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THE

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## WAR LETTERS OF THE BISHOP OF RICHMOND

*Edited by WILLARD E. WIGHT\**

THE Catholic Church was the only major religious body in the United States which was not split into Northern and Southern divisions by the causes which led to the Civil War or by the war itself. Even after the outbreak of hostilities, there was no official division, and hence after the conflict there was no need for reunion or apologies. This is not to say that the war did not disrupt or at least seriously impair the unity that had characterized the church prior to the conflict.<sup>1</sup>

A case in point is the difficulty encountered on two occasions in the recommendation of clerics for elevation to the episcopacy. These complications occurred in the Province of Baltimore which had three suffragan bishoprics in the Confederate States: Richmond, Charleston, Savannah, as well as the vicariate apostolic of Florida. The coming of the war and the consequent breaking off of ordinary modes of communication between the two sections interrupted the part that the Southern bishops were taking in selecting a suitable list of candidates for the See of Savannah, then vacant. The other, and more serious difficulty, was encountered in 1863 when the Archbishop of Baltimore died and the three suffragan bishops in the Confederacy were not only unable to be present for the funeral, but also found it difficult to secure a voice in the recommendation of a successor.

The blockade of the Confederate ports of entry worked a hardship upon the Catholic Church in the South. Supplies of all types necessary to carry on the services and functions of the church became more and more scarce until some of the rites of the church had to be seriously curtailed. These and other problems raised or accentuated by the war are illustrated in the letters

\*Mr. Wight is a member of the Social Science Department, Georgia Institute of Technology.

<sup>1</sup>Benjamin J. Blied, *Catholics and the Civil War* (Milwaukee, 1945), pp. 53-69, surveys the position of the bishops of the Southern States.

## LETTERS OF JOHN HOLT RICE TO THOMAS CHALMERS, 1817-1819

Edited by MARGARET DESCHAMPS MOORE\*

THE letters of John Holt Rice (1777-1831) to Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847) portray Protestant trends of the early nineteenth century, especially in the state of Virginia. Because he was writing to a foreigner, Rice's letters give the historical background and explain contemporary religious conditions to a degree not found in ordinary correspondence. They express interdenominational prejudices, yet illustrate the movement toward coöperative religious societies, reveal antislavery sentiment in a decade when such views were tolerated, and show the Presbyterians' zeal for higher education which caused Thomas Jefferson to fear that they aimed "at engrossing the education of the country."<sup>1</sup>

When Rice began his correspondence with Chalmers, he was pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Richmond and was already noted for his interest in theological seminaries, Bible societies, and religious newspapers. He was then editor of the *Christian Monitor*. Later, from January 1818 to December 1828, he edited the *Virginia Evangelical and Literary Magazine*, plans for which he discusses in his first letter to Dr. Chalmers. Rice's own denomination bestowed its highest honors upon him. In 1819 he was named moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. For his efforts in behalf of the Theological Seminary at Hampden Sydney and its successor, Union Theological Seminary now in Richmond, he is regarded by Southern Presbyterians as the father of their first seminary.<sup>2</sup>

Thomas Chalmers was one of Scotland's greatest theologians and religious leaders. His correspondence in the New College Library in Edinburgh reveals the breadth of his interest in the progress of the church throughout the world and his extensive influence as preacher, professor, writer, and social thinker.<sup>3</sup>

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\*Dr. Moore is acting associate professor of history at the University of Mississippi. These letters are a part of the Thomas Chalmers Correspondence, New College Library, Edinburgh, Scotland.

<sup>1</sup>Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Cooper, November 2, 1822, in Andrew A. Lipscomb, ed., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (Washington, 1904), XV, 402-406.

<sup>2</sup>For a brief sketch of Rice by Ernest Trice Thompson see: Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone, eds., *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York, 1928-1937), XV, 541-542. Also see William Maxwell, *A Memoir of the Rev. John H. Rice, D.D.* (Philadelphia, 1835).

