

THE PLUNGE INTO SECESSION: THE PRESBYTERIAN
SCHISM OF THE REVERENDS. CHARLES
HODGE, JAMES HENLEY THORNWELL
AND BENJAMIN MORGAN PALMER

by

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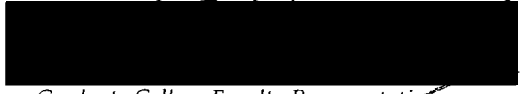
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ABSTRACT

The Plunge into Secession: The Presbyterian Schism of the Reverends. Charles Hodge, James Henley Thornwell, and Benjamin Morgan Palmer

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The Presbyterian Church had one of the largest pro-slavery clergy of any antebellum Protestant church. These men extracted verses and passages from the Bible to prove God sanctioned slavery. Many Southern Presbyterian ministers including Charles Hodge, James Henley Thornwell and Benjamin Morgan Palmer used the pulpit to defend slavery and advocate secession, collapsing political and religious boundaries. I focus on the 1855-1861 debates about slavery in the Presbyterian Church led by Charles Hodge, James Henley Thornwell, and Benjamin Morgan Palmer. I reorient the argument from the usual political and economic accounts of the antebellum secession discussions and build upon current scholarship on the influence of churches in encouraging secession through their cultural and spiritual justification of slavery. Further examination of the role that nineteenth-century theologians created for themselves provides an insight into the cultural and spiritual reasons religious Southerners found compelling as they embraced the political call for secession.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2 THE BIBLE AND SLAVERY.....	18
CHAPTER 3 THE FIERY PATH TO DISUNION: FAST DAY SERMONS OF 1860.....	40
CHAPTER 4 FRACTURED COUNTRY: THE 1861 PRESBYTERIAN CONFLICT.....	60
CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION.....	80
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	91
VITA.....	103

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My thesis is dedicated to my late and much-loved grandmother, Dorothy Lorraine Rayner. She encouraged me to finish this journey of discovery. Without her wisdom, love, and perseverance, I know none of this would be possible. My only wish would be

for her to see me finish the journey; however, she is still with me through spirit, love and faith. I miss you Mee-Maw; my life is not the same without you.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 1864, the editors of the *Army and Navy Messenger* compiled a tract of James Henley Thornwell's speeches and sermons as motivational propaganda for southern soldiers. The tract reminded soldiers of the power of Thornwell's words in the effort of the secession exclaiming his "stirring words, like the blast of the bugle, still echo through the land."¹ After three long years of war, Thornwell's words resonated in new ways:

We can conquer and we must. We can make every pass a Thermopylae...if we are overrun, we can at least die; and if our enemies' possess our land, we can leave it a howling wilderness. But under God we shall not fail.²

James Henley Thornwell was a prominent Presbyterian minister in the South who crafted a persuasive vision that linked the political interest in secession to a compelling religious argument beyond political and economic concerns. His ideas remained powerful and were still central to southern national identity even after his death in 1862 and reminds us of the important role of Thornwell's reprinted words even when the circumstances of the war changed. Thornwell argued that in the face of the changed political climate brought about Lincoln's election the failure to secede would violate the higher law of God.

The Presbyterian Church had one of the largest numbers of pro-slavery clergy.³ Pro-slavery supporters extracted verses and passages from the Bible to prove God sanctioned

¹ "Army and Navy Messenger Tract," *Confederate Morale and Propaganda* (Tuscaloosa: The Confederate Publishing Co, 1957), 58.

² James Henley Thornwell "Army and Navy Messenger Tract," *Confederate Morale and Propaganda* (Tuscaloosa: The Confederate Publishing Co, 1957), 58.

slavery. These verses came from both the Old and New Testaments. They took great care to portray the Bible as a paternalistic and benevolent guide for the promotion and sanctioning of slavery.

Abolitionists, however, used many of these same passages to uphold the Bible's anti-slavery position.⁴ There are approximately one hundred and eighty five verses in the Bible where the word "slavery" is used.⁵ Many Southern clergymen including Thornwell and Palmer used the pulpit to advocate biblical scriptures in both slavery and secession, thus collapsing the political and religious boundaries. My thesis focuses on the 1855-1861 debates about slavery in the Presbyterian Church led by Charles Hodge, James Henley Thornwell, and Benjamin Morgan Palmer. Hodge, a noted Princeton theologian and educator, was a northern minister with southern secessionist sympathies. Thornwell was born and raised in South Carolina and became one of its major supporters of secession. Likewise, Benjamin Morgan Palmer was born in South Carolina but served his congregation in New Orleans, Louisiana. In the year preceding the Civil War, Thornwell and Palmer ardently advocated secession through rallies, speeches, and sermons, while Charles Hodge played the role of peacemaker in the Presbyterian Church.

³ Presbyterians are included in the upper three denominations advocating justification of slavery through the Bible. See Michael O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Kenneth M. Stampp, *America in 1857: A Nation on the Brink* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 114; William McLoughlin., ed, *The American Evangelicals, 1800-1900* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 30-35.

⁴ The disputed Bible verses and passages are found in the books of the Old Testament: Genesis, Leviticus, Deuteronomy and Psalms and the New Testament: Matthew, John, Acts, Romans, Ephesians, Colossians, and First Peter (*The Holy Bible: King James and New International Versions*).

⁵ Edward W. Goodrick, John R. Kohlenberger III, and James A. Swanson., editors, *Zondervan New International Version Exhaustive Concordance* (Grand Rapids, M.I.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999) 1056-1057.

By 1859, their sermons played an important role in mobilizing both South Carolinians and Louisianans to embrace secession in rapid succession after Lincoln's election.⁶

In an effort to outline their religious discourse, I build upon current scholarship on the ways churches influenced the debates about secession through their cultural and spiritual justification of slavery but reorient the argument from the usual political and economic accounts of the antebellum secession discussions, showing how the structures of religious belief systems shaped the conversation. I believe further examination of the role that nineteenth-century ministers and theologians created for themselves provides insight into the cultural and spiritual reasons religious Southerners found compelling as they embraced the political call for secession.⁷ I provide biographical sketches of Charles Hodge, James Henley Thornwell, and Benjamin Morgan Palmer. A biography of each man will trace their shift on the issue of slavery and eventually secession

These theologians were instrumental in encouraging the Presbyterian Church to take a position on slavery in the antebellum period. It is interesting to note the similarities among the men and see the differences in sentiments twenty years before the start of the Civil War. These shifts are important because we see the Civil War as not only a political matter but as a deeply, personal conflict in the religious communities of the nation.

⁶ Secession dates provided by Bruce Catton, *The Civil War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1960), 374. Charles Irons argues Thornwell and Palmer were "representative of southern Christdom" therefore it was not a coincidence that South Carolina seceded first followed within a few months by Louisiana. See Charles Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2008), 213, 218-9.

⁷ Historians argue the need for the investigation of the theological implications and persuasions in the Civil War including Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Michael O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); John Patrick Daly, *When Slavery Was Called Freedom: Evangelism, Proslavery, and the Causes of the Civil War* (Louisville: The University of Kentucky Press, 2002) and C.C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Churches: Denominational Schisms and the Coming of the Civil War* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985).

Additionally, this introduction consists of a history of the Presbyterian Church, including a discussion of the ruling elder position as advocated by the Old School Princeton theologian, Samuel Miller.

Charles Hodge was born in 1797 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania into an educated family. His father, Hugh, was schooled at Princeton and obtained a medical degree. His father died when Charles was seven months old. Hodge was surrounded by an extended familial unit of lawyers, ministers, and merchants. He was a fast learner which prompted his mother to move the family to Princeton so Hodge could attend college. He entered Princeton College in 1812, then Princeton Seminary in 1816. By 1819, Hodge had finished his seminary program becoming ordained as a minister in 1821. His love and passion for the education that Princeton offered followed Hodge into adulthood. In 1822, he became professor of Oriental and Biblical Literature. He founded the *Princeton Review* in 1825 and was one of its most prolific contributors. By 1850, Hodge was considered a leader in Calvinist theology, thus securing himself a position of authority and respect in the Presbyterian Church.

Like Hodge, James Henley Thornwell faced a future without his father and pursued a career in the church.⁸ Thornwell was born in 1812 in South Carolina into a family with little wealth or education. His father died when he was eight years old and he was taken under the tutelage of a family friend, William H. Robins. Mr. Robins groomed young Thornwell for a law career. After a conversion experience, however, Thornwell decided he would pursue a life in ministry. He was admitted to South Carolina College, now the University of South Carolina, in 1830 and felt compelled to pursue more focused studies

⁸ Biography information for Charles Hodge from Mark Noll, *Charles Hodge: The Way of Life* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987) and Edward Gross., ed, *Charles Hodge: Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian Reformed Publishing, 1998).

in theology. He left the comfort of his birthplace and attended Andover Seminary in Massachusetts.⁹ He instantly disliked Northern culture because of the weather and society.¹⁰ After a brief stay at Andover, James transferred to Harvard but by 1834 he left to attend Columbia Seminary in South Carolina. He was ordained in 1834 and continued his academic career by accepting a professorship in Metaphysics at South Carolina College. He later took a post in Sacred Literature and became president of the college.¹¹ He founded the *Southern Presbyterian Review* and edited the *Southern Quarterly Journal* in 1847 in cooperation with Benjamin Morgan Palmer, another well-known Southern Presbyterian. These journals provided Thornwell with a vehicle to promote his most passionate interests. South Carolina College provided bright young men an opportunity to pursue their theological studies. Benjamin Morgan Palmer studied under Thornwell and formed a life-long friendship.

Benjamin Morgan Palmer was born in Charleston, South Carolina in 1818. His father Edward moved the family to attend Andover Seminary in 1821 but returned to South Carolina by 1824. In 1832, Benjamin attended Amherst College in Massachusetts. He transferred to the University of Georgia in 1837 and graduated from Columbia Seminary in 1839 where he met James Henley Thornwell. Like Thornwell, Palmer did not prefer northern culture and similarly finished his education in the South. In 1843, he was ordained at the First Presbyterian Church in Columbia, South Carolina—the same congregation which once employed Thornwell. In 1847, Palmer co-founded the *Southern*

⁹ There is no explicit reason in the biographies of Thornwell or Palmer why they attended Andover Seminary.

¹⁰ Benjamin Morgan Palmer, *The life and letters of James Henley Thornwell* (Richmond: Whittset and Shepperson, 1875), 2-50.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 2-50.

Presbyterian Review, with Thornwell and in 1856 was called to pastor the First Presbyterian Church of New Orleans, Louisiana.¹²

The Presbyterian Church was one of the largest Protestant denominations in the antebellum South.¹³ In 1837-1838, the church split into two factions, Old School and New School. This was not a sectional split amongst the entire church. The parting occurred because of differences in church government, mission boards and, most poignantly, the issue over slavery. The Old School faction which included Charles Hodge, James Henley Thornwell and Benjamin Morgan Palmer was considered the conservative voice of the Presbyterian Church. The New School favored a less traditional approach to the church's role in society. The Old School felt the New was too sympathetic to reforms such as abolitionism.¹⁴ As a result of their inability to compromise, both sides realized a split was the only recourse. The split also took on a geographical character. New School theologians were mainly located in the Midwest, the northeast (New York), and some of the Border States including Kentucky and Missouri. Many of them took an actual stance concerning the church's doctrinal position on slavery. If slavery was inhumane, they argued, then they had an obligation to defend the right of man to be free. Despite this schism, however, the church did not make an official statement either towards the validity or justification of slavery.¹⁵

¹² Biography information obtained from John L. Wakelyn., ed, *Leaders of the Civil War: A Biographical and Historiographical Dictionary* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, Incorporated, 1998), 306-308.

¹³ Protestant religions dominated the South. See Kenneth M. Stampp, *America in 1857: A Nation on the Brink* (Oxford University Press, 1990), 114 and William Mc Loughlin, ed., *The American Evangelicals, 1800-1900* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 30-35.

¹⁴ Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 448.

¹⁵ James H. Smylie, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1996), 79-81.

Other Protestant churches faced the same internal arguments about slavery. In 1845, the Methodist and Baptist churches divided over the issue of slavery. To many, the schisms in the three major Protestant denominations in the South seemed indicative of secession as these conservative churches were “harbingers of disunion.”¹⁶ The Methodist split resulted from the refusal of the Northern clergy to allow a slaveholder to serve as a bishop.¹⁷ However, neither slaveholding congregations nor clergy members were excommunicated for owning slaves. The Baptist church division was brought on by different issues. The rift occurred because of the Northern Baptist clergy’s refusal to permit slaveholders to serve on foreign missions. The ability to serve on the Baptist mission board was an honored accomplishment. The denial of such an honor to otherwise worthy candidates was considered heresy to Southern slaveholders.¹⁸

The Presbyterian Church followed the teachings of John Calvin. As Calvinists, Presbyterians were devoted to an organized church government under a system of pastors and laymen. Calvinism advocates the proper relationship between the church and secular law. Protestant churches had an obligation to follow national laws while focusing on the glory of God. The majority of denominations stayed out of political issues unless those issues affected its mission to spread the word of God. This position is based on Romans 8:22 which advocates “the church is a community of faith and life that is called to share Christ’s story with the world.”¹⁹ The church possessed the mandate to overthrow a

¹⁶ Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 113-115.

¹⁷ Randall Miller, Henry Stout and Charles Reagan Wilson, eds., *Religion and the American Civil War* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 78-79.

¹⁸ Michael O’Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 35.

¹⁹ James H. Smylie, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1996), 23.

‘tyrant’ who ruled contrary to God’s will.²⁰ This position was a source of contention in the late 1850s as southern Presbyterians reluctantly had to consider the propriety of seceding from the Union. Calvinist theology was based on the “Protestant principle of ‘the Bible alone’ as religious authority.”²¹ If the Bible said it, it must be true. Likewise, if the Bible was silent on an issue, ministers were to refrain from preaching about it. This notion is called the “regulative principle” and was a position developed in Calvinist thought.²² This influenced the broader debates about slavery in the church. Thornwell tended to refer back to this position in his arguments with other clergy about the connection between slavery and secession.

Through their interpretations of the Bible and Presbyterian Church doctrine, Hodge, Thornwell and Palmer were able to develop an argument which created the environment for the church to participate in secular issues. This was necessary for the Old School to refute the less traditional practices of New School practices such as abolitionism. They presented this argument as church doctrine because as Thornwell remarked: “it was presumptive of the Church to speak when Christ has not spoken.”²³ They could not, for instance, condemn slavery without clear biblical proof that Christ had done likewise. Their commitment to this regulative principle was so widely shared throughout American culture that they were able to be persuasive beyond the confines of their own denomination. This persuasion is evident in the 1859-1864 speeches, pamphlets and sermons given by Hodge, Thornwell and Palmer.

²⁰ James H. Smylie, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1996), 24.

²¹ George Marsden, *Religion and American Culture* (Belmont, C.A.: Wadsworth, 2000), 17. For further discussion of the literal hermeneutic see Mark Noll, “The Bible and Slavery” and *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*.

²² Mark Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 377.

²³ James Henley Thornwell, “Preliminary Statements (1842)” *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1873), 3:415.

It was not common for either abolitionists, or those who defended slavery, to use arguments based on scriptural interpretation until the 1830s.²⁴ Other elements of the issue of slavery existed, such as economic implications, political concerns, morality and social woes, and for many these provided more likely targets for debate than the religious aspect. Because slavery was considered a secular issue, the Presbyterian Church did not take an official position on the issue. Most churches preferred to not involve themselves in politics as they were skeptical of the process of the U.S. political system. In the South, the idea of legislating morality was very new in the 1830s.²⁵ Churches typically saw themselves as being above the bickering and unsavoryness of politics. There was no consensus before 1830 that politics could play a part in deciding moral issues; slavery helped change this. Religious institutions had to somehow align themselves to secular world issues without compromising their doctrines. Slavery was not a simple moral issue. This was particularly difficult to achieve especially for the southern branches of the Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian faiths because Southerners lived in the midst of slavery as it was a part of their daily reality.

Before slavery became a political issue, people, including Southerners, had other ideas about how to bring about its end. There were actually more anti-slavery groups in the south before 1830 than in the north. Within the last ten years, historians have begun to explore the capacity of denominations to assert their religious authority over political issues such slavery and persuade their congregations to join the crusade to preserve

²⁴ See Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 2-5 and Robert Pierce Forbes, *The Missouri Compromise and its Aftermath: Slavery and the Meaning of America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 41, 118.

²⁵ Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 2-5.

slavery.²⁶ I argue the defense of slavery, however, was not the only cause of the Civil War but also a consequence of a fractured country's inability to resolve the controversy in either the secular or religious arena and we need to look at how these ministers tried to do that in order to understand the complex defense of slavery in the debates about secession. Slavery becomes an issue too complex for both the church and the government to easily solve.

The position of the Presbyterian Church was to steer clear of involvement in political issues such as slavery. Beginning in the 1850s, Hodge and Thornwell became early supporters of the proslavery position of the Presbyterian Church which sanctioned slavery through a literal reading of the Bible. Initially, Old School Presbyterians had strong ties across sectional lines as Hodge and Thornwell were allies in the preservation of slavery; however, in time, Thornwell's radical approach alienated him from the conservative approach of Hodge. Hodge felt Thornwell overstepped his boundaries as a "ruling elder" of the Presbyterian Church because he engaged in preaching about the secular issue of slavery.²⁷

The ruling elder was a position of influence in the Presbyterian Church in 1831. Samuel Miller, a revered theologian of the Presbyterian Church, had outlined the qualifications of the office of the ruling elder. His essay, "The Ruling Elder" addressed

²⁶ Examples include: Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); John Patrick Daly, *When Slavery was Called Freedom: Evangelicalism, Proslavery, and the Causes of the Civil War* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 2002); Eugene Genovese, *A Consuming Fire: The Fall of the Confederacy in the Mind of the White Christian South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998) and earlier historiographies such as Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988) and James O. Farmer, *The Metaphysical Confederacy: James Henley Thornwell and the Synthesis of Southern Values* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1986).

²⁷ Samuel Miller, *The Ruling Elder: An Essay, on the Warrant, Nature and Duties of the Office of the Ruling Elder, in the Presbyterian Church* (New York: Jonathan Leavitt, 1831); Charles Hodge, *What is Presbyterianism?* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1855).

the role played by a ruling elder in church government. This essay provided guidelines because the church needed guidelines as to what kind of man was suitable to the serve in the position. This was particularly of concern to the Presbyterian Church as the morality of slavery was in question in the early 1830s. The role entailed a man to serve on the voting board of a presbytery. There were also “teaching elders” who were supposed to promote the doctrine of the church and for whom, the public advocating of secular causes was discouraged. The issue of slavery added a further contention to the ruling elder position. Hodge felt Thornwell overstepped his bounds as a teaching elder in the promotion of slavery. Slavery was a political issue but Thornwell felt as a member of the elders, albeit a teaching elder, he had the right to inform his congregation of matters which threatened their scriptural rights such as slavery. He also wanted those elders who could vote and assist clergy to be approved by either a minister or have an education. Hodge did not agree with this and embarked on a heated discussion with Thornwell.

