

Uncle Tom's Cabin, White Protestant Christianity and the Fate of
the Nation

By
Matthew F. Mahla

Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
Department of History of Vanderbilt University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for Honors in History

April 2009

On the basis of this thesis defended by
the candidate on

April 29, 2009 we, the
undersigned, recommend that the
candidate be awarded

High Honors
in History:



Richard Blumenthal



White

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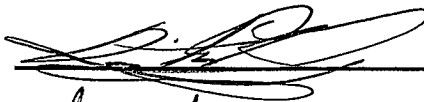
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Introduction

Born on June 14, 1811, Harriet Beecher Stowe grew up in New England and was raised with a significant Protestant worldview. Her family history was steeped in the New England Protestantism that had been pervasive in that region since the first settlers hit land in the seventeenth century. Eventually, this very influential Christianity, coupled with her experience with Southern slavery in Kentucky and the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, inspired Stowe to write *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Published in 1852, this anti-slavery story quickly became the most popular novel ever written and gained its author widespread notoriety throughout the United States and abroad. While countless historians have chronicled the general public reaction to the novel and critiqued its literary style, no one to date has thoroughly examined the response to the book by the institutionalized Protestant Church. Through specific analysis of the Methodist and Presbyterian churches of antebellum America, it is the goal of this thesis to argue that Stowe's work further perpetuated and encouraged the schisms that were ravaging these two denominations in the years preceding the Civil War. Further, because these denominations were so influential in those years, the thesis will also contend that these splits contributed, in no small way, to the great divide that developed between the North and the South.

Protestant Christianity was on the rise in America in the years preceding the Civil War. The young nation was being swept by a religious awakening that yielded significant increases in church membership. Because of this, Protestant denominations represented some of the most pervasive and influential organizations during the time period, and church leaders enjoyed a widespread impact on the ideas and activities of American citizens. Knowing the scope of Protestantism's influence, Harriet Beecher Stowe, by her own admission, wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin* "to show how Jesus Christ, who liveth and was dead, and now is alive and forever-more,

has still a mother's love for the poor and lowly, and that no man can sink so low but that Jesus Christ will stoop to take his hand. Who so low, who so poor, who so despised as the American slave?"¹ Essentially, her novel was aimed at rousing Americans out of their apathy to take a strong, unequivocal stance against slavery. The primary tactic that she employed was to show that Christianity was firmly entrenched against the South's institution of human bondage. To many church leaders, this was highly debatable. Ultimately, the Christian context of her novel guaranteed that the heavily influential and divided Protestant denominations would have much to say about *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Historians and literary critics acknowledge that there is no mistaking the heavy impact of Christianity on Stowe's work and the presence of many Christian themes throughout her text. In fact, multiple historians have relayed the fact that Stowe claimed *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was written directly by God.² Thomas Gossett includes, in his work, a letter from Harriet Beecher Stowe to her brother, Edward, in which she claimed, "I only put down what I saw" and "it all came before me in visions."³ Religion was important enough to the author that she believed she only acted as an agent for God in writing *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Clearly, religion factored heavily in Stowe's analysis of and response to the slavery question facing the nation during the time of her writing.

That the church was instrumental to this question in the period leading up to the Civil War is not a new concept for historians. It is well chronicled by many that the church was a predominant institution in a heavily Christian America. Its influence is something that cannot and has not been overlooked in the attempt to determine what led to the great sectional divide

¹ Charles Stowe, *The Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe* (Boston & New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1889), 154

² Thomas Gossett, *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1985), 96; Moira Davison Reynolds, *Uncle Tom's Cabin and Mid-nineteenth Century United States* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1985), 128

³ Gossett, 96

that spurred the start of the Civil War. In determining my contribution to the scholarship that is focused on this time period, it is important to look at the popular themes and ideas presented by United States historians.

A relatively new, but rather important theme in this topic's historiography is the important role that the denominational schisms of the nineteenth century played in the division of the nation. When C.C. Goen published his 1985 work, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation*, his introduction stated that the idea that "the divided churches painfully exposed the deep moral chasm between North and South" had not been adequately addressed preceding his work.⁴ His central argument was that the denominations, most notably Presbyterians, Baptists and Methodists, broke along sectional lines, and these schisms were significant and perpetuated the final break that occurred between the governments of the North and South. Because these schisms appeared to be peaceable, it made it easier for Southerners to break political ties. Additionally, in his eyes, "the divided churches played a crucial role in creating and sustaining...distorted images and psychological attitudes" of negativity between Northerners and Southerners.⁵ These proved to be a crucial driving force towards Southern secession.

Like most historians, Goen places the impetus for denominational schism on the controversial issue of slavery. His argument builds off of a claim made by Don Mathews in his 1977 *Religion in the Old South*. Mathews' work notes how the pro vs. antislavery debate began to rise in vehemence in the early to mid nineteenth century. He argues that the dispute that occurred within churches between abolitionists and proslavery advocates became a process that threatened to divide the Union. He contends, as does Goen, that "if religious people who valued forgiveness, reconciliation, and love could not resolve their differences, what hope for

⁴ C.C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985), 4

⁵ *Ibid*, 30

compromise was there for politicians – most of whom were lawyers – whose philosophy of social action was based on an adversary view of issues.”⁶ Both historians argue that the South created a Christianized slaveholding ethic that directly conflicted with the abolitionist ethic that was rising in popularity in many Northern religious circles. From this, there arose a sense of competition between the North and the South as to which section was more Christian.⁷

Ultimately, this competition and conflict eroded the sense of Christian brotherhood that occurred between the two sections and represented an irreparable split between the North and the South.

In the same vein, contemporary church historian Mark Noll points to slavery’s perpetuation of a theological divide over interpretation of the Bible and the idea of divine providence as a critical issue in leading to the split between the North and the South. His argument is based upon the idea that the Protestant religion was the most important center of value that existed in America on the eve of the Civil War. He provides numerous amounts of statistical data that lend credence to the idea that Protestant Christian churches were more popular, pervasive and influential than the government itself.⁸ From this, he depicts the Civil War as a theological crisis, which involved Southerners arguing that slavery was Biblical and in tune with divine providence and Northerners advocating that the Bible and providence were clearly opposed to the South’s “peculiar institution.” He briefly mentions that *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* “provided one of the era’s most powerful examples of abolitionist appeal to the general spirit of the Bible.”⁹ To him, this work was just an example of the divide that occurred between Northerners and Southerners over slavery. Like Goen and Mathews, Noll iterates that the Church’s split over the slavery issue was the driving force behind the Civil War.

⁶ Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, (Chicago:University of Chicago Press, 1977), 159

⁷ Mathews, 181

⁸ Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 11-16

⁹ Noll, 41

While the slavery issue was undeniably important, there has been a scholarly trend towards downplaying slavery as the ultimate cause of the Civil War. Perhaps rising from the group of scholars, Curtis Johnson's 1993 *Redeeming America* includes the slavery debate as just one of many issues that arose between the antebellum churches. Johnson, like the others, claims that the religious debate was instrumental in perpetuating the national split. Where he differs is in the weight he places on slavery as the cause of that debate. His argument centers on five points of contention that occurred between Northern and Southern Christians during the mid 19th century: disagreements over the Protestant doctrines of *Sola Scriptura*, the Second Birth, the need for a just and holy life, a desire to redeem America, and the Second Coming. For Johnson, the ideas concerning these doctrines were divided into two camps, the Formalists and the Antiformalists. The formalists were predominantly upper and middle class Presbyterians and Congregationalists and were strongest in the Northeast. On the other hand, Antiformalists were middle to lower class Methodists and Baptists, and their stronghold was in the South and West. While it is unnecessary to analyze these contentious issues in depth, it is important to note that Johnson believed proslavery vs. antislavery to be one of many religious conflicts that spilled over into political and cultural arenas and encouraged a sectional split in the nation.¹⁰ Regardless of the weight he places on slavery as the point of that contention, it is important to note that he agrees with previous historians on the significant impact of the slavery debate that occurred within the Protestant Church. Stowe's Christian examination of slavery became the ultimate driving force behind *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and it was within this debate that the novel had its greatest influence.

Therefore, historians are clear in placing Harriet Beecher Stowe as part of the faction of the Christian debate that sided with antislavery. It is within this context that Mark Noll mentions

¹⁰ Curtis D. Johnson, *Redeeming America* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Inc., 1993)

Stowe and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Stowe's antislavery tradition is also mentioned in Kathryn Long's *The Revival of 1857-58*, which chronicles the religious revival that occurred in the years immediately prior to Southern secession from the Union. Her introduction notes how this religious awakening has not received much focus from historians due to the popularity of the First Great Awakening as a course of study. Nonetheless, her work sees this revival as a critical factor in the growing abolitionist appeal that occurred in the North in the late 1850's. The mindset of the revival made religious awakening ideology synonymous with the antislavery tradition. This encapsulates Stowe's idea that religious fervor should be accompanied with a desire for reformation of society. In this sense, Long places *Uncle Tom's Cabin* into an awakening tradition aimed at reforming American society from the evils of slaveholding.¹¹ She also mentions that the revival received tremendous press coverage, throughout the extremely popular religious periodicals and also, for the first time in history, secular newspapers.¹²

Press coverage was an important and growing phenomenon during this time period, and denominational newspapers provided Protestant Churches with another opportunity to influence the American people. A large percentage of Americans received denominational periodicals, which were seen as an accurate representation of the denomination's viewpoints. For this reason, the majority of evidence for this thesis is drawn from over thirty periodical sources ranging from the 1830's to the 1870's. These sources give an accurate representation of the views of church leaders and demonstrate the amount of coverage the slavery issue and Christianity received. The high level of attention occasioned by the revival that Long discusses, coupled with the rage created by *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, were crucial in compelling Southern

¹¹ Kathryn Long, *The Revival of 1857-58* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 93

¹² *Ibid*, 27

leaders to believe they were backed into a corner. It is with this in mind that Stowe's novel becomes such an interesting, but largely undocumented area of investigation.

Historians have reached wide consensus concerning the Protestant Church's debate over slavery as a key component of division that occurred between the North and the South. Harriet Beecher Stowe was clearly part of that debate, and she entered the conflict with the most widespread novel ever written, a work that was profoundly Christian. Despite this, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is left relatively unmentioned by any of the above historians for its role in polarizing the two sides. In *Broken Churches, Broken Nation*, C.C. Goen implores his readers to understand that it is impossible to determine the impact of any one piece of writing on the course of history.¹³ Despite this claim, this thesis will attempt to do just that. It is reasonable to assume that because this novel received so much more acclaim than any novel ever written before it that it enters itself into a new category of writing. Additionally, Thomas Gossett mentions that most antislavery works before Stowe's were met with relatively little success, to the point that her publishers were less than optimistic about the potential for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.¹⁴ I agree with Reynolds when she says that "Southerners who did read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* must have recognized its potential effects on their 'peculiar institution.'"¹⁵ The surprise and fear that its popularity generated in Southerners' minds and the minds of other proslavery advocates had an immense impact on how secure they felt that slavery was. Yet what, if anything, the Northern and Southern churches had to say about *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is neglected in Mathew's, Johnson's and Goen's works.

In the same manner, while Reynolds includes reaction to the book from literary scholars, pro-slavery advocates, and abolitionists, she does not include any detail as to the church's

¹³ Goen, 14

¹⁴ Gossett, 165

¹⁵ Reynolds, 158

reaction. Her work includes the criticisms that came from Southerners, as well as the negative reaction of black abolitionists that felt Stowe stereotyped blacks as being gregarious and unintelligent.¹⁶ She even makes her argument that Stowe was “overwhelmingly successful in changing public opinion” (Reynolds, 164). So, while the church was instrumental in helping shape public opinion in the nineteenth century, Reynolds neglects to mention what role Stowe’s novel had in influencing the church. While her focus is not primarily the reaction generated by the book, it is surprising that such an important component of societal reaction is left unmentioned.

Likewise, Gossett downplays the Church’s reaction. While his work is inclusive of religious praise and criticism, it fits clergymen’s sentiments into the overarching political and social reaction to the book. He mentions how some clergymen opposed to the novel would attack the author personally and “denounced Stowe almost in street language.”¹⁷ On the other hand, antislavery clergy would often endorse her work. Despite this, Gossett makes the claim that “proslavery sentiment, even in the North, was strong enough to prevent church bodies from endorsing *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.”¹⁸ For the most part, the church’s reaction is not a focal point of Gossett’s work. He neglects to mention what role *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* had in the extremely important religious debate that occurred between those that were in favor of continuing and extending slavery and those who felt it was a black stain that needed to be eradicated from the country.

My thesis hopes to address this gap in the historiography. Because recent trends have tended to downplay *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, it seems that the role of this novel in the struggle has been largely overlooked. It does appear that *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* further polarized the dissenting

¹⁶ Reynolds, 162

¹⁷ Gossett, 192

¹⁸ Ibid, 176

sects of the split denominations, and it is evident that these schisms were a significant factor in the process that led to the Civil War. While historians agree that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had little affect on deciding the slavery debate, it did have a great effect that its author did not intend; the most popular novel ever written succeeded in further polarizing the split denominations and increased the sense of urgency for proslavery advocates. While I agree with C.C. Goen that it is difficult to examine the reaction of one piece of writing, I will contend that the uniqueness of the popularity and readership of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* places it in a different category than any writing that had ever existed before it. That it was the most polarizing work entered into the nation's most polarizing antebellum debate is a fact that cannot be overlooked, especially considering that it was imbued with Christian themes. Regardless of whether or not Lincoln was right when he stated that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* started the Civil War, he saw the importance of the work to the debate and struggle. Its influence deserves and will receive more thorough analysis in this thesis.

Chapter Overview

This examination begins with a background overview in Chapter One that lays the foundation for the environment into which Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Since its inception as a settlement, and later its own country, America was deeply tied to Protestant Christianity. Most of the major Protestant denominations have a storied history that dates back to the early settlers of the British colonies. Chapter One demonstrates that antebellum revivalism made the pre-Civil War time period one of the most deeply influenced by Protestantism. Presbyterian, Baptist and Methodist Christians found themselves part of some of the largest and most influential organizations in America. Into this context, Stowe, who was herself an adherent to evangelical Congregationalism and Presbyterianism, wrote her Christian antislavery text. This chapter also examines the uniqueness of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In its day,

Stowe's novel was the most popular ever written, the first antislavery text to receive widespread acclaim, and it was successful both at home and abroad. This distinctiveness makes her novel a valuable and insightful area of examination for this era.

With this context in place, Chapters Two and Three provide denominational case studies to examine the effects of a popular, Christian antislavery novel written in an era so deeply influenced by Protestant Christianity. Chapter Two focuses specifically on the Methodist Church in America. The Methodists were a logical choice for examination because they represented the largest Christian denomination during antebellum times. Additionally, this denomination has a history of conflict and confusion over the slavery issue. What this chapter ultimately seeks to demonstrate is that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was a polarizing force within a denomination that was already divided by the question of human bondage. It also provides a framework for the types of arguments and debates that this issue created within a Protestant context.

Chapter Three addresses the third largest denomination in antebellum Christian America, the Presbyterians. While ranking behind the Baptists, the Presbyterian Church and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* provides a much more unique area of examination. The reason for this is that the Baptist Church shares a lot of similarities with their Methodist brethren, in terms of both sphere of influence and history in dealing with the slavery issue. Both of these denominations were most predominant among lower to middle class Southerners and Westerners. Also, both denominations split over slavery within a year of each other, with Northerners and Southerners drawing firm lines against and for human bondage. It is my belief that examination of the Baptists would essentially amount to a recapitulation of the Methodist chapter. The Presbyterians, on the other hand, have a different history than the other two Protestant

denominations. This distinctiveness lies in the importance of a specific theological debate and how this debate shaped and was shaped by the slavery issue. Ultimately, this sheds further light on the polarizing effect of Stowe's novel and the ways that slavery rocked the antebellum Protestant Churches. Both these case studies demonstrate that America was heading down a dangerous path that ultimately culminated in secession and Civil War.¹⁹

¹⁹ It should be noted that both the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches in antebellum times had influential and important black abolitionists. Examination of the reactions of black Protestant abolitionists would prove to be inciteful and necessary to capture the full story of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Protestant Christianity. However, due to time constraints, this thesis focuses primarily on the reaction of the white Protestant Church to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Any mention of Protestants throughout the remainder of this thesis should be read as pertaining to white Protestants only.

Chapter One: A Unique Novel in a Protestant Nation

Perhaps the most influential life event that was to shape the story of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was the 1833 visit that Harriet Beecher Stowe made into Kentucky, a slave state. At the time, she was working as a teacher and made the trip with a fellow teacher named Miss Dutton. It was in Kentucky, that “the young authoress first came into personal contact with the negro slaves of the South.”¹ Years after the visit, Miss Dutton reflected, in a letter, upon the trip the two had made. In the letter, she mentioned that, at the time, it seemed as if Stowe was not paying “the slightest attention,” but after reading the novel it became clear that many of Stowe’s anecdotes came from that visit to Kentucky.² Almost two decades later, this visit was so influential that it comprised a good portion of the inspiration for the scenes depicted in the novel. This is something that Stowe corroborated in comments made following the initial publication of her book. In these remarks, she claimed that “the separate incidents that compose the narrative are, to a very great extent, authentic, occurring many of them...under [my] own observation.”³ Clearly, her first impressions of slavery were long-lasting.

What imbedded the scenes of human bondage so firmly in her mind was her Protestant Christian ethic, which increasingly compelled her towards antislavery. She drew her opinions towards slavery from the views espoused by her Protestant denomination. This was not something unique to Harriet Beecher Stowe. Protestant Christianity was sweeping across the nation in the early to mid nineteenth century, and it shaped a great deal of opinion both for and against slavery. This would have a profound impact on both Stowe’s novel and how the novel was received by the public. In order to understand why Methodists and Presbyterians reacted the

¹ Charles Stowe, *The Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe* (Boston & New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1889), 71

² *Ibid*, 71-72

³ *National Era*, April 1, 1852

way they did, which will be studied in Chapters Two and Three, it is crucial to examine the national context into which Stowe published her antislavery novel. It was because the United States was a Protestant nation that Stowe's text achieved unique status as an enormously popular and publicized novel. This notoriety ultimately deemed that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* would have a profound effect.