<sup>3</sup>George Shepperson, "Thomas Chalmers, The Free Church of Scotland, and the South," *Journal of Southern History*, XVII (November 1951), 517-537, gives a brief biography of Chal-

Richmond, Virginia, 25 July 1817

Reverend Sir

This letter is begun under all that feeling of embarrassment which a stranger may be expected to experience when addressing a gentleman for whom he entertains the highest respect. Yet so earnest is my desire to establish a correspondence with an evangelical clergyman of the Scotch Church, that I have determined at all events to address you.

The New Edinburg Encyclopedia is republished in this country, and I subscribe for it. The Article *Christianity* in that work attracted my attention, and excited considerable curiosity respecting its author. This was in part gratified by a young clergyman, a friend of mine, who returned about a year ago from Europe. After this I saw, in the *Christian Observer*, a Review of an Address to the Parish of Kilmaney; and an extract from a speech delivered in a Bible Society. Within the last month, too, I have had the pleasure of reading a Series of Discourses on the astronomical objection to Christianity, which has been republished in this country — In this way have I become acquainted with your character; & been induced to single you out, among all the clergymen of your church, as one in correspondence with whom I should find the most pleasure & profit.

I am a clergyman, a member of the Presbytery of Hanover, in connection with the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. About five years ago I settled in this city; and have been instrumental in the erection of a place of worship, and the formation of a Presbyterian Congregation consisting of about five hundred members.<sup>4</sup>

The Presbyterian Church in the United States owes its origin to that of Scotland, and it has often occurred to me that it would be well, if a closer correspondence were kept up between these two societies. Especially it would be advantageous for Ministers of this denomination, settled in the commercial towns of the two countries to open and keep up a friendly intercourse. Here is a case for illustration. Among the numerous emigrants from Europe to the United States there is a considerable number of Scotchmen, for the most part young men who strangers in a strange land, are very often thrown into company, and form acquaintances that do them no good: and soon they form habits very different from those in which they were brought

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mers and publishes other letters, primarily on slavery, which he received from Southern ministers. For a sketch of Chalmers by William Garden Blaikie see: Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee, eds., *The Dictionary of National Biography* (London, 1921-1922), III, 1358-1363.

<sup>4</sup>Rice refers here not to communicants, but all who attended services at his church, his congregation rather than his membership. From 1812-1823, as the first pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, he received only 265 members.

up at home. Now if when a young man is about, for instance, to leave Glasgow to come to Richmond, he should have a letter of introduction and recommendation from the clergyman under whose pastoral care he has lived & has been trained, to the clergyman of the place where he expects to reside, it would at once make his situation on arrival less painful, and might prevent many evils to which the young are greatly exposed in this place — This will furnish one reason for this unexpected address to you. I have another, a just exhibition of which requires at least a general view of the ecclesiastical state of Virginia.

While this was a British Colony, the Church of England was established by law; and the Bishop of London was our Diocesan. The parts of the state at that time settled, were laid off into parishes, which were generally supplied with ministers. But these men, for the most part, instead of seeking the glory of God, and the salvation of souls, sought a living. For the most part they were needy adventurers, who neither knew nor cared anything about vital piety. The consequences were such as might have been expected. There was a form of godliness without the power.

About the year 1750, the Presbyterians made their appearance in the province. The most distinguished among them was Davies,<sup>5</sup> afterward President of Nassau Hall in New Jersey. Notwithstanding much bitter opposition, they made several establishments in the State, which have been kept up ever since, and the number somewhat increased.

Shortly after the period above mentioned, the Baptists came among us. Many among them, as I have reason to believe, were truly pious and zealous men, but very illiterate. Pretty generally they pursued some trade during the week, and preached on the Sabbath. They affected, and it may be felt, great disinterestedness — refused to accept of stipends — and declaimed with great vehemence against “money preachers.” This made them quite popular, and the sect grew very rapidly.

At the Revolution (as we are accustomed to speak) the English establishment was overthrown, and the clergymen of that church who had engaged in her service for the sake of temporal advantage, deserted her, in her time of need. Some years after this, the Legislature, at the instigation of the Baptists passed a law authorizing the sale of the Glebe lands, and other property of the late establishment. So that Episcopacy in Virginia was left poor indeed.

