

Christian Duty in the Crisis of Secession: A Comparison of Philadelphia & Charleston

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how Protestant Charlestonians and Philadelphians interpreted and responded to the secession crisis of 1860-1861. “Christian duty” was a vital part of these responses, not only informing the worldview of Protestants, but directing their actions in the midst of the crisis. Charlestonians and Philadelphians defined the concept of “Christian duty” in similar ways, however as the crisis progressed they applied it in increasingly different manners. Early in 1860, Protestants in both cities emphasized their shared spiritual and political heritage, often defining Christian duty in regard to unity and conciliatory speech. However, the secession crisis marked a transition away from this shared unifying rhetoric toward the expression of regional exceptionalism. Increasingly, both Philadelphians and Charlestonians understood themselves and their respective governments to be specially anointed by God. Accordingly by the end of 1861, Charlestonian and Philadelphian Protestants described Christian duty as tied to serving the Confederacy or the Union.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1860, Rev. Thomas Smyth published his influential work, *The Well in the Valley*. In the treatise, Smyth recognized that Christians were citizens of a heavenly kingdom:

God claims the allegiance of every man to Christ, to whom “all power is given in heaven and on earth, and to whom every knee must bow” – as a friend or an enemy—“of things in heaven and things on earth, and things under the earth.” But to bow to Christ is to become a member of His kingdom, by having the enmity of our hearts slain by the power of the Holy Ghost, so that, laying down “the weapons of our rebellion,” we “deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Christ,” as our Leader, Teacher and King.

This spiritual citizenship was *essential* to Christianity, a “paramount duty.”¹ Rev. J.H.

Cuthbert described the Christian faith as a drastic transformation from death to life, from loyalty to the world to loyalty to Christ. For both, Christian faith was not limited to the momentary decision of a conversion experience, but rather came with its own obligations and duties. As Cuthbert described it, first there was “belief through truth,” indicating the moment of conversion, followed by “sanctification of the spirit,” in which the believer was daily shaped into an appropriate “dwelling place of the Spirit of holiness.”² In short, faith was not merely an inward feeling or belief, but rather transcended the internal, manifesting in outward and public ways.

Protestants used the concept of “Christian duty” as a means of encapsulating this outward manifestation of faith. Christian duty was applied to all spheres of life, dictating the individual’s proper behavior in the home and the public realm, while at work or in worship. It involved not only the practical spiritual disciplines of repentance, prayer and

¹ Thomas Smyth, *The Well in the Valley* (Philadelphia: American Sunday-School Union, 1860), 12-13.

thanksgiving, but also the broader concept of “Christian spirit,” in which the *inward* experience of faith informed the proper *outward* conduct of the Christian. As Smyth and Cuthbert demonstrated, the Christian faith was not a moment of redemption, but an identity and lifelong process in which the individual experienced the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit. By displaying such “fruits of the spirit” as love, peace, goodness, self-control and faithfulness, Christians acted out their faith, transforming themselves and the world around them.³ Just as faith transcended the inward realm, so too did Christian duty have consequences for people and events beyond the traditional sphere of religious influence.

Conceptions of Christian duty particularly impacted the ways in which Charlestonian and Philadelphian Protestants interpreted and responded to the secession crisis and the advent of civil war. Ministers and laypeople described the crisis in religious terms, emphasizing the national sins at the root of the conflict and its spiritual solutions. Presbyterian Henry A. Boardman of Philadelphia remarked that political demagogues had used religion to intensify sectional animosity and therefore that only religion could offer the remedy to avoid conflict.⁴ Presbyterian and South Carolinian Rev. James Henley Thornwell pointed to the crisis as divine judgment against national sins and repentance for

² J.H. Cuthbert, *The Prophet and the King; Or, a Message from God in The Union Pulpit: A Collection of Sermons by Ministers of Different Denominations* (Washington, D.C.: Published by William T. Smithson, 1860).

³ The “fruits of the spirit” are described by the Apostle Paul in Galatians 5:22-23. In addition to those referenced, the list includes joy, patience, kindness and gentleness.

⁴ Henry A. Boardman, *What Christianity Demands of Us at the Present Crisis: A Sermon Preached on Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 29, 1860* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1860).

those sins the only possible solution.⁵ Boardman, Thornwell and other Protestants overwhelmingly cast the national crisis as a spiritual, as well as a political, conflict, in which Christians held a vital stake. As Episcopal minister James Elliott of Charleston remarked in late 1860, “My object . . . is not to interfere with the business of the politician and statesman . . . It is to beg that you will do your part.” Although Elliott referred to the observance of a day of fasting and humiliation, his point regarding duty had implications beyond this one instance. The crisis, Elliott suggested, offered opportunities for Protestants to measure how they had lived up to their religious obligations. Had they carried out their full duties toward both God and others? If not, as suggested by the impending crisis and split of the Union, how might they make amends and avoid destruction? For Elliott, as for other Protestants, the answer lay in the renewal of Christian duty.⁶

Throughout much of 1860, Protestants in both cities described Christian duty as a function of social and religious conservatism, emphasizing unity, compromise and Christian spirit characterized by forbearance. This social and religious conservatism took on different forms in each respective city. While southern conservatism was expressed in a variety of ways, it was typically founded on the idea of social stability. Southerners were concerned with the preservation of a “good society” which maintained a balance of freedom and political order. For many southern conservatives, slavery tempered by religious influence allowed for such an ideal combination.⁷ Northern Protestants placed a

⁵ James Henley Thornwell, *Our National Sins. A Sermon Preached in the Presbyterian Church, Columbia, S.C. On the Day of the State Fast, Nov. 21, 1860* in *Fast Day Sermons: Or, the Pulpit on the State of the Country* (New York: Rudd & Carleton, 1860).

⁶ James H. Elliott, *Are These His Doings? A Sermon: Preached in St. Michael's Church, Charleston, S.C. on Wednesday, November 21st, 1860* (Charleston: Printed by A.E. Miller, 1860).

⁷ Adam Tate, *Conservatism and Southern Intellectuals, 1789-1861: Liberty, Tradition, and the Good Society* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005).

similar emphasis on stability, however Philadelphian conservatism related more to unionism, particularly as the crisis dragged on. Gary Gallagher has recently suggested that a number of northerners fought the civil war for the sake of Union and notes among the major outcomes of the war a greater recognition of a truly united nation in contrast with previous understandings of states united.⁸ Gallagher's assertion rings particularly true for Philadelphia's Protestants during the secession crisis. Philadelphians in 1860 emphasized the need for conciliatory speech and compromise to maintain spiritual and national unity. When southerners violated this unity beyond hope of reconciliation in the Secession Ordinance and the attack on Fort Sumter, Philadelphian social and religious conservatism shifted into full defense of Union. By the height of the secession crisis in late 1860 and early 1861, Protestants in both Charleston and Philadelphia increasingly connected Christian duty with citizenship and civic duty in support of the Confederacy or Union.

While Protestants in Charleston and Philadelphia defined Christian duty in similar terms, the way these definitions were applied changed over the course of the crisis, in accordance with national events. As a result, in both regions Christian duty looked very different in December 1861 than it had in January 1860, evolving over the course of the crisis in similar and yet profoundly different ways. By December 1860 in Charleston and April 1861 in Philadelphia, Protestants described patriotism as a vital element of Christian duty and their own respective governments as divinely sanctioned. Christian duty continued to represent the outward manifestation of an inward faith, however the object of sanctification expanded beyond the individual and community to include the nation-state. This marked a transition from a horizontal to a vertical faith, or from a faith that

⁸ Gary Gallagher, *The Union War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

emphasized Christianity's uniting influence across physical and ideological boundaries to Christianity's special relationship with a particular government or region. For both Philadelphian and Charlestonian Protestants, God's hand was within the crisis, convicting the nation of its sins and shaping the course of events for his glory. This belief in a divine providence was central to Protestant experience of the crisis and informed Protestant understandings of personal duty as well. The Christian's duty was obedience *to* and dependence *upon* an active and involved God who presented his will through the course of human events. This duty not only shaped Protestant experience of the crisis, but also helped to draw firm ideological boundaries between North and South, strengthening identity based on region and raising the stakes of the war itself.

The Civil War has been well represented in scholarly work. Despite the great diversity among studies of the Civil War, however, the secession crisis has not merited the same attention. Historians often give the crisis a cursory treatment, focusing much of their analysis on the political actors and events that occurred following Lincoln's election in November 1860. While these are important elements of the crisis, this thesis seeks to add depth to the scholarship of the Civil War by asking questions about how Protestant individuals and faith communities negotiated the unraveling of the Union and the coming of war. In what ways did Protestants in Charleston and Philadelphia understand their duties, both spiritual and physical, in the midst of the crisis and how did those impact their responses to conflict? How did Protestants reconcile their duties as Christians and as citizens? How did Protestant discourse contribute to the denial of compromise and the outbreak of war? In answering these questions, this study complicates understandings of a strictly political secession crisis. Just as the era's most prominent political figures did,

Protestants also debated the proper form of government and their roles within it. The debates that rocked the nation and sparked the Civil War went beyond the political, involving, in the eyes of Protestants, the very spirit of the nation's historical and religious legacy.

Christianity was extremely influential within the context of nineteenth-century American culture, permeating even issues of national scope. Political language during the secession crisis and civil war was full of religious rhetoric, biblical allusions, and Presidents Buchanan, Lincoln and Davis all issued their own calls to prayer, humiliation and thanksgiving. Scholars have long acknowledged the centrality of religion to the Protestant experience of the war. Mark Noll has drawn attention to the connections between Christianity and the Civil War, arguing that Christian exegesis exacerbated the tensions between North and South. The literal and common sense mindset of nineteenth-century Americans toward both scripture and God's will was unable to provide solutions for the turbulent society on the eve of the Civil War. In much the same way that political debates failed to produce compromise, theological debates concerning slavery and divine providence intensified sectional tensions and helped to usher in conflict.⁹ Other scholars have discussed how Christianity was used by Americans to justify both the decision to go to

⁹ Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, 32, 75. Noll discusses the emphasis among nineteenth century American Protestants upon a common sense interpretation of biblical texts in another work as well. For more on this topic, see Mark Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Other historians have also commented on similar themes in American Protestantism. See Martin E. Marty, *Righteous Empire: the Protestant Experience in America* (New York: Dial Press, 1970). Thomas E. Jenkins has also argued that the nineteenth century in America was characterized by profound religious tensions between the eighteenth century concept of the benevolent God and emerging conceptions of God founded in romanticism. This transition complicated Protestants understandings of God by recognizing his active influence in the world. *The Character of God: Recovering the Lost Literary Power of American Protestantism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

war, and how the war was waged. Harry Stout has pointed to the complex moral justifications that Americans applied to the Civil War, arguing that total war won out over religious constructions of just war.¹⁰ Mark Schantz has also emphasized the influence that Christianity had on warfare, noting that Christianity played a large role in facilitating “the carnage of war,” wherein an emphasis on heaven “made it easier to kill and to be killed” and encouraged soldiers to meet the finality of death with “a spirit of calm resignation.”¹¹ Other historians have also explored the ways in which religion impacted the Civil War through a sense of divine providence springing from millennial belief. Belief that God was all-powerful and guiding events allowed Americans to have confidence in their country’s cause, while granting assurance to soldiers and citizens that, regardless of circumstances, God was on the throne.¹²

In addition to demonstrating the ways that religion impacted the war, scholars have pointed out that religion is also used in the defining and expressing of nationalism. Anthony Smith has argued for the use of a religious framework to study nationalism and national identity even at the transnational level. For Smith, the religious elements of sacrality and covenant infuse national identity with meaning, giving such identities a persistent resonance beyond the power of ethnic or ideological ties in a great number of societies.

¹⁰ Harry S. Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation: a Moral History of the American Civil War* (New York: Viking, 2006).

¹¹ Mark S. Schantz, *Awaiting the Heavenly Country: The Civil War and America’s Culture of Death* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

¹² For more information on the relationship between religion and the Civil War, see Harry S. Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation: a Moral History of the American Civil War* (New York: Viking, 2006); Robert Miller, *Both Prayed to the Same God: Religion and Faith in the American Civil War* (New York: Lexington Books, 2007); Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson, eds. *Religion and the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). For more on millennialism during the Civil War, see Ben Wright and Zachary W. Dresser, *Apocalypse and the Millennium in the American Civil War Era* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2013); James H. Moorhead, *American Apocalypse: Yankee Protestants and the Civil War, 1860-1869* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978).

Indeed, this religious imbue ment lends nationalism a stubbornness that has proved historically difficult to contest.¹³ This stubbornness is well illustrated by Bertram Wyatt-Brown's argument that a key conflict between northerners and southerners resided in their different moral understanding of liberty. While abolitionists in the North decried slavery and pushed for reform, slaveholders in the South emphasized their need for and right to freedom from interference in their state and local affairs. Religion helped to cast these differences into stark contrast, elevating tensions between the sections and encouraging sectional identity.¹⁴ Smith's argument concerning covenant is particularly well demonstrated by the lines drawn by Americans between themselves and the Israelites of the Old Testament. Several historians have noted this phenomenon. Eran Shalev traces this connection between religion and American nationalism back to the seventeenth century when Americans first began to describe themselves as 'chosen people' and America as the 'new Israel.' Shalev argues that these ideas and the Old Testament "played into the politics of the early republic and in Americans' negotiation of nationhood."¹⁵ Drew Gilpin Faust has argued that southerners perceived themselves as not only heirs to the American Revolution, but also as recipients of God's special protection and promise, reminiscent of the covenant between God and the Israelites of the Old Testament.¹⁶ These connections were not limited to the South, however with similar arguments pervading the North as well. As Melinda Lawson notes, ministers were hard at work alongside other northern

¹³ Anthony Smith, *Chosen Peoples* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹⁴ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Yankee Saints and Southern Sinners* (Baton Rouge: University of Louisiana Press, 1985).

¹⁵ Eran Shalev, *American Zion: The Old Testament as a Political Text from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 1.

¹⁶ Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988).

leaders in constructing a unified patriotism in the face of war through participation in national fast days and their support of the Union in sermons and other published works.¹⁷ Religion held the power to both build up and break down national identities in the contentious era of the Civil War.

Scholars of religion have rightly focused a good deal of their attention on the American South, where religion had particularly nationalistic consequences. Mitchell Snay has argued that religion was used to sanctify slavery and interpret secession as the moral responsibility of a Christian people, which then contributed to the formation of a Southern sectional identity and nationalism in the South.¹⁸ Snay points out the complicated relationship between religion and politics in the antebellum South. While slavery was understood as a political issue, ministers justified speaking about it due to the interference of abolitionists; ministers understood themselves to have a moral responsibility to refute abolitionism. This viewpoint allowed for ministers to bring the national crisis and the war within their sphere of religious influence, influencing both political rhetoric and ultimately, supporting the Confederate cause.¹⁹ Other historians have paired the analysis of religion with honor and southern social order to demonstrate how and why Southerners defended the institution of slavery. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese argue that

¹⁷ Melina Lawson, *Patriot Fires: Forging a New American Nationalism in the Civil War North* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002). Others have also pointed to the tremendous influence of ministers in Civil War Era America. Richard Carwardine notes that sectional and political differences between North and South were due in large part to the experiences of northerners and southerners in their regional churches. Richard Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

¹⁸ Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

¹⁹ Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*, 28-29. This view may also be found in Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s-1890s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

slaveholders understood the defense of slavery as a necessary step toward the maintenance of Southern social order. Slavery was the mechanism through which a hierarchical system, paternalistic and sanctioned by God, could exist.²⁰ Several historians have built upon this argument, stressing the use of southern honor in shaping a distinctive southern identity as well as in supporting and defending the institution of slavery.²¹ Stability was very much the heart of the southern social order and the southern justifications surrounding slavery. In his study of antebellum southern intellectuals, Adam Tate has argued that conservatism and slavery were the linchpins to the southern social order. Southern intellectuals defended slavery not only as a means of maintaining congressional power, but in order to fulfill the revolutionary principles of stability and good society.²²

This study is also reliant on scholarship on the secession crisis. Although the crisis has not merited the same amount of scholarly attention as the war that it sparked, several excellent works have provided a foundation for this study. Shearer Davis Bowman has provided an excellent example of how historians can approach the Secession Crisis without making politics the sole focus. Although politics play a central role in Bowman's work, he

²⁰ In its original form, this argument can be found in Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, "The Divine Sanction of Social Order: Religious Foundations of the Southern Slaveholders' World View," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55.2 (1987): 211–33. An updated version of their argument can be found in Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders' Worldview* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

²¹ For more information, see Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s-1890s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Charles F. Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Charity R. Carney, *Ministers and Masters: Methodism, Manhood, and Honor in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2011).

acknowledges the threads of connection that linked politics with gender, race, honor, and religion for northerners and southerners during the era. Sectionalism stemmed not only from political debates, but from a combination of politics, religion, and sectional identity. In the influence of the antislavery movement and the labeling of slavery as a sin in the North, southerners felt keenly threatened politically, economically, and spiritually as they felt they were denied “the essential esteem and respect that was owed to dignified and honorable fellow citizens and Christians.”²³ Kenneth Stampp has also acknowledged the complex economic and political causes of sectional tension. Slavery was at the heart of the tension, Stampp argues, as “the northern attack on slavery was a logical product of nineteenth-century liberal capitalism,” while southern planters were “deeply concerned about both their profits and their capital investment.”²⁴ That is not to say that the war was inevitable, but rather that the issues at the heart of the conflict were vital enough that both northerners and southerners shied away from compromise.²⁵

I build upon this scholarship, but explore more deeply how religion impacted the how Protestants understood themselves to be invested and participants in the national crisis. Historian Richard Carwardine has suggested that while scholars tend to denote a separation between politics and religion as an analytical strategy, in fact, “they were not

²² Adam Tate, *Conservatism and Southern Intellectuals, 1789-1861* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005).

²³ Shearer Davis Bowman, *At the Precipice: Americans North and South during the Secession Crisis* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 16.

²⁴ Kenneth M. Stampp, *And the War Came: The North and the Secession Crisis, 1860-1861* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1950), 2.

²⁵ Stampp, *And the War Came*, 3. Further supporting the idea that compromise was perceived by Americans to be too costly, Stampp discusses the important role that northern churches had in blessing the war as a “Christian war, to be defended upon Christian principles.” Stampp, *And the War Came*, 294.

discrete areas of human existence.”²⁶ By examining the role that duty played in bridging the spiritual and the political for Philadelphian and Charlestonian Protestants during the secession crisis, this study seeks to answer Carwardine’s challenge to treat religion and politics in the way that nineteenth century Americans would have understood them. For many Americans, it would have been unthinkable to separate religion from politics, as religion represented both the way that they thought about and interacted with their world, and this mixing bled into the ways that Americans reacted to the secession crisis.

Charleston and Philadelphia provide a window into how Protestants linked faith with the experience of the national crisis. While these places are not wholly representative of their respective sections, both had significant influence in mid nineteenth-century America as social, intellectual and religious hubs. Daniel Kilbride has drawn attention to the social connections between these cities in the antebellum era, noting that they were vital centers for a “national social elite.”²⁷ Religion connected Charleston and Philadelphia as well. In addition to both containing the mainline denominations of the Presbyterian, Episcopal, Baptist and Methodist churches, both the city of “Brotherly love” and the “Holy city” were a part of a larger network of intellectuals and religious thinkers.²⁸

Philadelphians boasted in the number of southern men represented in their city’s pulpits and played host to medical students from Charleston until the secession of South Carolina. Many Charlestonian and Philadelphian ministers maintained active connections with their

²⁶ Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America*, xviii.

²⁷ Daniel Kilbride, “The Cosmopolitan South Privileged Southerners, Philadelphia, and the Fashionable Tour in the Antebellum Era,” *Journal of Urban History* 26, no. 5 (July 1, 2000): 563.

²⁸ Charleston, founded in 1670, and Philadelphia, founded in 1681, were also both centers of religious tolerance from their inception. It is unclear when Charleston’s moniker of “Holy City” came into use, however by the mid eighteenth-century, the city’s skyline was already coming to be

counterparts. Rev. Thomas Smyth of Charleston sent copies of his republished work, *The Well in the Valley*, to fellow Presbyterians and received complimentary reviews from at least two Pennsylvanian pulpits. Smyth also attended the Princeton Theological Seminary alongside Rev. Henry A. Boardman of Philadelphia.²⁹ Elevated sectional tensions served in many ways to intensify these connections, with publications and sermons being republished nationally as Protestants struggled to come to terms with the crisis at hand. Both cities also made claims to a unique American heritage. With their city the birthplace of secession and bastion of Christian social order, Charlestonians understood themselves to be divinely ordained heirs of the American Revolution. Philadelphians understood themselves in similar terms. Philadelphia was the cultural and historical heart of the Revolution, under the protection and guidance of the Supreme Being. How these ideological and religious claims conflicted is one of the subjects under consideration.