After Miller’s death in 1850, the debate over the role of the ruling elder reached a pinnacle when Charles Hodge and James Henley Thornwell traded insults over each other’s interpretation of the position. Hodge claimed Thornwell practiced in a “hyper-hyper-HYPER HIGH Presbyterianism” while Thornwell retorted Hodge represented, “no, no, NO Presbyterianism.”²⁸ The Presbyterian clergy were subject to scrutiny by both ministers and congregations. Pastors needed to present a moral character while using sound judgment in their interpretations of church doctrine.²⁹

²⁸ Charles Hodge and James Henley Thornwell as quoted in, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1996), 86.

²⁹ Karin Gedge, *Without Benefit of Clergy: Women and the Pastoral Relationship in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 122-123.

In 1831, Samuel Miller had declared “the ruling elder, no less than the teaching elder (or pastor), is to be considered acting under the authority of Christ in all that he rightfully does.”³⁰ Hodge did not believe ruling elders needed to be ordained or educated to serve. Elders were a representative of the congregation and therefore not subject to scrutiny of their “role.” This interpretation was based on the verse in 1 Timothy 5:17, which stated “elders rule but do not labour in word and doctrine.”³¹ They assisted the pastor with matters of church government. On the other hand, Thornwell vehemently believed the ruling elders needed ordination because of the risk to the congregation. Elders should be trained as they had the power to vote on important assembly and theological issues. He thought there should be a “distinction created between the ruling class and those who were ruled.”³² If an unsuitable man was elected to office, the congregation’s moral compass would be tainted. Hodge and Thornwell argued over whether scripture required or provided an answer to the form of government the Presbyterian Church must adhere to.³³

The Presbyterian Church was in agreement with Charles Hodge’s interpretation thus setting up the stage for a lifelong adversarial relationship between Hodge and Thornwell.³⁴ Thornwell and Palmer, who took Thornwell’s side in the debate, saw slavery as both a scriptural and state right of which they had the moral obligation to their congregations to promote and sanction. Their roles as teaching elders of the church, they

³⁰ Samuel Miller, *The Ruling Elder: An Essay, on the Warrant, Nature and Duties of the Office of the Ruling Elder, in the Presbyterian Church* (New York: Jonathan Leavitt, 1831), 3.

³¹ *The Holy Bible: 1 Timothy 5:17* and Charles Hodge, *What is Presbyterianism?* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1855), 16.

³² Sean Michael Lucas, *Robert Lewis Dabney: A Southern Presbyterian Life* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2005), 305.

³³ *Ibid*, 70.

³⁴ James Smylie, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1996), 86.

argued, obligated them to participate in a discussion which blurred the lines between the spiritual and secular.

In this thesis I trace the shift of Hodge, Thornwell, and Palmer from fervent Unionism to the acceptance of secession. To do so, I use sermons, letters, diaries, speeches, journal articles, newspapers, and biographies. These sources allow me to follow the transition of these theologians proslavery positions through written and oral discussion provided by Hodge, Thornwell, and Palmer. Additionally, I include the 1860 notice of decision of South Carolina to secede from the Union and the 1860-1861 minutes from the Presbyterian Church's conventions. The comparison of both state and church conventions show us the difficult task each sector had in preparing their citizens and congregations to accept secession.

Secondary sources include the religious and intellectual historians: Mark Noll, Drew Gilpin Faust, Michael O'Brien, John Brooke, Stephanie McCurry, Walter Conser, C.C. Goen, James O. Farmer Mitchell Snay, and Edwin Gaustad. Additional historiographies of slavery include Eugene Genovese, Stephen Haynes and John Patrick Daly.³⁵ Eugene Genovese and Mark Noll explore the tension within churches over the concern of slavery. Studies of theologians such as Charles Hodge, James Henley Thornwell and Benjamin Morgan Palmer offer us a fascinating look into a compelling past. John Brooke argues the contradictions in the Presbyterian Church are reflective of those in the secular world. The predicaments faced in the antebellum period affected both clergy and politician alike.

³⁵ These sources include: Walter Conser, *God and the Natural World: Religion and Science in Antebellum America* (1993); Drew Gilpin Faust, *A Sacred Circle: The Dilemma of the Intellectual in the Old South 1840-1860* (1977); Edwin Gaustad and Mark Noll., eds, *A Documentary History of Religion in America to 1877* (2003); Eugene Genovese, *A Consuming Fire: The Fall of the Confederacy in the Mind of the White Christian South* (1998); Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (2006) and Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (1993).

Drew Gilpin Faust claims it is not difficult to see how contradictions, namely slavery and secession, represented dilemmas faced by all intellectuals both in the spiritual and material worlds.³⁶ Mark Noll argues the American Civil War was the only resolution to the moral dilemma of slavery.³⁷ The divisions over slavery caused “a bloody fratricidal conflict” in the spiritual and material sphere of post-revolutionary America.³⁸

A background of the Presbyterian Church is included to show how the moment of the South Carolina convention is a foreshadowing of the 1860-1861 Assembly meetings. Hodge, Thornwell, and Palmer contributed in important ways to the acceptance of secession as a desirable outcome. This environment encouraged Southerners to engage in secession and ultimately allowed them to accept the impending war as an act of Providence. This was not true for all Southerners, however. Those who felt the Civil War was a holy, just war promoted their cause with vigor and their written record helps us to understand why men fought on in the face of great odds.

My thesis is divided into an introduction and four chapters. Chapter Two explores the biblical arguments within the Old School over slavery within the Presbyterian Church about in the 1850s. By the 1850s, some southern Presbyterian theologians, in particular, Thornwell and Palmer claimed “a divine guarantee that slavery would continue through all history” where as northern ministers like Charles Hodge, saw gradual emancipation of slavery.³⁹ In this chapter, I present the argument between pro-slavery promoters and abolitionists in their biblical interpretations of slavery. I focus on verses and chapters in

³⁶ Drew Gilpin Faust, *A Sacred Circle: The Dilemma of the Intellectual in the Old South 1840-1860*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977).

³⁷ Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2006).

³⁸ James H. Smylie, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1996), 89.

³⁹ Jack P. Maddex, Jr., “Proslavery Millennialism: Social Eschatology in Antebellum Southern Calvinism.” *American Quarterly*, Vol 31, No.1 (Spring 1979), 55.

the Bible which both sides used to claim that their argument was sanctioned by God. Although, the Bible contained passages that condoned slavery, vital questions remained: What was the relationship between master and slave? Was slavery perpetual? Was the American system of slavery racially based? Did the racial basis of American slavery make it different from the slavery sanctioned in the Bible? These questions created an environment in which Hodge, Thornwell and Palmer led the debate about controversial matters. Although the Old School Presbyterians sanctioned slavery, they considered the fracture of the Union as an unpleasant outcome of the controversy. But Thornwell and Palmer ultimately sanctioned slavery when the issue of slavery could not longer be resolved. The remaining chapters of my thesis will focus on the years 1859-1861. This three year span is important because the debates between Hodge, Thornwell, Palmer and the abolitionist groups culminated in a vituperous fervor.

Chapter three concentrates on the final months of 1860 when South Carolina seceded and the fervor of pro-secession sermons increased in the Presbyterian Church. These sermons united the spiritual and secular worlds into an amalgamated front against their northern oppressors. Hodge, Thornwell and Palmer shifted from defending slavery within the Union to sanctioning secession as an act of God. The religious argument sanctioning secession reached those who did not have property at stake and persuaded many who were not compelled by the political and economic arguments alone. In this chapter, I provide an outline and summary of the *Fast Day Sermons*, given by Benjamin Morgan Palmer and James Henley Thornwell after the election of Abraham Lincoln. Palmer and Thornwell claimed every Southerner was required by their Christian faith to support secession because it was God's will for the South to secede from the Union. However,

the act of secession did not necessarily mean war, at least not the bloody war ahead of them. This was different from the 1830s because now political issues were being supported from the pulpit.

Chapter four addresses the 1861 institutional and doctrinal split in the Presbyterian Church. The issue of slavery escalated from a secular matter to a question of morality. Secession was not decided on easily because there were three groups of proslavery advocates: proslavery supporters, proslavery secessionists and proslavery secessionist warmongers, those who accepted the possibility of war. This chapter also includes the *1861 Fast Day Sermon* by Charles Hodge. Though Hodge supported the South's right to secede under certain circumstances, he did not believe slavery was a convincing reason for disunion. Thornwell and Palmer were conflicted over their desire to separate the spiritual from the secular world. Instead of preaching sermons and speeches about the validity of slavery, they now reconciled themselves to promote secession. In this chapter, I outline the 1861 Presbyterian Church convention specifically the Gardner Spring Resolutions, because this is when the church shifts from the national unity of Presbyterians to the superiority of southern spirituality over all others. The fiery rhetoric in the Old School division of the Presbyterian Church reached a pinnacle. By choosing a position in the debate, clergy were either for or against the South's right to secede.

Chapter five traces the influence that Hodge, Thornwell, and Palmer had on the nation after the fall of Fort Sumter. Charles Hodge remained involved in the Presbyterian Church Assembly administration and as a revered theologian. James Henley Thornwell died shortly after the outbreak of war but throughout the war, in part through the efforts of his student Benjamin Morgan Palmer, his words continue to fill the Confederate camps

with hope for the soldiers. The chapter also follows Palmer as he spent the war travelling through the Confederate camps preaching patriotism and morality to the soldiers. Confederate generals welcomed preachers such as Palmer because he encouraged Southern soldiers to accept their Christian moral obligation and fight in the Civil War despite the hardship of injury and illness. Palmer presented compelling arguments that asserted the Confederacy was constitutionally sound, both legally and scripturally. The war was not only a holy war but also an epic one.

Religious leaders did not influence solely the members of their own clergy and congregations. I argue that their writings, including sermons and church doctrine, show us a persuasive form of rhetoric that linked political and religious sentiments of Southerners in a way that helps us understand why people initially agreed to secede and then were able to maintain the resolve to keep fighting even in the face of personal loss. Slavery influenced the daily lives of many Southerners and as people debated the issues they turned to the clergy for answers. The link between secession and slavery was persuasively constructed by religious leaders such as Hodge, Thornwell, and Palmer thus aligning the secular with spiritual concerns. By understanding the linkage of these ideas, we can understand the complexity involved in the decision of the South to secede.

CHAPTER 2

THE BIBLE AND SLAVERY

In the decade before the Civil War, ministers like James Henley Thornwell and Charles Hodge began to make new arguments that bridged the gap between religious faith and advocacy of political issues. The religious arguments over the biblical justification of slavery reached a new level of acrimony in the five years leading up to the Civil War. As James Farmer so clearly states, “the battle of the minds preceded the battle of the bullets.”⁴⁰ For many Americans, interpretations of scriptures that ‘endorsed’ slavery were credible when interpreted by well-respected and knowledgeable clergy members such as Hodge, Thornwell and Palmer.⁴¹ The authority of these ministers influenced southern congregations to accept slavery as an arrangement sanctioned by God rather than just a form of labor relations in part because they kept so much of their rhetoric rooted in scripture.⁴² Southern religious leaders insisted that the Bible stood as their collective test of controversial moral issues.⁴³ Eventually, with their positions hardening through years of sectional debate, James Henley Thornwell and Benjamin Morgan Palmer believed they had the right as ruling clergy of the Presbyterian Church to encourage Presbyterians and all Christians to accept slavery as God’s will and to ensure

⁴⁰ James Oscar Farmer, *The Metaphysical Confederacy: James Henley Thornwell and the Synthesis of Southern Values*, (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1986), 10.

⁴¹ Chapters in the *Holy Bible* which mention the word slavery include: *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Psalms, Matthew, John, Acts, Romans, Ephesians and Colossians*.

⁴² Eugene Genovese, *A Consuming Fire: The Fall of the Confederacy in the Mind of the White Christian South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 3-12.

⁴³ John Patrick Daly, “Holy War: Southern Religion and the Road to War and Defeat”, *North and South: The Magazine of Civil War Conflict*, 6:6 (2003): 36.

that their congregations understood the importance of such a mission. One major obstacle, however, remained.⁴⁴

Before 1830, the Presbyterian Church prohibited its clergy from involving themselves with political and social issues. In 1837, controversy over this issue caused a split in the church. The dissenting group, calling itself the New School to distinguish itself from the Old School began to engage more actively in political issues. The Old School Presbyterians did not believe the church had the authority to officially take a stand on the issue of slavery. Political issues, Old School ministers argued, did not belong in the pulpit. Thornwell, a prominent member of the Old School, led the argument over the morality of slavery and justified the involvement of the Presbyterian Church in the 1850s discussions of slavery and later, in the 1860 and 1861 issue of secession because he argued that there was a biblical basis for political discussions.⁴⁵ Three fourths of the Old School Presbyterian clergy were slave owners, so it was no surprise that they were among the most outspoken advocates for slavery.⁴⁶

Although slavery was generally seen as a moral, economic and political issue, Thornwell, Hodge and Palmer came to see that it was a scriptural right that no government could take that away from a man.⁴⁷ This was a counter argument to the abolitionists' use of William Lloyd Garrison's "higher law" argument. The integration of national politics and moral causes was a developing idea in the nineteenth-century. The Presbyterian

⁴⁴ James Henley Thornwell, "Dr. Thornwell On Ruling Elders" *Spirit of the Nineteenth Century*, *Southern Presbyterian Review* (December 1843), unnumbered.

⁴⁵ This argument is discussed fully in James Henley Thornwell, "Relation of the State to Christ (1861)," *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1873), 4:549-556.

⁴⁶ James O. Farmer, *The Metaphysical Confederacy: James Henley Thornwell and the Synthesis of Southern Values* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1986), 201.

⁴⁷ James Henley Thornwell, "Relation of the Church to Slavery (1850)," *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1873), 4:381-397.

Church could not avoid defining the role politics played in the pulpit and congregations if any.

Garrison was the editor of *The Liberator*, an antislavery newspaper. He believed that “to say everything in the Bible is to be believed, simply because it is found in that volume, is equally absurd and pernicious.”⁴⁸ Garrison believed a higher law than the Bible was a man’s rights in nature.⁴⁹ Slavery was an inhumane condition and not natural. It was the right of man to be free, not confined because of a biblical interpretation.⁵⁰ Garrison did not undermine the authority of the Bible, just the authority of the people who interpreted it.

Insofar as the government threatened to outlaw something the Bible allowed, Thornwell saw state-sponsored abolition as an interference into a church’s right to apply its interpretation of the Bible to slavery. In effect, he argued for the separation of church and state, to argue for the integration of church and state. The church needed to be involved in politics in order to keep the government out of the religious realm. If religion was present in politics, then politics and the morality of the church would go hand in hand; there would be no distinction between the two but an “official” separation. To Thornwell, slavery was both a scriptural and state right whereas abolition was not a scriptural right and thus had no authority to determine the morality of slavery.

Thornwell, Hodge and Palmer believed a man had a scriptural right to own a slave. James Henley Thornwell emerged as the leader of the Presbyterian pro-slavery position and he devoted the last thirteen years of his life arguing that the Bible sanctioned slavery.

⁴⁸ William Lloyd Garrison, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 387.

⁴⁹ Mark Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 387-388.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 387-388.

Thornwell relished his role and was known for his fiery spirit. He was charismatic as well as impetuous. Thornwell was considered the “Calhoun of the church” because of his fiery and passionate personality.⁵¹ Thornwell professed, “The Scriptures not only fail to condemn Slavery, they as distinctly sanction it as any other social condition of man.”⁵² To Thornwell, if the Bible endorsed slavery, then no man could deny it another man’s right to own a slave. “If the Church is bound to abide by the authority of the Bible, and that alone, he argued, she discharges her whole office in regard to Slavery.”⁵³ The Bible sanctioned slavery thus the Church had no right or reason to assert an argument to the issue. The Church was bound by the Bible to respect and honor its teachings and commands. Christians had an obligation, Thornwell argued, to protect the sanctity of slavery or sin against God.⁵⁴ Hodge, Thornwell and Palmer did not believe slavery was a sin because the Bible did not explicitly condemn it. All three theologians believed that the Bible sanctioned slavery as a natural, human condition thus no debate should take place because even a debate was against the will of God. Because slavery was the will of God, all Christians were obligated to protect it, or fail in their Christian duty. Slavery was not a sin. The sin as the failure to accept slavery as God’s will.

James Henley Thornwell took a personal role in guiding the Presbyterian Church to resolve the issue surrounding the dissent over slavery. Passages that mentioned slavery

⁵¹ Senator John Caldwell Calhoun served in the South Carolina senate from 1832-1843. He was considered to be a zealous, passionate politician who dominated the South Carolina legislature and was a leader in Southern politics. See William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 264-266. For Thornwell comparison see James W. Silver, *Confederate Morale and Church Propaganda* (Tuscaloosa: The Confederate Publishing Co, 1957), 16 and Erskine Clarke, “Southern Nationalism and Columbia Theological Seminary,” *American Presbyterians* 66:2(Summer 1988), 26.

⁵² James Henley Thornwell, “Relation of the Church to Slavery (1850),” *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1873), 4:385.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 4: 385.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 4: 384.

were easy to find in the Bible, but Thornwell's interpretation of those passages became a source of controversy. Thornwell found an approach to connect a traditional Old School theology with a progressive New School approach. In order to appease the New School theologians and deflect abolitionists' arguments, Thornwell argued that the coming of Christ did not change fundamental truths about slavery. Anti-slavery promoters claimed the mention of slavery did not prove Christ's sanctioning of either the institution or its moral fiber.⁵⁵ Thornwell disagreed because slavery appeared in both the Old and New Testaments. He cited verses in the Old and New Testaments such as Exodus, Chapter 21:2-21 (Old) and Colossians 3:22 (New):

If thou buy a Hebrew servant, six years shall he serve; and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing...And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free; Then his master shall bring him unto the judges [and] Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.⁵⁶

To Thornwell, the mere mention of slavery in the Exodus verse was evidence that God did not condemn slavery. If God sanctioned slavery then man could not condemn it, in any form. Anything contrary was immoral.⁵⁷ This argument was central to Thornwell's and the southern Old School Presbyterian position, including the stance of Benjamin Morgan Palmer, on slavery. God allowed a master to brand his slave therefore, marking a

⁵⁵ Walter H. Conser., Jr., *God and the Natural World* (Columbia, S.C., University of South Carolina, 1993), 95.

⁵⁶ *The Holy Bible: King James Version*, Exodus 21:2-19 and Colossians 4:10 (Nelson Bibles, 2006).

⁵⁷ Abolitionists also used the book of Exodus in the Bible to prove their case against the morality of slavery. Exodus 21: 16, "Whoever steals a man, whether he sells him or is found in possession of him, shall be put to death. For a history of the argument between pro-slavery and abolitionists in the context of the morality of slavery see Jon Meacham, *American Gospel: God, the Founding Fathers, and the Making of a Nation* (New York: Random House, 2007), 123-124. Other verses in the Bible used by both pro-slavery supporters and abolitionists include: Leviticus 25:45 and 1 Corinthians 7:20-21; The terms God and Christ are used interchangeably in the sermons and speeches of James Henley Thornwell.

slave as property was moral and legal.⁵⁸ Slavery was not a sin and the Bible sanctioned the ownership of slaves; opposition to slavery was opposition to God.”⁵⁹ His explanation was directed toward the arguments made by both gradualist and immediate abolitionists.