About the close of the war of the Revolution, the Wesleyan Methodists

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<sup>5</sup>Samuel Davies (1723-1761).



came into this state, and having proceeded pretty much in the style of the Baptists, met with considerable success.

The convulsion in the moral & religious world produced by the breaking out of the *French Revolution*, was deeply felt here. Its baleful influences seemed to threaten the destruction of religion. This great experiment on human nature, however, has had on the whole a happy effect among us. It is now seen that neither peace, nor order, nor liberty, nor any civil or political institution can be preserved without religion: and many who once were not backward to avow Deism, profess a willingness to countenance and support Christianity. Yet there is reason to apprehend that numbers who make this profession are disposed to encourage religion rather as a public benefit, than to cherish it as an individual & personal concern. Perhaps this is not a singular case.

At present the state of things is this — The Episcopal church is reviving a little. They have a new bishop, who is an evangelical preacher, and a zealous man.<sup>6</sup> He is like to do good in his Diocese. There are about thirty ministers in the State; and considerable efforts are making to encrease [*sic*] the number; if I may judge, however, without sufficient attention to their qualifications. As that Church raises its head, it shews a disposition to maintain its pretensions, and we already begin to hear of the *jus divinum* of Episcopacy; and the invalidity of Presbyterian ordination.

The Baptist preachers are quite numerous, perhaps four or five hundred. Ten or a dozen among them are men of some literary attainments; the rest ignorant except as to the elements of an English education. Almost every congregation has several of these preachers — This society is very exclusive in its sentiments utterly refusing to hold communion with others, and resolutely denying their church membership. They have most political influence in the state.

The Methodists are not quite so numerous as the Baptists; not quite so exclusive; and about equal in point of learning.

The Synod of Virginia consists of between forty and fifty members; generally zealous, warm preachers, furnished with the best education that the literary institutions of the State will afford, and anxious to diffuse religious knowledge among the people. The Synod has under its care a Theological Seminary, principally intended for the education of poor and pious youth for the ministry. This has been recently established — It is a small affair, and wants funds for the support of professors, as well as a good theological library, very much. It is under the direction of Moses Hoge D.D. a truly

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<sup>6</sup>Richard Channing Moore (1762-1841).

great and good man. There are near twenty students now pursuing their studies for the ministry of the gospel.

The Presbyterians, unhappily, are objects of great jealousy among these who profess no religion too. They are accused, without foundation, of aiming, in secret at the establishment of their form of religion.

The most perfect religious freedom is enjoyed among us; the state knows no distinction of denominations; protection is afforded to all, and support to none. The clergy live partly by their own labour, and partly by the voluntary contributions of the people.

The great bulk of the people are able to read and write; but they read little except newspapers. Religious books are few among us — religious knowledge very scanty — and the religious education of children much, very much neglected.

It has not been the policy of our State Government to afford encouragement and support to Literature & Science; and hence our institutions of learning are in a very languishing condition. There are three colleges in the state. The oldest was established under the reign of William & Mary, is called after them. The other two were erected by the zeal and public spirit of individuals among the Presbyterians — none of them however are greatly superior to private academies.

We have fifteen or twenty small Bible Societies in Virginia, which annually distribute between two and three thousand Bibles.

In all our principal towns there are Sunday Schools which meet with considerable encouragement, and promise extensive usefulness.

Since the Revolution the condition of the poor Blacks has been greatly meliorated; and we have reason to hope that before long some decisive measures will be adopted for changing their state. The conviction of the injustice and impolicy of slavery is every year increased.

I have thus given you, Sir, a very brief and of course imperfect sketch of the present state of Virginia. In this state of things the Synod of Virginia has determined to set up a periodical work to be consecrated principally to the interests of religion, without however neglecting those of sound and good learning — The form of which work is to be that of a monthly Magazine: the profits of which are to be devoted to the support of our Theological Seminary. It is hoped that it will have considerable circulation in Virginia, and the States south of us.