The chapters that follow trace the progression of Christian duty in Charleston and Philadelphia over the course of the secession crisis. In the first chapter, I examine the concept of Christian duty and how Protestants in Charleston and Philadelphia applied it to the crisis between January 1860 and December 1861, arguing that Protestants in both cities similarly defined Christian duty around the central themes of unity, spirit and dependence. Both Charlestonian and Philadelphian Protestants defined Christian duty in a multitude of ways, involving anything from prayer and humiliation to thanksgiving and praise. Particularly important was the requirement of a ‘Christian spirit,’ which was fluidly defined, but generally amounted to some combination of trust in God, peaceable and

dominated by its religious institutions. For more on religious and intellectual connections between the cities, see Fredrickson, *Inner Civil War*; Pease, *Web of Progress*; Kilbride, *American Aristocracy*;
²⁹ “Henry A. Boardman, 1808-1880,” *The Reformed Forum*.

conciliatory speech, and unity among Christians. However, these shared definitions of Christian duty came to be applied by Protestants in both cities in increasingly divergent ways toward the latter part of the crisis. Protestants made similar assumptions about the need for active faith in the context of crisis and war, but they came to very different conclusions. The details of this shift serve as the topic of the subsequent chapters.

Chapter two focuses on the ways in which Charlestonian Protestants uniquely defined and applied Christian duty to the crisis. Early in the crisis, Christian duty was linked with ideas of social and religious conservatism, and Protestants argued particularly in defense of the institution of slavery and against the divisive influence of abolitionism. For Protestants, conservatism flowed out of conceptions of 'Christian spirit,' emphasizing the need for rational and righteous speech even in the midst of strife. With the secession of South Carolina in December 1860, however, southern emphasis on unifying conservatism was replaced by the profession of the South's special claim to divine protection. While conservative rhetoric valuing social stability in the form of slavery was still present, Charlestonians increasingly described themselves as uniquely imbued with divine knowledge in opposition to an infidel North. Rather than seek reconciliation, Charlestonian Protestants understood their divine calling to be aiding the establishment of an independent and godly South. Furthermore, the southern victories at Fort Sumter and Manassas served as catalysts for the belief in a chosen South as God's hand seemed to be guiding events in its favor. By the end of 1861, Charlestonians firmly understood themselves as a chosen people and located their duty in maintaining God's favor through the manifestation of righteousness in support of the Confederate cause.

Chapter three considers how Philadelphian Protestants applied Christian duty to their experiences of the crisis. Philadelphia's Protestants also linked social and religious conservatism with Christian duty early in the crisis, however where Charlestonians rooted conservatism in the system of slavery, Philadelphians emphasized the need for national and spiritual unity. For these Protestants, partisanship and fanaticism presented the greatest threats to this continued unity. Abolitionism was understood to be especially guilty of disturbing the peace of the Church and was criticized at length, even as many were proponents of antislavery and gradual emancipation. By April 1861, former calls for conservatism and the emphasis of Christian unity gave way to calls for the defense of the sacred Union. As in Charleston, Fort Sumter and Manassas served as catalysts for the shift of definitions of Christian duty away from an emphasis on spiritual and national unity toward spiritual truth. As a part of this shift from social conservatism to Unionism, Protestants in Philadelphia saw the conflict as an inevitable clash between a covenant-breaking South and a covenant-defending North. God would reunite the nation through bloodshed in order to establish a truly godly nation. Duty, for Philadelphians, involved doing God's will in the midst of this class over true religion.

In the conclusion, I offer some general comments on the similarities and differences between Charlestonian and Philadelphian conceptions of Christian duty, suggesting that these cities provide a window into understanding something about the overall Protestant experience of the war. Protestants described the crisis as a spiritual trial and understood themselves as stakeholders in the national conflict. Christian duty not only required the practice of traditional spiritual disciplines, but required Protestant participation within the

crisis, whether in expressing a unifying conservatism or later, supporting the divinely sanctioned war effort as a means of expressing spiritual and national citizenship.

CHAPTER ONE

Duty & Spirit:

Charleston and Philadelphia in the Crisis

"The Church of the living God, which He purchased with His own blood," exists. It has existed always, from the very beginning of time. It is the kingdom of light, in contrast with "the kingdom of darkness;" "the kingdom of God," in contrast with "the world" of which Satan is the God and Prince; and it "is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost," in contrast with sin and selfishness and sensuality—

-Rev. Thomas Smyth, 1860¹

Besides that first movement which unites the soul to Christ, there is a subsequent movement, a constant, habitual preparation, which we cannot overlook—a work necessarily growing out of and connected with all true faith. It is the setting of the house in order, not once, but day by day, to the end of life.

-Rev. J. H. Cuthbert, 1860²

While Christian duty involved the outward manifestation of an inward faith, how duty was applied by Protestants changed in accordance with the events of the secession crisis and the early part of the war. Charlestonian and Philadelphian conceptions of Christian duty had a good deal in common, however, even in the midst of these changes. Protestants in both cities emphasized the cultivation of 'Christian spirit,' which had ramifications for their interactions with one another on the national stage, as it encouraged spiritual unity even in the face of sectional tensions. In Charleston, Rev. Smyth extolled the virtues of Christian community, contrasting the kingdom of God with the kingdom of the

¹ Smyth, *The Well in the Valley*, 14.

² Cuthbert, *The Prophet and the King*.

world and described Christian identity and allegiance as flowing out of faith in God.³ For Rev. Cuthbert in Philadelphia, Christian faith entailed a lifelong process of redemption moving the Christian closer to Christ. In aligning their spirits with Christ, Protestants also drew closer to their fellow redeemed.⁴ For Smyth, Cuthbert and other Protestants, Christian spirit involved the idea that unity with God fundamentally transformed the *inward* and *outward* being of the Christian. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit inspired repentance, prayer and thanksgiving, which, as suggested by the term “spiritual disciplines,” transformed the inward spirit of the Christian and encouraged the production of fruits of the spirit. This in turn transformed the Christian outwardly, impacting the ways in which he interacted with the world. By their very nature, the fruits of the spirit were *visible* markers of the Christian life, requiring that they be displayed in interactions with others. This had special consequences for the interactions of northern and southern Protestants in the midst of the crisis.

Just as the Apostle Paul entreated the Galatians to “not become conceited, provoking one another,” Protestants in Charleston and Philadelphia emphasized the need for spiritual unity and conciliatory speech early in the crisis.⁵ However while this social and religious conservatism was a vital part of Christian Duty in 1860, by the height of the secession crisis, Protestants emphasized regional and sectional identity as markers of Christian duty over the spiritual and national unity. How did Protestants account for this shift? Christians in both cities provided a variety of justifications, but running throughout was the belief that God’s hand was in the crisis, guiding events to a point of conflict in order to teach a lesson

³ Smyth, *The Well in the Valley*.

⁴ Cuthbert, *The Prophet and the King*.

⁵ Galatians 5:26 (NKJV).

to his chosen people, whether in the North or South. Where “unity” and “conservative” had been the watchwords of the early part of the crisis, “chosen” and “defensive” were the choice terms of the latter half.

Christian Duty in Charleston

Protestantism was a pillar of mid nineteenth-century Charlestonian society. The city’s skyline was dominated by church spires, providing a constant reminder to Charlestonians of the centrality of religion to everyday life. While Protestantism was represented by a wide array of denominations, the Episcopal and Presbyterian churches held the most influence as the chosen places of worship of Charleston’s religious and social elite.⁶ With this in mind, the sections that follow explore the ways in which Charlestonians defined Christian duty over the course of the secession crisis. First, Episcopalian William Porcher DuBose provides a case study for how faith and duty were concepts at the heart of Protestant responses to the secession crisis. DuBose’s emphasis on divine providence reveals how, for some, the Confederacy represented God’s will on earth; in supporting the Confederate cause, Charlestonians believed themselves to be fulfilling their duty as Christians and following the very will of God. The remaining two sections consider the transformation of Christian duty from social and religious conservatism to support of the Confederate cause. The first of these explores two of Charleston’s religious conservatives, Presbyterians Rev. Thomas Smyth and Rev. James Henley Thornwell. Smyth’s *The Well in*

⁶ William and Jane Pease estimate that in antebellum Charleston, “a quarter of wealthy churchgoers and a quarter of those with economic power” worshipped as Presbyterians and Congregationalists. Additionally, the prominent Episcopal churches of St. Philip’s and St. Michael’s attracted about “a third of the rich and the prestigious.” Although 1860-61 Charleston was not identical to its antebellum past, this elite preference for the Presbyterian and Episcopal churches persisted. *The*

the Valley provides tremendous insight into how Charlestonians perceived their duties as Christians early in the crisis. Smyth defined Christian duty as a requirement of faith, proof of Christian identity and allegiance to the kingdom of God. Thornwell's work, written later in the crisis, marks a point of transition away from horizontal definitions of Christian duty, which emphasized a spiritual unity that crossed ideological and sectional boundaries, and toward more vertical definitions that highlighted the special relationship between God and the Confederacy. The last section discusses how vertical definitions of duty came to dominate Charleston in 1861 as ministers stressed the duty of Christians and the Confederacy to depend on God.

A Christian in the Crisis: William Porcher DuBose, Faith and Duty

William Porcher DuBose was born to an affluent South Carolinian family in 1836, the descendent of Huguenots who had fled France and settled in South Carolina. DuBose's faith faltered during his time at the South Carolina Military College, but following a conversion experience in 1854, he dedicated his life anew to the service of God. In 1859, DuBose enrolled in the Episcopal seminary in Camden, and was enrolled there throughout most of the secession crisis. DuBose's experience of the crisis was greatly impacted by his engagement to Anne "Nannie" Barnwell Peronneau, the daughter of a prominent Charleston family. Visiting Nannie's family in December 1860 and April 1861, DuBose witnessed the transformational events of South Carolina's secession and the bombardment of Fort Sumter. These events and his dialogue with Nannie had a profound impact on

DuBose and in late 1861, after months of struggle over his duty to God and State, he enlisted in the Confederate army. DuBose experienced the war from both the perspective of a soldier and a chaplain, surviving the war to become a prominent Episcopal minister and theologian.⁷ DuBose's experience of the crisis and war was defined by his faith in a providential God who was guiding events, regardless of circumstances. The centrality of religion to DuBose's life, as well as his struggles to balance his spiritual duties with his civic duties make him a particularly compelling example for this study. How did faith impact the way that DuBose and those close to him interpreted and responded to crisis? While exceptional in many ways, DuBose's life nonetheless provides a window into the experience of Protestants during the prewar period, offering insight into how faith was used to navigate crisis.

Over the course of the crisis, DuBose's definition of Christian duty evolved from one with primarily religious and personal ramifications to one that reflected the national conflict. DuBose struggled to reconcile what he felt was his calling to ministry and the national conflict that seemed to represent "the cause of religion & the Church."⁸ Was it better to remain enrolled in seminary or enlist to support the southern war effort? What would best serve God's will? Until November 1861, DuBose understood his duty in wholly spiritual terms, believing that God had called him to ministry and as his life was not his own, but God's, he had no right to enlist it in service of the State. However, DuBose included the caveat that, "the emergency may become such as to break down all such scruples."⁹ By

Oxford University Press, 1985), 135.

⁷ W. Eric Emerson and Karen Stokes, eds., *Faith, Valor, and Devotion: The Civil War Letters of William Porcher DuBose* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2010).

⁸ W.P. DuBose to Nannie, Nov 11, 1861.

⁹ W.P. DuBose to Nannie, Nov 4, 1861.

December such a break down had occurred, and DuBose had enlisted in the Confederate army. DuBose's definition of duty had not necessarily changed, but expanded to include more active support of the Confederate cause. In the eyes of DuBose, just as God had called him in service of the ministry, his enlistment was likewise a divine ordination and a part of God's greater plan for the Confederacy and DuBose's life.

For DuBose and other Protestants, the cultivation of a Christian spirit was central to defining Christian duty. Christian spirit involved the disassociation from self in favor of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, resulting in perfect peace and dependence on God. Nannie bid DuBose to join her in praying from Ephesians 3, the passage emphasizing the phenomenon of the spirit of God indwelling the hearts of Christians.¹⁰ DuBose responded enthusiastically, praying further that God would make them truly his.¹¹ Christian spirit elevated the spiritual above the physical, demanding the individual to look beyond himself for provision. For Nannie it was a necessary "influence which will draw one away from earthy to higher thoughts, and which will lead me to carry all my joys as well as trials to my Savior to sanctify and bless them to me."¹² By grounding their identities in faith, DuBose and Nannie built strong foundations that could not be shaken despite the "conflicts & clouds" that occurred.¹³ Belief in divine providence allowed DuBose to disassociate himself

¹⁰ Nannie to W.P. DuBose, Oct 11, 1861. Nannie refers to the Apostle Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:16-19: "that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." (NKJV)

¹¹ W.P. DuBose to Nannie, Oct 15, 1861.

¹² Nannie to W.P. DuBose, Oct 11, 1861.

¹³ W.P. DuBose to Nannie, Oct 8, 1861.

from crisis.¹⁴ Secure in his identity as a child of God, DuBose was able to face even the national crisis with confidence that God's hand was in the conflict, guiding events in such a way to favor his people. Fort Sumter in particular stood as a testament to God's special anointing of the Confederate cause.¹⁵

DuBose provides a window into major themes of Christian duty in Charleston. Just as DuBose and his fiancé sought to embody Christian spirit, so too did Charlestonian Protestants profess to use this spirit in their responses to the crisis. Christian duty was manifested in a spirit that trusted in God's provision as it was founded in a greater Christian identity. This is especially true of another prominent Charlestonian and religious figure, Presbyterian Rev. Thomas Smyth.

Unity and Spirit: Charleston's Spiritual Conservatives

Erskine Clark has argued that some southern religious figures considered themselves moderates, caught between the fanaticism of abolitionism and the ruthless cruelty of some slaveholders in the pre-war era. Convinced of the "brevity of this earthly life and its relative insignificance beside the eternal," these religious men positioned themselves as conservatives and criticized the dangerous extremism that threatened the cause of Christ on earth.¹⁶ Rev. Thomas Smyth in Charleston and Rev. James Henley Thornwell in Columbia were exemplars of the social and religious conservatism identified by Clark. Smyth and Thornwell also provide examples of how while Christian duty was

¹⁴ W.P. DuBose to Nannie, Oct 24, 1861.

¹⁵ Nannie to W.P. DuBose, Nov 10, 1861.

defined in relationship with social and religious conservatism in the early part of the crisis, by late 1860 Christian duty was increasingly tied to the cultivation of a unified spiritual Confederate identity instead.

For Rev. Thomas Smyth, spiritual unity was vastly more important than the sectional tensions beginning to dominate Charlestonian society in 1860. Smyth, born in Belfast in 1808, immigrated to the United States as a young man and converted from Congregationalism to Old School Presbyterianism. Following his ordination, Smyth followed the call of Charleston's Second Presbyterian Church, where he served for his entire ministry. Smyth was a visible moderate presence in Charleston in the antebellum era, recognized for his interest in reforming slavery, his belief in the humanity of the African race, and his work to establish the Zion Presbyterian church for slaves.¹⁷ Smyth perceived these pursuits as not only vital to the continued unity of the nation and the church, but fundamental to the fulfillment of Christian duty.

In his 1860 publication, *The Well in the Valley*, Smyth outlined several religious obligations demanded of true Christians, including salvation, confession, communion and church membership, but at the heart of Smyth's message was the belief that "re-union and communion with God" was the "great end of true religion." The purpose of the Christian life was to become *one* with Christ, inwardly, in the spirit, and outwardly, in behavior. Unity with Christ corresponded to unity with the church as a whole. True religion, manifested in union and communion with the Church, was "the well in the valley of life from which weary and thirsty souls have drawn forth the waters of salvation." In the process of being filled

¹⁶ Erskine Clark, *Wrestin' Jacob: A Portrait of Religion in Antebellum Georgia and the Carolina Low Country* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2000), 161.

¹⁷ Erskine Clark, "Thomas Smyth," *American National Biography Online*.

with the spirit of God, Christians were to set aside their past earthly lives, repenting of their sins and dedicating themselves to living and manifesting the fruits of the spirit.¹⁸ *The Well in the Valley* circulated among ministers of various locales, and by all accounts, seems to have been well received. One South Carolinian Baptist remarked that the account well described the duty of Christians, as well as to promoted the unity “of feeling among those that “call upon the name of the Lord Jesus in sincerity & truth.”¹⁹ A Pennsylvanian Presbyterian praised the book for its excellent counsel, while a Philadelphian hoped for the book’s widespread circulation throughout the nation.²⁰

For Smyth, duty entailed the cultivation of a spirit that shaped the Christian both inwardly and outwardly. In a charge to the new co-pastors of the First Presbyterian Church of Columbia, S.C., Smyth remarked that the duty of ministers was to impress upon their congregations the importance of being unified with God in spirit: “Christ being formed in men’s hearts the hope of glory will fill their souls with love and their life with praise, budding with every precious grace, and loaded with the fruits of good works.”²¹ Smyth’s reference would have brought to mind for Protestants the “fruits of the spirit,” nine virtues, including peace and faithfulness, that were marks of a true believer.²² Smyth’s definition of Christian duty as the outward manifestation of an inward communion with the Holy Spirit held much sway in the early part of the secession crisis, emphasizing the importance of

¹⁸ Smyth, *The Well in the Valley*, 8.

¹⁹ B.W. Whildew to Thomas Smyth, Aug 9, 1860, *Smyth Family Papers*, South Carolina Historical Society (Hereafter SCHS)(Charleston, SC).

²⁰ J.W. Yeomans to Thomas Smyth, Aug 25, 1860 and S. Austin Allibone to Thomas Smyth, Sep 3, 1860, *Smyth Family Papers*, SCHS.

²¹ Girardeau, John L. and Thomas Smyth, D.D., *Services on the occasion of the Ordination of the Rev. F.P. Mullally, and the Installation of Rev. J.H. Thornwell, D.D., and Rev. F.P. Mullally, as Co-Pastors of the First Presbyterian Church, Columbia, S.C.* (Columbia: Steam-Press of Robert M. Stokes, 1860).

spiritual unity among Christians. Rather than an abstract trial merely to be endured by Christians, the crisis presented the opportunity and necessity for active Christian response. Throughout much of 1860 this belief resulted in the defining of Christian duty with the cultivation of Christian spirit and conciliatory speech in the mist of heated national debates.

Presbyterian Rev. James Henley echoed much of Smyth's emphasis on the Christian spirit and duty, however in his writings published later in 1860, Thornwell also demonstrates a shift away from discussions of spiritual unity in favor of spiritual truth alongside the culmination of the secession movement. Thornwell was a well-known presence in the mid nineteenth century, a leading figure in the Old School branch of the Presbyterian church, founder of the eminent *Southern Presbyterian Review* and editor of the *Southern Quarterly Review*. A South Carolinian from birth, Thornwell held positions of authority at both the South Carolina College and by the time of the secession crisis, Columbia's First Presbyterian Church.²³ Thornwell was socially conservative in similar ways to Smyth, valuing a paternalistic social order in which slavery both ministered to slaves and trained masters in righteousness.