A Protestant Nation

It was impossible for the slavery issue to remain outside the realm of the Protestant Christian Church. One of the main reasons for this is that the debate occurred "in an age when almost all authority for action was referred to the Bible."⁴ The influence of Christianity was quite clear to many people of the day. An 1851 review of Alexis de Tocqueville's work on democracy, reprinted in the *New York Times*, characterized the importance of the Christian religion in America:

In the United States religion also governs the mind, restrains it in its aberrations, and thus becomes a guarantee of the duration of the Republic. Everybody in the United States professes religious dogmas. The small number who are not sincere Christians affect to be so, lest they should be suspected of having no religion. Christianity, therefore, has an external adhesion which is unanimous.⁵

Almost a decade later, the same secular newspaper agreed with the sentiment that "Christianity, which forms the content and essence of our civilization, has always and everywhere to form the rule of our actions."⁶ This mindset was part of an advocacy for Sundays to be a civil day off from legislative activities. It was clear to these writers, and also evidenced by them, that Christianity was fundamentally important both to American politics and society, and shaped the course of the country's history.

⁴ Moira Davison Reynolds, *Uncle Tom's Cabin and Mid-nineteenth Century United States* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1985), 66

⁵ *New York Times*, October 24, 1851

⁶ *New York Times*, June 13, 1860

In fact, Methodism and Presbyterianism had played a role in America from the days of the early colonists. Puritans, who were to become Congregationalists and Presbyterians, found a safe haven for their religious beliefs on the rocky shores of New England. Methodism quickly found its way into Virginia and beyond, as the freedoms of belief offered by America ensured that Christianity would thrive and grow. Both of these denominations saw tremendous success in the nineteenth century, and their ranks were still swelling significantly as Stowe published her famous antislavery novel. According to the Census of 1850, there were 34,476 Catholic and Protestant churches for the American population of 23,191,876 people. That is one Christian church for every 673 American citizens. Of the churches, Methodists accounted for 13,280, placing them as the most represented church in America. Presbyterians formed 4,824 churches, which found them only behind Methodists and Baptists as the largest denominations.⁷ In addition to the amount of churches, Methodism saw a large increase in membership over the decade between 1850 and 1860, containing close to two million members on the eve of the Civil War. This substantial amount of growth was due to revivalism sweeping the nation during this time period. Methodist Church leaders were successful in employing effective revivalist rhetoric that encouraged new converts to join their church. In the same manner, Presbyterian membership jumped from around 350,000 in 1850 to close to half a million in 1860.⁸ While these numbers seem small relative to the population, C.C. Goen points out that “nearly every minister preached regularly to congregations three or four times the size of the church membership.” His work also mentions the fact that church buildings had the capacity to hold

⁷ Edwin S. Gaustad, *Historical Atlas of Religion in America* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2001), 400; While the Baptist Church is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is worth noting that the Baptists, like the Presbyterians and Methodists, split in the decades leading up to the Civil War. The Baptist Church split in 1844 of the issue of slavery and continue to grow further apart over the next 17 years. As noted in the introduction, the Presbyterians were chosen for analysis over the Baptists because of the uniqueness of the Presbyterian story. Baptists generally had the same sphere of influence as Methodists and generally a similar experience with slavery. Presbyterians, on the other hand, provide a unique and insightful area of examination.

⁸ *Ibid*, 131-137

three-fifths of the American population at one time. It seems clear that this information represents Protestant Christianity as a “massive social reality.”⁹

Another way to gauge the social reach of Protestant denominations is a study of the dissemination of religious periodicals. The first Christian periodical, *Christian History*, appeared in Boston in 1745. During the next century, periodicals from various denominations began sprouting up throughout all of the states, often with the larger denominations at the forefront. As a result, “most of the principal denominations had effected the establishment of an official or unofficial organ for each state” by the 1840’s.¹⁰ Using the Southern Atlantic states as an example of a larger trend, Henry Smith Stroupe notes that by 1850 there was “one subscriber to a religious periodical in every ninety-six persons” in that region.¹¹ Not surprisingly, a large percentage of those subscribers were readers of the three Methodist and five Presbyterian papers that were circulating at that time. In the decade preceding the Civil War, many more religious newspapers were started, reaching much wider success and prosperity for their editors.

The reason for this was the belief that the press was an avenue for the spread of religious ideas. According to Candy Gunther Brown in her work, *The Word in the World*, “the tone of evangelical commentary denoted optimism that publishers could effectively deploy printed texts to contend for religious truth.” Because of this belief, one Protestant periodical determined that “the pulpit and the press are inseparably connected...The Press, then is to be regarded with a sacred veneration and supported with religious care.”¹² Ultimately, denominational newspapers argued that their denominations’ interpretations of Scripture and doctrines were the proper ways

⁹ C.C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985), 55

¹⁰ Henry Smith Stroupe, *Religious Press in the South Atlantic States, 1802-1865* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1956), 25

¹¹ *Ibid*, 27

¹² Candy Gunther Brown, *The Word in the World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 49

to express Christianity as it was meant to be. A widespread readership suggests that these periodicals were effectively seen as a way for denominations to disseminate their religious truths.

It is for this reason, that Methodist and Presbyterian periodicals encompass a large portion of the primary sources used to examine the two denominations in the following chapters. Denominational newspapers were important because they provide an accurate representation of the denomination's views. Additionally and importantly, "subscription to a church periodical became an act of expressing denominational loyalty."¹³ Therefore, examining religious newspapers demonstrates how the dissemination of dissenting doctrines further enhanced the sense of division and rivalry between denominations, such as Northern and Southern Methodists following their split in 1844. Because of this, I chose to analyze periodicals from both regions of the country, including places such as New York, Philadelphia, New Orleans, Nashville, Chicago, Cincinnati, and Charleston. These sources give a fair representation of the beliefs and ideas held by these denominations in antebellum times and offer a good sense of the popular ideas spreading to Protestant religious adherents.

What these sources also suggest is that the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches were not only influencing American citizens on Sundays. Americans were breathing in the teachings and ideas of their denominations constantly. This type of influence is exemplified in the example of James A. Thome, included in C.C. Goen's *Broken Churches, Broken Nation*. Thome, in a letter to antislavery activist Theodore Dwight Weld, recalled the favorable response he received from an audience when he encouraged immediate abolition. Despite the popularity of his message, the crowd was slow to act because "they were chiefly Methodists, and were afraid to move until their minister should say – *move*."¹⁴ Religious adherents were not simply reading and hearing

¹³ Brown, 145

¹⁴ Goen, 58

for the sake of reading and hearing; they were looking to their denominational leaders for insight into what their Christian duty required. Additionally, religious debates were broadcasted publicly across the widely disseminated press. American citizens had a clear view of denominational strife as well as an opportunity to decide which denomination's views were most attractive. Consequently, the influence of these denominations was pervasive. Presbyterians and Methodists knew this, and their leaders and adherents used the pen and the pulpit to espouse ideas and encourage action. This is exactly the type of influence that Harriet Beecher Stowe attempted to draw upon with the publication of her novel. Examining slavery through the lens of Christianity was a powerfully persuasive tactic in a nation so deeply influenced by the Christian religion. This strategy, paired with the novel's enormous success, made *Uncle Tom's Cabin* a popular topic for denominational discussion, and therefore, a uniquely divisive force in the antebellum Methodist and Presbyterian Churches.

A Unique Novel

Uncle Tom's Cabin first appeared as a serial in the *National Era* beginning on June 5, 1851. It ran in that periodical until its completion in April 1852. Even before it was published as a book, Stowe's novel was already receiving massive acclaim from its readers. In a *National Era* article dated November 27, 1851, the editor noted how the "subscribers in renewing their subscriptions are unanimous in their praise of this admirable production [*Uncle Tom's Cabin*]." The article further chronicled their desire not to see the novel completed in too short a time because of their enjoyment of it.¹⁵ Newspapers like the *New York Evangelist* and *The Literary World* ran advertisements publicizing the day that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* would be ready in book form because of the widespread anticipation that the story produced as a serial in the

¹⁵ *National Era*, November 27, 1851

newspaper.¹⁶ Before being printed as a novel, Stowe's work was already well on its way to impressive success.

When it was first published on March 20, 1852, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* quickly became the most popular novel ever written. According to the *Liberator*, demand was so great that "three paper mills are constantly employed in making the paper," and three "power presses are kept running 24 hours per day" just to meet orders.¹⁷ Ultimately, the antislavery work sold 10,000 copies within the first week and over 300,000 copies within the first year of publication.¹⁸ Thomas Gossett notes that this was "an unprecedented number for any book, except the Bible, in so short a period of time."¹⁹ Mark Noll, refers to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a "lightning-rod novel."²⁰ While the sheer number of copies sold is impressive by itself, one reviewer, during the time of publication, explained that the novel "probably had 'ten readers to every purchaser,'" demonstrating an exceedingly enormous level of popularity.²¹ Extending *Uncle Tom's* notoriety further were the numerous amounts of merchandise sold and songs written. Additionally, the novel "became as popular on stage as in book form."²² In fact, it remained the most popular play in America for 80 years after its original stage production.²³ The fame and success for its author traversed internationally, as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* received an enormous amount of praise in Britain and other European countries, inspiring many international luminaries to host Mrs. Stowe. What is clear is that Harriet Beecher Stowe created quite the stir when she wrote her

¹⁶ *New York Evangelist*, March 11, 1852; *The Literary World*, March 20, 1852

¹⁷ *Liberator*, April 9, 1852

¹⁸ Thomas Gossett, *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1985), 164

¹⁹ *Ibid*

²⁰ Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 44

²¹ Gossett, 165

²² Goen, 147

²³ Reynolds, 152

profound and provocative antislavery novel. It encouraged an unprecedented wide readership and enormous success, unlike any novel ever written before it.

The acclaim achieved by *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is important because of the controversial topic of the text. From the onset of the nation up to the years preceding the Civil War, the enslavement of the African race had been a contentious issue for Americans. It was a controversy that raged on during the writing process of the Declaration of Independence, as well as the Constitution of the United States. It demonstrated its potential divisiveness numerous times throughout the 19th century, requiring such desperate legislation as the Missouri Compromise of 1820 to quell secession and Civil War. During the time that Stowe put her pen to paper to write her novel, slavery was one the most divisive issues facing American citizens. What makes Stowe's novel so unique is that antislavery works before *Uncle Tom's Cabin* were met with relatively little success, to the point that her publishers were less than optimistic about the potential for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In fact, Thomas Gossett suggests that numerous publishers actually refused to undertake the project.²⁴ That *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was making such a strong run was duly noted by many American citizens, and countless reviewers began to anticipate what kind of effect this novel would have.

These commentaries were crucial in shaping the perception of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. They did so because they were extremely widespread. A writer for the *National Era* commented that "testimonials of the strongest kind, numerous enough to fill a volume, have already appeared in the public journals."²⁵ This statement was made in the paper less than a month after the novel was first published. It is likely that reviews and comments on the book were more widely disseminated than the novel itself. Religious and secular periodicals alike, both North and South,

²⁴ Gossett, 165

²⁵ *National Era*, April 15, 1852

found *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to be an important topic of discussion, and because the papers were so popular, they possessed a great deal of influence in shaping public opinion. The extensive and provocative reviews suggest that newspaper editors were aware of their potential powers of persuasion. Their activities guaranteed that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* would remain a popular subject of debate in the public sphere. This only further contributed to the popularity and uniqueness of the novel.

Many Northern reviewers believed that Stowe's novel was the beginning of the end for American slavery. The *New Englander* praised *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for having "a success entirely without parallel in the history of literature." It continued by noting that "Mrs. Stowe has done what multitudes would much rather she had not done. She has made the public realize, to a most alarming extent, the unspeakable wickedness of American Slavery."²⁶ The writer seemed quite aware of the fact that slavery was a controversial issue and insinuated that Stowe, by unveiling the institution as it actually was, did much to damage the strength of the proslavery position. This idea was shared by a writer from the *Congregationalist*. In a review reprinted in the *National Era*, the *Congregationalist* posited that "Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe has done more to diffuse real knowledge of the facts and workings of American Slavery, and to arouse the sluggish nation to shake off the curse, and abut the wrong, than has been accomplished by all the orations, and anniversaries, and arguments, and documents which the last ten years have been the witness of."²⁷ This commentary encapsulated the idea also mentioned by the *Brooklyn Circular*: that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was "a center shot at slavery; the hardest blow that has been struck yet."²⁸ Northern newspapers were quick to opine that Stowe's novel would be a damning force on the Southern institution of slavery. Regardless of whether or not the novel did strike a

²⁶ *New Englander*, November 1852

²⁷ *National Era*, April 15, 1852

²⁸ *Brooklyn Circular*, May 30, 1852

decisive blow, these reviews were important because the ideas of eager Northerners and worried Southerners were shaped by the public opinion these commentaries generated. Stowe's novel would only have an impact if the American people believed it would, and Northern and antislavery commentaries tried to reveal these far-reaching implications.

The influence of these newspaper commentaries was coupled with the rising fear amongst Southerners of the Northern abolitionists. That *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was an abolitionist text was a widely held view within both Northern and Southern journalistic circles. The uneasiness and outrage associated with that was exacerbated by the idea that newspapers reported that "immense exertions are being made by the abolitionists to circulate the work."²⁹ This same idea found its way into the pages of *The Daily Dispatch* of Richmond where the author commented "that such a book should commend itself to the perusal of Northern Abolitionists – who, we seriously fear, constitute nine-tenths of the whole population of the New England, Middle and Northwestern States – is not at all surprising."³⁰ Through this statement, the author granted an acknowledgment of both the weight Stowe's novel carried in abolitionist circles and the fear that this idea presented for proponents of slavery. The belief that ninety-percent of Northerners were for abolition, though inaccurate, undoubtedly touched off a sense of panic for proslavery Southerners fearing the security of their institution. If Southerners viewed *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a mobilization for Northern abolition, the novel would represent a huge source of growing division between slaveholders south of the Mason/Dixon Line and their brethren to the North. Popular press and Christian journalism classified the novel as a powerful abolitionist force.

Because of the potent combination of journalistic opinion regarding the inevitable demise of slavery and the rising abolitionist fear generated by Stowe's novel, "Southerners who did read

²⁹ *The Liberator*, June 11, 1852

³⁰ *The Daily Dispatch*, August 25, 1852

Uncle Tom's Cabin must have recognized its potential effects on their 'peculiar institution.'"³¹ Southern reviewers, like their Northern counterparts, were well aware that the country was abuzz because of Stowe's provocative novel. *The Daily Dispatch* of Richmond acknowledged that "its sale has been so great that already it has passed through more editions than any former work of the class in any country."³² The *Charleston Mercury* reprinted an article from the *New York Herald* that predicted that "the boiling cauldron of abolition would ere long overflow" into a stream of activist writings and activities against the institution of slavery."³³ In the same vein, the title of a May 9, 1853 article in the *New Orleans Daily Picayune* referred to the recent response to the novel as "Uncle Tom mania."³⁴ Southern readers were made well aware of the fact that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was taking America, and Europe for that matter, by storm, and this had a significant impact on how secure Southerners believed slavery to be. Shock over how popular the novel became in such a short period of time put the proponents of slavery on the defensive. With Stowe's novel being viewed as the final stroke of victory against slavery, its advocates quickly rallied to the institution's protection.

This idea is borne out by the fact that Stowe's text was met with countless response novels, which came to form their own genre of American literature known as the Anti-Tom novel. Thomas Gossett's *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture* mentions 27 of these novels written in various styles by many different Southerners.³⁵ Newspaper sources acknowledged that these novels were volumes directly "elicited by Mrs. Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*."³⁶ For the most part, Southern periodicals carried advertisements for these Anti-Tom texts, while failing to

³¹ Reynolds, 158

³² *The Daily Dispatch*, August 25, 1852

³³ *Charleston Mercury*, May 25, 1852

³⁴ *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, May 9, 1853

³⁵ Stephen Railton, "Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture," Available from: University of Virginia, <http://www.iath.virginia.edu/utc/index2f.html>

³⁶ *Charleston Courier*, October 16, 1852

include any publicity for the availability of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In addition to these novels, Southerners responded to Northern journalistic acclaim with negative campaigns in their own press. From larger cities like Memphis, New Orleans, Richmond, Charleston and Little Rock to other smaller Southern cities, countless negative reviews arose concerning Stowe's antislavery novel.³⁷ As much as many Northern antislavery and abolitionist reviewers felt the need to praise *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Southern, proslavery and anti-abolition commentators felt compelled to attack the novel and defend the institution of slavery. Receiving such widespread acclaim and occasioning an unprecedented battle in the arena of public opinion, this novel was unlike any other the world had ever seen.

Uncle Tom's Cabin entered into a largely Protestant nation with a novel that "set the whole world agog" and gave "being at a single stroke to a new class of literary productions."³⁸ This type of influence demonstrates that novel was an extremely pervasive indictment of slavery. Because the novel itself was an example of Protestant rhetoric concerning slavery, and it received unique publicity, meant that Protestant churches could not avoid talking about Stowe's text and the issue of human bondage. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* brought slavery to the forefront of public attention and solidified itself as an extremely divisive force that contributed to the schisms that were already undermining Christian brotherhood and threatening national unity. The religious press became an avenue for the debates regarding Stowe's work and the nation's most disruptive issue in the antebellum era. The whole nation watched as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and slavery ripped through Protestant denominations and tore them past the point of reconciliation.

³⁷ Railton

³⁸ *Methodist Quarterly Review*, October 1854

Chapter Two: The Methodist Church and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

In the tumultuous antebellum times preceding the Civil War, the Methodist Church found itself caught in the middle of the controversy sweeping the nation. As the battle over slavery raged on in Congress, the experiences of church leaders of John Wesley's denomination proved that slavery was not only an economic and political issue, but one that was also deeply religious. As Northern and Southern politicians drew sectional lines over the South's "peculiar institution," church leaders found themselves forced to choose where their loyalties lay. Into this vehement antebellum debate, Harriet Beecher Stowe dropped *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, her deeply religious, social commentary on the evils of slavery. Just as the schism was reflected in the stance on slavery, it was further perpetuated by the publication of this novel. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* provided Methodist leaders with another opportunity to draw sectional lines and another means of "creating and sustaining...distorted images and psychological attitudes" of negativity between Northerners and Southerners.¹ *Uncle Tom's Cabin* entered into a tumultuous world of division and left it even more divided.

