

“THOSE NOW AT WAR ARE OUR FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS:”

The Views of Evangelical Editors in British North America

toward

the American Civil War, 1861-1865

by

Craig I. Stevenson

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Abstract

The American Civil War 1861-1865 drew the attention of Free Church Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist denominational editors in British North America. This thesis seeks to examine the religious and political ideas which influenced how these editors in the Maritimes and central Canada interpreted an event of significant meaning to them.

These religious editors in British North America viewed the conflict, its causes, and issues through a particular set of religious ideals. Particularly important in this regard was the idea, prevalent in much of the Anglo-American world during the mid-nineteenth century, of postmillennial optimism--that Christ's return to earth would be facilitated by society's moral reformation. This view led editors from all three denominations to see Southern slavery as the defining and central issue of the war.

Their interpretations of the Civil War were, however, influenced by differing denominational histories. The historical and religious background of Free Church Presbyterians in British North America was closely linked to events in Scotland, and was reflected in the Presbyterian editors' views of the American conflict. The Free Church view that civil government must be conceived within the framework of Christian principles moved them to see the United States' republican form of government as idolatrous and tolerant of slavery, and therefore as a major cause of the war.

Methodists and Baptists had longer and more varied historical backgrounds in British North America. The commentary of these denominational editors on the Civil War differed by region. In the Maritimes these denominations were influenced strongly

by British social and political ideals, causing editors there to look to republicanism in the United States as a political system which accommodated slavery and provoked political division between the Northern and Southern states. In central Canada, Methodists and Baptists possessed a dual Anglo-American heritage. With denominational ties to the United States, editors there did not form a causal relationship between republicanism, slavery, and the war. Instead, they looked to a reformed American Union as the most promising means of effecting the emancipation of the South's slaves.

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Chapter One--Introduction

The American Civil War challenged the people of the United States to redefine fundamentally their political and social institutions and perceptions. As a period of upheaval, it remains unparalleled in the nation's history. Tensions over states' rights, slavery, and the nature of territorial expansion which, despite growing North-South social differences in the decades previous to the war, had remained contained within the framework of the Union, were unleashed with the tumultuous political change which occurred after the election of Abraham Lincoln in the autumn of 1860. Five years later, issues which could not be solved politically before the war were solved militarily, with the surrender of Confederate forces during April 1865. Historians since, despite a multitude of differing interpretations, have seen the war as an immensely important watershed in the development of the United States as a nation.

Religion, as historians increasingly recognize, played a significant role in the social and political divisions which affected the United States prior to and during the war. Politicians were not the only public figures to affect the crucial social and political issues of the period. Rather, religious figures in both the Northern and Southern states, particularly those influenced by evangelical Protestantism, were prominent actors in the unfolding course of events.

The period of the American Civil War has received a staggering amount of attention from historians in the United States. Yet, events of the period did not occur within a bubble; other nations and regions, including the British North American provinces, took a keen interest in the struggle between the Union and the Confederacy. In particular, political disputes which arose during the war between

Britain and the American government threatened to spill over into Canada and the Maritimes. The North's seizure of two Confederate agents from the *Trent*, a British vessel, in 1861, held the potential to disrupt Anglo-American peace.¹ So too, from a different angle, the attack on the Vermont village of St. Albans in 1864 shook relations between Britain and the United States government; in that instance, the raid was a deliberate attempt by Confederate provocateurs to exploit the physical proximity of Canada and the United States and force the Union to open a second front on which to fight.² These are but the most prominent of a number of political incidents between Britain and the United States during the war which, directly or indirectly, involved the British North American provinces.

Aside from these explicitly political and diplomatic issues, a number of social issues attracted attention from observers north of the border. Slavery concerned British North Americans for both moral and pragmatic reasons. Commentators widely identified the Southern institution as a source of irritation between North and South in the decades prior to the war, and as a major cause of the commencement of armed conflict. Indeed, discussion of slavery and its relationship to the American political system became a focal point for those inclined to examine the religious and political differences between Britain, its North American provinces, and the United States.

Just as importantly, however, were the practical considerations which attended slavery, particularly for the Province of Canada. There, a shared border with the

¹ Brian Jenkins, Britain and the War for the Union, vol. one (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1974), chapters 8-10; Donald Creighton, The Road to Confederation: The Emergence of Canada 1863-1867 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1964), 7-8.

² Creighton, Road to Confederation, 194-195, 212-216.

United States, and the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in America in 1850, ensured that a large number of blacks would migrate north over the border in the 1850s. With the passage of the law, which greatly expanded the power of Southern slaveowners to reclaim escaped slaves living in the Northern states, American blacks flooded into central Canada. A number of communities consisting of escaped slaves were formed, with Canadian social reformers and religious leaders in particular playing a key role in aiding the establishment of these settlements. Most notable was the Presbyterian minister William King who, prompted by the inadvertent inheritance of a number of slaves through the family of his deceased American wife, established the Buxton settlement in Canada's southwestern farming country.

It is here, on the moral and religious issues attendant to the conflict, that a greater amount of Canadian historical research needs to be undertaken. The Civil War has traditionally attracted historians interested in weighing the conflict's role in the formation of the Canadian nation and in the development of British North American political ideologies and social attitudes. A compelling case, however, can also be made for the study of Canadian and Maritime religious figures and the particular interpretations they drew from the war. The focus of this thesis will be on Maritime and central Canadian evangelical interpretations of the American Civil War.

Drawing on the definition of David Bebbington, it can be pointed out, evangelicals as a group shared four distinctive characteristics. First, evangelicals stressed biblicism, and thus took the Bible as the primary source of religious authority. As well, they emphasized crucicentrism, or the centrality of Christ's atonement as the source of

salvation. Also important was conversionism, or the New Birth experience of spiritual regeneration. This in turn had implications beyond individual piety, for the converted individual was to express his commitment in an activist involvement in the moral reform of society. The latter is especially important for this particular study.³

In British North America during the mid-nineteenth century, evangelical denominations included Free Church Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists as well as a smaller number of Congregationalists and “low church” Anglicans, especially those with a strong Irish connection. The focus of this paper is, however, on the first three denominations. Free Church Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists were, during the period, the largest and most influential of the British North American denominations in terms of shaping a national awareness of social issues, and would play an increasingly key role in the development of an evangelical social and political outlook in Canada in the latter half of the nineteenth century.⁴ These denominations, whose moral concern with social conditions moved them to support a variety of reform movements, keyed in on slavery in the United States as a social issue of paramount significance.⁵ The importance of central Canadian and Maritime evangelicals’ interest in the American

³ See the introduction to Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington, George A. Rawlyk, eds., Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700-1990 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 6. This definition draws from David W. Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 2-17.

⁴ See, for example, Marguerite Van Die, “‘The Double Vision’: Evangelical Piety as Derivative and Indigenous in Victorian English Canada,” in Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington, and George A. Rawlyk, eds., Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700-1990 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 253-274. In Canada in 1861, Methodists accounted for 25.1 percent of the population, Presbyterians, 21.7 percent, and Baptists, 4.4 percent.

conflict and the underlying moral issue of slavery increases with the realization that evangelical leaders of the period tied their views of society and morality to political action.⁶ Furthermore, as will be seen, Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists in the United States were instrumental to the social and political debates which polarized the Northern and Southern states prior to the war. As such, their co-denominationalists in British North America took a keen interest in how these denominations responded to the foremost social and political crisis of the period.

In pursuing this line of inquiry, this study reflects developments in American historiography which show how, both socially and politically, evangelicalism in the United States affected national events in the period before and during the war, while itself being transformed by the immense social and philosophical changes wrought in American society as a result of the conflict. A significant number of recent American works linking religion to the Civil War draw from Timothy L. Smith's Revivalism and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth Century America. Smith's pioneering work, published in 1957, clarified the direct relationship between the postmillennial, optimistic theology of antebellum American evangelicalism and the rising sectional debate over Southern slavery. Smith placed evangelicalism in American society as a broad, socially-conscious movement for reform born of urban revivalism and driven by a postmillennial spirit which focused on God's active role in earthly affairs.

⁵ For a study of one moral reform issue which, during the nineteenth century, attracted the close interest of a large number of evangelicals in British North America, see Jan Noel, Canada Dry: Temperance Crusades before Confederation (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

⁶ John Webster Grant, A Profusion of Spires: Religion in Nineteenth-Century Ontario (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), esp. chapter 11; Neil Semple, The Lord's Dominion: The History of Canadian Methodism (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), esp. chapter

Importantly, antebellum postmillennialism demanded societal perfection as a precursor to the Second Coming--a view which, when adopted by Northern evangelicals, acted as a powerful impulse toward the eradication of slavery.

Furthermore, Smith linked evangelical postmillennialism to one of the most divisive social and political issues of the antebellum period--the sectional division of the nation's major Protestant denominations, divisions which would, as will be noted later, not leave Canadians unaffected. American Presbyterians, for example, split into Old and New Schools in 1837 over theological interpretations which would later take on sectional overtones. New School Presbyterians, who moderated Calvinism with a greater emphasis on revivalism and social activism, tended to embrace the politically sensitive abolitionist movement; Old School Presbyterians, in opposition, held to a strictly Calvinist interpretation which was particularly attractive to Southerners who looked to a traditional idea of social order to sustain the legitimacy of slavery. The Methodist Episcopal Church in 1844 and the Baptist Missionary Convention in 1845 also separated along North-South lines over the issue of slavery.⁷

Smith's emphasis on Northern evangelical postmillennialism and the consequences of this view for social and political relations between the Northern and Southern states has received greater historiographical attention in recent years. These developments are significant to the interpretation of American politics during the Civil War period, and, as will be seen, are relevant to the study of Maritime and central Canadian

13: William H. Elgee, The Social Teachings of the Canadian Churches: Protestant, The Early Period, before 1850 (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1964), 165-168.

⁷ Timothy L. Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth Century America (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957).

evangelicals' political interpretations of the war. Both Daniel Walker Howe and Richard Carwardine, for example, have argued for a more cogent understanding of the extent to which Northern evangelical social reformers played an active role in shaping the nation's political landscape. In particular, antebellum antislavery movements and their bearing on Northern politics may be seen as directly contiguous with the rise of the Republican party and the subsequent North-South political conflict which directly precipitated the Civil War.⁸ The illumination of the historical relationship between religion and politics in the United States during this period is relevant to the study of Canadian religion; it raises the question of whether religious commentators in British North America formulated explicitly political interpretations of events in the United States which were directly influenced by their evangelical views.

⁸ Daniel Walker Howe, "Religion and Politics in the Antebellum North," in Mark A. Noll, ed., Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the 1980s (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 125-127; Richard Carwardine, "Evangelicals, Politics, and the Coming of the American Civil War: A Transatlantic Perspective," in Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington, George A. Rawlyk, eds., Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700-1990 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 207-211. Howe sees as misleading past perceptions of the Whig party as a conservative entity opposed to Jacksonian Democratic "progress". Antebellum Whigs did not constitute a political body dedicated to middle-class social control, but were for the most part evangelicals who, deeply influenced by postmillennialism, saw themselves as "shapers of society and opinion." Howe effectively refutes common neo-Marxist historiographical assertions that Northern evangelicalism inadvertently blended reform with social control and the promotion of capitalism. Rather, he argues that self-control, and not social control, defined evangelicalism during this period. Carwardine argues that evangelicals' preference for political parties in the antebellum period reflected particular religious beliefs. Denominational divisions facilitated and reinforced the hardening of sectional evangelical political positions, and undermined the idea that there existed within the United States a core set of religious and political values to which both Northerners and Southerners could adhere. In the North, the divergence of sectional perspectives culminated with the election of the Republican party in 1860, when evangelicals explicitly melded Republican political success with a postmillennial understanding of unfolding events to produce an unprecedented fusion of religious and political goals. "Moral meaning" as interpreted by Northern and Southern evangelicals, is key to understanding antebellum American political identity as well as sectional and religious divergence.

Differing religious and political perspectives in the United States between Northern and Southern Protestants were key to the sectional tensions within the nation's churches and government which helped lead to the outbreak of war. C.C. Goen has noted that just as the Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist churches in the United States helped tie the North and South together, so too did the sectional schisms of these denominations contribute to the growing alienation of Northerners and Southerners from each other, a development which directly contributed to the outbreak of war.⁹ British North American Protestant editors were caught up in these divisions; much like their fellow evangelicals in the Northern states, they were at a loss as to how to reconcile Southerners' expressed religious belief with their vigorous defense of slavery. In the South, evangelicals occupied a differing position in society from those in the North. Geographically removed from the genesis of postmillennial social activism in the Northern states, and affected by a host of social customs which stratified Southern society and limited evangelicals' ability to effect change, Southern Protestants acted in a manner which suggested compliance with the Southern social order. A number of recent studies have examined the nuances of the relationship between Southern religion, culture, and slavery.¹⁰ As will be seen, this relationship

⁹ C.C. Goen, Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schisms and the Coming of the American Civil War (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985), 13.

¹⁰ E. Brooks Holifield, The Gentlemen Theologians: American Theology in Southern Culture 1795-1860 (Durham: Duke University Press, 1978), 153; James O. Farmer, Jr., The Metaphysical Confederacy: James Henley Thornwell and the Synthesis of Southern Values (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1986), 267-269; Mitchell Snay, Gospel of Disunion: Religion and separatism in the antebellum South (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 8, 214-218. Holifield suggests that Southern clergymen based their defense of slavery on a rational view of Christianity, and not on faith alone. The South's "gentlemen theologians," a group of urban and literate clergymen, developed a highly rational view of slavery grounded both in Biblical interpretation and in the firm belief that the South's social system was an essential element of a greater, ever-changing divine order. As James O.

drew pointed criticism from British North American evangelicals during the conflict, and was viewed by the editors as an important underlying factor in the commencement of hostilities.

More importantly, however, the Civil War is now seen as a major watershed in the history of American religion. As Mark Noll has shown, the involvement of two highly religious factions vying for superiority in the conflict ultimately led to a lessening of the importance of religion in American society. Issues which had brought American evangelicals to the forefront of the nation's political life appeared to have reached a logical end; the massive Northern response to Southern slavery faded with the end of the war and the emancipation of slaves, while the opportunity to open the west, over which both sections had fiercely contended before the war, proceeded in a socially and economically rapid and haphazard manner which displaced the importance of religion to settler's lives. Perhaps the lesson drawn from the war which proved most damaging to American religion was the apparent obsolescence of moral philosophy as a means of defining the nation's character. Given that "armies, not arguments,"¹¹ had settled the

Farmer Jr. shows in his study of Southern Presbyterian James Henley Thornwell, an influential member of Columbia Theological Seminary, Southern evangelicals' more conservative theological and political positions directly led to the idea of constructing a new state as the means by which to seek insulation from the North's alien values. Arguably, the articulation of this conservative evangelical position fed incipient Southern desires for political independence from the North. Snay, examining the schisms of the Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist churches from the Southern perspective, argues persuasively that the South's churches and political institutions increasingly found reinforcement in each other's language as they focused on the issue of slavery. The strength of the churches' stand on the legitimacy of slavery produced a consensus which lent moral backing to the political drive to preserve slavery. Conversely, the South's churches took from the schisms a keenly developed ability to incorporate political language into subsequent sectional arguments. The vital feature of the church schisms, then, was the ability of the South's churches to develop a monolithic view on the inseparability of slavery and Southern identity; without such a view, the South's economic and social diversity might have prevented the unity of thought and purpose necessary to bring about secession.

conflict, religion no longer seemed as vital to the national identity. Into this vacuum stepped the new and growing preoccupation with science as a means of philosophical explanation.¹² Here, it is of interest to note the commentary of religious figures in British North America who, while feeling a sense of common religious purpose with fellow evangelicals in the United States, were not directly affected by the social upheaval left in the wake of the conflict. Protestant editors in the Maritimes and Canada evinced a keen interest in, and often a pessimistic assessment of, the immediate effect of the conflict on the United States' churches.

The views of religious figures in British North America have received little attention from Canadian scholars who, traditionally, have studied the impact of the Civil War upon the process of Confederation, arguing that the American war was one of the factors which pushed British North American political leaders to pursue political union. In particular, it is argued that Anglo-American tensions during the war and the gradual realization that Northern victory was imminent made it clear to colonial politicians that the United States, provoked by Britain during the war, might easily choose to look north as a subsequent avenue of expansion. For this reason, British North American politicians moved more quickly than they might have otherwise in their attempts to unite the provinces within a common political structure.¹³

¹¹ Mark A. Noll, A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1992), 329.

¹² *Ibid.*, 330.

¹³ P.B. Waite, The Life and Times of Confederation 1864-1867: Politics, Newspapers, and the Union of British North America (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), 28-30.

Secondly, scholars have argued that the actual nature of the ensuing British North American union was shaped by the experience of civil war to the south. The American conflict convinced colonial politicians of the need for centralized government, for in their view the devolution of powers enshrined in the American constitution had led to the pursuit of regional self-interest, and ultimately war, in the United States.¹⁴

Other examinations of the relationship between the Civil War and British North American union look to Anglo-American relations as an expediting factor in the move toward Canadian Confederation. Ged Martin has recently argued that Confederation reflected British, more so than Canadian and Maritime, political interests. Confederation was seen by Britain as solving the dilemma of its obligation to defend militarily British North America; it would act as an effective check to American expansionism, and prevent the gradual annexation of the British North American provinces. After 1864, when it became clear that the North would emerge victorious in the war, Confederation moved from being an abstract concept to, in the British view, an immediate political goal for the defense of Canada and the Maritimes.¹⁵

There have been attempts, most notably by Robin W. Winks, to gauge popular opinion of the war within British North America as well as the extent to which Canadians participated militarily in the conflict. Winks identifies what he terms a “generally negative nature of press response”¹⁶ to the Civil War from British North

¹⁴ Creighton, The Road to Confederation, 142, 150; Peter J. Smith, “The Ideological Origins of Canadian Confederation,” in Janet Ajzenstat and Peter J. Smith, eds., Canada’s Origins: Liberal, Tory, or Republican? (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1995), 70.

¹⁵ Ged Martin, Britain and the Origins of Canadian Confederation, 1837-67 (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1995), 187-202.

American periodicals. It is more accurate, he argues, to identify editorial opinion by what was *disliked* about either side, rather than by allegiance to the cause of either the Union or the Confederacy. Importantly, Winks notes, both moral and political questions informed Canadian papers' judgment of the war's participants, and could lead to potentially contradictory editorial positions. Papers which supported Northern victory in the hope that it would lead to the abolition of slavery were by no means supportive of the North's political institutions; conversely, support for the South's right to secede did not imply a favourable view toward slavery. As well, Winks argues that the issue of Canadian enlistment in the Northern and, to a lesser extent, the Southern armies during the war was equally complex. While the number of British North Americans who fought in the war has generally been overstated in Canadian historiography,¹⁷ those who participated did so for a variety of motives. Some, including fugitive slaves from the Buxton Mission in Canada West, fought for the Union because it opposed the slaveholding South. Others, however, viewed enlistment as an economic opportunity, to such an extent that some Canadian enlistments were executed by the Union for repeatedly deserting and reclaiming enlistment bounties.¹⁸

The impact of the Civil War on Canadian Confederation, as well as British North American "participation" in the American conflict, in the form of political or editorial

¹⁶ Robin W. Winks, Canada and the United States: The Civil War Years (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1960), 222.

¹⁷ See Robin W. Winks, "The Creation of a Myth: "Canadian" Enlistments in the Northern Armies During the American Civil War," *Canadian Historical Review* (March 1958), 24-40.

¹⁸ Winks, Canada and the United States, 178-205. For a local study of Canadian enlistments from Oxford County, Canada West, see Lois E. Darroch, "Canadians in the American Civil War," *Ontario History* (March 1991), 55-61.

commentary or actual military enlistment, are areas which interested a broad scope of contemporary observers. At a time, however, when, as noted, a large percentage of the British North American population belonged to an evangelical Protestant denomination, there are few examinations which considered the conflict's implications for this group in the Maritimes and central Canada.

Few studies have made reference to the Civil War as an event of political significance to British North American evangelicals. S.F. Wise, tracing Canadian sentiment toward the United States during the mid-nineteenth century, has argued that political conservatives and reformers in Canada focused primarily on the perceived excesses of republicanism as the United States' signature political faults. Importantly, he notes, religious figures of varying political opinion also displayed a particular hostility to republicanism. Anglicans characterized republicanism as a "godless" form of government, while political reformer George Brown, a Free Church Presbyterian, attacked republicanism on the grounds that it sustained slavery. The war vindicated the views of both conservatives and reformers within the Canadian political culture. Reflecting a broadly held conviction that the war was the natural result of the American political system, they utilized the conflict to reflect positively on Canadian society and politics.¹⁹ Religious opposition to republicanism can thus be seen in the context of historic Canadian opposition to American expansionism.²⁰ During the war,

¹⁹ S.F. Wise, "The Annexation Movement and Its Effect on Canadian Opinion, 1837-67," in S.F. Wise and Robert Craig Brown, eds., Canada Views the United States: Nineteenth-Century Political Attitudes (Toronto: Macmillan, 1967), 48, 56, 83-88.

²⁰ George A. Rawlyk, "Politics, Religion, and the Canadian Experience: A Preliminary Probe," in Mark A. Noll, ed., Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the 1980s (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 263. Rawlyk argues that much of the anti-American sentiment evident in Canadian society, both in the present and the past, may be linked to the United States'

a period when there existed an explicit threat to Anglo-American peace, it is important to examine in some detail the explicit criticisms of republicanism leveled by religious commentators in their interpretations of the war and its underlying causes.

The issue of slavery, on the other hand, because of the moral importance it held for mid-nineteenth century evangelical reformers, is one of the few areas in which Canadian scholarship has examined British North American religious interest in American social and political issues of the period. Protestants in British North America, assessing social and political issues from an evangelical moral perspective, took an active role in criticizing slavery as a social sin. The Canadian concern with slavery was more than theoretical, for increasingly strident slave laws in the United States forced fugitive slaves to seek freedom in British North America.²¹ Organizations such as the Upper Canada Anti-Slavery Society were comprised of large numbers of evangelicals, while, as has already been noted individuals such as Presbyterian minister William King organized the Buxton Mission in southwestern Ontario to settle escaped slaves.

The leading historian of Canadian blacks, Robin Winks, has argued that religious leaders in British North America took up the antislavery cause largely for pragmatic

particular idea of religious destiny. The American idea of manifest destiny on the North American continent, which contained a strong sense of the United States as a model Christian republic, produced a significantly different sentiment within those against whom American expansionism was targeted. Historically, then, anti-republicanism in British North America grows from the reactive nature of Canadian settlement after the American Revolution. Loyalist settlement in the provinces, as well as survival through attempted American invasion during the War of 1812, caused Canadians to feel that theirs was a society under God's protection. A continuing sensitivity to American republicanism, argues Rawlyk, defined both political and religious ideas of loyalty within Canada.

