population was 29. Thirty eight slaves were born at Cottage Home. Three were born during the Civil War, the last in December, 1864. Thus, the number of slaves declined over the years.

The slaves, particularly house slaves, were an integral part of the Morrison home. Mary, Morrison's first slave, was called "the overseer" by other slaves at Cottage Home because of her supposed influence on Morrison.⁸⁹ All of Morrison's sons-in-law became slaveowners themselves. Hetty, inherited from Joseph Morrison in 1837, and valued at \$437, became a lifelong servant to Anna.⁹⁰ After Anna Morrison's marriage to Jackson, Morrison gave Hetty and her sons to the new couple. "Hetty, our chambermaid and laundress, was an importation from North Carolina," Anna recalled in her memoirs. "She had been my nurse in infancy, and from this fact there had always existed between us a bond of mutual interest and attachment. As she wished to live with me, my father transferred to me the ownership of herself and her two boys. Hetty was sent as a nurse to our first child, from her plantation home in North Carolina to Lexington, and made the journey all alone, which was quite a feat for one so inexperienced as a 'corn-field hand,' in which capacity she served for years."⁹¹ Thus, the concept that Morrison was

⁸⁸ "Dr. Morrison's Colored Family," Presidential Papers of Robert Hall Morrison, Davidson College.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Record of Deeds, Lincoln County, Vol. 39.

⁹¹ Anna Jackson, *Life and Letters*, 117.

“introduced” to the value of slavery when he moved to Cottage home—and therein changed his position on the institution—seems erroneous.

Nevertheless, by the 1850s, no further evidence exists to indicate that Morrison continued to look for the elimination of slavery. Rather, he began to assume a fearful view of slave insurrection that was prevalent within the slaveholding community.

John Brown’s Raid realized the planter class’s inherent fear of insurrection. In October, 1859 John Brown led a group of 21 men in an attempt to seize the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. The raid failed; within six weeks, Brown was tried, convicted, and hanged for treason. Most Northerners condemned his actions, but some abolitionists supported the act. For the South, it confirmed fears of slave rebellions supported by abolitionists and provided evidence of the potential violence of blacks taking revenge on whites.

In November 1859, Morrison wrote his cousin that he had heard from daughters Anna and Laura, living in Virginia. “All well but a great panic about the Harper Ferry affair—it seems a great wrong in State officers or any others to excite fears and rumors instead of adopting measures to allay excitement and prevent forebodings of evil—There will be no rest to Poor Females for miles around until the executions are all over. Why not the Govr. at once station a force there large enough to meet all contingencies and keep them there until the work is all done? If martial law had been proclaimed and the whole matter ended in 3 hours time, all this capital for abolitionism would have been prevented.”⁹² Despite Brown’s claim to be an agent of God, Morrison saw no religious worth in Brown’s actions, and he condemned the raid.

In 1820, Morrison condemned slavery as many New Side ministers had done at Princeton. By 1859, his writings concerned the fear of slave insurrection rather than the lamentation of the slave’s condition.

⁹² Robert Hall Morrison to James Morrison, Nov. 28, 1859, Robert Hall Morrison Papers, *Ibid.*

Morrison's identity as a minister offers no set construct in regards to his position on slavery. The relationship between religion and slavery varied greatly. History provides two men who possessed commonalities with Morrison, yet represent dramatically opposing positions in regards to the relationship between Southern religion and slavery. Like Morrison, Thomas Dew was president of a college. Yet Dew used religion as a means to advocate the proslavery argument. Appointed professor of political economy in 1820 at the College of William and Mary, Dew used the Bible--along with other political, economic and social arguments--to advocate slavery as a beneficial institution for the planter and the slave. In response to the 1832 Nat Turner Rebellion, Dew published the *Review of the Debate in the Virginia Legislature of 1831 and 1832*. Historians view this piece as one of the earliest proslavery arguments. Dew, who rose to president of William and Mary, used the Bible and his position as educator to further the proslavery ideology.⁹³

Presbyterian minister George Junkin left the South upon Virginia's secession. Originally from Pennsylvania, Junkin was president of Washington College (now Washington and Lee University) in Lexington, from 1848 to 1861. He was the father of Elinor Junkin, Stonewall Jackson's first wife, who died in 1854. Rev. Junkin was labeled an abolitionist by students because of his protest over secession. Junkin left the South and returned to Pennsylvania, despite leaving family behind in Virginia.⁹⁴

In her book *Southern Evangelicals*, Anne Loveland suggested that Morrison's changing position towards slavery stemmed from decrees issued by the Presbyterian General Assembly. In her discussion on the church's retreat from the issue of emancipation in the 19th century, Loveland used Morrison and John Holt Rice, head of the Union Theological Seminary, as examples of Presbyterian clergy who held high positions in the education of aspiring ministers--and questioned the morality of slavery--yet failed to use their positions to encourage their students to oppose slavery. She wrote: "Morrison justified his silence on the ground that 'the public mind of the southern states'

⁹³ Eric H. Walther, "Thomas Roderick Dew" in *Macmillan Encyclopedia of World Slavery* (New York, 1998) 1:250.

⁹⁴ Robertson, Jr., *Stonewall Jackson*, 213.

was not prepared for emancipation. Similarly, Rice argued that antislavery efforts within the church would ‘retard the march of public feeling in relation to slavery’.” Loveland argued that Morrison and Rice were part of a reaction from clergy in response to the 1818 and 1836 General Assembly acts, wherein the assembly determined that “slavery was so entangled with state laws that no church body could interfere with it, and it conceded that any action on slavery by the General Assembly would divide the church. Therefore, the committee resolved, ‘it is not expedient for the Assembly to take any further order in relation to this subject’.”⁹⁵

Though Morrison never mentioned the General Assembly’s decrees in any of his surviving letters, it is highly probable that its decision had an impact on him. No evidence exists that Morrison incorporated his views into the teachings at Davidson, or in any other public forum. Certainly, the opportunity to spread the antislavery position was lost by Morrison’s, and Rice’s, silence.