In his 1850 sermon, *Relation of the Church to Slavery*, Thornwell stated, “Certain it is, that no direct condemnation of slavery can be found in the sacred volume.”⁶⁰ The scriptures sanctioned slavery as “any other social condition of man.”⁶¹ In this sense, slavery, Thornwell argued, was a social condition not a relationship based on racial difference. In Thornwell’s opinion, abolitionists had no argument or basis for their judgment on slave-owners and slavery. He resented the interference of abolitionists, especially Northerners: They “curse us with their sympathies” for our slaves.⁶² Thornwell believed the Bible was clear on the issue of slavery; the controversy was caused by man’s own misinterpretation of the scriptures: “Opposition to slavery has never been the offspring of the Bible. It has sprung from visionary theories of human nature and society; it has sprung from the misguided reason of man.”⁶³ Thornwell reasoned that abolitionists were misguided and their arguments were based on a flawed understanding of the Bible.

⁵⁸ James Henley Thornwell, “Relation of the Church to Slavery (1850)” and “The Christian Doctrine of Slavery (1850),” *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1873), Vol. 4.

⁵⁹ Edward H. Sebesta and Euan Hague, “The U.S. Civil War as a Theological War: Confederate Christian Nationalism and the league of the South,” *Canadian Review of American Studies (Revue canadienne d’etudes americaines)* 32:2 (2002), 271.

⁶⁰ James Henley Thornwell, “Relation of the Church to Slavery (1850)” and “The Christian Doctrine of Slavery (1850),” *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1873), 4: 385-387.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 4: 385-387.

⁶² *The rights and duties of masters. A sermon preached at the dedication of a church erected in Charleston, S.C., for the benefit and instruction of the coloured population by Rev. J.H. Thornwell* (Charleston, S.C.,: Walker and James Press, 1850), 109.

⁶³ For further discussion of the various schools of interpretation of the Bible see: Mark Noll, “The Bible and Slavery,” *Religion and the American Civil War* (Oxford University Press, 1998) and *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 49-50. Quote by James Henley Thornwell, “Relation of the Church to Slavery (1850),” *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1873), 4:393.

The failure of the anti-slavery protestors to understand the teachings of the Bible made them responsible for the confusion about slavery.

Charles Hodge also supported the pro-slavery argument when the Presbyterians split in 1837. He condemned the mistreatment of slaves but did not explicitly condemn the institution itself. "Slavery was not an evil as such, but the American system of slavery was."⁶⁴ He was much more moderate in his position than Thornwell and Palmer. Hodge believed slavery would come to an eventual end.⁶⁵ Until that time, masters were obligated to treat their slaves with respect and humanity. By contrast, other pro-slavery supporters claimed "Israelite slavery had been far harsher than the slavery of the South," arguing that as an institution, American slavery was consistent with a paternalist vision.⁶⁶ For his part, Thornwell did not indicate whether slavery in the Bible in either the Old or New Testament sanctioned an end to the institution or its harshness. He did not offer his opinion on whether American slavery was as cruel as Israelite slavery as there was no easy answer to that question. Thornwell simply justified the existence of the institution. He did not feel the humanity of slavery was the issue, only its existence.

Thornwell accused the abolitionists of causing the confusion in the discussion of slavery. He saw anti-slavery groups even within his own church as evil and not of God. Their opinions were not Christ-driven nor found in the Bible. In Thornwell's opinion, the struggle between an abolitionist and a slaveholder was no less a struggle between Christ

⁶⁴ Mark Noll, *Charles Hodge: The Way of Life* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987), 30 and *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 50.

⁶⁵ Charles Hodge originally supported slavery and verbally attacked anti-slavery supporters. He supported gradual emancipation but did not believe any man had the power to completely abolish slavery in the South. See David Torbett, *Theology and Slavery: Charles Hodge and Horace Bushnell* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2006), 92-93.

⁶⁶ E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: New York University Press, 2003), 501.

and “anti-Christ.”⁶⁷ Thornwell felt he spoke for all Christians in his 1850 sermon, *The Christian Doctrine of Slavery*,

The parties in this conflict are not merely Abolitionists and Slaveholders, they are Atheists, Socialists, Communists, Red Republicans, Jacobins on one side, and the friends of order and regulated freedom on the other. In one world, the world is the battleground, Christianity and Atheism on the combatants, and the progress of humanity the stake.⁶⁸

To Thornwell, abolitionists threatened the whole idea of a Christian nation. Thornwell did not view slavery as a merely American controversy but as a global institution which must be defended at all costs.⁶⁹ In Thornwell’s opinion, defenders of slavery were bastions of the highest spiritual and moral backgrounds. Mark Noll argues that ministers like Thornwell had the “easiest task” as defenders of slavery because, in their view the Bible “demonstrated [slavery’s] inherent legitimacy.”⁷⁰

To Thornwell and Palmer, abolitionists sinned against God and their own country. From his vantage point in a non-slave state, Charles Hodge was not as defiant as Thornwell and Palmer but still found abolitionists distasteful.⁷¹ Their argument was that slavery was consistent with moral economy whereas abolitionists’ argued that it threatened moral economy.⁷² Because the matter of slavery was so closely tied to the question of private property, the religious debates could shift from defense of slavery to an argument of moral economy. Thornwell and Palmer effectively argued for the biblical

⁶⁷ Randall Miller, Henry Stout and Charles Reagan Wilson, eds., *Religion and the American Civil War* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 80.

⁶⁸ James Henley Thornwell, “The Christian Doctrine of Slavery (1850),” *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1873), 4:405-406.

⁶⁹ Walter H. Conser, Jr., *God and the Natural World: Religion and Science in Antebellum America* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 109.

⁷⁰ Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 50, 115.

⁷¹ E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 501.

⁷² David Torbett, *Theology and Slavery: Charles Hodge and Horace Bushnell* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2006), 93.

defense of property while connecting any protest to an act of treason against God. In 1850, Thornwell admonished the abolitionists in *Relation of the Church to Slavery*,

We are solemn and earnest, not only because we deplore a schism in the body of Christ, but because we deplore a schism among the confederated States of this Union. We know what we say when we declare our deliberate conviction, that the continued agitation of Slavery must sooner or later shiver this government into atoms.⁷³

Thornwell realized a break in the Union could happen because both sides were unable to reach a fair compromise on the issue and the burden was on the church to set a good example. But any discussion of secession was neither inevitable nor inherently a desired outcome of the arguments over slavery. The issue at hand during this time in the 1850s, was the instruction and proper benevolence toward the slaves themselves. Along with Thornwell, Charles Hodge promoted the benevolence of the southern plantation system and wrote about the proper relationship between a master and slave.⁷⁴

Along with his support for gradual emancipation, Charles Hodge believed slaves deserved humane treatment. Slaves should have basic rights such as “the right to marry, raise a family...receive religious instruction, own property and protection from abuse.”⁷⁵

Thornwell also instructed the master in terms of slave treatment. In his opinion, God allowed man to own a slave (servant) but with a personal responsibility. Although Thornwell endorsed the biblical justification of slavery, he, along with Palmer, was concerned with the physical welfare and spiritual salvation of the slaves. They wrote extensively and went to great lengths to define the proper relationship between slave and

⁷³ James Henley Thornwell, “Relation of the Church to Slavery (1850),” *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1873), 4:394-96.

⁷⁴ Charles Hodge, “Slavery,” *Theology and Slavery: Charles Hodge and Horace Bushnell* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2006), 82-83.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 82-83.

master; also the connection between society and slaves.⁷⁶ Thornwell believed he correctly interpreted the nature of slavery and submitted himself as representative of the Christian position.⁷⁷ This is how Thornwell and Palmer reconciled slavery with morality. If they promoted the well-being and treatment of slavery, then how can it be considered inhumane and unethical? The major difference between Hodge and Thornwell was the gradual emancipation of slaves. Thornwell saw no end to the institution while Hodge viewed slavery as a temporary system of labor.

In *The Christian Doctrine of Slavery* (1850), Thornwell extolled the instructions in Colossians 4:1: "Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal, knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven."⁷⁸ Fundamental to Thornwell's position was his defense of an ordered, paternal society where each person was placed in a natural order. He argued that slaves were slaves because God had destined this to be their place in society. Slavery was an extension of patriarchal subjection. The only right of the master was to the labor of his slave.⁷⁹ The Bible instructed masters not to mistreat slaves therefore there was no biblical basis for the mistreatment of slaves. Though Thornwell

⁷⁶ See James Henley Thornwell, "The Christian Doctrine of Slavery (1850)" and "Report on Slavery (1851)" and Benjamin Morgan Palmer's activity in the "General Assembly of 1859," *The Life and Letters of Benjamin Morgan Palmer* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1906), 188-192; To Thornwell, the morality of the South, certainly the evangelical south, rested solely in the flawed "benevolent" nature of slavery. For further discussion of the connection of "southernism" and morality of slavery see: Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders Worldview* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 365-382.

⁷⁷ James Henley Thornwell was thought to be the south's most effective intellectual especially on matters such as slavery and the Bible. See Michael O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), Vol.2, 1098; James O. Farmer, *The Metaphysical Confederacy: James Henley Thornwell and the Synthesis of Southern Values* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1986; John Patrick Daly, *When Slavery Was Called Freedom: Evangelicalism, Proslavery, and the Causes of the Civil War* (Louisville: The University of Kentucky Press, 2002) and Eugene Genovese, *A Consuming Fire: The Fall of the Confederacy in the Mind of the Christian South* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998).

⁷⁸ James Henley Thornwell, "The Christian Doctrine of Slavery (1850)," *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1873), 4:406 and *The Holy Bible*, King James Version, Colossians 4:1.

⁷⁹ James Henley Thornwell, "The Christian Doctrine of Slavery (1850)," *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1873), 4:405-408.

lectured slave-owners on the proper relationship to their slaves, there was no way to follow up with the masters as to their proper “duty.” There was no committee on the regulation of slave treatment. At the same time, Thornwell insisted that the slave also had certain human rights, which involved all the essential rights of humanity: the right to acquire knowledge, right of family relations and establishments, and the right to personal safety.⁸⁰ Thornwell’s instructions were generally directed to masters to school their slaves in Christian beliefs. Southern slaveholders did seek to convert slaves to Christianity, but largely to control their ability to revolt. Not all slaves easily converted to Christianity and many were critical of their masters’ personal relationship to God.”⁸¹ The regulation of slaves through Christianity was a form of an “internal police” in the South.⁸² Christian teachings did not encourage slaves to revolt because they would see that slavery was God’s will.

The solemnest of a master’s duties, Thornwell argued, was to “give to the servants, to the utmost extent of their ability, free access to the instruction and institutions of the gospel.”⁸³ Masters must fulfill their Christian duties and provide adequate religious instruction to their slaves. Additionally, adequate provisions such as food, water, and clothing were to be administered to the slaves. A slave should be allowed to secure his own family unit without fear that his wife or children would be sold. Lastly, slaves

⁸⁰ James Henley Thornwell, “The Christian Doctrine of Slavery (1850),” *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1873); for further discussion see James O. Farmer, *The Metaphysical Confederacy: James Henley Thornwell and the Synthesis of Southern Values* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1986), 223-228.

⁸¹ Anthony S. Parent, Jr., *Foul Means: The Formation of a Slave Society in Virginia, 1660-1740* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 240.

⁸² John L. Brooke, “Culture of Nationalism, Movements of Reform, and the Composite-Federal Polity: From Revolutionary Settlement to Antebellum Crisis.” *Journal of the Early Republic* 29 (Spring 2009), 25.

⁸³ James Henley Thornwell, “The rights and duties of masters”. *A sermon preached at the dedication of a church erected in Charleston, S.C., for the benefit and instruction of the coloured population.* (Charleston, S.C.: Press of Walker & James, 1850), unnumbered.

deserved relative assurance of protection from unjustified abuses such as at will whippings, the withholding of food /water, and denial of Christian instruction. To Thornwell, a slave's physical self was just as valuable as his spiritual mind.⁸⁴

Although Thornwell promoted humanitarianism in slavery, he admitted slavery was the result of a fallen human condition. Thornwell and other Protestant pro-slavery advocates extracted verses from First Peter, in which Peter, the Apostle, instructs servants to bear pain as a sign of devotion to Christ. The 'discomfort' they endure, Peter argues, is immeasurable to the pain Christ paid to cleanse us of our sins. "For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God... For even hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps."⁸⁵ He surmised that a slave was to align himself with the sufferings of Christ. God allowed the suffering as though it was a natural part of their existence. Thornwell concluded, "their services to their masters are duties which they owe to God, that a moral character attaches to their works, and that they are the subjects of praise or blame according to the principles upon which their obedience is rendered."⁸⁶ Whether or not punishment from his master is wrong, a slave should think of the pain as indicative of his predestined life and possible salvation. For Thornwell, the goal was to promote Christian behavior by masters and bring as many slaves into the church as possible to facilitate the benevolent, paternalistic model of slavery that was consistent

⁸⁴ James Henley Thornwell, "The rights and duties of masters". *A sermon preached at the dedication of a church erected in Charleston, S.C., for the benefit and instruction of the coloured population.* (Charleston, S.C.: Press of Walker & James, 1850), unnumbered.

⁸⁵ *The Holy Bible: New International Version and King James Version*, First Peter 2:19-21, (Nelson Bibles, 2006).

⁸⁶ James Henley Thornwell, "The Christian Doctrine of Slavery (1850)," *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1873), 4:411.

with Christian teaching. From his perspective, the American institution of slavery was becoming closer to what he believed God had intended with every passing day.⁸⁷

The majority of southern Old School Presbyterian theologians joined Thornwell in the defense of slavery.⁸⁸ They all believed that abolitionists interpreted scriptures with a political bias to halt the expansion and the practice of slavery. Thornwell asserted that abolitionists:

Settled it in their own minds that slavery is a sin, then the Bible must condemn it, and they set to work to make out the case that the Bible has covertly and indirectly done what they feel it ought to have done.⁸⁹

The Old School firmly believed in the absolute truths of scripture.⁹⁰ Any contradiction to the literal word of the Bible was a faulty interpretation. The debate escalated as the evangelicalism of the Second Great Awakening in the 1830s contributed to the ability of man to interpret the Bible himself. The type of evangelicalism advocated that the text of the Bible was established to be the responsibility of man to read not any particular church or doctrine. Though slavery was only beginning to take its moral roots in the early 1830s, the Second Great Awakening was a persuasive factor in grouping individuals of “like-minded” interpretations together.

As a Northerner, Hodge considered himself a moderate on the slavery question; though he cautioned there should be a limit to the expansion of slavery as all men were subject to God, not each other.⁹¹ He surmised: “The indwelling of the Spirit leads Christians to unite for the purpose of worship, and for mutual watch and care. It brought

⁸⁷ William W. Freehling, “James Henley Thornwell’s Mysterious Antislavery Moment,” *The Journal of Southern History* 57:3 (August 1991), 396.

⁸⁸ James H. Smylie, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1996).

⁸⁹ James Henley Thornwell, “The Christian Doctrine of Slavery (1850),” *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1873), Volume 4.

⁹⁰ Walter H. Conser, Jr. *God and the Natural World: Religion and Science in Antebellum America*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 78.

⁹¹ Charles Hodge, *What is Presbyterianism?* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1855).

them into subjection to the word of God as the standard of faith and practice.”⁹²

Christians, slave or free, had a spiritual responsibility for the well-being of each other.

Slavery may be acceptable, but its expansion amounted to unnecessary excess and therefore became sinful. This was a clear distinction between Hodge and Thornwell.

Thornwell believed the expansion of slavery was justified through the scriptural justification of slavery. Although, Hodge believed slavery was scripturally based, he did not see the expansion of the institution as sanctioned by the Bible.

Hodge, Thornwell and Palmer all agreed the abolitionists spewed gross embellishments of the atrocities in slavery. Abolitionists also argued that southern slavery was not biblical because it was racially based. But from Thornwell’s perspective, southern Presbyterian doctrine actually minimized racial distinctions, as opposed to the godless theories of human origins spreading through the north. According to Thornwell, the white man and the black man were joined into a universal kinship directly descendent from Adam. Thornwell made a special effort to denounce the idea that Africans represented a species dissimilar from Caucasians.⁹³ “It is as idle to charge the responsibility of the doctrine about the diversity of species upon slaveholders, he preached, as to load them with the guilt of questioning the geological accuracy of Moses.”⁹⁴ Thornwell and Palmer rejected the Biblical argument about the children of Ham. This is how they skated around the issue of racially based slavery. If Thornwell and Palmer did not solely use the Genesis story of Ham to justify and scripturally sanction

⁹² Charles Hodge, *What is Presbyterianism?* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1855). 65.

⁹³ Mark Noll, “The Bible and Slavery,” *Religion and the American Civil War*, (Oxford University Press, 1998), 51-52 and E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: New York University Press, 2003), 502.

⁹⁴ James Henley Thornwell, *National sins: a fast-day sermon: preached in the Presbyterian Church, Columbia, S.C., Wednesday, November 21, 1860* (Columbia: Southern Guardian Steam-Power Press, 1860), 49-51.

slavery, then, in their minds, they did not racialize slavery as being indicative of the black race. An attack on their interpretation of slavery was, Thornwell and Palmer insisted, a blatant assault on the Bible and its prophets.

Within this position, Thornwell and Palmer effectively affirmed the common humanity between blacks and white. Rather than see slavery through the lens of race of hierarchy. Thornwell attributed it to a social condition. If slavery ended, he was more concerned about the hierarchy of social order.⁹⁵ However, not all their Old School counterparts such as Robert Lewis Dabney, an Old School minister in Virginia, agreed with their position of common humanity with the slave population. Like Thornwell, Dabney feared the abolition of slavery would destroy the social order because he was disgusted by the thought of black integration into southern society.

Some evangelical proslavery supporters pointed to racial evidence in the biblical defense of slavery. Robert Lewis Dabney used the story of Noah and the “Curse of Ham” to justify his racial ambivalence to slavery.⁹⁶ Dabney saw the biblical story as proof the black man was destined for slavery and congregations should not include both races in worship. Dabney saw Africans as descendants of Ham, therefore they were subjected to forced servitude. He abhorred the mention of blacks serving on church boards. Dabney advocated for a place of worship “without the disgust of negro politics and the stain of negro denomination.”⁹⁷ Dabney’s position that African Americans were dishonorable was

⁹⁵ William Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists Triumphant, 1854-1861* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 405.

⁹⁶ This school of thought saw the son of Noah, Ham (and his descendants), as cursed by God. The belief is all of the descendants of Ham were dark-skinned because they were cursed. See Jon Meacham, *American Gospel: God, the Founding Fathers, and the Making of a Nation* (New York: Random House, 2007), 124.

⁹⁷ Sean Michael Lucas, *Robert Lewis Dabney: A Southern Presbyterian Life* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2005), 46.

not accepted by Thornwell or the majority of Presbyterians.⁹⁸ The humane treatment of slaves in the Bible was promoted because biblical slavery was not always a life-long involuntary type of servitude. This was not the case in American chattel slavery, which clearly perceived something innately in the black children of black parents.