²¹ See, for example, James M. McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 79-86.

reasons. Robin Winks sees the geographical proximity of the United States and British North America as an important determinant in the response of denominational abolitionists to the rising number of escaped slaves who arrived in central Canada in particular subsequent to 1850. Suggestive for this study is his argument that religious abolitionists in Canada viewed slavery as a continental, rather than specifically American, problem.²²

The most extensive examination of Canadian religious leaders' thoughts on slavery, however, while revising the interpretation put forward by Winks, largely bypasses the Civil War. Allen Stouffer's The Light of Nature and the Law of God: Antislavery in Ontario 1833-1877, a broad portrayal of Canadian racial attitudes of the period, focuses on Canadian religious figures because they comprise "virtually all the actors in the story."²³ Stouffer argues that abolitionist sentiment was *not* the norm in Canada; rather, its strength derived largely from transplanted British ministers and immigrant members of the middle class, affected deeply by antislavery efforts in that country. Antislavery activity was both a means of expressing evangelical social concern as well as a means by which British immigrants integrated into a new society.²⁴ Stouffer's work, however, almost completely ignores the American conflict itself, as his study moves from the pre-war period through to the reconstruction of the United States in an attempt to piece together Canadian antislavery movements and racial views. This omission is significant, given, as will be subsequently demonstrated, the extensive

²² Robin Winks, The Blacks in Canada (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 233-271.

²³ Allan P. Stouffer, The Light of Nature and the Law of God: Antislavery in Ontario 1833-1877 (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), xiv.

attention paid to the issue of slavery by British North American denominational editors during the war.

Historians should, therefore, examine the religious dimension of British North American commentary on the Civil War with greater depth and breadth. A fuller approach to the subject would shed insight into Canadian and Maritime Protestant views of the social, political and religious aspects of the conflict and, in turn, reveal more about the religious views which affected society and politics in mid-nineteenth century British North America. This approach would also help illuminate the extent to which religious leaders in British North America drew from either British or American influences in the formation of their political views. A comparative approach has already been employed successfully by historians of British evangelicalism seeking further insight into their own religious traditions. Richard Carwardine, for example, has examined the social and political activism of evangelicals in the United States in a comparison with evangelicals in Britain in the nineteenth century. It is his conclusion that a “common transatlantic experience”²⁵ marked the political activity of evangelicals in both nations. Nonconformists in Britain, traditionally wary of direct involvement in politics, he notes, began to change their “quietist” position in the first decades of the nineteenth century as a number of social issues--among them slavery--caught their attention and demanded their political involvement.²⁶ Given the organizational links

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 188-189.

²⁵ Richard Carwardine, “Religion and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Case Against American Exceptionalism,” in Mark A. Noll, ed., Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the 1980s (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 228.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 233.

between denominations in British North America and the United States and the tremendous interest shown by Maritime and Canadian evangelicals in the conflict, it would be fruitful to look at the British North American religious response to American events in order to learn more about domestic denominations themselves as well as the similarities and differences between evangelicals in these locations.

Examining the British North American religious response to the American conflict offers the further advantage of comparing political, social and religious views between the United States and the British North American provinces. This approach as well has been successfully employed by scholars of British evangelicalism. W. Harrison Daniel, focusing specifically on the response of British Presbyterians and Methodists to the Civil War, has shown that evangelicals in that nation took a keen interest in American political developments of the 1860s. In particular, evangelical editors wrote of the religious implications of the Civil War; slavery, it was contended, was the root cause of the majority of the United States' social, regional, and political crises.²⁷ Here, significant parallels may be made with evangelicals in British North America, who also viewed social and political events in the United States largely through the lens of slavery.

As these previous studies have shown, there is significant potential for an examination of British North American religious views of the American Civil War. The study of religious attitudes toward American political events of the period, while having been successfully employed in regard to evangelical Protestants in Britain and

the United States, has received sparing attention, if any, in the British North American context. In order to begin to rectify this historiographical gap, this paper examines the editorial views of a number of leading Canadian and Maritime evangelical commentators toward the American Civil War between the autumn of 1860 and the spring of 1865. Three Free Church Presbyterian periodicals are studied: the *Presbyterian Witness*, published in Halifax; the denomination's official periodical in central Canada, *The Ecclesiastical and Missionary Record* (in 1861 renamed *The Home and Foreign Record*), published in Toronto; and, thirdly, a "secular" paper, the *Toronto Globe*. The largest component of Presbyterianism in British North America, the Free Church, as will be seen, took a much more active interest in social and political issues than its sister denominational rival, the Church of Scotland. As such, its interest in the American conflict was considerable. The *Globe* is included for comparative purposes, as its publisher, George Brown, was a Free Church Presbyterian whose evangelical views affected his interpretation of social and political issues. The Methodist periodicals examined reflect the regional and denominational differences of the period. Two Wesleyan papers, the *Halifax Provincial Wesleyan*, published in Halifax, and the *Christian Guardian*, published in Toronto, are studied. Also examined for its Methodist perspective is the leading paper of the second major Methodist group in Canada, the Methodist Episcopal *Canada Christian Advocate*, published in Hamilton. To complete the focus on both the Canadian and the Maritime provinces, three Baptist periodicals are examined: the *Canadian Baptist*, published in

²⁷ W. Harrison Daniel, "The Reaction of British Methodism to the Civil War and Reconstruction in America," *Methodist History* (1977), 7-9; Daniel, "English Presbyterians, Slavery and the American Crisis of the 1860s," *Journal of Presbyterian History* (Spring 1980), 51-56.

Toronto; the *Christian Messenger*, published in Halifax; and the *New Brunswick Baptist and Christian Visitor*, published in Fredericton.

In examining these papers, two reasons may be offered as to why the denominational press offers important insight into evangelical religious and political interpretations of American social and political issues during the period. First, writing on a regular basis, denominational editors were compelled to stay informed of both foreign and domestic events and issues if they were to offer to their readers a religious perspective on the greater world. The denominational press is both an accessible and direct source of religious opinion on contemporary events, as well as an excellent means by which to gauge the religious and historical backgrounds which influenced these editors in their interpretations of current events.

Second, studying the religious press is an effective method of following the keen interest these editors displayed in the American conflict because of the strong religious ties between denominations in British North America and the United States. As will be seen, not only did British North American religious editors see themselves as active participants in the course of events in the United States, but they also evinced considerable concern over the roles played by their American co-denominationalists in these events. As seen, Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists not only formed the bulk of evangelicals in the United States, but their religious and increasingly political positions played a role in moving the nation toward internal conflict. This fact was noted, with considerable interest, by religious editors in British North America during the war.

In summary, then, this study of Canadian and Maritime evangelical editors' views of the American Civil War follows three general themes of inquiry. First, the relationship between these editors' religious views and the political significance they attached to the conflict is examined. As noted, British North American evangelicals were moved by their postmillennial optimism to oppose slavery in the American South. It is not surprising, then, that, as will be seen, these editors looked at slavery as both the primary cause and defining issue of the war. What is not as well understood, however, is the relationship they saw between the United States' political framework and the issue of slavery. Furthermore, as historians have noted, many British North Americans attached considerable significance to the war as an event of importance to the political identity of the emerging Canadian nation. It remains to be seen exactly what sort of political significance these religious editors attached to the conflict, and whether they in turn used the conflict to articulate their particular views of politics in British North America.

Second, in examining the religious and political significance these editors attached to the Civil War, it is necessary to examine whether their views were influenced by differing denominational backgrounds. Free Church Presbyterians in British North America drew strongly upon a religious and historical heritage oriented toward Scotland. Methodists and Baptists, however, were influenced by indigenous British North American historical factors and events. In central Canada, these denominations drew on a dual Anglo-American historical heritage, while in the Maritimes, their histories were marked by a closer adherence to British political ideals. It is important,

then, to study whether regionally differing denominational heritages translated into differing perspectives on the conflict.

Finally, the editors' interpretation of the Civil War are, where possible, placed within the context of the wider body of religious opinion on the conflict. This objective is made easier by the willingness of these editors to engage their readers, each other, and religious spokesmen in the United States in debate as to the war's causes, issues, and the most promising means of resolution. Identifying similarities in, and differences of, opinion on the war between British North American editors and those in Britain and the United States aids in tracing the extent of Anglo-American influences on these denominations in the Maritimes and Canada. By putting these editors' views into a historiographical context, and by following the numerous debates on the war in which they participated, we are further able to trace the national and historical influences on these denominations in the British North American environment as well as discern the political views of religious leaders on the most pressing North American event of the period.

Chapter Two—Free Church Presbyterians

Free Church Presbyterians in the Maritimes and central Canada were influenced by their Scots Evangelical world view when interpreting the American Civil War.¹ Two specifically Free Church periodicals, the *Presbyterian Witness*, published in Halifax, and the *Ecclesiastical and Missionary Record*, published in Toronto, displayed a similar analysis of the conflict. The editor of each paper viewed the war's issues largely as they related to the moral issue of slavery, and from a religious perspective which emphasized that civil government must be based on Christian principles. From this perspective they made specific criticisms of the United States' form of government and of the position taken by its churches as contributing to the nation's political and social divisions. Their commentary revealed a significant gulf in the religious and political perspectives between British North American Presbyterians and those of the Northern states. As well, the lessons which the Maritime editor drew from the war influenced his position on the national religious and political consensus in the British North American colonies which was emerging during this period. Significant parallels can also be seen between these specifically Free Church periodicals and the views on the war expressed by the Toronto *Globe*, whose publisher, George Brown, was also a Free Church Presbyterian.

¹ The term "Scots Evangelical" is employed by Richard Vaudry to describe the religiously and politically liberal group within the Church of Scotland who, led by Thomas Chalmers, seceded from the church in Scotland on May 18, 1843, and whose views were to have substantial resonance in British North America. See Richard Vaudry, The Free Church in Victorian Canada, 1844-1861 (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1989), 6-12.

Background—The Free Church in British North America

Before we begin the analysis, it is necessary first to examine briefly the foundation of the Free Church in British North America in 1844. In Scotland in 1843, the Church of Scotland split over the right of the state to judicate in matters which were, to many dissenting Presbyterians, of spiritual and not temporal significance. Presbyterian minister and Edinburgh University theologian Thomas Chalmers, who led the dissenting group which resented state intrusion into such matters as clerical appointments, and which formed the Free Church, represented a large body of Scots Evangelicals who stressed social action and personal conversion. This theological perspective stood in marked contrast to Scots Presbyterian Moderatism, which stressed reason and deference to civil authority.² Close organizational connections between Presbyterians in Scotland and British North America quickly brought the dispute overseas. The establishment of the Free Church in Canada and the Maritimes was aided to a significant extent by the efforts of Free Church Scots to propagate the idea of the new church in the British colonies. Robert Burns, secretary of the Glasgow Colonial Society, migrated to Canada in 1844 to promote the Free Church cause, while the Toronto *Banner*, under the influence of Peter Brown and his son George, emerged as a vocal supporter of the dissenters.

The founding of the Free Church in British North America has been described as the overseas transfer of a predominately ideological dispute.³ This fact is of no small importance, for it sets Free Church Presbyterianism apart from both Methodists and

² Ibid., 6-12.

³ Ibid., 15, 37.

Baptists in Canada and the Maritimes. While the latter two denominations were influenced by the British North American context in which they developed, the transferal of Free Church thought to Canada and the Maritimes was rapid and less affected by previous historical developments in British North America. The predominance of the Free Church perspective within British North American Presbyterianism after 1844 was aided by the rapid and remarkable growth of the denomination. Canada West (which would become the province of Ontario after Canadian Confederation in 1867) saw its number of Free Church ministers grow from 20 in 1844 to 129 in 1861.⁴ At ten percent of the population, Free Church Presbyterianism constituted the largest segment of Presbyterianism in the region.⁵ In Nova Scotia in 1861, when the Free Church united with the much smaller but evangelical and politically liberal United Secession Church, the newly-formed Presbyterian Church of the Lower Provinces numbered 21 percent of the population.⁶

In the period before the American conflict, then, Free Church Presbyterians in Canada and the Maritimes constituted a significant portion of the Protestants in each province. With the strength of its growth and its evangelical perspective, the Free Church constituted a much stronger voice in social and political issues than the non-evangelical Church of Scotland in British North America which, after the 1844 split,

⁴ Grant, *A Profusion of Spires*, 124.

⁵ Vaudry, *Free Church*, xiv.

⁶ P.B. Waite, *The Lives of Dalhousie University: Lord Dalhousie's College* (Kingston & Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 84.

experienced substantial numerical decline in Canada.⁷ As such, the Free Church position inherited from Scotland rather than from the United States was crucial to the Canadian and Maritime Presbyterian perspective on North American social and political issues.

Particularly important to the Free Church assessment of the American Civil War was the denomination's concept of the nation. While Free Church Presbyterians gradually became more "voluntarist" in the Maritime and central Canada after 1844 and moved away from demands that the state support their church,⁸ the denomination's religious heritage demanded an active role not only in religious but in social and political matters as well. Active participation in social and political matters was an important aspect of the Free Church heritage derived from its roots in the Scottish Evangelical tradition.⁹ Crucial to this tradition was the conviction that Christ, and not civil government, demanded ultimate allegiance.¹⁰ As such, while the Free Church had moved away from insisting on state support for churches on a denominational level, it intended to maintain and increase the moral alliance between church and state. The Free Church view held that not only people but the nation, and

⁷ Vaudry, Free Church, 42. Adherents of the Church of Scotland Synod (Canada) represented sixteen percent of the population of Canada West in 1842; by 1851, they represented only seven and a half percent of the population.

⁸ Richard W. Vaudry, "Peter Brown, the *Toronto Banner*, and the Evangelical Mind in Victorian Canada," *Ontario History* (March 1985), 6-7; Grant, A Profusion of Spires, 125.

⁹ Vaudry, Free Church, 63.

¹⁰ W. Stanford Reid, "The Scottish Protestant Tradition," in W. Stanford Reid, ed., The Scottish Tradition in Canada (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), 119-120; Donald C. Smith, Passive Obedience and Prophetic Protest: Social Criticism in the Scottish Church 1830-1945 (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), 6.

all its political, social, and economic aspects, must be subject to scrutiny in terms of their compliance with Christian principles.

Drawing on their religious heritage, Free Church editors in the Maritimes and central Canada looked to events and issues in the United States as one area on which to articulate their vision of state and society. Their interest in the Civil War lay in marked contrast to the disinterest shown by the British North American Church of Scotland periodical, *The Presbyterian*, on this subject.¹¹ For these Free Church editors, the religious, social, and political turmoil in the United States during the antebellum period and into the war confirmed for them the truth of their inherited concept of the role of religion in society and the type of government which should direct the nation. In light of regional and social polarization in the United States during the period of the war, two related issues captured the attention of Presbyterians: the increasingly strident debate over slavery, and the polarization of American Presbyterians within this debate.

The Free Church view of the relationship between church and state and its strong interest in moral issues acted as a strong basis from which to criticize slavery in the United States. Significantly, the establishment of the Free Church in British North America brought a number of Presbyterians with strongly antislavery views to the Maritimes and Canada. Michael Willis, a former theologian in Scotland who became professor of theology at Knox College, Toronto, in 1847 and later its first principal in 1857, was also the first president of the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada from 1851

¹¹ A monthly publication, *The Presbyterian* does not refer to social and political issues in the United States from 1860 to 1865.

until the association's termination in 1863.¹² Robert Burns, a Scots Free Church theologian who toured the Canadian colonies in 1844 to stoke interest in the new denomination and who eventually became a Knox professor and moderator of the Canadian Free Church, was also active in promoting the Free Church's anti-slavery position and in aiding fugitive slaves in Canada.¹³ As Allen Stouffer has noted, the antislavery sentiments of these influential Free Church Presbyterians were formulated in Britain and carried overseas. Burns was active within the British abolitionist movement in the 1820's and 1830's, when public agitation against the condition of slaves in the West Indian colonies culminated in the 1833 Emancipation Act. Willis had joined the British movement after the issue of slavery in the West Indies had been settled, and British abolitionists began to direct their efforts toward slavery in the American South.¹⁴ The Free Church contribution to anti-slavery efforts in Canadian West in particular was numerically substantial, comprising a full twenty-five percent of the anti-slavery leaders between 1849 and 1865 whose denominational affiliation can be ascertained.¹⁵

Importantly, the growing expression of Free Church antislavery sentiment in Canada and the Maritimes coincided with a marked rise in abolitionism which swept through Presbyterianism in the United States. The antebellum period in the United States saw a surge of post-millennial optimism (the idea that Christ's return would be

¹² Allan L. Farris, "Michael Willis," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* 10: 707-8.

¹³ H.J. Bridgman, "Robert Burns," *DCB* 9: 104-8.

¹⁴ Stouffer, *The Light of Nature and the Law of God*, 19, 33.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 181.

facilitated with the “perfectionist” sweep of sin from society) among American evangelicals. Revivalism and moral reform influenced the course of national politics on a scale unprecedented in the history of the United States.¹⁶ Postmillennialism, and its emphasis on a direct relationship between religion, morality, and political action, shook the United States by exacerbating the North-South debate on the institution of Southern slavery. Northern evangelicals in particular, as historians increasingly recognize, played an active role in the debate, comprising a considerable portion of the Republican party by 1860.¹⁷ The differing religious and political views between Northern and Southern Protestants found expression, as has previously been noted, by Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist denominational schisms during the 1830s and 1840s. In 1837, American Presbyterians split, on theological grounds, into two camps which roughly followed a North-South division. Old School Presbyterians, strongest in the South, preferred a strict, traditional view of the Bible which placed much emphasis on the Old Testament, an interpretation which lent itself to a defense of slavery. New School Presbyterians, meanwhile, brought to their interpretation of Scripture an activist approach to social issues which viewed slavery in a negative light. Old School Presbyterians contended that the New School had forsaken church tradition and

¹⁶ Timothy L. Smith, “Righteousness and Hope: Christian Holiness and the Millennial Vision in America, 1800-1900,” *American Quarterly* (Spring 1979), 21-45.

¹⁷ Carwardine, “Evangelicals, Politics, and the Coming of the American Civil War: A Transatlantic Perspective”. See esp. p. 207 for the fusion of evangelicalism and politics in the North during the 1850’s, as well as the extent to which this shifting view drew the opposition of Southern evangelicals. For a discussion of how American historiography has treated the relationship between religion and antebellum Northern politics, see Daniel Walker Howe, “Religion and Politics in the Antebellum North.” 121-145.

abandoned its historic roots for the sake of contemporary radicalism.¹⁸ While a number of slaveholders remained within the New School after 1837, these members broke away in 1857 after the increasingly anti-slavery New School went beyond condemning Southern slavery in principle to make slave-holding a church offence subject to denominational discipline.¹⁹

Free Church Presbyterians in British North America were keenly interested in how Presbyterians in the United States approached the slavery debate, and strove to ensure that they were not associated with pro-slavery American Presbyterians. Disturbed by the continuing pro-slavery views of many American Presbyterians, the Free Church took an uncompromising position on the issue. Synod meetings of the Free Church in 1845, 1851, 1853, and 1857 condemned slavery in general and American Old School Presbyterianism's tolerance of the institution in particular.²⁰ In 1854, a voluntary but almost total boycott of American Old School Presbyterian literature took effect, and in 1856 the Free Church began to examine ministerial recruits from the United States on their views toward slavery, with those refusing to take an absolute stand against the institution rejected as candidates for the Canadian church.²¹ The strength of the Free Church connection with Scotland and its position on the social issue of slavery

¹⁸ George M. Marsden, The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience: A Case Study of Thought and Theology in Nineteenth-Century America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 98-103. Marsden argues that the debate over slavery was symptomatic of a greater theological debate occurring within American Presbyterianism, and not the primary cause of the 1837 schism. See also Snay, Gospel of Disunion, 116-126.

¹⁹ Goen, Broken Churches, Broken Nation, 76-77.

²⁰ John S. Moir, "American Influences on Canadian Protestant Churches Before Confederation," *Church History* (December 1967), 454.

resulted, therefore, in significantly weaker denominational links with the United States, where this branch of Presbyterianism had not taken root.²²

Throughout British North America during the mid-nineteenth century the Free Church constituted a significant voice on social issues such as slavery. The pervasiveness of the Scottish influence would be crucial to the denomination's view of American religious and political events during the Civil War period. What remains to be seen, however, is how these particular religious and social views translated into editorial commentary within the denomination's periodicals.

The Maritimes—Robert Murray and the *Presbyterian Witness*

The *Presbyterian Witness*, published in Halifax and edited by Robert Murray, served as a denominational periodical for the Free Church in Nova Scotia. After 1861, when the Maritime Free Church united with the smaller but equally evangelical United Secession Church, the paper served members of the newly-formed Presbyterian Church of the Lower Provinces. Though Murray would hold the position of editor for fifty-five years, he possessed an education better suiting him to ministerial work than to journalism. A graduate of the Halifax Free Church Academy in 1852, he received a license to preach but never fulfilled the role of ordained minister, accepting instead the position of editor at the *Witness* in 1856. As editor, his writings reflected a firm desire for social and economic progress, not only within Nova Scotia but beyond the

²¹ John S. Moir, *Enduring Witness: A History of the Presbyterian Church in Canada* (Toronto: Bryant Press, 1975), 127; Vaudry, *Free Church*, 79.

²² For an example of Free Church preference for Scots as opposed to American theology in the context of denominational education, see Brian J. Fraser, *Church, College, and Clergy: A History of Theological Education at Knox College, Toronto, 1844-1994* (Kingston & Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), 58.

province's borders as well.²³ Political and social issues consumed much of Murray's attention, and his position on these has received some historical attention. The few historians who have examined either Murray or the *Witness* have, however, largely overlooked how his Free Church religious heritage influenced his views.²⁴

The strength of the Scots Evangelical influence on Murray's Civil War commentary is considerable. Importantly, his conviction that the faithful must involve themselves in the nation's civil as well as spiritual matters allowed him to address what he regarded as the particular susceptibility of the United States to division and disruption. As seen, Free Church Presbyterians held that civil government must make reference to Christian principles. From this perspective Murray criticized American republicanism, seeing it as a form of government which he saw as leading to idolatry as well as being tolerant of slavery. As such, he criticized the North for attempting to reunite the nation within a republican framework which, he contended, had been responsible for the very origins of the war. In "The Nemesis of Nations," published on March 9, 1861, Murray spoke of the United States' excessive pride in its government and institutions, and challenged his readers whether they could "forget the boastful and arrogant tone assumed by the great majority of the American people whenever their country was spoken of?"

²³ Joan M. Payzant, "Robert Murray," *DCB* 13: 755-57.

²⁴ E.M. Stevenson, "Robert Murray Tackles Confederation," *Nova Scotia Historical Review* 1 (1981), 33-38; Kenneth G. Pryke, *Nova Scotia and Confederation 1864-1874* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 229-230. Stevenson's brief article mentions the importance of the *Witness* to Nova Scotian Presbyterians as well as Murray's support of Confederation, but makes no serious attempt at analyzing Murray's thought and influence. Pryke makes no mention of Murray or the *Witness* in the text of his work. He states, however, in his note on sources that "falling into a different category were those papers such as the *Presbyterian Witness* and the *Burning Bush*, which were supported by various Protestant bodies. These papers provide a useful insight into intellectual and social affairs although they rarely commented on political disputes."

Americans had “looked with supreme contempt on the institutions of the old world and regarded them as so many effete tyrannies...They could scarcely speak courteously of the constitutional government of Great Britain.” With the apparent collapse of the Union, Murray called his readers to see

...how a just Providence is now dealing with the United States! The great idol of the Union is dashed to pieces, and the strength and wisdom of man proving unavailing to save it...Thus is God causing the great Republic to learn its sins that it may repent and turn to righteousness.²⁵

Murray, convinced that civil government must be guided by Christian principles, saw the war as proof of God’s direct intervention in the United States’ political affairs.

