NORTH CAROLINA PROTESTANT THEOLOGIANS AND THE IDEA OF DEATH DURING THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

by

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ABSTRACT

RICHARD CHARLES BAISLEY. North Carolina Protestant Theologians and the Idea of Death during the American Civil War (Under the direction of DR. JOHN DAVID SMITH)

The Civil War challenged almost every aspect of life for Confederate North Carolinians. Daily necessities became impossible to find or were outrageously priced, roles within households changed, and Americans died in record numbers. This work revealed that the Civil War affected Tar Heel beliefs about death in a multitude of ways. The ideals of the good death were tested through the carnage war inflicted on soldiers' bodies. Confederate civilians reconciled their horror at the number of casualties through a belief in eternal life and the rewards that awaited Christian soldiers. Disease ruined the ability of noncombatants in North Carolina to provide proper burials for the dead and brought some of the challenges of combat directly to the home front. Finally, the execution of Confederate deserters invalidated the promises that prompted many to serve.

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INTRODUCTION

The Civil War ripped America apart and brought death, destruction and decay in levels that people in both the North and South had never seen before. The conflict hampered almost every aspect of daily life for both soldiers on the battlefield and the civilian populations left behind. This was especially true in the South, where nearly one million white men served in Confederate armies and eighteen percent died.[1] North Carolina, though it left the Union months after its sister states, sent more men to fight and die than any other Confederate state.[2] Tar Heel soldiers routinely saw action in some of the fiercest battles of the war and suffered horrific losses. They left behind families and communities who struggled to survive the hardships that war brought to their doorstep. Scarcity, sicknesses, sorrow and worry plagued the Confederate home front as noncombatants anxiously watched the war go on. Throughout the chaos, theologians and civilians alike tried to find solace in religion as the war raged for far longer than most expected.

Over the 150 years since the end of the Civil War, thousands of books have been written on America's most destructive conflict. The "long shadow" of the war continues to inspire historians and provoke new works that delve into unstudied fissures of the monumental contest.[3] However, in much of the secondary historical record, civilian religious belief concerning death remains stagnant throughout the war only to continue relatively unchanged in 1866. For a war that shredded the very fabric of social and political life in the South, it seems impossible that religious leaders and their flocks on the home front were able to weather the storm without any thought on the subject of religion. In order to try to parse together some of the challenges and changes that swept

America's religious landscape over the Civil War, this thesis focuses on the impact of the conflict on civilian beliefs about death in North Carolina. To avoid being swept off into a tangential stream of history, the research presented within this work is furthered centered on white Protestant Confederate beliefs about death. This study could easily have been located within any member state of the Confederacy, but North Carolina was chosen for this task because this state is itself often ignored in the larger history of the Civil War. The amount of casualties North Carolina suffered from battle alone makes the state a strong choice for a focused study of Civil War death. The high number of deserters from this state and the devastation brought to the region from yellow fever outbreaks also provide further facets for study.

Despite the importance of religion to both soldier and civilian attempting to make sense of death during the horror of Civil War, theology during the conflict has only recently begun to receive proper attention. Most studies of religion localized to one state or community largely ignore the conflict, and there has not been any definitive work detailing the role of religion in North Carolina during the Civil War. Additionally, the contributions of civilian ministers are often overlooked in modern histories. Stories of chaplains serving with distinction and the role of warmongering clergy who rose to national fame on the platform of supporting secession often overshadow the more muted role of clergy who served local communities. Noncombatants too have been deemed neither as grand nor as glamorous as soldiers and have often been left out of the secondary literature. This thesis draws on a few different wells of historical inquiry, the primary ones being the study of death and the use of religion during the Civil War.

Nineteenth century American's experience with death is a subject that has gained much recent prominence. Philippe Aries' monumental study of death in the Western world, *The Hour of Our Death,* ignited a flurry of additional historical inquiry. Aries' work, published in 1980, provided a massive overview of Western Christian thought on death throughout a thousand years of history stretching from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century. Gary Laderman, author of *American Attitudes Toward Death 1799-1883,* credits Aires for kick starting the American study of death.[4] Laderman's book, published in 1996, argued that industrialization and the institutionalization of death over the course of the nineteenth century led to the creation of the modern funeral home and present-day perspectives on death.[5] The two most focused studies dedicated to death in Civil War America come from Drew Faust and Mark Schantz. Schantz's 2008 work, *Awaiting the Heavenly Country: The Civil War and America's Culture of Death* examined beliefs about death that Americans held in the decades before the Civil War. He concluded that death held significant political and emotional meaning far beyond its religious implications. Deeply held ideas about what it meant to die a good death, and what waited in the afterlife, helped to soften the blow of the carnage of the Civil War; something that Schantz believed may have even helped to prolong the combat.[6] Drew Faust's *This Republic of Suffering: Death in the American Civil War,* also published in 2008, discussed both the physical and immaterial aspects of dying over the course of the Civil War. Faust wrote about the ways in which bodies were handled, cared for, and buried both on and off the field, as well as how the war changed the ability of civilians to mourn for their dead.[7] Faust's work is one of the few to feature civilian input to any significant degree, though she did not step too deeply into the quagmire of religion;

mainly limiting her focus to the physical challenges that death presented and the means of dying brought about by war.

Shannon Bontrager and Ian Finseth have provided recent histories on the meaning of death in Civil War America. Ian Finseth's *The Civil War Dead and American Modernity,* published in 2018, also emphasized the role of Civil War dead as symbols. Finseth argued that the blood spilt during four years of brutal fratricidal combat brought "national unity, greatness, and progress: in a word modernity."[8] According to Finseth, graveyards transcended their role as a repository for corpses and served as a reminder of the great battles fought to unite a nation spanning a diverse continent, both sparking a sense of forward motion among post-war Americans and evoking a nationalistic drive today. Bontrager's *Death at the Edges of Empire: Fallen Soldiers, Cultural Memory, and the Making of an American Nation, 1863-1921*, published in 2020, discussed the American cultural memory of death, and how the nation's Civil War dead were transformed into symbols by national cemeteries and holidays. In the post war South, dead soldiers became a symbol of a twisted version of history; a Lost Cause mythology where politicians and generals betrayed the common farmer, abused the trust of the honorable Christian soldier, and watched without remorse as ruin spread across the Mason Dixon line.

Within the confines of the white Confederate South, religion combined with an intense Confederate nationalism and vocal ministers blurred the already tenuous lines between church and state. James W. Silver's 1957 *Confederate Morale and Church Propaganda* and Eugene D. Genovese's 1998 *A Consuming Fire: The Fall of the Confederacy in the Mind of the White Christian South* both illuminated the role of

religion in sustaining the Confederate war effort and the morale of a people burdened by war. The role of death in these works is limited to the way that southern religious leaders used the death of soldiers to extoll the virtues of the greater Confederate war effort. E. Brooks Holifield's, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* served as the main source concerning American theology of the nineteenth century. Printed in 2003, Holifield's work described the roots of American theological arguments and linked the nation to transatlantic religious leaders. Robert J. Miller's, *Both Prayed to the Same God: Religion and Faith in the American Civil War,* published in 2007, provided a comprehensive synthesis on the role of faith in war. While not a historian, Miller does have masters' degrees in Divinity and Religious Education and his work is useful as an introduction to the field. The most effective recent work on this topic is George C. Rable's *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: Religion in the Civil War.* Published in 2010, Rable's work provided a monumental overview of religious belief across North and South throughout the Civil War. His work charted a chronological path through the war and Rable argued that religion held an extremely important place (for believers) in the conduct of, and explanation for, the war. Rable's work took a more broad approach and thus death did not receive a concentrated focus. Benjamin L. Miller's 2019 work, *In God's Presence: Chaplains, Missionaries, and Religious Space During the American Civil War* presented the war through the eyes of chaplains and described how these men created and used religious space to minister to soldiers. He discovered that faith could transcend denominational bounds and create spaces for religious worship even within the confines of an army camp.

Focused studies on North Carolina's religious history are rare, and most works limited to this topic are decades old and rely on data that in some cases is outdated.[9] Hugh Talmage Lefler and Albert Ray Newsome's massive work of synthesis, *The History of a Southern State: North Carolina*, published in 1979, served a source of general information and gathered statistics otherwise scattered across numerous other volumes. This work of synthesis proved an invaluable source of information and revealed the clear importance that faith held for North Carolinians. The most useful recent work added to this historiography, *Religious Traditions of North Carolina: Histories, Tenets, and Leaders*, is a collection of essays detailing the evolution of a wide variety of religious practices within North Carolina. Edited by W. Glenn Jonas Jr. and published in 2018, this work proved invaluable for establishing the Tar Heel state's religious field prior to the Civil War.

The civilian experience of the Civil War is largely spread throughout other histories, though the amount of focused works on noncombatants is growing. Mark Grimsley's *The Hard Hand of War: Union Military Policy toward Southern Civilians, 1861–1865*, discussed the evolution of the Union army's military strategy toward Confederate civilians. Grimsley work, published in 1995, showed that the Civil War was not, as it is commonly called, a total war. Instead, Grimsley argued that the Union army took deliberate measures – where possible – to avoid direct civilian casualties. This work ended descriptions of the Civil War as a total war, redefining the conflict as a "hard war." Drew Faust's *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* told the story of the elite white women of the Confederacy and the challenges and changes the war brought to their doorsteps. Faust's work, published in 1996, argued

that the Civil War changed assumptions about gender in the South, and she explored the meaning of the Civil War to the privileged slaveholding class. The *Civil War Was You and Me: Civilians in the American Civil War,* a volume of essays edited by Joan E. Cashin and published in 2002, added a variety of original work to the study of civilians. Through essays examining family and community, gender, culture, and race this collection expanded the historiography and provided a detailed view of the home front. Joe Mobley's *Weary of War: Life on the Confederate Home Front*, published in 2008, provided a general overview of the Confederate civilian experience of the Civil War. Mobley argued that with most of the fighting occurring within the South, there was very little distinction between the front lines and the home front.

Works that examine the confluence of religion, death, and noncombatants are missing from this historiography. Soldiers have monopolized studies of devotion and death, and their experiences overshadow those of the too old, too young, or too female to fight. Studies limited to the civilian wartime experience fall into the opposite snare. Religion, if it is featured at all, is overshadowed by concerns about the hardships civilians faced and survival tactics used by weary noncombatants. James Silver's piece is one of the few to intertwine these topics with any detail. While his conclusions still ring true, his work is focused on the use of religion as a propaganda tool, and the age of Silver's work means it is distant from modern historiography. My thesis seeks to correct this trend by combining the studies of death and civilian religion through an examination of North Carolina's religious experience in the Civil War.

The first chapter of this thesis describes the religious underpinnings of North Carolina society, and shows that religion held a pervasive importance throughout the Tar Heel

state. The rites and rituals connected with dying a good death in the antebellum South are presented here through the works and words of ministers who, despite their misgivings, went on to support North Carolina's secession. Chapter two examines the first two years of war, and ministers' attempts to explain the deaths of soldiers to their civilian families. Immortality featured heavily in the sermons of civilian clergy, as they promised that those who died for the South would live on both through popular memory and in an eternal life, and this chapter explores the impact of this belief. Chapter three presents two events, the execution of twenty-two Confederate deserters and a devastating outbreak of yellow fever in Wilmington, comparing how religious leaders responded to these non-combat deaths. While disparate in both time and place, these events brought new meaning to death in the wartime South, as laity struggled to understand the reason behind the deaths and clergy interpreted them both as tests from God dispensed on an unrepentant nation.

Historian Richard Carwardine has described evangelical Protestantism "as the principal subculture in antebellum America."[10] As such, protestant Christian beliefs are evident in a very broad amount of Civil War era source material. Death and its many meanings are just as, if not more, prevalent. This study drew heavily on the journals and recorded sermons of civilian ministers, with the exception of the inclusion of chaplain John Paris, whose work is also included as it was intended both for soldiers and noncombatants. Clergy across denominations stated that they rarely intended to have their sermons published. The prints that survive are often accompanied by a short message stating that while the minister had little desire to see their work in print, someone else had asked for the permission to publish their work.[11] Thus, printed sermons were largely

constructed after the fact making use of the sermon notes a minister had prepared, however minimal or extensive. Regardless of how well these reconstructed sermons presented the original message intended by the minister, they now served a wider audience and even gave the author another chance to refine or alter his words. In addition to printed sermons, this thesis drew heavily on the diaries of Tar Heel civilians, collections of letters, and period newspapers. The primary motivation behind the choice of source was to avoid official military or political accounts in order to allow a deeper examination of death over the course of the war.

Death is a nigh-inexhaustible subject for historical inquiry. The very thing that makes it fascinating to study, the overwhelming amount of source material, also makes antebellum and Civil War beliefs on this subject difficult to adequately describe. There could be a dozen different works written on religion in Civil War North Carolina, and all could draw from different wells of information. Ultimately this thesis, to paraphrase historian George C. Noll, presents only one version of this history, and in arguing that the conflict changed civilians' relationships to death, it also argues that the intimate relationship between beleaguered southern civilians and their religious traditions is worth further study.[12]

Endnotes

[1] Drew Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York:

[2] John G. Barrett, *The Civil War in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), 10-13.

[3] James McPherson, *The War That Forged A Nation: Why the Civil War Still Matters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), vii.

[4]Gary Laderman, *The Sacred Remains: American Attitudes Toward Death, 1799-1883* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 7.

[5] Ibid., 10.

[6] Mark Schantz, *Awaiting the Heavenly Country: The Civil War and America's Culture of Death* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 5.

[7] Drew Faust, *This Republic of Suffering,* 138-170.

[8] Ian Finseth, *The Civil War Dead and American Modernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 25.

[9]Some of the older works consulted include: Marshall DeLancy Haywood, *Lives of the Bishops of North Carolina: From the Establishment of the Episcopate in that State Down to the Division of the Diocese* (Raleigh: Alfred Williams & Company, 1910); John G. Barrett, *The Civil War in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963); and Maloy A. Huggins, *A History of North Carolina Baptists, 1727-1932* (Raleigh: General Board, State Baptist Convention of North Carolina, 1967).

[10] Richard J. Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), xv.

[11] John Paris, *A Sermon: Preached Before Brig.-Gen. Hoke's Brigade, at Kinston, N.C., on the 28th of February, 1864, by Rev. John Paris, Chaplain Fifty-Fourth Regiment N.C. Troops, Upon the Death of Twenty-Two Men, Who had Been Executed in the Presence of the Brigade for the Crime of Desertion* (Greensborough, NC: A.W. Ingold & Co., Book and Job Printers, 1864), 4.

[12] George C. Noll, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 5.

CHAPTER 1: NORTH CAROLINA PROTESTANTISM AND THE PATH TO SECESSION

I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. Rev. 21:6.

Antebellum North Carolina flourished with religion. From Asheville to Wilmington, church bells rang, itinerant preachers wandered, and religious guidance dripped from pulpits. The very first colonists of the Tar Heel state brought Protestant Christianity with them, and the devout worked to spread their beliefs throughout the tumult of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By 1860, four Christian denominations proved the most popular, and Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians worked to provide a Christian worldview for their congregations. The theological base that these groups built upon was imported from Europe, but Americans refined and reforged these transatlantic ideas in the decades prior to the Civil War. Denominations differed in their practices and beliefs, but the traditions describing the proper way to die were an essential part of all Christian religions. North Carolina's churches held immense power in shaping their communities, and when conflict ensued this influence grew. Many considered the Civil War in religious terms, and the devout drew upon the theologies of their chosen denominations to explain the conflict. This chapter provides the histories of four popular religious denominations within North Carolina, which are important facet of understanding the role of faith among civilians during the war, as well as describing the religious lens through which both death and secession were interpreted.

The debates, sources, and schools of thought characteristic of European theology and philosophy set the groundwork for theological discussions in America. As proponents of

Christian religions crossed the ocean and began to proselytize to new populations, they brought with them beliefs influenced by hundreds of years of religious thought (thoughts which were themselves influenced by hundreds of years of debate featuring the philosophies of Plato, Aristotle, and Augustine). The greatest theological influence provided by this European connection was Calvinism, and American theology became largely centered on one's level of agreement or disagreement with Calvinist principles.[1] John Calvin's doctrines had remarkable staying power, and the principles that he first outlined in 1536 still sparked dissension 300 years later. Basic Calvinist beliefs of predestination, scriptural revelation providing knowledge of God and human nature, belief in the stain of original sin, and the repudiation of the primacy of the Catholic Church all later surfaced as parts of other religious factions. Puritans brought these beliefs with them to New England, and they defended Calvinism through the theological writings of an educated clergy.