Contrary to Loveland’s work, however, Morrison does not appear to have reacted largely to the decrees of the General Assembly, nor did the 1818 and 1836 declarations halt Morrison from publicly sharing his views on slavery. The bulk of Morrison’s comments on slavery began after 1818 and continued through until 1837.

Moreover, Morrison’s experimentation with silk production and his support for the Sierra Leone colony are indicative that Morrison might never have used Davidson as a vehicle for antislavery. Loveland quoted a Virginia minister, Jeremiah Jeter, who closely paralleled Morrison’s position on emancipation in the South. Like Morrison, Jeter also became a member of the planter class upon marriage. Loveland used Jeter to explore how the climate in Virginia changed toward slavery. During the 1820s, “the ‘prevalent opinion’ was ‘that the system imposed great responsibilities and was fraught with many evils, economical, social, political, and moral.’” There was support for the abolition of

⁹⁵ Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order*, 191-93.

slavery. Yet during the 1830s, the emphasis on the moral evil of the institution waned in the face of the rigid social systems in the South.⁹⁶

Morrison's hope that Sierra Leone "will be in time the channel by which our country will be drained of its slaves," and that "it would be a splendid business in the south without slaves" indicates his belief that emancipation alone was not the solution to the problem of slavery in Morrison's mind. The removal of blacks was the solution—a white South was a problem-free South. Emancipation represented a more damning scenario than that presented from the sin of slavery. To destroy the slave system—upon which the South rested—seemed to guarantee an end of order and the introduction of a chaotic social, political and economic state. In the words of Jeter, "abolition would be fraught with more mischief than good."⁹⁷

Therefore, Morrison's belief in the moral sin of slavery was certain. It stemmed from the evangelical belief in ultimate reprisal from God for man's sins. In this sense, Morrison supports the work of Matthews, Hill and Loveland, though not in the direct manner in which Loveland quoted him. The slaveholding South restricted the potential of evangelicals to change their society. Ministers themselves believed inherently in divine retribution for the sins of mankind, which would come from a society that harbored a moral evil but seemingly gave no opportunity to resolve the moral dilemma.

Yet Morrison understood how firmly slavery was embedded in the social system of the South. Emancipation signified the disintegration of the political, economic and social order of the region. Despite Morrison's moral condemnation of slavery, his concept of emancipation could only come with the removal of slaves after their freedom. Morrison could not envision a self-contained, devout, and orderly South where free blacks and whites lived conjointly. With the passing of each decade, the possibility of removing slavery increasingly guaranteed the destruction of society as Morrison knew it. Thus, over time, Morrison softened his position on the subject. Evangelical religion and a

⁹⁶ Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order*, 187.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

middle-class background planted the seeds for Morrison's condemnation of slavery; yet when faced with an alternative, chaotic environment where blacks lived with whites, Morrison chose the moral evil over the deconstruction of his society. Morrison's need for order superceded the fear of divine retribution. Morrison's powerful need for order becomes all the more evident upon examination of his position on secession.

Chapter 3

“This life is truly a scene of uncertainty of darkness, doubt and disappointment. We can see but a short way before us—All is uncertain.”—R.H. Morrison

Robert Hall Morrison feared secession. He viewed secessionists as blasphemers, held them in contempt, and condemned their rhetoric as ignorant and dangerous. He kept his conflicting views on slavery within the realm of close family and friends, but he openly voiced his position on secession. Though Morrison never actively participated in the political realm, he took careful note of the more critical political events that threatened the Union. Yet by the spring of 1861, as North Carolina seceded from the Union, Morrison threw his support behind the secessionists. To understand his conflicting views toward secession, one must first examine the political events that led to civil war, and his reaction to them. In so doing, Morrison’s motivation for his allegiance to the Union becomes evident, and his perception of the ideal political and social system emerges. With this perception defined, the reasons behind his 1861 decision to support secession become evident.

During the 1830s, political and economic tensions regarding the expansion of slavery, the power struggle by free and slave states over representation in Congress, and control over internal affairs reached a high pitch. By 1832, the concept of secession brought the threat of violence to the national scene with the Nullification Crisis. That year, Congress passed a tariff which South Carolina viewed as a hindrance to Southern interests. The tariff, deemed the “tariff of abominations,” followed a similar act in 1828. The 1832 tariff resulted in a call for a convention by the South Carolina state government, which determined the federal tariff to be “null and void.” President Andrew Jackson reacted by asserting the power of the federal government over state authority. He pushed a force bill through Congress to authorize the use of federal troops to collect the tariff. Henry Clay’s compromise tariff in 1833 prevented the outbreak of violence.

Economic tensions continued to exacerbate the strained political scene. Beginning in 1834, a high foreign demand for export crops, along with plentiful foreign credit for both Northern and Southern merchants and a heavy infusion of foreign gold, virtually doubled the nation's money supply. This created a boom economy. Easy access to credit spurred massive purchases of western lands. A staggering number of new internal projects began, including the construction of railroads. Despite warnings over the instability of this newfound economic prosperity, many Americans ignored the potential dangers and suffered from the financial fall that hit in 1837.

The Whigs blamed Andrew Jackson and his vice president, Martin Van Buren. Formed in 1834 from the remnants of the National Republican Party, the Whigs consisted of various factions, but all were united against Andrew Jackson and the Democrats. Historians often describe the Whig Party as having consisted of an odd assortment of men with little in common, except for the nationalist ideal of a strong federal government and animosity for Andrew Jackson. Michael Holt described the Whigs as possessing “a passionate devotion to the Revolutionary experiment in republican government and a common conviction that Jackson threatened it.”⁹⁸

The Nullification Crisis, and the concern over the financial depression absorbed many, including Morrison. In June, 1837, he wrote to James, in despair: “There is great apathy & gloom in worldly matters—We do not with us feel the thrilling excitement of being blowed to pieces—But the sudden discontent of having little cotton, no price for it, little money, the dread of less, fear of failures & etc. What an awful state of things our country is in! What will become over the people of Alabama, Mississippi? They were agitated enough before to drive away order contentment and religion—What will they be now?”⁹⁹ Morrison, an ardent Union Whig, supported strongly the Whig position on a strong federal government. The work by the Whig Henry Clay in response to the crisis furthered Morrison's animosity for Jackson and the Democrats.