As a Free Church Presbyterian, Murray tied his view of the United States’ government to his moral opposition to slavery, which he saw as the issue precipitating the war. The apparent contradiction between the institution of Southern slavery and the public rhetoric of American liberty was of special interest to Murray. It was transparently disgraceful that “this ‘freest nation on the globe,’ this boastful republic, was not ashamed to hold within its limits no fewer than *four millions* of our race in the bitter bonds of Slavery!”²⁶ American republicanism, tolerant of slavery, placed pragmatic political decisions before Christian principles. “Man always aims at living and governing without God and ignoring His laws,” he wrote as he compared America’s “lawless democracy” with other human forms of “despotism.” The war, then, was the result of God “strikingly illustrating his own sovereignty and vindicating the authority of his most holy law” with the intent of shattering a style of government

²⁵ Halifax *Presbyterian Witness*, March 9, 1861.

²⁶ *Witness*, March 9, 1861.

which sanctioned the worst forms of human behaviour. "How," Murray asked, could God "spare the nation or the individual who spurns His righteous laws and for mean and mercenary objects tramples on the dearest and most sacred rights of humanity!"²⁷

Murray, critical of republicanism and the role he saw it as playing in accommodating slavery in the United States, spoke out against the idea of the North waging war to maintain the American Union. He singled out the "moderates of all parties" for criticism. Those who "aim[ed] at keeping to the old position of affairs" implicitly supported a return to the social and political order which, prior to the war, had accommodated slavery. Northerners in particular "require[ed] to be scourged and taught still; for the majority of them are tolerant of Slavery and they fight now only for the idol of 'Union'."²⁸

Murray's Free Church perspective on social issues caused him to see slavery as the war's primary issue and underlying cause, much like Presbyterians in the Northern states. His particular view of civil government, however, distinguished him from Northern evangelicals, including Presbyterians, who placed much greater importance on the United States' form of government. Richard Carwardine has noted that during the antebellum period in the United States, and particularly in the North, a large number of evangelicals identified the American Union as an instrument of divine, rather than secular, origin. The American political system was seen as the best guarantor of religious as well as material progress for the United States. This political perspective caused tension between evangelicals' respect for the American

²⁷ *Witness*, April 20, 1861.

Constitution and their moral opposition to slavery. It affected constitutional decisions concerning slavery such as the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, for example, where respect for the decision of the United States Supreme Court superseded, to some extent, evangelical opposition to slavery.²⁹

Importantly, Murray's criticism of republicanism and the American Union allied him more closely to abolitionist radicals than to the larger body of Northern evangelicals. In the North, hard-line abolitionists were seen as threatening to American unity in much the same manner as the firmest defenders of Southern slavery. America's radical abolitionists, however, had drawn deeply from postmillennialism's emphasis on perfectionism. Relying on the "purity" of moral suasion as the only legitimate means by which to end slavery, abolitionist radicals regarded participation in political activities such as voting as coercive.³⁰ Furthermore, many Northern radicals, prior to the war, advocated the dissolution of the Union because of the political protection afforded slavery by the American Constitution.³¹ The goals and means of hard-line abolitionists were opposed by the majority of mainstream Northern evangelicals. Some radical abolitionists, moreover, abandoned Christianity in their anti-slavery efforts, arguing that the Bible had historically been used by Southerners to justify slavery.³²

²⁸ *Witness*, September 28, 1861.

²⁹ Richard Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 18-21, 180-186, 310-311. The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 greatly expanded the legal powers of Southern slaveholders attempting to reclaim slaves who had fled to free states.

³⁰ Curtis D. Johnson, *Redeeming America: Evangelicals and the Road to Civil War* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993), 142-144.

³¹ John R. McKivigan, *The War against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches, 1830-1865* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 68.

Unlike radical abolitionists in the United States, however, Murray's emphasis on the moral issue of slavery and his criticism that the North was fighting to maintain the Union, rather than for emancipation, was derived from his Free Church perspective. While parallels appear between Murray's views and those of Northern radical abolitionists, even greater similarities may be seen between his commentary and the opinions of other small Scottish-influenced Presbyterian denominations, most notably Presbyterian Covenanters, in both the United States and the Maritimes.

John R. McKivigan has noted that Covenanters in the North were looked upon with favour by radical abolitionists for their refusal to participate in a political system which both abolitionists and Covenanters viewed as flawed. In the United States, Covenanters looked directly to Southern slavery as proof that the American constitution, without reference to God as the supreme head of civil government, was an immoral basis of government.³³ As such, they regarded the outbreak of war as inevitable and necessary to the abolition of slavery.³⁴

³² Carwardine, Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America, 135,140,289. The tension evident in the antebellum period between moderate evangelicals and radical abolitionist perfectionists is also described in Curtis D. Johnson, Redeeming America, 142-144. The tension between mainstream evangelicals who opposed slavery within the nation's political and social framework, and radical abolitionists who advocated a substantial rethinking of the United States' institutions as a means of ending Southern slavery, came to the fore in 1840. That year, the American Anti-Slavery Society underwent a significant division; followers of radical abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison took control of the Society, while moderate anti-slavery evangelicals under the leadership of Lewis Tappan left to form the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society

³³ Mark Y. Hanley, Beyond a Christian Commonwealth: The Protestant Quarrel with the American Republic, 1830-1860 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 173 n.55.

³⁴ McKivigan, The War against Proslavery Religion, 163, 189. For a further view of the Covenanter approach to the American Constitution, as well as the denomination's view of abolitionism as a key issue during the war, see J.C. McFeeters, The Covenanters in America (Philadelphia: Spangler & Davis, 1892), 121-129.

Similar views were held by Covenanters in the Maritimes. There, a group of Reformed Presbyterians with organizational connections to Covenanters in the United States viewed the war largely as a conflict over the moral issue of slavery. Though constituting a small minority of Maritime Presbyterians, Covenanters in the region argued that slavery could not be sustained by Scripture; as one observer noted, “a faithful application of Bible doctrine would eventually extinguish human bondage.”³⁵ As Presbyterians who held that civil government must be subordinate to Christian principles, both the Free Church and the Covenanter positions on slavery as the primary issue of the war speak of the extent to which moral questions interested those Presbyterians whose theology drew from the Scottish tradition.

In summary, Robert Murray’s Free Church emphasis on morality, similar to the postmillennialism of Northern evangelicals, moved him to interpret the war as a struggle against the sin of slavery in the South. Agreement on these views, however, ended on the issues of the American Union and republicanism. Murray, whose Free Church heritage held that civil government must adhere to Christian principles and morals, argued that historically the American Constitution had worked as a tool of political compromise, and as an idol which drew attention away from urgent social issues. Most Northern Presbyterians, meanwhile, regarded the Constitution and republicanism in the exact opposite light, as the means of enhancing and assuring their millennialist aspirations. Robert Murray’s Free Church perspective, free of any attachment to the American Constitution and to republicanism, caused him to see the

war, its causes, and issues in a different light from most Northern evangelicals. His interpretations resemble those of the North's radical abolitionists and, in particular, the views of Scottish-influenced Presbyterians in the United States and the Maritimes.

II

The Civil War had the potential to influence both British North America and Presbyterians there to seek wider political and denominational union. Murray contrasted the divisions attendant to the American war, both within the nation's churches and, obviously, within the nation itself, with the move toward religious and political union in British North America during the same period. The Free Church was itself a product of schism in Scotland in 1843; however, from the perspective of the seceders, the separation had been necessary since, in their view, the Church of Scotland had abandoned the necessary relationship between the state and Christian principles.³⁶ In the North American context, moreover, the denomination had shown considerable interest in promoting union between evangelical Presbyterian bodies. As previously seen, the Free Church in the Maritimes united with the evangelical United Secession Church in 1861, while in the same year the parallel Presbyterian

³⁵ Eldon Hay, The Chignecto Covenants: A Regional History of Reformed Presbyterianism in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, 1827-1905 (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 144 n.18.

³⁶ See, for example, Free Church opposition to the 1843 Temporalities Bill. The bill, meant as a management plan for congregational property, was opposed by Free Church Presbyterians who feared that it gave civil courts too much control over congregational independence. Significantly, a number of prominent Free Church Presbyterians saw the bill as an attempt by the Church of Scotland to retain legal control over the newly seceded Free Church congregations. Richard Vaudry has argued that the debate over the Temporalities Bill heightened the importance of the Disruption of 1843 to Presbyterians in Canada, as it gave the Disruption a distinctly "Canadian relevance." See Vaudry, Free Church, 22-26; Moir, Enduring Witness, 103-109.

organizations in Canada--the Free Church and the United Secession Church--completed a similar union.³⁷

The trend toward union was a matter of significant contemporary interest to Murray as he reflected on the political and religious situation in the United States.

The connection between Presbyterian union in Canada and the Maritimes and the move toward political union of the provinces has been noted by historians such as John Moir, who has argued that the Presbyterian unions of the 1860s acted as a precedent to the political union of the British North American provinces.³⁸ The extent to which Presbyterian and provincial unions were affected by the Free Church Presbyterian heritage may be better understood by examining Robert Murray's views of the American Civil War.

For Murray, the experiences of national and church schism in the United States reinforced his own views of political and religious union. Most important for Murray were the severe divisions which took place within the American Presbyterian organizations in 1857, when 15,000 Southern members of the American Old School split from the main body, and in 1861 when the commencement of war saw the Old School split completely along North-South lines.

Against this backdrop of American political and religious division, Murray formulated a Free Church position on schism and union which had implications for both church and political organization in the British North American provinces. In a May 11, 1861, editorial entitled "Schism," Murray responded to the writings of the

³⁷ Moir, Enduring Witness, 129-131.

influential American Old School Presbyterian Dr. Charles Hodge, theologian at Princeton Seminary and editor of the *Princeton Review*. Specifically, Murray's editorial was a commentary on Hodge's assertion that denominational schism, under certain conditions, was justified. Hodge argued that a split within a denomination constituted schism only if personal animosity was the motivating influence. If, however, a split was the response to a direct infringement on a group's conscience or liberties, the departing party was absolved of responsibility. Hodge's argument that schism could be justified was related directly to the split between Northern and Southern Old School Presbyterians in the United States, and would lead him to oppose reconciliation between the two branches after the conclusion of the Civil War.³⁹

Murray welcomed Hodge's clear definition of schism as it related to the church, and extended his discussion of the subject to encompass the nation as well. "Schism," he flatly stated, "is undoubtably a sin, a grievous sin in the sight of God and right-thinking men." He did, however, agree with Hodge's assertion that, within the context of the war, the sectional division of Presbyterians in the United States was a matter of conscience for Northerners unable to remain within a denomination which contained Southern slaveholders and rebels. From this perspective he agreed with Hodge that the South's Presbyterians had played a significant role in the nation's division. Importantly, however, Murray made no distinction between schism within the church and within the nation. Both scenarios, he argued, could be traced to the prevalent emphasis on political liberties in the United States. The concept of schism had a "wider

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 135.

³⁹ Mark A. Noll, Charles Hodge: The Way of Life (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 30.

application,” and could be used to show that “men are prone to err in matters ecclesiastical as well as civil.” Political schism in the United States was contrary to the ordination of government on which Christian progress rested. From this position, he criticized the South’s political ambitions as disruptive and contrary to the nation’s welfare. “While you live in a country you must abide by its laws and respect the ‘powers that be,’” he argued. “If things are not just in accordance with your fancy you do not raise a rebellion...If you do not like the Governor, you do not commence a civil war.” Implicit in his criticism of the South’s divisive ambitions was the idea that the United States’ emphasis on political liberties had contributed directly to the splits within the nation’s churches as well as its political framework. “It is well to have full liberty of conscience,” stated Murray,

...but there is danger of liberty running into license, and of men demonstrating their “independence” at the expense of injuring the body of Christ. You may prove your dignity and importance very satisfactorily without endangering the peace of the Church--without scattering firebrands and death and sowing dragon’s teeth--without wounding sensitive hearts and burdening hearts already well nigh broken--without hindering the progress of the Gospel and laying a stumbling block in the way of those who know not the Saviour.⁴⁰

Republicanism, then, encouraged a sense of liberty contradictory to both national and religious welfare. This sense of liberty had directly contributed to the South’s demands for political independence.

Murray’s annual end-of-year editorial for 1861 allowed him another summary of American events. Again, he linked the United States’ apparent political success with the moral price paid to maintain the Union. “The bubble that astonished the nations for half a century has burst,” he wrote. “Evils of long growth and gigantic magnitude are

working their own punishment and cure; and in the disasters that have befallen a great and enlightened people we see clearly that God will not let national sin go unpunished.” The arrogant nationalism which Murray identified with the United States also merited mention. “The grand lesson of the year, read before the whole world,” he argued, “is HUMILITY!” Humility was certainly not a quality which Murray felt that the United States possessed. “Never,” he wrote, “was there a prouder nation than the United States; the Union was their idol; things the most precious were relentlessly sacrificed at its throne.”

In the Civil War could be found lessons for the British North American provinces as well as the United States. Murray, in a statement reflective of his growing concern that the war’s implications might extend north of the border, made a direct contrast of the fortunes of religion in America and British North America. “In the religious world,” noted Murray,

...we have had to note from time to time marked interest in the cause of truth. The Presbyterian Churches of Canada consummated a happy union. Many churches in the United States have been shattered to pieces by the sad civil convulsions which have shaken the nation.⁴¹

In the United States, religious decline followed the nation’s disintegration, and provided an explicit point of comparison for the development of Murray’s own denomination in Canada and the Maritimes.

Murray’s general position on schism and union was confirmed by the trials of Presbyterianism in the United States resulting from the outbreak of war. Using the

⁴⁰ *Witness*, May 11, 1861.

⁴¹ *Witness*, December 28, 1861.

North-South split of the Old School Presbyterian Church in 1861 as an example of the dangers of schism, he contended that the denomination's organizational framework had been significantly weakened in a manner parallel to that of the nation's civil structure. "We have at this moment before us," declared Murray,

...a melancholy illustration of the effects of war on religious communities, in alienating the affections and perverting the judgements of most pious and estimable brethren. The Old School Presbyterian Church, with almost every other large denomination, has been shattered more or less disastrously in proportion to the support received from the South.⁴²

To Murray, for whom the church was a vital component of society, the effects of the war on the American religious community were of as much concern as the broader political divisions which the conflict had wrought on the American nation.

Robert Murray saw religious and national schism as a sin derived largely from what he considered the licentiousness of republicanism. The war and its effects on religion in the United States exemplified the benefits of religious union for Presbyterians in British North America. As will be seen, he would also apply this lesson, as he saw it, to political union in the British North American provinces.

III

Murray's warnings about the dangers of schism caused by the Civil War took on heightened meaning not only within the context of religious, but also of political change in British North America. In 1864 and 1865, at a time of serious discussion about the union of the Canadian and Maritime provinces, Murray adapted the interpretations he derived from the conflict in order to comment on domestic political

⁴² *Witness*, September 19, 1863.

issues. Foremost in Murray's mind was the promotion of British North American political union in the face of Maritime opposition to the scheme.

Historical study of the Maritime's entrance into Canadian Confederation centers largely on political discussion of the benefits and detriments of union with Canada.⁴³ In particular, Maritimers who favoured union are described as economic liberals of an emergent native-born middle-class,⁴⁴ or as political conservatives who supported union provided that its political framework limited public participation and, therefore, counteracted what they saw as the excessive democracy which marked the political culture of the United States.⁴⁵ Political conservatives in Nova Scotia, and especially Halifax⁴⁶ looked directly to the American Civil War as confirmation that limits on public political participation were necessary.

Robert Murray's interpretations of the Civil War provides another angle from which to view the ideological forces which shaped the emergence of the Canadian nation. As a member of the Nova Scotia elite, his editorial position agreed with other conservative writers in the province who maintained that the American constitution was responsible for the political collapse of the United States.⁴⁷ However, Murray also wrote from an evangelical perspective which stressed the religious benefits of

⁴³ Philip A. Buckner, "The Maritimes and Confederation: A Reassessment," in Atlantic Canada Before Confederation (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1990), 370-395.

⁴⁴ D.A. Muise, "The 1860's: Forging the Bonds of Union," in E.R. Forbes and D.A. Muise, eds., The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 13.

⁴⁵ Philip A. Buckner, "The 1860's: An End and a Beginning," in Philip A. Buckner and John G. Reid, eds., The Atlantic Region to Confederation (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 377.

⁴⁶ R.H. McDonald, "Nova Scotia Newspapers View the United States, 1827-1840," *The Nova Scotia Historical Quarterly* 6 (1976), 12.

provincial union; political form was important not for its own sake but for the effect which it would have on the religious development of the new nation. His commentary reveals the extent to which his Free Church Presbyterian views of government led to a position which was both cautious and optimistic.

As union between the British North American provinces evolved from an idea to a reality, with conferences held in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island and Quebec City in 1864 to discuss the details of confederation, Murray wrote of the national and religious potential for the proposed union. Importantly, with these discussions being held while the American conflict raged, he contrasted the new nation's religious and political potential with the discord evident in the divided United States.

In September 1864, shortly after the Charlottetown Conference, Murray wrote of the religious potential of the uniting provinces. Declaring that "the Kingdom of Christ is not of this world, and is not necessarily affected by geographical, political, and ethnical considerations," but that "practically, these considerations have a very important influence on its prosperity," he called his readers to look beyond their own interests and consider the opportunity for the spread of religion in a united British North America. His argument that "Christianity [was] intended to be universal, not merely provincial or sectional,"⁴⁸ contrasted denominational unification in British North America with the sectional separation of American churches before the civil war.

⁴⁷ Waite, *Life and Times of Confederation*, 13, 33.

⁴⁸ *Witness*, September 17, 1864.

As the movement for British North American union intensified and the pragmatic details of union were fleshed out, Murray stepped up his support of the proposed scheme. The idea of union was what mattered to Murray; details were, in themselves, bound to be imperfect. "Human wisdom has never yet devised a plan of government that is above criticism, or that is free from serious theoretical faults," he wrote early in 1865. "Man is himself imperfect, and all his works and his plans bear witness to the fact." He then contrasted the American conflict and that nation's strict allegiance to its constitution with the meeting of provincial representatives at Quebec the previous autumn. The disagreements evident at the Quebec Conference were not cause for undue concern, he argued. Indeed, the Civil War proved that the allegiance which the United States attached to its own political framework was deceptive, and had only hidden what he saw as the faults inherent to the American constitution. It was his opinion that

Your wild constitutions, your model states, born of the wild fever of red-republicanism and socialism, always come speedily to grief...The Fourth of July orators of the neighbouring Republic have come to confess that even their wonderful Constitution is not faultless. This being the case it would be astonishing indeed if the QUEBEC CONVENTION had succeeded where all the world had failed.⁴⁹

The perceived failure of American republicanism strengthened Murrays' view that the proposed details for civil government in British North America were of less importance than the actual idea of confederation.

Murray's support of British North American union was bolstered by an evangelical optimism rooted in his Free Church Presbyterian perspective of the intimate bond

⁴⁹ *Witness*, January 7, 1865.

between a nation's spiritual and political arrangements. Within this framework, he was able to contrast the Canadian trend toward union with the American war. The causal connection Murray formed between the American constitution and the nation's civil war, and his subsequent endorsement of the process of confederation, should, therefore, be seen ultimately in the light of his evangelical view of the religious potential of a politically united British North America.

IV

The perceived connection between the religious and the political did not mean, however, that Murray's interpretations were successful in forming a Free Church Presbyterian consensus on the implications of the American Civil War. Not all Free Church Presbyterians were willing to see the American conflict as a reason to bring the British North American provinces into union. James L. Sturgis has argued that Nova Scotian opposition to Confederation was derived from a fear of the political structure which would shape the new nation, a critique which drew from the example of the contemporary dissolution of the United States federal system. It was a fear, in his view, compounded by the cultural "contentment" with the *status quo* in the province.⁵⁰

Nova Scotia Presbyterian opposition to British North American union, and its relation to the American Civil War, revealed itself in a remarkable debate carried out in the *Presbyterian Witness* through the late winter and spring of 1865. This debate occurred at a point of considerable opposition to the scheme of confederation in the Maritime provinces. Public reaction to the 1864 Quebec conference, at which the

⁵⁰ James L. Sturgis, "The Opposition to Confederation in Nova Scotia, 1864-1868," in Ged Martin, ed., *The Causes of Canadian Confederation* (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1990), 115, 119.

specifics of colonial union were hammered out, forced Premier Leonard Tilley of New Brunswick to put the plan to the electorate, and led the Maritimes into an agitated discussion of the benefits of union.⁵¹ Between January 28 and March 25, the *Witness* carried a series of six letters from Alexander James, a Nova Scotia Presbyterian opposing the prospect of provincial union. The debate reveals not only that Free Church Presbyterians were not of a single mind on the prospect of Canadian political union, but that the American war could also, conversely to Murray's position, be held as an example of the dangers inherent in attempting to bring about union. Though differing politically, both positions, nevertheless, reflected a shared religious heritage which emphasized the centrality of religion to both society and politics.

"Has the curse of war come upon us?," asked Alexander James in his first letter to the *Witness*. "Have intestine broils disturbed us?" The rhetorical question, an apparent reference to the bitter and prolonged war between the states, was meant to stir fellow Nova Scotia Presbyterians against the growing movement for union between the British North American provinces. Much of James' opinion on the subject of union places him squarely within Sturgis' model of the conservative Nova Scotian, not interested in contemplating participation within an expanded social or political framework. Importantly, however, it was James' Presbyterian view on the connection between civil and religious matters which served as his rationale to maintain the political status quo. "The first reason why I consider that we ought to be satisfied as a people and contented to remain as God has placed us," wrote James, "is that He has not withheld from us any blessing in our present condition that we have asked from

him.” Commenting on the proposed confederation, he drew on a view that civil government must reflect Christian principles, and argued that

...this Union, as now proposed, would be offensive in the sight of GOD, in that it has been entered upon and so far promoted without any public prayer for His blessing and guidance, and even without any recognition whatever of His being or sovereignty...the name, or even the existence of the LORD GOD of Hosts is not mentioned or alluded to in the Constitution prepared at Quebec from beginning to end, nor in any of the resolutions, correspondence, or other public acts which led to or have succeeded it.⁵²

James’ fear, on religious grounds, of the form which union might take formed the backbone of his opposition to Canadian Confederation. Specifically, he feared that the political framework in which the union might be formulated would deny the primacy of Christianity in the new nation. Seeing a lack of reference to religion in the provincial negotiations, he argued that such an omission was “indicative of the worldly and ambitious spirit in which the matter has been originated and conducted.” His fear of union lay in the possibility that the new nation’s polity would not be subordinate to, or even recognize, Christianity. Significantly, he held up the United States as exemplifying the type of political arrangement which Nova Scotia must avoid. “I do not desire,” stated James,

...that this Christian country should enter into any political arrangement which, like the godless Constitution of the United States, does not recognize the sacred religion which we profess, or the Supreme Arbiter in whose hands lies all our future happiness or misery as a people.⁵³

Without an explicit reference to Christianity within the proposed nation’s political

⁵¹ Creighton, Road to Confederation, 52.

⁵² *Witness*, January 28, 1865.

⁵³ *Witness*, February 4, 1865. James’ letters of February 11, 1865 and February 18, 1865 contain similar criticisms.

framework, James was unwilling to venture into a broader political arrangement with the other British North American provinces.