Mark Noll argues nineteenth-century whites “applied a faulty hermeneutic” to their theories of racial difference.⁹⁹ The Bible may have the word slavery written on its pages, however, it did not validate nor dispute the system of American slavery. As racial prejudice grew in the antebellum period, it “supplied the missing term to many of the arguments that defended American slavery by appeal to scripture.”¹⁰⁰ From within their interpretations of the Bible, Hodge, Thornwell, Palmer and Dabney applied the principle of “the canon within a canon.” This concept recognizes “that theological perspective [may] influence biblical interpretation in ways tending to emphasize some concepts [such as slavery] more heavily than others.”¹⁰¹ This is evident in the manner in which the Old School Presbyterians advocated fair treatment of slaves based on particular scriptures yet justified their enslavement with the same words.

Thornwell believed the Compromise of 1850 established a threat to slavery. He endorsed the right of any slave-holding southern state to secede from the treacherous

⁹⁸ Sean Michael Lucas, *Robert Lewis Dabney: A Southern Presbyterian Life* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2005), 149.

⁹⁹ Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2006), 51-64 and 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), 16. Hermeneutic is the conscious effort to approach interpretation of texts. See Donald Kim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 127.

¹⁰⁰ Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2006), 56.

¹⁰¹ Donald Kim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 39-40.

Union.¹⁰² Thornwell asserted the South had every reason to want to secede from the North as “the issue forced upon [us], is of submitting to a government hopelessly perverted from its ends and aiming at the destruction of our own interests.”¹⁰³ However, he still held fast to the hope the Union was redeemable. He announced in a letter to a former colleague,

I can well and heartily sympathize with you in your despondency in regard to the condition of the country. The prospect of disunion is one which I cannot contemplate without absolute horror. A peaceful dissolution is utterly impossible...I have hardly been able to sleep...may the Lord mercifully turn the tide and send peace and prosperity, at least in our days.¹⁰⁴

No other entity except for God could rectify the prospect of disunion as Man had failed in all attempts to save the nation. Even so, Thornwell remained a moderate on the subject of disunion until the late 1850s.

Thornwell and Palmer spent the mid to late 1850s fostering support for the continuation and expansion of slavery in both their congregations and respective state legislatures. In 1854, Thornwell gave a sermon, directed at the South Carolina legislature, which asserted that the powers given to the state of South Carolina were divinely anointed by God himself. Thornwell exclaimed, “there are no powers, whether physical or otherwise, but those which are ordained of Him...not a sparrow falls to the ground without His will.”¹⁰⁵ He encouraged the legislators to depend on their moral character to

¹⁰² Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 288-299.

¹⁰³ James Henley Thornwell, “Critical Notice,” *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 288.

¹⁰⁴ James Henley Thornwell, “Letter to the Rev. Dr. Hooper,” (1850) *The Life and Letters of James Henley Thornwell*, (Richmond: Whittset and Shepperson, 1875), 477-478.

¹⁰⁵ James Henley Thornwell “Judgments, A Call to Repentance.” *Presbyterian Church Association Historical Center: Historic Presbyterian Documents* (Columbia, S.C.: R.W. Gibbes & Co., State Printers, 1854), 7.

guide the commonwealth of South Carolina.¹⁰⁶ Legislators were moral agents of God “charged with solemn duties to the Commonwealth.”¹⁰⁷

Thornwell defined the state as a “Divine ordinance, a social institution, founded on the principle of justice, and it has great moral purposes.”¹⁰⁸ South Carolina had a moral purpose to submit to God. In regard to those who do not follow the will of God, Thornwell admonished, “God exacts [his will] and demands it, and no State or community can disregard this high and solemn obligation.”¹⁰⁹ By associating the will of South Carolina as in accordance with the will of God, Thornwell helped craft the argument that justified how South Carolina could secede based on political and moral reasoning. He concluded the sermon by explaining if the state were in danger, she could call on God to save her people from harm. He prayed, “O Lord [who] are in the midst of us...leave us not.”¹¹⁰ Though he could call on God for moral support, Thornwell feared disunion and preferred the abolition of slavery to the risk of civil chaos thus becoming a “frightened reactionary.”¹¹¹ He was so vexed about the ability of the disintegrating Union to cause the collapse of the South’s social order that he almost called for abolition to occur.¹¹² He predicted an act of secession would only bring a “reign of terror like that of the French Revolution.”¹¹³

¹⁰⁶ James Henley Thornwell “Judgments, A Call to Repentance.” *Presbyterian Church Association Historical Center: Historic Presbyterian Documents* (Columbia, S.C.: R.W. Gibbes & Co., State Printers, 1854), 11.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 12.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 17.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 21.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, 24.

¹¹¹ William Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists Triumphant, 1854-1861* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 405;420.

¹¹² *Ibid*, 420.

¹¹³ James Henley Thornwell as quoted in *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders Worldview* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 244.

In the last half of the 1850s, Thornwell and Palmer turned their attentions to their northern counterparts in the Presbyterian Church. They admonished the North for perpetuating dissent among the ranks of the church. Hodge, a northerner, supported the southern Old School argument that a schism in the body of Christ was intolerable. In 1859, Hodge claimed that the business of secession was the North's fault. The Southern Presbyterians had no choice but to retaliate to protect its interests. Thornwell previously warned the 'dissenters' of their Christian obligation to obey the word of God. He cautioned the denial of a man's right was one fault but to deny the word of Christ was yet another.¹¹⁴ In 1850, Thornwell exclaimed:

If Slavery be indeed consistent with the Bible, their responsibility is tremendous, who, in obedience to blind impulses and visionary theories, pull down the fairest fabric of government that the world has ever seen, rend the body of Christ in sunder, and dethrone the Saviour in his own Kingdom.¹¹⁵

By declaring that slavery was a sin, anti-slavery opponents contradicted the word of Christ, thus creating blasphemy in the Kingdom of God and attacking democracy.

“Are our country, our Bible, our interests on earth and our hopes of heaven to be sacrificed on the altars of a fierce fanaticism? Are laws made to be made which God never enacted?”¹¹⁶

The South refused to relinquish its slave population as it was not merely a matter of freeing the slaves.¹¹⁷ In 1850, Thornwell proclaimed: “slavery is implicated in every fibre of Southern society; it is with us a vital question, and it is because we *know* that

¹¹⁴ James Henley Thornwell, *Report on the subject of slavery, presented to the Synod of South Carolina, at their sessions in Winnsborough, November 6, 1851; adopted by them, and published by their order*, (Columbia: Press of A.S. Johnston, 1852).

¹¹⁵ James Henley Thornwell, “Relation of the Church to Slavery (1850),” *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1873), 4: 394-395.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, 4: 394-395.

¹¹⁷ For the moral economy of slavery in the south see: James Huston, *Calculating the Value of the Union*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003) and Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1999).

interference with it cannot and will not be much longer endured we raise our warning voice. We would save the country if we could.”¹¹⁸ Slavery was not merely an issue the South could easily let go of. Southern slaveholders and proslavery advocates believed in “the absolute sanctity of property rights” in slaves. Slavery was worth too much.”¹¹⁹ Thornwell connected property rights to God’s will for man. If slaves were considered property by the state, and not denied in the Bible, no one could take that right from man and God’s will was more important than current arguments over the nature of property—the social relation of slavery transcended those contemporary arguments.

Although he was initially against secession, Thornwell discerned it was foreseeable in 1859 because the North unjustly constrained the South to agree to impossible policies such as the denial of the expansion of slavery.¹²⁰ They also remained loyal to the Union although their pro-slavery positions were committed to the South. In Thornwell’s opinion, however, the North’s infringement upon the livelihood of the South, forced him to eventually support the secessionist movement. In an 1860 letter to a colleague, Thornwell conjectured: “Our affairs of State look threatening; but I believe that we have done right. I do not see any other course that was left to us. I am heart and hand with the State in her move.”¹²¹

Thornwell saw the state as a divine entity. Although the church and government supported and governed themselves, in reality, God was divinely head of both the spiritual and material world. The state was a territory where freedom was regulated and

¹¹⁸ James Henley Thornwell, “Relation of the Church to Slavery (1850),” *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1873), 395-396.

¹¹⁹ James Huston, *Calculating the Value of the Union* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), xiv.

¹²⁰ Walter H. Conser, Jr., *God and the Natural World: Religion and Science in Antebellum America*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 110.

¹²¹ Benjamin Morgan Palmer, *The life and letters of James Henley Thornwell* (Richmond: Whittset & Shepperson, 1875), 4:485-486.

slavery was legitimized.¹²² Thornwell and Palmer believed the abolitionist movement and ‘Black Republicanism’ forced secession.¹²³ They reluctantly accepted secession as a possibility, and even a necessity, but Hodge deemed it unjustifiable and immoral.¹²⁴

Secession became a source of contention between Thornwell and Hodge.

Although Charles Hodge agreed that slavery was sanctioned by the Bible, the radical move to link slavery to secession was, in his opinion, overstepping one’s boundaries as a ruling elder. To Hodge, the business of secession was a justifiable right of any individual state but to secede because of slavery was neither biblical nor constitutional. On the other hand, Thornwell and Palmer felt the denial of the right to own a slave meant that support for secession became an undesirable but necessary option.¹²⁵ Initially, secession was justified as a right reserved by the states even though they had ratified the U.S. Constitution, thus it was an issue proposed and debated in political circles. However, with Lincoln’s nomination and election, it seemed like the political climate had been irrevocably changed and with those bonds severed, the strictures against secession were softened. This moment was ripe for the 1860 South Carolina convention to get the support it needed for secession.

¹²² James H. Smylie, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1996), 79-90.

¹²³ “Black Republicanism” was a term used by secessionists to refer to the corruption (black- used figuratively) of the government and in the literal sense of promoting black equality. For further explanation see: William Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists Triumphant, 1854-1861* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 397; 456.

¹²⁴ Sean Michael Lucas, *Robert Lewis Dabney: A Southern Presbyterian Life* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2005), 107-109.

¹²⁵ James Henley Thornwell, *The State of the Country: An Article Republished from the Southern Presbyterian Review, Columbia, S.C.*, (Southern Guardian, Steam Power Press, 1861).

CHAPTER 3

THE FIERY PATH TO DISUNION: FAST DAY SERMONS OF 1860

South Carolina led the way to division of the nation and James Henley Thornwell thrived in the controversy over secession. By 1859-1860, he reconciled himself to the imminent demise of the Union. In December of 1860, he proclaimed, "I believe we have done right, I do not see any other course that was left to us."¹²⁶ South Carolina always saw Lincoln's curtailment of the expansion of slavery as a looming danger because slaves outnumbered whites in the state population.¹²⁷ Slavery became the cross to bear in the decision for South Carolina to secede from the Union. Slavery made the problems in the antebellum period "insoluble."¹²⁸ Although he was late to join secessionists, Thornwell plunged into the debates over secession with vigor. However, he encountered spiritual opposition to his position including from Robert Lewis Dabney, a fellow Old School southern Presbyterian from Virginia.

In September 1860, the *Central Presbyterian News* "denounced disunion and feared it would result in war."¹²⁹ By November of 1860, James Henley Thornwell became the most influential person in the Presbyterian Church.¹³⁰ He wanted South Carolina to lead

¹²⁶ James Henley Thornwell, "Letter to the Rev. Mr. Douglas," *The Life and Letters of James Henley Thornwell*, (Richmond: Whittset and Shepperson, 1875), 485-486.

¹²⁷ Robert Pierce Forbes, *The Missouri Compromise and its Aftermath: Slavery and the Meaning of America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 118.

¹²⁸ Bruce Catton, *The Civil War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin & Co, 1960), 7.

¹²⁹ W. Harrison Daniel, "Southern Protestantism and Secession," *Historian* 29:3 (May 1967), 391.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 391.

the path to secession first thus encouraging other southern states to do the same.¹³¹ South Carolina seceded on December 20, 1860 and “hereby dissolved” any union which existed between the state and “the United States of America.”¹³² Robert Lewis Dabney declared South Carolina, “the little impudent vixen [who] has gone beyond all patience. She is as great a pest as the Abolitionists.”¹³³ He regarded “the conduct of South Carolina as unjustifiable towards the United States at large.”¹³⁴ Dabney was frustrated by South Carolina’s decision to not consult other southern states before it seceded. He felt the state gave the election of Abraham Lincoln too high a priority in their decision to leave the Union.¹³⁵

In 1860, the governor of South Carolina, William Gist, set aside November 21, 1860 to fast and pray on the impending decision to secede.¹³⁶ This was an ingenious bit of legislation to enact: a state-endorsed effort to affirm God was on their side.¹³⁷ As the most preeminent defenders of slavery preachers obtained a wide audience for their position.¹³⁸ Politicians understood this connection between the clergy and society. They used ministers like Thornwell and Palmer to their fullest advantage. Mark Noll argues

¹³¹ W. Harrison Daniel, “Southern Protestantism and Secession,” *Historian* 29:3 (May 1967), 395.

¹³² Woodrow Wilson, ed, “Secession of South Carolina,” *A History of the American People* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1902), 259.

¹³³ Robert Lewis Dabney, “Actions of South Carolina,” *Robert Lewis Dabney: A Southern Presbyterian Life* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing Company, 2005), 106.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, 106.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, 107.

¹³⁶ Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 289.

¹³⁷ James Silver, *Confederate Moral and Church Propaganda* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company Inc, 1957).

¹³⁸ John Patrick Daly, “Holy War: Southern Religion and the Road to War and Defeat,” *North & South: The Magazine of Civil War Conflict* 6:6 (2003), 36.

that the *Fast Day Sermons* were embraced by southern society as they allowed people to “give thanks [so] He may allow the propitious times to continue.”¹³⁹

James Henley Thornwell addressed the South Carolina legislature and his congregation from the pulpit in his 1860 *Fast Day Sermon* and announced it was the “first time” he introduced the material world into his instructions from the pulpit. He was careful to toe the line between acceptable conversation in the church about “social and political topics” such as slavery. “I have never introduced secular politics into the instruction of the pulpit, he declared.”¹⁴⁰ In regards to slavery, he asserted it was “good and merciful [by which its] labor Providence was given us. Like every human arrangement, it is liable to abuse; but in its idea...it is wise and beneficial”¹⁴¹ Thornwell “sought to interpret the political crisis theologically” by preaching the support of secession from the pulpit.¹⁴² By sanctifying slavery, he reconciled the need for secession even though he was a Unionist at heart. He began to use the word “Yankee Spirit” to represent the North and “American Spirit” to represent the South. The latter should “usurp the former.”¹⁴³

In addition to the *Fast Day Sermons*, the South Carolina legislature advocated secession through a series of pleas and arguments of politicians. Congressman William R. Boyce declared South Carolinians must “dare to act with us or our enemies. They cannot

¹³⁹ Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 18.

¹⁴⁰ James Henley Thornwell, “National sins: a fast-day sermon: preached in the Presbyterian Church, Columbia.S.C., Wednesday, November 21, 1860” *The Collected Writing of James Henley Thornwell* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1873), 4:511.

¹⁴¹ James Henley Thornwell, “National sins: a fast-day sermon: preached in the Presbyterian Church, Columbia.S.C., Wednesday, November 21, 1860,” *Fast Day Sermons, or the Pulpit on the State of the Country* (New York: Rudd & Carleton, 1861), 48.

¹⁴² James O. Farmer, *The Metaphysical Confederacy: James Henley Thornwell and the Synthesis of Southern Values* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1986), 261.

¹⁴³ Benjamin Morgan Palmer, *The Life and Letter of James Henley Thornwell* (Richmond: Whittset & Shepperson, 18775), 482-483.

take sides with our enemies. They must take sides with us.”¹⁴⁴ Governor William Gist actually “threatened to send a posse” to close a profitable port in the lower section of South Carolina if they “delayed” the state’s departure from the Union.”¹⁴⁵ South Carolina started the “secessionist snowball rolling.”¹⁴⁶ It was important for the legislature to encourage support for secession. Hodge and Palmer articulated the need for people to support secession through their sermons, thus connecting the church with everyday, vital matters in a tangible way.

Governor Gist also sent correspondence to governors of other southern states asking the officials when their legislatures met and any proposals on the agenda. He needed the support of his own state for secession and desired,

That some other State should take the lead...if a single state secedes, we will follow. If no other State takes the lead, South Carolina will secede (in my opinion) alone, but only, if she has assurance that she will soon be followed by another or other States; otherwise it is doubtful.¹⁴⁷

Gist worried about gaining the support of the citizens of South Carolina to secede. He knew without “reasonable assurances” that other southern states would join South Carolina, he would not receive the cooperation he desperately needed.¹⁴⁸ In order to present a united front to the Union, the three “most secessionist states,” South Carolina, Mississippi and Florida, “pressured” the other states to secede thus preventing any “reluctant potential rebels.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ William Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists Triumphant, 1854-1861*, Volume II (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 382.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 527.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 496.

¹⁴⁷ Governor Gist sent letters to the governors of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and North Carolina; as quoted in *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists Triumphant, 1854-1861*, Volume II (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 385.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 497.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 492.

The southern Presbyterians' support of the confederated states occurred "when it was evident [the] fire-eaters had won control of public opinion."¹⁵⁰ However, Thornwell was wary of the possible outbreak of war in the southern states. He called for secession although "our path to victory may be through a baptism of blood."¹⁵¹ Thornwell knew this "day of reckoning was obliged to come."¹⁵² He now regarded the Union as being a form of "oppression, with treachery, with falsehood and with violence."¹⁵³ If the North would not compromise on slavery, the South had every right to distance themselves from the oppression. Thornwell was one of many ministers who chose this moment to defend secession. Benjamin Morgan Palmer joined in the effort to establish support for the immediate Confederacy. He praised the efforts of South Carolina because she stood out "with dauntless and defiant spirit, fiery temper and venturesome chivalry." He exclaimed "I am a South Carolinian, you know."¹⁵⁴ Like Thornwell, Palmer was at peace with his decision to accept the inevitable fracture of the Union.

Benjamin Morgan Palmer also addressed the Louisiana state legislature and parishioners from the pulpit. One particular address known as "The 1860 Thanksgiving Sermon" stands out. Palmer was so enraged about Unionist intrusion into the southern livelihood of slavery that he called on the state to form a separate nation, thus invoking the call for a southern confederation.¹⁵⁵ The South needed independence to settle the

¹⁵⁰ Margaret Burr DesChamps, "Union or Division? South Atlantic Presbyterians and Southern Nationalism, 1820-1861, *The Journal of Southern History* 20:4 (Nov 1954), 498.

¹⁵¹ James Henley Thornwell, "National sins: a fast-day sermon: preached in the Presbyterian Church, Columbia.S.C., Wednesday, November 21, 1860," *Fast Day Sermons, or the Pulpit on the State of the Country* (New York: Rudd & Carleton, 1861), 24.

¹⁵² *Ibid*, 40.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, 33.

¹⁵⁴ Benjamin Morgan Palmer, *The Life and Letters of Benjamin Morgan Palmer* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1906 (reprinted 1987), 18-19.