⁹⁸ Michael Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party* (New York, 1978), 28.

⁹⁹ Robert Hall Morrison to James Morrison, June 14, 1837, Robert Hall Morrison Papers, University of North Carolina.

By the 1830's and 1840's, the Whig Party began to suffer from sectional strains. Industrialization became a divisive issue for Southern Whigs. The Whig party platform focused on financial stability in the country, particularly through the establishment of a national bank and a protective tariff on manufactured goods. The protective tariffs that led to the Nullification Crisis now became of interest to a certain faction in the South, as new manufacturing centers developed-- particularly in Southern coastal states.

North Carolina developed several manufacturing centers during this period. Plantation owners who looked to increase their profit margin on cotton in wool by building these factories supported the urge to protect industrialization.

On December 22, 1838, Morrison wrote to James, and advocated his support for the newly developed factories. "Much very much might be done for this Section of Country by Cotton & Woolen Factories. Some in our State are doing admirable. Our Country will never improve until men of enterprize [sic] go forward and prove that they can make money by plans for the public good, and that others may share the same benefits by having like common sense."¹⁰⁰ Morrison's attempts at silk production and experimentation with various crop rotation systems are indicative of his attempt to find a solution to the need for the slave system, and of his desire to "go forward." While some Southern Whigs began to leave the party over opposition to the tariff, which they viewed as a hindrance to southern interests, Morrison supported the platform. A sectional split began, and Morrison followed the line that remained dedicated to a strong federal government.

The 1840 Presidential election proved frustrating for Whigs. In 1840, the party candidate, William Henry Harrison, won the race for the White House. Unfortunately for the Whigs, the new president died 32 days into his term, and his vice-president, John Tyler, assumed the office.

¹⁰⁰ Robert Hall Morrison to James Morrison, Dec. 22, 1838, Robert Hall Morrison Papers, Ibid.

Once a Jackson Democrat, Tyler angered national Whigs by vetoing bills intended to restore the Bank of the United States and redistribute the proceeds from the sale of public lands. In response, many Whigs in Tyler's cabinet resigned.

Morrison shared the frustration of his party. He wrote to James in March, 1840, and articulated his fear over the fate of the nation. "I know not what is to become of the financial interest of the Country if the present State things sh [oul] d continue long. There seems with us a stagnation of business, confidence is gone, and many of the best men ere long will be broken up if just for their dues. Farther South, I learn it is even worse—and yet the government deaf to all remonstrance & callous to all sufferings is going forward with its mad & astounding enforcements---! I see no ray of hope, humanly speaking, but the growing enthusiasm for Harrison & Tyler which I hope may grow and strenthen[sic] until every mountain & valley & plain in the Land may feel the redeeming Spirit & come to the rescue. Such a struggle as the next year will witness this country has never been the scene of, and if the dark cloud of misrule is not then rolled away, what will become of the Land we love?"¹⁰¹ Morrison associated the Jackson administration as a kind of pestilence upon the nation.

Morrison's biblical condemnation of the Democrats continued in an 1844 letter to James. He wrote: "It does seem as if Divine Providence would teach us as a nation the guilt and danger of our pride—When we seemed to feel that we had gained all we needed in the election of Genl. Harrison, He laid him low before our eyes—And when the High Functionaries of the land seemed to be gathering around that great gun as if it were the right hand of our defence,[sic] the Lord has shown that the very instrument of vain exaltation should become the messenger of lamentation thro' the Country." Morrison credited the death of Harrison and Tyler's succession as divine retribution from God. He continued, "It would be well if these warnings were duly pondered and improved—But they will be probably by very few—We seem to be too much carried off by the sudden and wonderful growth of our Country, from the true cause of our stability and the great

¹⁰¹ Robert Hall Morrison to James Morrison, Mar. 7, 1840, Robert Hall Morrison Papers, Ibid.

source of our mercies.”¹⁰² Morrison repeatedly associated the Democratic Party as punishment for the nation’s sins by Christ. This association, then, correlates to his belief in the nationalist ideology of the National Republican party and in turn, of the Whigs. Federal control equated to a kind of approval from God. For Morrison, this ideology went beyond the sectional tensions that had already begun to tear at the fabric of the national Whig Party.

In addition to tariffs and financial panic, territorial expansion readily aggravated sectional animosity in the first half of the 19th Century. Specifically, the spread of slavery into new territories struck upon the ethical nerves surrounding the institution of slavery and on the teetering balance of sectional power in Congress.

The Mexican War epitomized the hostility that stemmed from territorial expansion. In 1836, Texans led by Sam Houston defeated Mexican forces at the Battle of San Jacinto and captured their commanding General, Santa Anna. Soon thereafter, the government of the Texas territory ratified a state constitution and elected Sam Houston as president. An envoy was sent to Washington in order either to achieve annexation to the United States or at least receive recognition of the independent Republic of Texas.

Mexico never acknowledged the 1836 Treaty of Velasco, signed by Santa Anna, which declared Texas independence. James K. Polk, a Democrat, won the 1844 Presidential election, and in 1845 sent a detachment under Gen. Zachary Taylor to the Rio Grande River to guard against Mexican invasion. In 1846, after a small skirmish on the Texas side of the River, Polk declared war on Mexico. Troops led by Gen. Winfield Scott landed in Vera Cruz in May, 1847 and by September, Scott had claimed victory in the city.