Methodism and Slavery

Like the nation itself, the American Methodist Church had a long history of confusion and struggle over the slavery issue. Methodism was founded in England by an Anglican minister named John Wesley. Wesley personally believed that "liberty is the right of every human creature, as soon as he breathes the vital air. And no human law can deprive him of that right, which he derives from the law of nature."² Because of this sentiment, his stance was that slavery was "'villainy,' which violated 'all the laws of Justice, Mercy, and Truth.'"³ As Wesleyan

¹ C.C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985), 30

² John Wesley, *Thoughts upon Slavery* (London: University of London, 1744), 27

³ Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, (Chicago:University of Chicago Press, 1977), 68; Wesley, 19

Methodism spread to the United States, this sentiment towards chattel bondage made the cross-Atlantic voyage as well. Most influential in passing along this antislavery torch to the colonies was Thomas Coke, “Wesley’s personal emissary to America...and leader of the American church.”⁴ Coke and other early Wesleyan church leaders vehemently attacked slavery, seeing that it was already well established among the early colonial Virginians who sought slave labor to tend their fields. While economic reasons sought the expansion of slavery, it was the church, largely on the grounds of morality and Biblical adherence, that initially spoke out against the growing practice in the new American colonies.

In the late eighteenth-century, religious organizations provided the first examples of antislavery sentiment, of which the Methodist Church was the foremost leader. A most striking example of this was in 1784, when Methodist Church leaders “promised to excommunicate all Methodists not freeing their slaves within two years.”⁵ This stance seemed to set the early American Methodist Church on a path towards being an antislavery church, adopting the strong sentiments put forth by John Wesley towards the institution. Antislavery sentiment was present in other Christian denominations as well. An August 8, 1789 *Baptist Press* article attempted to gain publicity for a Virginia state resolution to ban slavery.⁶ It encouraged its Baptist readers to see the evil of slaveholding and the immoral treatment of masters to their slaves. In the same vein, early Presbyterian leaders of the Synod of New York and Philadelphia proposed a plan of action in which “the ultimate goal of the abolition of slavery was endorsed.”⁷ Although they

⁴ Douglas Ambrose, “Of Stations and Relations: Proslavery Christianity in Early Virginia,” Available from: John R. McKivigan & Mitchell Snay, *Religion and the Antebellum Debate over Slavery*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 38

⁵ Mathews, 69

⁶ *Baptist Press*, August 8, 1789, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives

⁷ Andrew E. Murray, *Presbyterians and the Negro – A History*, (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1966), 17

proposed a gradual method of emancipation, “final abolition” was their aim.⁸ The activity of the early Methodists, in tandem with other Christian denominations, seemed to suggest that slavery would have no place in the newly created United States of America.

Nevertheless, while Protestant denominations began in America with leanings towards antislavery, Methodist Church leaders “soon found it expedient to compromise with the ‘peculiar institution.’”⁹ The expediency of compromise was made clear because of the vehement opposition of many early white Southerners to antislavery sentiments. In response to the excommunication attempt of 1784, Southern Methodist churchgoers were adamant that the decision be rescinded. Too many of the early Americans had become content with slavery as an economic necessity and a natural relation between the black and white races. Coupled with this was the fact that proslavery forces began to show increased levels of hostility towards the efforts of antislavery advocates.¹⁰ Consequently, by 1800, “the church had virtually abandoned all efforts to cleanse itself of slavery.”¹¹ More than three decades later, it offered its official non-interference position with the “Pastoral Address of 1836.” In this address, the Methodist Church leaders decreed that the church declared “itself ‘opposed to modern abolition and wholly disclaim any right, wish, or intention to interfere in the civil and political relation as it exists between master and slave in the slaveholding states of the union.’”¹² The hope was to accomplish an assurance that they would never have to take a stand for or against human bondage. They argued, instead, that it was not a moral issue and thus outside the realm of ecclesiastical influence.

⁸ Murray, 17

⁹ Lewis M. Purifoy, “The Southern Methodist Church and the Proslavery Argument,” *Journal of Southern History*, no. 32 (1966): 325; Available from Paul Finkelman, ed., *Religion and Slavery* (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1989), 575

¹⁰ Mathews, pp. 69,75

¹¹ Purifoy, “The Southern Methodist Church and the Proslavery Argument,” 325; Available from: Finkelman, 575

¹² Lewis M. Purifoy, “The Methodist Anti-slavery Tradition, 1784-1844,” *Methodist History*, no. 4 (1966): 15; Available from: Finkelman, 573

This created a Methodist Church that was full of confusion and contradiction surrounding the peculiar institution. Despite the Pastoral Address of 1836 and adamant refusal to be labeled a proslavery church, Methodist clergyman defended the institution based on numerous principles.¹³ Some, like Reverend Edward Josiah Stearns of Maryland, appealed to Scriptures to provide defense of slavery. Stearns noted that “the silence of Holy Scripture, then, as to the incompatibility of slaveholding with Christianity, is an expressive one.” His argument was that the Bible never denounced slavery, and this demonstrated that it was not viewed by God as an immoral institution. He continued by arguing that the Apostle Paul acknowledged the relationship between a master and a slave in his epistles.¹⁴ Arguments from the New Testament incorporated the general argument put forth by Henry B. Bascom, that “the Bible recognized the jural and social relation of master and slave.”¹⁵ These New Testament appeals offered a popular source of support for those arguing against antislavery measures.

The Old Testament provided similar defense, as numerous ministers cited what came to be called the Curse-of-Ham argument. In a July 17, 1852 issue of the *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, the official Methodist newspaper of New Orleans, the editor praised the work of John Fletcher’s *Studies in Slavery*.¹⁶ The review of this book made explicit reference to the idea that the descendants of Ham, who were marked by God for servitude, were black, and this affirmed the sanctity of slavery. It should be noted, that while Scripture says nothing concerning the race of Ham’s descendants, slavery’s defenders interpreted them as black in order to justify enslavement of the African race. Stearns also used the Old Testament by quoting a

¹³ “The Southern Methodist Church and the Proslavery Argument,” 327; Available from: Finkelman 577

¹⁴ Edward Josiah Stearns, *Notes on Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1853), 63-64

¹⁵ Henry B. Bascom, *Methodism and Slavery* (Frankfort: Hodges Todd & Pruett, 1845), 65-66

¹⁶ *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, July 17, 1852

commandment from Deuteronomy that recognized the claim that masters had over their slaves.¹⁷ Because sanctity of Scripture was so important to the antebellum church, proslavery arguments from the Bible were powerful and pervasive. They also helped Southern Methodist Church leaders gain credibility for their non-interference stance offered in 1836, and subsequently reiterated in years following. In their minds, if the Bible did not clearly stand against slavery, which they argued it did not, than it was Christian duty to adhere to the laws of the state and live peacefully within the slavery society. This coupled with the view that the slavery issue was civil and political, not moral, allowed Southern Methodists to avoid making a clear proslavery defense and leaving proslavery advocacy to the state. This was convenient for a church that felt the pressure to support slavery but also disavowed the label of a proslavery church. Their actions suggest church leaders who were uncomfortable defending slavery but unwilling to risk alienating slaveholding adherents. Many Northern Methodists, however, were not satisfied with this contradictory position as the slavery issue became central to a growing debate between the two sections of the country.

The Great Sectional Divide: The Split of the Methodist Church

As antislavery sentiment became increasingly common in the Northern states, it was clear to Methodist Church leaders that slavery was going to be an extremely contentious subject facing the denomination. Silence regarding the topic could not prevail, as Southerners hope it would. The matter finally came to a head in the General Conference held in New York in 1844. Backed by the antislavery foundation of the Methodist Church in America, Northern ministers “maintained that their Church had always been anti-slavery.”¹⁸ While Southern churches continued to make compromises and peace with proslavery advocates during the early nineteenth

¹⁷ Stearns, 124

¹⁸ Lewis M. Purifoy, “The Methodist Anti-slavery Tradition, 1784-1844,” 3; Available from: Finkelman, 561

century, Methodist abolitionists and antislavery advocates began to spring up throughout the Northern states.¹⁹ By the time the Methodist church leaders held the 1844 General Conference, the foundation was already set for slavery to boil over into a significant controversy.

Specifically, at this conference the Northern and Southern delegates debated the contentious issue of whether or not Methodist bishops could be slave owners. While the Southern contingent argued in favor of this, the Northerners vehemently attacked it. The issue became personified in Bishop James O. Andrew, who inherited two slaves through a second marriage. Sparked by adamant demands for him to emancipate his slaves or renounce his episcopacy, Northern leaders carried a vote in the General Conference for him to be removed from office. Southerners were opposed to this measure. In a letter written by a close friend of Andrew, Reverend W.J Parks, Parks said that the bishop “called the southern delegates together and stated to us his purpose to resign, but we with voice protested against it because that would be to yield the whole ground to them and prove our ruin.”²⁰ Despite Andrew’s efforts to maintain peace, “Southern militants desired to make this a test of one of the few still respected antislavery rules of the church.”²¹ The culmination of this heated debate and unwillingness to compromise forced the Methodist Church to split in two, and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South was formed in 1845.²² According to William Pope Harrison, “Southern Methodist leaders’ thought and felt that the act of deposing a man from the episcopal office, in the face of the admission that he had committed no offense against the laws of God or man, was a demonstration of the sorrowful truth that the time for the separation of Abraham and Lot had

¹⁹ Lewis M. Purifoy, “The Methodist Anti-slavery Tradition, 1784-1844,” 8; Available from: Finkelman, 566

²⁰ Franklin Nutting Parker, ed., “A Diary-Letter Written from the Methodist General Conference of 1844 by the Rev. W.J. Parks,” (Atlanta: Higgins-McArthur Company, 1944), 19

²¹ John R. McKivigan, “The Sectional Division of the Methodist and Baptist Denominations as Measures of Northern Antislavery Sentiment;” Available from: John R. McKivigan & Mitchell Snay, 352

²² Mathews, 160-163

arrived.”²³ This was a Biblical reference to the separation that occurred between Abraham and his nephew, Lot, because the land that they inhabited could not hold all of their descendants and possessions.²⁴ In much the same way, Northern and Southern Methodist leaders found they could not coexist in the United States. Left in the wake of this disastrous split were extreme bitterness and anger between the two sections, sentiments which continued to escalate and eventually bubble over into the Civil War.

Slavery was such a heated issue in antebellum times that not even Christian churches were free from the anger and bitterness that the arguments generated. In the years after the split, Southern Methodist newspapers were littered with attacks against their Northern counterparts. In the *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, an editorial firmly opposed any attempts at the reunification of Methodism. The writer did not “believe that re-union of the M.E. Church under existing circumstances would or could be” or that “reason or religion either expects or requires it of the South.” He further asked, “How could it be expected or required of the South after she has been insulted time after time by the North?”²⁵ *The Nashville and Louisville Christian Advocate* went so far as to argue that the Northern churches had deviated so far from Methodist tradition that they did not even practice the religion any longer. At the same time, the writer affirmed that Southern churches held right and true to the principles of the Wesleyan tradition.²⁶ This set off an important debate as to which side comprised the proper followers of Methodism as it was intended to be.

This issue of Wesley’s true heirs is important to understanding the mindset of Methodist leaders during the time when *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was published. The Southern statement that

²³ William Pope Harrison, *Methodist Union* (Nashville: Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1892), 14

²⁴ Gen. 13: 1-18

²⁵ *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, June 21, 1851

²⁶ *Nashville and Louisville Christian Advocate*, March 18, 1852

Northern Methodism was a deviation from Wesleyan tradition was prompted by the belief that the Northern churches had become abolitionized, a posture that, in Southern minds, forced Southerners to establish their own church.²⁷ This criticism, more importantly, served as an attempt to preempt the same censure being levied Southerners by their brethren to the North. It was apparent to Northern Methodist leaders that the Southern churches “had departed from the traditional Methodist position on slavery.”²⁸ To Northerners, it was Southern refusal to hold to this tradition that made compromise impossible and schism inevitable. There was unmistakable truth in this idea. John Wesley, heavily influenced by Enlightenment belief in man’s right to liberty, was staunchly against human bondage. Because of this, Southerners who were defending the institution were unable to argue that they had not deviated from his ideas.

Consequently, Southern Methodist leaders admitted that there were disagreements they held with their founder and his work:

We may meet here and there an argument which we may not feel, or an opinion from which we may dissent, or an exegesis which modern criticism may not endorse, or a philosophical speculation which may have become obsolete; but these do not materially affect the value of the work, whose staple elements are Scripture truth, solid reasoning, and powerful incentives to repentance, faith, and holy living.²⁹

Despite the lack of clear mention regarding what these potential differences were, it is clear that the dissension was concerning Wesley’s adamant opposition to slavery. The Southern Methodists had made no overtures against any other theological tenet of traditional Methodism, and their actions at the 1844 General Conference and years prior suggest they were unwilling to make the same claim that Wesley had made. This failure to acknowledge slavery as moral villainy represented a major deviation from their founder. The subsequent refusal to specify the

²⁷ Purifoy, “The Southern Methodist Church and the Proslavery Argument,” 325; Available from Finkelman, 575

²⁸ John R. McKivigan, “The Sectional Division of the Methodist and Baptist Denominations as Measures of Northern Antislavery Sentiment;” Available from: John R. McKivigan & Mitchell Snay, 352

²⁹ *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, May 15, 1852

divergence suggests that it was something Southern Methodists were not completely comfortable acknowledging. The whole tone of the commentary on Wesley's work demonstrated a clear attempt to downplay the importance of the slavery issue to traditional Methodist thought. That the writer felt this effort was necessary further suggests that the writer knew Southern Methodism's defense of slavery was actually an important deviation. And it was, considering that slavery had already occasioned the dissolution of the national Methodist Church. It was an extremely contentious matter, and the gauge by which Methodists determined who was properly following Wesley.

Ultimately, Southern Methodists attempted to sweep the slavery question under the rug. By arguing that it was a matter outside the concern of the church, they were able simultaneously to avoid denouncing it and to adamantly reject the proslavery label. This adamant refusal, their previous non-interference decrees and the subsequent lack of acknowledgement of their deviation from traditional Methodism show that arguing for slavery produced a general unease within Southern Methodists. That the stance produced uneasiness is evidence that it was one in which Southern Methodists never fully believed. As Lewis Purifoy puts it, "the church ended by subjecting itself completely to the state and by indentifying what was right and Christian with what was Southern."³⁰ Therefore, while not in official name, the Southern Methodist Church had become a defender of slavery, a position dictated by the Southern slavery society in which their denomination operated. This was all the more reason that the growing Northern stance against slavery enraged the Southern leaders and led to a complete renunciation of Northern Methodism. Northern antislavery agitation exacerbated the Southern problem. The gap between the two sections was wide, and the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* assured it would grow wider.

³⁰ Purifoy, "The Southern Methodist Church and the Proslavery Argument," 341; Available from Finkelman, 591

The Methodist Episcopal Church, South and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

Because rising to the defense of slavery was an uncomfortable departure for Southerners, situations that forced them to do so were met with extreme hostility. Southern Methodists refused to give ground on the slavery issue and were unwilling to acknowledge the importance of their deviation. This served as an attempt to remove the slavery question from public discussion. Frustrations abounded with the publication of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* because its popularity, chronicled in Chapter One, thwarted this attempt and called into occasion a situation where Southern Methodists were forced to argue for slavery. Stowe's novel served as a staunch reminder that the Southern Methodist Church leaders had made an uncomfortable compromise with their proslavery adherents, and it was one they would be forced to maintain in public debate. That Harriet Beecher Stowe painted a portrait of slavery in the South designed to encourage antislavery sentiment made *Uncle Tom's Cabin* a necessary target for the venom of the Southern Methodist Church. Southern church leaders were forced to respond to Stowe's attack on slavery. Their slew of responses, which reflect their discomfort and confusion concerning slavery, demonstrated that they were not quite sure how to convincingly argue for the institution. As a result, their focus shifted to attacks upon the novel's author and the fellow Northerners who shared her views.

The main point of contention that existed between Southern Methodists and Harriet Beecher Stowe was the heated issue of abolition. Southern Methodists held firm to their belief that slavery was beyond the scope of ecclesiastical influence. Because, in their minds, the Bible did not show slavery to be a sin, it was the role of Christianity to follow the Southern laws that allowed human bondage. Abolition attempts were viewed as needlessly incendiary. They were also frustrating because they occasioned the need to defend slavery, again something with which

Southern Methodists did not feel comfortable. As a result, Southern Methodist writers spent time discussing the “many sins” within the “abolition ranks.”³¹ This same newspaper article described abolition’s works as “slimy brood.” Another Southern writer, who had attended a Northern abolition meeting, noted the difference between the North and South by saying, “it is pleasing evidence of the security of our government that such ravings have its contempt, and pass with impunity.”³² He equated the activity of staunch antislavery advocates with uncontrolled and insecure ravings, denouncing the vehemence and violence with which abolitionists were believed to act in their attempts to end slavery. It is interesting that the writer was speaking as if it was incontrovertible fact that abolitionism was insecure and unlawful without explaining what was inherently sinful about antislavery agitation. It seems the extent of his argument was that abolition was wrong because it could be harmful to slavery, a fundamental part of Southern society. It is doubtful that his claims would have had any sway with those who were not already proslavery. Nevertheless, this reflects that Southern Methodists were staunchly opposed to any abolitionist measures.

Others argued against abolitionism because they claimed it stood in direct contrast to an institution that the Bible did not condemn. The editor of the *New Orleans Christian Advocate* gave voluminous praise to a treatise written by a South Carolinian Presbyterian minister, James Henley Thornwell. In this treatise on slavery and the Bible, Thornwell stated that “there can be little doubt, that if the church had been content to stand by the naked testimony of God, we should have been spared many of the most effective dissertations against slavery.” He further asked, referring to the Scriptures, “will any man say that he who applies to them with an honest and unprejudiced mind, and discusses their teaching upon the subject, simply as a question of

³¹ *Nashville and Louisville Christian Advocate*, January 29, 1852

³² *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, May 15, 1852

language and interpretation, will rise from the pages with the sentiments or spirit of a modern abolitionist?"³³ To this Presbyterian, and the Methodist ministers who endorsed his stance, abolition works were unjustifiable, contrary to Christianity and the Bible, and completely unnecessary. Despite this, Thornwell and his Methodist supporters did not offer much by way of proslavery defense. They chose, instead to frame their arguments in terms of anti-abolition. It is important to note that this was a critical distinction. It was possible to be anti-slavery and anti-abolition at the same time. The anti-abolitionism arguments of Southern Methodist leaders said nothing about their true feelings regarding the Christianity of Southern slavery. In fact, the absence of any proslavery arguments seems to be further indication that they did not have any arguments they found convincing. For this reason, they did not attack Stowe's novel with proslavery ideology, but instead with criticism of abolitionism.