Throughout the eighteenth century, colonial theologians worked at such a rate that they were at the time the most published authors in America.[2] Most theologians furthered their education through studies in a university or through seminary, as many clergy members considered theology solely the realm of the scholar until after the American Revolution. The democratic ideals brought forth in the constitution and presented in speeches, writings, and debates during America's turbulent eighteenth century–coupled with the religious revivals common in the early nineteenth century–led to an increase of uneducated clergy who wrote about or argued theological issues.[3] Interaction with theological discourse slowly became more commonplace amongst laity and clergy alike, and spawned a diversity of opinions on faith. Religious debates became increasingly

common at the turn of the nineteenth century. While most of these discussions centered around a broad array of topics, denominational differences formed the base from which both professional and amateur theologians constructed their arguments.

North Carolina, despite gaining an early reputation as a state filled with people without religion and with no inclination towards religion, grew to have a vibrant community of believers in a variety of Protestant denominations. Consistent with the rest of the South, and with much of the North, Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian groups came to enjoy the greatest numbers of converts.[4] While some of the first colonists to North Carolina were Anglicans, this group struggled to recruit converts during the Tar Heel state's antebellum history. In matters of theology, North Carolina's faithful proved to hold strong opinions and many groups within the state frequently separated into sects. Religious organizations in North Carolina were influenced by national or sectional theological debates which were usually centered around Calvinistic theology. These debates grew in scale as divisiveness within the country increased in the mid-nineteenth century, and are central to understanding the make-up of religious groups in antebellum North Carolina. For Carolinians who experienced the Civil War from the home front, religion played a vital role, and the local histories of the Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians informed civilians' view of faith during the conflict.

Baptists in North Carolina proved individualistic. Churches split over differences in theology readily, and even groups with antagonistic beliefs still considered themselves as Baptists. The first Baptist Church in North Carolina was formed in the Chowan Precinct in 1727 by Paul Palmer.[5] While this church failed two years later, it marked a turning point as the number of Baptist groups increased throughout the eastern portion of the

state. Palmer, and the churches that he founded, were part of a Baptist sect known as the General Six Principle Baptists. They followed Arminian doctrine, and central to this sect was a belief that Christ died for the universal atonement of all men, human beings having a role to play in their own salvation, and the need to follow tenets established in Hebrews 6.[6] This doctrine began to change as these churches slowly moved away from their Arminian roots and took on more Calvinistic beliefs such as predestination, and became part of the Particular Baptist movement. Religious revivals in the 1750s led to yet another transformation. Separate Baptists preachers – led by Daniel Marshall, his wife Martha Stearns Marshall, and her brother Shubal Stearns – began to form churches within North Carolina. Separate Baptists favored evangelical messages and an egalitarian leadership, and by 1772, forty-two new Separate Baptist congregations had formed in the state.[7]

In the early nineteenth century, a Baptist minister named Martin Ross worked to unite Baptist churches throughout North Carolina in a statewide evangelical association. Ross succeeded in creating the North Carolina Baptist Society for Foreign Missions in 1814. This association focused solely on providing instruction and funds for missionaries, but it served as a precursor for a larger Baptist society in the state. In 1833, a newly formed statewide convention of united Baptist churches held its first meeting.[8] While it had a disappointing start, the Baptist State Convention grew quickly, sponsoring an official newspaper, the *Biblical Recorder*, and gaining hundreds of churches as new members. It even accommodated the theologies of both the Particular and Separate Baptist churches in the state, though it could not rectify political disagreements. By 1845, the national tensions between slaveholding Baptists and those with more abolitionist tendencies grew too large for North Carolinians to overcome. Representatives from Baptist congregations

across the South met that same year and created the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) in Georgia. North Carolina's Baptist State Convention joined the SBC almost immediately. Generally, Baptist groups throughout the South showed Calvinistic characteristics. However, in North Carolina, Separate Baptists who favored a more evangelical theology and egalitarian church organization cultivated a large base of support and were the dominant Baptist group in the state by 1860.[9] Baptists remained active during the Civil War, expanding their reach to the soldiers through colporteurs. These traveling missionaries spread 25,000 bibles amongst southern soldiers in 1864 alone.[10]

The reform movement that became known as Methodism began through John Wesley's vision for change within the Anglican Church. In the mid-eighteenth century, Wesley became convinced that the rigid Church of England needed to emphasize more of an emotional connection to its message. Through his efforts, the Methodist branch of the Episcopalians came to promote belief in a moment of rebirth of the soul, a God that freely gave grace, and a desire for a more democratic church society.[11] These differences transcended a simple reform of Episcopalian belief and led Wesley's followers to grow into a separate denomination. Methodism crossed the ocean and quickly found purchase among British colonists. In 1776, the Carolina Circuit (located entirely within North Carolina) was established, capitalizing on a boom of Methodist converts within the state. Itinerant preachers traveled this circuit in order to serve a dispersed and largely rural flock. As congregations grew in size and new parts of the state opened to the Methodists' message, the circuit itself expanded. By 1784, nearly 3,000 of the 15,000 North American Methodists were located in North Carolina.[12] Also in 1784, Thomas Coke and Francis

Asbury were ordained by John Wesley as the leaders of the newly minted American Methodist Episcopal Church.[13] This marked the final separation of the American Methodist movement from The Church of England.

In America, Methodists gained a reputation for preaching fire and brimstone. William Capers, a Methodist preacher who arrived in Wilmington in 1813, described locals as hoping that he would use fear-inducing methods in order to convert the "lower classes" of the city.[14] Despite their harsh reputation, which was largely untrue, the number of converts to this new denomination continued to grow rapidly. However, the hierarchy of the church remained the same, and laity and preachers felt repressed under the government of the church. The Methodist Episcopal Church continued to be led by appointed bishops who controlled large swaths of territory, while members had little direct say in organizational decisions. The church split into two denominations in the 1830s, the original Methodist Episcopal Church and the more democratic Methodist Protestant Church. This split was solely on the basis of church organization and the core beliefs of both groups remained the same, with the inclusion of elected positions and more power for the laity in the Methodist Protestant Church the only real difference. Methodists believed in a God whose death provided the opportunity for universal salvation, and leading Methodist theologians in America, such as Thomas Ralston, Nathan Bangs, and Wilbur Fisk, denied the Calvinists' ideas of predestination. They argued that a God who chose his elect beforehand denied humanity's freedom of choice, and was similar to a judge who charged innocents for a crime he committed.[15] Methodist theologians refined these beliefs as they debated Universalists and Calvinists, and these disputes further differentiated Methodist beliefs.[16] Statewide conferences from both the

Methodist Protestant Church and Methodist Episcopal Church were established in North Carolina during the 1830s. In 1845, increasing tensions between pro-slavery and anti-slavery groups further split the Methodist Episcopal Church into northern and southern denominations and these sectional institutions remained until the twentieth century.[17] By the beginning of the Civil War, Methodists were just as influential as Baptists in North Carolina.[18] However, many Methodist churches across the state suffered from the lack of a minister as large numbers of clergy left to serve as Confederate chaplains.[19]

Presbyterians represented the most direct form of Calvinism in North Carolina. This faith tradition was carried to the state largely through the efforts of Scottish and Scots-Irish immigrants. Presbyterian theology remained largely consistent and converts believed in the supremacy of the Bible over tradition, strict observance of the Sabbath, a refutation of various Catholic teachings such as purgatory, and that believers were predestined for either heaven or hell.[20] The Presbyterian Church had a hierarchical organization. Sessions, made up of preachers and church elders, led congregations. Presbyteries controlled large swaths of territory and were formed to lead a colony's, and later a state's, sessions. In 1770, Orange Presbytery was established to lead North Carolina's sessions, and was the first formal Presbyterian organization in the area.[21] Presbyterian clergy were required to be educated. This slowed the early growth of the church in North Carolina and limited its appeal, as Baptist and Methodist clergy were not at first required to complete a formal education. After a period of slow growth, aided by the construction of new schools and universities in Virginia and North Carolina, the Presbyterian Church faced turmoil.

In the 1830s, debates raged within the church between traditional and modernist perspectives on a broad number of issues, ranging from music choices for hymns to the church's stance on slavery.[22] Most of these debates occurred between two different factions within the church, the Old school and New School Presbyterians. Old School Presbyterians were more devoutly Calvinist, and generally more conservative in beliefs and practices. New School reformers sought more interdenominational partnerships as well as changes to the national church, and left the national Presbyterian organizations in 1838 after they met heavy resistance.[23] In the South, Old School Presbyterian practices remained the strongest.[24] North Carolina settled firmly into a conservative perspective and joined other southern Presbyterian churches in forming the Presbyterian Church of the South in 1861. Unlike other minor splits among Presbyterian groups that occurred before the war, the 1861 fracture was directly linked to the desire to defend slavery.[25] The split in 1861 saw pro-slavery conservative Presbyterians take control of North Carolina's wing of the denomination, and ostracized both New School Presbyterians and the anti-slavery, though still conservative, Covenanters.[26] By the start of the Civil War, North Carolina had enough Presbyterian congregants to require three different Presbyteries: Orange, Fayetteville, and Concord.[27] Presbyterian membership drew on the middle and upper classes of the Piedmont area, and thus, the influence of this church was spread further than numbers alone would indicate. Leadership of the Episcopal Church in North Carolina also held far more sway than can be inferred from quantitative data.[28]

While other Protestant faith groups quickly gained and kept a steady majority of converts in North Carolina, Episcopalians struggled to find proper footing. Derived from the traditions of the Roman Catholic faith, The Church of England followed the earliest

colonists into the New World. In 1701, the colonial assembly of North Carolina passed the Vestry Act and made the Anglican Church the colony's official religion.[29] Despite its position as the church of law, the Episcopal faith encountered recruitment challenges that slowed its growth. In order to serve as an Anglican minister, clergy needed to be ordained by a bishop. However, no bishops were permanently stationed in the colonies until after the American Revolution. This forced ordination to occur in England before the clergymen could cross the ocean and serve in North America. North Carolina also gained the reputation of containing both poor living conditions and an unreceptive populace, stymieing the desire of clergy to serve in that colony.[30] Governor William Tryon, himself a supporter of the Episcopal Church, also hurt the view of Anglicans through his suppression of the Regulator movement in the 1760s.[31] The American Revolution severed the ties between the Anglican Church in the colonies and its former leaders in England. The rector of Philadelphia's Christ Church, William White, worked tirelessly to create a new, American, organizational system for the church. Religious leaders in England consecrated White and two others as bishops in 1789, and they swiftly changed the structure of the American institution to operate separately from England.[32]

Charles Pettigrew gained election as the first bishop to the Diocese of North Carolina in 1794.[33] However, Pettigrew became discouraged at the state of the Episcopalian Church after the revolution and he failed to travel to Philadelphia to be properly ordained by the General Convention – thus he never officially served as bishop. Pettigrew's retirement at the beginning of the nineteenth century sparked renewed enthusiasm for the church. In 1811, the need to revitalize the Episcopal Church was apparent. The followers of two different groups, deemed the High Church and Low Church, both had strategies

for increasing membership. The High Church sect favored Episcopalians setting themselves apart from the other Protestant groups through a focus on the church's core theology – apostolic succession, ritual practices, and the sacraments. Those who supported the High Church also favored the traditional liturgical and organizational foundations of the church. Calvinism was considered "repugnant to scripture" and High Church adherents believed that the Anglican Church was completely incompatible with Calvinist beliefs of predetermination and the special grace thought to be given to those elected to go to heaven.[34] Supporters of the Low Church thought that Anglicans should adopt a more evangelical outlook and outreach even to those in competing faiths, whether those groups were Calvinist or not.[35]

In 1823 John Stark Ravenscroft was chosen as the first official bishop of North Carolina, replacing the temporary leadership of bishop Richard Channing Moore of Virginia. Ravenscroft was influential in deciding the direction of acceptable theology in North Carolina. He detested the Low Church evangelicalism that Moore had brought to the state and put an end to the cross-denominational partnership with Lutherans that the Virginia bishop fostered. Ravenscroft even attacked the fledgling North Carolina Bible society. While speaking at that society's annual gathering, Ravenscroft expressed his belief that giving away bibles without any accompanying guidance would do more harm than good.[36] Ravenscroft died in 1830, but his High Church beliefs were mirrored in the bishops that followed him. Levi Silliman Ives served as the next head of the North Carolina diocese. Ives began by furthering Ravenscroft's goals of cementing Episcopalians' belief in their church through the construction of Episcopal schools and new chapels. Ives's popularity among his diocese plummeted in the 1850s when he began

to promote Catholic traditions among his churches. Pushback from church leadership and lay members led Ives to abandon his faith and leave his post for Rome in 1852.[37] Thomas Atkinson, discussed at length throughout this work, would serve as the next bishop of North Carolina. Atkinson brought to the position a mixture of High Church beliefs with the Low Church emphasis on garnering converts. He sought to abolish the practice of pew renting in his diocese and started St. Paul's in Wilmington as a free and open church when the local minister of St. James's refused to end charges for pews.[38] Atkinson faced the turmoil of the Civil War with a calm demeanor. He did not favor the creation of a southern Episcopal organization and joined it reluctantly, leading the charge for reunification of the church between North and South after the war.[39]

Though these four denominations held disparate, and at times conflicting, theological beliefs, they all had significant reach within North Carolina communities. The uneducated ministers and more equalized hierarchy of Baptist and Methodist churches proved attractive to both black and poor white populations largely in the Mountain and Piedmont sections of the state; though this popularity spread prior to the Civil War. Episcopalians were largely more affluent than Baptists or Methodists, and the Coastal Plains of the state held most of the Anglican population. Presbyterians remained popular in the Piedmont prior to the Civil War, drawing largely on upper class communities. While most institutions were primarily interested in white congregants, North Carolina's religious organizations also served a large number of black worshippers. The degree to which free or enslaved blacks were allowed to attend services and receive religious education differed across the state, though the method in which this was accomplished was generally the same. African Americans were restricted to one section of the church,

usually the back, and heard a sermon delivered by a white pastor. In services intended for enslaved populations, white clergy members gave a message that kept to a very narrow focus to avoid the wrath of slaveholders.[40]

The 1860 census shows the reach that all of these institutions had within North Carolina. The census listed 966 Methodist churches, 780 Baptist churches, 182 Presbyterian churches, and fifty-three Episcopal churches across all three regions of North Carolina. These churches held approximately 61,000, 65,000, 18,000, and 3,000 parishioners respectively.[41] As North Carolina had a total population of 980,000 both enslaved and free persons in 1860, nearly a seventh of the total population were members of a church. A significant number in its own right, 144,000, this data only includes those who were officially members of a church, and church membership rates mask the fact that most ministers preached to mixed audiences consisting of members, the families of members, and visitors.[42] Clergy often published their messages through print materials, such as religious newspapers, pamphlets, and written sermons, increasing the range of any one writer's theology. Regardless of how the laity received religious instruction, the reach of churches within North Carolina was undoubtedly much larger than numbers alone would indicate. For this state, like the rest of the country, the religious practices of popular Christian beliefs were a constant and persuasive presence.[43] The mid-nineteenth century saw the influence that religious leaders held transcend theological matters. Ministers, reverends, preachers and pastors had influence, and the message they gave from the podium would be heard, even if that message contained political philosophy, rather than religious.