The Free Church view that the nation must be built on Christian principles could, therefore, also lead Presbyterians to oppose confederation on the grounds that the proposals for provincial union contained no reference to religion. From this perspective, Maritime Presbyterians such as Alexander James could look to the American constitution and see the form of government which might, if allowed, frame the new nation. This perspective precluded a consensus on the views of Robert Murray, who also looked to the Civil War and the American constitution as examples upon which British North Americans should draw when forming the framework of a new national government.

Central Canada—William Reid and the *Record*

The Free Church in central Canada was officially served by *The Ecclesiastical and Missionary Record* which, after the denomination's consolidation with the United Presbyterian Church in Canada in 1861 to form the Canada Presbyterian Church, continued as *The Home and Foreign Record*. The monthly periodical, though concerned primarily with domestic church issues, commented occasionally on the American conflict. Thematically, the issues of slavery and political and religious schism and union dominate the paper's commentary, as these issues did under Robert Murray's editorship at the *Witness*. These similarities may be traced to the paper's editor, the Reverend William Reid, a native of Scotland who, like Murray, was influenced substantially by a Free Church perspective.⁵⁴

Like Murray, Reid's antislavery views brought him to interpret the war in moral terms and to view the war's disruptive influence on the United States as the result of the issue of slavery. He noted, for example, that "commercial and financial distress is seriously affecting the country, especially the great centres of business." This disruption, which Reid argued could be traced directly to the blight of slavery, had yet to be recognized by the North's politicians. "It is to be regretted," wrote Reid,

...that the Federal Government does not openly recognise slavery as being the cause of the present struggle. There is no doubt that it is in reality the great origin of the present evils, and we trust that in the providence of God, the result of the conflict may be the destruction of this, the sum and source of all evils.⁵⁵

Moral issues, particularly slavery, were to Reid the lens through which he interpreted the war and its effects on American society.

Reid's commentary on the Civil War also indicates a perspective which viewed God as the true head of civil government. His editorial of January 1862 included a discussion of the possibility of Anglo-American war which, in the wake of the North's seizure of two Confederate agents from the British ship *Trent* in international waters the previous month, seemed a distinct possibility to many British North Americans. The "rumours and alarms of war" were "most anxiously watched" by those in central

⁵⁴ Reid was instrumental in the formation of a theological department under Presbyterian leadership at Queen's University, Kingston, Canada West in 1841. With the Scottish Disruption, Reid joined the Free Church and worked as Secretary and Treasurer of Knox College in Toronto. Throughout his career, he was prominent in the various unions between Presbyterian bodies in central Canada. Reid, as clerk of the Free Church, read the Roll of the Synod upon the union of Free and United Presbyterians on the sixth of June, 1861; later, in 1875, as a Clerk of the Canada Presbyterian Church, he would read the Articles of Union at the formation of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. See John Thomas McNeill, The Presbyterian Church in Canada 1875-1925 (Toronto: General Board, Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1925), 45; R.G. MacBeth, The Burning Bush and Canada (Toronto: The Westminster Press, 1926), 76; William Gregg, Short History of the Presbyterian Church in the Dominion of Canada (Toronto: C. Blackett Robinson, 1893), 157, 194.

⁵⁵ *Ecclesiastical and Missionary Record*, September 1861.

Canada, Reid wrote, and noted that “it becometh us earnestly to pray that God may still avert dreaded war.” He was, however, optimistic that the present tensions between Britain and the United States served a larger purpose. “No doubt,” he argued,

...earnest prayers will be offered up by good men in both countries that peace may still be continued. May God lend us a favourable ear in these supplications! Meanwhile let us rejoice in the assurance that God reigneth, that He is governor among the nations, and that He can make even these storms and tumults subservient to the advancement of His own great and blessed purposes.⁵⁶

Reid’s Free Church religious heritage caused him to see God, as head of the world and its nations, directing the war toward what Reid saw as a greater moral purpose.

Closely related to Reid’s view that God commanded contemporary events was his conviction that political and religious schism was contrary to social and religious progress. Shortly before the actual secession of the Southern states from the Union, Reid attacked the rationale by which the Southern states claimed that their interests were best served by severing themselves from the Northern states. He, like Robert Murray, agreed with Charles Hodge, the influential Old School Presbyterian who edited the *Princeton Review*, that the Confederacy’s argument for secession from the United States was self-deluding and harmful. Reid, like Hodge, felt that “the bright vision of prosperity, which the Slaveholding States are contemplating as the likely or certain result of disunion, is a work of the imagination.” Morally, the secession of the Southern states would be regressive, for “as long as slavery exists in the United States it will be the source and occasion of perpetual and unending troubles.”⁵⁷

⁵⁶ *Home and Foreign Record*, January 1862.

⁵⁷ *Ecclesiastical and Missionary Record*, February 1860.

Reid also looked to the division of the United States to confirm his opposition to what he saw as harmful denominational divisions in central Canada. The Civil War was an example of the dangers of sectarian identity, and worked against the development of national interests. From this perspective he commented on the state of religion in central Canada. In particular, Reid resented that Anglicans in Canada, in choosing to refer to themselves as the United Church of England and Ireland in Canada, had assumed a national identity which excluded other denominations. "Will not the least inspection shew any man," argued Reid,

...that in so far as the church is a church of Christ it is for *all nations*, and that so far as it is Anglican, it is fit only for the few islands that are Anglican? To prosper in the United States it must be American, and now must be either Federal or Confederate; and to prosper here it must be Canadian, and Anglican only so far as Canada is English.⁵⁸

Thus, to Reid, the Civil War was an example for Canadians of the dangers inherent in identifying the Christian church with a particular political or ethnic identity.

William Reid, similar to Robert Murray, expressed his views of the American Civil War from a Free Church Presbyterian perspective. This viewpoint moved him to interpret the war as a conflict which derived from the moral issue of slavery, to see God's influence in the war, and to oppose religious and political sectarianism both in the United States and central Canada.

George Brown and the Toronto *Globe*

Further evidence of the Free Church perspective on the American Civil War may be found in the editorial pages of the Toronto *Globe*, a paper which, though not specifically religious in focus, was strongly influenced by evangelical Scots

Presbyterianism. On the matter of the Civil War and its implications for British North America, the *Globe* continued to reflect the Free Church sentiment which explicitly guided its predecessor, the Toronto *Banner*. Founded by Peter Brown and his son George, Scottish émigrés who settled briefly in New York City and established the *British Chronicle* before moving to Toronto in 1843, the *Banner* endorsed a number of evangelical Presbyterian causes, the most notable being that of the Free Church in central Canada. The strength with which the paper and its proprietors, Peter Brown and his son George, transmitted Scots Evangelicalism from Scotland into the central Canadian context has been established by historian Richard Vaudry who, in examining the Browns' ardent support of the Free Church cause, has noted that, like other Presbyterians in British North America, they saw themselves as "part of a transatlantic Presbyterian community."⁵⁹

Thus the *Banner* was evangelical in outlook in its promotion of social causes such as anti-slavery while adhering to the view that Christian principles must shape a nation's government.⁶⁰ Importantly, this perspective influenced the Brown's second journalistic venture, the Toronto *Globe*, established in 1844. The *Globe* would, with time, become the most influential newspaper in central Canada. Under the editorial leadership of George Brown and, after 1850, his brother Gordon as well, the *Globe* espoused many of the causes of the Reform Party. Most notably, the *Globe* promoted the political and cultural interests of the largely English and Protestant Canada West

⁵⁸ *Home and Foreign Record*, January 1862.

⁵⁹ Vaudry, "Peter Brown, the Toronto *Banner*, and the Evangelical Mind in Victorian Canada," 5.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 8, 10.

which, since 1841, had become tied politically to French Catholic Canada East. As a spokesman for these interests, the *Globe* discussed a number of issues which were of interest to central Canadian evangelicals. Though the Browns, as Free Church Presbyterians, felt that religion was essential to society and civil government, they steadfastly opposed state preference in supporting any particular denomination. As such, the *Globe* persistently opposed preferential provincial funding for the Anglican church in the form of clergy reserve lands, the extension of government-funded denominational schools, and, after 1850, the establishment of a Catholic church organization in England.⁶¹

The importance of the *Globe* as a political journal allowed it to transmit a Free Church perspective to a broader audience than denominational organs, and to exercise a social and political influence which transcended the bounds of Free Church Presbyterianism in central Canada. As such, the extent to which the *Globe*'s positions on social and political issues were influenced by evangelical Presbyterianism merits its examination for its views on the Civil War, in order that some comparisons with the *Witness* and the *Record* may be put forward.

Few studies have made a complete link between the *Globe*'s implicit Presbyterian perspective and its interpretation of the issues involved in the American conflict. S.F. Wise has noted that George Brown criticized the United States' political framework

⁶¹ J.M.S. Careless, Brown of the Globe: Voice of Upper Canada 1818-1859 (Toronto: Dundurn, 1989), 125-128. Brown's public reaction to "papal aggression" in England defined him as the pre-eminent defender of Protestant rights in Canada, and provoked considerable opposition from Catholics in the province. This issue further strengthened his conviction that sectarian controversy in Canada was best avoided through the strict application of voluntarist principles in matters concerning church and state.

for the protection he perceived that it afforded Southern slavery. In particular, Brown linked slavery and the Civil War to a political system which was excessively democratic, rooted in partisanship and which sacrificed political authority for regional self-interest.⁶² Wise, however, is more interested in noting the *Globe's* view of American political issues in order to examine liberal and conservative Canadian views of the United States during the middle of the nineteenth century. George Brown's biographer, J.M.S. Careless, though he notes both George and Peter Browns' criticisms of American republicanism, emphasizes the *Globe's* support of the North during the war. In particular, Careless' delineation of Brown's liberalism leads him to argue that Brown's democratic leanings and antislavery views moved him to see the North as the United States' only option for preserving political freedoms.⁶³ More recently, Allen P. Stouffer's examination of central Canadian antislavery movements looks to the *Globe* as a powerful supporter of the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada, formed in response to the passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law in the United States. This legislation had broadened the power of Southern slaveholders to pursue fugitive slaves in non-slaveholding states, and dramatically increased the number of escaped slaves seeking refuge in British North America. Stouffer notes the importance of evangelical Free Church Presbyterianism in moving the Browns toward an actively antislavery position, and, while he touches on the *Banner's* criticisms of the American

⁶² Wise, "The Annexation Movement and Its Effect on Canadian Opinion," 56-58, 86-87.

⁶³ J.M.S. Careless, *Brown of the Globe: Voice of Upper Canada 1818-1859*, 17, 96, 102-103; Careless, *Brown of the Globe: Statesman of Confederation 1860-1880* (Toronto: Dundurn, 1989), 52-54.

political system for its accommodation of slavery in the 1840s, he does not apply their views to the American political context during the Civil War period.⁶⁴

A more complete examination of the relationship between the *Globe's* Free Church perspective and the American Civil War allows one to draw parallels between the *Globe* and the two other Presbyterian organs and to deepen ones' understanding of the political ideology of a paper which significantly affected public debate during this period. Furthermore, the similarities which emerge between the *Globe*, the *Witness*, and the *Record* reveal the strength of the regional consensus between Maritime and central Canadian Free Church Presbyterians on moral and political issues.

During the war the *Globe* made explicit reference to the connection between slavery and the American political system. Employing language which resembled the *Witness*, the *Globe* argued that "the Great Republic [was] in imminent peril; the hour of its trial has come at last." A "bloody torrent" would characterize what the *Globe* regarded essentially as a struggle between freedom and slavery. Slavery had "divided parties, distracted churches, disturbed the operations of trade, [and] interrupted the harmony of states and the peace of families." However, while slavery, as a moral issue, was a cause of the division of the United States, the *Globe* argued that the American Constitution itself had facilitated the division of the nation. Southern secessionists who regarded the Union as a loose collection of sovereign states, and who argued that the formation of the Southern Confederacy was a legitimate exercise of states' rights, were "encouraged in this belief by the tradition of the constitution," a political device containing "these fatal words, 'sovereign' and independent', first used by the fathers of

the republic to strengthen the feeling of liberty and nationality.” They were words which had “become, by a strange perversion, the very watchwords of treason and disunion...at once the greatest embarrassment to the friends of the Union, and the strongest support to its enemies.”⁶⁵

Importantly, the *Globe*'s assessment of the war as a moral conflict exacerbated by fundamental flaws within the political framework of the United States corresponded with the interpretation put forth by the *Witness*. Thus, Robert Murray's view that the American Constitution fostered self-interest, sustained slavery, and promoted liberty at the expense of political and social union was mirrored by the *Globe*'s assertion that “the notion that this ‘sovereignty’ might at any time be reasserted and resumed, that the federal compact could be broken at the option of any of the parties to it, lies at the bottom of the present difficulty.”⁶⁶ Furthermore, like the *Witness*, the *Globe*'s interpretation of the war as a moral struggle against slavery moved it to argue that the experience of war was a penalty which the United States deserved to pay. “It must be recollected,” wrote the *Globe* on January 4, 1864,

...that there are some things worse than war. Slavery--which subjects whole races to misery, degradation, and ignorance--is a greater evil than a brief contest. In our horror of bloodshed we must not withdraw from the oppressed the *ultima ratio* of the sword.⁶⁷

Brown's moral opposition to slavery, and his conviction that civil government must reflect Christian values, drew him to point out the obvious contradictions within a

⁶⁴ Stouffer, *Light of Nature and the Law of God*, 74-76, 108-109.

⁶⁵ Toronto *Globe*, January 8, 1861.

⁶⁶ *Globe*, January 8, 1861.

nation which proclaimed its religious values and its political freedoms while allowing the passage of laws strengthening the institution of slavery.⁶⁸

Like the *Witness*, the *Globe* saw the Civil War as a lesson for British North America as well as the United States. On Thanksgiving of 1863, the *Globe* offered its readers a lengthy editorial on the merits of being Canadian, the themes of which were remarkably similar to those offered by Murray in the *Witness*. Canadians, who were generally “apt to under-rate the blessings of a state of peace and prosperity,” should not “forget to whom gratitude is due.” They were free of a conflict which divided America “with the fury of utmost hate.” Like the *Witness*, the *Globe* looked to the United States’ national pride as self-deluding arrogance. “Four years ago,” wrote the *Globe*,

...the United States counted themselves the happiest of nations. The Republic had grown with a rapidity never before equalled or approached in the history of mankind. Powerful and united prosperous and contented, it bade defiance to its enemies, and scouted all thoughts of future danger or reverse. Its harvests were plentiful, its riches great, its population increasing, it proudly proclaimed that all the good men hoped for it possessed.

Prosperity had not, however, assured that the United States was immune to internal strife. Instead, a faulted political structure, the tolerance of slavery, and an excessive

⁶⁷ *Globe*, January 4, 1864.

⁶⁸ On the linkage of slavery as a moral issue to American republicanism, the *Globe*’s commentary was consistent with the opinions expressed by Brown prior to the war. In a lengthy speech to the Upper Canada Anti-Slavery Association on March 24, 1852, Brown reacted to the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in the United States by making explicit references to the moral implications of a political system which emphasized the freedom it offered while maintaining slavery in the Southern states. “Who,” spoke Brown at the meeting, “can talk gravely of liberty and equality in the States while slavery exists? Every intelligent American who professes to be a Christian, and upholds slavery, is committed to a glaring infidelity...How crushingly the upholders of tyranny in other lands must turn on the friends of liberty! “Behold your free institutions,” they must say. “Look at the American republic, proclaiming all men to be born free and equal, and keeping nearly four millions of slaves in the most cruel bondage!” See Alexander Mackenzie, The Life and Speeches of Hon. George Brown (Toronto: The Globe Printing Co., 1882), 260.

national pride had led to the United States' division "into hostile sections, both determined on fighting to the death." The effects of the nation's political and social schism were evident to the *Globe*. "Hundreds of thousands of men have fallen victim to the cannon and the sword," it noted, "while vast tracts of country, once occupied by an industrious population, now lie utterly waste." The American Civil War was a moral and political lesson upon which the *Globe*'s central Canadian readers should reflect. "It is only by thinking upon such sad facts as these," argued the paper,

...that we at all appreciate the happiness of our own condition. In future years it may be that similar trials await us. Then to this present year of grace we shall look back to as a golden period; as one almost too happy for a second realization. Then we shall thoroughly understand what cause of thankfulness we now have.⁶⁹

Again, the war served as a lesson which might remind the *Globe*'s readers of the dangers of national pride and complacency.

With the surrender of the Confederacy in April 1865, the *Globe* noted both the end of slavery and the North's reaction to the end of the war. As with earlier commentary, a critique of republicanism accompanied the philosophical discussion of the war's greater purpose. Importantly, Americans should not "regard the maintenance of the union as the grand object of the war," but instead temper their national celebration with the realization that the abolition of slavery had fulfilled the conflict's moral purpose. In the future the nation would "be called upon to rejoice that Providence had over-ruled a wicked war, begun in the interest of the slaveholder, to make it end in the emancipation of the slave."⁷⁰ Hopefully, the experience of war would instill in

⁶⁹ *Globe*, November 11, 1863.

⁷⁰ *Globe*, April 6, 1865.

Americans a greater sense of humility and introspection. The *Globe* found satisfaction in the evidence that at “the height of their self-glorification over the result,” America’s public speakers expressed “genuine thankfulness to God for his goodness in freeing them from dire calamity.” This realization led the *Globe* to hope that “the trials through which they have passed have sobered and rendered more dignified the national character of the American people.”⁷¹

The *Globe*, in assessing the war, emphasized the moral issue of slavery, the inherent dangers of republicanism, and the instruction which its readers might draw from the conflict. These themes, and the extent to which they parallel commentary in the *Witness* and the *Record*, underscore the paper’s Free Church heritage as well as its importance in disseminating opinion influenced by a Scots Evangelical world view.

Conclusion

A Free Church Presbyterian perspective influenced the Civil War commentary of the *Presbyterian Witness*, the *Ecclesiastical and Missionary Record*, and the Toronto *Globe*. The papers strongly emphasized the centrality of the moral issue of slavery to the conflict, and linked the United States’ form of government to the nation’s social and political rupture. Moreover, the Civil War was a significant event for British North America as well as the United States, and served as a point of reference for the emerging Canadian nation. The similarities in the papers’ views speak of the extent to which Free Church Presbyterianism in British North America looked to its Scottish,

⁷¹ *Globe*, April 12, 1865.

and not British North American, religious and historical heritages for guidance in analyzing current issues.

The particular importance placed on the American political system as a cause of the war differentiates Free Church Presbyterian commentary from the views of mainstream Northern Presbyterians and other evangelicals who, while espousing similar anti-slavery views, melded their postmillennial social activism with a significant reverence for the American Union. The parallels between the papers' criticisms of the American Constitution and the views held by smaller Scots Presbyterian bodies such as the Covenanters in both the Maritimes and the United States speaks to the strength of the evangelical Scots Presbyterian influence in North America. Importantly, the strong position of Free Church Presbyterianism in British North America brought these views to the forefront of public thought and thus, arguably, into a position to exercise some influence on Canada's emerging sense of social and political identity.

Chapter Two—Methodists

Methodists in the Maritimes and central Canada had a longer and significantly different historical heritage in British North America from that of Free Church Presbyterians. Unlike Free Church Presbyterians, whose intense, recent links with Scotland produced a relatively uniform perspective in British North America on social and political issues in the United States, Methodists were a group fractured by national association, political views, and differing religious and historical heritages.

The two main groups of Methodists in British North America were Wesleyans, who predominated in the Maritimes and comprised the majority of Methodists in central Canada, and Methodist Episcopalians, who constituted a substantial minority of Methodists in central Canada. Three periodicals are the focus of this chapter. The *Provincial Wesleyan*, published in Halifax, and the *Christian Guardian*, published in Toronto, were Wesleyan Methodist papers. The *Canada Christian Advocate*, published in Hamilton, was the periodical serving Methodist Episcopalians in central Canada. The editorial positions of these papers toward the Civil War were influenced by differing religious and historical heritages and were shaped by events in both the United States and British North America. As such, the reaction of British North American Methodists to the war is typified by differing regional views of the conflict's causes and issues.

Maritime Methodists and John McMurray of the *Provincial Wesleyan*

Nineteenth-century Maritime Methodism reflected the region's close ideological and political ties with Britain. The denomination was shaped by a set of historical circumstances which allied it closely to British, rather than American Methodism.

Subsequently, the response of Maritime Methodists to the American Civil War must be set within the context of a denomination firmly oriented toward British, rather than American, religious, social, and political values.

The roots of Nova Scotia Methodism can be traced to the late eighteenth century. Between 1772 and 1775, a group of immigrants from Yorkshire, England settled in Nova Scotia; many had previously belonged to Methodist societies in England, and maintained contact with English Methodist founder John Wesley. One of this number, William Black, was converted to Methodism in 1779 and began to disseminate Methodist views in the wake of the religious fervour spawned by Congregationalist "New Light" preacher Henry Alline throughout Nova Scotia during the same period. After the American Revolution, the ranks of Methodism in Nova Scotia were bolstered by the influx of thousands of Loyalists. These Loyalists, a number of whom were Methodists and who formed part of a conservative Halifax elite,¹ were ideologically opposed to the political ideals of the revolution which had forced them from their American homes.²

The British orientation of Methodism in Nova Scotia was made permanent by the connection which its leaders sought with the mother Wesleyan movement in England. In 1783 Wesley agreed to aid Black in his request for British volunteers who could establish a Methodist organization in the province.³ Later, in 1800, Black formally

¹ Grant, "Methodist Origins in Atlantic Canada," in Charles H. Scobie and John Webster Grant, eds., The Contribution of Methodism to Atlantic Canada (Kingston & Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 40.

² Neil Semple, The Lord's Dominion: The History of Canadian Methodism (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 31-32.

³ *Ibid.*, 31.

sought Nova Scotia's entry into the British Wesleyan Conference.⁴ Subsequently, Bishop Francis Asbury of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States was reluctant to send preachers to a region which was tied to the British organization, and which he regarded as a foreign outpost outside his denominational sphere.⁵

By the turn of the nineteenth century, then, Maritime Methodists enjoyed a close relationship with British Wesleyanism, from which they received organizational support and religious direction.⁶ The British Wesleyan heritage of the Maritime Methodist leadership reflected itself in the political views which played a significant part in directing the denomination's political outlook. Anti-republican and keen to retain their ties with the British monarchy and the Wesleyan mother denomination, the region's Methodist leadership resembled British Methodism in their political views.⁷

⁴ Grant, "Methodist Origins in Atlantic Canada," 42.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 40-41; George A. Rawlyk, The Canada Fire: Radical Evangelicalism in British North America, 1775-1812 (Kingston & Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 133. Rawlyk argues that this move was in part due to the position of American Methodist Episcopal leader Francis Asbury who, wary of the region's religious enthusiasm, stopped sending itinerants to Nova Scotia, a decision which forced Methodists in the region to pursue closer ties with British Methodists.

⁶ Goldwin French, Parsons and Politics: The role of the Wesleyan Methodists in Upper Canada and the Maritimes from 1780 to 1855 (Toronto: Ryerson, 1962), 59. French notes, for example, that at the 1823 Nova Scotia District Meeting, over half the clergy present were post-1812 immigrants, and that only two were native-born Nova Scotians

⁷ Symptomatic of this perspective was the accommodating relationship which existed between Nova Scotia Methodists and the province's Anglican hierarchy during the first third of the nineteenth century, with Methodist leaders emphasizing their tolerance for an established church and declining to involve themselves in political struggles over religious rights. Anglicans, in return, viewed Methodism as a socially stabilizing influence whose reach extended beyond their own to include the region's middle and lower classes. Even as the century progressed and Maritime Methodists developed a degree of independence, and despite the denomination's involvement in different facets of Maritime political life, Methodist leadership in the region was typified by pro-British loyalty and an emphasis on political stability. See Semple, Lord's Dominion, 103; French, Parsons and Politics, 62, 95, 210; Grant, "Methodist Origins in Atlantic Canada," 43-44.