Therefore, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was met with public, and often vicious, denunciation of the novel itself, Stowe, and the Northern abolitionist movement. Southern Methodist criticism framed the text, and its author, within what they considered the unbiblical abolition movement. This is readily apparent throughout the Advocate newspaper publications. In an editorial describing Henry Ward Beecher, Stowe's abolitionist brother, the writer mentioned that "my interest in the preacher had lately been increased by the book of his talented sister, Mrs. Stowe. 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' is all the rage, in abolition circles." He later continued by saying of Henry Ward Beecher that "if he would leave off the abolition lecturer and confine himself in the gospel preacher functions, all who hear him would be his friends as they must be his admirers."³⁴ The tone of this statement is surprisingly complimentary towards Beecher and the ideas he espoused from the pulpit. Again this draws out the distinction that existed between proslavery advocates

³³ *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, June 26, 1852

³⁴ *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, June 12, 1852

and those who stood as anti-abolitionists. The writer of this editorial commended Beecher for his skill as a Gospel minister, a function that included his sentiments that the whole nature of Southern slavery was contrary to the laws of God and the Bible. Beecher was even known to criticize the Southern church for defending slavery, and thus proclaiming Christian doctrines that were contrary to the Christianity of the Bible.³⁵ Despite this, the editorial writer's frustration with Beecher was not focused on these ideas, but simply the Northern minister's attempts to eradicate slavery. Therefore, antislavery sentiments were not contentious; it was only doctrines of abolitionism that were problematic. Like Thornwell and the Methodist leaders described above, this writer did not offer proslavery defense, just anti-abolition frustration. Nevertheless, his characterization of Beecher as an abolitionist set the tone for a later editorial in which Harriet Beecher Stowe was criticized for "the dogmatism and impudence peculiar to some members" of her family.³⁶ Stowe and her work were directly linked to abolitionism, and the popularity of her work placed her at the forefront of the contentious debate.

Other critics were not so gentle in their remarks about the abolitionist tendencies of Stowe. *The Quarterly Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* wrote off *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a series of "exaggerated pictures of domestic slavery, drawn by the hand of an unscrupulous abolitionist."³⁷ The author of this review made it clear his beliefs that abolitionism lacked the scruples of Christianity, and that Stowe was not above the sins, lies and aggression typically associated with Northern abolition by Southern proponents of slavery. The author, however, was not clear on what scruples abolitionism violated. It is likely that he was adopting the non-interference position of the church in order to avoid making clear proslavery defense.

³⁵ Henry Ward Beecher, *Patriotic Addresses in America and England* (New York: Fords, Howard, & Hulbert, 1887), 180; "American Slavery," speech before American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, New York, May 6, 1851

³⁶ *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, June 26, 1852

³⁷ *The Quarterly Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, October 1854, Volume VIII

His arguments drew not upon moral appeals, but instead adopted views that differed very little from secular proslavery polemicists.

In the same vein, Southern Methodists also attempted to demonstrate that abolitionists were speaking against an institution about which they knew very little, another prevalent argument among secular proslavery advocates. One critic of abolition made the claim that “real life among the slaves of the South is as little known by our Northern censors as that of Japan.”³⁸ This biting criticism towards Northern abolitionism was part of a review that praised an Anti-Tom novel for its style and truthful representation of slavery in the South. Reverend Josiah Stearns categorized *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as “of a piece with a good many others invented by the Abolitionists.”³⁹ He advanced the claim that Stowe’s work was just another typical example of the wrongful attempts of the abolitionists to extend their reach too far into the matters of their Southern brethren. As was claimed about Stowe and others, Southern Methodist leaders felt that abolitionists had too little experience with slavery to make a strong and true appeal to eradicate it. This argument fit nicely with the anti-abolitionist rhetoric that had been pervasive since the split in 1844.

As Stowe was readily portrayed as an abolitionist, further attempts were made to link the Christian plot of her text with the “sins” of abolition. A significant portion of the aforementioned treatise by South Carolina Presbyterian minister named James Henley Thornwell was included in the *New Orleans Christian Advocate* of June 26, 1852. He summed up his primary criticism of abolition in a manner with which the Methodist Church leaders readily agreed:

They lay down principles which make slavery an utter abomination - treason to man and rebellion against God. They represent it as an enormous system of

³⁸ *The Quarterly Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, July 1854, Volume VIII

³⁹ Stearns, 75

cruelty, tyranny and impiety. They make it a fundamental duty to labor for its extirpation, and yet will not venture directly and boldly, at least Christian abolitionists, to counsel insurrection or murder; they will even repeat the commands of the Bible, as if in mockery of all their speculations. Now we ask if these commands are not forced appendages to their moral system! The moral system of abolitionist does not legitimately admit them, and if they were not restrained by respect for the Bible from carrying out their own doctrines, they would find themselves forced to recommend measures to the slave very different from obedience to his master.⁴⁰

His criticism presented a series of biting insults designed to undermine the credibility of Northern abolitionists. His remarks framed abolitionists in much the same manner as the criticisms mentioned above because he tried to associate abolition with ardent support for violence and unlawful actions. Despite many abolition supporters, like Beecher and William Lloyd Garrison, consistently advocating non-resistance with Southern slavery, Thornwell and his Methodist supporters insinuated that their true doctrine was rebellion and insurrection. The focus of their attacks on antislavery rhetoric like Stowe's novel was to frame it as abolition and attack it as such instead of responding with convincing proslavery ideology. It is important to note that the Southern Methodist Church often accused the M.E. Church, North of being "abolition in its sentiments."⁴¹ For Southern Methodists to endorse this critique of Northern Christian abolitionism was a further indictment of their counterpart Methodists to the North. Thornwell's statements demonstrated how Stowe's novel further perpetuated this growing point of division.

While Thornwell failed to mention *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by name, his criticism hinted at an aspect of the character of Tom, the Christian hero of the novel. Tom's "turn the other cheek" worldview is one of the most clearly defined Christian aspects of the novel, and it carries a good portion of the book's emotive influence. In chapter 38 of the text, Tom is presented with an

⁴⁰ *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, June 26, 1852

⁴¹ *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, July 10, 1852

opportunity to murder his cruel and unfair master, Simon Legree. Another slave on the plantation, Cassy, says to Tom, “Come along! He’s asleep – sound. I put enough into his brandy to keep him so. I wish I’d had more, - I shouldn’t have wanted you. But come, the back door is unlocked; there’s an axe there, I put it there – his room is open, I’ll show you the way. I’d done it myself, only my arms are so weak. Come along!” While this seems like a legitimate opportunity for freedom, Tom responds with horror: “No!” said Tom, firmly. ‘No! good never comes of wickedness. I’d sooner chop my right hand off!’⁴² He continues by preventing Cassy from doing the deed herself, saying that it is unchristian of her to do such evil acts and that their role is to wait upon the Lord. Until the day Legree murders Tom, Uncle Tom believes it his Christian duty to obey his master. This scene seems to strikingly encapsulate the criticisms levied against Christian abolitionists by Thornwell and his supporters. Tom’s Christian character was marked by a desire to be free of slavery, but it also demonstrated an unwillingness to use violence or rebellion as a means of eradicating the institution. The abolitionist Christian stance portrayed throughout the novel by various characters, including Tom and the very emotionally appealing, Little Eva, were the cause of frustration and vehement outrage for Southern Methodist critics.

Their outrage with this Christian aspect of Stowe’s novel was due to the fact that it undermined many of their attempts to portray Stowe and her counterparts as blood-thirsty revolutionaries. That she did not present Uncle Tom or the novel’s other antislavery activists in this way put further pressure on the Southern Methodists to create a convincing argument that justified their defense of slavery. This further fueled the anger of the M.E. Church, South’s leadership. Anti-abolitionist rhetoric did not have the same appeal if abolitionist tactics were not full of violence, as proslavery advocates contended they were. Uncle Tom’s passivity in the face

⁴² Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 2003), 390-391

of oppression compelled the novel's attackers to offer other criticisms besides the traditional anti-abolitionist line of reasoning.

In response, Southern Methodists attempted to portray the novel as pure fiction. This was in tune with Thornwell's argument that many of the opponents of slavery formed their opposition to slavery "from sympathy with imaginary sufferings, from ignorance of its nature and misapplication of the crotchets of philosophy."⁴³ Drawing from this line of reasoning, the editor of the *Nashville and Louisville Christian Advocate* opined that "that which is all lie, like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, is not so good a foundation for pure sympathy, as where there is some admixture of truth."⁴⁴ *The Quarterly Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* further commented on the novel as "one little duodecimo volume, wrought into fiction, misrepresenting most egregiously the institution of domestic slavery in the South."⁴⁵ Reverend Stearns, in his over three-hundred-page response, made the claim that "truth is strange – stranger than fiction; than any other fiction, that is, than *Uncle Tom's Cabin*."⁴⁶ The accusation of these Southern Methodists was that Stowe conjured up false images to achieve her goal of sympathy for the slaves and advocacy for antislavery proponents. Regardless of the veracity of her story's examples, these criticisms demonstrate the idea that "the significance of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for the Biblical debate over slavery lay in the novel's emotive power...Stowe exemplified – rather than just announced – the persuasive force of what she regarded as the Bible's overarching message."⁴⁷ Stowe's emotionally powerful Christian characters demonstrated the Christian abolitionist belief that Biblical truth preached the evils of slavery. Critics of the novel believed that these Christian characters were fictitious representations of reality and falsely

⁴³ *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, June 26, 1852

⁴⁴ *Nashville and Louisville Christian Advocate*, February 3, 1853

⁴⁵ *The Quarterly Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, October 1854, Volume VIII

⁴⁶ Stearns, 8

⁴⁷ Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 43-44

represented what the Bible really had to say about slavery. They insinuated that the sinful abolitionists were quick to lie in order to garner support for their message. This would have provided an excellent opportunity for Southern Methodists to correct the “lies” of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, paint slavery as it truly was and argue its support from this clear picture. Again, however, they remained silent in any attempts to defend slavery as a God-ordained and justifiable institution.

Instead, they continued their attack on the novel with more of the typical Southern rhetoric. This came through a response to a question posed by Stowe about the level of Christian charity existent in the North. In the novel, Stowe portrays a benevolent and sarcastic New Orleans slave-owner by the name of Augustine St. Clare. St. Clare is Tom’s second master, and he is very cynical about Christianity and its attempts at abolition. Through St. Clare, Stowe poses the question, in regard to potentially emancipated slaves, “is there enough Christian philanthropy among your Northern states, to bear with the process of their education and elevation?”⁴⁸ Stowe demonstrated a belief in the affirmative answer to this question by presenting the successful rise of Topsy. Topsy is a rambunctious and rebellious slave that St. Clare gives to his Northern cousin, Miss Ophelia, in order that Miss Ophelia might educate her, a test of the Christian goodwill of Northerners towards slaves. Initially quite conflicted, Miss Ophelia eventually professes an ability to love Topsy and brings her home to the North after St. Clare is murdered. At the end of the novel, Stowe reports that “so thoroughly efficient was Miss Ophelia in her conscientious endeavor to do her duty by her elève, that the child [Topsy] rapidly grew in grace and in favor with the family and neighborhood.”⁴⁹ Eventually, Topsy became a Christian and was commissioned as a missionary. Her story is evidence that Stowe believed

⁴⁸ Stowe, 310

⁴⁹ Ibid, 429; note: elève means student

Northerners, like Miss Ophelia and her Vermont neighbors, could embrace freed slaves and labor for their wellbeing. To her, Northern Christian charity was very possible.

Southern Methodists, however, launched criticism against the Christian benevolence of Northerners. An editorial in the *New Orleans Christian Advocate* commented on Stowe's novel by saying, "the work is caught up and read with remarkable avidity and gusto by the public; and many a benevolent heart is made to forget the wants of a next door neighbor, while it sighs over the sorrows and woes of poor 'Uncle Tom.'"⁵⁰ The insinuation in this editorial is that Northerners were quick to address the plights of slaves, and they neglected to focus upon the needs of the poor much closer to home. The February 3, 1853 edition of *The Nashville and Louisville Christian Advocate* reiterated this idea by citing a news story about Harriet Beecher Stowe traveling to England to discuss her novel. The news piece issued a call for Englanders to notice "the starving, uncared for, and degraded poor of the Metropolis."⁵¹ Essentially, Southern Methodists were telling English and Northern abolitionists to worry about their own problems because they were far worse than the condition of slaves in the South. In the minds of Southerners, how Christian could Northerners antislavery advocates, like Miss Ophelia, be if they were not willing to assist the oppressed poor of their own region? This generalization about abolitionists, that they overlooked their own problems, had popular sway with Southern proslavery advocates.

The level of responses suggested that the Southern Methodist did not view Stowe's novel as just another abolitionist tract. Many authors, including Reverend Stearns, responded with immediate, large texts in order to specifically refute *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The novel, but more importantly abolition, became an increasingly popular topic of discussion in Methodist

⁵⁰ *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, June 26, 1852

⁵¹ *Nashville and Louisville Christian Advocate*, February 3, 1853

newspapers and quarterly reviews. It had the Southern Methodists more aware and more inflamed than a typical example of abolitionist rhetoric. A black Methodist preacher was even jailed for owning a copy of the novel because of the fear that it would incite revolt or encourage attempts to flee bondage.⁵² Methodists were angered by the belief that “Mrs. Stowe has inflicted an irreparable injury upon Southern reputation” and “she has perpetrated a public and an imperishable libel against it.”⁵³ While *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* may not have had the profound and desired effect of eradicating slavery in the South, it certainly aroused plenty of strong sentiments and responses from the Southern Methodist Church.

This was the case because its level of popularity provided the strongest attack on the flimsy Southern Methodist defense of slavery. While Southern Methodist reviewers painted the novel as another example of fictional abolitionist propaganda meant to sway the naïve and incite unhappiness among the slaves, they offered little by way of proslavery defense. It seems likely that if their proslavery convictions were strong, than they would respond to the novel with more rhetoric focused on showing the Christianity of the institution. The most convincing argument from a church standpoint would be to demonstrate that Stowe was wrong in her beliefs that Christianity clearly held the antislavery posture. Instead, Southern Methodists employed the arguments typical of secular proslavery polemicists. This hearkened back to the uneasy compromise they made in the late eighteenth century with their Southern adherents, who had threatened the church enough for Methodist leaders to back off Wesley’s strong antislavery position. It is apparent that Southern church leaders were never quite comfortable with this deviation but felt it necessary in order to remain in a position to shepherd increasingly proslavery Southerners. While church doctrine normally dictated the beliefs of its adherents, the case of

⁵² *Zion’s Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, February 23, 1859

⁵³ *The Quarterly Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, October 1854, Volume VIII

Southern Methodism demonstrates that adherents' beliefs may have controlled church doctrine. For this reason, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was frustrating to Southern Methodists not because of the beliefs it espoused, but because its very publication forced church leaders to publicly defend a proslavery ideology it never fully embraced. This awkward and constrained position made Stowe and her Northern supporters the enemies of the Southern Methodist Church and further polarized the two sections of the country.

An Opposing Viewpoint: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the Northern Methodists

In light of this controversy, it is not surprising that opinions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* proved to be another example of something on which Northern and Southern Methodists failed to agree. As shown, Southern Methodists typically denounced Stowe's work as abolitionist fiction and attempted to associate the Northern Methodist Church with what they framed as the evil and unchristian abolitionist movement. In direct response to these insinuations, Northern Methodists were strategic in their praise of Stowe, attempting to encourage readership of her novel while also separating themselves from ultra-abolitionists. The *Christian Advocate and Journal of Chicago* made a specific point of mentioning "there is one thing, especially, for which the American reader will thank Mrs. Stowe. Throughout all her notices of anti-slavery meetings and proceedings, there is a strong rebuke of the violence and bad temper of the ultra-abolitionists of our country. She never abuses or denounces even slaveholders."⁵⁴ This strategy of distancing themselves from ultra-abolition is important for what it reveals about the ideology of the Northern Methodist Church and how this shaped their response to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. For as long as the Southern Methodists were attempting to connect their Northern counterparts with abolition, the Northern Methodists were focused on proving that was not the case. Through these conflicting efforts, Stowe's novel succeeded in further polarizing the North and South.

⁵⁴ *Christian Advocate and Journal*, August 17, 1854

The reason for these attempts is twofold. The first was that abolitionism was still not a uniformly held belief in the North during the time when Stowe's novel was published. Only two years before the Schism of 1844, some Northern Methodist abolitionists had seceded from the Methodist Church because the church, in their minds, failed to uphold its "long ignored disciplinary condemnation of slavery."⁵⁵ Those who left, led by Orange Scott, LeRoy Sunderland and George Storrs, called themselves the Wesleyans, hoping to further tie antislavery advocacy with true Methodist tradition. Their break from the church was because a majority of Northerners held a moderate stance on slavery, acknowledging it as evil but refusing to act towards its eradication. Instead, they pushed for colonizing and evangelizing the slaves. They also warned that the Northern Methodist Church's "powerful influence in behalf of amelioration and gradual emancipation would be destroyed if the church adopted undiluted abolitionist doctrines."⁵⁶ Northern Church leaders were not ready to be labeled an abolitionist church.