Thornwell's reputation as a prominent theologian and moderate extended beyond South Carolina, giving him special influence in the context of the secession crisis. The *Richmond Daily Dispatch* noted that "Dr. Thornwell is probably the first divine of the Presbyterian Church on this continent," while Rev. Henry Van Dyke of Brooklyn grouped Thornwell among "men whose genius and learning and piety would adorn any state or

²² By "fruits of good works," Smyth referenced Galatians 5:22-23: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." (NKJV)

²³ James Oscar Farmer, Jr., *The Metaphysical Confederacy: James Henley Thornwell and the Synthesis of Southern Values* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986).

station.”²⁴ In an account of the General Assembly of the Old School Presbyterian Church, the *New York Daily Tribune* described Thornwell as “characterized by the fire and positiveness of a master’s eloquence, yet, with the courtesy and propriety of a Christian gentleman.” Even where Thornwell showed “the fire and the hair-splitting abstractionism of the extreme South,” the article acknowledged, this zeal was “tempered with admirable Christian forbearance in [his] demeanor.”²⁵ Thornwell’s November 1860 Fast Day sermon was included in a collection of northern and southern sermons intended to inspire calm reflection in the heightened sectional tensions that characterized the nation. Notably, Thornwell’s sermon was placed first in the collection with the editor’s note that he was the leading minister, if not the leading man, of South Carolina,” and the natural successor of John C. Calhoun due to his “intellectual ascendancy and influence.”²⁶

For Thornwell, Christian duty lay in allowing divine wisdom to guide the current tumultuous events. While opening a South Carolina Legislature session in November 1860, Thornwell emphasized the need for representatives to have divinely appointed wisdom:

We beseech Thee to give to all our people the spirit of a sound mind; give them a pervading reverence for Thy will; give them a solemn sense of their obligations; give them fidelity in their relations to one another; and, if consistent with Thy Holy Will, we beseech Thee that Truth and Justice may everywhere prevail; that our institutions may be preserved in their integrity, and transmitted to distant generations. O God! calm the tumults of the people; give wisdom to all our Senators; give the spirit of a sound mind to all the members of this Confederacy, and grant that Thy name may be glorified and our interests promoted.²⁷

²⁴ “Presbyterian Theological Seminary,” *The Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, VA), April 18, 1860; “The Character and Influence of Abolitionism. The Character and Influence of Abolitionism. A Sermon by Rev. Henry J. Van Dyke, Preached in the First Presbyterian Church, Brooklyn, N.Y., on Sunday Evening Last,” *The Daily Exchange* (Baltimore, MD), Dec 13, 1860.

²⁵ “General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, O.S.,” *New York Daily Tribune*, May 23, 1860.

²⁶ *Fast Day Sermons: Or The Pulpit On The State of the Country* (New York: Rudd & Carelton, 1860), vii.

²⁷ “House of Representatives,” *The Anderson Intelligencer* (Anderson Court House, SC), November 16, 1860.

Thornwell's use of the phrase "the spirit of a sound mind" connected political realities with rhetoric already familiar to Protestants, Christian spirit. Duty was not confined to the cultivation of the fruits of the spirit on a personal or local scale, but needed to impact national politics as well. It was the duty of Christians to ask for divine guidance in the midst of the crisis and allow it to influence their actions. Just as Smyth had described Christian spirit defining the identity of Protestants, overflowing into their everyday lives and duties, Thornwell envisioned Christian spirit defining the national identity as well.

While discussions of spiritual unity increasingly disappeared from Protestant vernacular following South Carolina's secession in December 1860, the expression of Christian spirit remained essential to navigating the crisis, helping to define duty in dependence on God. In his article, "State of the Country," published by the Southern Presbyterian Review in late 1860, Thornwell emphasized the need for divine wisdom and guidance within the new southern nation. Thornwell suggested that secession had been a Christian duty, the first step in asserting a truly Christian nation. Claiming "a candid and dispassionate spirit," Thornwell emphasized that the Secession Convention had been made up of a body of "sober, grave and venerable men," who "embraced the wisdom, moderation and integrity of the bench, the learning and prudence of the bar, and the eloquence and piety of the pulpit." The pairing of reason and divine authority granted the Convention its legitimacy as Thornwell assured his readers that "there were men there who would have listened to no voice but what they believed to be the voice of reason, and would have

bowed to no authority but what they believed to be the authority of God.”²⁸ Having established that the ordinance of secession was the work of godly and reasoned men, Thornwell exhorted southerners to repent of their sins and rededicate both their lives and their government to the service of God. Christian duty was defined by a spirit of total dependence on God even in national affairs.

Secession changed the way Charlestonian Protestants applied their understandings of duty to the crisis, causing them to shift away from calls for spiritual unity and instead emphasize dependence on God. Running throughout all of these understandings, however, was the idea that Christian spirit informed Christian duty. Early in the crisis, Smyth described the believer being filled with the spirit of God, shaping him not only inwardly, but also outwardly in the ways in which he interacted with others. If Smyth emphasized the horizontal aspect of Christian duty, that the individual was obligated to practice the fruits of the spirit in relation to others, Thornwell described a more vertically aligned duty, emphasizing the duty of dependence on God in order to strengthen the connection between God and man, or God and government.

The Duty (and Joy) of Dependence on God

In the latter half of the crisis, Charlestonian Protestants argued, in light of the belief that the crisis had been brought about by national sins, southerners needed to realign their society with the spirit of God. In pursuit of this ultimate goal, Christian duty included

²⁸ J.H. Thornwell, *Hear the South! The State of the Country: An Article Republished from the Southern Presbyterian Review*. By J.H. Thornwell, D.D., Professor of Theology in the Theological Seminary Columbia, S.C (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1861).

repentance of national sins, as well as renewed dependence upon God. The military successes at Sumter and Manassas seemed to present proof that southerners had successfully aligned their government and society with the divine will. For Charlestonians, as well as for other southerners, it seemed that God had rewarded southern penitence by appointing them his chosen people.

Charlestonians connected the national crisis with the failure of the Union to live up to the Christian faith and understood their duty to involve the establishment of a Confederate nation dependent on God. Where the current Union was lacking in Christian spirit and guilty of sins, the new Confederate nation would instead recognize divine authority as the basis of its governance. C. C. Pinckney, rector of Grace Episcopal church, and James Elliott, assistant minister of the prominent St. Michael's, both emphasized that national sins had prompted divine judgment. Pinckney criticized the American people for having viewed the nation's prosperity as a result of their own actions, rather than giving credit to God. It was the duty of southerners to depend on God and base their government on that dependence as well.²⁹ Elliott called upon his fellow Southerners to confess and repent of any personal sins, especially those related to slavery, that they might be truly blameless before God and therefore supported in their efforts to create a new nation. Only after examining their hearts and pursuing righteousness could Southerners be assured of God's defense of their institutions and lives: "[i]t is not Cotton, as many seem to think, or even courage, or that upon which we especially pride ourselves—a chivalrous tone of

²⁹ C.C. Pinckney, *Nebuchadnezzar's Fault and Fall: A Sermon, Preached at Grace Church, Charleston, S.C., on the 17th of February, 1861* (Charleston: A. J. Burke, 1861).

feeling; but *righteousness, that exalteth* a nation.”³⁰ Rev. Thornwell also extolled his congregation of their duty in repenting and realigning southern society with God. For Thornwell, as for Pinckney and Elliott, the crisis had been brought about due to the failure of the nation and individuals to live up to the duties accorded to them by God. Chief among the national sins Thornwell recognized was the deification of the nation. By elevating the State above God, Americans had disrupted the proper relationship between God and man, of providence and dependence, allowing faction to win over reason and godliness. The other national sins identified by Thornwell stemmed back to the disruption of this fundamental relationship: Americans disrespected divine authority through their profane treatment of the Sabbath and in their culture which valued self-sufficiency over dependence on God. Thornwell also pointed to the abuse of slavery as a sin that had brought on divine displeasure. While slavery itself was divinely ordained, some slaveowners failed in their spiritual duties as masters, neglecting their slaves’ inward and spiritual lives. Only by repenting of these sins might southerners hope to bring their society back in alignment with God, thereby ensuring his guidance in the crisis.³¹

The victories of Sumter and Manassas demonstrated that the southern cause was aligned with God, as well as reinforced the idea that Christian duty amounted to continual dependence on God. In the aftermath of Sumter and Manassas, ministers praised Confederate politicians for their heaven-mindedness, rejoicing that their first priority was calling the southern people to thanksgiving in the experience of success and prayer in

³⁰ James H. Elliott, *Are These His Doings? A Sermon: Preached in St. Michael’s Church, Charleston, S.C. on the Day of Public Prayer, Wednesday, November 21st, 1860* (Charleston: A.E. Miller, 1860).

midst of trial. Presbyterian Rev. Charles Stuart Vedder remarked that no sooner had word of victory arrived that Confederate leaders had hastened “to ascribe all honor to God, as He alone who had given the victory,” and urged “all worshipping assemblies in the Confederacy devote this day to the same grateful duty.”³² Other ministers also remarked on the righteous response of the Confederate Congress in calling the southern people to praise God for the victories at Sumter and Manassas.³³ Along with the early victories providing proof of southern alignment with the will of God, Sumter and Manassas also prompted Charlestonians to consider their duty to remain aligned with God. Episcopal Rev. W. B. W. Howe warned his congregation not to become so “intoxicated” with their victory that they neglected to honor God.³⁴ The victories of Sumter and Manassas should direct the eyes of Charlestonians upward to God, not inwardly to themselves.

Thanksgiving was a vital part of Christian duty as it facilitated the direction of the thoughts from self to God, reminding Christians of their dependence on God. Rev. Vedder in particular emphasized how central it was to Christian duty, arguing that without it, southerners risked their place in God’s favor. Vedder, a New Yorker by birth, spent much of

³¹ J.H. Thornwell, *Our National Sins. A Sermons Preached in the Presbyterian Church, Columbia, S.C. on the day of the State Fast, Nov. 21, 1860*, in *Fast Day Sermons: Or The Pulpit on The State of the Country* (New York: Rudd & Carleton, 1860).

³² Charles Stuart Vedder, *Offer unto God Thanksgiving.” A Sermon Delivered in the Summerville Presbyterian Church On Sunday, July 28, 1861* (Charleston: Steam-Power Presses of Evans & Cogswell, 1861).

³³ James Elliott, *The Bloodless Victory. A Sermon Preached in St. Michael’s Church, Charleston, S.C., on occasion of the taking of Fort Sumter* (Charleston: Printed by A.E. Miller, 1861); Edward Reed, *A People Saved by the Lord, Deut. XXXIII, 29. A Sermon Delivered at Flat Rock, July 28, 1861* (Charleston: Steam-Power Presses of Evans & Cogswell, 1861); Thomas Smyth, *The Battle of Fort Sumter: Its Mystery and Miracle, God’s Mastery and Mercy. A Discourse Preached on the Day of National Fasting, Thanksgiving and Prayer, in the First Presbyterian Church, Charleston, S.C., June 13, 1861* (Columbia: Southern Guardian Press, 1861).

his early life in the north until he attended the Theological seminary in Columbia South Carolina. In 1861 Vedder was ordained in the Presbyterian church and accepted a post in Summerville, South Carolina, although after the war he would go on to pastor the French Huguenot church in Charleston for the remainder of his ministry.³⁵ Despite having spent the first several decades of his life in the north, Vedder identified as a southerner and emphasized the need for thanksgiving in the face of the exceptional blessings bestowed upon himself and others in the South. God's hand had shaped Southerners as "a race brave, generous and noble," further blessing them with the institution of slavery, which facilitated the spread of the gospel bringing slaves out of "heathenish barbarity" into "possession of the only true faith." Vedder positioned the South as God's chosen land, pointing to its agriculture, system of slavery and pure Christian faith as evidence of God's favor. Furthermore, Vedder perceived the victories at Sumter and Manassas as the latest in a long line of blessings bestowed on the South:

It is God alone who has fought our battles. It was He who wrought the miracle of Sumter . . . He has given us soldiers fired with burning zeal and patriotic courage, and whose squadrons breast the hostile shock like a granite wall; He has given to the whole people a spirit of prayerful determination and reliance upon Himself which assures ultimate success, though the odds be fearful. It was He who gave the victory at Manassas.³⁶

For these many blessings, thanksgiving was not only the natural response of Christians, but the highest duty incumbent on them. Thanksgiving manifested not only in offering gratitude, although this was certainly part of it, as evidenced by the multitude of voices

³⁴ W.B.W. Howe, *Sermon XXIX. Preached at St. Philip's on the Sunday after the Battle of Manassas, July 28, 1861 in Sermons Preached in His Diocese by W.B.W. Howe* (New York: J. Pott & Co., 1897).

³⁵ James Calvin Hemphill, *Men of Mark in South Carolina: Ideals of American Life: A Selection of Biographies of Leading Men of the State* (Washington, D.C.: Men of Mark Publishing Company, 1907), 408-409.

³⁶ Vedder, *Offer unto God Thanksgiving*.

praising God for the victories of Sumter and Manassas, but also by increased faith in God's providence. Thanksgiving pointed individuals, and the Confederacy as a whole, toward a greater dependence on God that constituted the basis of Christian duty.

The experience of suffering, like that of thanksgiving, also pointed Christians toward dependence on God, making it a vital part of how Protestants in Charleston defined Christian duty. For Charleston's Second Presbyterian Church, suffering and thanksgiving seemed like the two sides of a coin with both serving as reminders of divine providence. In a report given in May 1861, the church leadership remarked that "along with good evil has come," and that a year of jubilee was at hand for their congregation, despite the national conflict. God would continue to bless his people regardless of outside circumstances.³⁷ Written in the aftermath of Fort Sumter, the report reflected on the divine blessing bestowed by God on the South. Because of their belief in a God who could bestow blessing regardless of circumstances, the congregation attempted to transcend anxiety brought about by the crisis and instead offer thanksgiving. Charlestonian Protestants praised God for the victories at Sumter and Manassas and their status as God's chosen people with great frequency; however, as the war progressed, hardship loomed large in the lives of many Charlestonians. The "bloodless victory" of Sumter seemed long in the past for Charlestonians who lost loved ones in the early battles of the war or who suffered from financial struggles resulting from Charleston's Great Fire in December 1861. These losses seemed to present a serious challenge to the narrative of the chosen South. Why had these things happened when they were doing God's will? In the aftermath of Sumter, Rev. Elliott had remarked that southerners had honored God and been rewarded by God's honor in

return, while following the victory at Manassas, Rev. Howe rejoiced that while “He is with us nothing can be against us.”³⁸

If these things were true, how could Charlestonians account for the hardships they still endured? For many Charlestonians, the answer lay in the belief that God used crisis of all kinds as a means of testing and strengthening faith. When a great fire destroyed a large portion of Charleston at the end of 1861, Howe admitted that the conflagration was a difficult test of faith for Charlestonians: “for this destruction to be permitted to take place, appeared strange, yea, passing strange, if God was indeed with us and upon our side.” Howe turned to the biblical story of Job for encouragement and determined that even though they were experiencing trials, God had not forsaken them. Charlestonians needed only to persevere and continue to trust in God’s providence with the reassurance that “Who knows for what God is preparing us?”³⁹ Similar to thanksgiving, suffering prompted Christians to deepen their reliance on God and realize that trust was a necessary part of Christian duty. Rev. Vedder also emphasized this relationship between thanksgiving and suffering, and the centrality of trust to Christian duty. Vedder urged his congregation to look to Sumter as a sign of God’s providence regardless of circumstances: “Whilst its walls frown defiance upon the invader, let no Southern Christian lose trust in the Almighty.”⁴⁰ Sumter was a perpetual reminder for Charlestonian Protestants of God’s promise to sustain

³⁷ “Anniversary Meeting May 13th 1861, President’s Report,” *Second Presbyterian Church Records*, SCHS.

³⁸ Elliott, *Are These His Doings?*; Howe, *Sermon XXIX*.

³⁹ W.B.W. Howe, *Cast Down, But Not Forsaken! A Sermon Delivered in St. Philip’s Church, Charleston, December 15, 1861, Being the Sunday after the Great Fire* (Charleston: Steam-Power Presses of Evans & Cogswell, 1861).

⁴⁰ Vedder, *Offer unto God Thanksgiving*.

the South. Trust in the midst of trial deepened the individual's dependence on God, helping to fulfill Christian duty.

Philadelphian Definitions of Christian Duty

As in Charleston, Protestantism in Philadelphia had widespread influence with McElroy's 1861 Philadelphia Directory listing more than 200 churches shared among the mainline Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian and Episcopal churches. As in Charleston, however, the elite of society tended to attend the Presbyterian and Episcopal churches. Also similar to their Charlestonian counterparts, Philadelphian Protestants emphasized the importance of Christian spirit within the divisive climate of secession. For many of Philadelphia's Protestants "unity of the spirit" among the church at large was an essential part of faith. Rev. Henry A. Boardman, an Old School Presbyterian, was a particular proponent of the idea that Christian duty encompassed a moderate conservatism that emphasized spiritual commonalities over ideological differences. Other Protestants also stressed the need for unity in the midst of the national crisis. Christian duty entailed the cultivation of a Christian spirit that fulfilled the command of Christ to "love one another." Through prayer and living in preparation of death, Christians drew closer in unity to both God and their fellow men. As the crisis progressed, however, Philadelphian conceptions of duty shifted away from the profession of national unity toward the emphasis on true religion and dependence on God.

Unity of the Spirit: Spiritual Conservatism in Philadelphia

By 1860 Philadelphians were very aware of the danger that divisiveness presented to the nation. In the preface to his sermon on “The Union,” reprinted in 1860, Rev. Henry A. Boardman noted with regret that, “within the last ten years, there has been a rapid development amongst us of an acrimonious theology, which has poisoned our politics, and filled the country with hatred instead of love.”⁴¹ The nation’s contemporary problems required the application of religious solutions that Boardman and others in the Church had identified a decade earlier. In other words, the problems facing the nation may have intensified, but the solutions remained the same. For Boardman, and many other Philadelphian Protestants, that solution was a conservative and unified Church.

Spiritual unity was of particular interest to Philadelphian Protestants, as they believed it to be a vital part of the Christian faith. In 1859, Episcopal Rev. Dr. Vaughan of Philadelphia had called for a conference to be held representing multiple denominations and dedicated to promoting Christian unity. The 1859 meeting sparked an annual Philadelphia tradition “for special prayer for the unity of the spirit among Christians.”⁴² In October 1860, the meeting reconvened, a joint-denominational event involving the Dutch Reformed, Baptist, Presbyterian, Methodist and Episcopal churches of Philadelphia and the surrounding areas. Just as the year before, the clergy were chiefly concerned with the question of Christian unity. References to the national crisis were plentiful in many of the day’s oratories, such as Presbyterian Rev. Chambers’ prayer that God would not only secure “the unity of the *churches*, but also the unity of *State*.” Even when not stated outright, the national crisis was implicit within many of the day’s events. Baptist Rev. Dr. Brantley hoped

⁴¹ Henry A. Boardman, *The American Union: A Discourse Delivered on Thursday, December 12, 1850, the Day of the Annual Thanksgiving in Pennsylvania, and Repeated on Thursday, December 19, in the Tenth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1860).

that the day might come “when Christians everywhere, of whatever name, would recognize each other as brethren in Christ . . . pray for each other’s success in their respective labors, and forget whatever minor and unimportant differences there might exist between them.” Rev. Dr. Howe of the Reformed Dutch church reminded his listeners to keep the commandment of Christ to “love one another” in order that they might “sit down as the same table of the Lord and forget our minor and unimportant differences,” while Presbyterian Rev. Dr. Jenkins hoped for a “tangible unity” and a “deeper piety” to result from the meeting among Christians at large. Running through all of the orations was the theme of a unity that diminished physical or ideological differences in favor of spiritual commonalities. Methodist Rev. Alfred Cookman described that in drawing closer to Christ, Christians simultaneously drew nearer to one another: “The nearer they came to the foot of the Cross, the more perfectly would they be one.”⁴³ In this way, unity and the Christian faith were inseparable from one another. Because spiritual unity was vital to the faith itself, it is no wonder that it was of so much concern to Philadelphia’s Protestants even in the midst of national and political crisis.

These annual meetings inspired a number of sermons pertaining to spiritual and national unity. Following the 1859 meeting, the *Press* had high hopes for an “unusual amount of *union preaching* in our pulpits to-morrow,” and noted that if these were “followed by an equal display of union practice, the effort will not have been in vain.”⁴⁴ Henry Boardman gave one such sermon in 1859, attempting to locate what obstacles stood in the way of the creation of a truly Christian Union. Boardman’s purpose was to diagnose

⁴² “Religious Intelligence,” *The Press* (Philadelphia, PA), Oct 1, 1859.

⁴³ “A Day of Prayer, &c.” *The Press* (Philadelphia, PA), October 1, 1860.

⁴⁴ “Religious Intelligence,” *The Press* (Philadelphia, PA), October 1, 1859.

spiritual stumbling blocks that created divisions between denominations, but his points held significance for the larger dilemma of sectionalism within the nation as a whole at the time. Of particular interest is Boardman's discussion of the "ignorance of each other's views and feelings" causing "prejudice and rivalry, where there should be love and concord." The only remedy for this problem was in adjusting the tone in which debates took place among individuals. On occasions where disagreement existed between men with strong convictions, debates needed to be conducted in a "Christian spirit." Although, Boardman acknowledged, "Christian union must not be purchased by a sacrifice of the truth," a caveat which would pose difficulties later in the crisis.⁴⁵ For the majority of 1860, however, Philadelphian definitions of Christian duty tended to retain this type of social and religious conservatism that valued conciliatory speech in the pursuit of continued national and spiritual unity.