While mid-nineteenth century Maritime Methodism was characterized by a political conservatism which stressed the British connection, it retained an evangelical perspective which placed much importance on moral issues. In Saint John, New Brunswick, it has been noted that Wesleyans played a leading role in promoting the causes of temperance and Sunday school education.⁸ Wesleyan Methodist interest in moral reform was rooted in the conviction that reforming the individual's behaviour was a key element of his spiritual regeneration, and was compounded by the growing postmillennialism during the nineteenth century which held that social reformation on a national scale would accelerate Christ's return to earth.

Two strong motives, one toward political conservatism and the other toward evangelical moral reform, directed Maritime Wesleyan Methodists during the period of the American Civil War. Both were reflected in the commentary of the Rev. John McMurray, editor of the *Provincial Wesleyan*, published in Halifax. A political conservative who viewed political events largely for their relevance to religion and morality, he was particularly critical of the United States' form of government for the role it played in the nation's current crisis.

The North's embrace of the American Constitution as an instrument of political freedom struck McMurray as arrogant and idolatrous. With the commencement of military engagement in 1861, he criticised the Northern press for exaggerating the Union forces' victories instead of offering a factual assessment, and accused it of construing mistruths to serve as a rallying point for the North. Simply put, Northerners

⁸ T.W. Acheson, Saint John: The Making of A Colonial Urban Community (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 146, 162-63.

were too willing to espouse nationalist rhetoric at “this sad and solemn crisis in their history,” a time when they should be exhibiting a greater sense of critical introspection.

Especially galling was the

...constant exhibition of bravado and bombast and extravagant self-conceit, ill supported, as yet, by actual performance. Month after month, have we been reading, in the columns of the Northern press, the most fulsome laudation of almost everything connected with the Federal Union. The Federal Constitution, a matchless creation of political perfection. The Federal Government, the purest, the wisest, and strongest the world ever saw. The American people, faithful to the Union, the best, the noblest, the most patriotic on earth.⁹

McMurray’s criticism of the North’s tendency toward self-glorification originated in a wariness of turning government into a form of idolatry. This view, rooted in his political conservatism, closely resembled that put forward by Free Church Presbyterians in British North America.

The United States’ form of government further offended McMurray because reverence for the Union appeared to have supplanted reverence for Christianity in the nation. In an editorial discussion of the various forms and dangers of idolatry, the American Union was roundly condemned as an idol currently bringing disaster to the people who worshipped it. Here, McMurray’s political conservatism melded with a religious heritage inherited from John Wesley which, as Goldwin French has noted, caused Methodists to see events in terms of their religious significance.¹⁰ The American Union was an idol

...we must name, because of his recent origin and remarkable peculiarities. He is a native of what was once the United States of America. His name is *Union*. A day

⁹ *Wesleyan*, September 4, 1861.

¹⁰ Goldwin French, “The Evangelical Creed in Canada,” in *The Shield of Achilles: Aspects of Canada in the Victorian Age* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968), 25-26.

in every year has for a long time past been set apart, as a day of special devotion to this god. In the national councils he has been more honoured than the Living God- -until at length, the God of heaven, in vindication of His own honour, has overthrown in vengeance this Rival, and now he lies prostrate, unable to help himself or others...God is now curing them in a severe manner of idolatry.¹¹

McMurray' political conservatism, forged in the particular historical development of Methodism in the Maritimes, and his evangelical tendency to see events through the lens of religion moved him to view the North's political views as arrogant and idolatrous.

Slavery, as the key issue dividing the United States, could not be considered separately from the system of government which, in McMurray's opinion, had allowed its continued existence. Regardless of "the immediate result on the politics of the country," the war portended

...the speedy and certain doom of the abominable system...Could its veil once be removed, slavery would instantly wither and become dead in the burning light of the nineteenth century. This secession movement will do much towards stripping off that veil.¹²

McMurray singled out the American political system for the protection it offered to Southern slavery. From a historical perspective, internal American division had been assured from the time of the nation's founding:

The early statesmen of the Republic started with a capital error. They imagined that by crafty legislation they could set at nought the eternal laws of the Most High. They passed high-sounding resolves and called very bad things by very pretty names. To all ingenious and statesmanlike expedients did they resort. But all has been of no avail. The dark and detestable system which they suffered to remain has "grown with the growth and strengthened with the strength" of the country. To day it threatens to ruin it, as it ruined the republics of Attica and Rome.¹³

¹¹ *Wesleyan*, October 2, 1861.

¹² *Wesleyan*, January 9, 1861.

Thus, the political framework of the United States bore significant responsibility for the entrenchment of slavery within American society. From this perspective, the attempt to accommodate an immoral institution through legislation had, from the nation's inception, laid the founding for the current social and political crisis.

John McMurray's view that the American political system bore the responsibility for the accommodation of slavery differentiated him from the large number of Protestants in the United States who, it has been noted, identified Christianity with republicanism.¹⁴ Like Maritime Free Church editor Robert Murray, McMurray did not see the importance of maintaining the Union; rather, he argued that the war must be fought over the moral issue of slavery, regardless of the political changes wrought in the United States. To this end, he advocated the nation's sectional disunion, in order to isolate the slaveholding South and hasten the emancipation of blacks in the region.

McMurray's advocacy of disunionism parallels, to an extent, the radical fringe of abolitionists in the North who, prior to the war, pursued a similar course of action. Followers of William Lloyd Garrison, for example, rejected religion and argued for disunion of the United States on the grounds that both the Bible and the American Constitution had been used by the South to defend slavery.¹⁵ In contrast, Northern members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States played a prominent role in opposing the Garrisonian radicalism of the 1830s and 1840s, and held that

¹³ *Wesleyan*, January 9, 1861.

¹⁴ See also Mark Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 115-120.

emancipation must be effected within the existing framework of the American political system.¹⁶

More expected are the parallels between McMurray's opinion on disunion and those of British Methodist editors. There, as W. Harrison Daniel has noted, denominational commentators questioned whether the North was fighting to end slavery or to maintain the Union. Some British editors further advocated disunion on the grounds that a weakened United States would be less of a threat to world peace.¹⁷

McMurray too did not see the preservation of the Union as fundamental to the abolition of slavery during the war, and argued instead that the separation of North and South might do more to hasten the end of slavery than a bitter fight to keep the Union whole. Arguing that "the race is not always to the swift nor the battle to the strong," he did not see the North's apparent military superiority as necessarily beneficial to American slaves. Instead, he interpreted Lincoln's claim that the North was fighting with the intent of preserving the Union as, in fact, detrimental to the fate of slaves in the United States. Any war fought for the preservation of Union, and supported by the legal framework of the American Constitution, could in fact be seen as reinforcing Southern slavery, given the South's record of using the American legal system to protect slavery. Furthermore, to conquer the South "would involve vast and perpetual expense," with the likelihood that such an occupation would only intensify

¹⁵ James Brewer Stewart, Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), 89, 93, 88; McKivigan, The War against Proslavery Religion, 58-59.

¹⁶ Donald G. Mathews, Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality 1780-1845 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 170-174.

¹⁷ Daniel, "The Reaction of British Methodism to the Civil War and Reconstruction in America." 6-7.

sectional discord and lead to future conflict. His solution was to allow Southern independence, with a view toward the formation of a “cordon of the Free States” to “engirdle the Slave Empire and prevent its expansion.” This course of action, he argued, “would be the result least detrimental to human liberty, and least injurious to the free people of the United States.”¹⁸

The *Wesleyan*'s position did not change after the Emancipation Proclamation came into effect on January 1, 1863. McMurray's first comment on Lincoln's abolition measure reiterated his position that the most effective method of freeing the South's slaves was to let the Confederacy separate and wait for the inevitable death of slavery. Moreover, to continue the war was, he felt, a needless waste of life in the United States. Maritime Wesleyans, he argued, “long[ed] for peace,” and “regard[ed] the continuance of the war, so utterly hopeless as it has been for some time past...as involving the North in still deeper national guilt.” Nor did he see “the truckling policy of Abraham Lincoln,” as he termed the Emancipation Proclamation, to be a significant antislavery measure. Rather, he argued that

The Highest will give the word in His own time, “Let the oppressed go free.” This may not, in its fullest sense, be accomplished immediately; though it cannot be far in the future. We hope to see, however, as a direct and immediate result of this war, that the grosser forms of the iniquity of slavery will be abolished...that the negro shall be recognised in his claims of the rights of manhood...that it shall be allowed to continue only in such a form as in the Providence of God may be necessary to introduce him to the blessings of advanced christian civilization...¹⁹

Lincoln's explicit antislavery measure did not, then satisfy McMurray. Instead, the war's human cost outweighed the benefits of immediate emancipation, especially as he

¹⁸ *Wesleyan*, July 31, 1861.

was convinced that allowing the Confederacy to separate would bring about the abolition of slavery, albeit at a slower pace.

To John McMurray, the American Civil War was a moral conflict which was rooted in the flawed political institutions of the United States. This perspective was forged both by his evangelical moral opposition to slavery as well as the political conservatism of Maritime Methodism. As such, disunion of the United States appeared as a viable option for ending the conflict and hastening the emancipation of the South's slaves. McMurray's assessment of the war and the course which he felt the North should pursue differentiated him from Methodist Episcopalians in the North, and allied him more closely to American abolitionist radicals and, in particular, to British Methodist editors.

Background--Methodism in Central Canada

The response of Methodists to the American Civil War in the central Canadian provinces of Canada West and Canada East was affected by a more complex historical heritage than that of Methodists in the Maritimes. Unlike the Maritimes, where Methodists uniformly were drawn ideologically to Britain, Methodists in central Canada were influenced by both British and American religious and political ideas. Reflecting these differing national influences, two differing denominational forms, Wesleyan Methodism and Methodist Episcopalianism, shaped Methodist ideology in the region. These dual influences allowed for a more complex assessment of American political events than that offered by John McMurray of the *Wesleyan*.

¹⁹ *Wesleyan*, February 4, 1863.

Unlike the Maritimes, whose Methodist population was influenced largely by British Wesleyan ministers, the population of central Canada included a substantial number influenced by American Methodist Episcopalians in the province's early years. Preachers such as William Case and Henry Ryan spent much of Canada's first quarter century spreading an enthusiastic Methodism which took as its source the revivalism occurring in the adjacent United States.²⁰ The ease with which religious ideas spread across the border became evident as the American Methodist Episcopal organizational framework quickly established itself in central Canada.²¹

Importantly, Methodists in the region were affected by political tensions between the United States and British North America. The War of 1812 between the United States and Britain, which played itself out in large part on Canadian soil, affected the closeness of the religious relationship between American Methodist Episcopalians and those in Canada. Because of their close American ties, Methodists were perceived as having been disloyal during the 1812-14 conflict.²² This perception was compounded by the expansion of British Wesleyan Methodism, more conservative in its religious and political outlook, into the region during the period. To reduce competition, in 1820 both factions of central Canadian Methodism reached an agreement whereby Wesleyan activity was limited to Kingston, York and Lower Canada (later Canada East) and Methodist Episcopal activity to Upper Canada (subsequently Canada

²⁰ Rawlyk, Canada Fire, 143-161.

²¹ S.D. Clark, Church and Sect in Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1948), 94. By the period of the War of 1812, the number of preachers and circuits in Upper Canada had multiplied considerably, and came under the control of the Genesee Annual Conference in New York State.

²² *Ibid.*, 104; Semple, Lord's Dominion, 45-46.

West).²³ Later, in 1828, Canadian Methodist Episcopal, still sensitive to charges that they were unduly sympathetic toward American political ideas, formed an organizational conference independent of the American Methodist Episcopal Church.²⁴

The two branches of Methodism did not, however, move entirely in different paths. In 1833, central Canadian Methodist Episcopal and Wesleyans, trying to avoid destructive competition, sought a compromise through union. A significant number of Methodist Episcopal, however, wary of the Wesleyans' political conservative and intent on retaining their episcopal form of organization, withdrew from the new union in 1834 to reconstitute a Methodist Episcopal Church which would last through to the permanent union of the Canadian branches of Methodism in 1884.²⁵

Internal conflict continued to characterize the remaining members of the 1833 union, known as the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Canada. Despite the departure of many Methodist Episcopal in 1834, a significant number remained within the union; their political ideals differed sharply from the more conservative Methodists whose background was British Wesleyanism. The issue of voluntarism, or state support, remained a point of contention between the two groups within the union. At the core of the debate was the province's distribution of "clergy reserves," an endowment intended for the support of the Anglican Church in central Canada.²⁶ Members with an American background such as Egerton Ryerson whose opposition to a state-

²³ Semple, Lord's Dominion, 51.

²⁴ Grant, A Profusion of Spires, 75.

²⁵ Semple, Lord's Dominion, 79-80.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 77; Grant, A Profusion of Spires, 88-93.

supported Anglican church led him to support reform politics in central Canada, came into conflict with conservative members such as Matthew Richey and Joseph Stinson who were willing to accept exclusive state support for the Anglican church in Canada.²⁷ The tension between political reformers and conservatives within the union was heightened with the Rebellion of 1837; once again, in the wake of the region's political unrest, Methodists were labelled by political and religious conservatives as disloyal.²⁸ These underlying tensions led to a breakup of the union in 1840, with the conservative members of the denomination re-establishing connections with the British Conference and the more reform-minded members establishing an independent Canada Conference. Neither group prospered independently, however, and in 1847 reunited further to form one Wesleyan organization in Canada West. In 1854, Wesleyans in Canada West and Canada East united to form a strengthened Wesleyan denomination in central Canada. The denomination remained financially connected to the parent British Wesleyan conference, though increased responsibility for its operation devolved onto Canadian Wesleyan authorities.²⁹

During the period of the Civil War, then, Wesleyans and the smaller group of Methodist Episcopalians co-existed in central Canada and reflected the dual Anglo-American influence on Methodism in the region. Methodist Episcopalians in Canada preferred an episcopal system of church organization similar to that of Methodism in

²⁷ Semple, Lord's Dominion, 94-95.

²⁸ Colin Read, The Rising in Western Upper Canada, 1837-8: The Duncombe Revolt and After (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 192.

²⁹ Semple, Lord's Dominion, 95-99.

the United States, as well as a more rural, revivalistic form of religion.³⁰ They continued to reflect the independence of post-Revolutionary American Methodism, where Francis Asbury adapted British Wesleyan principles to the newly-independent nation's differing political and religious needs.³¹ Canadian Wesleyans, meanwhile, changed the definition of loyalty to Britain by stressing allegiance to the British motherland while maintaining that the state should regard religious denominations equally and without preference.³² Thus, both American and British historical heritages continued to influence Methodism in central Canada, and differentiated it from the British-oriented perspective of Wesleyan Methodism in the Maritimes.

This dual influence was exemplified by the fact that Wesleyans and Methodist Episcopalians in the region each sought recognition from the American Methodist Episcopal Church as the legitimate body of independent Canadian Methodism. Between 1836 and 1864 the two groups of Methodists competed for financial support and the right to sit as delegates at the American General Conference—crucial considerations in a period when both groups continued to compete for members within the province. Importantly, this recognition was granted to the Methodist Episcopal Church in Canada during the Civil War in 1864, after repeated appeals by delegates

³⁰ Clark, Church and Sect, 315.

³¹ Semple, Lord's Dominion, 26.

³² David Mills, The Idea of Loyalty in Upper Canada, 1784-1850 (Kingston & Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988), 7, 52-72. See also Michael Gauvreau, "Protestantism Transformed: Personal Piety and the Evangelical Social Vision, 1815-1867," in The Canadian Protestant Experience 1760 to 1990 (Burlington: Welch Publishing, 1990), 88-89.

from both branches of Canadian Methodism to the General Conference of the American Methodist Episcopal Church.³³

Importantly, this competition for recognition from American Methodism affected central Canadian Wesleyans' assessment of slavery in the United States during the mid-nineteenth century. The connection between central Canadian and American Methodism and the issue of slavery took on heightened meaning in light of the 1844 debate between Northern and Southern Methodists over the right of Methodist clergymen to own slaves. Seeing the debate as a direct rebuke of their regional culture, which included slavery, Southern Methodist delegates to the conference met the following year to form the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.³⁴

Significantly, the retention of a number of border state Methodist churches within the Northern General Conference meant that the American Methodist Episcopal Church with whom both branches of Canadian Methodists sought closer connections still contained slaveholders within its ranks.³⁵ Allen Stouffer has argued that for this reason Canadian Wesleyans were reluctant to criticize either slavery or the American Methodist Episcopal Church through the 1840's and 1850's.³⁶ As well, the issue of slavery was symptomatic of continuing tensions between reform and conservative

³³ W.E.L. Smith, "The Methodist Episcopal Church in Canada, 1833-1883," *The Bulletin* (1964), 11. On the competition between Methodist Episcopalians and Wesleyans for membership during the mid-nineteenth century, see Semple, Lord's Dominion, 188-191.

³⁴ Snay, Gospel of Disunion, 127-129. While the first General Conference of the American Methodist Episcopal Church in 1784 condemned slavery, the rapid growth of Methodism in the American South gradually pushed slaveholders and Northern antislavery Methodists apart on the issue. At the General Conference of 1844, pro- and anti-slavery Methodists split over the case of Georgia Bishop James Osgood Andrew, a slaveholder by inheritance.

³⁵ Goen, Broken Churches, Broken Nation, 137-138.

elements within Canadian Wesleyanism. The denomination's most conservative members were also vigorous opponents of slavery and American influences within the church, and reflected the importation of British Wesleyan antislavery ideas into the central Canadian context. The antislavery voice became muted, however, as the Canadian Wesleyan Church sought closer ties with Methodist Episcopalians in the United States. Strong supporters of abolition such as Ephraim Evans, an English-born Wesleyan minister who acted as editor of the *Guardian* from 1835 to 1838 were moved to the margins of the organization, thus reducing anti-slavery agitation within the denomination.³⁷

Methodist Episcopalians in central Canada also took into consideration the competition for American recognition when commenting on slavery in the United States. Though staunchly antislavery, Methodist Episcopalians maintained that Southern Methodists bore a large degree of responsibility for the perpetuation of slavery in the American South, and were much quieter on the accommodation of the remaining slaveholders within Northern Methodism.³⁸ As such, their moral opposition to slavery, like that of Wesleyans in central Canada, was affected by the desire for recognition by the American church, and further reveals the extent to which Methodism in the region continued to be affected by its historical connection to the United States.

³⁶ Stouffer, *The Light of Nature and the Law of God*, 158.

³⁷ John Webster Grant, "Ephraim Evans," *Canadian Methodist Historical Society Papers* (1991), 109.

³⁸ Stouffer, *The Light of Nature and the Law of God*, 162-163.

The dual Anglo-American influences on central Canadian Methodism were represented by the editors of the *Wesleyan Christian Guardian*, published in Toronto, and the Methodist Episcopal *Canada Christian Advocate*, published in Hamilton.

Importantly, editorship of the *Christian Guardian* passed in 1860 from James Spencer to Wellington Jeffers, a British-born Wesleyan.³⁹ As editor he took a keen interest in the abolition of slavery; this interest, it has been argued, was derived from his close knowledge of British antislavery efforts.⁴⁰ In contrast to the influence of British Wesleyanism on Jeffers, the editor of the Methodist Episcopal *Canada Christian Advocate*, James Richardson, was influenced by American Methodist ideas.

Richardson became both a bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church and editor of the *Advocate* in 1858, and held both positions until his death in 1875. A former editor of the *Christian Guardian* from 1832-1833, Richardson left the Wesleyan church in 1836 because of his opposition to the influence of British conservatives within the conference. As a result, he worked for the following year in an American Methodist Episcopal church at Auburn, New York. Upon his return to the Methodist Episcopal Church in Canada he assumed an active role in the promotion of moral causes in the province as a member of the Upper Canada Bible Society and the Temperance Reformation Society. Richardson's deep interest in moral issues were likely affected by his experience in the United States, given the currents of social reform active in New York state during the period.⁴¹

³⁹ J. William Lamb, "Wellington Jeffers," *DCB* 12: 468-69.

⁴⁰ Stouffer, *The Light of Nature and the Law of God*, 212.

Central Canadian Methodism, then, was influenced strongly by both British and American religious heritages. These heritages were reflected in the organizational history of Wesleyans and Methodist Episcopalians in the region, and were further affected by historical developments in Canada West which forced both groups of Methodists to define their political and religious positions in the province. Both groups continued to compete for recognition from the American Methodist Episcopal Church in a manner which affected their commentary on slavery, the pre-eminent social and political issue in the United States during the period. Finally, given Richardson's participation initially in the Wesleyan church, both editors reflected the dual Anglo-American influence on central Canadian Methodism. These influences would be reflected in their commentary on the Civil War, which differed substantially from that of Maritime Methodist editor John McMurray.

Wellington Jeffers and the *Christian Guardian*

During the American Civil War, the political and religious views of central Canadian Wesleyan Methodists differed significantly from that of the perspective of Wesleyan Methodists in the Maritimes. Owing to a historical heritage in central Canada in which the American Methodist Episcopal Church influence figured prominently in religious and political debate, Wesleyan Methodists in the region did not, like those in the Maritimes, cling steadfastly to negative views of the United States. The commentary of Wellington Jeffers, editor of the *Christian Guardian*, on events in the United States was of a far more moderate tone than that of John

⁴¹ Goldwin French, "James Richardson," *DCB* 10: 615-17. Though interested in the American style of Methodism, Richardson's loyalty to his own province had already been proven. A veteran of the

McMurray of the *Wesleyan*. Rather than linking republicanism and slavery to the war, Jeffers offered a much broader and neutral discussion of the war's political issues. And, while slavery consumed much of his attention, so too did a variety of religious issues related to the war.

The dual Anglo-American influence on central Canadian Wesleyan Methodism was evident in Jeffers' moderate view of republicanism. Importantly, he was less convinced than McMurray of the inherent fallibility of republicanism and the superiority of monarchy. Outlining his desire to see an ideal nation which was "truly and entirely Christian," Jeffers had to admit that "the world has never yet seen such a nation." The ideal Christian nation

.....would be one in which the Word of God was universally read, believed, and understood; where Christian ordinances were universally established and faithfully attended...Its rulers would fear God, its legislators would be wise and faithful, its judges upright, its public servants incorruptable.⁴²

The ideal nation was to be defined in religious terms, then, rather than according to its form of civil government.

Jeffers further defined his vision of the ideal nation by commenting on the role which republicanism had played in instigating the war. In reference to an editorial in the New York *Christian Advocate* which defended American republicanism in light of the conflict, he held that imperfection was not particular to any specific form of government, but was endemic to those governments which neglected religious values. The United States' republican form of government was not inherently flawed. Rather,

War of 1812, Richardson lost his left arm while fighting American forces at the battle of Oswego in 1814.

⁴² *Guardian*, July 17, 1861.

it was “sad to think that the ‘corruption of politics’ is so universal. It is not confined to the United States; there is plenty of it in England and France, and, we fear, in Canada too.” Only with a “general abhorrence of the infidel doctrines of selfishness expediency, and utilitarianism,” and with a “resolute...regard for the principles and institutions of the only religion of truth”⁴³ could governments of various character rise above imperfection and approach Jeffers’ vision of the ideal nation.