For many members of the clergy, the debate surrounding slavery and the church subsumed other theological concerns. Scriptural defenses of slavery were common across the South and were no less popular in North Carolina. Passages from both the Old and New Testaments, often presented out of context and with no further elucidation, provided all the evidence of racial slavery's positive good that many white southerners needed.[44] For the denominations discussed above, serious rifts occurred over slavery, with the northern and southern members of national conventions unable to find common ground. Despite the schisms that formed, on a local level most congregations heard sermons featuring traditional Christian themes. Messages on the gospel were preferred over arguments pertaining to slavery or other divisive political conflicts.[45]

Religious leaders, regardless of their affiliations, were important figures in local communities and their knowledge of the divine was an important resource for those with spiritual questions. Preachers led services and revivals, spread their interpretation of the Bible, officiated weddings, and spoke at funerals. The teachings of these holy men were an important aspect of American lives and they figured prominently in American deaths. Religion provided answers that science could not and helped to bring comfort to those left behind. Though the nonconformity of faith groups within the state caused a spectrum of different antebellum religious beliefs, most of the devout agreed upon the meaning of death.[46] A common message given to congregants pertained to how one should die.

Death is a central part of the human experience. It is just as inescapable today as it was during the nineteenth century. However, due to advances in technology and medical science, Americans today can generally be assured of healthier and longer lives than their counter parts two centuries ago. For antebellum southerners, black and white, death was

no stranger. Diseases such as yellow fever ravaged the countryside every few decades, infant mortality was high, and injuries, or the medical procedures meant to heal injuries, often turned fatal. Yet, for those on their deathbed, a tradition of religious rituals sought to provide the means to ensure a smooth transition. When someone's time came, they strove to meet the end through the system of the "Good Death."[47] This good death entailed a litany of steps that were meant to comfort both the dying and those around them. Most hoped to spend their final moments at home, surrounded by their family, confident that their Christian beliefs would save them from hell, and with their final words upon their lips. The final step of the good death was a respectful burial, the body interned in the ground in an officiated funeral.[48]

Americans across the country wanted to follow these tenets, and North Carolinians were no exception. Obituaries in local papers were filled with references to the good death, as family members shared both their loss and their hope that the one they loved had found new life after death. The *Wilmington Journal*, a secular weekly newspaper, printed the obituary of Martha Wood on September 6, 1860. Wood's parents died while she was a child, and she lived out the rest of her twenty-seven years with her adopted family in Kenansville, North Carolina. Like so many others during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Wood died from consumption. Death from tuberculosis, as it is now known, entailed multiple organ failure or severe internal bleeding due to the disease eroding an artery. Despite this gruesome end, the author of Wood's obituary described her as "calm and resigned to a wonderful degree" during her illness, and that "her's [*sic*] was a happy death."[49] Wood held a membership in the local Baptist church, and her faith apparently enabled her to find peace in her final moments. Wood's demeanor was

described as bright and calm, and "her countenance bore a heavenly radiance, as, calling the family around her bed, she told them her bliss, and gave the affectionate farewell with the dying council to prepare to meet her in heaven."[50] Readers are thus assured that Wood died at home, surrounded by family, had expressed her Christian beliefs, and was able to share meaningful last words with those attending her. Martha Wood, as represented through her obituary, died what contemporaries considered a good death. The obituary itself served both as a memorial and as an example of the mollifying effect of religion on one's death. It also provided a clear example of death as seen through a Baptist lens. However, the tenets described in Wood's obituary, and the meaning that they provided, were not unique to any one Protestant faith. Religious leaders across denominations taught how to live and what to expect upon death, both through the pulpit and the pen.

Presbyterian minister Joseph Atkinson focused his energy on spreading these ideals to the young. A year before the combat of the Civil War began, Atkinson hoped to provide ammunition for what he felt was another, no less serious, fight. Young men were moving into cities, and there they encountered evils and vice in such a concentration that, in Atkinson's opinion, their souls were at risk. Men were losing their way. In order to counter the corrupting influence of city life, Christian Associations for Young Men formed as alternative gathering places. These associations provided religious guidance to men, and sought to disrupt the ensnaring vices such as gambling and drinking that lurked in urban environments. In order to support these associations and provide a text for men to study, Atkinson wrote *The True Path: or The Young Man Invited to the Savior.* This work was published in Philadelphia in 1860, and Atkinson hoped his writings would further the aims of these men's associations, which he called the "counter movement of

Christian benevolence."[51] This work provided what Atkinson considered the necessary Christian theology for young converts before the start of the Civil War, as well as another way antebellum religious leaders presented the message of the good death.

The True Path presented a standard version of Protestant Christian beliefs, with a focus on belief in Jesus Christ as a savior, in God's commandments as true moral guidance, and the necessity of refusing the corrupting influence of earthly things (such as vice). Atkinson's Presbyterian roots shone through the work with his inclusion of the doctrine of original sin, though predestination does not feature prominently. Atkinson hoped that parents would find his work scripturally sound, and that his message would rescue readers from "the deadly delusions of prevalent forms of infidelity."[52] The primary message provided by this book was meant to prepare readers to live a holy life in avoidance of sin and vice, but death also appears in its pages. There was no section explicitly dedicated to the ending of one's life, but Atkinson wrote on the subject throughout the work. Atkinson considered death a transition that brought peace, and his book presented faith in God as something that bore fruits such as, "holiness in life; peace in death; and happiness in heaven."[53] Those who expressed belief in God received "inheritance beyond the grave, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away."[54] Gaining this inheritance depended upon living a repentant life, and only an expression of faith allowed death to be peaceful. Atkinson wrote that those who denied Christianity or otherwise lived a life without religion met a darker end:

> Death is now the king of terrors, the consummation and climax of earthly ills, in the apprehension of mankind. There is nothing which they dread so much, and if they are not Christians, so justly; for it cuts them off from every earthly blessing

> and consigns them to everlasting woe. But then death for ourselves or our dear friends is felt and feared no more. Now we dwell in the region and shadow of death, in a world in which death reigns naturally over every son and daughter of Adam. But that is the land of life and truly the land of the living.[55]

According to Atkinson, believers should not fear death but rather they should be soothed by the knowledge that they are no longer only of the earth. Like most other Protestant Christians, Atkinson believed that those who had expressed faith in Christianity were now reborn as citizens of God. The tenets that Atkinson outlined allowed Christians to be free of the fear of that "king of terrors." Freedom from fear allowed one to be confident in their immortality after death, and this confidence in an everlasting life was an essential part of what Atkinson and his contemporaries deemed a good death. The message of immortality gained new meanings once war began and the stunning speed with which death occurred ensured that the "shadow of death" spread across the nation.

Funerals and mourning rituals provided the final physical and emotional pieces of the traditional aspects of a good death. In nineteenth century America, where refrigeration was almost non-existent, burial for the dead generally had to occur quickly. Preservation of bodies could be accomplished through embalming or other chemical preservation methods, but that required technical skill, specialized equipment, and proper knowledge and resources. In North Carolina, postponement of a burial was a costly process, thus funerals had to occur quickly or be delayed until after the burial had already occurred. Regardless of the timing of the funeral, these events still provided a chance for both attendees and the clergy leading it to reflect on death. Clergy chosen to give sermons at funerals relayed a changing message based on the characteristics of who was buried (their

age and whether they were known to be a believer), and on who was in the audience. By 1860, most sermons served as a means to warn attendees that death awaited all and that Christian religion was necessary to secure life after death.[56] The funeral itself served as the final means of closure for survivors; Drew Faust even describes funerals as a psychological transition in her book *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War,* stating, "a community of friends and relatives shared this ritual affirmation of loss and marked the new status of each mourner, now deprived of husband, father, brother, or son."[57] Despite this new status, the pain of loss remained in the minds of family members and their community even if the physical remains of the dead were entombed in the earth.

Internal grief assumed external forms through the process of mourning dictated by one's community. In the nineteenth century, unwritten rules for mourning guided both men and women in the actions they could take after the death of a loved one, as well as limiting their choice of fashion. Women faced severe restrictions, limited to wearing only black, grey, or dark shades of purple for a year or longer.[58] Out of deference to the dead, women also were not to attend social events. Men wore black armbands to mark their loss, and their clothing was limited to darker shades as well. However, it was not unusual for men to attend social gatherings within months of a loved one's death.[59] The Civil War affected almost every aspect of the good death tradition. Soldiers died away from home and mortal remains were frequently thrown into mass graves or left to rot after especially fierce combat. Black cloth, like most other goods, became hard to find when the Union blockade restricted southern trade.[60] The ferocious frequency of funerals, soldiers unable to die a good death, families unable to mourn one loss before receiving news of another,

were all unimaginable consequences for those who assumed that the South could secede peacefully. Still, when South Carolina left the Union and sought others to join with it, North Carolinians were hesitant.

However, arguments over the question of slavery pushed North Carolinians toward action. Religious fractures between northern and southern denominations centered on scriptural evidence from the same book, and both sides were convinced of the biblical truth of their anti- or pro-slavery ideals. Over questions on the morality of the enslavement of human beings, theological and secular allegiances combined, changing the relationship of the church and state.[61] This allegiance between the political and religious spheres of society caused widespread concern. Northern groups viewed southern religious organizations as under the control of demanding slave-owners, while white southerners swore that the heavy hands of abolitionists were tightening around the neck of their northern companions. Unlike the rifts that formed due to theological differences, the creation of northern and southern organizations, due to irreconcilable views of the Bible, caused some to believe that a dangerous precedent had been set.[62]

After South Carolina seceded, and before the war began in earnest, North Carolinian Methodists called into question the role of ecclesiastical groups in directing the political affiliations of their constituents through the *Raleigh Christian Advocate.* This publication served as the official paper of the Eastern North Carolina Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and on January 8, 1861, it featured an editorial on a state conference held by the Methodist church in South Carolina. This conference resulted in a pronouncement that favored South Carolina's recent secession. The editors of the *Raleigh Christian Advocate* used their platform and spoke out vehemently against the neighboring

Methodist Church's use of religion to defend a secular decision. The editors stated that they regretted this use of the church by the South Carolinians, "because it was the action of an ecclesiastical body upon a political question. And we regret it all the more because such political action by a leading conference of the Southern Church, forms a dangerous precedent, and may be disastrous to the peace of the church in those counties of North Carolina, which are under its jurisdiction."[63] The editors of the *Raleigh Christian Advocate* also found themselves resentful at Tar Heel Methodists still being under the control of South Carolinians, despite that state's exit from the Union and current sovereign existence, and the editors warned that visitors from the Palmetto state would not receive a warm welcome, stating "They [Methodists] ought to show to the church and the world, that they are under no more necessity to import foreign preachers from South Carolina, than Yankee cabbages from New England."[64]

Despite the fears expressed by the Methodist editors of the *Raleigh Christian Advocate,* the authors of both religious and secular sources seemed willing to support secession from afar. Yet, even if they agreed with the right of a state to secede, many within the Tar Heel state did not want to test that theory firsthand. Both secular and religious leaders expressed a desire to avoid secession. The *Biblical Recorder*, mouthpiece of North Carolina's Baptist State Convention, slowly took notice of the turmoil of secession. Over the course of the 1850s, the editors of the weekly paper increased their coverage of secession in the secular news section of the publication. By November of 1860, coverage of secession emphasized the editors' anxiety over the political strife in the nation. Under an article titled "The Crisis", secession was compared to a furious storm, as "the political heavens are blackening with portentous clouds, which

may break with fury upon our country. May the God of our fathers and the Guide of youth instruct our rulers, teach our Senators wisdom and control the passions of our people."[65] The statewide Baptist organization hoped that secession could be avoided, and wanted God to "direct the ship of State [*sic*] in the perilious [*sic*] waters."[66] North Carolina's other religious groups were of the same mind.

Bishop Thomas Atkinson, the head of North Carolina's Anglican population, feared the repercussions of secession on faith, and prayed for some sort of unity even after North Carolina left the Union. He spoke out vehemently against the idea that simply because the state in which a church resided had left the Union the diocese within had to leave its national organizations. In an address presented at the 1861 convention of North Carolina's diocese, He stated that if the actions of the state automatically influenced the actions of the church then the church itself was "the mere shadow of the State [*sic*], its slave, and not its fellow-worker."[67] Creating a new southern organization simply because the political situation of the country demanded it, ultimately destroyed the separation of church of state. Despite this belief, Atkinson was unsure of where his church stood and believed that a new system may indeed be necessary.[68] Only reluctantly would he give his acquiescence to a schism within his church, regardless of the severity of the political fracture that divided the country. Despite Atkinson's convictions, he recognized that secession sentiment ran high after the firing on Fort Sumter and he admitted that by the time North Carolina's secular representatives passed the secession ordinance its citizens had, "become nearly unanimous in the conviction that she must adopt the policy which she has pursued."[69] Ultimately, the national Episcopal Church separated in 1861 and Atkinson and his diocese turned into staunch supporters of the Confederacy soon after.

Anti-secession sentiment was also evident in secular publications. The editor of the *North Carolina Standard*, W. W. Holden, saw disaster awaiting North Carolina if it left the Union. In an editorial published on July 11, 1861, Holden stated, "disunion would be fraternal strife, civil and servile war, murder, arson, pillage, robbery, and fire and blood through long and cruel years."[70] Many in the state echoed Holden's desire to remain in the Union, though most did not use such apocalyptic language to do so. Most simply felt, as Holden emphasized toward the close of his editorial, that "there is no good cause *now* for dissolving the Union. The cause may arise, but let us not hasten to make or meet it."[71]

However, not all North Carolina citizens counseled caution. Hotbeds of Union support existed in the western reaches of the state but, in areas with greater concentrations of enslaved persons, support for secession was higher. A resident of Halifax county, Catherine Ann Devereux Edmondston, wrote frequently in her journal about her unwavering support of South Carolina, and her preparedness for North Carolina to follow suit. Edmondston's husband Patrick Muir Edmondston founded the Scotland Neck Mounted Rifles, and shared his wife's passion for the Confederacy. However, the rest of the Catherine Edmondston's family did not. In a journal entry dated February 16, 1861, Edmondston described her sister's anti-secession sentiments, and she was horrified at her sister's suggestion that it might be worth losing the slavery system if through such action the Union was preserved, "This to me is treason against Liberty…I *yield nothing* – no compromise – where my *liberty*, my *honour* [*sic*], dearer than life is concerned!"[72] Two days later, Edmondston recorded her wish that North Carolina would join the Confederacy, as the states who made up that new nation were the Tar Heel State's, "sisters in blood, in soil, in climate & in institution."[73] Even the flag of the United States

could not evoke any Union sympathy from Edmondston, as she had a strong response to family members who suggested she respect the banner, "who cares for the old striped rag now that the principle it represented is gone? It is but an emblem of a past glory. How can it be upheld when the spirit – nay even the body – that gave it value is lost?"[74] Edmondston, and other North Carolinians who professed such strong support for the Confederacy, were a minority group until tensions between South Carolina and the Lincoln administration came to a head.

After the fighting at Fort Sumter, public opinion across North Carolina swiftly pivoted. The general assembly of the state, previously advocating patience and hoping for a peaceful solution, voted a month after the short battle to hold a secession conference. A letter from North Carolina's governor, John Ellis, helped to spur this sudden change. On April 14, 1861, two days after the bombardment of Fort Sumter, Ellis received a request from Lincoln's secretary of war, Simon Cameron, for a supply of soldiers to serve in the Union army. Ellis was disgusted by this request, and he gave Cameron a decisive no. The governor of the Tar Heel state also penned a statement for both chambers of the state legislature, which described his unequivocal support for secession, and stated that the states that remained in the Union were now enemies of North Carolina as, "they have drawn the sword against us and are now seeking our blood… all fraternity of feeling is lost between us and them. We can no longer live with them. There must be separation at once and forever."[75] Ellis ended his letter with a call for the legislature to pass a secession vote, and North Carolina left the Union on May 20, 1861 with a vote in the state Senate of forty-seven for and none against.[76]

After the ordinance of secession passed, public opinion within the state shifted quickly. Support for the Confederacy swept the state, even within the Union-leaning western portions of the state.[77] Religious leaders, Thomas Atkinson and Joseph Atkinson among them, began to promote the Confederacy from the pulpit as religion in the state slowly took on a nationalistic proclivity. Ministers took it upon themselves to convert their flocks to the southern cause, and once conflict ensued, the war became a holy crusade championed by both clergy and their converts.[78] Civil religion, which clergy later used to conflate death with sacrifice for the nation, took hold of the white southern mind.