¹⁵⁵ Benjamin Morgan Palmer, *Rights of the South Defended in the Pulpits* (Mobile: J.Y. Thompson, 1860).

turmoil of slavery “guided by nature and God, without intrusive interference.”¹⁵⁶

Palmer’s sermon was widely distributed throughout the country as more than sixty thousand copies of his entire sermon were printed.¹⁵⁷ Like Thornwell, Palmer explained, “I have never intermeddled with political questions.”¹⁵⁸ Slavery, however, was the will of God therefore because of the North’s denial of a Christian’s right to own a slave; secession was part of God’s will for the South. Secession represented the express will of God and “is a duty which we owe, further, *to the civilized world.*”¹⁵⁹ Interestingly enough, although Palmer saw secession in a global context, he did not join the civilized world in the destruction of forced bondage. He claimed it was detrimental for slaves to end their ‘livelihoods’ as “freedom would be their doom.”¹⁶⁰ In this context, Palmer asserted the support of secession was in the best interest of a slave. Secession was the moral obligation of white southerners to the continued welfare of black slaves and in a sense, themselves.

One of the prominent themes in Palmer’s sermon was the blatant disdain for northerners, abolitionists, and “fierce zealots” who sought to destroy the divinely sanctioned institution of slavery and who bore responsibility for forcing the subsequent secession from the Union.¹⁶¹ He further admonished abolitionists and northern sympathizers. The protection of slavery is,

[The] duty bound upon us again as the *constituted guardians of the slaves themselves*...in our mutual relations we survive or perish together. The worst foes of the black race are those who have intermeddled in their behalf. We know better

¹⁵⁶ Benjamin Morgan Palmer, *The South: Her Peril and Duty* (New Orleans, 1860), 12.

¹⁵⁷ Jon L. Wakelyn, *Southern Pamphlets on Secession, November 1860-April 1861: Civil War America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 63.

¹⁵⁸ Benjamin Morgan Palmer, *Rights of the South Defended in the Pulpits* (Mobile: J.Y. Thompson, 1860), 2.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

than others that every attribute of their character fits them for dependence and servitude.¹⁶²

The irony is Palmer seemed to both protect and enslave the black man. He held the classic paternalist view.

The justification of secession was a divine struggle against the anti-slavery movement because the “abolition spirit is undeniable atheistic...we defend the cause of God and Religion.”¹⁶³ Thornwell also used the word “atheistic” when referring to abolitionists. Palmer argued the southern states’ covenant with God was unbreakable and, “I throw off the yoke of this Union as readily as did our ancestors the yoke of King George III.”¹⁶⁴ He compared the struggle for independence from Britain to the ‘holy’ effort to defend slavery. This is a fascinating correlation because Americans understood the Revolution to a war for freedom and independence. It was simple for both Southerners and sympathetic Northerners to translate the resistance against British oppression to a fight for the godly, righteous kingdom of the Confederacy. This is evidence of the ingenious ability of pro-slavery clergy such as Thornwell and Palmer to form a connection that resonated with Americans’ sense of history.

Palmer concluded his sermon with a cry for southerners to unite against Union subjugation and laid the ground for a united South. He pleaded with them to,

Decide either way, it is the moment of our destiny—the only thing affected by the decision is the complexion of that destiny. If the South bows before this [Northern] throne she accepts the decree of restriction and ultimate extinction, which is made the condition of her homage.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Benjamin Morgan Palmer, *Rights of the South Defended in the Pulpits* (Mobile: J.Y. Thompson, 1860), 5.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

He reconciled himself to the fact he could do no more. If the North was allowed to dictate southern livelihood then the southern culture itself would face annihilation. Palmer proclaimed he had “done [his] duty as a deep sense of responsibility to God and man as [he] ever felt.”¹⁶⁶ His biggest contribution was his connection of the defense of slavery to a matter of self preservation. Secession was now inevitable and his duty to God forced him to take a position. He knew there was no guarantee the South would remain unscathed by the repercussions of secession. Palmer expressed his love and compassion for the South and prayed “may the Lord God cover her head in this her day of battle.”¹⁶⁷ After secession became a reality, most white pro-slavery southern evangelicals felt a “particular responsibility to sustain the institution against all challenges.”¹⁶⁸ Palmer was no exception to this ‘challenge.’

After South Carolina seceded in December 1860, Robert Lewis Dabney looked to peaceful measures for the rest of the South to avoid further fracture of the Union. In late 1860, he circulated a tract which pleaded with southern states to seek peaceful measures. In the Presbyterian Synod of Virginia, Dabney pleaded with everyone “to pray for peace.”¹⁶⁹ James Henley Thornwell felt the effect of Dabney’s appeal “would [only] delay the secession of the South and, as that is inevitable, the sooner it is brought about the better.”¹⁷⁰ He believed the schism needed to happen quickly as “the Union, which our

¹⁶⁶ Benjamin Morgan Palmer, *Rights of the South Defended in the Pulpits* (Mobile: J.Y. Thompson, 1860), 11.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 11.

¹⁶⁸ 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), 219.

¹⁶⁹ W. Harrison Daniel, “Southern Protestantism and Secession,” *Historian* 29:3 (May 1967), 392.

¹⁷⁰ Sean Michael Lucas, *Robert Lewis Dabney: A Southern Presbyterian Life* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2005), 107.

father designed to be perpetual, is on the verge of dissolution.”¹⁷¹ Thornwell felt the Union was dissolved by Northern greed not Southern slavery. The South could not depend on its government to reach an agreeable decision for both sides. “The moment faith is broken, the Union is dissolved.”¹⁷² The moment was the North’s refusal to allow the South to continue the practice of slavery. Dabney disagreed with Thornwell as he did not feel the southern Christian community did enough “to moderate national ‘passions’ and mediate the dispute.”¹⁷³ He thought ministers like Thornwell should promote the Union even if secession was inevitable.

In addition to publically pleading with other Christians to avoid the fracture of the Union, Dabney also privately wrote to Charles Hodge. His letters reiterated the divide between the Old School Presbyterians over slavery rights and secession. The disagreement between Hodge and Dabney centered on the issue of free soil and slavery in the new territories.¹⁷⁴ Although he opposed secession, Dabney believed slavery existed because of “Divine Providence.” On the other hand, Hodge believed there should be an eventual end to slavery and thought slavery should exist within the sphere of where the slave lived.¹⁷⁵ This was vastly different from James Henley Thornwell and Benjamin Morgan Palmer’s position as they made secession the only viable choice for the South in order to protect the institution of slavery.

Dabney and Hodge continued to debate the constitutional right of the South to secede. These debates centered on the validity of the act of secession from the Union. Dabney did

¹⁷¹ James Henley Thornwell, “National sins: a fast-day sermon: preached in the Presbyterian Church, Columbia.S.C., Wednesday, November 21, 1860” *The Collected Writing of James Henley Thornwell* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1873), 4:525.

¹⁷² *Ibid*, 4:530.

¹⁷³ Sean Michael Lucas, *Robert Lewis Dabney: A Southern Presbyterian Life* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2005), 107.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 107.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 107.

not want southern states to secede, but felt they did have the constitutional right to do so. Hodge argued any southern state which claimed they had “the legal and moral right to secede from the Union and to reclaim all the federal property...within its own territory represents an intolerable wrong.”¹⁷⁶ After Virginia seceded in 1861, Dabney would later “castigate the fanatics in the North” as the southern states would not allow the Northern zealots to “enslave the southern states.”¹⁷⁷

After South Carolina seceded, James Henley Thornwell wrote an article for the *Southern Presbyterian Review* in January 1861.¹⁷⁸ He advocated for a peaceful co-existence between the Union and the Confederacy. The South did not force the hand of Northerners, he argued, rather the North used oppressive measures to subjugate the South. This tyranny, Thornwell declared, would not be tolerated under any circumstances. Thornwell claimed the true cause of secession was,

The profound conviction that the Constitution, in its relations to slavery, has been virtually repealed; that the Government has assumed a new and dangerous attitude upon this subject; we have...new terms of union submitted to our acceptance or rejection. Here lies the evil.¹⁷⁹

The evil of northern oppression outweighed their claims about southern slavery being inhumane. He moved the debate away from the moral debate about slavery and made it a moral debate about the Constitution. In his sermon, he sought to explain to Southerners why it was absolutely necessary to support secession and prepare for war. He stressed the responsibility of Southerners to defend slavery. This Union is not the union of their forefathers.

¹⁷⁶ Charles Hodge, “Letter to Robert Lewis Dabney,” *Robert Lewis Dabney: A Southern Presbyterian Life* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2005), 107.

¹⁷⁷ W. Harrison Daniel, “Southern Protestantism and Secession,” *Historian* 29:3 (May 1967), 392

¹⁷⁸ James Henley Thornwell, *The State of the Country: An Article Republished from the Southern Presbyterian Review* (Columbia, S.C., Southern Guardian, Steam Power-Press, 1861)

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 9.

Thornwell addressed the election of President Abraham Lincoln as a reason for secession of the entire slave-holding South. It was their duty to unite against the oppressive and corrupt federal government.

The election of Lincoln is nothing more nor less than a proposition to the South to consent to a government fundamentally different upon the question of slavery, from which our fathers established. If this point can be made out, secession becomes not only a right, but a bounden duty.¹⁸⁰

Throughout the sermon, Thornwell compared Lincoln and the Union to oppressive regimes such as the British Crown. He reminded Southerners that they must resist the tyranny in any form. Thornwell overtly compared the duty to the act of secession in America to the ability of “the immortal Parliament of England [who] taught the nations of the earth that resistance to tyrants is obedience to God.”¹⁸¹ Tyranny would and should not prevail. Thornwell warned Southerners the act of secession put them in harm’s way. The outbreak of war was a possibility but no military power could, would or should force slave states back into the corrupted Union.

Thornwell declared that the Union forced unconstitutional policies on the South. It was the right of slave-owners to own a slave. The Constitution had no policy that outlaws this right of all men. “This, we contend, Thornwell insisted, is the attitude fixed by the Constitution. The Government is neither pro nor anti-slavery. It is simply neutral.”¹⁸² Thornwell argued, how can slave-owning states even fathom to consent to such actions? He focused on the power of the North to use and influence the federal government to stop the expansion of slavery. Slave societies must be allowed to thrive without prejudice.

¹⁸⁰ James Henley Thornwell, *The State of the Country: An Article Republished from the Southern Presbyterian Review* (Columbia, S.C., Southern Guardian, Steam Power-Press, 1861), 9.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, 4.

¹⁸² *Ibid*, 10.

Northerners had no interest, Thornwell insisted, in promoting the truth or establishing national justice. Their tyrannical attitude left no room for discussion with the South. They separated themselves from the South:

This, at the same time, is the attitude of justice. We of the South have the same right to our opinion as the people of the North. They appear as true to us as theirs appear to them. We are honest and sincere in forming and maintaining them. We unite to form a government. Upon what principle shall it be formed?¹⁸³

This is the same position John C. Calhoun argued: the North unduly influenced the Federal government to support northern aspirations. The North refused to participate in southern negotiations of peace and goodwill. The South had to accept the refusal of Northerners to reconcile and unite the nation. He reminded Southerners that whatever might come, it was forced upon the nation, not by the South, but solely in the bloody hands of the North.¹⁸⁴

Thornwell reminded Southerners of their duty to God and their “holy” cause. The Union could not ask to renounce that which is divine and biblical. It was incongruous for the Union to force us to give up our most solemn institution.

It is to be asked of us to renounce doctrines which we believe have come down to us from the earliest ages, and we have the sanction of the oracles of God? Must we give up what we conscientiously believe to be the truth? The thing is absurd.¹⁸⁵

He declared that the South’s unashamed refusal to submit to Northern tyranny was sanctioned by God. Thornwell appealed to the common sense of Southerner. The South could not stand for such disregard for what they hold to be true and divine:

What would they think, if the South had taken any such extravagant ground as this? What would they have done, if the South had taken advantage...would they

¹⁸³ James Henley Thornwell, *The State of the Country: An Article Republished from the Southern Presbyterian Review* (Columbia, S.C., Southern Guardian, Steam Power-Press, 1861), 11.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 11.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 11.

have submitted? Would they have glorified the Union, and yielded to the triumph of slavery? We know that they would not.¹⁸⁶

Thornwell felt Southerners were treated as though they are a foreign or alien people.

“Why are [Southerners] subjected to such an attitude? Let them give the same measure to others which they expect from others. It is a noble maxim, commended by high authority—do as you would be done by.”¹⁸⁷ The South was the quintessential product of good republicanism.. As a former Unionist, Thornwell would have remained loyal to the Union but for their denial of slave ownership and territorial expansion but he did not recognize the “new Union.”

Thornwell argued the Union “has abrogated the law; every State is bound to respect the right of the Southern master to his slave.”¹⁸⁸ The expansion of slavery in the territories was an argument neither side could agree upon. Thornwell called on the entire South to see that “the Constitution...does recognize and protect slavery, in every moral and ethical feature of it.”¹⁸⁹ The North had no recourse or divine argument against the legality of slavery and its subsequent expansion. Slaves were property so why could Northerners bring their livelihoods but Southerners could not bring slaves into Northern states. Thornwell stated,

It is alleged that the equality of the sections is not disturbed by the exclusion of slavery from the territories, because the Southern man may take with him all that the Northern man can take.¹⁹⁰

Every argument about the expansion of slavery outside the South “became a sectional issue.”¹⁹¹ It tended to turn in to a North versus South argument rather than focus on the

¹⁸⁶ James Henley Thornwell, *The State of the Country: An Article Republished from the Southern Presbyterian Review* (Columbia, S.C., Southern Guardian, Steam Power-Press, 1861), 13.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 13.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 14.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 16.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 19.

issue at hand. Thornwell sought to alleviate the fear of Northerners that the slave trade would reopen if slavery was permitted to expand into the territories. The “expand or perish” fear the Northerners had about the slave-holding was not necessarily true for all states. Thornwell reasoned that just as all northern states were not the same nor were all southern states. The expansion of slavery was a twofold issue. Southern slave-owners wanted to either move freely throughout the Union with their slaves or they wanted to expand the number of slaves they owned to work land gained through the expansion to the territories. He argued his own state of South Carolina was “anti-expansionist” and only wanted to maintain her spiritual and state right to defend and practice slavery.¹⁹²

Thornwell felt the North failed to realize that “to exclude slaveholding is, therefore, to exclude the South.”¹⁹³ He claimed the North did not understand the South’s attachment to their slaves. It is a paternalistic relationship ordained by none other than God.

Northerners refuse to hear case of southern slave-holders because “the attitude of the Northern mind is one of hostility to slavery.”¹⁹⁴ Thornwell reasoned with his listeners that the North could not understand the relationship between a master and his slave because they refuse to understand its importance to the nation.

[Northerners] all regard [slavery] as a calamity, an affliction, a misfortune. They regard it as an element of weakness, and as a drawback upon the prosperity glory of the country. They pity the South, as caught in the folds of a serpent, which is gradually squeezing out her life.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 163.

¹⁹² William W. Freehling, *The Reintegration of American History: Slavery and the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 169; 174.

¹⁹³ James Henley Thornwell, *The State of the Country: An Article Republished from the Southern Presbyterian Review* (Columbia, S.C., Southern Guardian, Steam Power-Press, 1861), 19.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 20.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 20.

Neither side of the sectional crisis understood the other's intention to either abolish or protect slave rights. Thornwell placed the blame firmly at the head of the new President of the United States, Abraham Lincoln.

Thornwell saw Lincoln as a direct threat to slavery. He argued Lincoln had no legal right to abolish or limit the expansion of slavery because "the Constitution barred federal intervention in the South to force the extinction of slavery."¹⁹⁶ The election of Lincoln was a turning point for Thornwell to accept secession. "The triumph of the principles which Mr. Lincoln is pledged to carry out, is the death-knell of slavery...let us crush the serpent in the egg."¹⁹⁷ In short, Thornwell contended slavery would die if Lincoln had political and legal control over southern states.

Thornwell encouraged Southerners to deny the right of the North to force the inclusion of the South in the corrupted form of the Union. "The oath which makes him President makes a new Union. The import of secession is simply the refusal on the part of the South, to be parties to any such Union"¹⁹⁸ He claimed the "new" Union must be shunned or the South will suffer. In this sense, without slavery, his position was that the "Union not slavery must perish."¹⁹⁹ Thornwell argued secession must occur. There was no other option.

Under these circumstances, we do not see how any man can question either the righteousness or the necessity of secession. The South is shut up to the duty of rejecting these new terms of Union. No people on earth, without judicial

¹⁹⁶ William W. Freehling, *The Reintegration of American History: Slavery and the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 213.

¹⁹⁷ James Henley Thornwell, *The State of the Country: An Article Republished from the Southern Presbyterian Review* (Columbia, S.C., Southern Guardian, Steam Power-Press, 1861), 22-24.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 24.

¹⁹⁹ William W. Freehling, *The Reintegration of American History: Slavery and the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 159.

infatuation, can organize a Government to destroy them. It is too much to ask a man to sign his own death-warrant.²⁰⁰

This is a political argument in which Thornwell articulated the hope he had for Southerners; to realize they could not be expected to survive under such oppression. The South needed to seize the moment and act to save the world as God intended it to be. The Fast Day Sermons, specifically those given by Thornwell and Palmer, connected with an eager audience searching for direction and understanding. Thornwell defined secession in terms people understood thus promoting acceptance of the impending crisis.²⁰¹

Thornwell fostered the spirit that drove Southerners and pro-southern Northerners to unite against repression and domination of an unsound and irresponsible force.²⁰² He was ready to sanction battle as impending start of war was upon the nation:

It is becoming every day clearer, that the people of the North hate slavery more than they love the Union, and they are developing this spirit in a form which must soon bring every slave-holding State within ranks of secession. The evil date may be put off, but it must come.²⁰³

In Thornwell's opinion, the Presbyterian Church could no longer support a pacifist position and argued for the religious and political logic in secession; Southerners could experience a new dawn with secession.

The sections, separately, will not be as formidable to foreign powers as before. That is all. But each section will be strong enough to protect itself, and both together can save this continent for republicanism for ever.²⁰⁴

²⁰⁰ James Henley Thornwell, *The State of the Country: An Article Republished from the Southern Presbyterian Review* (Columbia, S.C., Southern Guardian, Steam Power-Press, 1861), 24-25.

²⁰¹ James O. Farmer, *The Metaphysical Confederacy: James Henley Thornwell and the Synthesis of Southern Values* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1986), 270-271.

²⁰² *Ibid*, 271.

²⁰³ James Henley Thornwell, *The State of the Country: An Article Republished from the Southern Presbyterian Review* (Columbia, S.C., Southern Guardian, Steam Power-Press, 1861), 25.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 27.

He mourned the Union of the nation's forefathers. Thornwell argued both sides should accept the opinion of the other thus securing a bigger power in the preservation of republicanism in America.

Thornwell addressed the northern attitude toward Southerners. If the North refused to compromise with the South, he argued, Southerners could not change their countenance. He directly addressed Northerners and reminded them that only they could change this dangerous course; the nation's fate was in their hands:

We cannot close without saying a few words to the people of the North as to the policy which it becomes them to pursue. The whole question of peace or war is in their hands. The South is simply standing on the defensive, and has no notion of abandoning that attitude... "If, on the other hand, their thoughts incline to war, we solemnly ask then what do they expect to gain? What interest will be promoted? What end, worthy of a great people, will they be able to secure...what have they gained?"²⁰⁵

The North could inflict pain and suffering on the South but as Thornwell argued, what purpose would it serve? He asserted separation was not an evil as such. The greater harm to the nation was the threat that a coercive union posed to the greater good of republicanism for America.