The Democrat’s policy toward the Texas territory only solidified Morrison’s fatalism. In an April, 1847 letter to James, Morrison chastised the war as being unjust: “The news from the Seat of War is indeed of thrilling & awful interest. It would be

¹⁰² Robert Hall Morrison to James Morrison, Mar. 25, 1844, Robert Hall Morrison Papers, Ibid.

glorious news if the cause were righteous. It is indeed wonderful that with 5,000 troops, nearly all militia, he should whip Santa Anna with 20,000 and disable & scatter his army—But the loss! What bleeding hearts has it opened in this country! Where is the Glory? It is written in blood of noble men, the loss of untold treasure and the national honor sullied by injustice & cruelty—Our greatest gain will be ultimate losses—Our boasted renown will be written in the vitiation of morals, and confirmed by the execration of good men.”¹⁰³ Most Whigs opposed the war with Mexico, as slaveholders pushed to gain territory for the expansion of slavery. In his response to Mexico, Morrison followed the party line. He also correlated a war fought for “unjust causes” as an abomination.

The 1850s proved pivotal for the nation. Political parties changed dramatically. The Whig Party disintegrated, as two new parties--Republican and American--appeared on the political stage. During this decade, the Compromise of 1850 attempted to mollify sectional animosity, while slavery and calls for secession brought the nation to the brink of war.

The annexation of Texas to the United States and the territory gained at the 1848 close of the Mexican War aggravated the hostility between the North and South over the expansion of slavery. In 1849, California requested admittance to the Union as a free state. Conflicts arose over boundary claims in Texas. Questions over the slave trade and fugitive slave law increased in intensity. The possibility of the disintegration of the Union loomed.

In response, Henry Clay came out of retirement and returned to the Senate. He proposed a series of measures to be passed as an omnibus compromise bill. Stephen Douglas organized support for the bill. The measures included: the admission of California as a free state; the organization of new territory without mention of slavery; a new, more restrictive fugitive slave law; the prohibition of the slave trade in Washington, D.C.; and a payment by the federal government to settle the Texas boundary issues.

¹⁰³ Robert Hall Morrison to James Morrison, Apr. 13, 1847, Robert Hall Morrison Papers, Ibid.

The fugitive slave law, which allowed for the recovery and return of escaped slaves, angered Northern abolitionists. It required citizens to assist in the recovery of fugitive slaves, whereas a 1793 law allotted the recovery of fugitive slaves as an obligation of the federal government. Personal liberty laws previously enacted by Northern states in response to the 1793 law—in effort to protect former slaves—became null and void. Nevertheless, after extensive debates, most notably by Daniel Webster, the Compromise of 1850 passed as separate bills in September of that year.

In 1850, Morrison praised Webster, Clay, and Lewis Cass—a democrat who lost the 1848 presidential election to Zachary Taylor, who supported the Compromise. “Those having nothing to lose are the croakers. I thank God that His aim is almighty and His mercy above the Heavens. He has blessed us with such men as Clay & Webster for this hour of trial—Genl. Cass too deserves all praise. We ought to pray more for our Country,”¹⁰⁴ he wrote to James, in April 1850. In his letters addressing the Compromise, Morrison never comments on the morality of the issues themselves. Moreover, he crossed party lines in praising Democratic Cass because of Cass’ efforts towards the Compromise. Morrison’s primary concern involved maintaining peace and preventing secession. This further illustrates Morrison’s driving concern for order, which surpassed the ethics of divisive issues and partisan politics.

Creators of the Compromise of 1850 hoped the legislation would subdue, if not end, sectional animosity, yet it proved to only delay secession. The new fugitive slave law agitated factions of the North, and in turn, the South increased its threats to leave the Union altogether.

On December 10, 1850, Georgia, the Empire State, called for a convention to meet to discuss secession. Whigs in Georgia attempted to curb, if not halt, the call for disunion by emphasizing the disadvantages that would await the state should she leave the Union. The pro-Union stance crossed party lines, as Whigs welcomed Democrats who shared their pro-Union view, and referred to themselves as Union men, part of the

¹⁰⁴ Robert Hall Morrison to James Morrison, Apr. 29, 1850, Robert Hall Morrison Papers, Ibid.

“Union and Southern Rights Party.” Men who later held positions in the Confederate cabinet, including Alexander H. Stephens and Robert Toombs, supported the compromise in the early 1850s. Efforts by Stephens and Toombs helped secure the Union vote in Georgia. In December 1850, the state convention voted to stay in the Union, provided the North recognized the Compromise of 1850, which had been adopted in Congress in September.¹⁰⁵

In November, 1850, Morrison correctly predicted the success of the “Union Men” in Georgia, and in turn he expressed one of his few optimistic views of the future of the Union. He wrote to James, “We have had a very fine fall of beautiful weather—Mild, dry, healthful, delightful weather—As a result the crops are gathered in good condition—Even the Croakers South of us have hard work to find just matters of complaint. They Bluster on however cause or no cause—Health, plenty, peace (except what they disturb) all reasonable enjoyments, and all exalting previliges, and yet their wailings come up with a most pitiful vehemency—The signs from Georgia are cheering, that the Union men will carry the State triumphantly—So with nearly every other State except S. C. This is [a] matter [for] thanksgiving.”¹⁰⁶ While sectionalism divided parties, Morrison supported the Pro-Union stance, whether it occurred in Southern or Northern states.

During the 1850s, state rights advocates continued to stir talk of secession, despite efforts of Pro-Union factions in southern states. As the spread of secession sentiment excelled, southern radicals hoped that the spirit of secession would spread from state to state.

In 1851 Morrison expressed concern that North Carolina might follow actions of its radical neighbor, South Carolina, or that its northern neighbor, Virginia, might lean toward secession. He wrote to James, “Our Belligerent neighbors on the South have been letting off steam awfully & I hope will soon be relieved of part of their heat—After a flood of vapor & Bluster & Humbug they have solemnly & emphatically & unalterably

¹⁰⁵ Arthur Charles Cole, *The Whig Party in the South* (Gloucester, MA, 1962), 179-181.