North Carolina proved a useful member of the Confederacy. Wilmington, the state's largest city, acted as a vital base for blockade-runners. Consequently, the city suffered an outbreak of yellow fever in 1862 due to blockade running ships bringing back diseased mosquitoes along with supplies gathered from the Caribbean. More direct support was provided by the 110,000 men from the Tar Heel state who fought for the Confederacy, 40,000 of whom died. North Carolina natives turned to the theologies of Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Episcopal clergy members to explain the war, and both clergy and laity attempted to expand the definition of the good death to include soldiers who died away from home. Changing interpretations of religious belief paved the way to a Christianization of a war that was anything but holy.

Endnotes

[1] E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 10.

[2] Ibid., 1.

[3] Richard J. Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 2.

[4] Clarence C. Goen, "Scenario for Secession: Denominational Schisms and the Coming of the Civil War." in *Varieties of Southern Religious Experience*, ed. Samuel S. Hill (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 14.

[5] Lydia Huffman Hoyle, "Baptists," in *Religious Traditions of North Carolina: Histories, Tenets, and Leaders*, ed. W. Glenn Jonas Jr. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2018), 8.

[6] Ibid.; Hebrews 6 lists six different principles of believers, repentance for sin, baptism of believers, the laying of hands of the congregation on a new believer, resurrection of the dead, and the final judgment that was believed to await all.

[7] Ibid., 9.

[8] Ibid., 16.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid., 17.

[11] Michael Perdue, "Methodists," in *Religious Traditions of North Carolina* (see note 5), 176; In this aspect, Wesley was influenced by his association with Moravian communities in Europe and Arminian beliefs.

[12] Ibid., 177.

[13] Ibid., 178; Episcopal here refers to the organization of the Methodist church. Bishops presided over the movement at the National or district level and had similar powers and roles to those in the Anglican church. Shortly after the formation of this organization, Asbury maneuvered this church out from under Wesley's control, and became the sole head of the American Methodist Episcopal Church.

[14] Holifield, *Theology in America*, 261.

[15] Ibid., 263.

[16] Ibid., 260.

[17] Perdue, "Methodists," 192.

[18] Holifield, *Theology in America*, 260.

[19] Perdue, "Methodists," 186.

[20] Holifield, *Theology in America*, 370-77.

[21] Robert J. Cain, "Presbyterians," in *Religious Traditions of North Carolina* (see note 5), 224.

[22] Ibid., 226.

[23] George C. Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 16.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Robert J. Cain, "Presbyterians," 227; Old School Presbyterians were responsible for the establishment of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederacy.

[26] Joseph S. Moore, *Founding Sins: How a Group of Antislavery Radicals Fought to Put Christ into the Constitution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 90.

[27] Ibid., 225.

[28] Ibid.

[29] N. Brooks Graebner, "Episcopalians," in *Religious Traditions of North Carolina* (see note 5), 70.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid., 71; The Regulators, many of whom were Baptists, sought equality in the colony's politics. Colonial militia imposed the rule of law and defeated armed Regulator bands, hanging the leaders.

[32] Ibid., 72-73.

[33] Ibid., 73.

[34] Holifield, *Theology in America*, 240.

[35] Graebner, "Episcopalians," 74.

[36] Ibid., 76; Ravenscroft believed that providing bibles without also providing biblical teaching went against Episcopal beliefs that one has to reach God through an official mediator such as a bishop.

[37] Ibid., 79.

[38] Ibid., 80.

[39] Ibid., 81.

[40] Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples*, 18.

[41] For statistics on Methodists, Baptists, and Episcopalians see Hugh Talmage Lefler and Albert Ray Newsome, *The History of a Southern State: North Carolina*, 3rd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 416-417; For Presbyterian numbers see Robert J. Cain, "Presbyterians," 225.

[42] Goen, "Scenario for Secession," 16.

[43] Ibid., 17.

[44] Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples*, 14.

[45] Ibid., 24.

[46] James Farrell, *Inventing the American Way of Death, 1830-1920* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 36.

[47] Mark Schantz, *Awaiting the Heavenly Country: The Civil War and America's Culture of Death* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 18-19.

[48] Ibid.

[49] "Died", *Wilmington Journal*, September 6, 1860, 3.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Joseph Atkinson, *The True Path, or the Young Man Invited to the Savior. In a Series of Lectures* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1860), 9.

[52] Ibid., 10.

[53] Ibid., 14.

[54] Ibid., 32.

[55] Ibid., 294.

[56] James Farrell, *Inventing the American Way of Death*, 178-79.

[57] Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*, First Vintage Civil War Library Edition (New York: Vintage Books, 2009), 153; Faust goes on to say that during war many funerals turned into a chance to showcase the patriotism and bravery of the dead.

[58] Ibid., 147-48.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 12.

[62] Goen, "Scenario for Secession," 18-19.

[63] "South Carolina Conference", *Raleigh Christian Advocate,* January 8, 1861, 2.

[64] Ibid.

[65] "The Crisis", *Biblical Recorder* (Raleigh, NC), November 29, 1860, 2.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Thomas Atkinson, *Extract from the Annual Address of the Rt. Rev. Thomas Atkinson, D.D., to the Convention of the Diocese of North Carolina: Holden at Morganton, July 10th, 1861* (Raleigh: The Church Intelligencer, 1861), 5.

[68] Ibid., 8.

[69] Ibid.

[70] "Constitutional Union," *North Carolina Standard* (Raleigh, NC), July 11, 1860, 1.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Catherine Ann Devereux Edmondston, *"Journal of a Secesh Lady": The Diary of Catherine Ann Devereux Edmondston 1860-1866,* ed. Beth G. Crabtree and James W. Patton (Raleigh: North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 1979), 37.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid., 38.

[75] John Ellis, "Governor's Message" in *Journal of the Senate of the General Assembly of the State of North Carolina at its Session of 1860-'61* (Raleigh: John Spelman, printer to the state, 1861), 511.

[76] Ibid., 512.

[77] John C. Inscoe and Gordon B. McKinney, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia: Western North Carolina in the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 84.

[78] Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis,* 7.

CHAPTER 2: THE GLORIES OF DEATH AND THE PROMISES OF REBIRTH: IMMORTALITY IN WARTIME NORTH CAROLINA

Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? John 11:25-26.

On November 17, 1861, in the town of Ellerslie, North Carolina, a chaotic scene unfurled along the Cape Fear River. The previously deserted town received a visit from two companies of local soldiers returning from Yorktown, Virginia, and their arrival sparked a scene reminiscent of a pre-war celebration. Mary Florence Maffitt Wright, who preferred to be called Florie Maffitt, recorded the gathering in a letter, describing anxious citizens waiting to welcome the men who were already a day late. Maffitt's group sat on top of a hill overlooking the waters of the river, watching the horizon for any sign of the returning soldiers. Just before sunset, the ship carrying the men came into view sparking pandemonium amongst the throngs of people gathered along the riverside. Maffit explained:

> "there is but one step from the sublime to the ridiculous," and thus it was. As soon as they landed, the scene was truly ludicrous, – ladies crying, shouting, and rushing in every direction; children lost, servants hunting for them, – indeed such an excitement, as I suppose, was never witnessed on the banks of the Cape Fear.[1]

The excitement evident in Maffitt's description of this joyous scene contrasts vividly from her later descriptions of the empty streets of Ellerslie during the Civil War, after regiments from across North Carolina became decimated by the rigors of battle. Maffitt suffered the loss of both a brother and a friend, and the despair in her later letters suggests

the degree to which the realities of the Civil War strayed from the martial excitement so evident in 1861. Once North Carolina settled into its place within the Confederacy and combat began to take its toll, civilians were hard pressed to find cause for celebrations.

Throughout the conflict, North Carolinians suffered horrors both old and new. Disease, such as the 1862 outbreak of yellow fever at Wilmington, killed thousands.[2] The Union blockade, put into place at the beginning of the conflict, sealed off the South and made a wide variety of basic supplies both hard to find and exorbitantly priced. By 1862, basic materials like salt, sugar, and cloth were much more expensive than they had been just a year earlier. The suffering incurred from disease and war profiteering paled for many in comparison to the anxiety they bore knowing that a brother, father, son, or friend faced danger and destruction while serving the Confederacy. Through the four years of war, hearing of the death of a loved one confirmed the worst fears of those on the home front. Pain brought by the news of a fallen soldier reached from the soldier's command back to the family and friends who received the dreaded communiqué at home. Civilians turned to religious leaders to explain the hardships they experienced. In response, ministers promised immortality as a means to mollify the pain of war deaths, their writings evoking images of eternal life laced with implicit messages about gender and nationalism in the face of nationwide war.

The horrid consequences of war did not respect the rules of engagement. Soldiers fought across the south, and for those who lived within the eleven southern states the war, as historian Joe Mobley states in *Weary of War: Life on the Confederate Home Front,* "raged in their midst and permeated every aspect of their daily lives."[3] Border areas faced increasingly disastrous partisan conflict and many unfortunate towns endured Sherman's

fiery wrath as he pushed to the sea. North Carolinians saw some of the worst that the war on the home front had to offer. The state's coastal islands and forts came under varying degrees of Union control quickly. An early amphibious assault led by Ambrose Burnside captured Roanoke Island in February of 1862, merely eight months after North Carolina joined the Confederacy. Union forces occupied increasingly large portions of the eastern region of the Tar Heel state as the war ground on. Occupation varied in intensity and severity, but just the news of Union troops in control of southern territory was horrific to Confederates who wished to die upon the sword rather than submit to the disenfranchisement or even enslavement that many assumed a Union victory would unleash.

Occupation brought tension to religious institutions as well. Union commanders claimed churches to use as field hospitals or even closed churches when ministers failed to pray for Abraham Lincoln (though these actions were less common than the southern press had citizens believe).[4] Even in western areas of the state, untouched by a sustained Union presence, audiences for church sermons dwindled as conscription drew men away from local services. At the beginning of the conflict, ministers largely agreed that the Union should allow the Confederate nation to operate in peace.[5] The rapid deployment of men from North Carolina as frontline soldiers changed this desire as clergy promoted the war effort and their flocks sent men to war. Many ministers themselves felt called to serve as chaplains or to attend to military hospitals; those who remained were forced to change their relationship to their congregations. Despite the dislocation of war, ministers still served as conduits of God's will, but now their attentions had to be focused on explaining the destruction and death brought by the conflict. The Confederacy bought its

continuance only through blood drawn in battle, and preachers shifted their messages in order to provide their congregations hope for the future in the face of utter devastation.

Advocacy for peace and reunification among ministers and civilians throughout the Tar Heel state faded after North Carolina left the Union. By the first months of 1862, ministers across the state began to include blatant aspects of a civil religion based on Confederate nationalism as one of the central tenets of their sermons. Written works and public speeches helped to foster a nationalistic fervor among white southerners, but those preaching from the pulpit often became just as important in inspiring belief, as were public officials and fire-eating newspaper editors.[6] Drew Faust has stated that through their sermons, ministers had "one of the most effective and influential means of reaching the southern population" and that these preachers constructed a "transcendent framework" for the spread of Confederate support.[7] Through the pronouncements of the church, clergy assured citizens that they retained God's support and that he desired for the South to reign supreme; though this ultimate victory could not come without a cost.

Drawing on the established tradition of sacrifice and belief in an eternal cause already present in Protestant Christian faith traditions, Confederate ministers spoke about soldiers as willing martyrs for the south. For these theologians, death came to represent the ultimate act of the Confederate patriot. Blood had created the nation, and those who sacrificed themselves to ensure its survival would be enshrined in the annals of Confederate history as martyrs who proved their beliefs. Christianity itself already featured a long line of men and women revered as saints whose death proved their devotion. With the injection of Confederate nationalism into Tar Heel religious belief, those who died while serving the state gained the same boons as those who died for their

God. In an attempt to Christianize the disastrous conflict, preachers ensured civilians that eternal life, through faith and through popular memory, followed the death of a soldier.

Immortality had long been a central promise of Christianity, so much so that historian Benjamin Miller calls this belief system a "death centered religion."[8] While opinions differed on how to, and who would, enter into heaven upon death, believers were comforted by the idea of an eternal life in a time when death rates were high and life was dangerous. As the Civil War progressed from its bloodless first battle at Fort Sumter, to the increasingly violent and gruesome battles that later characterized the conflict, the promise of immortality comforted ministers and civilians alike. The confluence of nationalism and immortality in response to death can clearly be seen through a sermon preached in 1862 by the Reverend Joseph Atkinson, a Presbyterian minister in Raleigh. Atkinson's *God. The Giver of Victory and Peace*, espoused the idea that, "the martyred dead have taken possession of this Southern soil for the Southern people. It was theirs originally, by the gift of God, and they have bought it anew by their blood. This land will be endeared to us and to our posterity, because it is the earthly resting-place of our immortal dead."[9] Confederate soldiers thus became religious martyrs upon death, and Atkinson believed that with their deaths they both sanctified and laid claim to the land of the Confederacy. He described the deaths of soldiers as an act of creation for the nation and connected causalities to faith in this newly apportioned country. The fallen made the ultimate act of sacrifice and proved their belief in the South and, in dying this way, soldiers gave their life in return for immortality.

Death for the nation, according to clergymen like Atkinson, earned one an immortal remembrance through the memory of the white people of the South. The ground of North

Carolina became the resting place of men represented as martyrs and, through the sustaining of the Confederacy, Atkinson believed that these men became immortal. Soldiers' names, the Confederate nation, and faith intertwine through this message. He maintained that belief in Christianity would provide soldiers with an eternal life after death. Atkinson believed that the eventual ascendency of the Confederacy would provide soldiers with an eternal life through popular memory. This act gave new meaning to the Confederacy for civilians, and this message emphasized among the non-combatant population that the only way to sustain their white southern nation was through blood sacrifice. According to Atkinson, the Confederacy was bought and paid for by those who died from Union guns, something civilians needed to remember.

North Carolina's advanced educational infrastructure aided preachers in spreading the importance of this message. Calvin Henderson Wiley, a licensed Presbyterian preacher and North Carolina's first superintendent of common schools, discerned that for the Confederacy to survive for any length of time, establishing a new southern culture through education was of vital importance. By 1861, Wiley, who had already written several books on southern life, including *Roanoke; or, Where is Utopia?* (1849), *Early Life in the South* (1852), *Life in the South* (1852), and *The North-Carolina Reader* (1851), led a conference of educators in Raleigh that met in 1861 with the purpose of adopting standards to illuminate the responsibilities of educators in the new nation. The convention adopted a series of resolutions that were originally put forth by Daniel Johnson, then serving as the principal of Floral College in Robeson County, and published these resolutions presumably for the citizens of the Tar Heel state to read. The rhetoric these contemporary educators used showed that they wanted to take an active

position in supporting the Confederacy and enforcing a southern literary tradition in order to promote faith in their new country. After they stated that conference members should commend themselves to "the hearts and consciences of all the people of the Confederate States," Wiley explained their view of the importance of religion in their new country's birth struggle,

> Resolved, That as this is a struggle for national existence and independence, it is to be maintained and carried on not only by legislative acts and force of arms in the field, but, also, in the school room, at the fireside, and by all those moral agencies which preserve society, and which prepare a people to be a free and self-governing nationality; and that, considering our former dependence for books, for teachers, and for manufactures on those who now seek our subjugation, it is especially incumbent on us to encourage and foster a spirit of home enterprise and self-reliance.[10]

Originally intended to separate the South from the North and to provide a unique literature free from Union bonds, this nationalism became a part of every aspect of white southerners' lives and played a large part in the creation of the Lost Cause ideology that swept the region after the war ended. The authors of the address also stated that if the education system of the state languished, then a whole generation would not receive proper moral guidance. Religion provided the principles that they believed should fill southern educational materials, "let us at once fill our schools with books which draw all their ethical doctrines from this Divine source, and which make the incarnate Son of God the centre [*sic*] and sun of every moral system."[11] Thus, nationalism within the South intertwined with religion through both religious and secular leaders.