Thornwell concluded his sermon and asserted that nothing, not even military intervention, would stop the South from declaring her rights. The South implored the North to negotiate in good faith but they refused. He encouraged southerners to accept the inevitable; "to save the Union is impossible."²⁰⁶ As war became imminent, Thornwell accepted what he prayed would never happen; the demise of the old Union. His hand was forced by the threat to republicanism and slavery. Thornwell could not allow the abolition

²⁰⁵ James Henley Thornwell, *The State of the Country: An Article Republished from the Southern Presbyterian Review* (Columbia, S.C., Southern Guardian, Steam Power-Press, 1861), 27-28.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 29.

of slavery. Southerners had no option but to accept the potential of civil war. Thornwell declared:

We prefer peace but if war must come, we are prepared to meet it with un-shaken confidence in the God of battles. We lament the wide-spread mischief it will do, the arrest it will put upon every holy enterprise of the Church...the South can boldly say to the bleeding, distracted country,
*Shake not thy gory locks at me;
Thou canst not say I did it.*²⁰⁷

The church was the most effective means of engagement in the support for secession and the impending civil war.²⁰⁸ Experienced orators such as James Henley Thornwell and Benjamin Morgan Palmer were an effective means to encourage the morale of the South.²⁰⁹ They expressed the ability for Southerners to claim victory in the name of God.²¹⁰ If the South respected and fasted upon the will of God, she shall not fail. The South would take the bullets but could not give up its slaves. This linked the South to a higher purpose, a higher law than the Union had.

Thornwell and the others compellingly argued for a shift in the understanding of the moral character of what constituted the nation. In response to the imminent fracture of the entire Union, ministers changed their 1850s opinion of secession and used their “unparalleled influence” to reach every member and parish of South Carolina.²¹¹ Pro-secessionist Presbyterians in South Carolina had to reach far beyond their intimate circle of intellectuals to include yeoman farmers. James Henley Thornwell cunningly created a political shift which reached ordinary men and women in the Low Country of South

²⁰⁷ James Henley Thornwell, *The State of the Country: An Article Republished from the Southern Presbyterian Review* (Columbia, S.C., Southern Guardian, Steam Power-Press, 1861), 29-30.

²⁰⁸ James W. Silver, *Confederate Morale and Church Propaganda* (Tuscaloosa: The Confederate Publishing Co, 1957), 15.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 15.

²¹⁰ Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 18.

²¹¹ Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 289.

Carolina.²¹² He appealed to the local ministers who in turn played a critical role in promoting secession in the farming communities in South Carolina.²¹³ The division between the spiritual and material worlds dissolved. The general public was skeptical of politics. Rural southerners did not interact much with the planter elite. This is evident in the case of South Carolina. South Carolinian yeoman farmers accepted secession because their ministers “assured them that theirs was the course ‘God approves of.’”²¹⁴ The farming community were reassured the sanctity of slavery was worth preserving whether or not they owned a slave. People came to understand that they needed to keep God on their side by fighting in God’s name. Thornwell created a compelling idea, moralized it, and made it a common human problem not a class issue. The South must triumph over the North.

The *Fast Day Sermons* encouraged rural and urban peoples alike to accept and support secession. The importance of these sermons is the culmination of the shift as defenders of slavery, to advocates of secession to finally the preparation to battle for their livelihoods, both physically and intellectually. April 12, 1861 would become the day of reckoning for ministers and politicians alike. They needed to accept secession but most did not foresee that secession meant actual war. Charles Hodge believed “allegiance to the Union should not be a test of denominational loyalty; once begun, the Civil War deserved to be fought vigorously.”²¹⁵ This argument reached a pinnacle in the May 1861 Presbyterian Assembly debates over denominational loyalty. Thornwell and Palmer thought the

²¹² Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 291.

²¹³ Ibid, 291.

²¹⁴ Ibid, 291.

²¹⁵ Mark Noll.,ed, *Charles Hodge: The Way of Life* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987), 30.

abolitionist's declaration that slavery was a sin "was a call to a holy war."²¹⁶ At this point, there expected war to happen.

As the division between the North and the South widened, the Presbyterian Church had to take on the unenviable role of either ignoring the imminent threat of war or taking action. In 1860, the Protestant church "constituted the nation's most influential cultural force."²¹⁷ By relying on their interpretation of absolute truth of the Scriptures, the clergy set itself up for a never-ending discourse in the defense of slavery. Although, the church relied implicitly in the Bible's authority, it still did not untangle the questions and disagreements regarding pressing issues such as slavery and abolition. There was no resolution to the debacle, thus which became the era's most pressing "theological crisis."²¹⁸ The 1861 Presbyterian Church Assembly meetings forced the denomination to take a stand against the disunion of both the nation and its own congregation.

²¹⁶ Eugene Genovese, "Religion in the Collapse of the Union," *Religion and the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 74.

²¹⁷ Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 28-29.

²¹⁸ *Ibid*, 50.

CHAPTER 4

FRACTURED COUNTRY: THE 1861 PRESBYTERIAN CONFLICT

The Presbyterian Church experienced a tumultuous period in 1860-1861 which threatened to divide the church permanently. This “fratricidal conflict” which existed along sectional lines, had previously affected the Old and New School Presbyterians in 1837. The two schools split from each other in 1837 over the issue of church administration and slavery. The election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860 brought change and disorder to the Old School Presbyterians because of the issue of slavery. The 1860 secession of South Carolina prompted the Presbyterian Church to take action to address the national conflict because the state had the support of strong Presbyterians secessionist such as James Henley Thornwell and Benjamin Morgan Palmer. In January 1861, Gardiner Spring, an Old School Presbyterian from New York, proposed a set of resolutions which forced Old School Presbyterians, both the North and South, to pledge an allegiance to the federal government.²¹⁹ These resolutions were tabled for the time being to focus on the pressing issue of secession.

Although Charles Hodge previously argued abolitionists had no constitutional right to forcefully abolish slavery in the South by force, he supported the gradual emancipation of slaves. The resolutions proposed by Gardiner Spring were particularly influential in this

²¹⁹ James Smylie, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians* (Kentucky: Geneva Press, 1996), 88-90.

change. By 1860, Hodge attacked “proslavery theology as a shameful dogma.”²²⁰ In January 1861, Charles Hodge responded to Thornwell and Palmer with his own version of the Fast-Day sermon. He addressed the northern argument that secession would provide a financial advantage to the South.²²¹ He admitted there was a clear economic benefit for the South to continue slavery but did not feel they benefitted monetarily from secession. Although Hodge spoke of “no material difference of opinion on the subject of slavery among the intelligent people of this country”, he did not find a solid reason for the disunion of the country.²²² He argued that slavery was not enough of a sin to warrant disunion. Secession should not happen as he claimed slavery was not worth it. Like Thornwell and Palmer, he addressed the occasions “when political questions rise into the sphere of morals and religion...[this] should be considered in the law of God.”²²³

Hodge did not believe the southern grievances over slavery warranted or justified secession.²²⁴ However, he did lend credence to the southern complaints of radical abolition activity.

“Another grievance justly complained of, is the interference of Northern abolitionists with the slaves of the South Hodge conceded.” This is done by the attempted distribution of abolition publications through the southern states, and by emissaries who endeavour to create dissatisfaction among the slaves. This is not only offensive but in the highest degree dangerous.²²⁵

²²⁰ Charles Hodge, *Theology and Slavery: Charles Hodge and Horace Bushnell* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2006), 91.

²²¹ Charles Hodge, “The State of the Country,” *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* Vol. 33, No.1, (1861), 12. The financial argument for the North is implied in Hodge’s speech. He does not mention a specific name, only refers to the “northern argument.”

²²² *Ibid*, 14.

²²³ *Ibid*, 20.

²²⁴ John Halsey Wood, “The 1861 Spring Resolutions: Charles Hodge, the American Union and the Dissolution of the Old School Church,” *Journal of Church and State*, 375.

²²⁵ Charles Hodge, “The State of the Country,” *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* Vol. 33, No.1, (1861), 14-15.

Although he was a part of the Northern division of Old School Presbyterians, Hodge had a great affinity for the plight of his southern counterparts. He abhorred abolitionists but did not feel their activity nor the threat to slavery warranted disunion. After 1860, Hodge took an anti-slavery approach because he felt the institution should fade away but he was far from an abolitionist. Although Hodge felt the act of secession was the constitutional right of any state, he argued there had to be sufficient cause for such a division, and slavery was not a satisfactory reason. On the other hand, Thornwell claimed “dissolution and war were the result of the sins of the Nation,” because the state can “do too much or too little.”²²⁶ The federal government did too little or too much to the South in regards to slavery; therefore, according to Thornwell, disunion was the result. Hodge’s argument did not convince Thornwell because slavery was a sufficient cause for secession according to most southern Presbyterian clergy.

Charles Hodge was not swayed by Thornwell’s argument though he believed South Carolina had the right to secede. He argued not so much against secession but against South Carolina’s misunderstanding of what constituted equality in the Union. He laid the blame at the feet of John Calhoun.

The thing claimed is...that the slave interest should have equal political control with all the other interests of the country combined. This is what is meant by equality...this is the idea which, by the teaching of Mr. Calhoun has taken thorough possession of a certain class of Southern politicians.²²⁷

Hodge was trying to separate the moral argument about slavery and secession whereas Thornwell was trying to weave the two issues together. Hodge blasted his southern counterparts for supporting secession without reason or cause. He felt only destruction

²²⁶ Mark J. Larson, “A Champion of the Original American Republic: The Political Thought of James Thornwell,” *Journal of Presbyterian History* 82:4 (2004), 263-264.

²²⁷ Charles Hodge, “The State of the Country,” *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* Vol. 33, No.1, (1861), 25.

and division would occur. For Southerners, slavery must be protected at the cost of even disunion. Hodge claimed “if this is the ultimatum of the extreme South, disunion is inevitable” then he had no choice but to accept disunion.²²⁸

Hodge felt Southerners made slavery the only priority of the Federal Government. If slaveholders wanted equality in the Union, they did not offer the same in return.

There are only twenty-five thousand slaveholders in South Carolina, and yet they have really as much control of the Government as the two million five hundred thousand people in Pennsylvania...surely, the complaint of want of equality on the part of slaveholders, is of all others the most unfounded.²²⁹

The number of slaveholders compared to the rest of the nation was small. Hodge admonished southerners for expecting so much in return. Their claims of the conspiracy of Northerners to end slavery were ridiculous and unsubstantiated he argued. As Thornwell argued that Unionist tyranny did not serve the republic, Hodge argued that the tyranny of a few was not consistent with the spirit of the entire republic, thus secession in the case of slavery is unfounded.

Hodge reminded southerners he believed they had a legal right to secede but was their cause of discrimination against a true justification for secession?

It is however assumed that any state has the right to secede from the Union, whenever it sees fit. It matters not, therefore, whether these grievances are real or imaginary, if the cotton states believe that their interests will be promoted by secession, they have the right to secede. This is the ground taken by the leaders of the secession movement. They desire a dismemberment of the Union.²³⁰

This was a direct retaliation against his northern Old School counterparts who felt secession was illegal and unethical. It did not matter whether northern Presbyterians agreed with the southern right to secede.

²²⁸ Charles Hodge, “The State of the Country,” *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* Vol. 33, No.1, (1861), 26.

²²⁹ Ibid, 26-27.

²³⁰ Ibid, 27.

Hodge went on to admonish Southerners for their lack of motivation to capture their fugitive slaves. The North was, he argued, not intentionally refusing to return runaway slaves,

Of oppression, therefore, there can be no pretence. As to injustice, the only things complained of are the difficulty thrown in the way of the restoration of fugitive slaves, and of the territorial question. These grounds of complaint have been considered. The North has not broken faith with the South as to fugitive slaves. The Federal Government, which alone has the right to restore them, has never refused to do so.²³¹

Hodge went on to claim southerners should take some responsibility for the recovery of their runaway slaves as the resources of the Federal government were limited in such matters. The government was not expected to make slaves its only priority as it had greater responsibilities. The Federal government was not solely concerned with slavery, if this were true then it would be guilty of the same thing the South was accusing the North of.

Hodge also mentioned the ability of the clergy to lead their flocks astray. Although, slavery was sanctioned in the Bible, the method of enforcing that scriptural right was not always what God intended. He argued,

The greatest crimes have been perpetrated by those who thought they were doing God's service. The fact, therefore, that good men approve of secession, that they pray over disunion, that they rise from their knees and resolve to commit the parricidal act, does not prove it to be right. It only proves how perverted the human mind may become under the influence of passion and the force of popular feeling.²³²

The fact that Thornwell and Palmer advocated the blessing of God over secession did not sit well with Hodge. Their actions caused the church great harm not just in the Union but in a global sense. He admonished them and remarked,

²³¹ Charles Hodge, "The State of the Country," *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* Vol. 33, No.1, (1861), 32.

²³² *Ibid*, 32.

This is the light in which we think this subject ought to be viewed. Is disunion right? Does it not involve a breach of fight, and a violation of the oaths by which that faith was confirmed?...it is as dreadful a blow to the church as it is the state...it blots our name from among the nations of the earth.²³³

The Presbyterian Church, once a symbol of strength and truth, was tainted with the stain of perpetual slavery. He directly blamed South Carolina for beginning the trend for all southern states to believe that secession was the only true way to save their cause:

“The secession of South Carolina may draw after it that Georgia and the other cotton states. [I cannot believe] such horrors [follow] this secession movement.”²³⁴ South Carolina led the way for a division in the nation which had an adverse impact on the rest of the southern states. Hodge concluded his speech with direction to the leaders of the southern division of the Old School Presbyterians.

His message directed the blame to the leading evangelical promoters of secession. He spoke directly to James Henley Thornwell and his supporters. He felt they had deceived their public by arguing that secession did not necessarily mean war.

One of the most distinguished advocates of secession tells the people of South Carolina not to deceive themselves with the expectation that disunion does not mean war. It seems to be...if we are to be plunged into the horrors of civil...no tongue can tell how the cause of the Redeemer must suffer throughout the whole land. It seems impossible that Christian men can blind their eyes to these probable consequences of disunion.²³⁵

Hodge closed his address with the conclusion that “the mass of the people would gladly preserve the sacred edifice, cemented with the blood of our father, if we could only be reconciled and live together peacefully.”²³⁶ He called Thornwell’s proslavery argument

²³³ Charles Hodge, “The State of the Country,” *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* Vol. 33, No.1, (1861), 32.

²³⁴ Ibid, 34.

²³⁵ Charles Hodge, “The State of the Country,” *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* Vol. 33, No.1, (1861), 34-35. It is understood in the text of this speech that Hodge directed his statement to group of clergy members including James Henley Thornwell and Benjamin Morgan Palmer.

²³⁶ Ibid, 36.

“poison.”²³⁷ In 1861, Hodge condemned secession but later in the year, he refused to sign the Gardiner Spring Resolutions because he saw the resolutions as “wrong and out of place.”²³⁸ The church could not expect southern Presbyterians to agree to a motion of allegiance to the federal government especially after secession occurred. This is evident of the contradictory stances that many theologians including Hodge, Thornwell, and Palmer took as the country plunged into the darkness of war.

James Henley Thornwell took an extended trip to Europe from June 1860 to September 1860 to cure his ailing health. On his return, Palmer had a conversation with him, in which Thornwell said, “he had made up his mind...for the gradual emancipation of the negro, as the only measure that would give peace to the country, by taking away, at least, the external cause of irritation...but when he got home, ‘it was too late; the die was cast.’”²³⁹

In April of 1861, he wrote the “Relation of the State to Christ” as a platform to publically define the relationship between church and state. Thornwell thought religion, not church, should have place in government and politicians were representatives of God “who must answer to Him for execution of their trust.”²⁴⁰ Thornwell was very clear on what he thought the relationship between the church and government should be. There should be no “union or alliance betwixt the church and state.”²⁴¹ Furthermore,

²³⁷“The General Assembly,” *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* Vol. 31, No.3, (1859), 617.

²³⁸ David Torbett, *Theology and Slavery: Charles Hodge and Horace Bushnell* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2006), 97-98.

²³⁹ Benjamin Morgan Palmer and James Henley Thornwell, *The Life and Letters of James Henley Thornwell* (Richmond: Whittset & Shepperson, 1875), 482-483; William Freehling questions this recollection as Palmer did not say anything about the conversation until he wrote Thornwell’s biography fourteen years later. However, Freehling comments he finds Palmer to be credible.

²⁴⁰ James Henley Thornwell, *The collected writings of James Henley Thornwell, late professor of theology in the Theological Seminary at Columbia, S.C.*, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1873), 4:550.

²⁴¹ *Ibid*, 4:554-555.

The State, as such, cannot be a member, much less, therefore, can it exercise the function of settling the creed of a church. The provinces of the two are entirely distinct; they differ in their origin, their ends, their prerogatives, their powers and their sanctions. They cannot be mixed...without injury to both.²⁴²

However, although he understood government had no place in the church; he did believe religion belonged in the federal government. The separation had become skewed since the times of the founding fathers as,

The separation of church and state is a very different thing from the separation of religion and the state. Here is where our fathers erred. In their anxiety to guard against the evils of a religious establishment, and to preserve the provinces of church and state separate and distinct, they virtually expelled Jehovah from the government of the country...it is an anomaly that we desire to see removed.²⁴³

What makes Thornwell's speech interesting is his contradiction between what is considered church and religion in relation to the state. He virtually admonished the founding fathers of the nation. April 1861 was a desperate time for both the North and the South.

In April 1861, Benjamin Morgan Palmer also wrote a pamphlet to encourage faith in the southern peoples. He portrayed the South as a victim with the "crying dogs of war" set upon them by the North.²⁴⁴ His message spoke to the nation and argued for the vindication of the South and her right to secede.

During the long anterior conflict which has terminated in secession, what manifestation has the South made of the spirit which tramples upon sacred institutions...through forty years she has been loyal to the Constitution...never, in a single instance, trespassing upon the rights of others, she has only succeeded in maintaining her own, through a vigilance which has never been permitted to slumber.²⁴⁵

²⁴² James Henley Thornwell, *The collected writings of James Henley Thornwell, late professor of theology in the Theological Seminary at Columbia, S.C.*, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1873), 4:554-555.

²⁴³ *Ibid*, 4:554-555.

²⁴⁴ Benjamin Morgan Palmer, *A Vindication of Secession and the South from the Strictures of Reverend R.J. Breckenridge in the Danville Quarterly* (Columbia: Southern Guardian Steam-Power Press, 1861), 13.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 17.

Palmer portrayed the South as a victim who had done nothing more than to protect her rights. The southern states were just as devoted to the same Constitution that the North presumed to follow.

Palmer compared the battle to preserve slavery to a Greek battle of survival against all odds. In order for the South to preserve its interests, she had to prevail at any costs.