¹⁰⁶ Robert Hall Morrison to James Morrison, Nov. 20, 1850, Robert Hall Morrison Papers, *Ibid.*

ordained that the Chestnuts must & shall be pulled out of the fire if any body's Paws can be found with w[hich] to do it—I trust N.C. will keep her fingers out of the fire—I hope Va. Will not stir the ashes for her.”¹⁰⁷ Neither Virginia nor North Carolina showed the radicalism of South Carolina in regards to secession. Nevertheless, in 1861—one month after Virginia decided to secede—North Carolina followed Virginia into the Confederacy.

The 1852 elections illustrated how unraveled national parties had become in the wake of sectional division. The Whigs suffered a fatal blow with these elections—at the national and state levels.

In June 1852, the Whig Party nominated Winfield Scott and William A. Graham as its presidential and vice-presidential candidates, respectively. Like Morrison, Graham was a Union Whig, who had thrown his support behind the Compromise of 1850. Winfield Scott, a figurehead for northern antislavery Whigs, faced strong opposition in the South. Graham campaigned strongly to appease southern fears about his running mate. Despite these efforts, the Democratic candidate Franklin Pierce overwhelmingly defeated Scott and Graham.¹⁰⁸

Of his brother-in-law, William Graham's defeat, Morrison only stated to his cousin in December 1852, that “the election is rather too bad to write about just now.”¹⁰⁹ Graham even lost his home state, as Pierce took 50.4% of the popular vote.¹¹⁰

To fill Graham's seat in the North Carolina Senate, Whig candidate John Kerr faced Democratic Governor David Reid. Kerr lost to Reid, who won with 53% of the

¹⁰⁷ Robert Hall Morrison to James Morrison, Jan. 6, 1851, Robert Hall Morrison Papers, Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Max Williams, “William Graham” in *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography* (Chapel Hill, 1986), 2:338.

¹⁰⁹ Robert Hall Morrison to James Morrison, Dec. 22, 1852, Robert Hall Morrison Papers, University of North Carolina.

¹¹⁰ History Central.com, <http://www.multied.com/elections/1852.html>

vote. The Democratic victory in North Carolina, once a Whig stronghold, effectively ended any forward momentum for the Whig Party there.¹¹¹

The loss of the presidential Whig candidate signaled the beginning of the demise of the Whigs. The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 effectively nullified the Missouri Compromise and left no boundary in regards to the potential expansion of slave territory. The law created the states of Kansas and Nebraska, and stipulated the inhabitants of the territories could decide themselves as to the legality of slavery, thereby repealing the Missouri Compromise. Stephen Douglas sponsored the bill with the hope—along with other northern leaders—that a transcontinental railroad would be constructed in their states rather than in the South. The removal of the slavery restriction ensured southern support for the bill. Signed into law by Franklin Pierce on May 30, 1854, the bill split the Democrats. It destroyed the Northern Party of the Whigs. In the South, Pro-Union Whigs were left without a national party. Many joined the Southern Democrats, while others turned to the inchoate American Party.

Officially named the American Party in 1854, the party platform consisted of limiting the spread of foreign influence and control, preventing immigrants from holding public offices and deterring immigration. Derisively called the Know-Nothing Party, due to its members' practice of secrecy, they waffled on slavery, and in so doing, lost members to the emerging Republican Party.

The American Party found support—particularly in Northern states—as immigration dramatically increased. Between 1820 and 1855, over 5 million foreigners immigrated to the United States, many of whom were Roman Catholic. By 1850, Catholics were the largest single denomination in the United States, and were overwhelmingly Democratic.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party*, 760.

¹¹² Lawrence Guy Brown, *Immigration: Cultural Conflicts and Social Adjustments* (New York, 1961), 79-84.

In 1843, Morrison wrote to James on this influx of Irish Catholics: “I am truly afraid much of the talent & learning of what has been called Protestantism will soon be arrayed if not under Catholic colors, at least in sustaining th[eir] awful creed and promoting th[eir] alarming measures. If Popery makes another bloody effort to crush truth and Godliness this country will probably be the Scene of the conflict.”¹¹³ Morrison resented the growing number of immigrants who came to America during the second quarter of the 19th Century. In particular, he feared the potential power from the growing number of Catholics.

To his cousin, Morrison continued to admit his fear of the spread of Catholicism to the nation: “The flow of Catholics to this country is astounding. They can be wielded by one head. Their address is proverbial, th[eir] rites are captivating and th[eir] revolutionary designs spring forth whenever there is prospect of success—What adds to the danger is too many in this land, seem to think, that toleration means countenance to false religion and suspicion of true religion.”¹¹⁴ These statements resemble anti-Catholic sentiment that was prevalent in the United States, particularly in the first three decades of the 20th century. One can conceive how Morrison, as a devoted Presbyterian, would anguish over the influx of Catholics, yet Morrison’s fears extended beyond the threat of Catholicism. Well before the establishment of the American Party, Morrison worried over the “heathenism” that threatened to overtake the Christian world. In 1820, he wrote to James, “I am sensible that the lurid rites of Superstition are yet chanted in many climes. I look often with amazement at the 600,000,000 of heathens yet to be evangelized. The trophies won by the soldiers of the cross in the South Sea Islands should rouse the faith of every Saint. I often wonder at the inactivity and coldness of Christians when beholding the present estate of the world.”¹¹⁵

Morrison discussed the conversion of a Native American, who, after redemption, was given the Christian name John Arch. Morrison praised that Arch was now “a

¹¹³ Robert Hall Morrison to James Morrison, Feb. 20, 1843, Robert Hall Morrison Papers, Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Robert Hall Morrison to James Morrison, Feb. 20, 1843, Robert Hall Morrison Papers, Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Robert Hall Morrison to James Morrison, Feb. 12, 1820, Robert Hall Morrison Papers, Ibid.

converted Savage.” Morrison described Arch’s acceptance of Christianity as salvation not only of the soul but of saving the man from a life that, to Morrison, characterized all Native Americans: “To behold him who in other times would have delighted to brandish the tomahawk for battle; to scalp the infants; and raise the hoop of exaltation while dancing around the embowelled [sic] captive—Now uniting with Christians in the worship of God; commemorating his redeeming love; and pondering with delight over deliberations relating to the extension & prosperity of Zion was delightful indeed,”¹¹⁶ he wrote to James. Granted, New Light Presbyterians emphasized missionary work. Evangelists in other denominations such as Episcopalians and Methodists during this period also viewed much of the world as dominated by heathen faiths and cultures. Yet Morrison’s fearful view of foreigners extended beyond indigenous cultures or threats from Irish Catholics.