The second reason is that Northerners knew that the Southern Methodists already labeled their church in this way. Ideas regarding abolitionism were responsible for driving the gap between the two sides further apart. Southerners often sought to justify their decision to break away from the Methodist Church by pointing a finger at the instigations of Northern interference with slavery, hence their characterizations of Stowe as an immoral abolitionist. As mentioned above, Northern Methodists believed that Southerners, instead, should own the blame for the schism because of their uncompromising position on slavery. If Southerners could paint Northern Methodism as being "abolition in its sentiments," as they attempted to do, then the blame for the schism could be passed onto the M.E. Church, North.⁵⁷ If Northerners could create

⁵⁵ McKivigan, "The Sectional Division of the Methodist and Baptist Denominations as Measures of Northern Antislavery Sentiment," Available from: John R. McKivigan & Mitchell Snay, 347

⁵⁶ Ibid, 348

⁵⁷ *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, July 10, 1852

distance between their churches and the ultra-abolition movement, then responsibility shifted back to the uncompromising South. With this in mind, church leaders in the North attacked William Lloyd Garrison and other abolitionists, referring to their activities as “serpent-hisses.”⁵⁸ They further believed in the “impolicy of the measures pursued by the anti-slavery societies” and advised “using great caution on this subject.”⁵⁹ This led to an understanding of the importance of guarding “well the temper and style of our Northern discussions respecting [slavery]. Our severities have challenged the South into a posture of self-defense rather than self-relief.”⁶⁰ Northern Methodists wanted to tread carefully because they had little doubt that within the slavery issue was “the very question of our national existence.”⁶¹

Despite this, the Northern Methodist Church was unwilling to remain quiet and indifferent to the slavery issue. This is because antislavery sentiment had continued to grow since the time of the Wesleyan secession, and it was necessary for conservative Northern Methodists to take “steps to limit defections of antislavery moderates to the Wesleyans.”⁶² Therefore, while demonstrating opposition to abolition, Northern Methodists believed in the evils of slavery and thought that through amelioration and Gospel preaching that it would gradually disappear from the United States. The chief Northern stance was that God “has revealed his abhorrence of slavery in his providence.”⁶³ They spoke against the Southern belief that slavery was justified and argued that “God’s own word, gave way before the mighty and selfish fallacy” that slavery was a moral good. Their belief was that “antislavery sentiments...needed a *moral basis*,” and they looked to antislavery works like Stowe’s novel to

⁵⁸ *Western Christian Advocate*, May 29, 1835

⁵⁹ *Christian Advocate and Journal*, March 13, 1835

⁶⁰ *The Methodist Quarterly Review*, July 1857, Volume IX

⁶¹ *Ibid*

⁶² McKivigan, “The Sectional Division of the Methodist and Baptist Denominations as Measures of Northern Antislavery Sentiment;” Available from: John R. McKivigan & Mitchell Snay, 348

⁶³ *The Methodist Quarterly Review*, October 1857, Volume IX

provide such a basis.⁶⁴ Already having thanked Stowe for her unwillingness to condone ultra-abolition, Northern Methodists continued to praise her for preserving the “language of kindness and clarity” in “her remonstrances and arguments against the system of slavery.”⁶⁵ In their minds, her approach to antislavery advocacy was more preferable because it refrained from the actions of provocative abolitionists who “have acted on the assumption that the South were to be scared out of slavery by abusive epithets, and the circulation of incendiary pamphlets among their slaves: not considering that resentment always interposes a barrier to the clearest arguments.”⁶⁶ They saw a lot of potential in the tactics employed by Harriet Beecher Stowe and also hoped that favoring her work, which was marked by calmness and kindness, would put them beyond reproach of Southern critics who claimed the Northern church was apt to employ incendiary abolition. They also saw in support for *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* a response to the claims, made by William Lloyd Garrison and other staunch antislavery advocates, that the indifferent “countenance and practice of the [both Northern and Southern] Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians, were the main supports of slavery in the South, and that were these denominations to renounce their connection with the system and use their influence against it, . . . the whole fabric would totter to its fall.”⁶⁷ Northern Methodists sought to show that they were not apathetic to the slavery issue.

Therefore, the Northern Methodist Church endorsed Stowe’s Christian novel. A March 18, 1853 issue of *The Liberator* reported *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was being adopted as a Methodist Sabbath School book within a year of its publication. The article quoted from the *Cleveland Commercial* and the *Peoria Journal* (Illinois), the latter of which offered the hope that *Uncle*

⁶⁴ *The Methodist Quarterly Review*, October 1857, Volume IX

⁶⁵ *Christian Advocate and Journal*, August 17, 1854

⁶⁶ *Ibid*

⁶⁷ *Christian Advocate and Journal*, June 26, 1835

Tom's Cabin would "soon be in every S.S. [Sabbath School] in the free states."⁶⁸ Clearly, Northern Methodist church leaders felt that the book was true and its Christian sentiments valid enough to be taught on Sundays. It reflected the fact that the Northern Methodists were inclined to antislavery sentiments and wanted such ideas shared with their members. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, with its true representation of slavery and nonviolent tactics, provided a paradigm of Christian response to the slavery question. To them, morally based opposition to slavery was not contrary to the Christian faith.

In order for *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to stand as the moral example of antislavery advocacy, the Northern Methodists needed to demonstrate that Stowe did not exaggerate to garner sympathy for her cause. Consequently, Northern Methodists labored to defend the veracity of her novel from the Southern criticisms that the book was full of lies. In *The Ladies' Repository; a Monthly Periodical, Devoted to Literature, Art and Religion*, a Methodist magazine written largely by ministers, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was hailed as "a picture of American slavery as it now exists."⁶⁹ The writer believed that the novel would have great success in achieving sympathy for the cause of antislavery. Additionally, *The Methodist Quarterly Review* of New York offered that Stowe's account of slavery was accurate, and her ideas were "fairly and genially painted in the proper place."⁷⁰ To them, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was a true picture of slavery and would have a profound effect upon the institution. To encourage support and readership of the novel was viewed as decisive action for the antislavery cause. Northern Methodists were not remaining indifferent to human bondage because they were supporting *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which they viewed as a good and true example of proper Christian response to the evils of slaveholding.

⁶⁸ *Liberator*, March 18, 1853

⁶⁹ *The Ladies' Repository; a Monthly Periodical Devoted to Literature, Art and Religion*, July 1852

⁷⁰ *The Methodist Quarterly Review*, April 1859, Volume IX

It was further portrayed as proper to Methodist Christianity because of the Methodist belief in “salutary reform, and moral and religious improvement.”⁷¹ A Methodist editorial praised New School Presbyterians because “they are zealous and in earnest, and mend the hearts and reform the morals of many wicked people.”⁷² As the next chapter will show, this theological point was central to the beliefs regarding slavery of the New School Presbyterian Church. For the Methodists, considering that they regarded slavery as a moral evil that had penetrated the hearts of Americans, their leaders considered the reformation of slavery and slaveholders to be a Christian duty. This was reflected in the newspaper reviews that were issued from the North. *The Methodist Quarterly Review* of New York praised Stowe’s ability to gain support for her antislavery stance, claiming that “the reader sympathizes with the objects, and especially the persons of whom he is reading.”⁷³ In this, they were affirming that Stowe’s portrayal encouraged readers to see the wickedness of slavery and desire a change in the system. Along this same vein, the Chicago-based *Christian Advocate and Journal* compared *Uncle Tom’s Cabin’s* ability to generate awareness about slavery to the effects that *Oliver Twist* had in making known the issues of the poor, or *Nicholas Nickelby* in encouraging reform of the English public school system.⁷⁴ To compare Stowe’s work to the popular and renowned novels of Charles Dickens was a firm affirmation of the value of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* to both the literary world and the American political scene. It also demonstrated that Stowe’s novel was popular with Northern Methodists because it encouraged awareness of areas that required significant social and moral reform. This served as a direct response to claims levied by their Southern counterparts that Northerners neglected the problems closer to home. In the minds of Northern Methodists, the

⁷¹ *Christian Advocate and Journal*, January 10, 1834

⁷² *Christian Advocate and Journal*, June 6, 1834

⁷³ *The Methodist Quarterly Review*, October 1854, Volume VI

⁷⁴ *Christian Advocate and Journal*, October 13, 1853

oppression of slavery required important action. Their Christian duty deemed *Uncle Tom's Cabin* a valuable work.

It is clear that Northern Methodists encouraged widespread readership and action in response to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. It was their hope, as evidenced by the call to include the novel as a Sabbath School book, that the antislavery opinions of the novel would be disseminated throughout the Northern states, and that readers would be enlightened to the horrors of slavery. Northern Methodists were attempting to solidify themselves as John Wesley's true heirs, adopting the antislavery views of his *Thoughts on Slavery* and of the early American church leaders. To Northerners, Stowe's novel represented a Christian paradigm for the antislavery movement, fairly portraying slavery and slaveholders while refraining from incendiary tactics. In their minds, it was antislavery advocacy that fit the mold of True Methodism. For this reason, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was endorsed and heralded for ushering in the inevitable end to slavery.

The Southern Methodist Church recognized "the mania against slavery produced by *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," and attributed it to what it believed to be the unjustifiable abolitionist fervor of the Northern Methodist Church.⁷⁵ Southern Methodists issued a call for people to see that slavery was not prohibited by God and abolition was the real sin. Despite the best efforts of the Northerners to create distance between their church and ultra-abolition, the Southern Methodists continued to argue that the M.E. Church, North was inclined towards that movement. Their reviews of Stowe's antislavery novel demonstrated that the Northern and Southern Methodist churches were far apart. Northern support for the novel was viewed as the death of slavery, and it pushed Southerners past a point of reconciliation. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* produced a popularity that was unparalleled by any novel ever written before its time, and it created quite the stir in the United States and abroad. It drove an even bigger wedge between the angry factions

⁷⁵ *The Quarterly Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, April 1855, Volume IX

of the Methodist Church. Clearly, Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel generated a dramatic effect; it just may have been different than the one she anticipated when she published her great novel in March of 1852.

Chapter Three: The Presbyterian Church and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

Like the American Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church began to feel the forces of division in the years preceding the Civil War. While the Methodists drew clear sectional lines over the divisive issue of slavery, antebellum Presbyterians were having a different set of disputes centered upon opposing views of Calvinist theology. Growing up in a family with Calvinist ideology, it was impossible for Harriet Beecher Stowe to avoid the influence of the ideas discussed in these debates. In writing *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, she became a personification and perpetuation of one of the major theological rifts that occurred within the Presbyterian ranks over the theology of Scriptural interpretation, moral obligation and social reform. This rift continued to drive Presbyterianism apart throughout the early and mid 19th century. Therefore, the Presbyterian Church differed from Methodism in that it suffered a schism that was not specifically over slavery. However, as it will be shown, it was impossible to completely separate the vehemence of the slavery debate from the split that rocked the antebellum Presbyterians. The story of the Presbyterian Church and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* demonstrated that antebellum Christian division extended far beyond the sectionalist loyalty of Northerners and Southerners. Her novel once again entered a religious sphere of division and left it even more divided.

The Great Theological Divide: Dissent between Liberals and Conservatives

With the end of the American Revolution came a religious crisis that greatly concerned evangelical Presbyterian leaders. Many claimed that infidelity and immorality were beginning to abound, and as settlers began pouring into the West there was relatively little “to restrain the lawlessness, unbelief, and indifference that seemed to be sweeping the nation.”¹ In response to

¹ George Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 9

this growing crisis, many New England pastors began following these settlers into the West, bringing with them a Calvinist evangelical thought that was attracted to revivalist Christianity. Their hope was to bring the Christian religion to an area that was found to be exceedingly “bereft...of religious observance.”² In the same manner as the First Great Awakening, many of these New England ministers “stressed the heart-felt spiritual experience of the individual and a rigorous moral code.”³ Born out of this activity was a new religious revival that would ultimately be central to the split that was to occur within the Presbyterian Church. A wedge, perpetuated by growing theological differences and greatly affected by disagreements over slavery, left liberal and conservative Presbyterians on irreconcilably different sides of a great divide.

What was to become a key part of this theological split was the Plan of Union between the Presbyterians and Congregationalists, which rose up in response to the growing religious crisis of the young nation. Under the plan, which became the organizational structure of the Presbyterian Church in the western areas of New York and Ohio, Presbyterians and Congregationalists joined together in an interdenominational form of cooperation. As part of this, “clerics from one side could minister to congregations on the other.”⁴ Other important results were that this plan increased the communicant membership of the Presbyterian Church from 18,000 to 248,000 between 1807 and 1834 and gave rise to a group of liberals who were to be called New School Presbyterians.⁵ The New Schoolers possessed a great zeal for revivalism, which was the cause of great alarm among conservative Presbyterians who had, in the past,

² Chris Padgett, “Abolition and the Plan of Union’s Demise in Ohio’s Western Reserve;” Available from: John R. McKivigan and Mitchell Snay, *Religion and the Antebellum Debate Over Slavery* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 251

³ Marsden, 3

⁴ Padgett, Available from: McKivigan & Snay, 250

⁵ Marsden, 11-12

“deemed irregular” the series of revivalist activities that arose out of “the heady sense of direct contact with God.”⁶ With this in mind, conservatives were quick to try and quell any extreme emotionalism present in the newest revival that was beginning in the West. Revivalism had already led to secession from Presbyterianism by two groups out on the frontier, and conservatives, being keenly aware of the potential for division, “maintained their moderate stance.”⁷

Suppressing the revivalist zeal of New School evangelicals, however, proved to be impossible, as enthusiasm was continuing to grow in Western New York and the newly settled region of Ohio, which was called the Western Reserve. The revival that arose out of this New School activity was chiefly concerned with the salvation of souls. This goal was met with a large number of converts in the early years of the revival. As result of this success, liberals “were willing to indulge in doctrinal innovation if men’s eternal salvation could be affected more regularly.”⁸ They were beginning to adopt some of the revivalist activities that had left conservative Presbyterians feeling uncomfortable. Some of these tactics included “vulgar language” and “theatrical gestures,” as well as highly emotional exhortations of sin designed to encourage unbelievers “to plead for salvation.”⁹ Conservatives believed that Calvinist theology was clear on tactics of preaching and that these tenets were non-negotiable. New School revival tactics, according to Old Schoolers, put too much emphasis on the sinner choosing salvation as opposed to being chosen by God. This was an example of the rising vehemence on the part of Old Schoolers towards the theology of the New School, which they insisted was “riddled with

⁶ Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 51

⁷ Marsden, 14

⁸ *Ibid*, 75

⁹ *Ibid*, 76-77

heresy.”¹⁰ The early part of the 18th century saw ever growing dissension between the two sides over the doctrinal issues of original sin, moral obligation and the state of unregenerate men. Theology would eventually boil over into schism, thanks in part to the slavery issue.

Theology, the Slavery Issue and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*

The theological conflicts over unregenerate men, moral obligation and revivalist preaching are extremely important for this thesis because of their undeniable connection to the slavery question. According to Old School doctrinal theology, unregenerate men were marked with an inability to follow the commands of the Bible because of the possession of a completely sinful nature. This nature was imputed upon man from the time when Adam and Eve first sinned in the Garden of Eden.¹¹ Because of their decision, man was subject to sin and was only able to achieve salvation and become better with the help of God. New Schoolers, on the other hand, as a means of attracting more converts, preached to the sinner “that he could, and certainly must, *act* to escape his damnable condition.”¹² Under this theological stance, man had a much greater amount of free will in choosing actions that were good, and this had significant sway with the targets of revivalist preaching. It also led to the formation of another tenet of New School theology: the obligation of the church to seek “the moral welfare of the nation.”¹³ As a result, “almost every form of vice or oppression had a corresponding moral or benevolent society to stamp it out.”¹⁴ According to the New School thought, social reform was the moral responsibility of believers seeking to regenerate the nation and save themselves from immoral corruption. This would come to include the issue of slavery.

¹⁰ Marsden, 82

¹¹ Gen. 2 & 3, According to the story of Genesis in the Bible, when God created man and women (Adam and Eve), he placed them in a garden and allowed them to eat of any of the trees with the exception of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Despite God’s command, a serpent convinced both Adam and Eve to eat of the tree, and this marked the first sin of humanity.

¹² Marsden, 50

¹³ Ibid, 21

¹⁴ Ibid, 15

It did so because slavery was fast becoming the predominant moral issue facing the nation in the years preceding the Civil War. The moral obligation doctrine and the ability to act towards regeneration, ideas that were “diffused by the revivals, made people receptive to the political appeal of the antislavery movement, and...the intensity of the revival experience gave them the fervor to act on that belief.”¹⁵ This idea is evidenced by an 1835 statement issued by the New School evangelical faculty of Western Reserve College, now Case Western Reserve University, which pronounced that “this college is now professedly listed on the side of abolition.”¹⁶ Like Western Reserve, Lane Theological Seminary issued a decree that attempted to “gain the confidence of students and young men who are becoming generally tinctured with abolition.”¹⁷ This is notable because two of Lane’s leading professors were Lyman Beecher and Calvin Stowe, the father and husband of Harriet Beecher Stowe respectively. Beecher was adamant in his denunciation of slavery and often encouraged students in their abolitionist leanings.¹⁸ In an 1834 address in Cincinnati, Beecher demonstrated his opinion of slavery, saying “in our own country, it is manifest that slavery must terminate quickly.”¹⁹ While he was unwilling to specifically endorse abolitionism, he encouraged his listeners to engage themselves in groups aimed at the eradication of slavery. He was one of the leading New School voices in favor of the idea of the moral wellbeing of the nation and the role of the church and government in seeking that welfare.²⁰

¹⁵ John L. Hammond, “Revival Religion and Antislavery Politics,” *American Sociological Review*, no. 39 (1974): 176; Available from: Paul Finkelman, ed., *Religion and Slavery* (New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1989), 164

¹⁶ *New York Evangelist*, May 23, 1835

¹⁷ *New York Evangelist*, November 8, 1834

¹⁸ Padgett, Available from: McKivigan & Snay, 254

¹⁹ Lyman Beecher, Address on Abolitionism in Colonization, Washington, D.C.: *American Colonization Society*, November 1834

²⁰ Marsden, 21

That Stowe's father was a prominent New School evangelical and encouraged social reform had a profound impact on his daughter and her writing of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In the preface to the first printed edition of the novel, Stowe wrote that "the object of these sketches is to awaken sympathy and feeling for the African race, as they exist among us; to show their wrongs and sorrows, under a system so necessarily cruel and unjust."²¹ This sentiment embodied the New School theological thought that social reform was the duty of benevolent Christians, and that the church's activities should be aimed at righting the moral wrongs befalling the nation. The author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* believed that it was her Christian duty "to show how Jesus Christ, who liveth and was dead, and now is alive and forever-more, has still a mother's love for the poor and lowly, and that no man can sink so low but that Jesus Christ will stoop to take his hand. Who so low, who so poor, who so despised as the American slave?"²² Stowe believed in moral regeneration for the slaves through the eradication of slavery. Only when they were allowed the freedom to live and act as they pleased would slaves be able to achieve true opportunities for renewal. She also felt that knowledge of slavery's evils would ultimately lead to its demise. Therefore, just as abolitionist appeal could be undeniably linked to the revivalism of New School evangelicals, Stowe and her novel could be paired with New School thought and abolitionist leanings.

The pairing is fundamentally important because of the conservative Old School stance towards the slavery question and abolition. Throughout the early part of its history in the United States, the Presbyterian Church had been unwilling to take a strong and clear stance on slavery. General consensus among Presbyterians deemed that the activities of slaveholding were sinful, but the General Assembly was not committed to direct action towards its eradication for fear of

²¹ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *First Edition Preface* (Boston: Jewett & Co., 1852)

²² Charles Stowe, *The Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe* (Boston & New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1889), 154

alienating its Southern constituencies. In 1818, it made a unanimous declaration that encouraged its members to seek “to obtain the complete abolition of slavery throughout Christendom.”