Jeffers’ lack of hostility toward the United States’ form of government led to a more balanced assessment of the United States and Anglo-American relations during the war. In the wake of the North’s seizure of the *Trent* in November 1861, and amidst international tension over the capture of two Confederate agents from a British ship in international waters, Jeffers sought to portray to his readers the similarities, rather than differences, between Britain and the United States. In a political atmosphere in which American, British and British North American commentators feared and expected war,⁴⁴ Jeffers maintained Canada’s political independence while stressing the religious ties which transcended international borders. “The Canadians,” argued Jeffers, “are loyal to Britain; they prefer their own political institutions; they have not, and never had, a desire to be one of the United States.” Jeffers’ words implied a nationalist perspective rooted in Canadian Wesleyan Methodists’ historical sensitivity to accusations of disloyalty to Britain, particularly after the Rebellion of 1837. His assertion of loyalty to Britain was, however, moderated by the view that similarities, rather than differences, characterized the Anglo-American relationship.

⁴³ *Guardian*, October 14, 1863.

This perspective was essential in the atmosphere of competition between Wesleyans and Methodist Episcopalians for recognition by American Methodism. Canadian Wesleyans, he stated,

...desire friendship, and are anxious above all things that the two great kindred nations of the earth, the two great nations which have so much in common, so much that is similar, should always love each other, and always help each other in every good work upon earth.⁴⁵

Even at a time of political crisis, Jeffers' assessment of the United States was moderate and emphasized Anglo-American social and religious commonalities rather than political differences.

Jeffers offered a strongly postmillennial view of the centrality of slavery to the war. However, without explicitly linking slavery to republicanism, as did John McMurray, he emphasized the importance of the American Union in abolishing the Southern institution. Slavery was the product of the American South, not the American political system. As such, the abolition of slavery was best assured by Northern victory and a strong, reunited America.

The American Civil War was, to Jeffers, essentially a trial through which God would cleanse the United States of a tremendous moral transgression. As in the case of John McMurray, he viewed the war largely in terms of its religious significance.

Jeffers argued that "if all governments were truthful, upright, and honourable, there need never be such a thing as war." However, "until the world is renewed, there will always be some nations actuated by a wicked and reckless selfishness." The paper's readers could take consolation in the fact that

⁴⁴ McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom, 389-390; Creighton, Road to Confederation, 7-8.

...He who rules over all is able to make all these conflicts work for the world's ultimate welfare. It is awful and horrible to see such bloody slaughter in the fratricidal American war; but if it frees four millions of slaves, if it frees the nation from the corrupting influence of slavery, if it delivers this whole continent from slavery, and extinguishes it throughout the world, for all future time, will not this war be productive of good?⁴⁶

Wellington Jeffers' interpretation of the war as a fight for slave emancipation was consistent with a postmillennial assessment of the conflict. The Civil War, then, was evidence of God's intervention in human affairs, for the express purpose of ending Southern slavery.

To Jeffers, the responsibility for slavery lay with the South's defense of its society. Key to this interpretation was the role which the Southern churches played in defending slavery. Biblical defences of slavery were but a mask for the defence of an entire social system. Those who followed the South's religious press would quickly see that it was "not slavery in the abstract that they are defending, but the whole Southern system with all its wrongs." The actions of Southern churches showed that the war, while national in scale, was ultimately rooted in individual subjugation. "The course of the Southern churches," argued Jeffers in discussing Southern religious journals such as the Nashville *Advocate* which advocated war as a means of defending slavery,

...is every way to be deplored. By firmly and prudently checking acknowledged evils, by seeking gradually to abate the severity of slavery; by instilling principles of mercy and justice toward the slave; by preparing the way for the extinction of the whole system, they might become the saviours of their country. But at present their course only aggravates its miseries.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ *Guardian*, February 26, 1862.

⁴⁶ *Guardian*, February 17, 1864.

⁴⁷ *Guardian*, April 3, 1861.

The South's churches, then, were particularly responsible for maintaining the social system which, in Jeffers' view, had led the United States to war.

Importantly, Jeffers held that the resolution of the conflict, and of the slavery issue, lay within the context of a reunited American Union. In this respect, his view of the war closely corresponded with Northern Methodist opinion. It has been noted that Northern evangelicals, including Methodists, gravitated toward the Whig, and then the Republican, party in the decade before the war.⁴⁸ The propensity of these Northern evangelicals to view the Republican party as a vehicle for the moral reformation of the United States was reflected by Jeffers who, during the war, stridently supported Lincoln's expressed purpose of fighting to maintain the Union. This perspective led him to confront his Maritime colleague John McMurray about the sincerity of his antislavery convictions. Specifically, he took the *Provincial Wesleyan* to task for its proposal that the American Union be dissolved in the hope that isolating the South would hasten the end of slavery.

The basic philosophical difference between the Maritime and central Canadian Wesleyan editors over the military and political course which the North should pursue was expressed in the *Guardian* in the autumn of 1864. Two American Methodist Episcopal periodicals, the New York *Christian Advocate* and the Cincinnati *Western Christian Advocate*, published editorials which cast doubt on the strength of British North American Methodist support of the Northern cause. The New York paper took issue with both British and Canadian Wesleyans for seeing emancipation and

preservation of the Union as separate issues, while the *Cincinnati* periodical insinuated that Canadian Wesleyans were not as supportive of the Northern war effort as they might be due to the recognition that year of the Canadian Methodist Episcopal Church by the parent American Methodist organization. Both papers were reacting to the position taken by the *Maritime Provincial Wesleyan*. The *New York Christian Advocate*, for example, referred to *Wesleyan* editor John McMurray as “a Wesleyan apologist for slavery” in reference to McMurray’s stated editorial position that the North was fighting for maintenance of the Union alone, and that the Confederacy should be allowed its independence.

Both American papers received swift and extensive replies from the *Guardian*. To the *New York* paper, which argued that Canadian Methodists had shown relatively little support for the North’s fight to preserve the Union, the *Guardian* replied that its antislavery position was, in fact, proof of their support for the Northern cause. He pointed to his critics that the *Guardian* had “repeatedly contained editorials decidedly condemning the objects of the South and contending that slavery was the sole cause of the war...it has never given utterance to one sentiment of a different nature.”⁴⁹ This view of slavery as the key issue of the war differed substantially from McMurray’s assertion that American republicanism was in large part responsible for the nation’s sectional division.

⁴⁸ Johnson, *Redeeming America*, 152-154; Carwardine, “Evangelicals, Politics, and the Coming of the American Civil War,” 206-207.

⁴⁹ *Guardian*, August 17, 1864.

To the *Western Christian Advocate*, Jeffers made clear his preference for Northern victory, with preservation of the Union leading directly to the abolition of slavery.

Separating the two issues might have disastrous results; the *Guardian* would

...regard it as an incalculable calamity to the States, and to mankind, for a great Southern nation to be established on the foundation of slavery. We could not contemplate such a prospect without horror. As British subjects, and still more as Methodists, we cannot possibly wish otherwise than that the friends of slavery may be defeated in their objects, and the friends of freedom come out of this struggle purified and strengthened and delivered for ever from the curse of slavery. And as friends of liberty and the Bible we wish and pray that Britain and America may always strengthen each others hands; and always be joined in friendship and alliance to spread the blessing of the Gospel as well as of civil liberty over the whole earth.⁵⁰

With a positive view of the United States as a religious nation, and concerned primarily with the abolition of slavery, Jeffers vigorously opposed the idea of allowing the political separation of the republic. This opinion was consistent with Methodist Episcopal editors in the North who attached much importance to the maintenance of the Union as a Northern goal during the conflict.

Jeffers' opposition to Southern independence highlighted his strongly postmillennial interpretation of slavery as the central issue of the war. Agreeing with the American editors who had criticized McMurray, he wrote that it was his

...duty to say that *our* views are as different from his as it is possible for them to be. We felt saddened and shocked to see such sentiments expressed by a Wesleyan editor, and we feel the utmost confidence in declaring that they are not the sentiments of Wesleyan Methodists in Canada.⁵¹

To Jeffers, the *Maritime Wesleyan's* proposal for Southern independence had "recanted the principles of universal Methodism" which demanded an uncompromising

⁵⁰ *Guardian*, September 14, 1864.

attitude toward the elimination of moral injustices such as slavery. The fragmentation of the United States would not, in his estimation, achieve this goal. Furthermore, his postmillennial view of slavery drew him to see the war as the event which would permanently eradicate the Southern institution from American society. The end of slavery was

...now demanded by the Word of God, by the Providence of God, and by the cause of God. It is demanded by the interests, temporal and spiritual, of humanity, both for the present and the future. If slavery is abolished now, it is abolished for ever throughout the world...Southern slavery is an abomination to God, and a blighting curse upon earth. Nothing can make it justifiable or tolerable. Our respected contemporary must be misunderstood; but if not, we cannot find words too strong to express our dissent from his views.⁵²

Jeffers' postmillennial view of slavery caused him, then, to see it as the defining issue of the war. From this perspective, the only option which he felt would obtain the quickest emancipation of the South's slaves was Northern victory. Maintaining the integrity of the American Union was crucial to this course of action. This opinion closely aligned Jeffers with Methodists in the North. As well, this position further highlighted a significant difference between himself and John McMurray, whose political conservatism moved him to see the American Union as, in fact, accommodating slavery, and who saw Southern independence as an effective, though gradual, route to the abolition of slavery.

Subsequent debate between the *Guardian* and the *Wesleyan* showed that, unlike their views on the Union, their difference on the slavery issue was a matter of means rather than principle. The *Wesleyan* maintained that its convictions were resolutely

⁵¹ *Guardian*, October 26, 1864.

⁵² *Guardian*, October 26, 1864.

abolitionist, and that “were there no choice but the immediate emancipation of the negroes of the South, or their perpetual enslavement, we should unhesitatingly prefer the former.” However, McMurray maintained that Lincoln’s emancipation policy could be considered little more than a war measure, and not part of God’s greater scheme for freeing Southern slaves. “What Providence may be working out by this war for the benefit is one thing,” he wrote, “but what the Federal Government are hoping to accomplish by their emancipation policy, is quite another.” McMurray continued to promote a gradual route toward abolition. He held the “conviction ...that *at once* to elevate the slaves to all the privileges of United States citizenship would not be the very best thing for them.” What was “theoretically right may not be practically possible;” if mistaken, the “error is one of philosophy rather than of morals.”⁵³ It was a position which, when articulated, appeared to mollify Wellington Jeffers. Subsequently, he might “still differ from the *Wesleyan*“ as to the route which abolition should follow, but he was satisfied that “so excellent and truly Wesleyan a paper could not be an advocate for the continuance of slavery.”⁵⁴

The difference between the two editors reveals the differing historical heritages of Wesleyan Methodism in the Maritimes and central Canada. In the latter region, where the influence of the American Methodist Episcopal church was an ongoing reality, Wesleyan Methodists were more open to religious and political ideas from the United States. Without the conservatism which directed John McMurray, Wellington Jeffers did not explicitly link republicanism to slavery and the war, and instead saw the war as

⁵³ *Wesleyan*, December 21, 1864.

a moral struggle against slavery best resolved through a strengthened and reformed American Union.

Jeffers displayed considerable concern for the war's potential effects on American religion and society. In his reply to Toronto Baptist minister H. Grattan Guinness, who, early in 1861, had published a pamphlet concluding that true Christians had no place participating in the American conflict, Jeffers maintained that "neither scripture nor history" supported such a claim. Jeffers exonerated Americans who fought in the war, arguing that "the sin of war is wholly on those rulers who provoke it, or engage in it when it can be avoided." Furthermore, since he saw the war as a means to eradicate slavery, he viewed it as a just war, noting that it was "not contrary to duty nor to Christianity for a person to bear arms under the Government, for the defence of his country in a just cause, for the suppression of an unwarrantable rebellion, or for the punishment of evil doers."⁵⁵

Jeffers' acceptance of the war as a necessary means of eradicating Southern slavery aided him in coming to terms with a considerable dilemma faced by religious leaders during the conflict. Both North and South identified themselves as Christian societies, sought Biblical justification for their participation in the war, and accordingly employed rhetoric during the war which suggested that theirs was the cause nearest to God's wishes. Though the *Guardian* solidly favoured the North in the contest, Jeffers' religious frame of reference allowed him to admire "the sincerity of the christian

⁵⁴ *Guardian*, June 4, 1865.

⁵⁵ *Guardian*, March 12, 1862. Entitled *On the duty of Christians in the present crisis*, Guinness' position precluded participation in the defense of one's country, or, within the context of contemporary events, participation in the suppression of civil rebellion

people of the South.” He admitted that the concept of both North and South praying for the defeat of the other was “perplexing,” but maintained that “though one’s own government may not have taken the correct...position on the disputed question,” all Americans “ought still to pray for the preservation and welfare” of their nation. To pray “in the spirit of envious rivalry” or “with a feeling of hatred,” regardless of the cause, was sinful; to pray “in a spirit of philanthropy, that the world, the cause of human progress, may reap advantage from the result of the conflict” was the proper concern of Americans as well as “Christians of other nations, who are spectators of this awful strife.”⁵⁶ Here Jeffers, free of the sharp political bias which affected McMurray’s interpretation of the war, could focus his view of the war as an event of religious and moral as well as political importance. Potentially, the Civil War might end slavery and, as the postmillennial tone of Jeffers’ commentary indicates, aid in the religious regeneration of the United States.

The war, however, might also impede the progress of religion in the United States. Jeffers argued that “allowing religion to lose ground while attending to the war” was potentially “the greatest of the nation’s perils.”⁵⁷ While “the sermons, prayers, and writing of American Christians have been chiefly employed upon the necessities of the present struggle,” he feared that “the salvation of souls and the spirituality of the churches almost seemed likely to be forgotten.” Of similar concern was the fact that while the United States’ religious leaders had diverted their attention to the war, the nation’s politicians had also deemed the role of religion to be of secondary importance

⁵⁶ *Guardian*, August 3, 1864.

to the war's military goals. Commenting in 1863 on a "very curious debate" in which the United States Senate denied the exemption of clergymen for active military duty in the Federal army, Jeffers argued that the North's government was actually endangering the nation by neglecting spiritual guidance at the expense of military service. Rather than concerning itself with augmenting the North's military ranks,

It would have been a proper inquiry for these sage Senators, whether clergymen would not be more useful to the nation, and a better support of the national spirit in the war, if employed in exercising the proper functions of their office--whether, indeed, those functions are not absolutely necessary in time of war, to prevent the ruin of the country, by the increase of wickedness among the soldiers and the people.⁵⁸

Thus, despite his optimistic view that the Civil War would end slavery and might potentially provide for the spiritual regeneration of the United States, he was alarmed that pragmatic military and political considerations would turn the nation's attention away from what he viewed as an era of religious potential and significant social change.

Jeffers, as editor of the *Christian Guardian*, reflected the Anglo-American influences on Wesleyan Methodism in central Canada. Without a historical heritage which sharply moved the denomination toward political conservatism, as in the Maritimes, central Canadian Wesleyans such as Jeffers were more prone to assess a nation's value in terms of its concordance with religious values rather than viewing its political system as a cause of the conflict. Coupled with a view of slavery as the central issue of the war, Jeffers interpreted the war and its causes far differently than his fellow Wesleyan editor John McMurray. The roots of slavery lay in the South's

⁵⁷ *Guardian*, November 26, 1862.

particular social system, rather than American republicanism. Thus unlike McMurray, whose political conservatism moved him to view disunion as an acceptable means of ending the war and bringing about gradual emancipation, Jeffers held that the abolition of slavery must be attained as quickly as possible within the context of Northern victory and a strong American Union. From this perspective his views paralleled those of Methodists in the North who associated Northern victory with the moral reformation of the United States. This position also moved Jeffers to criticize publicly McMurray for his views, and to assure Methodist critics in the United States that the *Guardian* most accurately represented British North American Methodist opinion on the Civil War. Finally, Jeffers' moderate view of the United States' form of government and public opposition to McMurray must be seen in the light of the Wesleyan Methodist history in central Canada and of the denomination's continuing competition for recognition by the American church, with whom it had historic ties.

James Richardson and the *Canada Christian Advocate*

The Methodist Episcopal Church was the second largest group of Methodists in central Canada at the time of the American Civil War. James Richardson, editor of the denominational *Canada Christian Advocate*, was influenced in his interpretation of the war by his own denomination's close ties to the American sister church. As noted, this branch of the denomination was, until 1864, in competition with the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Canada for recognition and support from the American Methodist Episcopal Church. This tension between Wesleyans and Methodist Episcopalians in central Canada reflected a deeper ideological difference between the two

⁵⁸ *Guardian*, March 25, 1863.

groups. After 1833 the continuing Methodist Episcopal Church in Canada viewed itself as the true heir of Methodism, a perspective which reflected its preference for the episcopal form of denominational organization originally established in the region. Methodist Episcopalals, whose form of church government was the same as that of the American Methodist Episcopal Church, feared that central Canadian Wesleyans had allied themselves too closely with the province's Tory hierarchy in their efforts to disassociate Methodism from elements of political radicalism in the province.⁵⁹

Both of these influences moved Methodist Episcopalals in central Canada to strengthen their denominational ties to the United States and to view that nation and its political issues through a lens less clouded by suspicion or hostility. Richardson did not condemn the United States for the role which its political institutions had played in contributing to the onset of the war, but preferred to assess the American Union as a moral agent for the emancipation of the South's slaves and for the spread of Christianity. Richardson's views on the Civil War lacked hostility toward the North and its war aims, and instead emphasized the maintenance of the American Union as an effective means of emancipating the South's slaves. His support of the North and its political strategy during the war distinguished him from John McMurray of the *Provincial Wesleyan* and his critical portrayal of the defects of the United States' government and constitution. Richardson's views were largely consistent with those expressed by Wellington Jeffers of the *Guardian*. However, as will be discussed shortly, the ties between American and Canadian Methodist Episcopalals, and the

⁵⁹ Semple, *Lord's Dominion*, 91.

history of Methodism history in the region, left Richardson's Civil War commentary open to criticism from Jeffers.

The issue of slavery was of primary interest to Richardson throughout the war. To Richardson, the start of the war prompted a renewed, closer examination of Southern slavery. The *Canada Christian Advocate*, in a lengthy examination of the details of Biblical slavery, concluded that "no two things on earth can be more unlike, both in principle and practice, than Hebrew and Negro Slavery."⁶⁰ The South's religious leaders, attempting to justify Southern secession, were quickly targeted as playing a significant role in the defense of slavery.

Significantly, Richardson was convinced that preservation of the Union and the emancipation of the nation's slaves were symmetrical, inseparable goals. The *Advocate*, arguing that the Confederacy was motivated solely by the desire to preserve slavery, insisted that fighting for the nation and fighting for the freedom of slaves were one and the same. It was "undeniable, that not to allow the slave States to retire in such an emergency, and for such a purpose, but to insist on the preservation of the Union, is exactly equivalent to a war against slavery."⁶¹ With the Northern government's announcement of the Emancipation Proclamation after the North's victory at Antietam in the autumn of 1862, the *Advocate* announced that Lincoln had "aimed a heavy blow at the head of the Slave Dragon." There was no equivocating in the position that "Slavery in America, or the American Union must fall. They can no

⁶⁰ *Canada Christian Advocate*, March 6, 1861.

⁶¹ *Advocate*, June 12, 1861.

longer live together.”⁶² Here, his emphasis on the Union as central to the abolition of slavery paralleled the view of fellow central Canadian Methodist editor Wellington Jeffers.

Richardson, in common with Methodists in the North, regarded Lincoln’s administration as a help, rather than a hindrance, in regard to the principal issues involved in the Civil War. Fighting to suppress the Confederate rebellion was, in his opinion, synonymous with a fight against slavery. From this perspective, Richardson’s commentary, like that of Jeffers, followed American Methodist trends closely. Reflecting Northern Methodist sentiment that the South’s defence of slavery was the cause of the war, Richardson regarded the Federal government in a positive light for its effort to maintain the Union. A united American nation was, to Richardson, essential to ensuring that the United States’ religious prosperity would continue. It was, furthermore, essential to the nation’s moral condition; a separate Confederacy based on slavery would only propagate an immoral institution which was unacceptable to Richardson. As with Jeffers, herein lay a significant difference in perspective between Richardson and Maritimer John McMurray, who argued that the roots of the war were to be found within the United States’ political framework. The seeds of war were not inherent in republicanism, as McMurray had argued, but lay instead in the “ungratified selfishness” of the Southern states. For Richardson, the seceding states, “with paracidal hands,” had “rent the goodly Union, cemented in the wisdom, and by the blood of their forefathers.”⁶³

⁶² *Advocate*, October 15, 1862.

The American form of government, then, was not an agent of enslavement but rather the most promising means by which abolition might be attained. It was a position which Richardson articulated clearly with the re-election of Abraham Lincoln to a second term as American president in November 1864. Calling Lincoln's re-election "a triumph of freedom," Richardson declared that the "President's new lease" would "not end till 'liberty and union' are one." Canadian Methodist Episcopal, he added, had "faith in the Republican party, faith in their principles, faith in their President, and unfaltering faith in the God of battles and of justice who maketh the wrath of men to praise Him, and bringeth the counsels of the ungodly to naught."⁶⁴ James Richardson's acceptance and endorsement of the North's government, and its explicit goal of fighting to restore the Union, derived from his view of the American government as an institution which could enhance and preserve morals and strengthen America as a Christian country, rather than lead to internal division.

Richardson and Jeffers agreed on the importance of maintaining the American Union as a means of abolishing slavery. However, within the context of Wesleyan-Methodist Episcopal competition for recognition by the parent American church, the two editors disagreed sharply as to political leaning which characterized Methodists in central Canada. In 1864, with the heightening of Anglo-American tensions during the war, views of the United States became a divisive issue among Wesleyans and Methodist Episcopal in the region. This exchange of opinion between the *Guardian* and the *Advocate*, separate from Jeffers' previous engagement of Maritime editor John

⁶³ *Advocate*, February 27, 1861.

⁶⁴ *Advocate*, November 23, 1864.

McMurray, allowed both central Canadian Methodist editors to clarify their political views against the backdrop of the Civil War.

The *Guardian's* criticism of the political perspective of Canadian Methodist Episcopalians was prompted by an editorial in the *Northern Advocate*, an American Methodist Episcopal journal which, in discussing the recognition of Canadian Methodist Episcopalians, noted the continued hostility of Wesleyan journals in British North America to the Northern cause. *Northern Advocate* editor Dallas Lore, an ardent abolitionist,⁶⁵ noted that, unlike British North America's Wesleyan periodicals, the Canadian Methodist Episcopal Church had "always sympathized with us heartily and honestly, and has unhesitatingly expressed it." In supporting the Northern war effort, the *Northern Advocate* praised Canadian Methodist Episcopalians for having "imbibed...the spirit of American liberality." The *Guardian*, which carried the *Northern Advocate* editorial, took these remarks as a chance to make a distinction between the political views of Canadian Wesleyans and Methodist Episcopalians. "The *Northern*," Jeffers stated,

...thinks the Episcopalians in Canada are more *American*, and better *republicans*, than the Wesleyans. This may be; we are rather inclined to think it is so. The Wesleyans love the British Constitution better than Republicanism; even while they greatly admire American progress, and feel a very ardent love for the Methodist Church in the United States.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Victor B. Howard, *Religion and the Radical Republican Movement 1860-1870* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1990), 204.