In 1852, Hungarian expatriate Lajos Kossuth arrived on the American political scene. Kossuth had attempted to secure independence for Hungary during the middle of the 19th Century. He reported his observations of political activities in a parliamentary gazette, which resulted in his 1837 imprisonment by Austrian police. He was freed by popular demand three years later. In July 1848, Kossuth called on Hungarians to fight for independence. Austria received Russian assistance to squash the uprising. Kossuth fled to Turkey, then England and the United States, where many received him as a patriot of freedom and democracy.

Kossuth attempted to garner support from the American government for Hungarian independence. His repeated calls for action, based on democracy and freedom, stirred the question of whether America should continue with its policy of nonintervention in foreign affairs. The question became a serious issue in the 1852 presidential election. He toured the eastern seaboard in 1851, to throngs of cheering people, and he toured the West in 1852. The Whigs split on the issue, and Kossuth

¹¹⁶ Robert Hall Morrison to James Morrison, Nov. 5, 1820, Robert Hall Morrison Papers, Ibid.

received support from the Democratic Party on the issue of independence against oppressive governments.¹¹⁷

In March 1852, Morrison wrote to James in regards to Kossuth's presence in America. "It seems as soon as one cloud passes over, our restless & foolish spirits Raise another storm. This Kossuth [page torn] is proof of it—Depend upon it, we have much to fear from the Foreign population, in this country," he wrote to James. Morrison feared foreign influence in matters beyond religion. He continued, "We have more to dread from the Germans than the Irish—The Irish are generally poor & soon disperse, so that their influence is not much felt—The Germans settle in dense borders, retain their language, have industry, some wealth, many have learning—And what is worse most of them are infidels—They will soon acquire influence, are determined to exert it and may soon form a third party in political contests."¹¹⁸ Kossuth, then, embodied to Morrison the threat of disunion and the threat of foreign influence.

Morrison's comments on Kossuth reflect the fear of immigrant influence on the American political scene. Yet Morrison's other letters show a history of anti-immigration sentiment, which extended beyond the threats Kossuth presented to the Union. For Morrison, immigrants represented a threat to his perception of an ideal environment, i.e. an Anglo-Saxon world of evangelicalism. The most fundamental characteristics of an immigrant—including language, cultural heritage and race—represented a threat to Morrison. Michael Holt noted that, "The anti-Catholic bigotry and proscriptiveness of Know Nothingism provided a new dividing line between former Whig allies."¹¹⁹ Unlike William Graham, Morrison's brother-in-law and fellow Whig, Morrison chose to join the American Party which rested on the fears of immigrants.

¹¹⁷ Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party*, 692-95.

¹¹⁸ Robert Hall Morrison to James Morrison, Mar. 22, 1852, Robert Hall Morrison Papers, University of North Carolina.

¹¹⁹ Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party*, 934.

On August 9, 1855, Morrison wrote to James concerning North Carolina's Congressional elections. "I am sorry that the American party seems to have failed in most of the Districts."¹²⁰ Clearly, Morrison hoped his party would have fared better in the state. Yet by the end of the 1850s, the American Party lost momentum. In 1854, they successfully secured governorships in Massachusetts and Delaware.

The 1856 election proved damaging, though, as the party waffled on slavery and therefore lost partisans in the North and West to the newly formed Republican Party. Millard Fillmore ran on the American Party ticket, James Buchanan on the Democratic ticket, and John C. Frémont represented the Republicans. Buchanan had served as a diplomat to Great Britain, which removed him from the political pitfalls surrounding the Kansas-Nebraska Act. His record of compromise on slavery made him acceptable to the South. Frémont represented a party formed from a hodgepodge group of political refugees, all of whom had only an anti-slavery ideology as a unifying force. Buchanan won by a small margin. Fillmore only carried the state of Maryland. His loss represented the beginning of the demise for the party. By 1861, it had no representation from Congress, and soon after dissipated altogether.¹²¹

On November 7, 1856, Morrison wrote to his cousin, "For one I am glad the Presidential election is over. I hope the excitement & bitterness & discord may soon be quelled. Such times of agitation are unfriendly to all the interests of Religion. Buchanan is far from my choice but I take consolation in the fact that Fremont a Still worse man was not chosen. The signs of the Times are dark and foreboding—Our only hope for the Country is, that God can restrain the wrath of men, and defeat the counsels of the ungodly."¹²² Morrison's reaction to the 1856 election marks the beginning of his support for the Democratic Party, and in turn, for secessionists.

¹²⁰ Robert Hall Morrison to James Morrison, Aug. 9, 1855, Robert Hall Morrison Papers, University of North Carolina.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Robert Hall Morrison to James Morrison, Nov. 7, 1856, Robert Hall Morrison Papers, Ibid.

On December 8, 1857, Buchanan delivered his first message to Congress, and discussed the Utah territory. Appointed territorial governor in 1850 by Congress, Brigham Young openly advocated polygyny two years later. Non-Mormons in the Utah territory, and elsewhere in the nation, called for action. In his speech, Buchanan described the Mormon beliefs as “deplorable in themselves and revolting to the moral and religious sentiments of all Christendom.” The federal government should intervene. “We ought to go there with such an imposing force as to convince these deluded people that resistance would be vain, and thus spare the effusion of blood.”¹²³ Buchanan then appointed a new territorial governor; when Young refused to relinquish the position, Buchanan dispatched federal troops. Skirmishes over the winter of 1857 forced Buchanan to change tactics. He sent Thomas L. Kane to negotiate with Young, who then released the territory to Alfred Cumming, and relocated to Provo. When Albert Sidney Johnston led an expedition to Great Salt Lake City in June 1858, he found the city largely deserted.