Slavery may be left to be determined by nature...Slavery having come, in God's providence, to be the inheritance of the South, thoroughly interwoven with every fibre of society and giving the very complexion and form of our civilization—and the historic moment having arrived, at the close of more than a Peloponnesian War, for concluding the conflict forever—it is therefore the duty of the South, in the discharge of a great historic trust, to conserve and transmit the same.²⁴⁶

He contradicted Hodge's claim that the South had another option to resolve the conflict of slavery. Palmer invoked the very sentiment which all Southerners knew whether or not they were slaveholder; slavery was in every fiber of southern society and culture. Slavery was impossible to simply eliminate. It was too entrenched into the South to abruptly cease to expand. The South would no longer exist has it had for almost eighty years.

Palmer attacked those who opposed southern secession with a simple explanation:

What was the South to do? Submission at this stage would have been submission forever; and since this was impossible with the surrender of all that a people can hold dear—liberty, honor and safety—she simply, and, as we think, with great dignity, withdrew from the disgraceful and destructive association.²⁴⁷

Without secession, the South would not have had any recourse against its oppressors. He did not believe the South would suffer as a result of secession but would if it failed to accomplish disunion. He concluded his vindication of the South and claimed:

The future historian will look back upon this movement of secession as the movement which rescued the whole country just as it was slipping into an empire—an empire to be shattered at last, after the manner of all the empires of

²⁴⁶ Benjamin Morgan Palmer, *A Vindication of Secession and the South from the Strictures of Reverend R.J. Breckenridge in the Danville Quarterly* (Columbia: Southern Guardian Steam-Power Press, 1861), 25.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 26.

the earth—and least of all to be endured upon this continent, where it is an utter apostasy from the political faith of our fathers.²⁴⁸

Thornwell agreed with Palmer as he previously spoke about how “sin has been the ruin of every Empire that has ever flourished and fell.”²⁴⁹ The ability of the United States to prosper and expand its territory included the ability to own slaves as property and use them to extend ones wealth. Greed, a sin, caused the division between the North and South.

Hodge directly addressed the issues posed by Thornwell and Palmer in their previous articles and sermons of April 1861. Charles Hodge, ever the peacemaker, published an article in the *Princeton Review* calling for reconciliation in the Presbyterian Church and the nation. He claimed the issue of secession brought up the fact “that [should it] even be finally consummated, unavoidably, brings up the question, must our church also be divided?”²⁵⁰ During this time, there was pressure from both the northern and southern sections of the Old School Presbyterians regarding the outcome of the Gardiner Springs Resolution. Hodge argued, “should, therefore, the Gulf States of this union form a permanent independent confederacy, there is nothing in that event which renders necessary the secession of the Presbyterians in those states from our General Assembly.”²⁵¹ Hodge argued the division in the nation did not necessitate a schism in the church. However, he felt it was the intention of southern evangelicals to split from the church along with the national disunion.

²⁴⁸ Benjamin Morgan Palmer, *A Vindication of Secession and the South from the Strictures of Reverend R.J. Breckenridge in the Danville Quarterly* (Columbia: Southern Guardian Steam-Power Press, 1861), 46.

²⁴⁹ James Henley Thornwell, , *The collected writings of James Henley Thornwell, late professor of theology in the Theological Seminary at Columbia, S.C.*, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust 1873), 4:523.

²⁵⁰ Charles Hodge, “The Church and the Country,” *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* Vol.33, No. 2, (1861), 322.

²⁵¹ *Ibid*, 322.

Hodge felt the schism in the American Presbyterian churches sent a message of failure and despair to the rest of the world. He characterized the division of the Presbyterian Church as having global implications of grave proportions.

The Presbyterian church in this country has, by its numbers, its union, its harmony, its soundness in doctrine, its adherence to the Scriptures as the only standard of morals, of practice, as well as of faith...stood as the great conservative body, a rampart against error and evil, and the powerful advocate of truth and righteousness. To diminish the influence of such a body, to lower its character, or to impair its strength, would be a great calamity to the country and the world.²⁵²

The schism in America could cause the entire global community of Presbyterians to split over simple matters of disagreement. He felt the southern Presbyterians were not honest with their supporters because they did not connect the act of secession with a civil war, however, by this time, war was upon America. This was not merely a battle between the North and South but between good and evil, right versus wrong, and most of all truth versus sin.

Despite his previous admissions of his support for slavery, Charles Hodge now saw its evil in its purest form. He admonished Thornwell and told him to:

Let it be admitted that slavery is what all competent authority defines it to be, the system which makes the legal status of men, and women, and children, to be that of *property*; that is, of *real estate*, or *chattels* person as the case may be; and *slavery* is condemned as a sin against God and the most gross outrage upon man.²⁵³

First, the argument over the scriptural viability of slavery was over. The nation needed to move on and worry about the consequences of the disunion rather than quarrel over semantics. Hodge maintained slavery in America was not consistent with slavery in the Bible and it must end. Secondly, he directed his response to Benjamin Morgan Palmer.

²⁵² Charles Hodge, "The Church and the Country," *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* Vol.33, No. 2, (1861), 324.

²⁵³ *Ibid*, 340.

Hodge addressed a concern that Palmer addressed regarding comments made by the General Assembly. Palmer felt the Assembly misinterpreted his vindication of the South and secession. Hodge argued,

A theory that slavery is a desirable institution...has been avowed by some of the most prominent ministers of our church in the cotton states...Dr. Palmer's sermon [proposes] that the divinely appointed mission of the South is to conserve and perpetuate the institution of domestic slavery as now existing [but] Dr. Palmer complains that our strictures on his sermon in our last number did him injustice in two respects; first, in representing him as teaching that slavery should be indefinitely perpetuated; and secondly, in saying that the abuses of the system should be continued.²⁵⁴

Slavery was a contentious issue which did not get easier even after most of the South seceded. In response to Palmer's allegation, Hodge maintained:

We did not so interpret his sermon, nor did we attribute either of these opinions to him...we understood him to say just what he does say, that the mission of the South is to conserve and perpetuate the institution of domestic slavery as it now exists. This is a view of slavery which the church we are persuaded will never sanction.²⁵⁵

Hodge concluded his message with a prayer: "We can only but hope that, with the blessing of God, our church may survive this conflict, and present to the world the edifying spectacle of Christian brotherhood unbroken by political convulsions."²⁵⁶

After the surrender of Fort Sumter in April 1861, the Old School Presbyterian Assembly rushed to pass the Gardiner Spring Resolutions.²⁵⁷ The 73rd General Assembly of the Old School Presbyterians met on May 17, 1861 in Philadelphia, PA without many of its southern brethren in attendance.²⁵⁸ Palmer and Thornwell were not there but Hodge

²⁵⁴ Charles Hodge, "The Church and the Country," *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* Vol.33, No. 2, (1861), 347.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 347.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 376.

²⁵⁷ James H. Smylie, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians* (Kentucky: Geneva Press, 1996), 88-90.

²⁵⁸ For background information on the Assembly Meeting see James Smylie, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians* (Kentucky: Geneva Press, 1996), 88-89. There is no specific number of Southern Presbyterians recorded in Smylie's records but it is assumed the number was extremely low.

was. The resolutions called for a time of fasting and prayer in the midst of what now looked like the Civil War. Because Gardiner Spring previously proposed in January 1861 that “a committee be appointed to inquire... [about] making some expression [of the church’s] devotion to the Union of these states and their loyalty to the Government;” all Presbyterian churches were expected to pledge an allegiance to the Federal Government even those in southern states.²⁵⁹

Charles Hodge knew this would not go over well with the Southern Presbyterians and offered a compromise to Spring’s resolutions. He gave a three-part solution and response to try to counteract the anti-Southern sentiment at the Assembly. Hodge argued,

The General Assembly is neither a Northern nor a Southern body; it comprehends the entire Presbyterian church, irrespective of geographical lines or political opinion; and had it met this year, as it does with marked uniformity one-half of the time in some Southern city, no one, would have presumed to ask of it a fuller declaration of its views upon thin subject, than it has embodied in this minute.²⁶⁰

To Hodge, the decision to convene the meeting or cast a vote without its southern brethren was unethical on behalf of the General Assembly. It seemed to be done out of spite. Secondly, Hodge argued,

Owing to providential hindrances nearly one third of our Presbyteries are not represented at our present meeting; they feel that not only Christian courtesy, but common justice requires that we should refrain...from adopting measures to bind the consciences of our brethren who are absent. Most of them, as we believe, by no fault of their own.²⁶¹

He admonished his fellow Northerners for their failure to include their fellow brothers even during the secession conflict. The division in the nation did not mean a schism in the church was necessary.

²⁵⁹ Presbyterian Church, *Gardiner Spring Resolutions* (1861), 2.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 3.

²⁶¹ *Ibid*, 3.

In conclusion, Hodge pitched a desperate effort to unite the Presbyterians while admitting there was conflict, but insisted that the crisis was nothing that could not be resolved with prayer, fasting and fellowship. The third and final point argued for was that,

The dismemberment of our Church, while fraught with disaster to all our spiritual interests, could not fail to envenom the political animosities of the country, and to augment the sorrows which already oppress us. We are not willing to sever this last bond which holds the North and South together in the fellowship of the Gospel.²⁶²

Despite his efforts, Hodge's motion for compromise failed 152-86.²⁶³ The vote went to the Assembly. The business of the allegiance to the federal government needed a vote. Hodge worked against tough odds but he still forged ahead in the hope that reconciliation could take place.

The Spring Resolutions went to a vote but not without supporters of the resolutions own version of why such a requirement of allegiance should pass.

This General Assembly, in the spirit of that Christian patriotism which the scriptures enjoin, and which has always characterized this Church, do hereby acknowledge and declare our obligations to promote and perpetuate...the integrity of these United States, and to strengthen, uphold, and encourage the Federal Government in the exercise of all its function under noble Constitution; and to this Constitution in all its provisions, requirements, and principles, we profess our unabated loyalty.²⁶⁴

In this sense, the General Assembly was connecting the allegiance to the Federal government as synonymous to an allegiance to the Constitution when the two institutions were not necessarily indicative of each other. For this Assembly, the "federal Government [does not mean] any particular administration but the central administration

²⁶² Presbyterian Church, *Gardiner Spring Resolutions* (1861), 3.

²⁶³ *Ibid*, 4.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 5.

[is] the visible representative of our national existence.”²⁶⁵ The underlying tone to the resolutions spoke a message which Charles Hodge vehemently opposed.

Hodge immediately voiced his dissent and wrote the majority opinion protesting the decision:

We make this protest, not because we do not acknowledge loyalty to our country to be a moral and religious duty, according to the word of God, which requires us to be subject to the powers that be; nor because we deny the right of the Assembly to enjoin that, and all other like duties, on the ministers and churches under its care; but because we deny the right of the General Assembly to decide the political question, to what government the allegiance of Presbyterians as citizens is due and its rights to make that decision a condition of members in our church.²⁶⁶

In hindsight, the Assembly proposed the allegiance as an avenue to attempt a reconciliation, first within the church and then the nation. Again, Hodge reasoned it was “not a question which the Assembly has a right to decide.”²⁶⁷

Charles Hodge and his supporters argued “we protest loud against the action of the Assembly.”²⁶⁸ He argued:

Such a declaration, made our members residing in what are called the seceding States is treasonable. Presbyterians under the jurisdiction of those States, cannot, therefore make that declaration. They are consequently forced to choose between allegiance to their States and allegiance to the Church.²⁶⁹

In response to Hodge’s dissent, the General Assembly asserted,

It is ‘a notorious fact’ that many of our ministers and members believe themselves absolved from all obligations of loyalty to our National Government [and that] disunion is morally right...thousands of Presbyterians are likely to be seduced by...the machinations of wicked men...when it remains a question whether our national life survives the conflict, or whether our sun sets in anarchy and blood—is it uncalled for, unnecessary, for this Christian Assembly to renew in the

²⁶⁵ Presbyterian Church, *Gardiner Spring Resolutions* (1861), 5.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 7.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 7-8.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 8

²⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 8.

memories and hearts of a Christian people, respect for the majesty of law, and a sense of the obligation of loyalty?²⁷⁰

Their argument lay in the notion that if they did not make a declaration of allegiance, many of the brethren could be misled thus destroying all hope of the union to remain intact. Hodge tried to separate church and state whereas the Assembly member insisted on linking them. The measure passed 156-66 to require the allegiance.²⁷¹ Their response to Hodge was that the Civil War was an extraordinary case and it warranted special measures.²⁷²

In July 1861, Benjamin Morgan Palmer spoke at the Assembly of New Orleans Presbytery on the passing of the Gardiner Spring Resolutions. He echoed the majority southern position when he argued,

Since this action places the Southern portion of the church in a false position before the church and the world, there should be no delay in recording the protest, and in dissolving, without heat and passion but with full deliberation, and in the fear of God, the connection hitherto maintained with the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States.²⁷³

Palmer's message was one of the last efforts to discuss the resolutions before a permanent schism took place in the church. He approved a schism because the Assembly took no measures to address southern concerns over a forced allegiance to the federal government. In the absence of support from the General Assembly, ministers like Hodge could not convince their southern brethren to remain loyal to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church.

²⁷⁰ Presbyterian Church, *Gardiner Spring Resolutions* (1861), 11.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁷² James H. Smylie, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians* (Kentucky: Geneva Press, 1996), 88-89.

²⁷³ Benjamin Morgan Palmer, "Assembly of New Orleans Presbytery," *Life and Letters of Benjamin Morgan Palmer* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1906), 242.

On December 4, 1861, the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America (PCCSA) formed and convened in Augusta, Georgia, to finalize the process which provided a concrete break from the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. During this assembly, James Henley Thornwell provided the main text, “An Address to all the Churches of Jesus Christ throughout the World.”²⁷⁴ He was too ill to speak and Benjamin Morgan Palmer took over as the moderator for the Assembly. The speech addressed the need for the formation of a new and independent church for the southern Old School Presbyterians. He extended Palmer’s argument in “A Vindication of the South” and reminded Southerners there was no need for an apology for seceding from the Union.

Thornwell claimed the General Assembly in January and May 1861 had abandoned the “spirituality of the church.”²⁷⁵ The Assembly decided a political question thus “confusing Christ and Caesar.”²⁷⁶ Thornwell argued the Assembly’s adoption of the Spring Resolutions:

shows that if we should remain together, the political questions which divided us as citizens, will be obtruded on our church courts and be discussed...with all the acrimony bitterness and rancor with which such questions are usually discussed by men of the world [both sides would meet] to wrangle over the questions which have split them in two confederacies, and involved them in a furious and bloody war.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁴ James Henley Thornwell, “An Address to all the Churches of Jesus Christ throughout the World,” *The collected writings of James Henley Thornwell, late professor of theology in the Theological Seminary at Columbia, S.C.*, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust 1873), 4:446-464 and “Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America,” 51-66. This address was written specifically for the Assembly. Each Presbyterian Assembly had a moderator who administered speeches and voting.

²⁷⁵ Benjamin Morgan Palmer, *The Life and Letters of Benjamin Morgan Palmer*, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1906), 246-262.

²⁷⁶ James H. Smylie, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians* (Kentucky: Geneva Press, 1996), 89.

²⁷⁷ James Henley Thornwell, “An Address to all the Churches of Jesus Christ throughout the World,” *The collected writings of James Henley Thornwell, late professor of theology in the Theological Seminary at Columbia, S.C.*, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust 1873), 4:446-464.

Thornwell claimed the Northern division of the Old School “overstepped their boundaries and no one has any right to usurp the jurisdiction of the other.”²⁷⁸ As a justification to form the new Confederate church, he explained that it was normal in Protestant churches for organizations to follow national lines. It is proper that there should be a separate church for the new nation of the Confederacy.²⁷⁹

The differences between the North and South were too great to overcome, Thornwell argued, making it necessary to create a separate and distinct church government and assembly. He wrote a response to the General Assembly’s assertion that the southern clergy did not have an allegiance to the government. He argued,

The presbyteries of the Confederate States have not ceased to love the church of their fathers. The difficulty [is] the differences in the manners, habits, customs and ways of thinking, the social, civil, and political institutions of the people...it is eminently proper that the Church in each should be as separate and independent as the Governments.²⁸⁰

He had set up the foundation for a “southern” distinctness in relationship to church and state. The question remaining was the difference between northern and southern religious convictions. Thornwell answered this plainly, “slavery.”²⁸¹ The Christian response to slavery should be dictated by the Bible because:

Only if slavery is a sin may the church preach against it, and the Bible does not say that it is. We have denounced the abuses that the institution permits, but slavery itself is a state matter. Its drawbacks must be balanced against the fact that

²⁷⁸ James Henley Thornwell, “An Address to all the Churches of Jesus Christ throughout the World,” *The collected writings of James Henley Thornwell, late professor of theology in the Theological Seminary at Columbia, S.C.*, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust 1873), 4:446-464.

²⁷⁹ James Henley Thornwell, “Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America,” 54-55.

²⁸⁰ James Henley Thornwell, “An Address to all the Churches of Jesus Christ throughout the World,” *The collected writings of James Henley Thornwell, late professor of theology in the Theological Seminary at Columbia, S.C.*, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust 1873), 4:446-464.

²⁸¹ James Henley Thornwell, “Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America,” p. 55-59 and James H Smylie, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians* (Kentucky: Geneva Press), 89.

it has brought many Africans to us who have been made heir to the heavenly inheritance.²⁸²

He acknowledged the brutality of American slavery and conceded that there was contention over this issue. However, he did not yield from the promotion of the legality of slavery obtained from the Bible.

Thornwell wanted to send a farewell letter to the Old School Presbyterians in the North as a measure of good will but the Southern Assembly opposed such a measure because the southern church had nothing to apologize for, thus there was no need to reconcile with the northern Old School clergy.²⁸³ He thought it might serve both organizations if he fostered a working relationship. Thornwell was mistaken if he thought his fellow clergy were interested in any type of reconciliatory measures. Though he already drafted the letter, Thornwell withdrew the gesture.²⁸⁴ The new Confederate Assembly saw no reason to reconcile, apologize or maintain a relationship with the Northern division of the Old School. The end of 1861 brought much uncertainty to the nation. The debates discussed in this chapter open up new ways to perceive and appreciate another aspect of the dissolution in the Union between the election of Lincoln and the end of the first year of war. We can see the complications in separating and

²⁸² James Henley Thornwell, "Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America," p. 55-59 and James H Smylie, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians* (Kentucky: Geneva Press), 55-59.

²⁸³ Benjamin Morgan Palmer, *The life and letters of James Henley Thornwell, D.D., LL.D. ex-president of the South Carolina College, late professor of theology in the Theological Seminary at Columbia, South Carolina* (Richmond: Whittset & Shepperson, 1875) 508-509.