Boardman was a well-respected conservative presence in Philadelphia at the start of the secession crisis. Born in New York in 1808, Boardman's mother had been a Quaker prior to marrying Boardman's Presbyterian father, accounting in part for his conservatism, as well as his antislavery sentiment. Interestingly enough, Boardman had attended seminary with another moderate religious figure: Rev. Thomas Smyth of Charleston. Even more remarkably, Boardman married the sister of another fellow seminary student hailing from Charleston.⁴⁶ His southern connections as well as his membership in the Old School branch of the Presbyterian church gave Boardman plenty of reason to desire both spiritual and national unity. Just over a month after the 1860 "Unity of the Spirit" meeting,

⁴⁵ Henry A. Boardman, *Christian Union: A Sermon Preached in the Tenth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, On Sunday Evening, November 27, 1859* (Philadelphia: William S. & Alfred Martien, 1859).

Boardman once again placed emphasis on Christian spirit in the midst of arguments even as contentious as those over the morality of slavery. For Boardman, it was a lack of Christian spirit among people of both sections that was responsible for the heightened tensions. He argued that there “*ought* to have been religion enough in the country to repress or preclude the disorders which have grown out of the agitation on the subject. . . We are one people.” The only chance of resolution, Boardman argued, lay in whether “the spirit of true religion” was allowed to dictate the decisions of those contributing to the strife. In the North, this entailed the removal of partisanship from the pulpit. Rather than heap “denunciation and abuse” upon the South for its slavery, northerners needed to acknowledge that the South had been divinely entrusted with its social institutions and refrain from undue meddling.⁴⁷ Similarly, in his “American Union” sermon several years earlier, Boardman had emphasized the dangers of fanaticism, by which he meant Abolitionism, that was “faithless to those sacred bonds which have hitherto united the North and South in an honorable and affectionate brotherhood.” Christian duty then lay in the dual obligation of denying fanaticism and embracing “patriotic and conciliatory sentiments.”⁴⁸

Rev. Thomas Brainerd of the New School Presbyterian church also remarked on the need for conservative voices to prevail in order to maintain spiritual and national unity within the crisis. In an article for the *Presbyterian Quarterly Review*, for which he was a frequent contributor, Brainerd argued that the crisis would not be calmed by “threats and demonstrations” or other extreme measures. Rather, it was the duty of northerners to

⁴⁶ “Henry A. Boardman, 1808-1880,” *The Reformed Forum*.

⁴⁷ Henry A. Boardman, *What Christianity Demands of Us in the Present Crisis*.

⁴⁸ Boardman, *The American Union*.

restrain and guide the crisis through reason, charity and to “breathe the spirit of peace over our land.” In Brainerd’s view, the chief obstacle to developing this spirit of peace was partisanship exacerbated by the work of the press. In the South, free speech and the “great Protestant principle of private judgment” were frequently violated, “denying to honest, conservative and true men, the fair expression of their moral judgments.” By forbidding the circulation of antislavery publications, southerners threatened the universal priesthood of believers, a Protestant tradition that recognized the ability of individual believers to discern truth in scripture. While the South was lacking in moderated action, the North fell short in spirit. For Brainerd, the ideal Christian man possessed a combination of northern and southern traits with each section’s strengths balancing the other’s weaknesses; Christian perfection could only be achieved in balance. The North would benefit from the “impulsive generosity, the high sense of personal honor, the gentlemanly courtesy, the frank bearing and chivalrous courage of the sunny South,” while the South would gain much from the compass for moral reform found in the northern states. Accordingly, the national crisis required some form of compromise, in speech and action, in order for resolution to be reached. Brainerd summed up his hopes for reconciliation by referencing the story of Abram and Lot, pleading, “Let there be no strife between us, for we are brethren.”⁴⁹ By doing so, Brainerd emphasized the shared heritage of North and South and the biblical importance of peace. Ironically, the Genesis story ends with Abram and Lot each going their own way to keep the peace between their tribes. Brainerd’s choice of biblical passage would prove apt for describing how impressions of duty changed for Philadelphian Protestants later in the crisis.

⁴⁹ Thomas Brainerd, *Who is Responsible for the Present Slavery Agitation?* (Philadelphia:

The Essential Duty of Spirit

For many Philadelphian Protestants, the cultivation of a Christian spirit was essential to the proper expression of faith. In January 1860, the *American Presbyterian* reported on a disturbing trend of “speechless members” in Philadelphia’s churches. These individuals perceived themselves to be lacking in the spiritual gifts of teaching, prophesy and so on and rarely participated in church. The author was deeply disturbed by this trend, remarking that the “Saviour has no superfluous members in his Body.” *All* Christians had been filled with the Holy Spirit, thereby possessing spiritual gifts that required fellowship and exercise within the church body. By neglecting this aspect of faith, these Christians failed to live up to their spiritual duties, impacting the strength of the Church as a whole. The article argued that what was needed was a “church whose members lived consistently in the endeavor to do their *whole* duty to the cause of Christ.” By actively applying their faith in service of the church, the individual and the church as a whole were strengthened by God to achieve greater ends.⁵⁰ Christian duty did not stop at inward belief, but required outward manifestation of that belief in the form of Christian spirit.

Unity was the desired result of Christian spirit and, for many Protestants in Philadelphia, the failure to achieve unity equated to the death knell of the nation. Baptist Rev. J. H. Cuthbert looked to the book of Isaiah for lessons on how to understand the national crisis. Just as Isaiah had warned the king of Judah to “set thine house in order,” Cuthbert perceived the tensions shaking the nation as a warning for the American people to do the same. Christian spirit entailed living in preparation for death and the final

Presbyterian Rooms, 1860). Brainerd references Genesis 13:8.

judgment. Because of inattention to eternal consequences, Cuthbert lamented, “our house is all in disorder and confusion,” testifying “to the moral and spiritual ruin into which sin has plunged our nature, the total unfitness of man for the inevitable and tremendous ordeal of the coming judgment.” Only by the saving grace of Christ might man, and consequently the country, be saved. However, even as the individual was saved by faith, they were sanctified by constantly aligning themselves with Christian virtues. It was the daily discipline “setting of the house in order” that prepared the Christian for the ultimate crisis of death. Cuthbert exhorted his congregation to be prepared to face death as a sick man assured of his salvation. When told of their impending deaths by tearful physicians, let them have the faith to allow the reply: “My friend, you do not alarm me.” Only through faith, expressed through the constant alignment of spirit and practice, could Philadelphia’s Protestants avoid being “swept away in wreck and ruin by the floods of sin that have inundated the whole world.”⁵¹ By repenting of sins and realigning themselves with God, Protestants not only would assure their own salvation, but that of their nation from the troubles that plagued it.

In the pursuit of true spiritual unity, Protestants also perceived the need for a spirit characterized by dependence on God. For Episcopal Rev. Alexander Vinton, the ideal Christian man gave the first efforts of each day to God, “in his closet on his knees, acknowledging his dependence upon sovereign grace and power; there surrendering his whole being to Him who died to save him.” Out of this dependence grew other virtues, the fruits of the spirit, which characterized the ideal Christian life. Such a man, Vinton argued, would receive the reward of the Lord’s welcome into heaven, “Well done, good and faithful

⁵⁰ “Speechless Members,” Jan 5, 1860, *American Presbyterian* (Philadelphia, PA).

servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”⁵² By living a life characterized by Christian spirit, Protestants were assured that they had already won spiritual victories. Prayer was another means of expressing dependence on God in the midst of crisis, granting believers assurance of spiritual victories. Rev. Boardman preached on the duty of praying for rulers, emphasizing that the future unity of the nation was dependent on electing and supporting godly leaders. For Boardman, as civil government had been ordained by God, government needed to live up to the will of God rather than the “practical Atheism” which had characterized much of recent American history. Boardman exhorted his congregation to pray especially that leaders would be awakened to *their* dependence on God, in order that they might shape legislation, particularly in relation to slavery, that glorified God. Prayer also demonstrated the believer’s dependence on God and their trust that God’s hand was active in guiding events for the good of his people.⁵³

The Duty of Dependence and True Religion

Where other Protestants emphasized the need for spiritual unity that triumphed over sectional differences, Rev. Albert Barnes linked Christian duty with spiritual truth. Barnes, born in New York in 1798, was a contentious figure in mid nineteenth-century Philadelphia. A member of the New School branch of the Presbyterian church, Barnes had been put on trial for heresy in 1836 after challenging the doctrine of original sin. Barnes was not convicted, however, and continued to wield a significant amount of influence,

⁵¹ J.H. Cuthbert, *The Prophet and the King*.

⁵² Alexander H. Vinton, *The Strength and the Weakness of Youth in The Union Pulpit: A Collection of Sermons by Ministers of Different Denominations* (Washington, D.C.: Published by William T. Smithson, 1860).

particularly due to the wide domestic and international circulation of his studies on the Bible. Barnes was also an abolitionist, adding to his perceived controversy, particularly in the South.⁵⁴ In a sermon adapted from Psalm 52 on the question of the morality of informers, Barnes tapped into a wellspring of agitation. In the heated context of the Secession Crisis, Barnes' connection of the biblical lesson with the Fugitive Slave Act in a brief paragraph sparked heated debate.⁵⁵ The scandal stemmed from Barnes' claim that the Fugitive Slave Act, a law that established informing on runaways as the duty of all northerners, was "against the moral sense—the conscience of mankind, and such a law cannot be carried out."⁵⁶ In a lengthy footnote in the later printed sermon, Barnes justified his remark, arguing that caring for the oppressed was an intrinsic part of Christian duty. If a runaway appeared in need of aid, Barnes determined to follow the biblical instruction to care for strangers in need as if they were Christ himself, noting that Christ had instructed his disciples, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."⁵⁷ Barnes, not one to shy away from controversy, argued that religious truth was of primary importance, even in the context of the secession crisis. Unity could not be bought at the expense of truth, for by doing so Christians undermined their own faith and effectively unseated God from his throne.

⁵³ Henry A. Boardman, "The Duty of Praying for Rulers," Delivered Jan 8, 1860, *Henry A. Boardman Papers*, Presbyterian Historical Society (hereafter PHS)(Philadelphia, PA).

⁵⁴ "Albert Barnes, 1798-1870," *Encyclopedia Britannica*; "Guide to the Albert Barnes Papers," PHS, Philadelphia, PA.

⁵⁵ The outrage was so fierce that in the published version of the sermon, Barnes included a footnote over twenty times the length of the original section, justifying his position, spanning almost 7 full pages of text!

⁵⁶ Although an abolitionist, Barnes argued that he did not mean to encourage the breaking of the law or the forcible removal of slaves from their masters. Rather, Barnes meant to suggest that Christian duty began when the runaway appeared before him in need of care.

As the crisis progressed, Philadelphian Protestants increasingly valued truth over unity, believing themselves to be caught up in a conflict of spiritual significance. Rev. Brainerd had hoped for unity in his 1860 article, but acknowledged the profound difference in moral opinion between North and South in regards to slavery that was drawing an ever-increasing wedge between the sections.⁵⁸ Indeed, Brainerd's use of the biblical story of Abram and Lot had proved an accurate foretelling of the break between North and South. Just as Abram and Lot's herdsmen had come into conflict over resources, national debates over slavery had intensified sectional differences. However while the biblical story ended in peaceful separation, for Philadelphians, the southern attack on Fort Sumter ruled out such a compromise. While prior to Sumter, many Philadelphians saw themselves as Abram, benevolent and willing to compromise, Sumter reminded many of other biblical examples of God using conflict to bring his people out of sin. Old School Presbyterian W.P. Breed reminded his congregation that God had brought Israel out of Egypt through a variety of conflicts, putting them through trials to achieve a greater end.⁵⁹ Methodist C. D. Carrow cited the long history of the Israelites as proof that God often worked through strife. While war was a painful duty for Christians to undertake, it was often the preferred method of a

⁵⁷ Albert Barnes, *Doeg, the Edomite; Or, The Informer. A Lecture on the Fifty-Second Psalm, Delivered in the First Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, January 6, 1861* (Philadelphia: Henry B. Ashmead, 1861).

⁵⁸ In addition to the moral wrong of slavery, Brainerd decried that northerners were required to follow the Fugitive Slave Act and put the southern order into practice, while southerners refused to allow northerners freedom of expression in the South. Brainerd argued that if southerners continued to demand this double standard, true compromise was unattainable. Brainerd, *Who is Responsible for the Present Slavery Agitation?*

⁵⁹ W.P. Breed, *The National Nest-Stirring. A Discourse on the Times Delivered in the West Spruce St. Presbyterian Church, Sabbath Morning, May 5, 1861* (Philadelphia: Henry B. Ashmead, 1861).

righteous God to cleanse away evil and chastise his people.⁶⁰ By mid-1861, Philadelphian Protestants increasingly embraced the idea that they were embroiled in a conflict to prove something of spiritual significance and eternal value, well worth the cost of national unity.

As Protestants were caught up in a conflict of spiritual proportions and ramifications, they described Christian duty as the cultivation of spirit that recognized and depended upon divine providence. Philadelphians reminded themselves of the tumultuous legacy of the Hebrew people, noting that just as God had sustained them through sin and strife, so too would God sustain the North. Belief in divine providence not only gave hope that the cause of the Union, as the cause of God, would be supported, but provided a measure of assurance for the believer entering the conflict. In an address to a newly formed regiment, Rev. Boardman stressed the importance of faith and the pursuit of “true religion” in the face of danger and death. Christianity was not merely a belief or creed, but a way of living that could aid soldiers in facing temptations and despair with true courage due to the certainty they possessed in their faith.⁶¹ Rev. Charles Wadsworth, a fellow Old School Presbyterian, drew connections between Christianity and military service, using soldiery as a metaphor for Christian life. Christians were to embrace the bravery and comradery of soldiers to combat worldly influences within the church and themselves. Of chief concern for Wadsworth was the *personal* responsibility of Christians inherent within the military metaphor. Wars, even spiritual ones, could not be fought with generals alone, and therefore it was left for individual Christians to fill the ranks of the enlisted, making public

⁶⁰ C.D. Carrow, *The Divine Right of the American Government. A Sermon Delivered in Wharton Street Methodist Episcopal Church, Sabbath, May 11, 1861* (Philadelphia: From Bryson’s Caloric Power Printing Rooms, 1861).

⁶¹ Henry A. Boardman, “Address to Col. Gray’s Regiment, the “Scott Legion,” in my church, May 21, 1861,” *Henry A. Boardman Papers*, PHS.

declarations of faith and living in accordance with Scripture. Wadsworth noted that this element was wanting within their present church, as “many professing Christians seem[ed] but lookers-on in the battle—a sort of “home-guard” enjoying pleasant re-unions for drill after business hours and in the cool of the evening, staying at home as a privileged “reserve,” while the President and the Generals take care of the rebels.”⁶² Whether or not Wadsworth intended to encourage actual military service among his congregants, the mention of ‘rebels’ suggests that he hoped to capitalize on the rhetoric of the secession crisis to inspire religious fervor, especially as this sermon was given a mere month after Fort Sumter and the rush of volunteerism that resulted from it. Wadsworth’s comments also brought to light a new kind of unity among northerners resulting from the outbreak of war that would become central to patriotic definitions of Christian duty through the rest of the crisis.

Conclusion

Three strands connected Charlestonian and Philadelphian conceptions of Christian duty throughout much of the secession crisis: unity, spirit and dependence. These overlapping themes dominated Protestant discourse in both cities, prompting Christians to respond in similar ways to the events at hand. Early in the crisis, Protestants in both Charleston and Philadelphia emphasized the need for moderate responses to the crisis as one part of Christian duty. For these Protestants, spiritual unity was of more importance than political and ideological differences; if Americans allowed their conduct to be characterized by Christian spirit, Protestants believed that the nation might avoid outright conflict. Thomas Smyth in Charleston and Henry Boardman in Philadelphia described

⁶² Wadsworth, *The Christian Soldier*.

Christian spirit in moderate terms, highlighting that fruits of the spirit like peace, self-control and long-suffering were intended for the public realm as well as the private. Later in the crisis, however, Protestants increasingly discussed the spiritual truths that were being violated as indications of their government's spiritual preeminence. Hand in hand with this recognition was the shift from horizontal to vertical definitions of Christian duty. In the latter half of the crisis, Protestants in both cities emphasized the relationship between God and man, and God and government, over spiritual and political unity between the two regions. In Charleston, this played out in the connection of Christianity with the new Confederate government, and in Philadelphia with the elevation of truth and true religion over superficial unity. Ideas of unity also played an important role in both cities throughout the crisis. Spiritual and national unity were stressed as vital aspects of Christian duty early in the crisis, while by height of the crisis Protestants in Charleston and Philadelphia were emphasizing regional unity and their own divinely ordained governments instead. While Charlestonians and Philadelphians shared a common framework for understanding Christian duty, several important differences drew an increasingly large division between the two cities as the crisis progressed. The *hows* and *whys* of applying Christian duty appeared different according to the varying experiences of Protestants in Charleston and Philadelphia.

CHAPTER TWO

“Our present and future course as Christian patriots”:

Charleston and the Divinely Ordained Confederacy

If we would enjoy the pure and tranquil happiness that flows from content, we must regulate our passions, affections and dispositions, bring our desires within the limit of our ability, and place our inner being under the control of a vigorous will. If there is happiness in the breast—if our souls are stayed on the author and giver of all good, and we catch refreshing glimpses of the glory that is to be revealed, no cloud can darken our prospect, and no storm can disturb our composure—

-Charleston Courier, August 11, 1860¹

My brethren, I am not here to speak to you as a politician, or as a philosopher. I am here in God's name and stead to point out to you the causes of his anger, the sources of all our past and present dangers, the proper ground for humiliation and repentance, and our present and future course as Christian patriots.

-Rev. Thomas Smyth, November 21, 1860²

The *Charleston Courier* succinctly described the ideal Christian spirit as the regulation of passions and the focus of attention instead on “the author and giver of all good.” For many Charlestonians in the early part of the crisis, this understanding of faith suggested that Christian duty entailed social and religious conservatism. This brand of conservatism stressed the need for fruits of the spirit to be present within national debates, as seen in the writings of Thomas Smyth in the previous chapter, but it further emphasized the duty of maintaining the South’s divine social and religious institutions, particularly slavery. In this case, conservatism did not breed national unity, but sought to maintain

¹ “Contentment,” *Charleston Courier* (Charleston, SC): Aug 11, 1860.

² Thomas Smyth, *The Sin and the Curse: The Union, The True Source of Disunion, and Our Duty in the Present Crisis. A Discourse Preached on the Occasion of the Day of Humiliation and Prayer Appointed*

tradition and social stability. In August 1860 the *Courier* reported that southerners were increasingly turning away from northern resort destinations in favor of more southern locales “so long as Northern men and Northern associations permit the subject of abolitionism and mock philanthropy for the negro to be [bleated] from Churches, social circles and other assemblages.” Southerners, the writer announced, would simply not travel northward unless they could be assured that northerners would “be civil and learn to let other people’s business alone” and “cease intermeddling with things not belonging to them.” Southerners increasingly patronized only the destinations that remained *neutral* in the face of the intensifying sectional conflict. Locales where slavery was criticized proved incompatible with southern standards of conservatism. As the correspondent put it:

Four out of every five Southern men now at Old Point, or any other Southern watering place, if asked why they did not go to Saratoga, Cape May, Newport, Niagara, &c., will reply: “I did not wish to hazard the probability of having my servants stolen—fanaticism is too *extremely pious* in those quarters, and hence I cannot trust its honesty.”³

Over the course of 1860, Charlestonians grew increasingly critical of the North, castigating abolitionists in particular as threats to the unity of the nation. Protestants in Charleston overwhelmingly united in the defense of slavery, citing its roots in the nation’s revolutionary past, as well as in the biblical past.

Through secession, Charlestonians separated themselves from an anti-conservative and infidel North, and emphasized the South’s claims to a special relationship with God based on its religious and social traditions. Definitions of Christian duty among Charlestonians experienced a similar transformation. While definitions of duty earlier in

by the Governor of South Carolina, on November 21st, 1860, in the Second Presbyterian Church, Charleston, S.C. (Charleston: Steam-Power Presses of Evans & Cogswell, 1860).