On December 16, 1857, Morrison wrote to his cousin concerning Buchanan’s address. “I have read the Presidents message all thro’ although it is long. I am much pleased with it throughout—It is conservative, wise and in all respects worthy of the Chief Magistrate of a Great Nation—I am particularly pleased to see him so decidedly opposed to Filibustering as it is Known that many of his Party have Strong proclivities in that way—He treats the Mormon question too with great wisdom and firmness. The only thing to regret is, that he has not a force there in time & Strength to carry out his purpose of subduing the rebellion.”¹²⁴ Morrison found common ground with Buchanan via the Presidents policy towards the Mormons. Once again, his anti-immigration sentiment proved an important factor in determining Morrison’s political loyalties.

Thus, only two years after the destruction of the Whigs, Morrison began to support the Democratic Party—a political group he once considered blasphemous. Though Morrison agreed with Buchanan’s position on Utah, he reluctantly supported the

¹²³ George Ticknor Curtis, *Life of James Buchanan: Fifteenth President of the United States* (New York, 1883), 2:195-198.

¹²⁴ Robert Hall Morrison to James Morrison, Dec. 16, 1857, Robert Hall Morrison Papers, *Ibid.*

Democrats in 1856. For Morrison, the Republican Party represented the greater of two evils. The party sprouted from a Northern stronghold, with a high population of immigrants. Backed by abolitionists, advocated a platform of ending the expansion of slavery. Though Morrison believed in a strong federal government, national events forced him to choose between the Democratic zeal for state rights and secession or the Northern “Black” Republicans. By the end of the 1850s, the Democrats represented the continuation of the political and social environment that Morrison wanted to protect. For him, the Republicans represented abolition and immigration. Morrison knew of the moral pitfalls inherent to a Southern society founded on slavery. Yet, when faced with a loss of this orderly society--where class, race, and religion existed within clearly defined boundaries--Morrison retreated from his nationalist ideology, albeit reluctantly.

In March 1861, Morrison’s daughter Anna noted that the spirit of secession had swept through her native state: “During this visit of mine to North Carolina, I was surprised to find the people of that State almost unanimous for secession, for in my Virginia home the feeling was very much the reverse.”¹²⁵ As secession loomed, Morrison wrote to his sister Margaret in January, 1861: “It seems that we are called to witness great excitement, and strife and turmoil in our country. As a nation God has been very merciful to us, and we have been too proud and unthankful and rebellious—My chief hopes of the country is that God will hear the prayer of his people, forgive our provoking him, and turn away his judgements [sic] from us.”¹²⁶ He continued to see the calamity as retribution from God on a sinful people. Nevertheless, Morrison opted accept the Democratic Party, state rights, and secession over the Republican Party, the North, and the Union.

¹²⁵ Jackson, *Life and Letters*, 139.

¹²⁶ Robert Hall Morrison to Margaret Kimmons, Jan. 23, 1861, Presidential Papers of Robert Hall Morrison, Davidson College.

Conclusion

“It looks like our country shall soon be absorbed by vast cities and all the worse I fear for it, peace and prosperity—We were to have a Rural population of good families, but it is fading away.”—R.H.Morrison

After the outbreak of war, Morrison wrote to his cousin less frequently. The letters that survive from this period primarily concern local church matters and the health and well being of family members.

During the last four decades of his life, Morrison endured many personal tragedies. Mary Graham Morrison died from cancer in 1864. He wrote to his sister, Sarah Walker, about her death, and on the state of the nation: “The disease of my wife gradually became stronger and stronger until about a week ago, she was taken with a spasm. This was followed by others of equal violence for five days and nights. Her power of endurance at last gave way, and her handsome spirit went home to god. She died on the 27th at 11 at night. We buried her yesterday beside her father.... The country has suffered greatly. The Lord will guide and defend and bless us all.”¹²⁷

Before his own death in 1889 at the age of 91, Morrison endured the deaths of his daughter Eugenia in 1858, his son William in 1865, his daughter Susan in 1886, and son Alfred in 1876.¹²⁸ Most notably, Morrison’s son-on-law, Stonewall Jackson, died in 1863.

During the war, Morrison continued as regular minister at Macpelah Presbyterian Church. He also served as visiting minister at Unity and Castanea, two neighboring Presbyteries. Poor health continued to plague him during this period. Outside of his ministerial duties, he rarely left his home.

¹²⁷ Robert Hall Morrison to Sarah Morrison Walker, Apr. 30, 1864, Presidential Papers of Robert Hall Morrison, *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ Lore, *Morrison Family*, 281.

He acted as postmaster for Lincolnton throughout the Civil War, as the stagecoach went from Charlotte to Cottage Home to pick up and deliver mail. Crop production continued on the farm, though output fell significantly during this period. His children Susan, Anna, Laura and Alfred stayed with Morrison at Cottage Home through much of the war.

After the war, Morrison rented part of the property at Cottage Home to sharecroppers. A contract dated January 10, 1868, listed three men as renters at Cottage Home, (though Morrison noted that there were four). Jake Morrison, Albert Johnston, and Ellick Lean rented and farmed the land, and built homes. Morrison received corn and cotton in exchange.¹²⁹ He wrote to Sarah on the condition at Cottage Home in this regard: “We have very few servants about us now, only one woman and a boy—We got on with as much quiet and peace as could be expected. My farm is rented out to four men and...we must try and live on what we get.”¹³⁰

Similar to many white southerners, Morrison viewed life in the South after emancipation negatively. Morrison wrote to Sarah in 1868 that he had suffered much from growl, and had not traveled from his home much for some years, that his sister Margaret [who moved to Mississippi in 1837] was in good health, “but I am afraid they have awful times in that State, as they have such crowds of idle and worthless negroes to prey upon the substance of the land.”¹³¹

In 1887, he wrote to his daughter Laura: “It looks like our country shall soon be absorbed by vast cities and all the worse I fear for it, peace and prosperity—We were to have a Rural population of good families, but it is fading away.”¹³² Morrison admitted he longed for the order that once existed in the South. In 1868 he wrote to his sister that his

¹²⁹ Contract between Robert Hall Morrison and Jake Morrison, Albert Johnston and Ellick M. Lean, Jan. 10, 1868, Presidential Papers of Robert Hall Morrison, Davidson College.