²⁸⁴ Benjamin Morgan Palmer, *The life and letters of James Henley Thornwell, D.D., LL.D. ex-president of the South Carolina College, late professor of theology in the Theological Seminary at Columbia, South Carolina* (Richmond: Whittset & Shepperson, 1875) 508-509 and James O. Farmer, *The Metaphysical Confederacy: James Henley Thornwell and the Synthesis of Southern Values* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1986), 280.

intertwining issues such as slavery and secession. These religious debates are important in shaping the larger discourse on the morality of slavery and secession.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The fiery debates between Hodge, Thornwell, and Palmer came to an end after the first year of the Civil War. Charles Hodge continued his role in the Presbyterian Church as the preeminent authority on church administration. He participated in discussions concerning slavery; however, his attention was drawn to internal issues of the church. James Henley Thornwell remained an advocate for slavery and secession but was unable to participate as fully as he once had. He suffered from severe gastrointestinal and prostate pain which limited his church participation and caused his death in August, 1862. Benjamin Morgan Palmer continued to sustain the South in its effort to fight a holy war and became a “Confederate zealot.”²⁸⁵ He was instrumental in encouraging both soldiers and citizens to stay the course of the war.

After the outbreak of war, southerners continued to assert the independence of the South and urged their “northern neighbors” to “rejoice at their escape.”²⁸⁶ After the end of 1861, “churchmen who championed the cause of the South were conscious of their indebtedness to the “Calhoun school of statesmen” which included James Henley Thornwell and Benjamin Morgan Palmer.²⁸⁷ Southern newspapers printed articles calling

²⁸⁵ Erskine Clark, “Southern Nationalism and Columbia Theological Seminary,” *American Presbyterians* 66:2 (Summer 1998), 128.

²⁸⁶ “Our Friends in the North!,” *The Charleston Mercury* (Charleston, S.C., April 23, 1861).

²⁸⁷ W. Harrison Daniel, “Southern Protestantism and Secession,” *Historian* 29:3 (May 1967), 408.

for the North to accept the South's decision to secede.²⁸⁸ The *Charleston Mercury* published the following article eleven days after the fiery eruption of the Civil War,

A united North, for war and blood, makes a united South for defence. Friendship, regard, esteem, respect are gone, and you stand before us our mortal, unmistakable foes. We take up the sword you cast at our feet and say God save the right.²⁸⁹

Benjamin Morgan Palmer continued on the course that he and Thornwell started some twenty years prior. Palmer did not merely give sermons supporting the Civil War, he went to the Confederate camps to encourage soldiers to continue to fight under the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. To Palmer, the Civil War was a war "of simple defence."²⁹⁰ He traveled the south preaching unity and Providence in Confederate Camps thus becoming a noted enemy of the Union generals. He was regarded as "an arch rebel and formentor of treason."²⁹¹ Conversely Confederate generals looked at Palmer as a savior and "worth more than a thousand soldiers to the cause."²⁹²

The scriptural justification for slavery and subsequent secession was not a high priority of defense for Palmer anymore. After Thornwell's illness and untimely death, Palmer replaced Thornwell in the southern evangelical community. His role in the Presbyterian Church took on that of Thornwell's previous position of authority. Palmer presented a divine link between the Confederate cause and the soldiers on the battlefield. He implored soldiers to hold to their faith, their cause, and to prepare "for the hour of death

²⁸⁸ Other articles printed in the *Charleston Mercury* after April 12, 1861 include: "God Government Over All.-'Have We a Government?,' (April 29, 1861); "Our Policy Towards the President," (April 4, 1862); "Day for Humiliation and Prayer," (May 16, 1862); "Moral Influence," (December 19, 1862) and "What Subjugation Means," (January 16, 1864).

²⁸⁹ "Our Friends in the North!" *The Charleston Mercury*, Charleston, S.C., April 23, 1861.

²⁹⁰ Benjamin Morgan Palmer, "Address to the Crescent Rifles" in *Life and Letters of Benjamin Morgan Palmer*, (Richmond: Whittset & Shepperson, 1875), 237.

²⁹¹ Thomas Cary Johnson, *Life and Letter of Benjamin Morgan Palmer* (Richmond: Whittset & Shepperson, 1875), 264.

²⁹² James W. Silver, *Confederate Morale and Propaganda* (Tuscaloosa: The Confederate Publishing Co, 1957), 78.

and entrance into the world of bliss.”²⁹³ He evoked the triumph of spirit even in the face of defeat.

Confederate Generals and Commanders welcomed the exuberant Palmer into their camps and at rallies.²⁹⁴ In May 1861, Palmer led the rally for the Washington Artillery of New Orleans, Louisiana extolling the validity and religious importance of the Civil War. He claimed: “It is a war of defense against wicked and cruel aggression...of religion against a blind and bloody fanaticism...for your wives and children.”²⁹⁵ Palmer urged soldiers to fight the war with vigor and pride because the Union had plans to oppress them. There was no other choice but to defend their land, way of life, and souls. He exclaimed “the alternative which the North has laid before her people is the subjugation of the South... [and this] despotism will put its iron heel upon all that the human heart can hold dear.”²⁹⁶ Palmer portrayed the Union as a despotic force against which the Confederacy had no recourse but to defend itself. Illness forced James Henley Thornwell to let Palmer take the reins of authority for the Presbyterian Church. However, he still provided support and encouragement for the Confederate cause.

Thornwell felt “the Confederacy [embodied] the only hope of constitutional liberty on this continent.”²⁹⁷ In an 1862 address distributed to Southern soldiers, *Our Danger and Our Duty*, Thornwell illustrated the horrible fate he thought would overtake the South if the North were triumphant. “We can conquer and we must. We must not suffer any other

²⁹³ Thomas Cary Johnson, *Life and Letter of Benjamin Morgan Palmer* (Richmond: Whittset & Shepperson, 1875), 238.

²⁹⁴ James W. Silver, *Confederate Morale and Propaganda* (Tuscaloosa: The Confederate Publishing Co, 1957), 76-77.

²⁹⁵ Benjamin Morgan Palmer, “Address to the Washington Artillery” in *Life and Letters of Benjamin Morgan Palmer*, (Richmond: Whittset & Shepperson, 1875), 238.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 239.

²⁹⁷ James Henley Thornwell, *The State of the Country: An Article Republished from the Southern Presbyterian Review, Columbia, S.C.* (Columbia: Southern Guardian Steam Power Press, 1861), 30-31.

thought to enter our minds. If we are overrun, we can at least die; and if our enemies get possession of our land, we can leave it a howling desert.”²⁹⁸ He provided well-received encouragement to the Confederate troops in the face of so much danger. “But under God, we shall not fail.” He assured them: “If we are true to Him, and true to ourselves, a glorious future is before us. We occupy a sublime position. The eyes of the world are upon us; we are a spectacle to God, to angels and to men.”²⁹⁹ These are examples of how Thornwell rallied the troops even in ill health.

Thornwell encouraged the faith of the southern soldiers even in the face of defeat. This war was God’s battle not Man’s. Thornwell truly believed there was no option to return to the Union even on favorable terms. He believed the battle was a religious crusade not a political squabble. He continued his address to the soldiers, the Civil War might become a massacre of men but it would be a tribute to their ancestors.

Can our hearts grow faint, or our hands feeble, in a cause like this? The spirits of our fathers call to us from their graves. The heroes of other ages and other countries are beckoning us on to glory. Let us seize the opportunity, and make to ourselves an immortal name, while we redeem a land from bondage and a continent from ruin.³⁰⁰

The fate of all humanity, Thornwell argued, rested with the South and its brave soldiers. They could win the battle by force or by their spirit. Either way, victory was theirs. The “new” Union was a lost cause; the South seceded from a Union it no longer recognized and it would fight under any conditions and circumstances to prevent its forced surrender to the corrupted union. Thornwell reminisced about the earlier conflicts fought to secure the great Republic like the American Revolution. The South would remain the defender

²⁹⁸ James Henley Thornwell, *Our Danger and Our Duty*, Columbia, S.C. (Columbia: Southern Guardian Steam-Power Press, 1862), 13-14.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 13-14.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 14.

and the champion of the rights and freedoms of every American. Thornwell's illnesses caused his early death in 1862. Palmer delivered Thornwell's eulogy with passion and admiration. He compared Thornwell to "the men who with their heroic deeds make history to-day, become its theme of song to-morrow."

Although his contentious relationship with Thornwell ended, Charles Hodge continued his role of administration on church boards. However, his greatest concern was the theological battles between the Old School and New School Presbyterians. In 1862, although he disapproved of the resolution forcing loyalty to the federal government, he argued the Assembly was free to do so as the Southern branch had broken off, thus rendering the issue moot.³⁰¹ He opposed the reunion of the Presbyterian Church even after the Civil War because it compromised the conservative position of the Old School Presbyterians.³⁰² However, he later changed his opinion as the amalgamation of the two groups would foster a peaceful resolution to the fractured relationship between northern and southern Presbyterians.

In 1864, the Old and New School Presbyterians in the North started their journey toward permanent reconciliation. At the 1865 General Assembly, Hodge admonished his fellow clergy for their unsympathetic opinions of their Southern counterparts.³⁰³

It is easy to say we are right and they are wrong...but the fact of being right or wrong was not a very good explanation of why the Northern Presbyterians upheld the Union and eventually condemned slavery, while the Southern Presbyterians took opposite positions.³⁰⁴

³⁰¹"The General Assembly," *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* Vol. 34, No.3, (1861), 516.

³⁰² James Henley Thornwell, *Our Danger and Our Duty*, Columbia, S.C. (Columbia: Southern Guardian Steam-Power Press, 1862), 30.

³⁰³ James H. Smylie, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1996), 91.

³⁰⁴ Charles Hodge, "The General Assembly," *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* Vol. 37, No.3, (1865), 506.

All men were subject to the influence of the community in which they reside. Hodge felt there was no purpose to pass blame on either side. It was unproductive and did not cultivate Godly behavior. He published an article in *the Princeton Review* calling for efforts to understand the conflict between the North and South. As editor of the review, Hodge prided himself that the journal was “an organ for upholding sound Presbyterians the cause of the country, and the honour of our common Redeemer.”³⁰⁵

Hodge articulated the position of northern Old School Presbyterians. He did not cast blame but did not apologize for the outcome of the 1861 Gardiner Spring resolutions.

He asserted:

We have from the beginning denied the right of secession; we have maintained that the rebellion was without any adequate provocation; that it was obligatory on the national government to employ all its resources for its suppression; that the war to that end was a righteous war; that it was the duty of all citizens to sustain and support the government in this national struggle to the utmost of their ability; that as slavery was the cause of rebellion, and as the South constantly refused to accept any reasonable terms of accommodation, the President was right in emancipating all the slaves within our military lines, and that the government is right in demanding the entire and final abolition of slavery through the country.³⁰⁶

This statement is fascinating because during the resolution process, Hodge adamantly resisted pressure from the northern Old School clergy to force the southern body to pledge an allegiance to the federal government. Yet, three years later, he supported the federal government’s actions to quash the South’s rebellion from the Union.

Charles Hodge argued the need for reconciliation and peace as above all, northern and southern Old School Presbyterians were still Presbyterians. He asserted:

As to the union of churches, we have maintained that all Presbyterians should be joined in one body, New-School and Old-School, Presbyterians of the North and of the South, provided they agree in adopting and carrying out our constitutional

³⁰⁵ Charles Hodge, “The Princeton Review on the State of the Country and of the Church,” *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*, Vol. 37, No.4, (1865), 657.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 656.

standards of doctrine and order; that no other conditions of union should be demanded of any party, and that the Assembly has no right to enforce any other.³⁰⁷

The Old and New School Presbyterian reunion was finalized in 1869. Charles Hodge argued the reasons for reconciliation,

are great. The strength of the united body for good would be far greater than of either portion separately, or even the whole as it is now. We should indeed be, in the eyes of the world, glorious as an army with banners. We are for peace and cooperation.³⁰⁸

The motivations for resolution went deeper than a national cooperation. The global evangelical community needed to see a united church front in order to believe the nation itself was healed. The church did not fully reunite until 1983.³⁰⁹ Charles Hodge died on June 19, 1878 and was praised by his fellow Presbyterians for his tireless effort in promoting pure Calvinist thought in venues such as *The Princeton Review*, his pulpit and the yearly Presbyterian conventions.³¹⁰

In April 1862, Palmer addressed the soldiers of Confederate General Albert Sidney Johnston, while sitting astride on a horse, just before they went to battle.³¹¹ Four months later, Palmer found himself in the midst of a bombing campaign in Tennessee. He was appointed the Commissioner to the Army of Tennessee and traveled the state preaching in both camps and homes. He happened to preach in the home of Rev. McCallie in the city of Chattanooga and it overflowed with soldiers and citizens alike. Palmer led the prayer when a cannon's boom filled the small space of the house. He did not stop the

³⁰⁷ Charles Hodge, "The Princeton Review on the State of the Country and of the Church," *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*, Vol. 37, No.4, (1865), 657.

³⁰⁸ Charles Hodge, *The Reunion of the Old and New-School Presbyterian Churches* (New York: Charles Scribner and Co, 1867), 18-19.

³⁰⁹ James H. Smylie, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1996), 86-87, 91.

³¹⁰ Mark Noll, ed, *Charles Hodge: The Way of Life* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987), 17-18.

³¹¹ There is no record of the speech in the *Life and Letters of Benjamin Morgan Palmer*. It is only mentioned as a "thrilling address" to Johnston's army before they went into battle. See Thomas Cary Johnson, *Life and Letters of Benjamin Morgan Palmer*, (Richmond: Whittset & Shepperson, 1875), 262.

prayer, but when he was finished he opened his eyes to an empty room.³¹² Palmer knew the risk he faced traveling in southern states but held fast to his belief that this was a righteous war. He defended it at whatever cost or peril he encountered.³¹³

Palmer also presided at the burials of Confederate officers and soldiers. At the burial of General Maxey Gregg in December 1862, he praised the service of Gregg and compared him to a Greek hero. The Civil War was not only a holy war but an epic war. He proclaimed although the Confederacy lost a valued comrade, “the state, like the Spartan mother of old, receives through us one of her noblest sons upon his shield, and pours out her grief upon his venerated form.”³¹⁴ Palmer traveled extensively throughout the South “assuming the appearance of a prophet of the Lord.”³¹⁵

On March 27, 1863, Palmer addressed the Georgia state legislature, in another *Fast Day Sermon*. This time it was commissioned by President of the Confederate States, Jefferson Davis. Palmer encouraged the South to hold fast to their faith even in the midst of despair and bloodshed. He upheld that:

Upon the dark background of the cloud which now hangs so low and drenches it with sorrow and with blood, can we discover the sign of the rainbow, the emblem of mercy and hope? I derive consolation [from] God in our favor, during the present struggle... The North cannot succeed against the South except through the perpetration of a double crime—the extermination of both the white and the black race upon our soil. Our cause is preeminently the cause of God himself, and every blow struck by is in defense of his supremacy.³¹⁶

³¹² There is no comment provided by biographer as to Palmer’s response to this incident. Thomas Cary Johnson, *Life and Letters of Benjamin Morgan Palmer*, (Richmond: Whittset & Shepperson, 1875), 264-265

³¹³ Thomas Cary Johnson, *Life and Letters of Benjamin Morgan Palmer*, (Richmond: Whittset & Shepperson, 1875), 264-269.

³¹⁴ Benjamin Morgan Palmer, “Burial of General Maxey Gregg” in *Life and Letters of Benjamin Morgan Palmer*, (Richmond: Whittset & Shepperson, 1875), 266.

³¹⁵ James W. Silver, *Confederate Morale and Propaganda* (Tuscaloosa: The Confederate Publishing Co, 1957), 78.

³¹⁶ Benjamin Morgan Palmer, “The Rainbow Round the Throne; or Judgment Tempered with Mercy,” *Life and Letters of Benjamin Morgan Palmer*, (Richmond: Whittset & Shepperson, 1875), 267-268.

This sermon indicated that although Palmer acknowledged that the South might not prevail in the battle against the North, he preferred death to subjugation. In 1864, Palmer provided a report on his activities as the Commissioner to the Army of Tennessee to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of the Confederate States.³¹⁷ He professed he “did not accomplish anything more than preaching” the word of God and salvation to anyone man who listened. Palmer felt it was his life’s mission to serve his God in nothing more than a modest fashion. The devastating blow to the South at Gettysburg in July of 1863 fueled Palmer to encourage soldiers in the face of death and danger.³¹⁸

In 1864, the *Army and Navy Messenger* compiled a tract of Thornwell’s various speeches and sermons as motivational propaganda for southerners. The tract extolled the virtue of Thornwell’s words and the war exclaiming his “stirring words, like the blast of the bugle, still echo through the land. We can conquer and we must. We can make every pass a Thermopylae...if we are overrun, we can at least die; and if our enemies’ possess our land, we can leave it a howling wilderness. But under God we shall not fail.”³¹⁹ This tract demonstrated the continuing resonance of Thornwell’s moral vision of Southern nationhood.

After the Civil War ended, Palmer continued his service in the Presbyterian Church and offered his oratory and administrative skills to continue the work of the Church. He worked diligently to rebuild the educational systems of the church and establish an intellectual discourse between both his northern and southern counterparts. On May 25,

³¹⁷ There is no direct quote from Palmer about his report to the commission. Benjamin Morgan Palmer, “Report on services as Commissioner to the Army of Tennessee” in *Life and Letters of Benjamin Morgan Palmer*, (Richmond: Whittset & Shepperson, 1875), 276-277.

³¹⁸ The battle of Gettysburg resulted in approximately fifty thousand deaths. See Bruce Catton, *The Civil War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960), 157.

³¹⁹ “Army and Navy Messenger Tract,” *Confederate Morale and Propaganda* (Tuscaloosa: The Confederate Publishing Co, 1957), 58.

1902, Palmer died from injuries occurred from a car accident. His long life was praised by all who knew him.³²⁰

Another way to understand the history of antebellum America and the process to secession is through the most influential church in the South, the Presbyterian Church. The Presbyterian Church forged the moral ground for the rest of the nation, especially the South, to follow and it claimed itself as the moral authority of the country. Church history isn't about the church itself but about institutions and the nation. We know this because through ministers like Charles Hodge, James Henley Thornwell and Benjamin Morgan Palmer, engaged in moral debates about slavery and secession thus intertwining debates between the political and religious spheres. These debates inspired others far beyond Presbyterian congregations through the ability of ministers to connect the politics of the moment to God's work: James Henley Thornwell's sermons and speeches are reprinted, Benjamin Morgan Palmer promoted Christian patriotism throughout the Civil War and Charles Hodge continued his role in the Presbyterian Church as peacemaker. The Presbyterian Church managed to maintain its moral authority in a national movement beyond politics and economics.

In the last two decades, historians have begun to see the importance of the inclusion of defenders of slavery and secession such as James Henley Thornwell and Benjamin Morgan Palmer. Mark Noll argues that because of the method of interpreting the Bible that America had developed, the American Civil War was the only resolution to the moral dilemma of slavery.³²¹ The divisions over slavery caused "a bloody fratricidal

³²⁰ Thomas Cary Johnson, *Life and Letters of Benjamin Morgan Palmer*, (Richmond: Whittset & Shepperson, 1875), 620-627.

³²¹ Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2006).

conflict” in the spiritual and material sphere of post-revolutionary America.³²² My contribution to the antebellum discussions of secession and subsequent support of the Civil War is the assertion that Charles Hodge, James Henley Thornwell and Benjamin Morgan Palmer show us a new way to see how the moral imperative of the Civil War was framed and this helps us to understand why Southerners were willing to leave the Union and unwilling to rejoin it except in defeat.

³²² James H. Smylie, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1996), 89.

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