³ “Correspondence of the *Courier*. Baltimore, June 8, 1860,” *Charleston Courier*, Aug 11, 1860.

the crisis were largely spiritual, involving the cultivation of a Christian spirit that aided believers in deepening unity with God and men, following the ordinance of secession in December 1860, Charlestonians increasingly described duty in sectional and patriotic terms. The imminent threats of violence leading up to the attack on Fort Sumter also eclipsed earlier calls for national spiritual unity, prompting Charlestonians to emphasize their unique claim to divine favor. The victories at Sumter and Manassas further entrenched the belief in a chosen South, with ministers drawing connections between the Confederacy and the Israel of the Old Testament. For Protestants in Charleston in the latter half of the crisis, Christian duty helped to define identity along sectional lines. Victory or defeat, God's hand guided events, and it was the duty of individuals, as Christians and as citizens, to muster in support of their divinely appointed government, trusting in Divine Providence for security even in the midst of battle.

This chapter addresses how Protestants in Charleston understood their duties as Christians and citizens in the midst of crisis. Mitchell Snay has argued that religion was used in the South to sanctify slavery and interpret secession as the moral responsibility of a Christian people, contributing to the formation of a southern sectional identity and nationalism.⁴ Conceptions of duty, one part of the religious discourse, had a powerful impact on the ways in which southerners understood and responded to the crisis of secession. Faith not only helped to justify secession, but cast the national crisis as a spiritual conflict in which individual believers held monumental stakes.

⁴ Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*.

The Duty of Defense in the Face of An Infidel North

Slavery was intertwined with nearly every aspect of southern life and religion was no exception to this rule. Southern Protestantism regulated the institution within its own sphere of influence, assigning duties to both masters and slaves, and for many, southern slavery was admired for the avenues it opened up for preaching the gospel among slave populations. As the secession crisis dragged on, slavery, vital to southern culture, became one of the major points of contention between North and South.

Charlestonian conservatism was in part characterized by a contrast between divine wisdom in the south and foolishness in the north. While southerners like the renown Rev. James Henley Thornwell valued and displayed restraint, eloquence and intelligence, the opposite of these traits came to be identified increasingly with the North over the course of the crisis. For Charlestonians, the crisis was exacerbated by the well-meaning, but often bumbling moral sentiments pertaining to slavery within the northern population. In March 1860, Presbyterian Rev. John L. Girardeau noted in a commencement address at the College of Charleston that, “the chief peril to our institutions lies in the misinformed and misdirected moral sentiments of one great section of the country.”⁵ Annie Middleton, an affluent Episcopal woman in Charleston, echoed the theme of a misinformed north in December 1860. “The difficulty with you at the North is that you read *one side*,” Middleton argued, advising her Mother in Rhode Island to “always bear in mind that the “other side” is kept carefully out of sight.” Of northern political leaders, Middleton wrote, “I hope the foolish ones who are trying to be “wise above what is written,” will learn at last that “the

⁵ Rev. John L. Girardeau, *Conscience and Civil Government. An Oration Delivered Before the Society of Alumni of the College of Charleston, on Commencement Day, March 27th, 1860* (Charleston: Evans & Cogswell, 1860).

service of God is the only perfect freedom” and that “His Word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path.” Northern ignorance was contrasted by the “perfect order and quiet” of Charleston where there was “the expression of serious but cheerful earnestness upon every face.”⁶ The only hope for peaceful reconciliation was for wisdom to reign in the North as it did in the South, beginning with the northern public educating themselves on the situation of the South. Middleton’s point that southerners possessed superior religious knowledge reflected an idea popular among other Charlestonians, that southerners, with their special insight and gifts, were the chosen people of God. Christian duty involved the embrace of that identity.

If Christian duty involved embracing the southern identity of God’s chosen ones, a vital part of this process involved the defense of slavery. Charlestonians viewed human bondage as a system given to them by God and inextricably tied to their chosen status as a people. Like many southern Protestants, Rev. Thornwell was especially concerned with refuting northern claims against slavery and argued that as the scriptures were clear in regulating and not condemning slavery, northern arguments about its immorality were unfounded. Abolitionists could only turn to law to make their claims, however even there Thornwell argued that the southern system of slavery had been established and was protected by the very nature of the Constitution. Slavery involved the legal control of an individual’s labor, not “his soul, not his person, not his moral and intellectual nature,” leaving no room for northern arguments to the contrary. Regardless of the protection offered by both the Constitution and scripture, however, Thornwell perceived antislavery

⁶ Annie Middleton to her Mother, December 31, 1860 in *Life in Carolina and New England During the Nineteenth Century As Illustrated by Remembrances and Letters of the Middleton Family of Charleston*

sentiment dominating northern culture, as although a few were “not prepared to condemn it as a sin, nor to meddle with it where it is legally maintained, are yet opposed to it as a natural and political evil, which every good man should desire to see extinguished.” So-called northern conservatives may deny that southerners were sinning by maintaining slavery, Thornwell argued, but their “pity” was of little use as it existed on the assumption that the South was “caught in the folds of a serpent, which is gradually squeezing out her life.”⁷ For Thornwell and Charlestonians the problem lay in the sheer irrationality of northern antislavery. Despite there being no grounds for any biblical or legal argument against slavery, abolitionists had poisoned the northern public and government against the southern system of slavery. Thornwell’s focus on the political, rather than spiritual, justification of slavery is significant for the way that it emphasized the immorality of the North breaking the contract of the Constitution, while *deemphasizing* any moral debates over slavery itself. By doing so, Thornwell characterized secession as the only possible southern response to northern aggression, effectively removing the radical stigma from a concept considered revolutionary.

When abolitionists threatened the existence of slavery in the South, they threatened the very foundations of the Christian nation. Episcopal minister William O. Prentiss stressed the religious roots of southern slavery and the current crisis in a sermon given in late November 1860. He argued that the civilized world had been built by slavery to the extent that “it feeds the hungry, it clothes the naked, it employs the idler, it supports tottering thrones and starving paupers; kings in their diadems, and beggars in their rags, all

South Carolina and of the De Wolf Family of Bristol Rhode Island (Bristol, RI: Privately Printed, 1929).

⁷ Thornwell, *The State of the Country*.

cry aloud to the God who feeds them, “give us this day our daily cotton.” Despite this fact, northerners, whose very ancestors were implicated in the trade of slaves, expected for southerners to abandon the institution that represented the lifeblood of the nation as a whole. By doing so, abolitionists undermined the Christian foundation of the nation as well since scripture did not condemn slavery, but in fact regulated it by defining duties pertaining to its practice. Northern abolitionists, however, disregarded the biblical support of slavery, instead insisting that a higher law than scripture existed and refused “to worship a God who can sanction the right of one man’s property in the body of another.” Abolitionism was not only a threat to the temporal prosperity of the nation, but represented godlessness at its very core. The “great duty” of southern Christians was to combat this godlessness, bolstering themselves in dependence on God and trust in his providence.⁸

For Charlestonians, abolitionism represented a dangerous threat to the stability of southern society and served as a foil for southern conservatism. For Prentiss, abolitionism’s success had been brought about by the tradition of “congregational infallibility” in New England puritanism. Rather than look to God for guidance and truth, members of this tradition created their own moral compasses, leading to the pursuance of every type of societal improvement without a foundation in true religion. Abolition was merely the latest of the *isms* to take hold of the northern conscience, which ironically,

⁸ William O. Prentiss, *A Sermon Preached at St. Peter’s Church, Charleston, by the Rev. William O. Prentiss, On Wednesday, November 21, 1860, Being a Day of Public Fasting, Humiliation, and Prayer, Appointed to be Observed by the Legislature of the State of South Carolina, on Contemplation of the Secession of the State of the Union, And Repeated at St. Peter’s Church, at the Request of the Congregation, on the Evening of Sunday, November 25, 1860, and Again in the Legislative Hall at Columbia, During the Session of the Legislature* (Charleston: Steam-Power Presses of Evans & Cogswell, 1860).

hoped to usher in heaven on earth, while ignoring the biblical passages which regulated or refrained from condemning slavery. In its neglect of scripture, abolition represented a kind of *anti-conservatism* for Prentiss and others in the South. In their failure to adhere to the literal interpretation of scripture, abolitionists violated the most basic precept of Protestantism, *sola scriptura*, the idea that individuals could read and understand the Bible. Prentiss argued that northerners in this tradition undermined the beliefs of their national and spiritual forefathers even to the extent of calling foundational spiritual truths “follies” of previous generations. These northerners also overlooked the destiny of Africans to serve as slaves, demonstrated by history, physiology and experience. In their attempts to overthrow the longstanding social and religious tradition of slavery in South, abolitionists threatened the very will of God himself. When faced with such a violation of conservatism, Prentiss saw splitting from the North as the only option left to the South: “We cannot coalesce with men whose society will eventually corrupt our own, and bring down upon us the awful doom which awaits them.”⁹ For Prentiss, it was only separation, even by war, that would reap heavenly rewards.

Charlestonians also increasingly defined Christian duty in opposition to northern fanaticism. Rev. Smyth, a Presbyterian known for his desire to reform southern slavery to better provide for the religious education of slaves, preached passionately on the destructive influence of abolitionism in the North and its contribution to the crisis. The northern public was made up of the dangerous combination of “atheists, infidels, communists, free-lovers, rationalists, Bible haters, anti-christian levellers, and anarchists” alongside “God-fearing and Christ-loving, conscientious people,” who sought God, “but not

⁹ Prentiss, *A Sermon Preached at St. Peter's Church*.

according to knowledge.” The result, Smyth argued, was that northerners, in pursuing antislavery, had “perverted and prostituted the Bible.” Contrary to northern opinion, slavery was a moral good for Africans, multiplying their race, providing healthy and godly environments. Having illuminated such a stark difference between North and South, Smyth reminded his congregation of their duties in relation to the sinfulness of northern fanatics. Where abolitionists had rejected the scripture “as the only standard of faith and practice, of right and wrong, of sin and duty,” Charlestonians were to live as “Christian patriots,” repent of sins and dedicate themselves to the will of God.¹⁰

Contrary to the example of abolitionism, for Charlestonians submission to God was the only Christian duty. In a letter to her mother in December 1860, Annie Middleton wrote with confidence in a God that protected the South and its institutions, “You say “let us submit like Christians.” I will join you heartily in submitting to God, but not to man; there is a wide difference—” She turned abolitionism against itself, expressing that the only *true* emancipation took place as a result of the southern system of slavery for both blacks and whites. The South offered slaves *moral emancipation*, and was “the only effectual Mission Station for the African,” while secession offered whites freedom from an overbearing and unrepresentative government.¹¹ Because of their true religion and submission to God, Charlestonians believed the South had been chosen by God and would be sustained regardless of circumstances. In order to maintain this God-chosen identity, Charlestonians emphasized need for increased dependence and submission to God throughout the remainder of the crisis.

¹⁰ Thomas Smyth, *The Sin and the Curse*.

¹¹ Annie Middleton to her Mother, December 31, 1860.

A Righteous and Chosen South

In November 1860, South Carolina's governor, William Gist, issued a proclamation calling for November 21st to be a day of Fasting, Humiliation and Prayer. Following the General Assembly's call for a state convention to determine secession, the specially marked day offered South Carolinians the opportunity to "implore the direction and blessing of Almighty God in this our hour of difficulty, and to give us *one heart and one mind* to oppose, by all just and proper means, every encroachment upon our rights." In a similar phenomenon to the calls for Christian unity in the face of crisis, the proclamation called for unity among South Carolinians in petitioning divine support for their cause. Gist further addressed two important themes: South Carolinians were a "people who acknowledge the hand of God in every event, and bow in reverence to His will," and they desired to "imitate the noble example of their forefathers" in resistance to oppression, as well as in "supplication for Divine aid and counsel in this momentous crisis of our country's history."¹² Charlestonians would echo the themes of a godly southern people and the South's present being linked with a righteous past throughout the remainder of the crisis.

When invoked, the theme of a godly southern people referred both to the South's special place within or understanding of God's plan, as well as the need to therefore remain godly in the face of crisis. Presbyterian Rev. W. C. Dana emphasized the South's special understanding of scripture by contrasting southern Christianity with the northern misapplication of religious sentiment. Crisis might have been avoided if only northerners had "known how to read their Bibles aright, and been willing to test their favorite notions by the unerring standard—that Divine Revelation." Dana also acknowledged the need for a

¹² "Proclamation," *Anderson Intelligencer*, Nov 16, 1860.

godly people to recognize those national sins that had brought nation to the brink of war. It was therefore the duty of Charlestonians and southerners to repent of their sins and petition for divine aid.¹³ By exercising the Christian virtues of humility and prayer, the South might rely on the hand of God to sustain it. Similarly, James Henley Thornwell noted that it was the first duty of a Christian people to “confess our national sins with humility and penitence,” and “seek Divine guidance and Divine strength for the future.” A godly people, and a godly State, needed to be wholly dependent on God’s provision. Thornwell considered the partisanship that had come to define the political process as chief among the nation’s sins. Because Americans had “deified the people,” imperfect popular opinion had replaced the representative system of their forefathers. However, through the unified effort of southerners in confession, humility and the renewal of “energies of the inward life,” the South could take hope in God’s help. Penitence and humility, as well as united southern effort were all necessary elements of duty, helping to define a new nation by dependence on God. And as Thornwell noted, “If we are to lay the foundations of a new empire, or to readjust the proportions of the old, the only pledge of permanent success is the Divine favor.”¹⁴

The second theme introduced by the governor’s proclamation, of southerners building on the legacy of their righteous forefathers, demonstrated the justice of the South’s cause. In other words, the South was responding defensively, and righteously, to an aggressive North. Annie Middleton wrote that because the would-be soldiers gathering in Charleston were “actuated by the spirit of *defense* not *aggression* there is a peculiar feeling

¹³ W. C. Dana, *A Sermon Delivered in the Central Presbyterian Church, Charleston, S.C., Nov 21st, 1860, Being the Day Appointed by the State Authority for Fasting, Humiliation and Prayer* (Charleston: Steam-Power Presses of Evans & Cogswell, 1860).

of respect and sympathy drawn out of every human heart toward them.”¹⁵ The South’s cause was legitimized in their defensive response to attacks on their traditional social institutions. Pointing out all of the wrongs perpetuated by the North, Rev. Thornwell emphasized that the South had no choice but to secede in order to stay politically and spiritually true to their revolutionary past. The revolution had established a covenant among the states, valuing true and righteous principles, but abolitionist influence in the government, culminating in the election of Abraham Lincoln, had challenged even that legacy. The North had corrupted the government with antislavery sentiment, broken the sacred contract of the Constitution and brought about the crisis that preceded secession. For Thornwell, compromise with the North was impossible and entailed moving backwards. If the South was to maintain its institutions and way of life, secession was a “bounden duty.” Only by separating from the corrupted North might southerners “resist the revolution which threatens them with ruin.” While the South was true to the spirit of the nation’s founding, the abolitionists in the North, under the guise of seeking equality, were tearing down the very frameworks of the government.¹⁶ Rev. Dana also emphasized the justness of South Carolina seceding from a “foreign and hostile government.” The Union no longer resembled the compact of their forefathers as northerners had broken the covenant of the Union in their hatred for “those institutions which the Word of God recognizes and regulates, and which his Providence has here made a necessity.”¹⁷

The concept of divine immanence, or the belief that God was actively involved within the world, was present throughout these and other southern depictions of the crisis.

¹⁴ J. H. Thornwell, *Our National Sins*.

¹⁵ Annie Middleton to her Mother, December 31, 1860.

¹⁶ Thornwell, *State of the Country*.

Rev. Dana warned his congregation not to believe the fallacy that human agency was real, while Divine agency was imaginary or a “fantasy of the mind.” Rather, “unless the Almighty has left his throne, abdicated his government, ceased to be the Omnipotent, then he orders the external events, he directs the circumstances, which have so much to do with our earthly desires.” By including the absurdity of God leaving his throne Dana emphasized that intercession in world events was an inextricable part of God’s nature. God’s hand touched the hearts and minds of men, as well as all elements in the natural world. With this knowledge Protestants then needed to petition for divine intercession in the crisis at hand.¹⁸ The understanding of God’s hand involved in the Secession Crisis was particularly prevalent in relation to the events of Fort Sumter and Manassas.

“In the solemn ‘night watches’”: Uncertainty, Faith and Ft. Sumter

Following South Carolina’s secession on December 20, 1860, the State claimed the military installations around Charleston Harbor as its own, demanding federal evacuation. The small number of federal soldiers housed in Fort Moultrie, fearing attack in their current position, relocated to the partially completed, but more easily defended Fort Sumter under cover of night. President Buchanan attempted to reinforce and resupply the federals in January, but the ship charged with the task was turned back with cannon fire. These movements and the mere fact of continued federal presence in their newly independent State caused both great anxiety and outrage among Charlestonians. Sophia Haskell of Abbeville wrote to a friend that she had expected to “see the taking of Fort

¹⁷ Dana, *A Sermon Delivered in the Central Presbyterian Church, Charleston, S.C., Nov 21st, 1860.*

¹⁸ Dana, *A Sermon Delivered in the Central Presbyterian Church, Charleston, S.C., Nov 21st, 1860.*

Sumter” during her visit to Charleston in March, noting that three of her sons still resided in the city to help defend against the imminent federal threat.¹⁹ Caroline Gilman, the Charlestonian widow of respected Unitarian minister Samuel Gilman, wrote as early as December 1860 that cannon fire was expected from the fort at any time along with the promise of armed southern response. In church that morning, the women had been “sad & frightened, some in tears, for the best men and the flower of our youth are in the two forts.” Gilman noted that a friend, whose husband was frequently absent due to the crisis, “suffers very much now, that danger is so near for those she loves.”²⁰ The immediate possibility of violence transformed the crisis from a primarily ideological conflict waged among the political and religious elite into one with physical and spiritual ramifications for individuals.

Fort Sumter was both a source of anxiety and confidence for Charlestonian Protestants. This duality of emotion is explained by the role that faith played in assuaging fears about the crisis. While individuals feared imminent violence from the Fort, the Protestant faith offered assurance in a God who would intervene for his people. Christian duty also lay within this intersection, requiring that believers depend on God regardless of circumstances. In January, Caroline Gilman reflected on her anxiety in the light of her faith: “In the solemn “night watches,” when I know that any moment may wake the Fort cannon, which is the signal of death and destruction, I feel the inestimable value of Christ’s revelation.” In spite of the fearful atmosphere, Gilman noted, “I am willing to sacrifice every thing to Christian truth,” although the “only sacrifice I am called upon to offer is faith.”²¹ For

¹⁹ Sophia Haskell to friend, March 28, 1861, Cheves Papers: Haskell Correspondence, *SCHS*.

²⁰ Caroline Gilman to children, Dec 30, 1860, Caroline H. Gilman Papers, *SCHS*.

²¹ Caroline Gilman to children, Jan 20, 1861.