The draw of serving in the Confederate army drained the male population of many areas of North Carolina, and the nationwide conscription acts put in place starting in 1862 further lessened male presence. Contemporaries saw religion as the realm of women and, even prior to the war, greater than two-thirds of all southern Protestant church members were female.[12] The drain of the state's male population due to the war exacerbated this phenomenon. Congregations across the South lost many of their male members, and women made up an even larger proportion of the audiences. Mothers, daughters, wives, and female friends of soldiers played a vital role during the war as nurses and in assuming the responsibilities abandoned by men who left to fight. As the war ground on, women, already taxed by the depletion of resources within the Confederacy, still faced the loss of husbands, sons, and fathers in a quest for southern independence and bore a heavy burden of mourning when a soldier died. By 1862, ministers noticed this change in the demographics of their audience, and the patriarchal overtones common in southern religion intensified. Many clergy members, in fact, tailored sermons to explain the new religious duties that they believed women needed to follow in order to support the soldiers.

Reverend R.H. Lafferty gave one such sermon on February 28, 1862 from the pulpit of the Sugar Creek Church in Mecklenburg County. Jefferson Davis called for this day to be one of fasting across the South in recognition of recent Confederate losses, and Lafferty chose to preach a sermon describing the mistakes the Confederacy had already made and the methods that he believed would remedy them. He described the war as a conflict of self-defense by the South against the aggressive North, and Lafferty gave

instructions for what actions civilians could take to benefit the war effort. Among them was this command directed towards women:

> Your affections may be strong, as they ought to be, for your fathers, husbands, brothers, or sons, but this is no valid reason why you should not be willing that they should go and perform that duty which God in his providence has imposed upon them, and to which our country is loudly calling them. Let us make the sacrifice, however costly; it will only enhance in our estimation, the sacred boon of independence when once achieved, and will lead us to watch and defend it, in all coming time, with undying care.[13]

This message came months before the introduction of a draft, when the Confederacy was still relying on voluntary recruits, and Lafferty commanded that men needed to fight and, if need be die, for their new country. Families, meanwhile, should dutifully promote this sacrifice, as caring for your loved ones was not a "valid reason" for keeping them from death, especially if this death served to further the success of the Confederacy as a whole. He also promoted the idea that families had a responsibility to the Confederate nation to be separated from loved ones, whether temporarily through service or permanently through death, and God commanded all to adhere to their roles. Affection could not change the fact that men in North Carolina had a duty to perform, and Lafferty wanted women to be prepared for their male family members to die for the southern cause. Only by prayerfully sending men into the fight, Lafferty argued, could the Confederacy achieve its ultimate status as the "most complete exponent upon earth of a free government."[14]

The Episcopal minister Alfred Watson of Wilmington preached a similar message a year later in a sermon given in 1863 before the Council of the Diocese of North Carolina. Watson focused his message on the church's role in supporting the fighting, and the steps the faithful had to take to ensure soldiers would serve. In doing so, he reminded his listeners that death not only bought the Confederacy its existence, but it led to the eternal reward of immortality. Watson described the church as a whole in feminine terms and his instructions applied to the families of soldiers.

> She [the church] can remind him that even to escape death in battle is not to escape it long, but that, in fact, he is 'immortal till his work is done' – that he is immortal even in death – that for the Christian, death upon an honorable battle-field is but one great pathway to eternal glory. And though she draw not the sword herself, nor descend to the dust of the field of strife, yet she can take her stand with God upon the Mountain, and by prayer uphold her warrior's hands.[15]

Watson agreed with Lafferty that men should fight and die in service to the nation, and that families needed to remind soldiers of their duties. However, he tempered his message by promising that those who died as Christians would see eternal life in heaven. While men fought and died, if they died on the battlefield, then they would receive the glory due to a Christian soldier. This sermon also served as a reminder to listeners that they would only die at the time God appointed for them. Contemporary ministers wanted civilians to believe that if a soldier died on the battlefield, he had completed his destiny. While giving sermons to the families who remained at home, civilian ministers ardently sought to remind listeners that soldiers, through an honorable death, received immortality and glory. Any death, no matter how grievous or seemingly unnecessary, thus became a

pathway to heaven for the Christian soldier and ministers argued that their sacrifice led them to something better. This message both crossed denominational lines, and took on a variety of shades of meaning. Clergy represented the Confederate nation, born out of strife and built on the promise of enslaved labor, as needing the blood of believers to prove its worth and consecrate its existence.

Secular and religious literature throughout North Carolina echoed the clergy's messages. Newspapers, tracts, and other written works discussed the importance of living—and dying—a Christian. And religious periodicals helped to disseminate the promise of immortality to a broader audience. For example, an article published in 1862 in the *Biblical Recorder* provided a rather standard version of immortality as broached in print. Titled "Death in the Household," the author of this piece opened with a question and a warning asking, "has the dread visitor made one call – or already more than one – at your dwelling? He is yet to come again."[16] This article was published in June, when fighting had begun to reach a fever pitch. The fierce combat seen at the battles of Shiloh (April 6, 1862) and Seven Pines (May 31, 1862) claimed lives at a pace never seen before on American soil and made the "dread visitor" very busy.[17] However, the editors of the Baptist newspaper promoted the same beliefs that religious leaders across the state were preaching; those suffering from the loss of a family member were not to be without hope. Relief from suffering would come; "Thanks to Him who 'hath brought life and immortality to light."[18] While death had visited many families throughout the South already, and would only continue its tour, the promise of immortality, given by the editors of the *Biblical Recorder* and its contributors, served as a means to lessen grief.

Ministers believed faith to be the central pillar of an effective southern soldier, and the immortality they promised to those at home and in the field could only be obtained if one kept their faith in the midst of a destructive war. This focus on the faith of the soldiers led to the creation of an archetype of the proper "Christian Soldier" in print; this holy warrior placed the ideals of his nation and his protestant Christian faith above all and suffered pain, exhaustion, and loss with humility. This trope appeared often, especially when survivors wrote about the death of a soldier, and those who died a Christian soldier were memorialized through print throughout North Carolina as dying "a proper death." This stereotype both served as an example for soldiers to strive for, and as an example of how contemporaries believed faith could mollify the suffering of a soldier away from home. Stories of a soldier dying in the fullness of Christ also brought some light to the darkness of the seemingly endless causality lists. Referenced in secular and religious sources, authors used the ideal of the Christian soldier to disseminate beliefs about faith producing superior fighters and allowing for more peaceful deaths.

On September 9, 1863, the editors of the *Biblical Recorder* printed the obituary for R.H.C. Atkinson, the son of the Reverend Watson Atkinson. This piece presented the younger Atkinson as an evangelical soldier, his captain describing him as, "a brave, generous, and above all, a moral young man, and a pious christian [*sic*]."[19] Atkinson died on September 3 in fighting around Chancellorsville, but despite suffering from a mortal wound with no family or friends around him, his beliefs tempered his agony. The enemy could kill the body but the obituary assured readers that the soul of a Christian remained bulletproof.

> What a mercy, that the enemy could only kill the body, that the soul could leave the field of battle and go to Jesus.—What a change, from amidst the roar of cannon, the bursting of shells, and clash of arms, that the spirit enters the calm and peaceful paradise of God, to dwell with Jesus and loved ones for ever, in singing redeeming grace and dying love.[20]

Despite falling in the chaos of battle, Atkinson had found peace through faith. In describing this hopeful scene, the writers of the obituary used Atkinson's death to send a message both to soldiers and to those on the home front. Faith became a salve that allowed Atkinson to face death without fear and gain the soldier immortality, undoubtedly a promising thought both for families and for soldiers who might read of their companion's demise. In presenting the final moments of a Christian soldier as a calm and bright transition, almost one to be celebrated, the authors also represented death as something not to be feared. Families of soldiers could take comfort in the knowledge that faith shielded soldiers from the horror that one would usually ascribe to a soldier's death, "we would say to the bereaved, dry up your tears and let your sorrows cease; think how he suffered here, and let your thoughts pursue the spirit as it wings its way through the trackless air."[21] The authors of this article hoped that this soldier's faith could mollify the sufferings of those who knew him, while also minimizing the physical trauma that a violent death entailed. This image of the purity of the transition to eternal life, and the minimization of the suffering of the wounded, saw frequent use in the decades leading up to the Civil War to describe those dying of a disease such as consumption. But here the editors of the *Biblical Recorder* have applied the message to war.[22]

The story of an evangelical British officer named Hedley Vicars also offered an example of this Christian soldier archetype. Vicars served as a minister and a volunteer combatant in the Crimean War (1853-1856). He provided religious encouragement to his soldiers and led them into battle against charging Russians, finally being struck down in fierce hand-to-hand combat.[23] Southern writers memorialized Vicars' death as an example to live and die for. One such writer, Catherine Marsh of Raleigh, ensured the survival of the memory of his service in a variety of pamphlets. Her *A Sketch of the Life of Capt. Hedley Vicars, the Christian Soldier*, published in Raleigh in 1863, provided portions of Vicars' diary and letters in order to represent him as a noble soldier who served both his country and his faith with distinction. Marsh drew clear connections between the British officer's life of service in the Crimean War, and the plight of the Confederate army formed five years later. Marsh hoped that current soldiers could learn from the life of one who had already served with distinction. As she stated at the end of the tract "these brief extracts from the life of this noble Christian Soldier, are concluded – with the humble, earnest prayer, that every soldier of our Confederate army may follow Hedley Vicars, as he followed Jesus, the great Captain of our salvation."[24] Vicars also found new life through several mentions in the *Biblical Recorder,* the editors followed Marsh's example and held Vicars up as an example of the Christian soldier par excellence, one Confederates should emulate.[25]

Methodist minister Adolphus Williamson Magnum provided a more local example of the Christian soldier in his poem "Morven and Linda: or the Token Star." Written and published as part of a book of poetry and devotional literature in 1864, Magnum centered his work of fiction on two devoted white southerners; Morven, a southern white man in

love with Linda, presented as a stereotypical southern belle. Morven is drawn to the Confederate cause through a "zeal magnanimous" that prompted him to join the fight to support soldiers already in the field.[26] Linda supported Morven in his choice, her piety and devotion to the southern cause an example of the kind of devotion expected from southern women, just as Morven's adaptation of the role of the Christian soldier showed the expected duty of all southern men. Of course, no man or woman could hope to meet these standards with any accuracy, and some soldiers returned home only to find that their wives had chosen to take new partners or otherwise moved on while they served in the army.[27] Linda, however, remained true and zealously prays for her lover's safety; referring to him as a "Christian hero." So attached is she to Morven that their separation causes her physical suffering to the point that she believed herself to be dying,

The lustre [*sic*] of her noble eye
Grew dim, the roses on her cheek
Were faded by despondency.
The heart was sick; and when a heart
Like hers, is filled with gloom or pain,
The power's felt through form and soul.[28]

In Magnum's representation of a devoted southern woman, the depth of support that she holds is so great that the very separation itself drained her vitality. Not to be outdone, Morven proves himself an apt example of the Christian soldier archetype; he prays for bravery, sees action, and is wounded in battle. Despite his suffering, Morven ministers to his comrades on their deathbeds, telling them of the glories that awaited believers upon death.[29] Magnum concealed Linda's fate from the reader until the end of the poem, but

she survived her sadness and is waiting when Morven finally secures a furlough to visit her. The ideal Christian soldier, despite experiencing the agony of separation from his loved ones, would never commit the sin of desertion in order to return home. Magnum's work of fiction neatly encompassed what he believed the roles of both men and women to be during the war, pious men and women would fashion themselves after the example of the Christian soldier Morven and the devoted supporter Linda. Both of Magnum's characters survived their encounters with the war but, throughout the poem, both characters are confident that Christian beliefs of immortality would allow them to meet again regardless of their fates on earth. As Linda stated in a parting statement to her friends, "I die—but only *die to live*."[30]

Presbyterian religious works also emphasized the qualities of Christian soldiers, with an article in the *Raleigh Christian Recorder* proclaiming the same values detailed by both the Baptist *Biblical Recorder* and Methodist preacher Adolphus Magnum's poem. In an article published on June 10, 1863 the editors described a dying soldier as, "a patriot soldier…with a steady and glowing heroism…[who] looked upon death with the serene composure of an Addison or a Havelock."[31] The authors of this work lauded the patriotism and composure this soldier expressed in the face of death; qualities that ultimately served to make "a scene lovely amid horrors, bright amid gloom – the death-bed of a christian [*sic*] soldier."[32] The war itself generated numerous other examples of this type of soldier as well. Thousands across the South grieved when they heard news of Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson's death on May 10, 1863, and his mythic religiosity and bravery as a soldier became immediately immortalized.[33] Idealized fiction differed wildly from reality, and the reach of the messages provided through sermons, newspapers, and

works of fiction remained highly dependent on individual levels of belief. Clergy and ministers ardently sought to expose civilians across the Tar Heel state to messages of immortality, though listeners responded to what they heard in a variety of ways. For some, the promises of religious leaders helped to sustain them through the four years of war others; however, found that the immediate grief at news of the death of a loved one outweighed belief in an afterlife. The following accounts provide examples of the variety of responses and recorded feelings of grief of several families that sent men to fight. The power that religion held on those who believed can be seen through the diary of one woman who took the messages she heard to heart.

Mary Jeffreys Bethell believed strongly in the power of religion. Despite suffering from deafness, she still went to church when she could – enjoying the service even if the words of the preacher eluded her. Bethell remained a life-long, devoted, Methodist and her diary makes constant reference to her faith. Born in 1821, she was just over forty years old when North Carolina joined the war and Bethell recorded her reactions to it as she watched the war from her home in Rockingham County. The changes it wrought tested her faith like little else had. Two of Bethell's children, Willie and George, left Rockingham County in 1861 to serve in Confederate regiments. In the last year of the war, Bethell's husband, Weldon, also enlisted.

Throughout the conflict, Mary worried constantly about the dangers her family faced. In response to her sons leaving to fight, Bethell wrote: "I hope and trust in God that they will get back home from the battle field, but if they should fall, I hope that God will forgive them and take them to Heaven for Jesus [*sic*] sake who died for them."[34] Despite her initial fears and the sorrow that came with missing her children, Bethell nonetheless

remained largely hopeful for all of 1861. In February of 1862, the Confederate losses at Fort Donelson and Roanoke Island proved especially hard for Bethell to fathom, as both of these losses were closer to home. Bethell knew that the likelihood of her sons being injured or killed only increased the longer they served, and she knew the impossibility of providing the ideal conditions for dying during the chaos of a battle. Instead, Bethell hoped that God would provide this service should her sons fall. In an entry dated March 10th she wrote, "if it should be God's will for them to fall on the battle field, I hope he will send his angel to comfort them and help them, and if they die, to bear their souls to Heaven."[35] Bethell hoped that God would provide the rituals that she could not for her children.

The following year brought no better tidings to Bethell and other citizens of Rockingham County. On July 29, 1863, Bethell received word that her son George had been captured at Gettysburg. While saddened by the news, Bethell thanked God that George remained alive and she posited that his capture might even be God's means of converting her child who had yet to profess his faith writing, "man's extremity is God's opportunity, 'tis my daily prayer that God may convert his soul."[36] While none of her own had yet died, Bethell witnessed the ravages of war on her community. On September 16, she learned that Union forces had brought George as a prisoner to Johnson's Island Prison in Ohio. That same day, Bethell recorded visiting with "Mrs. Watson, a poor widow lady" whose husband had died, "Sophia and Bettie De Jarnette, poor orphan girls" and "poor old Mrs. Mitchell" who had lost her youngest child.[37] While Bethell seemed sad about the deaths, her entry provided this information in a very casual form. Her emotions were tempered by finding comfort in her faith and in believing that those who

had died, had died Christian. The sting of the scythe was lessened by her ardent belief that for these people, death was not the end, but a new beginning.

The next year saw the continued decline of the Confederate army. Bethell's diary remained hopeful for the first half of the year but by August, she could no longer conceal her increased stress. On August 10, 1864, in response to a death in her community, Bethell stated, "the Lord is judging his people, he turneth man to destruction and sayeth return ye children of men, it is intended for the good of us all."[38] She believed the high number of deaths the South experienced were a message to the living to repent. November proved to be a hard month as well, as Bethell prayed for deliverance from "temptations and great trials."[39] This year ended with George still in prison, Willie still on the field, and her husband newly enlisted as well.