The Character of the Magazine will be evangelical, decidedly Presbyterian, yet liberal and friendly to other denominations.



It will contain discussions of religious doctrine: Illustrations of Scripture — Essays on Christian Morals — Religious Intelligence — Literary Notices &c&c.

The Religious Intelligence will embrace the exertions of all Christian Societies; but will more particularly notice what is done by the Presbyterian denomination in all parts of the world.

The Synod has been pleased to appoint me Editor of the Magazine. The first Number is expected to appear at the beginning of the next year. In the mean time I am engaged in making arrangements, forming correspondencies &c to enable me to discharge as well as possible the duties of an Editor.

In reference to this important work, I solicit a correspondence with some members of the Church of Scotland. I wish to receive the most valuable Religious Magazines — the best Literary Journals — The acts of your General Assembly — The Reports of Missionary & Bible Societies — The best new publications of any description, that have a strong tendency to call forth zealous exertions to promote the cause of vital piety; to explain and defend the true doctrine of the gospel; to overthrow infidelity; or destroy the creeping pestilence of Socinianism.

Mr. Gilchrist, the gentleman who will take charge of this, is a countryman of yours, who has been more than twenty years in the United States, and is now about to visit Old Scotland. He is an intelligent and worthy man; and will be happy to form an acquaintance with you. If you should find it compatible with your duty, and agreeable to your inclination to answer this letter, he will take charge of your communication. Any orders that you may please to give to your bookseller in conformity to my wishes as expressed above, will be immediately paid for by Mr. Yuille Merchant of Glasgow, with whom, I wish packages to be left directed to the care of Leitch Graham & Co. Manchester Virginia, or as Mr. Gilchrist may perscribe [*sic*].

With very great respect

Yrs & c

John H. Rice

Richmond, Virginia 30 April 1819

Rev'd. & Dear Sir

I received your letter of the 29th Decr, a few days ago; and am glad that I have so ready an opportunity of tendering you my acknowledgements.

This will be handed to you by my friend Mr. Caskie,<sup>7</sup> a native of Scotland; but for a long time resident in our vicinity. He is a man of real worth, and, I hope, of sincere piety; and will take great pleasure in our acquaintance with you.

In relation to the subject of establishments, the prejudices [torn] . . . [of] my education are in opposition to your "partialities;" and perhaps in this state of mind we should derive different conclusions from the same facts. The circumstances of the American States and of Gr. Britain or almost any protestant country are so different that it is scarcely possible to argue correctly from the one to the other. The yearly increase of our population is so great that all our efforts to afford a supply of spiritual instruction are not adequate, nor nearly adequate to the wants of the people. And it is not certain that the operations of a legal establishment, would produce ministers & churches sufficient for the necessities of the case. It is understood here, whether truly or not, that in London, Liverpool, Glasgow and other cities, which have grown rapidly, the population far exceeds the provision for religious instruction and notwithstanding all that has been done both by members of Dissenting Churches and the Establishment, that yet multitudes have no place of worship. . . . If this is the case in England, it may not be surprising that it should be so in this new country, where the whole population doubles in twenty five or thirty years; and in particular places, in less than half that time.

But whatever may be thought as to these matters, all christians here agree that the most vigorous measures are necessary to supply the spiritual wants of the people. And even now our numbers have so far outstripped the means which the church [torn] . . . [has] of affording supplies, that one is dismayed with the [torn] . . . [vastness] of the undertaking. One of the greatest evils under which [torn] . . . [we] labour is the rapid growth of our country — We are endeavoring to put all the facilities within our reach into [torn] . . . [service]; and for the rest, we must look to him who can bring strength out of our weakness, and make our feeble efforts to subserve his glory and the interests of his church.