Gilman, and other Protestants, faith offered an outlet for fears, as well as informed their duty in response to the crisis. Sophia Haskell described the “steady spirit of firm resolution” that had taken hold of Charlestonians in the lead up to Fort Sumter. Her son, volunteering in defense of the city, viewed his service in light of both God and State: “whatever may happen my trust is in God. God Save our Country. For such a Country and such a people is it easy to die.” Haskell saw in this development “the hand of an almost Visible Providence,” guiding events and sentiment to the advantage of the South.²²

In April the stalemate that had existed for several months between the federal forces ensconced in Sumter and the Confederates manning the surrounding batteries reached an end. Lincoln’s intention to resupply the fort was met with the South Carolinian government’s demand for the immediate surrender of Major Anderson’s federal forces within the installation. Following Anderson’s refusal, the fort was bombarded for over a day, but eventually, caught between the outbreak of a fire in the fort and the constant barrage of Confederate fire, Anderson surrendered. Soon after, Gilman wrote a letter to one of her children that, while a mere three sentences long, provides a rich example of how faith impacted the ways in which Protestants interpreted the event: “Wonderful, miraculous, unheard of in history, a bloodless victory! I cannot describe the note of thanksgiving that goes up in every quarter, as well for anderson as our selves. I cannot write more now I must breathe and pray.”²³ Gilman understood the “bloodless victory” as a sign that the hand of God was upon the South, and the Christian duties of thanksgiving and prayer followed necessarily in the wake of such a miracle. Haskell also remarked on the victory: “I can hardly say how much I am cheered and comforted by the wonderful almost

²² Sophia Haskell to friend, March 28, 1861.

miraculous, bloodless victory of Fort Sumter.” For Haskell, the victory gave her a confidence that reinforced her belief in the South’s just cause. One of her sons remarked on how the result of the battle seemed “like the battles of the chosen people,” while Haskell wrote to a friend in Delaware, “What is to come God only knows but come what may we can never never never yield.”²⁴

While the idea that the South was chosen by God predated the victory, Sumter served as a catalyst for Protestant Charlestonians to understand their special anointing in the context of war. The Confederate victory at Sumter proved for Charlestonians that their cause was just and reinforced that God had chosen the South. Presbyterian Thomas Smyth accused Republicans and Lincoln of distorting and destroying the Constitution, noting that in defending itself against such adversaries, the South could only be right. The miraculous victory of Sumter proved God’s favor was on the side of the South, but even more so, the accidental deaths of two federal soldiers during the surrender ceremony revealed God’s displeasure with the idolatry of the North toward their Union. In Sumter, northern corruption had been laid bare. Regardless of its claims of conservatism, the North loved power more than peace and would cling to the South even as it abused it. For Smyth, Sumter stood as proof of the power of divine providence and a “pledge and promise of God’s continued providence and protection” over the South. Sumter, understood to be nearly impregnable, had fallen in mere hours and with not a life lost on either side during the fury of the bombardment. The miracle of Sumter was not limited to the battle itself, but continued in the aftermath and “cemented into one living mass of patriotic ardor every Southern spirit, however previously divided.” Along with demonstrating the power of

²³ Caroline Gilman to children, April 14, 1861.

divine intercession, Sumter also provided southerners with “an anchor of hope” for future protection.²⁵ Episcopal minister J. H. Elliott also focused on the “bloodless victory” as a sign of God’s intercession on behalf of the South. Elliott praised the Confederacy’s soldiers, statesmen, citizens and military command for excellence displayed during the attack, but acknowledged that, beyond these earthy agencies, God had wrought the victory. God’s hand had especially been in the fire that broke out in the fort, which had ushered the conflict to a speedy end when more time might have resulted in a higher cost in men and morale. Considering this phenomenon, Elliott argued that it would be “profane and stupid not to see the mighty arm of Jehovah which has all along guided and defended the course of this great Revolution, and which, we believe, will guide and defend it so long as it continues to be the cause of righteousness and truth.”²⁶ Righteousness, then, was vital to duty and patriotism, as it was the pursuit of righteousness that corresponded to divine protection.

Sumter not only presented the opportunity to remark on the chosen South, but also to outline the proper response of Christians to divine providence. Smyth noted that it was the duty of Christians to acknowledge this providence through thanksgiving and “the consecrated devotion of our living energies.” Just as the Old Testament was full of reminders for the Jewish people to remember God’s provision, the people of the South, God’s new chosen people, needed to do the same. It was in remembering God’s provision at Sumter that southerners might gain confidence and help to ensure divine intercession in future trials.²⁷ Elliott’s celebration of the victory included the caveat that the South needed

²⁴ Sophia Haskell to friend, May 5, 1861.

²⁵ Thomas Smyth, *The Battle of Fort Sumter*.

²⁶ J. H. Elliott, *The Bloodless Victory. A Sermon Preached in St. Michael’s Church, Charleston, S.C., On occasion of the taking of Fort Sumter* (Charleston: Printed by A.E. Miller, 1861).

²⁷ Smyth, *The Battle of Fort Sumter*.

to maintain its righteousness in order to ensure God's favor. The danger for southerners lay in prideful boasting in their own success, rather than acknowledging that it was God's doing that led to such results as Sumter. In order to continue to receive divine blessing, southerners needed continually honor God in "prayerfulness, forbearance, patience and honorableness." But even as the South currently enjoyed divine blessing in the form of bloodless victory, Elliott acknowledged that the days ahead undoubtedly held "loss and privation, disaster and reverse, from which the holiest and most sacred cause is not exempt." However, as long as southerners honored and trusted in God, they would be able to endure any trials.²⁸

God's Chosen People: Victory at Manassas and the Testing of Faith

If Sumter was the catalyst for understanding the special anointing of the South, Manassas crystallized that belief among Protestants in Charleston. Episcopal Rev. Howe remarked on Manassas as "a most signal manifestation of God's mercy toward us and toward the people of these Confederate States."²⁹ The victory at Manassas proved that God's hand continued to be upon the southern cause and that southerners were God's new chosen people. Ministers used biblical narrative to emphasize that divine intervention in the present was directly tied to past intervention, drawing explicit comparisons between the battle at Manassas and biblical warfare. Southerners, therefore, were the heirs of God's covenant with the Israelites and might depend on his assistance just as the ancient Hebrew people. Charlestonians responded in two major ways to the Battle at Manassas, both of

²⁸ Elliott, *The Bloodless Victory*.

²⁹ W.B.W. Howe, *Sermon XXIX*.

which were informed by their understanding of their place as God's chosen people. First, Protestants responded with thanksgiving to God for his intercession in the battle. Ministers, in particular, reflected on the anointed nature of the South, as well as reminded their congregations of the necessity of remaining righteous in the midst of the conflict. Protestants also recognized that the victory at Manassas had been won at a high cost. The second response had to do with the acknowledgement of Manassas, and the ongoing conflict, as a testing of faith. Charlestonian Protestants expressed grief at the loss of loved ones and anxiety over the promise of continued hardship, but couched these uncertainties in the context of their faith. Ultimately, Manassas and other trials offered opportunities for faith to be strengthened.

Protestants emphasized the need for united thanksgiving in response to the providential victory at Manassas. Episcopalian Christopher G. Memminger of Charleston introduced a resolution to the Confederate Congress for a day of national thanksgiving:

Resolved, That we recognize the hand of the Most High God, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, in the glorious victory with which He bath crowned our arms at Manassas; and that the people of these Confederate States are invited, by appropriate services on the ensuing Sabbath, to offer up their united thanksgiving and praise for this mighty deliverance.³⁰

Memminger addressed dual themes: God's hand had determined the outcome of the battle and the appropriate response of Confederates was "united thanksgiving" in the face of such intercession. Memminger's resolution passed with unanimous consent and was met with much enthusiasm among Protestants in Charleston and the surrounding areas. Fellow Episcopalian Rev. Edward Reed hailed the declaration as "noble and admirable," the example of Confederate leaders filling "the heart of the Christian patriot with the liveliest

joy." The righteousness of Congress was manifested within its desire to offer God thanksgiving and praise.³¹ Indeed, in offering thanksgiving, Confederates demonstrated why God had chosen to favor the cause of the South.

As an essential Christian duty, thanksgiving was a necessary and natural response to the victory at Manassas. Presbyterian C.S. Vedder noted that thanksgiving was an often overlooked, but vitally important Christian duty for both individuals and nations. Vedder pointed to the importance of thanksgiving in the Bible, particularly the New Testament example of Christ's disappointment when only one among ten lepers returned to thank him for healing them of their disease. The Old Testament was also resplendent with songs of thanksgiving and regulations concerning it. The Confederacy, Vedder argued, had many causes to be thankful due to the divine blessings bestowed on its land, society and religion. However, in Manassas, Vedder perceived additional and special reasons for thanksgiving. Manassas displayed the culmination of God's blessings upon the South. The hand of God had been at work in giving wisdom to the Confederacy's leaders, courage to its soldiers and to the whole of the Confederacy, "a spirit of prayerful determination and reliance upon Himself which assures ultimate success, though the odds be fearful."³² Likewise, Episcopal Rev. Reed noted that Confederates were "a people saved by the Lord," having been carried

³⁰ *Journal of the Congress of the Confederate States of America, 1861-1865* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), 276.

³¹ Edward Reed, *A People Saved by the Lord. Deut. XXXIII, 29. A Sermon Delivered at Flat Rock, July 28, 1861* (Charleston: Steam-Power Presses of Evans & Cogswell, 1861). Although now located in North Carolina, at the time of the Civil War, Flat Rock served as a retreat for affluent Charlestonians among other South Carolinian elites.

³² C. S. Vedder, "Offer Unto God Thanksgiving." *A Sermon Delivered in the Summerville Presbyterian Church On Sunday, July 28, 1861* (Charleston: Steam-Power Presses of Evans & Cogswell, 1861).

safely “through every crisis as it has arisen” from the Ordinance of Secession to the battle at Manassas.³³

Just as they had with Sumter, Protestants looked to Manassas as proof of their special ordination as God’s chosen ones. Ministers linked the Confederacy and the Israel of the Old Testament, effectively casting themselves as the new chosen people. Rev. Reed repurposed Deuteronomy 33:29 for the Confederate cause, changing the definition of “a people saved by the Lord” from Israel to the South.³⁴ Methodist Rev. John T. Wightman of Yorkville emphasized the special calling of the South as the culmination of centuries of religious evolution. Originally, “the germ of religion was lodged in the heart of the Hebrew,” but “locked up in an unknown language.” The next stages of progression involved the gospel being converted into the “universal tongue” of Greek and benefiting from the organization of the Romans. In its final stage, Christianity was equipped by the Germanic race, by which Wightman likely refers to the Reformation and the advent of Protestantism. Wightman argued that southerners shared in the legacy of the Germanic race and also in the duty to spread the gospel and civilization, which largely took place through slavery and cotton. While “government and religion are disintegrating at the North,” Wightman argued, “deeper principles are penetrating the heart of the South,” and God was “converting the South into a financial and national scourge to an infidel, avaricious, and bloodthirsty North.”³⁵

³³ Reed, *A People Saved by the Lord*.

³⁴ Reed, *A People Saved by the Lord*.

³⁵ John T. Wightman, *The Glory of God. The Defense of the South. A Discourse Delivered in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Yorkville, S.C., July 28, 1861, the Day of National Thanksgiving for the Victory at Manassas* (Portland, ME: Printed by B. Thurston & Company, 1871).

Celebratory responses to the victory at Manassas were accompanied by the acknowledgement of the ongoing strife as a physical and spiritual trial to be borne by God's chosen people. Rev. Wightman perceived that in Manassas the "seventh seal" had been broken, referring to the end of times described in the biblical book of Revelation. Manassas was only the beginning of the struggle between the southern Christianity and northern infidelity, the contest between which, Wightman hoped, would help to usher in the kingdom of God on earth.³⁶ Rev. Howe likewise acknowledged that while God had granted victory at Manassas, there was yet a struggle for Protestants to endure. As the southern cause was a righteous one, Howe argued that Confederates might be assured that the ultimate victory would be theirs, however they would undoubtedly experience trial and hardship along the way. Southern Protestants needed to trust God completely, even if it "pleased God to permit us to suffer the defeat which our enemies have sustained," southerners were to endure in faith and continue to fight for their cause. In Manassas, Howe perceived the promise of God to sustain the South's cause through all of the trials to come.³⁷

Even with divine aid, Manassas had been a hard-won battle and in the days following the battle, Charlestonians mourned the loss of loved ones and expressed anxiety in the face of an uncertain future. Susan Middleton, an Episcopalian in Charleston, noted to her cousin in Flat Rock, that the Sunday following the battle was somber, full of funerals and grief: "Oh—are not these dreadful days? Each hour seems to bring its own sad tale— And many say there are darker ones still in store for us—in spite of this great victory—the

³⁶ Wightman, *The Glory of God*.

³⁷ W.B.W. Howe, *Sermon XXIX*.

brilliance seems very faint—amidst all this sorrow and suspense.”³⁸ Manassas had not been the deciding blow in the contest between North and South, and it seemed that still more southerners would be called to suffer for the cause. In August, Middleton wrote of her uncertainty regarding God’s plans after a relative was killed in battle. “It has often seemed hard,” she wrote, “that he should have been taken—when so many far less valuable lives were spared.” All the same, Middleton acknowledged that she clung to her faith even in the midst of her grief and uncertainty: “when God’s ways are hard to understand, is there not more room as there is more necessity for entire trust in Him?”³⁹ Trust in God offered an outlet for anxieties and grief even in the aftermath of the battle. Similarly, Rev. Reed acknowledged that “wailings for the dead [mingled] with the shouts of victory” following the battle at Manassas. Reed charged his congregation to comfort those who grieved, as well as offer their own grief to God, in order that he might “bind up the broken heart and comfort every sorrowing soul.”⁴⁰ Whether thanksgiving or sorrowful prayer, however, Protestant responses to Manassas were informed by their faith.

Further hardship would pose additional challenges for Protestants contemplating their duties as God’s chosen people. Sacrifice in battle was tragic albeit expected, but the senseless destruction of Charleston’s Great Fire in December 1861 prompted questions about whether the South was truly doing God’s will. If the will of the Confederacy was the will of God, why were Charlestonians suffering even outside of the conflict with the North? On December 11, a great fire broke out in a curtain and blinds workshop, and swiftly spread across a large portion of the city. Caroline Gilman described the fire as a massive

³⁸ Susan M. Middleton to Harriott Middleton, July 26, 1861. Cheves-Middleton Papers, *SCHS*.

³⁹ Susan M. Middleton to Harriott Middleton, August 24, 1861.

⁴⁰ Reed, *A People Saved by the Lord*.

force of destruction with wind in the form of a tornado, “sending large billets of burning wood immense distances,” virtually blinding the firemen.⁴¹ The fire was finally brought under control the next morning, but the damage it wrought was extensive, physically and spiritually. Practically speaking, the fire destroyed several prominent churches and the homes of dozens of black and white Charleston residents. The fire had spiritual consequences for Charlestonians as well. The victories of Sumter and Manassas had led to the increasingly entrenched belief among Charlestonians that the South enjoyed God’s favor and southerners were his chosen people. If God was on the side of the South, why had such terrible destruction been wrought in Charleston? For those whose homes and churches had escaped the flames, the great fire was one more instance of God’s providential blessing. Gilman wrote to her daughter, “After the terrible scenes we have witness, you can hardly fancy us as we are, quietly seated in Frank’s beautiful home, the Orange St. house safe, & our dear Church with its garden surroundings unscathed.” Still, Gilman noted that many in the city had suffered grievous losses, including many “negro washer-women,” who had taken refuge in the church cemetery when their row houses went up in flames. The church, at least for these women, represented God’s deliverance even in the midst of destruction.⁴² For others, the fire was a reminder that God used trials to strengthen faith. The Sunday after the fire, Rev. Howe preached from the book of Job, which detailed the hardships endured by a righteous man in order to test his faith. Throughout the biblical narrative, Job was given the opportunity to curse God for striking him with disease, poverty and uncharitable company, however Job praised God in the midst of his trials and reaped even greater rewards than he had possessed prior. The moral of the

⁴¹ Caroline Gilman to Eliza, December 15, 1861.

story was man could not comprehend in his “finite understanding” the thoughts and designs of God. Although Charlestonians may not comprehend why they were being tested, they could be assured that if they remained faithful, they would receive rewards beyond measure. Charlestonians were “cast down, but not forsaken” as God’s chosen ones.⁴³ Charlestonian understandings of the war would continue to be shaped by the understanding that God continued to be present with the South even in the midst of difficulty.

Conclusion

In October 1860, A. Toomer Porter “found the State of South Carolina was wild with excitement.” With the presidential election looming, South Carolinians debated secession frequently. The doctor with whom Porter and his family stayed during a visit to nearby Columbia “seemed ready to buckle on his sword,” while the doctor’s son and Porter took the opposing view, calling secession a “second nullification madness.” Porter claimed conservative roots, noting that his own father had been a Union man, although he had died prior to the debate. Secession was associated with madness throughout Porter’s narrative. Recalling the story of an acquaintance, Porter recounted how a man was walking down Main Street in Columbia when he was approached by countrymen and questioned about the location of a nearby lunatic asylum. The man gave directions to the asylum, but urged the men to consider another madhouse instead: “Yonder,” [he said] pointing to the State House, where the Legislature was in session, “is the asylum, and it is full of lunatics.” Despite their original moderation, Porter recalled that by the height of the Secession Crisis

⁴² Caroline Gilman to Eliza, December 15, 1861.

⁴³ Howe, *Cast Down, But Not Forsaken!*

he and many of his acquaintances were as “crazed” and “enthusiastic as the rest.” The end of the convention arrived and “the fiery eloquence of the secessionists prevailed” over conservative sentiment and the desire for national unity.⁴⁴

A. Toomer Porter, an Episcopal minister in Charleston, published his memoirs in 1898, recalling the flurry of passions and activity that led up to the secession of South Carolina on December 20, 1860. In his retrospective, Porter makes the claim that conservatism was a force in opposition to secession, urging calm evaluation of the tensions over slavery. Porter recalls the doctor’s son, with whom he stayed, telling his secessionist father, “secession will not be a peaceable measure; it will mean war, and war will mean the emancipation of our slaves.”⁴⁵ Porter, through the doctor’s son, had all the benefits of looking back and speaking prophetically. While Porter’s memoirs do not provide the most accurate glimpse into the secession crisis, they nonetheless speak to several of the important themes discussed by Charlestonian Protestants in relation to Christian duty.

First, Porter’s emphasis on conservatism is reminiscent of how Charlestonians understood Christian duty in relation to the South’s social and religious traditions. While Porter’s use of the term is reminiscent of a more political conservatism, Protestant Charlestonians were animated in the defending the South’s social and religious traditions from a fanatical North. Slavery was also a vital part of this debate, as alluded to by the doctor’s son in Porter’s story connecting the loss of the war to the loss of slavery. For Charlestonians, slavery not only defined southern society, but helped to define the southern people as uniquely ordained by God. Lastly, Porter’s admittance that *even he* was

⁴⁴ A. Toomer Porter, *Led On! Step by Step: Scenes from Clerical, Military, Educational, and Plantation Life in the South, 1828-1898, An Autobiography by A. Toomer Porter, D.D.* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1898).

pulled into the patriotic fervor of secession alludes to how compelling secession was for Charlestonians, particularly as it was tied to conceptions of Christian duty in the midst of the conflict. In the context of secession, even spiritual unity gave way to an emphasis on regional unity and the idea that the cause of the Confederacy was the cause of God. The victories at Sumter and Manassas further entrenched this idea among Charlestonians, helping to solidify a Confederate national identity. By the end of 1861, Christian duty was widely equated with civic duty, setting the stage for the rest of the war.

⁴⁵ Porter, *Led On! Step by Step*.

CHAPTER THREE

“The very framework of our moral being”:

Philadelphia and the Sacred Union

Still the Thornwells, Rices, Armstrongs, and Van Reusselaers will speak, while the timid conservatives tremble with fear, lest an impending agitation will disturb their boasted harmony and quiet. There can be no reliable basis for peace and quiet but truth, and discussion is to be feared only by those who prefer to rest on some other foundation.

-*American Presbyterian*, February 9, 1860¹

And thus the effort to remain stationary, which so many men are always trying to make, under the idea that they are holding fast and making strong the good things that are and that men have realized only by progress, —such efforts, instead of being conservative, are essentially destructive.

-*W.H. Furness*, Nov 25, 1860.²

And this it is which, under God, has made the Union so strong; it is because its roots are struck down into our hearts, and so interlaced with the very framework of our moral being, that they seem to belong to our personal identity.

-*Rev. Henry A. Boardman, D.D.*, December 12, 1850.³

In early 1860, the Presbyterian New Orleans *True Witness*, boasted of the “anti-fanatic and truly conservative” nature of the Presbyterian press in the North and South, as well as of the “conservative spirit” of the Presbyterian Church at large. While other denominations were growing “sectionalized, fanatical, and heretical,” the Old School Presbyterian Church was fulfilling its spiritual mission, “preaching the Gospel, through her press and from her pulpits, to a world of dying sinners, throwing the weight of her influence against error, fanaticism, and disunion.” Indeed, in 1860 the Old School branch of

¹ “Dr. Rice on Slavery,” *American Presbyterian* (Philadelphia, PA): Feb 9, 1860.

² W. H. Furness, *Our Duty as Conservatives. A Discourse Delivered in the First Congregational Unitarian Church, Sunday November 25, 1860* (Philadelphia: C. Sherman & Son Printers, 1860).

³ Boardman, *The American Union*.

the Presbyterian church was one of the few Protestant denominations that had yet to experience a major sectional schism. The Methodist, Baptist and Episcopal churches all experienced their own divisions along sectional lines in the 1830s and 40s, while the New School Presbyterian church split over slavery in 1857. The Old School would undergo a similar division in the summer of 1861, but at the time of the *True Witness* article, the church was more or less intact.