While this seems like a direct statement in favor of abolition, the decision came with a compromise that spoke out against agitating Southern slaveholders with incendiary tactics. It decreed, instead, that individual presbyteries were to make their own decisions and only provided advice that encouraged eventual abolition.²³ Because of this, the Presbyterian focus shifted to colonization, as many church leaders supported freeing and sending blacks to the African colony of Liberia. This was the general position of the Presbyterian Church towards slavery until the 1830’s, when abolitionist sentiments began to swell within the New School ranks.

While New Schoolers were beginning to support abolition, Old Schoolers remained conservative in their stance. They argued that theology dictated abolitionism to be opposed to the tenets of Calvinism. The Old School believed that the church should not debate public issues on which the Bible had not clearly spoken. Consequently, their position was that “the church should not go beyond Scripture in its declarations. The Scripture do not explicitly condemn slaveholding as a sin.”²⁴ Because of this, taking a strong action against slavery was deemed theologically incorrect. This idea was popular with Southern Old School Presbyterians because it assured that Northern conservatives would not ally themselves with abolition attempts. For Southerners, supporting this sentiment was most likely a result of their proslavery views. For Northerners, it was not only an attempt to avoid alienating their Southern Old School brethren, but also a principle that shaped their views regarding slavery. George Marsden provides evidence for this by mentioning the Old School stance towards the temperance movement.

²³ Marsden, 90-91

²⁴ Ibid, 100

While New Schoolers were encouraging total abstinence, “the majority of the Old School opposed such a denominational stand for exactly the same reason that they opposed condemning all slavery as sin – the church should not speak where Scripture is silent.”²⁵ Despite the fact that some Northern Old School Presbyterians felt Southern slavery to be wrong, they believed their theology was clearly opposed to abolitionism. Therefore, while the New School believed that social antislavery reform was the moral obligation of the Christian Church, Old Schoolers repudiated this. It is clear that opposition to abolition was a matter of theological principle to the Old School Presbyterians, and one that placed them at odds with their New School brethren.

Another key theological factor that determined Old School opposition to abolition was their ideas regarding the role of Christians with regards to the secular authority placed above them. Conservative Presbyterians believed that “the principle of subjection to government is a conscientious submission to the will of God.”²⁶ This was derived from Scriptural references in the New Testament, such as 1 Peter, which states “Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution.”²⁷ With this in mind, Old School conservatives promoted submission to the powers that were in authority. In regards to the slavery question, they encouraged that “every patriotic and peaceful citizen of the United States, while he seeks by suitable means to better the condition of our colored population, should anxiously abstain from acts inconsistent with the text or spirit of the Federal Constitution.”²⁸ Abolition was often associated with engaging in activities contrary to the spirit of the law, which at least in the South, upheld slavery as a legitimate relation between whites and blacks. Consequently, conservative Presbyterians opposed New

²⁵ Marsden, 100

²⁶ *Southern Presbyterian Review*, 1849; Available from: Drew R. Smith, “Slavery, Secession, and Southern Protestant Shifts on the Authority of the State,” *Journal of Church and State*, no. 36 (1994); Available from EBSCOhost, <http://web.ebscohost.com>

²⁷ 1 Peter 2:13

²⁸ *New York Observer*, February 13, 1833

School abolitionism for its attempts to subvert governmental authority, seen as divinely appointed to rule in the United States. To conservatives, New School support of abolition was contrary to a God-ordained theological tenet encouraging submission to appointed authority.

Ultimately, the theological differences surrounding such issues as the state of the unregenerate man, moral obligation and abolition eventually boiled over in the Presbyterian Church. Backed by the support of a solidly Old School South, the conservatives voted to abrogate the Plan of Union between the Congregationalists and Presbyterians and expelled the New School synods from the Presbyterian Church. As highlighted by a June 10, 1837 statement in the *New Haven Religious Intelligencer*, the 1837 Presbyterian General Assembly adopted a resolution “declaring the Synod of the Western Reserve not to be a part of the Presbyterian Church.”²⁹ In addition to the removal of the Western Reserve synod, the Old School also eliminated the New York synods of Utica, Geneva and Genesee, which were all a part of the original Plan of Union.³⁰ Essentially, the New School evangelicals were forced to form a new church, one in favor of revivalist theology and, though not universally, one that had augmenting abolitionist leanings.

The Aftermath of the Split

Like the Methodist Church split of the 1840's, the schism of the Presbyterian Church was bitter and left its lasting mark of divisiveness. The *Christian Observer*, a voice of the conservative sect of Presbyterianism, posited that the schism “disgraced and shattered” the Presbyterian Church.³¹ While this appeared to be a statement that placed blame on both the conservatives and New Schoolers, it became clear that Old School leaders were not suffering from guilt. A June 18, 1840 edition of the same periodical reflected this in saying “now it is

²⁹ *New Haven Religious Intelligencer*, June 10, 1837

³⁰ Marsden, 63

³¹ *Christian Observer*, January 23, 1840

seriously doubted whether their [New School Evangelicals] measures have made themselves or anything else, any better.”³² In the eyes of Old School Presbyterians, the schism was a result of the sins of the New School, offering that they, “having now made this separation... must bear the blame of it.”³³ Conservatives proved unwilling to try and reconcile the differences, even when the New School “had been making periodic overtures for reunion or fraternal recognition.”³⁴ The Old School systematically declined all of these attempts until the New Schoolers finally resolved to put an end to all actions designed at achieving this goal. The Old School seemed content with remaining separate bodies.

Beyond this contentment with maintaining division was growing animosity between the two sides. In the years following the split, the conservative Presbyterians were quick to point out that the New School was struggling to find its legs as their own denomination. Conservative documents provided statistics that said that the New School evangelicals were finding no success in increasing their numbers, whereas the Old School sect was steadily increasing in the number of churches, ministers, and members in their denomination.³⁵ While the New School had seen some success in its early years as a new denomination, it did slightly decrease in numbers in the latter half of the 1850’s.³⁶ This lack of success was viewed, by the Old School, as a form of judgment for the transgressions of the schism. That the Old School leaders happily reported the struggles of the New School is evidence of the deep-seated hostility they had towards their recently expelled brethren. They had a desire that the New School would greatly struggle. This was a representation of an animosity that assured there was little hope for evangelical unity between the two sides that had once formed one body. The actions of the Old School following

³² *Christian Observer*, June, 18, 1840

³³ *Presbyterian Magazine*, April 1853

³⁴ Marsden, 124

³⁵ *Presbyterian Magazine*, May 1852 and February 1853

³⁶ Edwin S. Gaustad, *Historical Atlas of Religion in America* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2001), 136

the split demonstrated that the separation between the Old and the New School was firmly in place.

It was clear that there were feelings of ill will on the other side, as well. According to the *New York Evangelist*, the members of the New School synods that were expelled from the Presbyterian Church felt “deeply injured” by their removal and sought means to remedy the situation.³⁷ This sentiment was further exemplified by Southern Presbyterian Frederick Augustus Ross, who referred to the New School sect as having “sustained some temporary injury.”³⁸ Frustration over their expulsion led New School Evangelicals to launch a lawsuit against the legality of the actions of the 1837 General Assembly.³⁹ The lines of communication were so strained that legal action was the only remaining course. In addition to this, New Schoolers maintained bitterness towards the teachings of the Old School Presbyterians, and certain liberal leaders determined that the conservatives’ position constituted “unpreachable theology.”⁴⁰ Just as Old School Presbyterians had questioned New School theology, the opposite was quite common in the years following the split. One *New York Evangelist* article included an account of the recent activity of the Old School General Assembly, in order to provide New Schoolers an opportunity to question the decisions their counterparts were making.⁴¹ The schism of 1837 left New School Presbyterians frustrated and unhappy with the Old School. Clearly, the aftermath of the split left the Presbyterian Church sects at odds with one another, and the hostility and tension was only further exacerbated by the groundbreaking novel of Harriet Beecher Stowe.

³⁷ *New York Evangelist*, December 23, 1837

³⁸ Frederick Augustus Ross, *Slavery Ordained of God* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1857), 38

³⁹ *New York Evangelist*, August 11, 1838

⁴⁰ Marsden, 111

⁴¹ *New York Evangelist*, June 8, 1839

The Theology of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

The division over *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that occurred in the Methodist Church was largely a result of a sectional dispute. As expected, Southern Methodists launched numerous and vehement attacks against Harriet Beecher Stowe and her antislavery work. Not surprisingly, Northern Methodists viewed the book much differently. Critics from this section of the country were quick to praise Stowe, not only for the veracity and necessity of her novel but also for the skill with which she wrote it. While this division is simple to explain, the Presbyterian Church of the United States suggests that the split over slavery, abolition, and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was not always defined this clearly across sectional lines. For Presbyterians, the issue was theology more than sectional interest, as issues regarding hermeneutics, moral stewardship and submission to authority drew firm lines between the Old and the New School.

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is a field that is concerned with identifying the proper way to interpret Scripture. In the Presbyterian debate, the understanding of Scripture was a cornerstone to the positions of each school of thought concerning slavery, abolition and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. This was due in large part to the importance that Presbyterians, from both sides, placed upon the authority of Scripture as the foundation for all moral action. As mentioned above, Presbyterians from each side of the theological divide had different ideas with respect to the Bible and slavery. These would ultimately play an important role in shaping their opinions to Stowe's provocative novel.

A mouthpiece for the conservative viewpoint was Frederick Augustus Ross, a Presbyterian minister from Huntsville, Alabama. His case, however, was an interesting one. After the split of 1837, Ross became a Southern New School Presbyterian, a sect that "believed

that the Old School had acted unconstitutionally in removing the Northern New Schoolers.”⁴² These Southerners remained part of the New School denomination of Presbyterianism, though not without concern with the abolitionist sentiment that was becoming more prevalent with some of the New School’s most outspoken leaders. Because of the New School membership of these Southerners, some of whom were slaveholders, the denomination was unable to take a definitive stance on abolition.⁴³ As the years went on, however, liberal theologians attempted to demonstrate that “the Bible revealed general moral principles incompatible with slavery.”⁴⁴ When the New School finally established a firm abolitionist stance in 1857, based upon the Bible’s incompatibility with the institution, the Southern New School Presbyterians split with the Northern New Schoolers. This was also the year Ross published *Slavery Ordained of God*. In this book, he offered his newly reestablished conservative leanings, referring to New School doctrine as “stultified abstractions.”⁴⁵ From this, it is helpful to examine Ross’ arguments about *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* from a conservative standpoint.

As mentioned above, this conservative stance was unwilling to argue that the Bible was clearly opposed to slavery as an institution. Conservative doctrine held that the Bible did not clearly condemn slaveholding, and the church could not take position on issues that were not present in Scripture. What the Bible did clearly prohibit was the abusive treatment of slaves, a belief with which even Christian proslavery advocates would agree. However, slavery as a beneficent relation between the white and black races was viewed as justifiable and divinely ordained by Scripture. As a result, any attempts to speak out against slavery were deemed beyond the theological bounds of Presbyterianism. This explains why Old School Presbyterians

⁴² Edward R. Crowther, “Religion Has Something...to Do with Politics;” Available from: McKivigan & Snay, 327-328

⁴³ Marsden, 101

⁴⁴ Ibid, 102

⁴⁵ Ross, 111

attempted to associate abolitionism with infidelity, and they condemned the enthusiasm generated by abolitionism as “baneful.”⁴⁶ Conservatives, like Ross, had a strong opposition to the abolitionist sentiment of Stowe’s 1852 novel. In *Slavery Ordained of God*, Ross gave his review of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as “true in all its facts, false in all its impressions.”⁴⁷ The impressions it gave off were that slavery was the blight of the nation, and that common sense and Christian charity demanded that a stance be made against it. He admonished the antislavery advocates for falsely creating this abolitionist sentiment in Scripture and reiterated that the Bible was not opposed to slavery but was actually unequivocally in favor of it.⁴⁸ Accordingly, Stowe’s abolitionism was contrary to Presbyterian theology because it went beyond the Bible in its attempts to encourage antislavery activism.

A clearer picture of the Old School position regarding Scripture and slavery was provided by Ross’ comparison of slavery to marriage. In his criticism of the Stowe’s novel, Ross acknowledged the truthfulness of Stowe’s depictions, not something most opposing clergy were willing to do. While this seems an important concession on his part, it actually proved not so because of how it related to the theological argument concerning slavery pioneered six years prior to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*’s publication by a conservative Presbyterian minister from Philadelphia, Reverend Joel A. Parker. While Parker’s arguments will be examined in further depth later in this chapter, his belief that the evils of slavery were separable from the institution itself is critical to understanding Ross’ and the rest of the Old School’s position towards Stowe’s novel. The basic premise of this argument is that slavery is a lawful human relation that is only

⁴⁶ *Christian Observer*, June 18, 1840; *New York Observer*, September 2, 1843

⁴⁷ Ross, 38

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 60

made sinful if corrupted by sinful masters.⁴⁹ Therefore, the evils that come out of it are a result not of the relation, but of masters corrupting that relation. This idea was in line with Old School belief that the Bible did not clearly condemn slaveholding as a sin. Therefore, while the Bible could be used to censure ill treatment of a slave, it could not be used to characterize the whole of the institution as sinful.

With this idea in mind, Rev. Ross compared slavery to marriage. He classified both as relationships ordained by God in the Bible. To him, arguing that slavery was contrary to God's law was the same as arguing that marriage, as an institution, was sinful. After pointing this out, he continued by opposing *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for its Southern focus, which ignored the problems of the North, where one allegedly could see "more cruelty from husband to wife, parent to child, than in all the South from master to slave in the same time."⁵⁰ He further noted that an increasing number of marriages were suffering in the North, while intimating that "you seldom hear of divorce in Virginia or South Carolina."⁵¹ He was willing to concede Stowe's truthful depiction of evil masters like Simon Legree because, in his mind, slavery was as lawful a human relation as marriage, and only by the sin of the participants did either relation become sinful. Therefore, it seemed to him hypocritical for Stowe and her antislavery proponents to criticize the lawful Southern relation of slavery while Northern marriages suffered from similar ills. Like Parker, Ross did not condone the evil treatment of slaves by their masters, but he did defend slavery as a lawful relation ordained by God and the Bible. Especially in light of this, his viewpoint was that to work to undermine slavery was an unnecessary and unlawful agitation. Despite not being a slaveholder, something he was sure to mention, Ross disavowed Stowe's text

⁴⁹ Rev. Joel A. Parker and Rev. Anson Rood, *The Discussion between Rev. Joel A. Parker, and Rev. A. Rood* (New York: S.W. Benedict, 1852)

⁵⁰ Ross, 53

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 56

because of its abolitionist tendencies and false interpretation of the Bible, crucial arguments fitting the mold of Old School Presbyterianism.

His ideas stood in direct contrast to the New School position that held that “the broad principle of common equity and common sense” made it clear that slavery stood against all the moral sentiment of the Bible. Although the Bible did not specifically take a stance against slavery, the moral ideas of the text as a whole made it incongruous with the institution.⁵² To New Schoolers, Biblical principle made it obvious that slavery was incompatible with Christianity and should be abolished. The fundamental principle at hand was the inalienable rights of man. Albert Barnes, “who next to Lyman Beecher was the best-known of New School leaders,” published a book entitled *The Church and Slavery*, which clearly laid out the New School position regarding the institution.⁵³ In it, he wrote that “a book which contains such views of human bondage - which would place it among the lawful relations of life, and make provision for its being perpetual – CANNOT be from God.”⁵⁴ This was because God ordained, by nature, for men to have the freedom to live and act as they pleased. This corresponded directly with New School revivalist preaching that offered that man had the freedom, duty and ability to act towards his salvation. Slaves, who were consistently denied that right, did not have the opportunity to act towards moral regeneration. For New Schoolers, marriage did not inherently deny human freedom, but the very premise of slavery did. This, in the opinion of the New School, was contrary to the fundamental essence of the Bible, an argument that was prevalent throughout Stowe’s novel. Ultimately, Scripture revealed that slaveholding was a sinful violation of God’s law, and consequently, New Schoolers could take a strong abolitionist stance against it.

⁵² Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 41

⁵³ Marsden, 27

⁵⁴ Albert Barnes, *The Church and Slavery* (Philadelphia: Parry & McMillan, 1857), 37

Both sides were adamant that their interpretation was correct and that the other side misconstrued the Bible to fit their needs. This was a fundamental criticism that Stowe put forth when she wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In her text, "she intimated the cynical conclusion...that the Bible was easily manipulated to prove anything with regard to a problem like slavery that readers might desire."⁵⁵ She also directly criticized ministers for espousing proslavery ideas from the pulpit. In one telling incident from the novel, Mrs. Shelby, the wife of Uncle Tom's first master, tells her husband that she "never thought that slavery was right."⁵⁶ He reminds her how she differs from many pious men and asks her to remember the sermon they had just heard about the rightness of slavery. Mrs. Shelby vehemently replies, "Ministers can't help the evil, perhaps, - can't cure it, any more than we can - but defend it! - it always went against my common sense."⁵⁷ Mrs. Shelby was a clear personification of the opinion held by the novel's author, that ministers misconstrued the Bible in order to politick towards their proslavery adherents, even though the Bible was clearly opposed to slavery and required abolition. Stowe hoped that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* would awaken the Christian sympathy of the nation and encourage citizens to see how slavery violated clear Biblical opposition to human bondage.

The Old School did not see the same clarity from the Bible, arguing that it was not specifically condemned as a sin, and if anything, was actually supported with Biblical arguments like the Curse of Ham argument mentioned in Chapter Two. For Old School Presbyterians, if the Bible did not clearly prohibit slavery, then it was divinely ordained to exist, either as an institution justified by God or an unfortunate part of a sinful world. That Stowe and New Schoolers argued Scriptural sentiment towards abolition was problematic for conservative Presbyterians and offered evidence that they had misconstrued the Bible.

⁵⁵ Noll, 44

⁵⁶ H.B. Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 35

⁵⁷ Ibid

This idea was a popular theme in one of the many anti-Tom novels inspired by Stowe's text. *Frank Freeman's Barber Shop* was a novel written by Reverend Baynard Rush Hall, a Doctor of Divinity at Indiana Seminary. In this novel, Hall depicted antislavery philanthropists as the villains of the tale, a stark contrast to the slave-holding villains portrayed in Stowe's novel.⁵⁸ His chapter entitled, "Philanthropism," paints the tale of an abolitionist meeting in which he sarcastically describes the fervor of the president of the society, a Christian minister. In his description, he raises his criticism of abolition:

Hence Scripture, when inspired, accorded with reason—his reason; and Bible-saints had done right or wrong, and apostles had been mistaken or otherwise, as they were emancipators, *i. e.*, philanthropists. The end of life was emancipation! If common law was not in favor, there must be uncommon law; and if the lower would not serve, we must try the higher; and if that higher law led to theft, murder, anarchy, all was *fiat justa!*⁵⁹

His point was that abolitionists, like Stowe, were willing to twist the sentiment of the Bible in order to fit their abolitionist ideals. In this sense, they were manipulating Christian doctrine and the people that they attempted to persuade. Additionally, he launched a common criticism that abolitionists would use incendiary and sinful tactics to promote their cause. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was painted as an example of this. His theology clearly placed him in opposition to abolition because he believed the Bible did not sanction such activity.