By 1865, the Confederacy was all but completely broken. Bethell knew by March that the Confederates were routed, saying: "This is a dark hour for our country, the enemy are still advancing, taking possession of our citys [*sic*] and destroying property, thousands of our men have been slain. The war has been going on nearly four years, it is thought that slavery will be abolished, the enemy have been victorious."[40] Despite her dreary thoughts, the end of the war would bring glad tidings to Bethell. Her husband and sons returned home – safe and whole – and the country could turn its attention to what came next.

Bethell had had moments of doubt. Being away from her family and not knowing when or if they would return stretched the limits of Bethell's faith, and she suffered physically from a lack of supplies and digestive problems in the last months of the war. Despite all this, her faith nevertheless remained strong. Not all in her church could say

the same. On August 7th, 1865, one of her last entries, Bethell wrote "I feel sad when I look at the church, almost desolate, some of the members have died, and some backslidden, nearly all of the rest worldly minded, prayer meetings, class meetings, Sunday school, all are broken up because iniquity abounds. The love of many has waxed cold, all are selfish and seeking of their own."[41] For those citizens of Rockingham County who were not as secure in their faith as Bethell, the Civil War had an even more undeniable impact on their beliefs.

Bethell's faith remained strong, and she viewed the war through the lens of her stalwart belief in God, her trust in His protections, and her belief in an eternal life. As Bethell so pointedly described, many others in Rockingham County behaved differently. Across North Carolina, the promises of ministers often did little to dull the pain that war and loss had brought with it. While Bethell lived for the future and took the messages she heard to heart, other people expressed their anxiety about the war in different terms. Most did not have the level of abject belief that Bethell maintained.

Many found it more difficult to trust in the power of faith when confronted by the violence of war. Florie Maffitt, resident of Ellerslie, NC, wrote constantly to her friend Second Lieutenant John Wetmore Hinsdale throughout the first three years of the conflict. Despite complaining about the inconsistencies and slowness of the mail service, Maffitt and Hinsdale kept a steady stream of correspondence. Her letters provide valuable information on the war from the perspective of a civilian in Ellerslie, a small town just outside of Fayetteville NC. In a letter written to Hinsdale on September 2, 1861, Maffitt was startled by Hinsdale's description of the battle of Manassas and states that "Oh! It must have been heart rending to view the battlefield of Manassas! There death had spread

its pale ensign over many a countenance; there many, once full of hope, and life, languished and passed…without a friend near to close the eye, or bear a message of tenderness to a distant home."[42] Through Hinsdale's description of the battlefield, Maffitt grasped that significant parts of dying a good death were unavailable to the soldiers, specifically that no one could hear their final words or provide any final comforts. The company of friends or loved ones could not always be found during war, and with no one around to comfort those in their final moments, the last words of the slain were lost.

Several men in Maffit's life served in the Confederacy. Maffitt was the daughter of the famed Confederate blockade-runner John Newland Maffitt and one of her stepbrothers, Laurens, died serving under her father's command. Maffitt shared the news of her stepbrother's death with Hinsdale on October 21, 1862.

> Since you last heard from me, Mr. Hinsdale, death has taken from us one of our loved ones – our darling Brother Laurens. It is so hard to say 'Thy will be done', so difficult to realize that he has left us, no more to be seen on earth ~ gone in his fresh youth; so true, so brave & generous. Oh! I cannot tell you how lonely, how desolate our hearts are, as the days glide on, and we feel, we realize somewhat that other loved ones we may behold, but this dear Brother never again on earth. He died at Cardenas of that terrible fever.[43]

Maffitt's father almost died from the same fever but he survived, and Maffit gave credit to "God in his mercy" for sparing her father.[44] The struggle that Maffitt related in her letter was a common one for those reeling from the news of a fallen loved one. While Maffitt kept in mind the religious messages that flooded North Carolina, she also struggled to believe them. The same God of mercy that saved her father had apparently

willed death for her stepbrother, and despite the promises given of seeing him again in an afterlife; Maffitt felt pained by the knowledge that Laurens would be seen no more on earth.

The confusion and strain between what Maffitt heard about the promises and rewards awaiting the death of a Confederate soldier and the melancholy she expressed about Laurens's death were a common dichotomy. Rarely did someone relate a complete belief in the promises of eternal life without expressing some misgivings about the loss of the person who then experienced this gift. Members of the Pettigrew family would undergo the same confusion, and an even clearer dichotomy between belief and disbelief is seen in their responses. The circumstances surrounding the death of Brig. Gen. Johnston Pettigrew reveal the complex meaning behind a soldier's death and the letters of his families and friends showcase a wide variety of responses to the bleak news.

Johnston Pettigrew quickly joined the fighting once the Civil War began. He served with distinction and gained a swift promotion to the rank of general, after which he commanded a regiment from his native Tar Heel state.[45] While Pettigrew himself may have relished his position, his family did not. Pettigrew's family wrote to him often, worried about his safety. During the battle of Seven Pines in June 1862, Pettigrew received severe wounds from Union small arms fire but he remained on the field. Soldiers under Pettigrew's command assumed, incorrectly, that he was dead, and heavy fighting thwarted their recovery attempts.[46] Shortly after the fighting, some of these same soldiers notified Pettigrew's family of their loss. His family members' written responses to the news shows that the message of immortality did not always satisfy those who now mourned for the dead.

In the aftermath of the general's presumed death, many in Pettigrew community wrote to the grieving family, expressing both their sympathies and the depth of their pride in Pettigrew's civilian and military careers. A friend of the family, signing their letter V. C. C., sent a message to Mary Pettigrew that exemplifies many of the surviving letters, stating "…we all – not only of this family but our entire state – mourn with you & yours for the loss of your noble brother – the scholar, the gentlemen, and natural leader."[47] Pettigrew's sister, Sue, naturally had a more emotional response. In a letter sent to her father after she heard the news of her brother's death, she wrote

> I try to feel that it is best because it is, but; I cannot. Johnston's life seems to me to have been thrown away in this fearful manner for no purpose. I know nothing & have heard nothing, but the bold, arbitrary, dreadful fact, yet I feel assured that he exposed himself unnecessarily, & that his country & his friends have lost a man whom might still have been spared to us if his prudence had equaled his courage. But why should I say this? From the beginning I have felt, & others did the same, that Johnston's first battle would be his last.[48]

Sue went on to say that though God had willed Johnston's death, she nevertheless found it "very bitter."[49] Sue believed that God had decided her brother would be killed, but did not shroud his death in the language of sacrifice for the nation, nor did she express interest in the eternal life that Christianity promised for her brother. Sue felt that her brother threw away his life with no tangible purpose, and that he could have survived and returned home safely had he not tried to act so courageously. Immortality did not factor into this letter about her brother's death, nor had it eased her mourning. In the same year that Thomas Atkinson and other ministers were making promises of eternal life and

describing dead soldiers as martyrs for the nation, Johnston Pettigrew had presumably died and his sister could find no comfort in religion. The war simply dragged on without him. While ministers promised a continued life after death for Confederate soldiers, for those who missed the earthly presence of their loved one, this promise did little to console their sorrows.

Johnston Pettigrew did not die on the fields of Seven Pines in 1862. While his injuries (wounds to his left shoulder, neck, windpipe and right arm from a miniè ball, and a bayonet wound in his right leg) were grave enough to seem mortal to his comrades, Pettigrew survived long enough to be taken into Union custody as a prisoner.[50] After a few months of recovery, Pettigrew took part in a prisoner exchange and found himself back on the field and back in command, in good enough health to take a leadership position during the Battle of Gettysburg. On that battlefield in Pennsylvania, Pettigrew led one of the three wings of Pickett's charge, and his men were some of the last southern soldiers to cross the Potomac upon the Confederate retreat. On June 14, 1863, a Union soldier wounded Pettigrew again, this time fatally, as a minié ball tore through his stomach. He died – as far as his family was concerned a second time – few days later on July 17. Once again, Pettigrew's family received dreadful news.

Letters written to the family this time clearly emphasized both a nationalist feeling and the will of God in conducting Pettigrew's affairs. On July 18 1863, a day following Pettigrew's death, L. M. Winder wrote a letter, stating, "I sympathize with you in your great affliction in the loss of your brave, & noble patriot brother – he was an honor and a glory to his native state, and as much as we need him, and mourn for him, we must bow in submission to the will of providence."[51] Winder believed that Pettigrew's death proved

his bravery, and the story of his sacrifice glorified his home state of North Carolina as a whole. Winder also noted that Johnston died while doing his duty and called his death "the most glorious of all deaths."[52] This statement echoes the words of ministers who sought to describe the war as a glorious struggle for the survival of the Confederate South, and referenced the Christian soldier ideal of dying in service to God and country. With Pettigrew's final death, contemporary responses emphasized his heroic actions and the hand of God directing Pettigrew's fate.

However, the loss of Pettigrew impacted others close to him differently, especially as there was no possibility of a mistaken message this time. A sister, who signed her letter L.Q.N., felt stricken with grief by the news of Pettigrew's death. Her letter of July 21, 1863 stated that, "our brightest hope gone – it is dreadful – alas for the young – no guide or pattern all our hopes for the future of this frail life put out."[53] This despondent strain of response continued throughout the rest of her correspondence. Pettigrew's death, that could not be doubted this time, raised questions that L.Q.N. believed were better left unasked: "Thousands upon thousands of useful mortals left to fill their ignoble places – questions arise which must be put down, for they cannot be answered without offering discontents unlawful for a Christian. Oh God – how little of Christ's spirit rules this poor world – otherwise this cruel war could not have been."[54] Pettigrew's death made the letter writer ponder the state of the world as a whole, and L.Q.N. even appeared to question her faith. She likely questioned why it was, or if it was, God's will that caused her reason to mourn. On the back of her letter, in a postscript, L.Q.N. mentioned the weight her family then carried and how she looked for God's mercies. Ultimately, she found that God had no mercy to provide as she ends with a quote from Matthew 27:46, writing, "My God,

My God why has thou forsaken me?"[55] This verse, derived from the New Testament, is spoken by Jesus as he hangs from the cross, close to death. He, like the letter writer, received no recorded answer.

Contemporaries believed that the promise of immortality was given freely (more or less) to those who confessed faith in Christian beliefs. Eternal life stood as an important part of many denominations before the Civil War began, and this promise only increased in its usage as the war ground on. Ministers preached on the promised immortality of fallen soldiers through various means, and with various meanings. Eternal life became tied to a nationalistic support of the Confederacy. Ministers, such as the Presbyterian Joseph Atkinson, preached that through the triumph and memory of the nation, the dead were honored and their sacrifices and names never forgotten. The nation owed a debt to those who spilled blood for it, and Atkinson hoped to remind North Carolinians of this. The promise of immortality, and God's protection, also provided reasons to fight. Civilian ministers, just like chaplains, argued that God's will could protect soldiers from the fire and shells of the enemy and, if soldiers should die, those who held Christian beliefs would soon live again in heaven.

The gendered command that men were to fight and die for the nation, and women were to support their actions and honor them should they fall on the field, provided a common thread throughout all of these messages. In this way, women were given the responsibility to care for the spiritual health of men, as well as the societal pressure to mourn in a certain way and for a certain time once the soldier they prayed for died. Across the state, the inundation of messages of how one should interpret the death of a loved one did not make the demise of a soldier any easier for his family. Florie Maffitt

found it difficult to accept the death of her stepbrother Laurens, and the family of Johnston Pettigrew found little immediate comfort in the knowledge that God had directed the life and death of their loved one. One sister, L.Q.N. found herself so distraught that she compared the loss of her brother to being forsaken by God as had Jesus on the cross. Not everyone found death as peaceful a transition that they could respond, after witnessing the death of a very sick friend, with Mary Bethell's remark, "I was convinced that it was a glorious scene to see a Christian die, in the triumphs of the faith."[56] Rarely was death as glorious as Bethell had made it seem, and death in battle was only one means of demise that Tar Heel civilians were forced to interpret.

Endnotes

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[3] Joe Mobley, *Weary of War: Life on the Confederate Home Front,* Reflections on the Civil War Era, ed. John David Smith (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2008), xii.

[4] Paul Teed, "Loyalty and Liturgy: Union Occupation and Religious Liberty in Wilmington, North Carolina, 1865," *American Nineteenth Century History* 15, no. 1 (December 2013): 45-46.

[5] Eugene D. Genovese, *A Consuming Fire: The Fall of the Confederacy in the Mind of the White Christian South* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 33.

[6] James W. Silver, *Confederate Morale and Church Propaganda*, Confederate Centennial Studies, ed. W. Stanley Hoole (Tuscaloosa: Confederate Publishing Company, Inc., 1957), 16.

[7] Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Southern Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 22.

[8] Benjamin Miller, *In God's Presence: Chaplains, Missionaries, and Religious Space During the American Civil War* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2019), 74.

[9] Joseph M. Atkinson, *God, the Giver of Victory and Peace: A Thanksgiving Sermon, Delivered in the Presbyterian Church, September 18, 1862, Raleigh, N.C.* (Raleigh: n.p., 1862), 15.

[10] Calvin Henderson Wiley, *Address to the People of North Carolina* (Raleigh: n.p., 1861), 1.

[11] Ibid., 12.

[12] Miller, *In God's Presence*, 27.

[13] R.H. Lafferty, *A Fast-Day Sermon; Preached in the Church of Sugar Creek, Mecklenburg County, N. C., February 28th, 1862* (Fayetteville, NC: Published by Congregation, 1862), 14.

[14] Ibid., 16.

[15] Alfred Augustin Watson, *Sermon Delivered Before the Annual Council of the Diocese of North Carolina, Upon the Festival of the Ascension, May 14, 1863* (Raleigh: Progress Print, 1863), 8.

[16] "Death in the Household," *Biblical Recorder* (Raleigh, NC), June 25, 1862, 3.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] "Deaths," *Biblical Recorder* (Raleigh, NC), September 9 1863, 3.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Mark S. Schantz, *Awaiting the Heavenly Country: The Civil War and America's Culture of Death* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 17.

[23] Catherine Marsh, *Sketch of the Life of Capt. Hedley Vicars, the Christian Soldier* (Richmond: Soldiers' Tract Association, 1864), 31.

[24] Ibid., 32.

[25] "The Model Captain," *Biblical Recorder* (Raleigh, NC), May 21, 1862, 2.; and "Christ in the Camp," *Biblical Recorder* (Raleigh, NC), June 24, 1863, 1.

[26] Adolphus Williamson Magnum, *Myrtle Leaves, or, Tokens at the Tomb* (Raleigh, Branson and Farrar, 1864), 82.

[27] David Silkenat, *Moments of Despair: Suicide, Divorce, and Debt in Civil War Era North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 95-96.

[28] Adolphus Williamson Magnum, *Myrtle Leaves,* 87.

[29] Ibid., 88.

[30] Ibid.

[31] "Death of a Christian Soldier," *Raleigh Christian Advocate*, June 10, 1863, 1.

[32] Ibid.

[33] As many as 20,000 people attended Jackson's funeral in Richmond, and newspapers were filled with references to Jackson's life as a Christian soldier. See Wallace Hettle, *Inventing Stonewall Jackson: A Civil War Hero in History and Memory* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011), 21-23.

[34] Diary of Mary Bethell, April 29, 1861, Mary Jeffreys Bethell Diary, 1853-1873, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

[35] Ibid., March 10, 1862.

[36] Ibid., June 29, 1863.

[37] Ibid., September 16, 1863.

[38] Ibid., August 10, 1864.

[39] Ibid., November 10, 1864.

[40] Ibid., March 3, 1865.

[41] Ibid., August 7, 1865.

[42] Maffitt to Hinsdale, September 2, 1861, Hinsdale Family Papers.

[43] Maffitt to Hinsdale, October 21, 1862, ibid. (underling and symbols in original).

[44] Ibid.

[45] Earl J. Hess, *Lee's Tar Heels: The Pettigrew-Kirkland-MacRae Brigade* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), xv.

[46] Ibid., 39.

[47] V.C.C. to Mary Pettigrew, June 3, 1862, Pettigrew Family Papers, 1776-1926, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

[48] Sue Pettigrew to her father [stated as Papa], June 3, 1862, ibid.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Hess, *Lee's Tar Heels,* 39.