By late March of 1860, however, the *True Witness* was swiftly revising its opinion of the conservative nature of *some* Presbyterians. A little earlier, Nathan Rice, an influential Presbyterian minister, editor, and professor of theology in St. Louis, had published an article in which he stressed that slavery had “originated in violence and wickedness” and that “the tendency of the Gospel is gradually to abolish it.”⁴ Rice’s comments about slavery sparked a heated debate among Old School Presbyterians. In the weeks that followed Rice’s article, pulpits and religious newspapers expressed their agreement or disdain. The *True Witness*, just weeks after boasting in the conservative nature of the Presbyterian press, accused Rice of having “betrayed the faith of [the] church” and grouped him along with other “Northern fanatics” whose business was in spreading agitation. The *Richmond Central Presbyterian* likewise criticized Rice’s position, although it admitted that he might have erred because of the influence of “the current of popular feeling and sentiment and sympathy in the North-west.” The *Cincinnati Presbyterian* rejoiced in Rice’s courage in opening up the subject of slavery to further discussion, remarking joyfully that all but one of the Old School Presbyterian papers had begun to openly criticize slavery. Meanwhile Philadelphia’s *American Presbyterian* noted that while Rice had made “‘a ripple’ upon the surface of Old

⁴ “Dr. Rice on Slavery,” *American Presbyterian* (Philadelphia), Feb 9, 1860.

School quietude,” it could boast in its status as the only Old School newspaper not to be provoked into speaking on slavery. Instead, in “prudent” fashion, the paper reported southern and northern responses to exhibit the “harmony, unity, and temper of this large and conservative body of Christians!”⁵

The controversy that surrounded Dr. Rice’s article illustrates the delicate national balance concerning slavery during the secession crisis. For many Protestants in 1860 Christian duty was characterized by conservatism in the form of “prolonged and continued *silence* on the subject of slavery;” however as the crisis progressed, it was characterized by increasingly furious debates over slavery, leading to increased divisions between the northern and southern parts of denominations.⁶ These divisions included very specific understandings regarding the meaning of Christian conservatism and duty in the context of the crisis. The Presbyterian Church serves as a particularly useful example of this shift as Presbyterians, especially those of the Old School, experienced this change in a more extreme fashion due to their relative unity at the start of the crisis compared to other Protestant denominations.

As seen in the *Presbyterian* article, Philadelphians clung especially stubbornly to the appearance of conservatism, shying away from making a definite statement about slavery and stressing the duty of conciliatory language even while other northern papers took more defined stances. This hesitance to break the status quo was repeated in other denominations as well. Baptist minister William Brantly preached for a revival of “that spirit of mutual forbearance and concession,” while William Taylor of the Dutch Reformed church remarked that, “much less is it a time for crimination and recrimination, for cheap

⁵ “Religious Press,” *American Presbyterian*, March 22, 1860.

defiances, or for degrading and disgraceful maledictions.”⁷ Old School Presbyterian Henry A. Boardman likewise extolled his congregation to remember a “spirit of accommodation” even in the midst of sectional strife.⁸

In the aftermath of southern outrage that followed Nathan Rice’s claim that slavery was not a “divine institution,” the *Presbyterian* noted that it agreed with Dr. Rice’s newspaper, the *St. Louis Presbyterian*, that southerners were to blame for agitating the issue further.⁹ The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church had already met and determined its policies on slavery, the article noted, which were in line with Rice’s comments. With that being the case:

No one now has the right to disturb the church, destroy its peace, and impede its great and glorious work by a new agitation. Such as will not submit to the highest authority of the church on earth, and remain *quiet and peaceable*, should withdraw, they should be separated from the communion as *disturbers* of the church by a regular process of discipline. By steady perseverance in the right way, the church has attained a high degree of prosperity and power. To retain what has been gained she must never be found lacking in vigilance, firmness, and decision.¹⁰

The excerpt quoted by the *American Presbyterian* highlights several important themes involved in how Philadelphian Protestants defined their duty in the midst of the crisis. For Philadelphian Protestants early in the crisis, Christian duty involved the cultivation of a Christian spirit that valued spiritual unity over sectional or ideological differences. Abolitionists and secessionists were “*disturbers of the church*,” threatening not only the peace of the church, but the nation as a whole. In contrast to these radical unchristian

⁶ “Dr. Rice on Slavery,” *American Presbyterian*, Feb 9, 1860.

⁷ William T. Brantly, *Our National Troubles. A Thanksgiving Sermon. Delivered in the First Baptist Church, before the First and the Tabernacle Baptist Congregations of Philadelphia, on Thursday Morning, Nov. 29, 1860* (Philadelphia: T.B. Peterson & Brothers); “Thanksgiving in Philadelphia. How the Day Was Celebrated. Principal Sermons Preached,” *Philadelphia Press*, Nov 30, 1860.

⁸ Boardman, *The American Union*.

⁹ “Dr. Rice on Slavery,” *American Presbyterian* (Philadelphia, PA), Feb 9, 1860.

elements, Christian duty lay in the expression of Christian spirit and a “quiet and peaceable church.” When faced with the increasingly likelihood of secession, Protestants looked to national sins to explain the crisis, often arguing that partisanship and violations of Christian spirit had led to the conflict. During this stage of the crisis, the term “conservative” provided a powerful tool for describing the crisis and granting positions legitimacy.

Following South Carolina’s secession, however, definitions of duty that valued this brand of conservatism and spiritual unity became difficult for Philadelphians to maintain. As a result, Protestants increasingly discussed duty in relation to *spiritual truths*, such as the immorality of slavery, the sacred covenant of the Constitution, as well as the spiritual heritage of the Union. In contrast to the earlier months of the crisis, “defensive” became the new watchword for Philadelphia Protestants, providing them with the assurance that they were on the righteous side of the conflict. Philadelphians emphasized northern claims to spiritual legitimacy in the absence of military victories. While Charlestonians could look to the victories at Sumter and Manassas and see proof of their chosen status, Philadelphians struggled to make sense of their duty as Christians in the wake of serious military setbacks. Definitions of Christian duty pointed Protestants toward greater dependence on God, trusting that God would provide the ultimate victory if they persevered and acted righteously in the midst of the intensifying conflict. Philadelphians cast the war as a spiritual trial, intended to test the faith and courage of northerners to do God’s will.

¹⁰ “Religious Press,” *American Presbyterian* (Philadelphia, PA), March 22, 1860.

The “Disturbers of the Church”

Amid calls for conciliatory speech and Christian unity, ministers and laypeople alike frequently decried the polarizing influence of abolitionism in the North and secessionism in the South. Old School Presbyterian Rev. Henry A. Boardman pointed to the twin forces of abolitionism and disunionism as the greatest threats to the nation. These groups, while separated by their ideology and “bitter mutual hostility” had “virtually joined hands for the purpose of demolishing this Government.”¹¹ Both *isms* presented dangerous threats to spiritual and political union. Baptist William Brantly noted that while devotion itself was “allowable and even dutiful, when restrained within proper bounds,” it could become “mischievous when immoderate and excessive.” Abolitionists and secessionists violated the proper bounds of devotion in Brantly’s view, to the detriment of the nation as a whole. Abolitionists “openly denounced the constitution of their country as a covenant with death and a league with hell,” while secessionists looked eagerly to achieve disunion. The only remedy for this sectional spirit was to “revive that spirit of mutual forbearance and concession on which our national organizations were originally founded.”¹² Arguing that concessions were involved in the founding of the nation, Brantly placed moderation at the heart of American tradition. Abolitionists and secessionists therefore threatened not only the temporal peace of the nation, but its very legacy.

Philadelphian Protestants were among the most vocal critics of radical abolition within the nation. Henry Boardman, a proponent of antislavery himself, argued that abolitionists and their fanaticism were “the worst enemies of the slave, and the most efficient protectors of Slavery.” Abolitionists continually harassed the South, overstepping

¹¹ Boardman, *The American Union*.

the bounds of their duty in order to interfere with matters not within their purview. Throughout his discussion of abolitionists, Boardman painted the picture of a woman refusing the attentions of a particularly boorish suitor: "The South declines the proffered civility; but they press their attentions . . . her officious friends insist upon [interference] as their right to help her manage her private affairs." Such meddling only served to intensify sectional division and thereby undermine the cause of antislavery. It was as if, Boardman noted, abolitionists were drawing slaves into an embrace the like of which had not been experienced since the days of the Inquisition, which while "clasping the victim in its arms and pressing him to its bosom, transfixed him with a thousand concealed spikes and poniards."¹³ Boardman made the case that an intact Union was the greatest hope for slaves; abolitionism was far more destructive than it was redemptive. Rev. Thomas Brainerd felt similarly that radical abolitionism served to agitate more than to save. Abolitionists were characterized by "self-complacency, without virtue; and by loud claims to one equivocal charity, and loud laudations of themselves and slander of all others." By pursuing abolition single-mindedly, abolitionists were like modern Pharisees, full of self-righteousness but little grace.¹⁴

Rev. Thomas Brainerd felt a similar dislike for both the extremes of radical abolitionism and proslavery sentiment in the South. Born in 1804 in New York, Brainerd was converted during a revival led by Charles Finney and ordained in the Presbyterian church in 1831. Before being called to minister in Philadelphia, Brainerd assisted in the ministry of noted Presbyterian Lyman Beecher. When the Presbyterian church split in

¹² Brantly, *Our National Troubles*.

¹³ Boardman, *The American Union*.

¹⁴ Brainerd, *Who is Responsible for the Present Slavery Agitation?*

1836, Brainerd followed the New School, but retained a reputation for moderation and was deeply disturbed by the divisions between North and South, particular those encouraged by the presence of extremism.¹⁵ Just as abolitionism presented a danger to Christian spirit and unity, proslavery sentiment in the South presented similar dangers to the nation and the church. In the times of their founding fathers a minister of the Gospel who used scripture in the defense of slavery “would have been regarded as insane or imbecile.” Even as recently as twenty-five years prior, Brainerd noted, one Mississippi minister attempted to do so and was understood to be “partially insane on account of this effort.” However the North was now being asked to act against the interest of that historic antislavery sentiment, leaving slaves “bereft of schools, Bibles, marriage and civil rights, and legal protection, and all this under sanction of our holy and beneficent religion.” This imposition went against not only “the spirit of Christianity,” but all the “declarations and moral foundations on which our revolutionary fathers based their appeals to God.” In short, southerners were suggesting a compromise that was no compromise at all, demanding northerners to renounce their deeply held beliefs in order that the South “might be safe.” Unfortunately for the South, Brainerd noted wryly, “Northern clergymen and honest Christian men in our churches, do not hold their principles on swivels.” Christian duty then involved striking a delicate balance between maintaining principles and truths, while not conceding to an unchristian spirit.

As tensions over slavery heightened, Philadelphians grew increasingly concerned with hostility toward the North among southerners, seeing it as a real threat to the nation’s unity. In a letter to Rev. Henry Boardman, Horace Binney, a prominent Philadelphia

¹⁵ Mary Brainerd, *Life of Rev. Thomas Brainerd, D.D.: For Thirty Years Pastor of Old Pine Street*

lawyer, expressed his uncertainty in the face of southern extremism and hostility. Describing the ongoing Secession Convention as the “late extreme and un-fraternal outbreak,” Binney feared that secession was an “evil beyond the remedy of persuasion or attempt at amendment.”¹⁶ The *Philadelphia Press* was similarly astonished at charges leveled by southerners at the religious press of the North. Refuting claims that northern pulpits and religious presses were “a sort of John the Baptist to pave the way for political demagogues,” the *Press* emphasized the moderate nature of most northern pulpits, which “resounded with so many bold, conservative Gospel appeals in behalf of the rights of our brethren of the South, and the duty of all good citizens to cherish by their every act the perpetuation of our glorious Union.” In Philadelphia in particular, the article argued, friendly feeling toward the South could be seen in the number of southern ministers taking over the pulpits in the city.¹⁷ It was this sentiment of friendship and cooperation that many Philadelphia prided themselves on holding even in the midst of national struggle. Daniel Kilbride has remarked on the historical connections between Philadelphia and the southern planter class, noting that significant pro-southern sentiment existed in antebellum Philadelphia. However, as Kilbride notes, this sentiment experienced a serious challenge during the secession crisis as Philadelphians increasingly mustered in support of the Union cause.¹⁸

Church, Philadelphia (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1870).

¹⁶ Horace Binney to Henry A. Boardman, December 11, 1860, Henry A. Boardman Papers, *PHS*.

¹⁷ “Disunion Saddled on the Pulpit,” *Philadelphia Press* (Philadelphia, PA), Feb 18, 1860. The article mentions Rev. Henry A. Wise, Rev. James Brooks and Rev. Merriwether Winston, as well as the recently invited Rev. Dr. Burrows. The experience of southern ministers in the North will be explored further in the following chapter.

The Power of Conservatism and Spiritual Truth

While many Philadelphians used abolitionism as a foil for conservatism, others emphasized that abolitionism was at the heart of both conservatism and Christian duty. In a sermon given on November 25, 1860, Rev. W. H. Furness claimed that abolition was at the heart of true conservatism and Christian duty. For Furness, true conservatism was in fact progressive. Because mankind was “a thing that lives by growing,” society also needed to evolve. As Furness remarked:

It is the established course of things that men should appear, here and there, and from time to time, to help their fellow-men, either by reviving and reinforcing old and neglected truths, or by revealing new; or, if no guides appear, qualified to inspire and save mankind, events take place, events, which, by their impressive significance, discharge the same office, and approve themselves messengers from God.

True conservatism, then, involved a constant forward movement toward principles of truth. Furness perceived many so-called conservative pulpits as advocating false ideology that, while attempting to remain stationary and cling to its contentment, ultimately “renders all that has been attained insecure.” The South served as an example of this backwardness as it deprived men of freedom of thought. He cast aspersions on the South, arguing that Southern minds had been so corrupted by a lack of true conservatism as to no longer recognize the difference between “the heaven of Liberty and the hell of Bondage.” Where others called for the end of abolitionism, Furness pointed to slavery as the cause of all evil, including the radical elements of abolitionism. Slavery was the antithesis of the divinely ordained principle of freedom and it was the duty of all “truly conservative men” to pursue the abolition anything that impeded God’s will of “a more perfect Union.”¹⁹

¹⁸ Kilbride, *An American Aristocracy*, 147.

¹⁹ Furness, *Our Duty as Conservatives*.

Furness is not interesting simply because of the antislavery sentiment present in his sermon, but rather because of his participation in a larger conversation concerning the meaning of conservatism and its ties to duty. By using the term ‘conservative’ in reference to his own belief in the need to end slavery, Furness draws attention to how powerful the trope of ‘conservatism’ was within Philadelphia, and arguably the nation as a whole, as a means of encapsulating Christian duty. Spiritually, conservatism spoke of divine providence, spiritual unity, the outpouring of faith. Politically, conservatism possessed compelling ties to the Revolution and the nation’s compromise-based founding.²⁰ In adhering to principles of conservatism, Protestants also fulfilled Christian duty and valued spiritual and national unity over ideological differences.

Despite its compelling nature, this type of Christian duty was unable to face up to heightening national tensions in late 1860 and early 1861. Furness provides an example of the shift experienced by Philadelphian Protestants from describing Christian duty as in line with social and religious conservatism to the recognition of spiritual truths of more value than superficial unity. Just as Furness made claims to special knowledge of divine concepts that informed duty, other Philadelphian Protestants throughout the remainder of the crisis connected duty increasingly with the Union’s special relationship with God. Following South Carolina’s secession in December 1860, Furness and other Philadelphian Protestants viewed the intensifying conflict with uncertainty, but still acknowledged the hand of God hovering over the splintered nation: “Above all, we must be prepared for coming events, for

²⁰ Paul Quigley discusses the reshaping of memory of the American Revolution in relation to southern secessionists. By using memory of the American Revolution in service of their own aims, secessionists legitimized their cause and made claims to an authentic American national identity. Quigley, *Shifting Grounds: Nationalism and the American South, 1848-1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 77-83.

crises, that will try our souls, and test what of self-possession, of nobleness, of magnanimity there is in us.”²¹

“Wherefore hath the Lord done”:²² National Sins and the Hand of God

Protestants in Philadelphia saw the hand of God at work in the intensifying conflict. Following the events at Sumter, Rev. Henry A. Boardman noted that two agencies were at work in the strife: the political and the religious, or the earthly and the spiritual. Boardman argued that war was an agent of the divine, chiefly used for the punishment of both “heathen nations, & now upon his own people.” God’s hand was at work within war, appointing leaders, defeating armies and sending victory or defeat.²³ For Philadelphians in the aftermath of Sumter, this belief sparked a serious problem. If God was dictating the course of events, why had the North lost at Sumter? Had they somehow done wrong and lost the favor of God? It fell to Boardman and other Protestants to answer these questions and restore the North’s divine appointment in order that Philadelphians might understand where their duties lay in the conflict.

If war was brought about as a part of divine judgment, what were those sins that had brought about the conflict? After the losses at Sumter and Manassas, Rev. John Jenkins drew attention to national sins and reminded his congregation of their own share of the guilt, alluding to a shared identity between the nation and its Christian citizens. All bore a portion of the nation’s sin, whether they be northern, southern, Christian or otherwise. This

²¹ Furness, *Our Duty as Conservatives*.

²² Henry Boardman, “Deut. 29:24, 25. The War,” *Henry A. Boardman Papers*, PHS. The quotation is drawn from the scriptural passage which Boardman bases his sermon on: Deuteronomy 29: 24.

²³ Boardman, “Deut. 29:24, 25. The War.”

appeal overlapped with earlier calls for national unity, but like with Boardman, Jenkins' argument extended beyond the conservative Christian duty described in early 1860. For Jenkins, one of the chief sins for which the nation was suffering was slavery, which while practiced in the South, had been tolerated by northern Protestants unwilling to spark controversy or risk being labeled abolitionists. As a result, Jenkins argued, northerners "may not ignore this subject to-day. God is dealing with us; and whether we will or no, is obliging us to consider this whole subject of American Slavery in its bearing upon the great interests, social, commercial, moral, and religious, of the American Continent." While northern conservatives had previously hoped that conciliatory speech would stave off conflict, they were swiftly discovering that "God's thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are His ways our ways." God was using the war to teach the North important moral lessons. Only by humbling themselves and repenting of their failure to live up to their Christian duties, as a nation and as individuals, might the ongoing crisis be stemmed and the North be saved.²⁴

Echoing throughout Philadelphian discussions of national sins was the assurance that God only chastened those whom he loved. This was especially portrayed through the linking of the northern people with Israel. The biblical Israel seemed to constantly fall short of God's commandments and yet remained favored by God. By relating themselves to the Israelites, Philadelphian Protestants sought to make sense of northern losses. Although they had lost at Sumter and Manassas, lack of victory did not equate to having lost God's favor. Rev. Henry A. Boardman connected the plight of the nation to that of Israel in the Old

²⁴ John Jenkins, "Show My People Their Transgression." *A Fast Day Discourse, Preached in the Calvary Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia, on Thursday, September 26th, 1861* (Philadelphia: C. Sherman and Son, Printers, 1861).