⁶⁶ *Advocate*, September 14, 1864.

As Jeffers' words show, the residue from this acrimonious period in central Canadian Methodist history still affected Wesleyan-Methodist Episcopal relations two decades later, despite significant changes in the region's political atmosphere.

Richardson, however, would make no apology against Jeffers' accusation that the American Methodist Episcopal Church had recognized Methodist Episcopalians in central Canada because of the Canadian denomination's political outlook. He noted that the American and British governments were yet on peaceful terms, "notwithstanding the unreasonable and unchristianlike agitation of the press on both sides of the Atlantic." Richardson pointed to examples of Anglo-American co-operation and suggested that republicanism was not at all incompatible with Christianity. Indeed, he frankly stated that it was a sentiment which Canadian Methodism as a whole should endorse. "If this be the 'spirit of American liberality'," wrote Richardson,

...we care not how much our membership and our whole country "imbibe" it, and we trust our contemporary will pardon us for suggesting that they too become heavy importers. The *Guardian* call this *republicanism*. We call it christian charity, and are glad to know that it characterizes the greatest monarchy as well as the greatest republic the world ever saw. We trust the day is far distant when it shall be otherwise.⁶⁷

Richardson's support of the United States' government indicates the influence of American religious and political ideals on central Canadian Methodism during the period. Furthermore, Jeffers' criticism of Richardson reveals the extent to which religious opinion in the United States affected relations among Methodists in central Canada, even though the discussion centred on the Civil War and its issues.

⁶⁷ *Advocate*, September 14, 1864.

In summary, James Richardson's interpretation of the American Civil War was, in many respects, quite similar to that of *Christian Guardian* editor Wellington Jeffers. Like Jeffers, he viewed slavery as the central issue of the conflict, the fault of which lay with the South's social system rather than the United States' republican form of government. As such, he viewed the North's war strategy and emancipation as essentially similar goals. Maintaining the American Union by suppressing the political goals of the Confederacy was tantamount to a fight against slavery. Like Jeffers, then, his view of the conflict and its fundamental issues differed substantially from that of Maritime Wesleyan John McMurray. However, within the context of discussing the war, significant differences arose between Jeffers and Richardson which related to the history of Methodism in central Canada. The pressures of Wesleyan-Methodist Episcopal competition for recognition by the parent American Methodist church, compounded by historical perceptions of central Canadian Methodist sympathy for American political and religious ideas, led Jeffers to question openly Richardson's political sympathies. Importantly, this debate was instigated by external, not internal, pressures; Jeffers' criticism of Richardson was spurred largely by favourable commentary toward Canadian Methodist Episcopalians by an American Methodist editor. The extent to which commentary on American events could be related to divisions within central Canadian Methodism highlights the close religious and political relationship between American and Canadian Methodism during the mid-nineteenth century. As well, these views indicate the tenuous balance between American and British religious and political ideas which affected Canadian Methodism during the period.

Conclusion

Whereas Free Church Presbyterian views on the American Civil War were influenced by the nature of that denomination's recent history in British North America, Methodists in the Maritimes and central Canada possessed a more diverse religious and historical heritage which led to a regional division in interpretations of the conflict. Halifax editor John McMurray argued that the United States' political system was responsible for accommodating Southern slavery, the most pressing issue of the conflict. His view of the moral issue of slavery, and of the nature which abolitionism should assume within the context of the war, was influenced by a politically conservative outlook which derived from Maritime Methodism's close organizational relationship with British Methodism. In central Canada, however, Wesleyan editor Wellington Jeffers and Methodist Episcopal editor James Richardson were influenced by a historical heritage which included American as well as British influences. Each viewed slavery and the South's political struggle to maintain the institution through independence as the central issue of the war. Furthermore, each commented on American events in an atmosphere in which Wesleyans and Methodist Episcopalians in the region competed for recognition by the parent American Methodist church. These factors precluded them from explicitly linking republicanism to slavery. Like Methodists in the Northern states, they saw Lincoln's attempt to maintain the American Union as essential to the abolition of slavery. Here the agreement between the two editors ended. Wesleyan editor Jeffers, sensitive to historical perceptions of Canadian Methodist loyalty to Britain, used the Civil War as a backdrop against which to shed an unfavourable light on the province's Methodist Episcopalians by insinuating

that the American Methodist Episcopal Church's recent recognition of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Canada was due to the ease with which Richardson and the denomination he represented looked on American political ideals.

Chapter Four—Baptists

Baptists in British North America, much like Methodists, were influenced by different historical heritages when commenting on the American Civil War. The denomination's membership included Maritimers influenced by both American religious movements of the late eighteenth century, converts from Anglicanism, American Baptists who migrated in significant numbers into the western portion of central Canada in the first half of the nineteenth century, and British-influenced Baptists who settled in the eastern part of central Canada. These differences were reflected in the editorial positions on the war put forward by the *Christian Messenger*, published in Halifax, the *New Brunswick Baptist and Christian Visitor*, published in Fredericton, and the *Canadian Baptist*, published in Toronto. Like Methodists, their views of the war were shaped simultaneously by both American and British North American events. As with Methodists, these differing backgrounds led to significant regional differences in commentary on the war.

Maritime Baptists—Stephen Seldon of the *Christian Messenger* and Ingraham Bill of the *Christian Visitor*

Maritime Baptists were served by two periodicals, the *Christian Messenger*, edited by Stephen Seldon, and the *New Brunswick Baptist and Christian Visitor*, edited by Ingraham Ebenezer Bill. Like Methodists in the region, the historical experience of Baptists in the Maritime provinces directly affected the editors' interpretation of events and issues surrounding the American conflict. The two editors offered a sharp critique of both North and South, and engaged the American Baptist press as well as Maritime readers in debate over the war's causes, issues, and implications.

Social reform was of considerable interest to the denomination; as several studies have noted, Baptists were among the foremost supporters of temperance in the Maritimes.¹ The Baptist desire for moral improvement in society was not confined to temperance, but included calls to end slavery. With the onset of the American Civil War, both Seldon and Bill explicitly referred to Southern slavery as a moral blight which had caused the war and which was key to its resolution. Similar to Baptists in the Northern states, both editors saw the war as the result of Providential intervention in American affairs for the purpose of ending the institution of Southern slavery.² From this perspective, both emphasized that religious institutions in the United States had played a significant role in propagating slavery, as well as having a key place in its abolition.

Bill contrasted the positions of Northern and Southern religious figures on slavery in order to offer a postmillennial vision of a slave-free United States. He praised, for example, the address of the Episcopal Rev. Stephen Tyng to the New York Bible Society in 1861, the theme of which concentrated on Southern slavery as the cause of the war. To Bill, Tyng's abolitionist stance was a "noble and manly declaration of free and righteous principles," and he lamented that "would to God that all Ministers and laymen were equally consistent and clear as to the great guilt and sin of Slavery." Here, he pointed out what he saw as the hypocrisy of the South's churches and clergy on the slavery issue. It required "little effort to discover the inconsistency of a church...whose Discipline declares Slavery to be the 'sum of all villainies,' but many of

¹ Noel, Canada Dry, 23-25; Acheson, Saint John, 146.

whose papers...admit column after column of articles in defense of the vilest system of iniquity." Bill's vision of the desired outcome of the war was clear; the "noblest results of the present difficulty" would lead to "*a land without a slave in it.*" When the United States was "no more...injured by the spectacle of a christian nation trafficking in the liberty, the blood, and the life of human beings," the world would "see the dawn of that long predicted and glorious period, when all shall know the Lord from the least to the greatest, and man shall recognize in his fellow-man only a friend and a brother."³

Seldon, from his vantage point in Halifax, recognized the considerable role played by the South's churches in supporting the Confederacy's drive for political independence. Historians have argued that the South's clergy, by defending slavery as an integral part of Southern culture, made independence more acceptable to Southerners by investing the political act of secession with religious meaning.⁴ Seldon was more apt, however, to point out the detrimental impact upon religion in the South. His view paralleled that of Northern evangelicals who argued that the Southern Christian defence of slavery was a perversion of their faith. Reacting to the explicit support given to the Confederacy by Southern Christians, he wrote that "one of the worst symptoms of this most unhappy catastrophe" was the "deep perversion of religious feeling which seems universally to pervade the Southern churches." Nova Scotia Baptists, he wrote, "dare[d] not believe that the pious...of the South, many of them esteemed hitherto among the excellent of the earth, have in reality abandoned

² For Baptist anti-slavery thought in the Northern states, see Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform, 199, 214; Goen, Broken Churches, Broken Nation, 92-94; Snay, Gospel of Disunion, 135.

³ *New Brunswick Baptist and Christian Visitor*, May 29, 1861.

some of the plainest precepts of their faith, and given themselves over to be the willing tools of an ungodly political party, whose very watchword is Mammon.”⁵

Both editors’ opposition to slavery and to those Southerners who defended it did not, however, translate into unqualified support for the North during the war. While both Bill and Seldon solidly opposed the South’s interests in the conflict, they tended toward a critique of the United States as a whole, a position characterized by a sweeping perceived relationship between the United States’ form of government, slavery, and the onset of war.

The editors’ political perspective on the American conflict was influenced by the context in which both men wrote; Seldon worked in Halifax, while Bill edited in Fredericton. The urban environment in which both men worked, and its particular relationship to Baptists in the Maritimes significantly affected the ideas which both men attached to the conflict. Understanding how a denomination influenced heavily by American religious beliefs came to adopt a strongly “British” view of the American Civil War becomes clearer when it is understood that urban Maritime Baptists were influenced considerably by conservative forms of thought during the period. Significantly, a number of prominent Baptist religious and political figures of the mid-nineteenth century were, in fact, former Anglicans.⁶

⁴ Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*, 214-216.

⁵ *Messenger*, April 17, 1861.

⁶ In 1824, the Reverend John Thomas Twining of St. Paul’s Anglican Church in Halifax, in disagreement with Bishop John Inglis over Twining’s evangelical leanings, led his congregation out of the Anglican fold. Though most of the seceders eventually returned, the remaining dissenters formed their own congregation and were recognized as a Baptist church in 1827. The fact that some Halifax Baptists were former Anglicans had a profound effect on urban Maritime Baptist political ideology. The newly-minted Granville Street Church, while Baptist in name, was characterized by a

Compounding the political conservatism which a number of urban Maritime Baptists inherited from their Anglican roots was an effort by the denomination's second generation to adopt the sheen of middle-class respectability. Though the historiography of this phase of Baptist change has focused primarily on the denomination's recognition of the need for higher education,⁷ the conservative shift within urban Maritime Baptist ideology also reflected a process of reconciliation with the colonial political and religious establishments of Maritime Canada. With the move toward religious voluntarism in British North America by the mid-nineteenth century, and as Baptists became a more visible presence in urban Maritime society, they in turn

membership which was generally urban, conservative, and loyal to Britain in outlook. Members of the Halifax elite abounded in the congregation, among whom James William Johnston, lawyer and future premier of Nova Scotia, was most prominent. Johnston's membership in the congregation speaks volumes about the changing social position and political perspective of urban Maritime Baptists. The leading biographer of Nova Scotia Reformer Joseph Howe, for example, has described Johnston as one of the leading members of Halifax's influential and conservative alliance between Baptists and the Tory party. See Judith Fingard, "John Thomas Twining," *DCB* 8: 901-2; D.A. Sutherland, "James William Johnston," *DCB* 10: 383-88; J. Murray Beck, Joseph Howe: Volume I, Conservative Reformer 1804-1848 (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1982) 249, 253. Bill has been described as a "transitional" figure in the development of Maritime Baptist ideology during the nineteenth century. See Jonathan Wilson, "Leading the 'New Epoch': Charles Tupper, Ingram Bill, Richard Burpe and the Regular Baptists of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island, 1800-1850" (MA thesis, Queen's University, 1995) 71. Importantly, Bill took pains later in life to portray Johnston not only as a firm Baptist but as a Tory who emphasized responsible government rather than republican excess. On Johnston's political views, Bill noted that he "freely recogniz[ed] the right of the people, through their representatives, to control public affairs, yet he desired that changes so radical as those sought in the political constitution, should be made with caution and efficiently guarded, in order that the rights of all might be respected, and liberty be in no danger of degenerating into license, or being converted into an engine of oppression." See Ingraham Ebenezer Bill, Fifty years with the baptist ministers and churches of the maritime provinces of Canada (Saint John, 1880), 266-269.

⁷ Clark, Church and Sect, 253; Barry M. Moody, "Breadth of Vision, Breadth of Mind: The Baptists and Acadia College," in Canadian Baptists and Christian Higher Education G.A. Rawlyk, ed. (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988) 16.

were decreasingly viewed as the “ultimate dissenters” and moved to adopt many of the political views previously held largely by the Maritime’s Anglican establishment.⁸

This conservative perspective influenced both editors’ interpretations of the social and political issues involved in the American conflict. Again, as with Free Church Presbyterians and Wesleyan Methodists in the region, the editors’ political conservatism caused them to see the war differently from many Northern evangelicals. Thus, though Seldon and Bill, in common with a vast number of Protestants in the North, viewed slavery as the key issue of the conflict, their political conservatism precluded them from sharing the deep affinity for the American Union felt by many Northern evangelicals.

Seldon and Bill, like Maritime Free Church Presbyterians and Methodists, held that republicanism in the United States led toward excess and self-interest. Bill, assessing the state of Christianity in the world at the beginning of 1861, described American government as a form of extremism *on par* with that of China and Italy. In each nation the “immutable principles of social, civil, and religious liberty” were “struggling for...mastery over the crushing influence of despotic monarchy on one hand, and of democratic tyranny on the other.”⁹ Seldon argued that republicanism ultimately worked against a nation’s liberty and interests. In the current “conflict of passion and power,” he hoped there might result a “diminution of the boasting so prevalent in that really great country, and more charity towards other countries where less of power is

⁸ Acheson, *Saint John*, 119, 136; Nancy Christie, “In These Times of Democratic Rage and Delusion”: Popular Religion and the Challenge to the Established Order, 1760-1815,” in *The Canadian Protestant Experience 1760 to 1990* G.A. Rawlyk, ed. (Burlington: Welch Publishing, 1990) 42.

in the hands of the people--where constitutional monarchy exercises its checks to hasty legislation....”

To Seldon, republicanism in the United States had traditionally fostered the nations’ desire for territorial expansion. The Civil War, then, was seen to be a check to both the nation’s political system as well as on its self-held idea of “manifest destiny” over the North American continent. Historically, both North and South had “suppose[d] that republicanism is in advance of all others, to secure freedom for the subject.” This assumption drew from “the ambition to combine under one flag, the vast American continent.” It was an ambition which was currently being “severely rebuked...we know not at present within what limits the wings of the great eagle will in future be confined.”¹⁰

Both editors’ critical view of republicanism as a form of government led them to question the motives of the Federal government during the war. Like Maritime Methodist editor John McMurray, Bill and Seldon held that the North’s stated purpose of fighting to restore the American Union was detrimental to the struggle for abolition. Rather, to fight to reinstate the Union was to return to the political and social *status quo* which, in their view, had historically accommodated slavery.

Such views did not go unheeded in the American press. Bill, in an exchange of opinion with a Baptist periodical in the United States, the *Watchman and Reflector*, of Boston, argued that he could not condone the North’s war measures if they simply reinstated the pre-war social and political order in the nation. Thereupon, the

⁹ *Visitor*, January 9, 1861.

¹⁰ *Messenger*, May 29, 1861.

American journal, echoing a widespread Northern view that British North Americans were reluctant to support the North because of a desire to see England intervene militarily on behalf of the South, accused the *Visitor* of holding a similar sentiment. Not so, argued Bill: the *Visitor's* desire was for England to “continue perfectly neutral” in the conflict. If abolition was the North’s motive for fighting, then “would England and her colonies give to the North their deepest and warmest sympathies.” Bill, however, saw the war as an effort by the North “simply to compel the South to remain under the Stars and Stripes with its ‘peculiar institution’ in full operation, thus retaining slavery under the protection of the national wing.” If the North was fighting to preserve the union, and its republican ideals, at the expense of allowing the continuation of Southern slavery, he could “not perceive why there should be disappointment or vexation when English or Colonial sympathy is withheld.”¹¹

Bill went further and argued that the American constitution was a political device which historically had accommodated slavery. The North’s current attempt to restore the Union would, if successful, only reinstate a political system which sustained the immoral institution. This position attracted the attention of a second American paper. In January 1862, the Chicago *Christian Times* characterized Bill as “sympathizing with, fondling and coddling the rank pro-slaveryism” of the South, and claimed that he rationalized this perceived support of the South by proclaiming “the pro-slavery character of our Government.” Bill responded to this accusation by outlining his understanding of the historical relationship between slavery and the American constitution. Pre-war measures such as the Missouri Compromise and the Fugitive

Slave Law were measures which “had their origin in the *compromise* which was made in the original Constitution.” The “Union between the Northern and Southern States,” as he termed it, was “based upon the law of compromise between slavery and freedom.” Furthermore, “all subsequent compromises to uphold and perpetuate the gigantic abomination...were but natural outgrowths of the original compact.” Hence, Bill argued, a previous generation of Northern politicians such as Daniel Webster had been compelled to acquiesce to Southern slaveholders in order to preserve the Union. Webster “saw plainly that his *idolized Union* could only be preserved by throwing the wing of the nation’s power over the *idolized Institution* of the South.” President Lincoln, argued Bill, might be regarded in the same light as previous Northern politicians who had failed to come to terms with the South’s domination of American government. Lincoln and his cabinet “may be anti-slavery men, for ought we know,” concluded Bill,” but so long as they fight for the old Constitution as it was, so long will they be regarded by disinterested spectators as fighting for the perpetuation of human thralldom.” He concluded that any American conflict fought for union, and not abolition, was indirectly complying with the preservation of Southern slavery. The solution he advocated for ending the crisis grew directly from his conservative political ideology, which placed little value in republicanism as a form of government. Reforming American government during the present crisis, argued Bill, was a means of moving toward abolition. Southern rebellion “has given the North the golden opportunity of remodeling the Constitution upon an anti-slavery basis, why not

¹¹ *Visitor*, September 11, 1861.

embrace it at once, and give to the world a model government? Do this, and British sympathy will be no longer withheld.”¹²

Seldon, like Bill, opposed the North’s motive of fighting to restore the American Union. However, whereas Bill advocated reforming the United States’ form of government during the war, Seldon, like Maritime Methodist editor John McMurray, explicitly argued that the American union be dissolved in order to hasten the end of slavery. He questioned whether it was justifiable to fight for “a Constitution of which a leading principle goes to sap and poison every essential of human freedom...which has brought reproach upon the fair names of Union and Liberty in the eyes of the world.” Instead, it would be “infinitely more wise and consistent for the North to seize the opportunity and dissolve at once the unholy union that for years past has only engendered injustice, hatred, and violence.” Such a division, which he conceded would be a “bitter sacrifice for a powerful and ambitious nation like the United States,” would ultimately work against slavery; the institution would “receive a far heavier blow by the entire isolation of the South...than by the restoration of a system, where in effect ...the whole country was compromised as Slave owners, or abettors.”¹³ Seldon, unfettered by any affection for the American constitution, saw the sectional division of the United States as the most pragmatic means by which to bring about resolution to the issue which he, as a Maritime Baptist, considered vital: the quickest possible emancipation of the South’s slaves.¹⁴

¹² *Visitor*, January 29, 1862.

¹³ *Messenger*, October 9, 1861.

Not all Maritime Baptists, however, agreed with the editors' perception of the relationship between republicanism, slavery, and the war. One correspondent to the *Christian Messenger*, signing himself "A.C." and writing from King's County, Nova Scotia, disagreed with Seldon's view of republicanism and the North's war strategy. Importantly, however, this correspondent, like the editors, spoke from the perspective of a Maritime Baptist deeply concerned with the moral issue of slavery.

To "A.C.," the preservation of the American Union was a worthy end in itself, given what he saw as the benefits of republicanism in the United States. In his words, the

*... Life of the American Nation; the Protection of a liberal Constitution; the defense and permanent establishment of a free and good government; of wholesome law and order, are the objects for which twenty millions of that nation are now worthily struggling.*¹⁵ [italics his]

To this commentator, then, the American Constitution was a political device which would guarantee the utmost amount of freedom for the people of the United States.

Importantly, "A.C." saw the North's fight to restore the American Union as a fundamental step toward the abolition of Southern slavery. He identified Southern independence with the expansion and preservation of slavery; its rebellion had been "boldly declared a crusade for the *extension* of slavery." To maintain the Union, then, was to oppose directly "the mainspring of the Southern Rebellion." He was further convinced that the North in its determination to suppress Southern secession

¹⁴ For further insight into Seldon's view of dividing America as a resolution to the war, see the *Messenger*, August 13, 1862.

¹⁵ *Messenger*, March 12, 1862.

increasingly viewed the war as a fight against slavery as well as to prevent the political disintegration of the United States. A “very marked change,” he commented,

...has come over them, *especially in respect to slavery*. Christian--and worldly-men now see God's hand visibly beckoning them to wipe out at once and forever from their nation the foul curse of slavery, *and their determination is steadily growing to see that it be done.*¹⁶ [italics his]

To maintain the political integrity of the United States, then, was to suppress the South's political and social goal of preserving slavery. The views of “A.C.” indicate the differing interpretations which Maritime Baptists attached to the war. While he and the editors each focused on slavery as the main issue of the war, they differed substantially as to the role which the United States' form of government played in either accommodating Southern slavery or in actively suppressing the South's pro-slavery political ambitions.

In their commentary on the war, the editors of the *Messenger* and the *Visitor* reflected their own particular views as Maritime Baptists. Politically conservative, both Bill and Seldon emphasized the relationship they saw between American republicanism, slavery, and the North's fight for union. This position was, however, interpreted by some religious editors in the United States as implicit support for the South. And, as shown by a correspondent to one of the papers, the criticisms of the North and of its strategy during the war were not shared by all Maritime Baptists.

Central Canada--Robert Fyfe and Hoyes Lloyd of the *Canadian Baptist*

Similar to central Canadian Methodist editors, Baptist editors in the region were affected by both British and American influences when interpreting the American Civil

¹⁶ *Messenger*, March 26, 1862.

War. Like Presbyterian and Methodist editors, a postmillennial perspective caused them to assess the war as part of a greater moral struggle to eradicate slavery.

For this reason, when commenting on the American conflict Robert Fyfe and Hoyes Lloyd, who successively edited the Toronto-published *Canadian Baptist*, focused explicitly on slavery and the maintenance of British North American neutrality.

Central Canadian Baptists during the mid-nineteenth century were composed of two groups differing in geographical location, religious practice, and political outlook. In the eastern section of Canada West and in Canada East, a large number of Baptists were of British origin, the result of early nineteenth-century migration of British Baptists to the region. As John Webster Grant has noted, this group provided a disproportional amount of leadership to the denomination.¹⁷ In particular, these Baptists included a large number of well-educated members who sought out positions in the denomination's press and educational facilities as well as its pulpits.¹⁸ Central Canadian Baptists of British origin have been described as urban in outlook, typified by "cultural attainment,"¹⁹ and conservative in political ideology. At the same time, Baptists of British origin were more liberal in that they tended to favour the practice of open communion to include those baptized at birth.