[51] L.M. Winder to sister, July 18, 1863, Pettigrew Family Papers.

[52] Ibid.

[53] L.Q.N. to her sister, July 21, 1863, ibid.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Diary of Mary Bethell, March 25, 1862, ibid.

CHAPTER 3: "INNOCENT BLOOD": TAR HEEL EXECUTIONS AND WILMINGTON'S YELLOW FEVER EPIDEMIC

Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, Saying I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? See thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself. Matt. 27: 3-5.

Wilmington's Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1862

Through four years of war, the sounds, smells, and horrors of battle filled the writings of southern religious leaders. In journals and sermons, ministers beseeched the God of battles to protect friend and smite foe, and spoke of the rewards awaiting those Christian martyrs who died for a holy Confederate cause. In homes and churches throughout the South, civilians gathered to pray for living soldiers and to mourn those claimed by combat. When not struggling to ensure their own survival, battle dead remained at the forefront of civilian thought during the conflict. However, war also brought death beyond the field of combat, and both epidemic disease and desertion devastated the North Carolina home front. While seemingly disconnected – besides the apt description of desertion as a "disease" that rots armies – Tar Heel religious leaders interpreted desertion and epidemics in similar means and both served to bring new definition to the meaning of death in Civil War North Carolina.[1] This chapter examines the religious implications of Wilmington's deadly yellow fever epidemic in 1862, and the executions of twenty-two Confederate men labeled as deserters in 1864. Although separated by time and distance,

both of these violent events nonetheless served as catalysts that prompted a redefinition of the religious meaning of death.

Casualties incurred from the wrath of shot and sword paled in comparison to the ravages of disease, a sinister killer that claimed the majority of total lives lost during the Civil War.[2] As millions of men marched over unfamiliar countryside, they both suffered from and aided the spread of illnesses.[3] Both northern and southern soldiers faced exposure to blights that their immune systems were ineffective against. A lack of proper medicine resulted in armies suffering devastating losses, and up to 500,000 men died from pestilence alone.[4] Dysentery and diarrhea killed the bulk of these men, but viral diseases such as malaria and typhoid fever also proved detrimental. Sicknesses that acted as a nuisance for armies were devastating for beleaguered Confederate civilians who lacked both the means to relocate and the medical supplies needed to treat epidemics. Conflict affected the physical health of southern civilians most directly through outbreaks, and epidemics that would cripple a town under normal circumstances proved devastating under wartime conditions. In the South, summer months brought yellow fever, a largely misunderstood illness with no effective treatment that instilled fear in soldier and civilian alike. North Carolinians, often able to avoid the seasonal pandemics that swept through Mississippi and South Carolina, suffered two outbreaks of yellow fever over the course of the Civil War.

Yellow fever, also known as “yellow jack” or the “stranger’s disease,” haunted the American South throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Only active in the late summer and early fall, epidemics usually began in Cuba or other tropical trading hubs before spreading through trade to the lower South. Urban business centers along the

Mississippi River were especially at risk of epidemics. Yellow fever regularly tore through New Orleans and, in the worst years, the disease accounted for half of the city's mortality rate.[5] Once one city along a popular waterway or trade route became contaminated, yellow fever could spread and kill thousands throughout a wide area of contagion. Out of fear for their lives, residents of an infected city usually attempted to evacuate at the first sign of an epidemic, resulting in major economic losses for businesses in the area of an outbreak.[6] Poorer whites and people of color often could not evacuate, and thus remained trapped in ravaged cities to suffer the brunt of sicknesses.

Due to its constantly recurring nature, physicians worked tirelessly to determine the cause of yellow fever outbreaks. Throughout the nineteenth century, the leading theory for the origin of yellow fever came from doctors who purported that miasmic gasses – born from street litter and the South's natural marshes – bred sickness. Contemporary physicians noticed the connection between the disease and cities without strict health codes, and furthered the miasma theory to include the possibility of the indigenous appearance of yellow fever in cities simply due to the heat, filth, and moisture these places tended to generate.[7] Regardless of contemporary physicians' mistaken belief in these malevolent odors, the dire consequences of yellow fever were well known, and doctors could not operate for any length of time in the South without becoming familiar with the symptoms of the disease. Yellow fever spread when an infected mosquito drew blood from a victim, leaving the virus behind through the bite. Once injected, victims began to suffer from headaches and fevers, and for some lucky patients this was the extent of their brush with the fever, recovering without suffering any further effects.[8] For others, the disease slowly progressed to attacking the liver and patients began to show

signs of jaundice (hence the name "yellow" fever). Death came from internal hemorrhaging and kidney failure, evidenced by the infected vomiting black, partially digested, blood.[9] For those who survived the harrowing experience, their reward was lifelong immunity from the disease.

In the final years of the nineteenth century, medical researchers Walter Reed and James Carroll, and a group of brave army volunteers, finally revealed the vector for yellow fever to be the mosquito, specifically the females of the *Aedes Aegypti* species.[10] Through feeding on an infected victim, these mosquitoes became incubators for disease and aided the spread of yellow fever by acting as transporters. Conditions in the South were (and remain) ideal for mosquitoes and, when coupled with a lack of an effective insect repellant, led to a booming population of the bloodsucking insects. *Aedes Aegypti* breed even more quickly in cities, preferring to lay eggs in stagnant pools of water, such as puddles or rainwater-filled containers commonly found in urban areas.[11] The coastal city of Wilmington, located on the eastern edge of North Carolina and home to a bustling population of ten thousand people, provided the ideal environment for *Aedes Aegypti* to flourish.

By 1862, Wilmington served as a well know haven for blockade-runners, who used the city to sell goods and resupply their ships. However, in the rush to bring ships away from the dangers of Union guns and into the relative safety of Wilmington's harbor, many ships failed to undergo proper inspections or quarantine before being allowed into the city. One ship in particular, the *Kate,* was blamed amongst those in the city for the outbreak.[12] The exact date and victim of the first case of yellow fever in Wilmington is unknown. In early September, however, the city's leadership finally acknowledged the

spread of the fever into their city. The editors of Wilmington's *The Daily Journal* commented on the appearance of yellow fever in their city on September 16, 1862. Despite the growing fear amongst residents of the city, the editors of this secular paper wrote confidently that "we feel no apprehensions personally on the subject of Yellow Fever, as we do not think that there is any likelihood of its becoming epidemic."[13] The editors of the *Wilmington Journal* agreed with the conclusions of editors of *The Daily Journal*, reprinting the same comments and conclusions in their own paper two days later, adding that "no new cases of Yellow Fever have been reported to-day. There seem to be no indications of the disease extending itself, and there is no ground for fright or panic. All the excitement will pass away in a few days."[14] Despite the hopeful outlook provided by the newspapers, yellow fever spread like wildfire through Wilmington. Those who could afford to leave abandoned the city and medical personnel quickly became overwhelmed. A small contingent of clergy, convinced that God wanted them to stay and care for their flocks through the sickness, stayed to minister to the sick.

One of the best surviving records of the pandemic is a collection of letters, later used to form a memoir, written by John Lamb Prichard, a minister who worked constantly through the outbreak and died shortly before the disease had run its course.[15] Prichard (b. 1811) spent the last two decades of his life as a pastor in churches throughout Virginia and North Carolina. Shortly after the death of his infant son in 1856, Prichard moved his family to Wilmington and took leadership of the First Baptist Church, an established church in the midst of the city. Prichard threw himself into his work, taking an active role in a religious revival that swept the city in 1858.[16] While supportive of the southern cause, Prichard met news of South Carolina's secession with trepidation. In a journal

entry written on the last day of 1860, Prichard bemoaned the chaos of the previous month, stating, "all is confusion and uncertainty. South Carolina is precipitating things, and thus goes down the sun on Dec. 31st, 1860. How will it rise and set to-morrow? Will it behold our country stained with blood? God forbid it we pray."[17] With the exception of soldiers sent to reinforce the city, Wilmington remained relatively peaceful until the pandemic began.

In Prichard's memoir, the blame for the yellow fever outbreak is placed firmly on the blockade-runner *Kate*. Shortly after the arrival of the ship and subsequent spread of yellow fever, Prichard's wife and children left the city to wait out the disease in a safer environment. Prichard, however, believed he had a duty to stay and aid the sick, remaining in Wilmington with his sister. Despite the danger he now faced, Prichard felt confident that he was where he needed to be, writing to his family, "I could get no nearer to God, except he should take me to Himself…[M]y times are in his hands. I would not have it otherwise."[18] This sense of duty to fellow man drove many ministers and medical personnel to remain in Wilmington, and this common motivation allowed clergy and doctors to lean on each other in moments of fear.

On September 22, 1862, a week after city officials confirmed the existence of yellow fever in Wilmington, Prichard wrote a letter to his family confessing his trepidation at fulfilling his duties in a disease-ridden city, as his initial excitement began to fade. Prichard told his family that a member of his church, stricken by fever, had sought a visit from his pastor. Prichard, afraid of catching the disease himself, had in turn asked Dr. Dickson (one of Wilmington's leading physicians) what he should do. In response, Dickson compared the fight against the pandemic to the war raging around them stating:

"I reckon you will have to do as I do. It is like war, we must take our chances. You will have to go and see many during their illness."[19] In Wilmington, doctors and ministers worked together to fight a desperate battle to bring comfort and relief to those afflicted by a horrific disease. The danger Prichard and Dickson faced in attending to the needs of their fellow citizens reminded the men of the struggles faced by men in war. Shortly before Prichard endured the final stages of the infection that claimed his life, he was again reminded of the martial character of the pandemic, which claimed lives at an extreme rate, writing, "death all around us. They fall as in battle on our right hand and on our left."[20] Bringing to mind soldier's accounts of the thick of battle, Prichard's short statement relates the struggle against disease to the soldiers fighting in fields not far from the city.

The chaos brought by yellow fever fostered inter-denominational partnerships amongst religious leaders in the city, even while their organized church services as a whole disintegrated. By September 19, the frantic evacuation of many within the city left churches without their usual congregants. One minister, Dr. Henry Drane, canceled even the simple music service he had planned due to fears over the fever.[21] The devastated community quickly reached the point where Sunday schools and weekly meetings had no attendees, and by the worst of the fever, church services were stopped entirely. In restricting their usual access to the public through a pulpit, the fever forced ministers to relate to their community in new ways. Prichard and Drane visited their congregants in their houses and, where time permitted, prayed for the health of the city. The two ministers also worked closely with the doctors and nurses of the city, much of their time being taken by the need to conduct or attend funerals.[22] The severity of the disease also

erased any inter-denominational conflicts within the city, as faithful from a variety of backgrounds sought to aid the sick and dying. Drane reported an atmosphere of cooperation among the minsters still in Wilmington, stating that all parties acted "very friendly during the epidemic, [with] much cordiality [growing] between them."[23] The common experience of tending a flock stricken by an epidemic formed strong bonds between religious leaders, and that cordiality spread between denominations and faith groups.

Even those who had already left Wilmington transcended denominational divides to provide aid to those in need. A group of Jewish residents, who fled once the epidemic was confirmed, raised over a thousand dollars to support the sick and those trapped with them in the midst of the contagion. They used this money to buy forty barrels of flour, and with the remainder purchased bacon, shipping both into the city.[24] When news of the outbreak reached South Carolina, nurses and doctors from Charleston arrived to help those in Wilmington. A Roman Catholic priest joined the medical crew, and worked with the local ministers in the city.[25] Wilmington remained a strongly Episcopal city, and the welcome presence of a Catholic priest within the city's borders shows the great need of those suffering from the epidemic. This also mirrored the need for inter-denominational religious services found in both northern and southern armies, in Wilmington, as on the battlefield, clergy of different clothes worked together to aid the faithful.[26] From both inside and outside the city, ministers across denominations risked death to provide comfort and aid to the sick.

While in the city, civilian ministers took on roles similar to that of chaplains, working closely with medical personal, comforting the dying, and providing rapid funeral services

at the expense of their own safety. However, religious leaders also quickly became desensitized to the deaths they witnessed. By October twelfth, the height of the epidemic, Prichard began simply listing the names of the sick and the dead in his letters home. Often these are provided without further comment or explanation, with the sheer weight of each name left to stand on its own.[27] The amount of dead quickly overwhelmed ministers and gravediggers alike, with burials suffering as a result.

Shortages of grave details left corpses un-interred and delayed funerals as, Prichard complained, "you can scarcely get any one to help shroud and bury the dead."[28] This problem was partially solved through the use of mass graves, as described by C. P. Bolles, a resident who contracted yellow fever but survived: "I saw a shabby old hearse coming across the corner, drawn by a lean horse, looking as if he had the fever and a young colored man leaning over, too sick to hold the reins and before the setting of another sun he was laid by the side of many of his fellow men, white and colored in a deep trench that had been provided for the dead."[29] A shortage of coffins accompanied the rise in corpses; the demand grew so great that Drane wrote local carpenters could not keep up with the demand, commenting, "coffins have had to be brought both from Fayetteville and Charleston. It is a sad sight indeed to see loads of them…going through the streets.".[30] the editors of *The Daily Journal* used dramatic prose to express their need for coffins, stating that "the mortality on Saturday night and Sunday exceeded anything that had been known since the epidemic commenced, or since Wilmington was a town. Coffins—coffins, was the great want, and so continues. Coffins cannot be obtained as people die. Drip, drip, from the leaden sky."[31] In that same issue, the impact of the fever on even the quality of the press is evident.

By October, *The Daily Journal* consisted of a single page, and the last remaining editor lamented the loss of most of his coworkers. Some had left the diseased city for healthier climates, and many others had suffered from the bite of an infected mosquito and were rendered unable to continue work due to their suffering. This final editor admitted that the paper could not even mail out copies with any reliability, and that a single page bulletin on the machinations of the sickness was the best that could be hoped for, as "we can do no better. —We can *hardly* do that. We will stick to our post and do all in our power."[32] Accompanying the drought of burial materials and the loss of much of the staff of *The Daily Journal* was an erosion of the death rituals previously deemed a spiritual necessity.

Months prior to the yellow fever epidemic, Prichard and his family boarded a sick soldier who seemed close to death. Prichard hoped his loved ones would serve as a surrogate family for the soldier as the man suffered through his pained final days.[33] When the soldier died, Prichard not only recorded his last words, said to be "O Heavenly Father, save me," but also paid for a coffin and passage for the man's corpse back to Virginia so that he could be buried by his own family.[34] While a testament to the importance that Prichard placed on the rituals of the good death, this event also speaks to the dire impact that yellow fever had on Wilmington. Timely burials became uncommon and, when burials could be conducted, the interment often had no input from the clergy as the ravages of the fever stopped religious leaders from providing their customary words, as Drane complained, "many are interred without even a prayer!"[35] Prichard would have found it an impossible task to provide coffins for the amount of dead he now witnessed.

The use of mass graves prevented citizens from providing the dead with the final aspect of the good death – proper burial – and many within the city died without family present. Doctors and nurses traveled from their homes to the city to aid the sick, while ministers like Prichard and Drane sent their families away to try to ensure their safety; leaving no relations to mourn for them when they passed. This compounded the problems already presented by the lack of coffins and gravediggers. At the height of the epidemic around mid-October, residents died without family present to hear their last words or to soothe their suffering, and likely received internment in a mass grave or suffered the indignity of waiting to be buried. Ultimately, the horrors of outbreak within the city left those who remained with the feeling that "It is a terrible thing to die under such circumstances!" [36]

On the 16th of November, very near the end of the epidemic, the "slender thread" of Prichard's life was cut short, with his passing only attended to by his sister.[37] Prichard knew that the fever might kill him, but he felt prepared to sacrifice everything for the promise of a better, more eternal, life: "To make a complete, final, triumphant escape from all the evils of our degraded and afflicted nature and this melancholy world; to be clearly and forever beyond the region, and beyond all possibility of sin and sorrow – this *is* worth resigning all on earth to attain."[38] Prichard's actions inspired his community, and the compiler of Prichard's memoir, J. D. Huffman, described Prichard as "keenly alive to all the claims of humanity. Whether he sat by the bedside of the sick and dying and pointed them to the Saviour [*sic*] of sinners, or visited the sorrowing and the bereaved, his warm heart and active sympathies prepared him for the task and rendered him a ever welcome guest."[39] In a letter written whilst Prichard was in the throes of the sickness that

would claim his life, Henry Drane described his actions as noble, believing that he and other ministers had "[stood] to their posts faithfully"[40] Prichard died in service to his community, a willing sacrifice for the well-being of the Confederate home front.