¹³⁰ Robert Hall Morrison to Sarah Morrison Walker, Mar. 17, 1868, Presidential Papers of Robert Hall Morrison, *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² Robert Hall Morrison to Laura Morrison Brown, June 3, 1887, Presidential Papers of Robert Hall Morrison, *Ibid.*

health was not good, and financial pressures loomed, but “I would submit to all these trials cheerfully if I could have peace and order and harmony returned to an agitated country.”¹³³

In 1855, he acknowledged the contradictions that patterned his life. “I know that I am much better in giving advice than in improving it, and when I say what we ought to do, I only utter the convictions of my mind, feeling often painful impressions that I come so far short of what I know to be right.”¹³⁴

These contradictions stemmed from his evangelical faith—the governing characteristic of the man. Though evangelical religion retained certain homogenous characteristics, the use of evangelical religion varied greatly in the South. Certainly, religious leaders used it to support the secessionist cause, and after the war it became a foundation for the Lost Cause myth. Thomas Dew used religion to support the proslavery argument. Religious leaders also followed in the footsteps of Rev. George Junkin, who condemned slavery and secession until the last moment and chose to leave the South, even if that meant leaving a part of his family behind.

Therefore, the paradox that Morrison represents has its roots in religion. Yet in Morrison’s case, the desire for a pious, structured society, and the fear of the antithesis of that society, kept Morrison from following clergymen like Junkin. Ironically, this desire for an orderly, devout society also has its roots in southern evangelicalism. Charles Reagan Wilson explained: “While the clerics thus stressed that slavery Christianized the blacks, they also admitted the closely related point that slavery provided a valuable system of moral and social discipline. The key word was ‘order’.”¹³⁵

Southern evangelicalism survived and supported the social hierarchy in the South, which was based on a system that contradicted the theology of evangelical religion.

¹³³ Robert Hall Morrison to Sarah Morrison Walker, June 15, 1868, Presidential Papers of Robert Hall Morrison, *Ibid*.

¹³⁴ Robert Hall Morrison to James Morrison, June 27, 1855, Robert Hall Morrison Papers, University of North Carolina.

¹³⁵ Wilson, *Baptized in Blood*, 102.

Anne Loveland noted: “Evangelicals had little confidence in people, whether politicians or otherwise. Most evangelicals had no doubt that Americans would be punished for their sins. The only remedy, the only way of averting God’s wrath and regaining his favor, was through repentance and reformation.”¹³⁶

In this sense, Morrison personified southern evangelicalism. Religion itself both supported and condemned slavery and secession. To what degree religious leaders allowed themselves to be used by slaveholders and secessionists, whether to assuage guilt or support their causes, remains a debated argument among historians.

Morrison’s recognition of his own shortcomings—“ I come so far short of what I know to be right--” indicates that he was a conflicted supporter of slavery and secession. His middle-class childhood and early exposure to Northern New Side Presbyterians probably instilled in him a genuine sense of guilt over slavery. His advocacy of nationalism and his unwavering support of the Union Whig position remained constant until the Whigs no longer existed. Nevertheless, Morrison’s fear of losing his structured society dominated his guilt and his political ideology. “One of the duties of a Christian citizen was obedience to constituted authority,” Loveland observed. “Since government was ordained by God, resistance to government was resistance to God.”¹³⁷

Perhaps the personal trait that solidified Morrison’s retreat from his anti-slavery and anti-secessionist sentiment lay in his fear of immigrants. Much as the fear of miscegenation permeated northern communities, Morrison feared a kind of religious suicide. His education at Princeton and his successful endeavor in establishing Davidson College indicate his determination to further Presbyterian theology. Catholic immigrants represented an indirect threat to the institution he had founded.

Morrison relied on his faith to sustain him through the health troubles that plagued him throughout his life. His daughter Anna wrote to Margaret Junkin Preston in

¹³⁶ Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order*, 128.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, 121.

1866: “My father is still able to preach with great enthusiasms...he looks as well as ever...but I think it is my duty to stay with him. I do all I can for his comfort and pleasure.”¹³⁸

His daughter Laura Morrison Brown wrote that she never remembered him being in bed from sickness, despite his poor health history, until the last few weeks of his life. “Towards the last, suffering with acute kidney trouble, his suffering was often sever and continuous, but no one ever heard a word of complaint from him or an expression of impatience; on the contrary his heart overflowed with gratitude to God for His goodness to him; he would say ‘Surely goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life’.” When Morrison succumbed to a kidney infection in 1889, his last words to his children were: “It is one thing to feel the love of Christ in our hours of ease but it is inexpressibly dearer to feel it as such a time as this.”¹³⁹

Morrison’s religious beliefs guided him through the decades leading to Civil War. He relied on it all the more during and after the contest, as the society he sought to preserve, and improve, crumbled around him with the defeat of the Confederacy.

Rather than eulogize or condemn Morrison, this analysis of his life and letters portrays a human portrait of Morrison—a flawed man who made great achievements in education and religion, a man vulnerable to his fears in a turbulent time in the nation’s history. As Morrison wrote in 1820, “It is the prerogative of God alone to judge the heart.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Anna Jackson to Margaret Junkin Preston, June 6, 1866, George Junkin Collection, University of North Carolina.

¹³⁹ Brown, *Historical Sketch*, 10.

¹⁴⁰ Robert Hall Morrison to James Morrison, Feb. 12, 1820, Robert Hall Morrison Papers, University of North Carolina.