Testament. In the case of the Israelites, heathen nations had been amazed at “witnessing the ruin of a people whom- to their envy & hate- God had for ages loaded with his favors & exalted to the pinnacle of renown.” Like the Israelites, Americans were faced with the unfortunate knowledge that where they had been blessed, now they were cursed, a state brought about by their own sinfulness. Americans had broken the covenant of God much in the same way that the Israelites had in ancient times. In their “pride & self-confidence,” Americans had ceased to be reliant on God, taking their prosperity for granted. This destructive pride led to the withdrawal of the “educated & wealthy classes of our population” from participation in the political system, effectively handing over “this greatest of our earthly treasures, this noble & beneficent system of government, to the control of the lowest of the people.” Boardman’s argument was reminiscent of earlier conservative arguments against partisanship, as it was these ‘lowest people’ who were guiding the nation’s political debates into “growing acerbity & violence.” Where Boardman differed from conservative arguments, however, was in his solution to this dilemma. If “indifference to political affairs shown by tens of thousands of the intelligent citizens of our country” was the problem, then the only solution was in a reaffirmation of political interest among the best of the population. For Boardman, Philadelphians needed not only to be good Christians, but also good *Citizens*.²⁵

The Duty of Christian Patriotism in War

In Sumter, earlier calls for unity *within* the nation transformed into calls for unity in *defense of* the nation and definitions of Christian duty reflected this shift by including the

²⁵ Boardman, “Deut. 29:24, 25. The War.”

importance of offering support to the Union. Immediately following the news of the bombardment, the Philadelphia *Press* recounted the overwhelming response of patriotism among crowds of Philadelphians. "For the first time in nearly a century," the paper remarked, "an insult had been offered to the flag of the common country, and with the first intimation of the bombardment of Sumpter all party and personal differences seemed to be healed." Pro-secession talk was particularly inflammatory in the post-Sumter climate of Philadelphia. The newspaper reported an incident when a man expressed his feeling that South Carolina had "deservedly thrashed" Anderson and kept her word in expelling federal forces from her harbor. Swiftly following his remark, "a hundred hands were clutching at the profaner's throat and he was hurled from left to right, and back again, in a manner entirely at variance with commonly received ideas of politeness." Churches were not exempted from the extraordinary show of patriotism, with ministers making appeals "for the welfare of those gallant men who had made the first resistance to rebellion," and several services closing with renditions of the Star Spangled Banner.²⁶ Where ministers did not live up to this formula, outrage swiftly followed. On April 28, Henry A. Wise, an Episcopal minister in Philadelphia with southern origins, refused to include President Lincoln in his prayers and was "compelled to leave the pulpit and the church, without preaching his sermon."²⁷ When he was later overheard to "talk secession," Rev. Wise was unceremoniously booted from a barbershop half-shaved. Local newspapers reflected that the divine was the son of the former governor of Virginia and had fled to that state

²⁶ "The City," *The Press* (Philadelphia, PA), April 15, 1861.

²⁷ "Scene in a Church," *Lebanon Advertiser* (Lebanon, PA), May 4, 1861.

following the controversy.²⁸ Wise was not the only southern minister to take his leave of post-Sumter Philadelphia. By May 11, the *Press* noted that at least two others had vacated their Baptist pulpits, although one claimed health concerns as his reason for vacating, both originally hailed from and returned to the South.²⁹

In the weeks following Sumter, most Philadelphia pulpits resounded with patriotic sermons, acknowledging the morality of the war, recommending obedience to the Union and outlining Christian duties in the conflict. Rev. Boardman remarked on the importance of the war among the city's pulpits, remarking on the marvel it was that "ministers of religion [should] cry, "I cannot hold my peace, because thou hast head, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of War." The pulpit occupied a special place in the patriotic conversations that followed in the wake of Sumter. While ministers were not to preach politics, Boardman argued, nevertheless "men do need to be instructed, strengthened, & comforted by the teachings & consolations of the Gospel."³⁰ Likewise, members of the First Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia noted, in a request for publication to Rev. Barnes, that they felt his recent sermon was "well calculated for the instruction of the Christian patriot in these times."³¹ It was the pulpit, then, that did much to define what were the proper responses of Christians to the crisis and defined individuals' duties in the context of the war.

Protestants in Philadelphia were especially concerned with the justification of war against the South. This concern was a response not only to the position of the South, but

²⁸ "Excitement in Philadelphia," *Weekly Mariettian* (Marietta, PA), May 4, 1861; "Secessions from the Northern Pulpit," *The Press* (Philadelphia, PA), May 11, 1861.

²⁹ "Secessions from the Northern Pulpit," *The Press* (Philadelphia, PA), May 11, 1861.

³⁰ Henry A. Boardman, "Jeremiah 4:19 The War," *Henry A. Boardman Papers*, PHS.

also to the influence of Quakerism in Philadelphia. Rev. Boardman was particularly interested in clarifying the war with the Quaker position. He remarked, "It is frankly admitted that at first view, the doctrine of the unlawfulness of War appears to accord with the teachings of the New Testament." It is interesting to note that in the manuscript copy of his sermon "unlawfulness of War" was substituted for "Friends." Boardman complicated the pacifism of the Friends, arguing that as the Bible contained numerous instances of divinely directed wars, war might not be called sinful *per se*.³² In the case of the contemporary conflict, Boardman perceived the war as defensive on the part of the North and, as a result, not "incompatible with the teachings of Scripture." Like 'conservative' had been in the prior months, 'defensive' became the preferred label of the latter part of the Secession Crisis for Philadelphians. Just as Charlestonians situated themselves as responding to an aggressive northern power, Boardman described the North as *defending* the Union's "rights and liberties" from the violations of the South. Boardman related the North's right to defend the Union as akin to that of an individual defending his home from attack: "Would any man see an incendiary about to apply a torch to his dwelling without seizing him—or, if necessary, felling him to the earth?" Just as an individual had the right to protect the life and livelihood given to him by God, so too did the nation have the right to defend its own "divine ordinance." Secession was a "glaring & hostile invasion of [the North's] rights," which the North had tolerated for a while, hoping that "a generous forbearance might win back the Seceded States to their duty." The South had retaliated

³¹ Albert Barnes, *The Love of Country. A Sermon Delivered in the First Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia. April 28, 1861* (Philadelphia: C. Sherman & Son, Printers, 1861).

³² Boardman acknowledged later in the sermon, "many young Quakers of the first families, character, & property, not discouraged by the elders, have turned into the ranks & marched with

with a “murderous assault” on Fort Sumter and Boardman perceived a heavenly voice asking whether the nation was worth preserving. Seemingly in response, “twenty millions of people sprung to their feet & answered, as with the voice of seven thunders, “Yes! & God helping us, it must & shall be preserved!” The South had effectively forced the North to war. It was left for Philadelphian Protestants to muster in support of the Union, which, Boardman hoped, might awaken the South to the seriousness of their position.³³

The duty of Christian patriotism was emphasized in other pulpits as well with Philadelphian ministers reminding their congregations of the necessity of allegiance to the Union. Rev. Albert Barnes noted that passionate love of country was the only response for Christians when the nation was so threatened: “when the hand of violence would tear away all that is great and noble, we do not bring to the solution of the question of duty the cool and calm spirit of calculation with which we examine our day-book and our ledger.” It was no longer a time for reflection or conservatism, rather Protestants were to “rush at once to the rescue, or if too old ourselves, we lay our hands on the heads of our sons, and given them our blessing, and follow them with our prayers as they go forth to defend their country with their lives.” This love of country, Barnes suggested, was alike to the love of a parent for a child and had been implanted in humanity by God.³⁴ Likewise, Episcopal minister J. P. Lundy described the State as an extension of the Family. Just as God had placed Christians within families and instructed them to honor their parents, so too God

the troops.” Clearly Boardman was speaking to a larger conflict between pacifism and patriotism in Philadelphia.

³³ Boardman, “Jeremiah 4:19. The War.” Others also emphasized the defensive nature of the war the North was embarking upon. Rev. George Duffield noted that “Defensive war is absolutely necessary and absolutely lawful,” and that, as the Confederacy was responsible for the first shots fired, the North was in the right. See George Duffield, *Courage in a Good Cause; Or, The Lawful and Courageous Use of the Sword* (Philadelphia: Published by Request, 1861).

had placed them within governments with a similar expectation. By protecting “its subjects in life, property and reputation,” the State safeguarded the church, making loyalty to the State “not only a Christian duty, but a matter of the highest interest.” Lundy called for his congregation to submit in aid of their government, accepting “the sacrifice like men going to a holy sacrament, solemnly, determinedly, and in a spirit of heroic love.”³⁵ New School Presbyterian Rev. George Duffield noted that Christians needed to respond to God’s historic blessing by displaying patriotism. Anything less was “effeminacy and cowardice,” and risked provoking God to “raise up his indignation against us, and to cast us off as a nation utterly and forever!”³⁶ Rev. E. E. Adams agreed, remarking that the Christian citizen’s duty was to “consecrate himself to the defence of the government.” In fact, “the true Christian will pray, and speak, and write, and labor, and die for its success!”³⁷ Protestants in Philadelphia emphasized that God had ordained the war and that the Union represented the interest of God in the conflict. With such spiritual odds at stake, patriotism became a vital part of Christian duty for Philadelphians.

“Evil spirits that yield not to gentle exorcisms”: Christian Patriots, Persevere!

Protestants in Philadelphia scrambled to reconcile the northern loss at Manassas with the knowledge that God’s hand was upon the North. If patriotism was a Christian duty, why had the Union lost at Manassas? Philadelphians had proved themselves patriots in the

³⁴ Barnes, *The Love of Country*.

³⁵ J.P. Lundy, *Loyalty to Government. Sermon by Rev. J.P. Lundy, Preached at Emanuel Church, Holmesburg, Sunday, April 21, 1861* (Philadelphia: Lindsay & Blakiston, 1861).

³⁶ Duffield, *Courage in a Good Cause*.

³⁷ E. E. Adams, *Government and Rebellion. A Sermon Delivered in the North Broad Street Presbyterian Church, Sunday Morning, April 28, 1861* (Philadelphia: Henry B. Ashmead, Book and Job Printer, 1861).

aftermath of Sumter and continued to do so throughout the rest of the year. In May, the *Press* reported proudly that “there are quite a number of ministers in Philadelphia who are anxious to undertake the responsible duties of a chaplain,” while in September, a movement was forming to “raise a company of soldiers to be composed wholly of young men who are members of church” in addition to the hundreds of men already enlisted.³⁸ Patriotism was still an important part of how Philadelphians understood their duties, but as the war’s devastation increased, the lack of northern success loomed large in the minds of Protestants.

To help address this disparity, Philadelphian Protestants described the war as a spiritual trial. Rev. Charles Wadsworth’s Thanksgiving sermon provides a particularly helpful example of this rhetoric. Wadsworth remarked matter-of-factly, “It is never so bad with us that it might not be worse.” Despite the North’s lack of victory, it enjoyed special providence nonetheless, giving Philadelphians cause for thanksgiving. The task before Protestants was to endure the struggle that God might yet bring good out of evil. Wadsworth warned his congregation that there were “evil spirits that yield not to gentle exorcism,” but rather “‘tear and sore,’ even unto a seeming of death, ere they depart forever.” The war between North and South was one such evil spirit and might require a great bloodletting before it would pass. By allowing them to undergo war, God was purifying the nation as gold in a fire, transforming them from a “boastful infidel nationality” into a “reverent and christian people, whose God is the Lord.” In aid of this development, Protestants were to practice the virtues of humility, benevolence, conscience, reason and patience. But more than these, Wadsworth argued, Christians should cultivate faith, “a firm

³⁸ “Religious Intelligence,” May 4, 1861, *The Press* (Philadelphia, PA); “Christian Soldiers,”

persuasion of and trust in God's loving kindness," that they might learn to give thanks to God no matter the circumstance with the knowledge that he would work things for their good.³⁹ For Wadsworth and others, duty was found in perseverance. Northerners were to interpret northern losses within the knowledge that Protestants had already won spiritual victories. Wadsworth invoked the heavenly rewards waiting for Christians in aid of this idea: "Oh, awake to better thoughts! Lift your eye from the low path you are treading to the brighter things before and around you—the divine love that watches over you; the shining angels that wait on you; the eternal city that opens its glorious gates to welcome you!"⁴⁰

Others picked up on similar themes pertaining to the duty of persevering. Rev. E. E. Adams assured his congregation that God had "a glorious purpose for the church in her present trials. It is to purify and prove her." It was for northerners to recognize when God was chastising them for sin, to repent and trust that he would not destroy them in the process.⁴¹ Rev. W. P. Breed emphasized the numerous reasons for which Philadelphians ought to offer God thanksgiving, reminding his congregation that God had shined a light on the North, even in the midst of the dark clouds of war. For Breed, it was the spiritual blessings that Philadelphians enjoyed that were especially compelling. He described, "that victory, more memorable than any ever won by the soldiery of the nations, in which an immortal soul has broken from the fetters of sin, and rushed into the glorious liberty of the children of God . . . the moment of this transition from death to life, will glow in your

September 7, 1861, *The Press* (Philadelphia, PA).

³⁹ Charles Wadsworth, *Thanksgiving. A Sermon Preached in the Arch Street Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, on Thursday, November 28, 1861* (Philadelphia: T.B. Peterson & Brothers, 1861).

⁴⁰ Wadsworth, *Thanksgiving*.

⁴¹ E. E. Adams, *The Temple and the Throne; Or, the True Foundations. A Sermon, Preached in the North Broad Street Presbyterian Church, September 26th, 1861* (Philadelphia: H. C. Peck & Theodore Bliss, 1861).

memories with a lustre, that nothing can eclipse!⁴² By reminding themselves that God was on the throne, dictating events and working for the good of his chosen people, Philadelphian Protestants placed the war within a broader spiritual context. God was at work within the conflict, despite appearances, ensuring the sustaining of both the Union and its people. Rev. Boardman summed up how trust and perseverance gave Protestants assurance in the hardships brought on by war:

Christianity has girded herself with new strength for this day of trial; and that our cherished Union promises, by the blessing of Heaven, to emerge from this conflict, purified by the fires, more firmly established upon its foundations, penetrated with a more humble and grateful temper, and better fitted than ever to help forward the cause of liberty, humanity, and true religion throughout the earth.⁴³

Conclusion

In March 1860 the Presbyterian General Assembly, the St. Louis *Presbyterian* and Philadelphia's *American Presbyterian* had agreed that the church should be characterized by peace, spiritual unity and true doctrine.⁴⁴ By late 1861, these ideals had shifted among Philadelphians to reflect the growing conflict. While the early part of the crisis in Philadelphia was characterized by attention to conciliatory speech and the criticism of the fanaticism, the secession of South Carolina in December 1860 changed the way that Protestants interpreted the crisis and their duties within it. While southerners defended their claims to religious and political traditions, Philadelphian Protestants argued for the divine sanction of their own government and the duty of patriotism in order to defend its sacred cause. In this new formula for Christian duty, Philadelphian Protestants emphasized

⁴² W. P. Breed, *The Lights Which God Hath Shewed Us. A Thanksgiving Discourse, Delivered Nov. 18, 1861, in the West Spruce Street Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: John Alexander, 1861).

⁴³ Henry A. Boardman, *Thanksgiving in War: A Sermon Preached in the Tenth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia on the 28th Day of November, 1861* (Philadelphia: C. Sherman & Son, Printers, 1861).

the importance of patriotic unity among northerners and sound religious doctrine in the absence of peace. Early northern military losses presented challenges to the argument of the Union's righteous cause, however Protestants couched even these difficulties in exceptionalist language, noting that God was testing them for some special purpose. By the end of 1861, Philadelphian Protestants closely connected their duties as Christians with their duties as citizens and patriots.

⁴⁴ "Religious Press," *American Presbyterian* (Philadelphia, PA), March 22, 1860.

CONCLUSION

In 1860, J.H. Cuthbert of Philadelphia hastened to warn his congregation: “Awake, O sleeper! Set thine house in order!” Cuthbert described the need for Protestants to live in preparation of that most important moment: death and the throne of God. Would the believer receive judgment or reward when the measure of his life was taken?¹ Cuthbert’s warning was written for a congregation in the midst of the contentious debates surrounding slavery and secession, but in its succinct definition of Christian duty in the face of death, it can reveal quite a bit more about how Protestants understood duty over the course of the entire crisis and into the war. Simply put, Christian duty entailed living in preparation for death and in hopes of heavenly reward.

Christian duty was a concept with diverse meanings for Charlestonian and Philadelphian Protestants throughout the secession crisis. Definitions of Christian duty varied among Protestants, from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, to the practice of repentance or thanksgiving, from unity to patriotism. However, running through all of these definitions was the recognition of an active and sovereign God whose hand was in the midst of the crisis, determining and shaping events. As Rev. Thomas Smyth also suggested in *The Well in the Valley*, Christian duty was directly connected to spiritual citizenship. Consequently, for Protestants in Charleston and Philadelphia the secession crisis was an extension of this spiritual reality. The themes of unity, spirit and dependence were shared between Charlestonians and Philadelphia and all emphasized the elevation of God above earthly matters and valued a Christian spirit that drew closer to God. While Charlestonian

¹ Cuthbert, *The Prophet and the King*.

and Philadelphian Protestants defined duty in other similar ways throughout the crisis, the secession of South Carolina shifted the ways in which these definitions were applied to the crisis.

The culmination of the secession movement in late 1860 and early 1861, however, encouraged Protestants to define their duties as Christians in relation to divinely ordained sectional identity. However, even while applying duty to patriotism, Protestants persisted in their connection of duty with spiritual identity. For northern and southern Protestants, the government, divinely appointed and blessed, was a representative of God on earth. Support of the government's cause, therefore, helped to fulfill the will of God. Rev. John T. Wightman of Yorkville, South Carolina perceived that the southern victory at Manassas was ushering in the "glowing outlines of the kingdom of Christ."² Even later hardships did not shake Charlestonian confidence in God's favor, for "He will exalt us, if we trust and faint not."³ Despite the experience of loss, Philadelphians too emphasized the divine origins of the cause for which they fought. Rev. George Duffield reflected on "How large an addition to the kingdom of Christ has been made in this land," while Rev. Boardman praised God that, after surviving her current trials, the Union would emerge "by the blessing of Heaven . . . better fitted than ever to help forward the cause of liberty, humanity, and true religion throughout the earth."⁴ As their governments had been shaped and were being led by God, Protestants were obligated to muster in support of their divine institutions. Ideas about what constituted Christian duty were consistently at the heart of Protestant responses to the Secession Crisis and the early part of the war.

² Wightman, *The Glory of God, the Defense of the South*.

³ Howe, *Cast Down, But Not Forsaken*.

⁴ Duffield, *Courage in a Good Cause*; Boardman, *Thanksgiving in War*.

Charleston and Philadelphia provide windows into a larger national trend of Protestants using the concept of duty to interpret the secession crisis as having great spiritual significance and in which northerners or southerners were God's chosen people. While Charleston and Philadelphia experienced the crisis uniquely, nevertheless a similar phenomenon was taking place in other locations in the North and South. Rev. Sylvanus Reed of Albany, New York remarked that defending the government was "the imperative duty of every Christian citizen of the Republic" as its leaders had been divinely appointed.⁵ Rev. Thomas Atkinson of Wilmington, NC argued that the South was in the right in the conflict and that God was testing southern Protestants.⁶ Numerous other examples in other northern and southern cities demonstrate how Protestants elsewhere in the nation used the discourse of duty to make sense of the crisis and their roles within it. I suggest that further research in cities like Albany, Wilmington, New York and New Orleans would show similar results to those discovered in Philadelphia and Charleston. Although these places were all different, Protestant conceptions of Christian duty bridged these gaps, creating a common discourse surrounding the obligations flowing out of faith.

Protestant faith transcended the realm of the personal, which in turn impacted the ways in which individuals responded to the secession crisis and the coming of war. In describing the crisis and war as a spiritual trial and placing themselves at the center of a narrative of divine blessing and judgment, Protestants *personalized* the national crisis. This casting of the national crisis as a spiritual crisis does much to illuminate the motivations for

⁵ Sylvanus Reed, *The Duty of the Citizen in These Times: A Sermon Preached in the Church of the Holy Innocents, Albany, Sunday Morning, April 21, 1861* (Albany: Munsell & Rowland, 1861).

⁶ Thomas Atkinson, *Christian duty in the present time of trouble. A Sermon Preached at St. James' Church, Wilmington, N.C., on the Fifth Sunday after Easter, 1861* (Wilmington: Fulton & Price, Steam Power Press Printers, 1861).

individuals to fight in the Civil War. James McPherson has argued that men fought in the Civil War due to a combination of potential factors including patriotism, ideology, duty, honor and group cohesion. McPherson notes that religion particularly offered many soldiers the ability to cope with violence and hardship.⁷ The experience of Philadelphian and Charlestonian Protestants during the secession crisis offers a glimpse into how religion might also serve as a motivating force for enlistment as Protestants described the cause of the Confederacy or the Union as the cause of God, for which all Christians needed to do their duty.

Looking at the secession crisis through the lens of Christian duty also helps to illuminate the complex relationship between religion and politics in the context of the Civil War. Christian duty both informed and responded to the events of the secession crisis. By attempting to fulfill their spiritual obligations Protestants influenced national perspectives of the crisis, however conceptions of duty were also continually being shaped by national events like the Secession Ordinance, Fort Sumter and Manassas. This complex relationship indicates how permeable the boundary between religion and politics was for nineteenth-century Americans on either side of the national conflict.

⁷ James McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 13.

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