Hall's novel is very illuminating of the Presbyterian split over theology and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* because it was reviewed on the same day, in the same city, by the *New York Evangelist* (New School) and the *New York Observer* (Old School), and the two sides came to completely different conclusions. According to the *Evangelist*, the novel attempted to "show, not by way of facts, but by fiction, that slaves are much better off in bondage than they would be free." To the

⁵⁸ Stephen Railton, "Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture," Available from: University of Virginia, <http://www.iath.virginia.edu/utc/index2f.html>

⁵⁹ Baynard Rush Hall, *Frank Freeman's Barber Shop* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1852), 176

Evangelist's New School editors, the book endeavored to perform a "hopeless task."⁶⁰ Their claims reflected the idea that the Bible did not show slavery to be for the wellbeing of slaves or provide for a clear indictment of the abolition sentiments of the New School. Condemning an anti-Tom novel served as further evidence of support for Stowe's novel. On the other hand, the *Observer* called Hall's work the "best we have read from his pen." They praised him for his ability to portray the wickedness of abolitionist philanthropists.⁶¹ This idea encapsulated the Old School beliefs that abolitionists went well beyond the scope of the Bible, and therefore, Hall was correct in censuring them. Praising anti-Tom literature showed that the Old School editors were decidedly anti-Tom themselves. The two newspapers failed to agree on their reading of this novel because each denomination had a different idea regarding the proper interpretation of Scripture with regards to slavery. These different understandings laid the foundation for further theological debates surrounding *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Moral Stewardship

Another Old School criticism of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was that it did not recognize the divinely ordained duty of the master as a moral steward to his slave. By adopting this role, slaveholders had the opportunity to protect their slaves and help them know the saving power of God. With this in mind, Ross and Old Schoolers insisted that "slavery may, in given conditions, be for a time better than freedom to the slave." He also offered that a Southern slave was "elevated and ennobled, compared with his brethren in Africa."⁶² For Old School Presbyterians, this idea of the opportunity for moral stewardship rendered abolition unnecessary and unlawful because the eradication of slavery was not in the best interest of the slave. This explains why some of the main Old School criticisms of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* were that "full justice is not done

⁶⁰ *New York Evangelist*, December 9, 1852

⁶¹ *New York Observer*, December 9, 1852

⁶² Ross, 29

to the character of the American slaveholder for humanity and generosity” and “justice is not rendered to American slaveholders for what they have done in the religious instruction of the slaves.”⁶³ Old School Presbyterians posited that the Bible did not clearly condemn slaveholding as a sin, and the benevolence of Christian masters towards their slaves actually proved that the institution had a high potential for good. Therefore, for New Schoolers, like Stowe, to argue that abolition was necessary to erase the sin of slavery from the country, was contrary to sound Biblical interpretation and the proper theology of moral stewardship to slaves.

Fitting this same mold were the Old School editors of the *New York Observer*, the conservative “sheet that routinely denounced abolitionists and offered, like Ross, that blacks were better off as slaves in the South than as free persons in the North.”⁶⁴ The *New York Observer*’s anti-abolitionism was evident in an 1852 article in which the editors reported that “the ultraism of modern abolition” was “happily dying out”⁶⁵ Though this may have been wishful thinking on the part of the conservative editors, especially considering that in years to come the New School would take an unequivocal stand towards abolition, it nevertheless demonstrated an opposition to abolitionism on the part of the paper’s editors. In light of this, these editors offered a specific opposition to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*: that Stowe refused to acknowledge the potential effects that Christianity had on making masters of slaves more humane. She, instead, depicted “the indulgent and amiable *masters*” Augustine St. Clare and Mr. Shelby as men without religion.⁶⁶ Consequently, according to the *New York Observer*, she failed to acknowledge that Christian principle could and did make humane masters and demonstrate the appropriate Biblical example of this lawful human relation. She also was

⁶³ *New York Observer*, May 26, 1853

⁶⁴ Crowther; Available from: McKivigan & Snay, 330

⁶⁵ *New York Observer*, September 23, 1852

⁶⁶ *Ibid*

censured for failing to give proper credit and respect to Christian ministers. To the editors, her novel seemed more a proponent of a lack of religion than an example of proper Christian response to the slavery issue.

Therefore, the Old School continued their disavowal of Stowe's abolitionism. In the *Christian Observer*, a Southern Conservative Presbyterian periodical published in Louisville, Kentucky, Stowe was portrayed as an "exquisite sentimentalist." According to the editors, works like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* "rouse the passions, but offer nothing practicable to be done."⁶⁷ Other Old Schoolers made reference to "the general false teaching of its abolitionist writer" that was "barely tolerable."⁶⁸ In general, Conservatives offered, that the novel was "bad in its theology, bad in its morality, bad in its temporary evil influence."⁶⁹ Consequently, the *Christian Observer* made an erroneous prediction that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* would "be remembered – if not forgotten - as one of the 'humbugs' of 1852."⁷⁰ Their criticisms centered on the idea that Stowe's descriptions failed to acknowledge both the realities of slavery and the truth that abolitionism represented misguided theology. It was not only immoral to advocate for abolition, it was also undermining an institution that ultimately was best for the slave.

The New School did not share the sentiment that slavery could have any benefit for the slave. This, again, hearkened back to the idea that human bondage violated the free will and rights of man to choose his own path towards salvation and moral regeneration. Stowe, and her New School counterparts, believed that the best course of action was to show chattel slavery as evil and harmful to slaves. Therefore, New Schoolers not only took to praising the novel, but

⁶⁷ *Louisville Christian Observer*, September 11, 1852

⁶⁸ *New York Observer*, September 30, 1852

⁶⁹ Ross, 17

⁷⁰ *Louisville Christian Observer*, October 2, 1852

also sought to defend it from the criticisms levied against it.⁷¹ One way they did this was by providing testimony from a Southerner who was willing to attest to the veracity of Stowe's claims about the evils of slavery. On October 22, 1852, *The New York Evangelist* published a letter from James Hill, a Tennessean, who implored the paper to do what they thought "best for the cause of humanity."⁷² In response, the newspaper printed the testimony that Hill provided regarding Stowe's accurate description of evil masters and the plight of slaves in the South. He provided this letter as a former slave-owner who had "seen the evil" of his "former practices."⁷³ This was a purposeful intention on the part of the New School paper to make known the horrors of slavery, in hopes of spurring action towards snuffing out the evil. It was also designed to show that antislavery and abolition were the best course of action for the benefit of the slave and the rest of humanity. This served as stark contrast to the Old School posture that slaves were far better off in the present condition than they would be as free. For New Schoolers, regardless of how well a master treated his slave, slavery was ultimately more harmful because it denied natural human rights to slaves to seek their own moral welfare.

Submission to Authority vs. Seeking the Welfare of the Nation

The idea of seeking moral welfare traced its roots, from before the split, to the revivalism preaching of New Schoolers like Lyman Beecher. Beecher and his counterparts were strong supporters of the role of the church and Christian duty in redeeming the nation. This posed another theological problem for the two denominations because the Old School was concerned that New School reform attempts had stepped well beyond the bounds of Christian doctrine. This is why an 1854 article by *The Presbyterian Magazine*, a conservative periodical issued by

⁷¹ *New York Evangelist*, September 23, 1852

⁷² *New York Evangelist*, October 22, 1852

⁷³ *Ibid*

the Old School General Assembly, classified Stowe's work as "inimitable fiction."⁷⁴ It should not be imitated because the novel encouraged abolition and violation of the Fugitive Slave Law. Stowe's text was labeled as an effort designed to incite its readers to undertake the unconstitutional measures of abolitionism.⁷⁵

Unconstitutionality was an issue for Old Schoolers because it attacked their position concerning appropriate moral action with regard to governmental authority. As mentioned above, Old School Presbyterians believed that it was ungodly to oppose the authority of human societal institutions if those institutions acted in a way not forbidden by God. Frederick Ross characterized the Old School position by saying "government over men, whether in the family or in the state, is, then, as directly from God as it would be if he, in visible person, ruled in the family or in the state."⁷⁶ In this sense, social order also represented divine order. Therefore, if governmental authority decreed slaveholding to be lawful, it was the duty of Christians to adhere to this authority because God did not specifically prohibit slaveholding as a sin. Again, the concept of submission to authority was tied to Old School hermeneutical interpretation of slavery as not sinful. It was for this reason that the unconstitutionality of abolition became an issue of proper Christian behavior. Considering that Stowe's work questioned the morality of slavery and encouraged rebellion against the recently passed Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, her novel presented an attack on divine order, a serious theological problem for Old Schoolers who believed that the Christian must submit. It was for this reason that the Old School *New York Observer* referred to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as "anti-Christian."⁷⁷ If their ideas were correct, the very nature of Stowe's novel was an attack on the authority of God.

⁷⁴ *The Presbyterian Magazine*, June 1854

⁷⁵ *New York Observer*, May 26, 1853

⁷⁶ Ross, 133

⁷⁷ *Ibid*

In contrast to their conservative brethren, New School evangelical Presbyterians viewed the eradication of slavery as their God-ordained moral obligation to seek the welfare of the nation. Growing up out of the New School tradition, Stowe had a firm belief in benevolent social reform, a cause pioneered by her Calvinist father, brother and husband. Like other New Schoolers, Stowe believed it was her Christian duty to take a stand against the Southern institution. This was because, in New School minds, slavery was contrary to the moral spirit of the Bible. It represented a black stain of sin on the nation, a blight from which Americans needed salvation. In contrast to Old School beliefs, it was slavery and not abolition that threatened the authority of God. Stowe felt that she would not be a proper Christian if she did not use her talents and efforts to abolish slavery. This mindset represented the entirety of her views regarding slavery and such constitutional measures, like The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, designed to ensure its security.

Her own writing confirmed the New School sense of mission that she felt. Prior to authoring the novel, Stowe received a letter written from her brother, Edward's, wife. In this piece of correspondence, Edward's wife wrote, "Now Hattie, if I could use a pen as you can, I would write something that would make this whole nation feel what an accursed thing slavery is." In a response from December 1850, Stowe claimed "I will write that thing if I live."⁷⁸ This exchange was motivated by the government's passage of The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. In offering her reasons for the novel, Stowe questioned the morality of the act, and wrote at length her opinions of the new piece of legislation:

But since the legislative act of 1851, when she [Stowe writing in the third-person] heard, with perfect surprise and consternation, Christian and humane people actually recommending the remanding escaped fugitives into slavery, as a duty binding on good citizens—when she heard, on all hands, from kind,

⁷⁸ Charles Stowe, *The Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe* (Boston & New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1889), 145-146

compassionate, and estimable people, in the free States of the North, deliberations and discussions as to what Christian duty could be on this head—she could only think, These men and Christians cannot know what slavery is; if they did, such a question could never be open for discussion. And from this arose a desire to exhibit it in a *living dramatic reality*. She has endeavored to show it fairly, in its best and its worst phases.⁷⁹

She clearly believed that slavery was contrary to the laws of God, and it was her duty as a Christian to strive for the wellbeing of the nation, which was seen as slavery's abolition.

This reflected clear New School theology, advocating that evil anywhere needed to be stamped out by the members of the Church. Northern Congregationalists, who had been theologically allied with New School Presbyterians, acknowledged this sense of mission. A review of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* from their periodical opined that “we look upon the writing of this book as providential, and as the best missionary God has yet sent into the field.”⁸⁰ The *Oberlin Evangelist* further confirmed this New School theological stance. In a review of the anti-Tom novel, *Life in the South*, the editors claimed that they had “no sympathy” with the effort of this novel to defend slavery, but instead had “a decidedly strong sympathy the other way.”⁸¹ Abolition was quickly being viewed as the way for New School Christians to fulfill their moral obligation and work towards regenerating the nation and themselves. Believing Stowe's novel was providential, abolitionists were increasingly viewing their mission as God's work. The laws of slavery no longer represented a responsible godly authority for the New School.

Antebellum Presbyterianism reflected a complicated set of divisions that could not be simply classified as Northern reaction and Southern reaction. Instead, theology was a fundamental factor in determining how Presbyterian Church leaders would respond to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The theological differences from the Old and New School led to a wide gap

⁷⁹ *National Era*, April 1, 1852

⁸⁰ *Congregationalist*, Available from: *New York Evangelist*, May 27, 1852

⁸¹ *Oberlin Evangelist*, October 22, 1852

between their views regarding slavery and abolition. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, as the most popular antislavery novel ever written, and a text with undeniable New School roots, presented the embodiment of New School theology regarding the contentious slavery issue. At the same time, the novel represented the most publicized and widely read direct attack on the Old School theological posture towards human bondage. Not only did the novel show how far apart the two schools were on this issue, it also occasioned the broadcasting of their vehement disagreement to the public through widely disseminated denominational periodicals. That the two sides failed to agree on the novel represented irreconcilable differences and continued to drive the denomination apart on the eve of the Civil War.

The Parker/Rood Debate: A Theological Case Study

Perhaps the best way to understand this contentious issue is by examining a direct debate between the two sides. In 1846, six years prior to the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Reverend Anson Rood and Reverend Joel Parker engaged in a dialogue, through the *Philadelphia Christian Observer*, over the issue of slavery. This dialogue took the form of a series of letters written between the two ministers. Reverend Parker was a conservative Presbyterian minister from Philadelphia who often wrote for the Old School *Philadelphia Christian Observer*. Reverend Rood, from the same city, was a member of the New School and a correspondent for its liberal *New York Evangelist*. While their conversation occurred years before Stowe ever put pen to paper, it was brought back into the forefront of the public mind because Stowe referenced Reverend Parker and his arguments in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Her citation created quite a stir in the press.

The reason why Stowe's mention of Parker caused a commotion is that Stowe misquoted Parker in the novel. In chapter 12, "Select Incident of Lawful Trade," Stowe described the heart-

wrenching situation of a slave trader separating a family by selling a mother's child to a different master. In a rather sarcastic and scathing invective, Stowe makes her opinion known and places blame upon Christian ministers:

Tom had watched the whole transaction from first to last, and had a perfect understanding of its results. To him, it looked like something unutterably horrible and cruel, because, poor ignorant black soul! he had not learned to generalize, and to take enlarged views. If he had only been instructed by certain ministers of Christianity, he might have thought better of it, and seen in it an every-day incident of a lawful trade; a trade which is the vital support of an institution which an American divine tells us has "*no evils but such as are inseparable from any other relations in social and domestic life.*"⁸²

In the original text she footnoted the American divine's quotation as attributable to Dr. Joel Parker of Philadelphia. In reality, Parker did not argue this but actually said, "What then, are the evils that are inseparable from slavery? There is not one that is not equally inseparable from depraved human nature in other lawful relations."⁸³ In order to help clear up the confusion, the original debate was republished in book form in 1852. The publisher made it clear in his introduction that Stowe's misquote was unintentional, and the debate was reprinted so that "the public may understand the exact state of the case."⁸⁴ Despite getting the exact wording wrong, Stowe's quote still expressed sentiments that Parker held, namely the Old School theological belief that slavery in and of itself was not considered sinful, but it was a divinely ordained institution that could be corrupted by sin. Regardless, Stowe's misquote provided an occasion to recall and re-publicize the dissension that was growing between the New School and Old School Presbyterians.

The main point of the debate focused on the question of whether or not slaveholding was a sin, which was at the center of the hermeneutical debate between the two schools. Throughout

⁸² Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 2003), 129

⁸³ Parker and Rood, 24

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, iv

the discussion, Reverend Rood personified the New School position. In his opening letter, he endorsed the opinion “that American slavery is ‘opposed to the prescriptions of the law of God, to the spirit and precepts of the Gospel, and to the best interests of humanity.’”⁸⁵ As part of this, he advocated acting in a Christian manner that would reflect his belief that slavery opposes God’s law. Therefore, Rood criticized incendiary abolition and claimed that “the great mass of Christians in the non-slaveholding States give no countenance to the mad projects of a few who would ‘call down fire from heaven.’”⁸⁶ He advocated for the New School position of benevolent social reform, not aimed at inciting violence or alienating those in need of regeneration. Thus, his comment was used as a means to preempt any attempts by his conservative adversary to link his stance to what was considered violent and unlawful ultra-abolitionism. Despite Rood’s best efforts, that is precisely what his opponent did in his response. Reverend Parker countered that Rood and his New School counterparts “cautiously and gently insinuate the same doctrines” as the “billingsgate abuse of Garrison.”⁸⁷ This demonstrated that Old Schoolers believed their New School brethren to be ardent abolitionists. Parker closed his response by asking Rood if he believed that holding a slave was a sin. Here, he made the important distinction between slaveholding and the abuse of a slave, which he said both sides view as sinful. This distinction was critical to Parker’s and the Old School Presbyterian views of slavery that he expounds upon in later letters.

Throughout the remainder of the debate, Reverend Rood argued his main point that the evils of slavery are “*part and parcel of the thing, and can never be separated from it.*”⁸⁸ In his mind, chattel bondage was an unlawful human relation because a slave was “robbed of his

⁸⁵ Parker and Rood, 9

⁸⁶ Parker and Rood, 8

⁸⁷ Ibid, 12

⁸⁸ Ibid, 18

inalienable rights.”⁸⁹ As mentioned above, this idea tied directly to New School theology in favor of the free will and rights of man to seek his own path towards regeneration and a holy life.⁹⁰ Therefore, Rood was willing to condemn slavery as inherently opposed to God’s law. He was not, however, vicious in his description of all slaveholders as sinners. He expressed sympathy for Southern slaveholders who, though opposed to slavery, were “placed by it in circumstances of great difficulty and trial.”⁹¹ This line of reasoning was no doubt an attempt to avoid alienating the Southern New School slaveholders that were still a member of that denomination during this time. It also seems clear that Rood’s argument had significant sway for Stowe, who wrote in the preface of the first published edition of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, “The author can sincerely disclaim any invidious feeling towards those individuals who, often without any fault of their own, are involved in the trials and embarrassments of the legal relations of slavery.”⁹² The two sides recognized that the sin of slaveholding sometimes entrapped the master as much as it did the slave. This line of reasoning provided further evidence that Stowe recognized the potential divisiveness her novel could create with its abolitionist leanings. It also shows agreement with the New School ideology of Reverend Rood.