In this city the *young* men connected with our church have recently organized a society for domestic missions, which promises well — Besides we have a Female Missionary Society, a *Cent* Society to assist in educating poor & pious youth for the Ministry, and two or three scholar institutions. We are

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<sup>7</sup>Either John Caskie (1790-1867) or his brother James Caskie (1792-1866). Both were born in Stewarton, Scotland, both came to Virginia to join their uncle Alexander Kerr in the Richmond tobacco firm of Kerr and Caskie, and both became elders in the Presbyterian Church. Jaquelin Ambler Caskie, *The Caskie Family of Virginia* (Charlottesville, 1928), pp. 27, 32.

encouraged to hope that God will not despise the day of small things; and that yet our wilderness will bud and blossom as the rose. The brethren on the other side of the Atlantic will we are persuaded aid us by their remembrances at a throne of grace.

The subject of greatest solicitude with me at the present is the *University of Virginia*. I fear that the whole establishment will fall under Socinian influence and management. Mr. Jefferson who takes very great interest in it, is known to be a Unitarian. His zeal is great, and his personal influence irresistible. I understand that he has written to Dugald Stewart for the purpose of procuring professors from your country.<sup>8</sup> I know not how true this may be. But this I know, that a Scotsman, who has [torn] . . . [lost] the religion of his fathers, is uniformly the bitterest [torn] . . . determined enemy of true piety. . . . This is easily accounted for — He sins against great light; and breaks thro' all the restraints of an early religious education. A man of good attainments and true regard for religion shall be hailed by me as a brother, come from what clime he may; but we have already baptised Deists enought among us, without importing any from abroad. Unhappily the school in this country that most nearly approaches to an English University (Cambridge in Massachusetts) is altogether under Socinian direction, and is acquiring a formidable efficiency in promoting that cause. Indeed I fear that it is to be the plague of the church here for some time to come.

I have always considered your parochial schools as the glory of Scotland. We are attempting a similar plan with us, with one exception however of disastrous importance — We have no assurance that these institutions will be under the direction of religion. That must depend on the future exertions of the friends of Religion. Enquiries have frequently been made of me respecting the *details* of your parish schools — And I have not been able to afford information sufficiently minute to answer the purpose of the enquirers — I should be glad to get some book that would inform me.

. . . .

J. H. Rice

Richmond, Virginia, 14 August 1819<sup>9</sup>

Rev. & Dear Sir

A direct conveyance offers from this place to Glasgow; and I eagerly em-

<sup>8</sup>Dugald Stewart (1753-1828) then living in retirement at Kinneil House, Linlithgowshire, Scotland, was professor of moral philosophy at Edinburgh University. In his first book, published in 1792, he had referred approvingly to some of the French "philosophes." His assistance had been sought by Jefferson.

<sup>9</sup>This letter was published with slight variations in Maxwell, *A Memoir of the Rev. John H. Rice, D.D.*, pp. 167-170, from which the words in brackets have been copied.

brace the opportunity which it affords of communicating to you on a subject in which I take a very lively interest.

You will receive with this several pamphlets; and among them "Extracts from the Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America." for 1819.

I refer you to the passage marked on page 158 of this pamphlet for the object of this letter.<sup>10</sup>

In considering the signs of the times, it has appeared to me that if, in any one thing, the intimations of heaven are more prominent and decisive than in all others, it is in the favour shown to the united efforts of Christians to promote true religion. Protestants of different denominations endeavoured, for ages, to sustain and advance the truth by controversy; and they had well nigh disputed vital religion out of the world. Within the last twenty five years, they have combined in various associations, such as Bible and Missionary Societies, for the promotion of Christianity, and now the word of God is going forth into all the world; and while evangelical piety is growing among Christians, heathens Mahometans & Jews are gathering into the fold of Christ. It is by the *zealous cooperation* of Christians that the glorious things foretold in the Bible are to be accomplished.