A significant number of Baptists in central Canada, however, were influenced by the views and practices of Baptists in the United States. More rural in orientation,

¹⁷ Grant, *A Profusion of Spires*, 80, 232.

¹⁸ Robert S. Wilson, "British Influence in the Nineteenth Century," in *Baptists in Canada: Search for Identity Amidst Diversity* Jarold K. Zeman, ed. (Burlington: G.R. Welch Co., 1980) 34-37; Clark, *Church and Sect*, 230.

¹⁹ Clark, *Church and Sect*, 230.

these Baptists were concentrated geographically in the western portion of the province of Canada West. American Baptist missionary work in the area prior to the War of 1812 not only instilled religious practices in the western end of the province, in particular the restriction of communion to immersed believers, but passed along an ideology rooted in the American Revolution which heightened the emphasis on the separation of church and state.²⁰ Politically, many of these Baptists identified with reform movements in mid-nineteenth century Canadian politics.²¹

Fyfe and Loyd, editors of the *Canadian Baptist*, were aware of the distinct national influences on the denomination in central Canada. Fyfe, editor from 1859 to 1863, was of Scots descent and influenced by the British Baptist heritage of his native Quebec. Fyfe's formal education took place at both Canadian and American schools, in Montreal, Hamilton New York, and Worcester Massachusetts. While the majority of Fyfe's career work took place in Canada, between 1851 and 1855 he served as the pastor at Baptist churches in Rhode Island and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Fyfe held a versatile view of Baptist religious practice; one of the major efforts of his career was his attempt to reconcile the dispute between Baptists of eastern and western Canada over the issue of communion.²² Similarly, Hoyes Lloyd, who assumed editorship in 1863, was also exposed to both influences on central Canadian Baptism. Raised in Quebec, he received his formal education at the University of Rochester in New York

²⁰ Theo T. Gibson, Robert Alexander Fyfe: His Contemporaries and His Influence (Burlington: Welch, 1988) 29.

²¹ Clark, Church and Sect, 231.

²² F.T. Rosser, "Robert Alexander Fyfe," *DCB* 10: 295-96.

State and served in Baptist churches in Port Hope and Whitby, Canada West.²³ This exposure to the dual roots of central Canadian Baptists is important, for it precluded the editors from forming a politically conservative view of the issues of the conflict, as expressed by the Maritime Baptist editors. Rather, aware of the diversity of opinion within the body of Baptists in central Canada and, as will be seen, of historic perceptions of Baptist loyalty to Britain in the region, both editors emphasized slavery as central to the war while, against the backdrop of Anglo-American tensions during the war, they insisted on British North American neutrality in the conflict.

Fyfe's strong view of slavery as the defining moral issue of the war was consistent with his previous experience as a spokesman against slavery in both Canada and the United States. Already in 1845, at a Canada Baptist Union meeting in Beamsville, Canada West, Fyfe had moved a resolution strongly condemning slavery. His biographer notes that Fyfe also spoke out against slavery while a pastor in Rhode Island, where he undoubtedly was influenced by the postmillennial optimistic social outlook prevalent in the northern states during the period.²⁴

Consistent with his previous experience, then, a strong tone of moral opposition to the institution of Southern slavery and explicit support of the North in its war aims characterized the *Canadian Baptist's* interpretation of the conflict. Importantly, Fyfe's approval of the North depended on its government's recognition of slavery as the key issue of the war. When the Southern states began seceding from the Union in

²³ Harold U. Trinier, *A Century of Service* (Toronto: Board of Publication of the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec, 1954) 52.

²⁴ Gibson, *Robert Alexander Fyfe*, 190-191.

December 1860, Fyfe maintained that the North should not accede to Southern demands that the Fugitive Slave Act be upheld. It was his fear that the North might potentially make “some serious sacrifice to propitiate the Moloch of slavery” if it gave ground on the matter. If the North was

...actuated by *principle*--if they really think the fugitive slave law a hard and cruel enactment, and if they really want “no more slave territory”--we see not how they can “compromise” things to suit the South. They had better stand on the right.²⁵

Fyfe, viewing slavery as the key issue in the split between the North and the South, morally opposed any concession to the demands of the emerging Confederacy.

Fyfe’s interpretation of the political events surrounding the Civil War was further influenced by a moderate view of the United States which was rooted in his Baptist denomination’s Anglo-American heritage. His commentary on social and political issues in the United States may have been written with the denomination’s history in central Canada in mind. Baptists had long been associated with movements for political reform in the region.²⁶ It was popularly assumed by Anglicans and political conservatives who preferred a state-supported church that these movements were rooted in political ideals imported from the United States. Thus when political unrest in the region had erupted during 1837-38, Baptists had been wrongly assumed to have played a leading role in the disturbance because of their opposition to the privileges afforded to the province’s Anglican oligarchy.²⁷ In short, as a dissenting religious group, many of whom also held historic ties to Baptists in the United States, and in

²⁵ *Canadian Baptist*, December 20, 1860.

²⁶ Grant, *A Profusion of Spires*, 140, 146.

²⁷ Read, *The Rising in Western Upper Canada*, 189-191.

their vigorous calls for the separation of church and state, Baptists continued to be viewed with suspicion by those who measured the concept of loyalty according to the adherence to British social and political values.

The *Canadian Baptist's* view of the American conflict indicates that the issues of loyalty and political orientation were of ongoing concern to the denomination. Thus, political tensions between Britain and the United States within the context of the war offered the editors an opportunity to clarify their thoughts on the meaning of political loyalty from a Baptist perspective.

Fyfe offered a political position on the war within the context of the strained Anglo-American relations at the beginning of 1862 in the aftermath of the *Trent* affair. He chose to examine the issue at greater length and in more depth than the quick reaction to the incident which characterized much of the American, British, and British North American press, and used the event to discuss the meanings of nationalism and loyalty as he understood the concepts.

Fyfe was adamant that Britain and British North America maintain a neutral stance on the conflict despite the diplomatic tensions caused by the *Trent* incident. In response to those in Britain and Canada who saw the affair as sufficient provocation to declare war on the North, he argued that Canadian Baptists were "not of the number...who have adopted the motto, 'My country, right or wrong;' for we hold that *right* comes before love of country." Instead, he was convinced that for Britain, and by extension, British North America, to wage war against the Federal government was to support the ambitions of the slaveholding South. For Britain to engage the North in

war was to “believe, practically, all our professed dislike of slavery, and range ourselves on the side of the most ruthless slave system the world ever saw.” To Fyfe, it was unconscionable that Britain might fight “shoulder to shoulder with a power whose key-stone was perpetual slavery.”²⁸

Fyfe’s insistence that the *Trent* incident was insufficient reason for Britain to engage the United States in war mirrored the opinion of religious commentators generally in Britain who, unlike much of the secular press, argued that the affair must be peacefully resolved through negotiation.²⁹ Strongly committed to British neutrality in the conflict, Fyfe supported the care taken by the British and colonial Canadian governments in negotiating with the Federal government subsequent to the seizure of the *Trent*. This incident also offered him the opportunity to support the moderate course pursued by the British authorities by defining his understanding of the concepts of loyalty and nationalism.

Fyfe’s emphasis on British neutrality in the wake of the *Trent* incident, in consideration of the denomination’s history in central Canada, allowed him to offer a balanced commentary to Baptist readers of both a British and American background. Furthermore, on the surface he could discuss the concepts of nationalism and loyalty in reference to their religious meaning, while, by insisting on neutrality, he could effectively address critics of the denomination who had traditionally questioned the loyalty of Baptists in Canada. In the current political crisis he argued that the idea of

²⁸ *Canadian Baptist*, January 2, 1862.

²⁹ Daniel, “The Reaction of British Methodism to the Civil War and Reconstruction in America,” 14; Jenkins, *Britain and the War for the Union*, vol. one, 236. A general account of the Anglo-American negotiations resulting from the *Trent* affair can be found in chapters 8-10.

loyalty had “been made a kind of Shibboleth, by certain presses as well as persons in Canada.” As such, Canadian Baptists should ignore self-interested loyalty, the “loud tongued blatant loyalty which generally means ‘I am true to those that pay me best’.” Loyalty to government was conditional upon that government’s adherence to “truth and right.” It was, then, a mutual relationship between governor and governed within the framework of religious principles. From this perspective, Fyfe argued that Canadian Baptists could, in good conscience, support the actions of their colonial government during the *Trent* crisis. It was his view that

Men in Canada have every reason to be loyal, or true to their obligations to their Sovereign and their country, and especially is this true of those who profess to take the Bible as their standard. That great standard requires us, as individuals, and in our collective capacity, to do unto others as we would have them do unto us in like circumstances. The men who hold to this golden rule will stand true and firm when all the noisy and fire-eating and hireling loyalists will be each for himself.³⁰

Loyalty, defined by Fyfe against the backdrop of Anglo-American political tensions, was to be judged by its adherence to Christian ideals, and rested on specific views of principle and government. From this perspective, he argued that the Canadian government had taken a moderate and principled approach to relations with the United States. Furthermore, by defining loyalty in religious terms, Fyfe could assuage Baptist readers of both British and American heritages, as well as those in the province who might continue to suspect the denomination’s loyalty to Britain.

The *Baptist’s* emphasis on British neutrality continued after Fyfe was succeeded as editor by Hoyes Lloyd. In the face of further Anglo-American disputes resulting from

³⁰ *Canadian Baptist*, January 16, 1862.

the war, Lloyd consistently echoed his predecessor's emphasis on British and Canadian neutrality. In the autumn of 1864 the United States government announced that it was suspending the 1817 Rush-Bagot treaty banning armaments on Great Lakes ships. This move was a response to public pressure in the United States to take some prohibitive action against British North America after a number of border incidents during which Confederate agents used the provinces as a base from which to operate. The seizure of the *Chesapeake*, a Northern steamer, in December 1863 by a group of Confederate sympathizers on the hope that bringing the vessel into Nova Scotian waters would embroil Britain and the North in war, had angered public opinion in the North.³¹ So too did the Confederate attack on the Vermont village of St. Albans in the autumn of 1864 and the subsequent pursuit of the perpetrators by Northern border troops into nearby Canada East. While tensions were cooled by the Canadian government's passage of the Alien Act in February 1864 which limited Confederate activity in Canada,³² the abrogation of the Rush-Bagot accord indicated that the United States' government was taking an increasingly skeptical view of British North American assertions of neutrality.

The issue of the Rush-Bagot treaty prompted an editorial from Lloyd critical of those in Canada who he thought were threatening the provinces' neutrality by favouring one party or another in the conflict. The presence of "refugees from the South" and "disaffected skeddaddlers from the North," he argued, was due in part to

³¹ Winks, Canada and the United States, 244-264.

³² Waite, The Life and Times of Confederation, 151-152; Winks, Canada and the United States, 295-336.

the encouragement they received “by the tone of some of our leading journals, and the high Tory party generally.”³³ Implicit in this reference was the idea that political conservatives in the province were such pro-British nationalists that the opinions they voiced publicly could lead observers to conclude that Canadian sympathy in the war lay with the Confederate cause.³⁴ Lloyd agreed strongly with the Canadian government’s intention of maintaining neutrality in the conflict regardless of provocation, and contended that

...if the Canadian people be prompt and faithful, we have implicit confidence in our Government that every attempt to violate strict neutrality will be visited by swift retribution, and thus a great national calamity will be avoided.³⁵

Maintaining Canadian neutrality, then, was essential if the province were not to violate what appeared to be a delicate Anglo-American peace during this period.

The response of the *Canadian Baptist* to the American Civil War was shaped by the conviction that the Canadian government and people had a duty to attempt to uphold Anglo-American peace and British North American neutrality in the conflict. This position derived from the conviction of Robert Fyfe and Hoyes Lloyd that an Anglo-American conflict would implicitly ally Britain with the slaveholding South, an unacceptable option given their moral opposition to slavery. As well, keeping in mind those in central Canada who equated Baptists with disloyalty, the editors’ emphasis on neutrality allowed them to offer a definition of loyalty which stressed that political

³³ *Canadian Baptist*, December 18, 1864.

³⁴ Winks, *Canada and the United States*, 238-242; Fred Landon, *Western Ontario and the American Frontier* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1941) 209-210; Jenkins, 345; Careless, *Brown of the Globe: Statesman of Confederation*, 104-105.

³⁵ *Canadian Baptist*, December 18, 1864.

actions must be consistent with religious principles. Finally, the editors' insistence on neutrality would appease Baptist readers of both British and American heritages

Conclusion

Like Methodists, Maritime and central Canadian Baptist editors, working from different historical perspectives, offered regionally distinct assessments of the American Civil War. Maritime editors Stephen Seldon and Ingraham Bill, influenced by the historical development of the Baptist denomination in urban Halifax and Fredericton, were political conservatives who made an explicit link between slavery, the United States' republican form of government, and the Civil War. As such, they questioned the North's motives for fighting to maintain the Union, believing that such a course of action would only preserve the pre-war political and social *status quo* in the United States. However, as shown by the commentary of one reader, their views did not encompass the entire spectrum of Maritime Baptist thought on the war. In central Canada, taking a different position, Robert Fyfe and Hoyes Lloyd emphasized the necessity of British and British North American neutrality toward the war's two belligerents. With a historical heritage which included close ties to American Baptists, they did not focus specifically on republicanism as an underlying cause of the war. In their view, British neutrality in the conflict would preclude any alliance with the slaveholding South, an alliance which, as Baptists morally opposed to slavery, they could not countenance. Moreover, within the context of Anglo-American political tensions during the war they defined the concept of national loyalty in religious terms. This view limited, therefore, the extent to which the editors could endorse the

vociferous anti-Americanism put forward during the war by politically conservative Canadian periodicals.

Chapter Five—Conclusion

That the American Civil War was a watershed in the history and the development of the United States can easily be seen in retrospect. With the end of the conflict in April 1865, the nation's four years of civil strife had changed it irrevocably. Slavery, which had precipitated tremendous social and political division between the Northern and Southern states, had been abolished. The system of human bondage which so strongly stamped Southern culture, which enraged Northern moralists and proponents of free-soil labour, and which drove the nation's political debate through three tumultuous decades was decisively defeated. In the place of slavery, and an independent Confederacy, stood a victorious North militarily occupying the formerly rebellious states. Politically, the vision of the United States as a collection of loosely-organized states had been replaced, both in theory and in hard fact, by a reorganization of itself into a more cohesive political entity.

The war was also, however, an event of significance for observers in British North America. Canadian historiography has traditionally emphasized that the war's influence on British North America was one of shaping the political growth of the emerging Canadian nation. The conflict's inherent Anglo-American diplomatic tensions, compounded by the geographical proximity of the United States and British North America and by the North's sudden rise as a military power, moved politicians in Canada and the Maritimes as well as in Britain to unite the North American provinces into a single, autonomous political state capable of resisting assimilation into the United States.

This historiographical emphasis on the Civil War as an event to which British North America reacted for pragmatic reasons of self-preservation has, however, largely obscured any discussion of the ideas which observers in Canada and the Maritimes applied to, or took from, the American conflict. Historians examining the ideological relationship between provincial observers and the war have dwelt largely on the politicians who used the American conflict as confirmation of previously-held conceptions about the defects of the American political system. Closer examination should be made, however, of the commentary written on the war by the editors of Free Church Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist periodicals in the Maritimes and central Canada.

As this paper has shown, Protestant editors in British North America were quick to apply their particular religious views to their interpretation of the Civil War. Chief among the ideas influencing Protestant editors in British North America when they interpreted the war was the evangelical postmillennial optimism which moved each of the editors to view the war primarily as a sectional struggle over the moral issue of slavery. The idea that the eradication of social sin was a necessary precursor to Christ's return moved evangelical Protestants to agitate for the end of slavery throughout the much of Anglo-American world. That these British North American editors, from a variety of denominational, historical, and regional backgrounds, could commonly draw on an evangelical opposition to slavery when assessing the war speaks of the strength of postmillennial optimism throughout the Anglo-American world during the middle of the nineteenth century. In Britain, evangelical opposition to slavery had been elaborated within the context of debate over slavery within the

nation's overseas colonies during the 1830s. Views formed in Britain were easily carried overseas by the strong denominational connections which linked Britain and its North American provinces, and nowhere is this fact clearer than with the speed with which, after the 1843 "Great Disruption," Free Church Presbyterians brought their strong antislavery views to British North America. Free Church Presbyterians such as Robert Murray, William Reid, and George Brown, strongly influenced by religious and historical developments in Scotland, quickly turned to Southern slavery as the focus of their attention when discussing the war.

The strong currents of postmillennial moral opposition to slavery which emanated from the United States also affected these editors' views. The tremendous moral opposition to slavery among evangelicals in the Northern states in particular, when combined with the geographical proximity of the United States to British North America, had a profound influence on Protestant editors in the Maritimes and Canada. In particular cases, such as James Richardson of the *Canada Christian Advocate* and Robert Fyfe of the *Canadian Baptist*, moral opposition to slavery was in part formed by first-hand experience in the northern United States, in the course of brief ministerial postings.

Methodist and Baptist editors in British North America were influenced by differing historical heritages when assessing the events and issues of the Civil War. While these editors focused on the war largely through their moral opposition to slavery, significantly different political perspectives in interpreting the war occurred along regional lines. Maritime editors were critical of the United States' republican form of government as an underlying cause of the war, and of the North's stated intention of

fighting to preserve the Union rather than explicitly to abolish slavery. In this region, both Methodists and Baptists were historically influenced by ties to Britain which moved the editors toward a politically conservative outlook critical of republicanism.

In central Canada, however, Methodists and Baptists drew much more strongly from their co-denominationalists in the United States, a fact of historical circumstance reflected in their commentary on the war. The early years of Methodism in Ontario had been marked by early American Methodist forays into the province, though later British influences also shaped the denomination. Wesleyans and Methodist Episcopalians in central Canada continued to compete during the war for recognition by the American Methodist Episcopal Church, a struggle indicative of the importance which they placed on the American component of their historical heritage. Though both Wellington Jeffers of the *Christian Guardian* and James Richardson of the *Canada Christian Advocate* saw slavery as the foremost issue of the war, their different historical background led them to criticise the American government in a different manner from their fellow Methodist editor John McMurray in Halifax. The American Union was, to them, not a major cause of Southern slavery. Rather, they saw maintaining the United States as a single nation to be the key to ensuring that slavery would eventually be abolished. Likewise, Canadian Baptist editors were also influenced by a dual Anglo-American historical heritage which moderated their political view of the war's main issues. Robert Fyfe and Hoyes Lloyd, mindful both of the denomination's conservative, British-oriented membership and of those rural Baptists in southwestern Ontario who had been influenced more by American political

ideals, tried to strike a balance by insisting that Canada should maintain a neutral stance in the conflict.

Free Church Presbyterian editorial commentary on the war was not differentiated by region. Rather, their historical experience in British North America was deeply affected by a Scottish church schism which broadly transformed Presbyterianism in both the Maritimes and Canada in the middle of the nineteenth century. As such, the dominant Free Church political belief--that civil government must be obedient to Christian principles--became the lens through which Free Church editors viewed the American conflict. This perspective was not at all favourable to the United States' republican constitution. It did, however, allow an editor such as Robert Murray to contrast what he saw as the underlying political issues of the conflict with contemporary political developments in British North America. Thus, the Civil War, from this view, was instructive for British North Americans as to the type of government which should frame the emerging Canadian nation.

The editors' interpretations of the war allow some significant comparisons to be made with the views of religious commentators in the United States. Maritime Methodist and Baptist editors, along with Free Church Presbyterian editors in both regions, viewed the American political system as an underlying cause of the war. The American constitution, they argued, had allowed the United States historically to compromise between Northern anti-slavery and Southern pro-slavery interests. For the North to fight to preserve the Union, they argued, might potentially allow further compromise between the two sections which would not ensure the abolition of slavery. This anti-republican sentiment moved these editors away from seeing the war and its

issues in the same way as mainstream evangelicals in the northern United States who viewed the American Union as a political instrument of divine origin. Within the framework of the Union, northern evangelicals were confident that slavery might be abolished and the nation's political integrity restored. The views of these British North American editors were quite different, and held more in common with radical abolitionists in the United States who advocated the disunion of the United States in order to isolate the slaveholding South. That Maritime Methodist and Baptist and Free Church Presbyterian editors could look at republicanism in a similar light as radical abolitionists in the United States is surprising, given the strength of the editors' evangelical perspective and the American radical abolitionists' tendency to condemn evangelical religion as a traditional defence of Southern slavery.

In central Canada, meanwhile, American political and religious ideals were an essential part of the Methodist and Baptist historical experience. As such, these editors did not work from a position of outright hostility to the United States' form of government. Rather, they, like evangelicals in the North, saw the maintenance of the American Union as essential to the nation's social and religious progress. To fight to preserve the Union was, therefore, essentially a fight to preserve the religious ideals which would ensure the abolition of slavery.

Finally, it must be underscored that these editors did not write in isolation, but at certain times were able to engage their readers, fellow denominational editors, and even religious editors in the United States in debate over the causes and course of the Civil War. Thus, Robert Murray's conviction that the war served as an example of the evils of religious and national schism and should awaken British North Americans to

realize the benefits of provincial union met with opposition by at least one reader, who feared that moving toward Canadian nationhood might in fact prove harmful if the new nation's government resembled that of the United States. So too a Maritime Baptist questioned the editor's harsh criticisms of the North's strategy of fighting to maintain the Union. That these two editors were challenged in their interpretation of the war indicates that there did not necessarily exist any sort of consensus on political issues between a denomination's commentators and audience.

Nor did there necessarily exist an agreement of opinion between denominational editors within British North America. As seen, editors in the Maritimes and central Canada of the same denomination drew on significantly different political views by which to interpret the war. Most notably, Maritime editor John McMurray and Canadian editor Wellington Jeffers, both Wesleyan Methodists, engaged in debate as to the particular relationship between the American political system, slavery, and the North's war aims.

As this and subsequent cross-border debates reveal, however, the religious press in the United States was also quite sensitive to British North American views of the war. Criticisms of Maritime Baptist editor Ingraham Bill's commentary on the war by religious papers in both Boston and Chicago indicate the gulf of understanding which separated observers on both sides of the border as well as the extent to which many in the United States confused criticism of the North, especially from British circles, with support for the Confederacy.

In conclusion, it is to be hoped that this study has expanded the role for religious commentary in the field of political history. Recent historiographical developments,

particularly in the United States, have broadened the definition of what constitutes political discussion. As seen in the introduction, a growing number of studies concerned with religion in the United States argue effectively for the meaningful impact of religion on political developments during the period of the Civil War. Similarly, as shown by the views of denominational editors, British North American Protestants were moved by their historical and religious backgrounds to draw specifically political lessons from the American conflict. In this examination of the denominational press, the concept of political dialogue has, arguably, been sufficiently broadened to include religious commentary as well. Even where slavery, the most explicit social and moral issue of the war, was discussed by denominational commentators, it was more often than not followed by an examination of the political structure of the United States which, to many of the editors, played a crucial role in the Civil War because it was seen as accommodating Southern slavery. These editors could not have seen the relationship between social and political issues in the war differently; as observers, they were as aware as anyone else of the extent to which the issue of slavery had driven national and church politics in the United States for the past three decades. Their deep antislavery impulses and particular views of the United States did not just appear with the outbreak of war, but had been shaped and modified by particular historical and denominational circumstances. In the end, these editors were not only religious commentators, but also political commentators whose views were shaped and influenced both by specific religious ideas and by different historical circumstances.

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