Parker, on the other hand, spent the rest of the debate defending the argument mentioned earlier in this chapter, that the evils of slavery were separable from the institution itself, and it was only by sin that the lawful relation was corrupted. In his second letter of the debate, Parker listed the evils that are separable from slavery as abusive punishment of slaves, lack of provision for their education and bodily needs, and separation of families because of the domestic slave

⁸⁹ Parker and Rood, 29

⁹⁰ Marsden, 97

⁹¹ Parker and Rood, 17

⁹² H.B. Stowe, *First Edition Preface*

trade.⁹³ He argued that countless Christian and benevolent masters treated their slaves in a humane way and are not perpetuators of these abominations. This drew upon the idea of the Christian master as a moral steward to the wellbeing of his slaves. To him, only immoral masters were the cause of the evils that New Schoolers associated with slavery. Reflecting the Old School theological bent against antislavery advocacy, he discredited abolitionist attempts and instead encouraged Christian reform to the institution over its eradication. It was his belief that this would eliminate the evils that are separable from the lawful relation of slavery itself. To do more than this was beyond the bounds of Presbyterian theology, because while the Bible was clear on common charity for the poor and oppressed, it did not speak clearly on the immorality of slavery. This further explained why his attempts to discredit Rood's argument were aimed at linking him to abolition. For Old School conservatives, who were staunchly opposed to abolition, New School doctrine like Rood's represented a gross deviation from the doctrines of true Calvinist theology.

This is one of the reasons why this debate was important. It demonstrated just how far apart Old and New School Presbyterians were on these theological issues. Old Schoolers believed that New Schoolers were unlawful abolitionists. New Schoolers countered that the conservatives sat idly by while slaves were suffering in the South. This was not a friendly disagreement. Throughout the debate, Parker and Rood had biting criticisms for each other that reflected an increasing amount of animosity between the two sides. Despite being from the same city, it was impossible for these two Presbyterian ministers to come to an agreement over this controversial issue. They could not overcome the differences in their theology that contributed to driving apart the Presbyterian Church in the first place. The fact that Stowe provided a reason

⁹³ Parker and Rood, 20-24

for the debate to resurface showed that her novel only contributed to the vehemence of the split between Old and New School.

The Parker/Rood debate also had significance because it helped shape both Stowe's arguments in the novel and some of the response to it. In the debate, Rood found it extremely questionable that Parker could argue that the relation between a master and a slave was lawful. He lamented that "if Northern men can take this ground, and offer such palliations for the atrocities of slavery, the prospect is indeed dark and hopeless for the poor slave."⁹⁴ This was one of the indictments that New School Presbyterians had for their Old School brethren, and it formed one of the chief complaints of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. By mentioning Parker in her novel, Stowe sarcastically drew attention to the "divinity" of such American ministers who were unwilling to strive towards the wellbeing of the slave. More importantly, she was offering a critique of his Old School theological position. Her book was full of criticism for the beliefs being put forth from the pulpit by Christian ministers.

This chapter already chronicled the exchange between Mr. and Mrs. Shelby, but this theme was also present in another insightful instance. Augustine St. Clare, Tom's second master and a man without religion, asked his churchgoing wife and cousin what the sermon was about one Sunday afternoon. His proslavery wife responded by saying of the minister, "He proved distinctly that the Bible was on our side, and supported all our institutions so convincingly." St. Clare scoffs at this and says he could learn more of value from a secular newspaper. He continues, "If I was to say anything on this slavery matter, I would say out, fair and square, 'We're in for it; we've got 'em, and mean to keep 'em, - it's for our convenience and our interest."⁹⁵ Through St. Clare, Stowe argued her position that proslavery ministers twisted the

⁹⁴ Parker and Rood, 41-42

⁹⁵ H.B. Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 180-181

sentiments of the Bible in order to politick towards their proslavery religious adherents. To Stowe, in reality, the only real interest that motivated proslavery preaching was economic prosperity and convenience over clear theological opinion. Like Rood, Stowe attacked the Old School leaders who espoused that slavery was in accordance with Biblical teaching. By attacking the Scriptural interpretation of the Old School, New Schoolers like Stowe attempted to undermine every anti-abolition argument offered by Old Schoolers. If slavery was contrary to God's law, it was not unlawful for the New School to seek abolition because this would be in accordance with God's will and in the best interest of the country. Therefore, to New Schoolers of this bent, Old School ministers were in the wrong for their inactivity and defense of slavery, especially in light of the principles of the Bible. This was a crucial component of Stowe's New School arguments.

It was also this censuring of ministers that provided Old Schoolers with a main reason for their criticism of the novel. On May 26, 1853, the *New York Observer* contained an in-depth analysis of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. One of the main critiques that the Old School editors had was that "the grossest injustice is done to ministers of the Gospel in America."⁹⁶ The parallels between the arguments of the *Observer* and those laid forth by Reverend Parker years earlier are very enlightening. In the debate, Parker was upset that Rood did not acknowledge the Christian beneficence of many of the masters who treated their slaves with generosity and were diligent in their religious instruction. In the same manner, the editors from the *New York Observer* expressed frustration because of Stowe's unwillingness to make the same acknowledgement. The *Observer* stood up for ministers like Parker, who were deemed to be inaccurately portrayed and "scarcely ever introduced but with a sneer" in the novel. The editors were specifically frustrated that Stowe characterized ministers "as holding sentiments which render them callous

⁹⁶ *New York Observer*, May 26, 1853

to the most grievous oppressions practiced under” slavery.⁹⁷ In fact, the editors of the *New York Observer* specifically defended Parker in print when Stowe misquoted him in her novel.⁹⁸ They took pains to point out that Stowe made a mistake, hoping to discredit her entire novel in the process. Their actions compelled a publisher to reprint the original Parker/Rood debate. It is clear that the theology discussed in the debate shaped a good portion of Stowe’s arguments and the criticisms levied against her. This specific case provided another example of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* sparking a vicious public debate between the Old School and New School. It also demonstrated how far the divide had grown and that Stowe was a key player in the perpetuation of that split.

In 1837, the New School *New York Evangelist* issued a foreboding prophesy to the rest of the nation: the division of the Presbyterian Church in the United States would be a precursor to the division of the nation.⁹⁹ As Stowe’s novel suggests, fifteen years after this prophesy, the two denominations of Presbyterianism were far apart. The novel itself drove a further wedge between the two factions, and made it clear that reconciliation was not an option. Differences regarding the theology of abolition and slavery were insurmountable, which was made clear from the Presbyterian leaders’ views regarding *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. As the most powerful and popular novel written to date, Stowe’s text occasioned significant publicity for this sorrowful truth. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* publicized and exacerbated the Presbyterian divide. Nine years after its publication, the nation was split in two. It turns out that the Presbyterian division would contribute to the schism that would befall the nation. This was an effect it is doubtful Stowe could have anticipated when she put her pen to paper.

⁹⁷ *New York Observer*, May 26, 1853

⁹⁸ *The National Anti-Slavery Standard*, September 30, 1852

⁹⁹ *New York Evangelist*, December 23, 1837

Conclusion

In the introduction to *Broken Churches, Broken Nation*, C.C. Goen suggests that “the reader should remember that historians simply cannot evaluate with precision the influence of a sermon, a tract, or a book (even *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*).”¹ It is undeniably true that it is impossible for any study to accurately represent just how many people were changed or compelled to action by Stowe’s novel. While it undoubtedly changed votes, motivated sermons and gained advocates for the abolitionist cause, just how many will forever remain unclear. However, as this thesis has shown, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was not simply another popular and influential book regarding the issue of American slavery. When it was published, it was the *only* novel of its kind ever produced. A historian cannot precisely quantify the influence the novel had; but a historian can and should examine the evidence and conclude that the novel generated unparalleled publicity and public discussion for the divisive issue. Inspired on their own volition, coupled with the pressure of a curious international audience, Americans, as the writer for the *New Englander* suggested, were “moved to feel, to think, to discuss the question of slavery, against its own resolute determination to the contrary – a determination which has been formed deliberately under the advice of the Union Safety Committees, urging the highest consideration of commercial and political expediency.”² Slavery had always been the unspeakable weight bearing down on American society. Nervous politicians had long held the mindset that silence on the issue may allow it to quietly slip away. Considering that Stowe and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* are still heralded today suggests that its publication ensured that the issue of slavery in America could never calmly disappear. An outraged international audience and an increasingly

¹ C.C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985), 14

² *New Englander*, November 1852

inquisitive American citizenry were ready for Americans discuss slavery in the press, the legislature and, more importantly, in the church. This left *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a symbol of the irreconcilability of the American slavery issue.

The last two chapters of this thesis demonstrated that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was a divisive force that exacerbated the differences that existed within the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches regarding Southern chattel bondage. Because *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was so heavily imbued with Christian themes, and claimed to be the result of divine inspiration through visions, it was already a prime candidate for discussion in American ecclesiastical organizations.³ Stowe's criticism of American Christian leaders also occasioned the response of Christianity. Finally, the importance of its topic ensured that the church would enter into the conflict created by the novel's publication. For Southerners and anti-abolitionist Northern Christians, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* represented an unbiblical and incendiary attack on a God ordained relational institution. Because Stowe rose from a New School Presbyterian background, and believed that "the continuing existence of slavery was 'largely the result of beliefs and actions stemming from the Presbyterian Church,'" only increased the distrust it created within proslavery Southern Methodists and Northern and Southern Old School Presbyterians.⁴ Northern abolitionist Christians, on the other hand, saw *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a rallying cry for their benevolent and Christian social reform movement. They were equally frustrated with their rivals' disavowal of the text. It was clearly an issue on which Methodist and Presbyterian Church leaders failed to see eye-to-eye.

The novel's popularity turned up the pressure that was already bearing down on Southerner Christians to take the position that owning another human being was a divinely

³ Thomas Gossett, *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1985), 96

⁴ Goen, 144

appointed concept. With a large amount of commentary flooding the pages of the widely disseminated religious periodicals, heavily church-influenced Americans had a firsthand view of the increasing divide between pro and antislavery Christians. America's religious adherents took their cues from the vehement debates raging in the Church. Stowe's Christianity turned the eyes of the nation upon how the Church would handle the slavery issue. What they saw was even more bickering, dissension and frustration as a result of the novel. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* represents the final tipping point that pushed American Christians beyond the point of reconciliation. To the author in the *New Englander*, the novel worked "to disturb the repose of great ecclesiastical organizations."⁵ The slavery issue, until resolved, would forever remain a barrier to ecclesiastical union in the United States. As long as human bondage existed in America, the denominational schisms were permanent and growing.

By Schisms Rent Asunder: The Collapse of National Unity⁶

The rifted denominations at mid-century seemed to have full awareness that their split would culminate in national turmoil and Civil War. A personification of this mindset in the Methodist Church was church leader Peter Cartwright. He was a "well-known Methodist preacher from Illinois," and he attended the disastrous General Conference of 1844 during which the church split in two.⁷ After the fateful events of that year, Cartwright wrote of the schism:

And I the more deeply regretted it because any abomination sanctified by the priesthood, would take a firmer hold on the community, and that this very circumstance would the longer perpetuate the evil of slavery, and perhaps would be the entering wedge to the dissolution of our glorious Union; and perhaps the downfall of this great republic.⁸

⁵ *New Englander*, November 1852

⁶ "By schisms rent asunder" are lyrics from the Christian Hymn, "The Church's One Foundation."

⁷ Goen, 79

⁸ Peter Cartwright, *The Autobiography of Peter Cartwright* (London: Arthur Hall, Virtue, and Co., 1862), 276

Cartwright's concern was understandable considering that, as stated by C.C. Goen, "the Methodist Episcopal Church was the most extensive institution in antebellum America other than the federal government."⁹ Being the largest of the Christian denominations, the implications of the split were the most far reaching. The *Christian Advocate and Journal* painted a clear picture of these implications. In a letter written during the time of the General Conference of 1844, the correspondent predicted that the Methodist Church, "which has been a light to the world, will become a byword of reproach, a stumbling block over which multitudes will fall into hell." He continued, saying "the connection between the division of the Church and the dissolution of the Union seems to us exceedingly plain."¹⁰ The widely disseminated religious periodicals were now letting their readers know that national disunion was inevitable. The perception in the Methodist Church was that a broken church meant a broken nation.

The time period following the Presbyterian split of 1837 was no less foreboding. Activist William Lloyd Garrison was quick to acknowledge the connection between the Presbyterian split and national disharmony. In a Fourth of July speech in Providence, Rhode Island, Garrison implored his listeners to "look at the recent turbulent and despotic transactions in the Presbyterian General Assembly at Philadelphia: that mighty denomination is severed in twain at a blow. *The political dismemberment of our Union is ultimately to follow.*"¹¹ In the same vein, the *New York Evangelist* recounted popular public sentiment regarding the Presbyterian schism:

There is still another and a larger class, whose feelings are very deeply interested in the present difficulties in the Presbyterian Church. This class, whilst it includes some in her own communion, also includes a larger number connected with other religious denominations, and a still larger number who are not professors of religion. All these look at the Presbyterian Church with the eye and the feelings

⁹ Goen, 58

¹⁰ *Christian Advocate and Journal*, August 7, 1844

¹¹ *Liberator*, July 28, 1837

of patriots, and say, that the division of the Presbyterian Church will only be the precursor of the division of the Union...The ambitious who desire the sundering of the Union, are elated with the certain accomplishment of their desires, if this great and powerful church can only be divided.¹²

The implications of this article are not only that Presbyterians were viewing their schism as a precursor to civil war, but that this idea had become prevalent in public opinion.

Heavily influenced American citizens could not help but note that “the die has been cast, and the further union of the North and South for Christian operations seems to be almost hopeless. If a union cemented by all the finer influences of the gospel could not last, what can?”¹³ It certainly seemed hopeless for the nation if institutions based upon Christian mercy and forgiveness could not remain united.

With church leaders, like *Southern Christian Advocate* editor and Methodist spokesman William Capers, warning that church disruption would ultimately leave the nation “rent asunder,” Americans were becoming increasingly uneasy with the church schisms.¹⁴ Goen classifies these statements as predictions of the impending demise of the national union. Instead, they served as self-fulfilling prophecies for the leaders and their religious adherents. In the wake of the Baptist split, a correspondent believed that the church leaders would gladly embark upon the road to reconciliation for “they love the church too much; they love the political Union too much.”¹⁵ By the next day, he had already given up this glimmer of hope for reconciliation, resigned to unavoidable schism. What this example suggests is that church leaders were not willing to adopt any means necessary to preserve their ecclesiastical union. As they began to write that church rupture would lead to “disunion and civil war,” they were already resigned to

¹² *New York Evangelist*, December 23, 1837

¹³ *Charleston Courier*, Available from: *Christian Observer*, May 23, 1845

¹⁴ *Southern Christian Advocate*, December 8, 1837, Available from: Henry Smith Stroupe, *Religious Press in the South Atlantic States, 1802-1865* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1956), 22

¹⁵ *Charleston Mercury*, May 9, 1845, Available from: Goen, 102

that fate and made little effort at reconciliation.¹⁶ Their inactivity left the wounds of schism festering and boiling over into the tragic destiny they predicted for the United States. A failure of church leadership to adopt strong positions and work tirelessly towards reconciliation and peace was a main contributor to the failure of the nation.

Once political leaders began entering with the same rhetoric of disunion, things looked bleak for the country. John C. Calhoun, the champion of Southern secession, wrote a speech, delivered by James Mason on March 4, 1850, that served as an “articulate reminder” to the struggles of a nation. In the speech, Calhoun characterized the “spiritual and ecclesiastical” bonds as the strongest holding the sections of the country as one. He noted how these cords “consisted in the unity of the great religious denominations, all of which originally embraced the Union.”¹⁷ With denominations breaking apart, Calhoun warned that all the ties that hold the nation together would disappear. In the same vein, Henry Clay, Calhoun’s famous adversary, had his own concerns with denominational schism, writing, “The sundering of the religious ties which have hitherto bound our people together, I consider the greatest source of danger to our country.”¹⁸ American leaders, both political and religious, deemed reconciliation to be a hopeless task. Their apocalyptic mindset, shared well with the public through the press, steered the nation down an irreversible path to national disharmony and the violent Civil War. Left in the wake of the bitterly divided churches was a divided nation.

Uncle Tom’s Cabin entered into the divided Methodist and Presbyterian Churches with strongly Christian antislavery rhetoric that hinted at the Christian Church’s decades of failure in taking a strong stance on the divisive issue. Chapters One and Two suggest that the discussion of issues generated by the novel’s publication left the divided sides of the denominations more at

¹⁶ *New York Evangelist*, May 29, 1845

¹⁷ Richard K. Crallé, ed., *Speeches of John C. Calhoun*, pp. 556-558, Available from: Goen, 104

¹⁸ Available from: Goen, 106

odds with one another. Stowe's novel stood as a symbol that slavery was an issue that could never die quietly and never be lived with peacefully for the United States of America. With the relationships between these disrupted denominations becoming increasingly strained, the ties that held the nation together were beginning to break. While it is impossible to precisely measure the influence of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, it is clear that it played no small role in increasing the divide that was then, and is now, seen as a primary cause for the break in the Union. Over a decade after Southern secession, one Methodist writer saw that this was so:

And it is the opinion of some whose opinion is entitled to respect, that the 'Cabin' contributed largely to incite and enkindle an outrageous "Rebellion," which, under Divine control, was 'a blessing in disguise.' This one 'Cabin' utterly demolished thousands of slave-cabins south of 'Mason and Dixon's line.' We fear not that we go beyond the boundaries of sober fact in the averment, that this single book accomplished more in behalf of a grievously wronged and sorely oppressed humanity than had been achieved by all the lectures against slavery, from the day that Garrison, Phillips, Thompson and other pioneer antislavery champions ascended the emancipation rostrum, down to the time that 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' first greeted the reading public.¹⁹

Perhaps Abraham Lincoln was not completely joking when he insinuated that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* made the Civil War. It certainly helped push the nation in that direction, a result far beyond what its famous author ever intended.

¹⁹ *The Ladies' Repository; a Monthly Periodical, Devoted to Literature, Art and Religion*, September 1873

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