The Romish Church brings all its energies to bear on any point sufficiently important to call them forth. Cannot Protestants devise some means by which their united strength may be employed for the accomplishment of the great purposes & plans undertaken in the present day? Have not Christians of this age given a pledge that they will neglect no measures within the compass of their ability to make known the saving health of Christ to all nations? The Bible Society, wherever its branches extend, is but one association and the wonderful favour shown by heaven to this institution seems to me to point to the adoption of other measures of versal co-operation. And I do think that such a correspondence between all protestant churches, as would cause all to recognize the Unity of the Church of Christ however its parts may be separated; and diffuse a common feeling thro the whole body would be productive of the happiest effects. Besides the delightful communion that would then subsist; many important benefits might be con-

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<sup>10</sup>The passage reads: "The following overture was brought in, and being read and amended, was adopted, viz. Resolved, That the Rev. John H. Rice, Drs. Green, Miller, Alexander, and Romeyn, and Rev. Messrs. John B. Hoge, and George S. Woodhull, be a committee to enquire into the expediency of collecting information of the doctrine and discipline, and general state of the protestant churches in Europe; and into the expediency of establishing a communication with the judicatories of said churches, or any of them; and that said committee report thereon to the next General Assembly." *Extracts from the Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 1819* (Philadelphia, 1819), p. 158.

ferred. For instance, You have [a] Missionary Society for the purpose of sending the gospel to the Tartar [tribes,] and when once you shall have succeeded in firmly planting Christianity in the place selected for the field of your operations, its local situation will, I suppose afford you very great facilities for a wider display of your benevolence. There may be most important and urgent calls which your resources may not enable you to meet. In this case the whole protestant world ought to step forward and afford you aid. The liberality of American Christians might enlarge your means, or relieve your embarrassments — And so of us. We have a mighty field for domestic missions. We have Indians and Blacks, and Spaniards to Christianize, and at the same time are obliged to support Theological Seminaries for the educations of young men for the ministry. In some urgent case you might help us then, and draw our hearts to you by a sense of obligation. So throughout Protestant Christendom. It was with views of this sort that the overture was brought forward in the G Assembly.

Now I wish to know of you whether in your judgment any correspondence can be established between the Church of Scotland and the Presbyterian Church in the United States that would promise an increase in brotherly affection and cooperation in the important measures now carrying on for evangelizing the world — We have the same Confession of Faith, the same discipline, the same mode of worship. In fact the Presbyterian Church here is a descendant of the Church of Scotland.

And the great mass of our people are descendants of the English Scotch & Irish — We use the same language, have the same stock of literature; in general the same usages, and fundamentally the same laws. The intercourse between us and Great Britain is more than between us and all other parts of the world. Harmony and peace ought always to prevail among us — Your Reviews and our Newspapers seem to forbid this — But Christians ought to Counteract their influence. The present is a most favourable time for them to step forward and "*brighten the chain of love.*" We are at peace; the hostile feeling produced by the late war is giving way to kindly sentiments. Our government and our people are generally disposed to cultivate a friendly disposition towards you. I wish the Christians in each nation so to draw the cords of love, that ambitious rulers will be unable to divide us. Men will learn war no more, when the majority of the people become Christians, and love as brethren.

This subject interests me so that I talk at a great rate. Excuse my loquacity.

I wish that your Reviewers would alter their tone respecting America. They suffer themselves to be greatly imposed on by garrulous travellers who go home, & *play the traveller*, as the French say, most egregiously. But they seem to obtain easy credit with their countrymen; and their wonderful stories are repeated in illustration of a state of morals and manners not known in this country. Some of the people here laugh at their mistakes and others are angry at abuse. The general effect of the scant praise and abundant censure bestowed on us convinces me that the people of this country in general esteem the British more than they do any but themselves, and would rather have their praise and enjoy their friendship than that of all the world beside. If this is so, how easy would it be to perpetuate peace — And how deadly must be the hatred, when all these feelings are changed into malignity.

You see that I write you with the freedom and confidence of an old acquaintance. I regard you as a brother in the gospel, rejoice in your reputation, and [much more in your widely extended usefulness, and] pray that your labours may be crowned with more and yet more success — and

I am most truly yrs

J. H. Rice

Your sermons in the Tron Church have been republished here & are highly esteemed.