Wilmington was not unique in suffering outbreaks of disease, and the scenes presented in this ravaged city in 1862 repeated two years later in the coastal city of New Bern, as an outbreak of yellow fever devastated that town in 1864. In New Bern, the epidemic fever claimed the lives of over 300 soldiers and 650-750 civilians, as the occupying Union force struggled to rein in the disease.[41] When Union forces first occupied New Bern in 1862, Union chaplains or unionist ministers replaced many of the religious leaders of the city's churches and most remained in their new post by 1864.[42] Regardless of their political affiliation, the devastation of the disease forced New Bern's ministers into the same role as the ministers of Wilmington two years earlier. They had to provide the same services and reconcile the same problems as did those who suffered in Wilmington.[43] Wilmington itself suffered another tragic contagion after typhus spread throughout the city in 1865, killing 300 of the occupying Union force.[44] Civilian losses during this epidemic are unknown, though they must have been equally severe.

Out of Wilmington's 10,000 residents, only 4,000 risked a bout of yellow fever by staying within the city limits. Of those 4,000, nearly 700 died and many more suffered from a bought of sickness but did not succumb to the fever.[45] The rapid spread of the contagion prevented residents from participating in religious services and led ministers to take an active stance in trying to mollify the suffering of their flocks. The sheer amount of dead prevented burials from occurring in a normal fashion, and desensitized clergy members like Henry Drane and John Prichard. Faced with shortages of coffins, time, and

even burial plots, the rites of the good death could not be followed, and residents faced a stark redefinition of what it meant to die. By the end of November, cold weather and frosts killed any remaining mosquitoes, bringing the epidemic to a close. However, the ecumenism fostered by the rapidity of death remained a part of the city, as did the fear of a resurgence of yellow fever.

Execution of Deserters

Preachers found themselves responsible for explaining other types of non-combat deaths besides disease, and one that held great importance for both military and civilian populations was execution for desertion. In February of 1864, soldiers of North Carolina's 54th infantry regiment, supporting men in Brig. Gen. Robert Hoke's brigade, fought a bloody skirmish along Bachelor's Creek near New Bern. During the fierce firefight, Union forces retreated but were pursued by the Confederate army. Some of the retreating Union men were captured and others, cut off from any hope of joining the rest of their forces, surrendered. Questioning revealed that fifty of the captured men were from North Carolina, and twenty-two admitted that they originally served in Confederate regiments but had since taken up arms for the northern cause (the other twenty-eight men likely served only in Union regiments). The commanders of the 54th regiment considered these twenty-two men to be traitors who had deserted the Confederate cause and they treated the captured as such. Court martials for the deserters were swiftly conducted, resulting in the same damning sentence for all: death by hanging. Staggered executions of the condemned men took place over two weeks, with a nearby open field and specially constructed scaffold providing the place of execution.

John Paris (1809-1883), Chaplain of the Fifty-fourth regiment, witnessed all of the proceedings and provided religious services to the captured men in the final days of their lives. Paris spoke with the convicted men in order to gain both an expression of faith and information as to what drove their decision to desert the Confederate cause. When all were dead and buried, Paris held a funeral service for the executed. Speaking to an audience that included both soldiers of the regiment and grieving families of the recently dead, Paris preached at length on desertion. He believed that men who renounced their vows and abandoned their comrades committed a sin unlike any other, and he hoped that the flood of deserters could be stopped at its source – the home front – if men only knew the horrific physical and spiritual consequences of deserting.

Northern and southern armies suffered from desertion from the beginning of the war, and this problem only intensified as the conflict continued. Desertion siphoned at least 103,000 men from Confederate ranks, the majority abandoning the fight during the final years of the South's increasingly desperate struggle. Though discerning the exact number of deserters is challenging due to discrepancies in the scant records of official sources, there can be no doubt that absenteeism severely hampered Confederate armies.[46] In North Carolina alone, 14,000 of the 110,000 Tar Heels who fought for the Confederacy deserted, causing concern among contemporaries that troops from North Carolina were abandoning the fight at an alarming rate.[47] However, almost every southern state suffered similar desertion rates and North Carolina's total number of deserters, nearly 12% of the total number of men supplied by the state, is not an outlier.[48]

Historians have provided numerous theories for why soldiers abandoned the southern cause. Early studies of desertion stressed that pressures of familial responsibility

motivated soldiers to desert, usually to return home to plant or harvest, with additional motivation provided by the economic hardship caused by the Confederate army's failure to properly supply its soldiers.[49] Recent research shows that while the reasons behind an individual's choice to desert can be hard to determine, as a whole, desertion occurred when the bonds that tied a soldier to the Confederacy's undertaking dissipated, and the bonds that tied the man to his hometown resurfaced. Historian Peter Bearman, in a quantitative study of North Carolina soldiers, showed that this localism featured heavily in the troops' decision to desert.[50] Confederate nationalism helped to push men into war and established a new central identity to fight for, but it lacked the sustaining power needed to keep men repeatedly running into cannon fire. As the war spiraled into something monstrous and devastating, soldiers felt drawn back home, and the ties that held units together were replaced. According to Bearman, "identities shaped in antebellum civil society resurfaced toward the end of the war, replacing the Confederate/Southern identity that had emerged in 1861 and that had initially propelled men into war."[51] Despite jeering comments from contemporaries and the anger fostered by men like Paris, soldiers were not so much running from danger (though that may have prompted some) as much as they were running back to the old loyalties they felt they owed their kin or their communities. In suffering equipment and medicine shortages, eroding loyalties to Confederate cause, and horrific casualty rates, soldiers from the Tar Heel state felt desertion was their best choice. John Paris saw their decision in a different light.

Throughout his sermon, Paris showed a remarkable disdain for men who desert, even going so far as to state, "I am not sufficiently skilled in language to command words to

express the deep and unutterable detestation I have of the character of a deserter."[52] This hatred stemmed from Paris' visits with the condemned in prison. While seeking to console the men, he found them to be largely unrepentant; even describing two of the executed as "the most hardened and unfeeling men I ever encountered" who "met their fate with apparent indifference."[53] These meetings confirmed for Paris that deserters were criminals and, in his sermon, he conflated the actions of the men who had defected to the enemy and those who simply abandoned the conflict to return home. Both Paris and the commanders of the 54th North Carolina infantry saw little difference between abandoning the Confederacy and joining the enemy under a flag of invasion. Paris held little sympathy for the executed, convinced that most of those who died met their fate as unrepentant sinners. He compared them to Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus for the price of thirty silver pieces and thus gave these imprisoned men "an immortality of infamy."[54] However, the Bible is mute on desertion, with no reference given to the proper punishment or status of those who either abandon a fight or change sides. Instead, John Paris and his contemporaries interpreted absenteeism as an act betrayal, and those who desert as traitors.

Paris based his funeral sermon on Judas' final moments as described in the book of Matthew, representing the act of desertion as a betrayal of a holy cause. While the executed men may not have exposed Jesus to Roman soldiers, Paris agreed with his commanders that hanging constituted a just punishment for the condemned. Paris believed that the primary reason for the former Confederate's betrayal of their native state was the corrupting influences at work on the home front. With the war raging for three years, and most of the South mired in death and heartbreak, the unionist sentiment

that had boiled in North Carolina before the war had begun to rise.[55] William Holden, who remained editor of Raleigh's *North Carolina Standard* throughout the war, published articles that were ardently in favor of peace, echoing the voices of fellow Tar Heel unionists Bryan Tyson and Lewis Hanes.[56] Paris accused men like Holden of fomenting unrest among civilians, and he found the peace meetings disloyal. Tar Heel soldiers who were absent without leave found support through North Carolina's small, but influential, peace movement.

Unionist sentiment permeated North Carolina before the state joined the war in earnest.[57] Centered in the western mountain areas of the state closest to Tennessee, and the central counties of the Piedmont, unionism subsided in the face of all-consuming Confederate nationalism after North Carolina left the Union. However, unionist urges resurfaced in force after the decline of the southern cause and a series of disheartening losses in 1863.[58] Civilians who showed disaffection for the Confederacy, and later support for deserters, were largely located in the areas that held little support for the war before it even began. Peace movements found the most ardent support in the aforementioned regions that historian William T. Auman refers to as the "Quaker belt" of the Piedmont.[59] In William Holden, North Carolina's leading unionist, agitators found support within this Quaker belt and argued against the war through print.

The year 1863 proved significant for deserters in another regard, as Chief Justice Richmond Pearson of the North Carolina Supreme Court ruled in the spring of that year that only official Confederate military units could capture deserters; militias and state soldiers lost their legal authority to take deserters.[60] This decision angered both governor Zebulon Vance and Robert E. Lee, especially as the latter was already convinced that

troops from North Carolina were more apt to desert than any others.[61] Many civilians found Pearson's decision to be a tacit show of support of runaways, as the new ruling made it more difficult for the army to recover wandering soldiers. Absent men relied on connections within their home state both for supplies and to avoid detection, and they were often prompted to return home by desperate letters sent by wives or children in need of help.[62] Paris knew that many in the Tar Heel state encouraged desertion or supported deserters after the fact, and he hoped to change that mindset with his sermon. He wanted to educate those who heard or read his words so that "the eyes of the living might be opened, to view the horrid and ruinous crime and sin of desertion, which had become so prevalent."[63] In abandoning the fight, soldiers were neglecting their duty to protect the "innocent blood" of Confederate civilians.

Paris directly railed against pastors who dared to desire peace, even suggesting that those who participated in North Carolina's peace movement should be cast out of the Kingdom of God:

> Whilst the pulpit, to the scandal of its character for faith and holiness, has belched forth in some places doctrines and councils through the ministrations of unworthy occupants, sufficient to cause Christianity to blush under all circumstances. I would here remark, standing in the relation which I do before you, that the pulpit and the press, when true and loyal to the Government which affords them protection, are mighty engines for good but when they see that Government engaged in a bloody struggle for existence, and show themselves opposed to its efforts to maintain its authority by all constitutional and legal means, such a press

> and such pulpit should receive no support for an hour from a people that would be free. The seal of condemnation should consign them to oblivion.[64]

Religious meaning and a nationalistic fervor combined through Paris' words, as he echoed the words of other Tar Heel ministers who pushed for war in 1861. However, Paris's zealousness subsumed the entire cause of Christianity under that of the Confederate government. According to Paris, a true Christian fully supported the war effort, did not desert, and denied unionism; thus avoiding the oblivion that awaited those who spoke peace from a pulpit.

Paris continued his argument by drawing on the image of the Christian soldier, of whom he believed Stonewall Jackson was the superior example, calling him "a model of a Christian soldier!"[65] By 1864, the qualities of the best Christian soldiers – loyalty, patriotism, faith and honor – were widely spread through most print media, and both the soldiers and civilians in Paris' audience were likely familiar with these qualities. Paris denied those who were executed this title, telling his audience that the sin of desertion was all the evidence he or anyone else needed to know that the twenty-two men just executed were not really Christians, as "the true Christian is always a true patriot."[66] Even those who professed faith from the stockade were discounted as being "no credit to the religion they professed, as it lived only upon their lips and was a stranger in their hearts."[67] In drawing on the established qualities of Christian soldiers, Paris separated the executed from those still serving and provided a counter-example and a warning for those on the home front: if soldiers truly wished to gain God's blessings, then they would not and could not desert, as a soldier who is truly a Christian would never desert his comrades-in-arms. In fact, any semblance of desire for the war to end could be seen as

loyalty toward the North, something that Paris believed could not properly exist in southern soldiers, since "there is no toryism in a Christian's heart. The two principles cannot to [*sic*] dwell together."[68] True Christians would rather die for their country than desert or betray their comrades. Paris believed that those who heard his message on the home front needed to fight against those who were clamoring for peace, to ensure that the soldiers they knew met their "proper" Christian fates.

However, the siren song of reunification, originating from the Tar Heel state's Piedmont, caused some otherwise loyal soldiers to make a fatal error and desert. Paris believed this decision had disastrous physical and spiritual ramifications. The ideals of the good death, and the means through which a soldier could still accomplish this on the field, were readily available to both soldiers and civilians by 1864. And there is little doubt that an outspoken chaplain such as Paris failed to remind his men of how they should meet death. Desertion removed those ideals and turned death into both a spectacle and a warning.[69] Paris established that deserters could not be Christians; therefore, their deaths could not lead to an eternal life. In claiming that no deserter could be a Christian, Paris extolled the view that executions served as a physical and spiritual consequence for supposed acts of cowardice. Soldiers suffered the pain of an execution, and they furthered suffered through a denial of immortality. Paris took this idea farther still by stating that death did not end the stain of disloyalty; instead the blemish spreads to the family of a deserter, and that "disloyalty is a crime that mankind never forget and but seldom forgive; the grave cannot cover it."[70] So while the sins of the father are paid for in blood, that blood was spilt in such a way that Paris believed it forever marked those with the misfortune to be related to an executed deserter.[71] While death in battle or on the field

hospital table brought glory to the sufferer (and his family by extension) executions denied this. Instead of dying in service to their country, as Paris believed they should, this group of deserters had fled the field and swore fealty to their enemies. Just like Judas, they betrayed something sacred and death followed their actions.

The audience for Paris' sermon is key when considering the impact of his message. Paris spoke in front of a group of both soldiers and civilians, including the families of the executed men. Paris clearly sought to keep other men in his company from considering desertion (if they would even have the stomach to consider it after witnessing twenty-two hangings) while also inspiring them by extolling the virtues that he believed loyal soldiers possessed. However, Paris' message transcended that of a simple warning for service members. He denounced the entire Confederate peace movement as unchristian and denied eternal life for those executed for desertion; thus, Paris sought not just to further punish the dead and frighten the living, but to change the meaning that death held for the executed. Paris told the families who suffered through the execution of a loved one that they should be ashamed of the deserter's actions, and that if they had played any part in his decision through encouraging absenteeism, then they were guilty of corrupting the soul of the dead. This harsh message is far from the rallying cries given just years earlier by pro-Confederate ministers who pushed families to willingly send their sons to fight. Paris desired that his listeners remembered the executed men not as Confederate heroes, but as criminals on par with the most well known human betrayer in Christian theology, Judas. While Paris originally gave this sermon in front of a limited audience, he later published his work in Greensboro where his message on the many dangers of desertion found new civilian audiences.

Newspapers in Greensboro softened the news of the deserters' executions and represented them in a better light than did Paris. An article provided in *The Greensboro Patriot* on February 18, 1864, denied Paris's view of the "hardened" and "unfeeling" men, stating that the executed soldiers "ascended the scaffold with a firm and elastic step, and met their fate with much fortitude and determination."[72] Though this view was largely unique, and the editors of Raleigh's secular *The Confederate* held little sympathy for deserters, and agreed with Paris that peace parties on the home front induced men to leave their companies. Deserters may have suffered the final punishment for their actions, but the editors of *The Confederate* echoed Paris's argument that newspapers and preachers promoting desertion led these men to their deaths. *The Confederate*'s editors deemed the home front complicit in the deserter's act of sin, stating, "if these poor deluded men have friends, or kin they ought to search, the press – and if it be found that pernicious counsels have led to this deplorable crime and its attending calamity, the blood of these men appeals for justice upon all the guilty – the instigator as well as the actor."[73] With the pressures of war weighing heavily on the South by 1864, those still zealously supportive of the Confederacy (such as *The Confederate*'s editors) were nearly ready to send unionists into the void themselves.

Regardless of what or who drove men to abandon the fight, deserters returned home only to find some similar hardships to what they experienced in the field: lack of material resources, inadequate food, and families disrupted by conflict. Desperation drove increasingly frenzied actions, and some of the harsher qualities that Paris attributed to deserters came to fruition as civilians living in the Confederate South often had to worry less about the death of a deserter and more about the deaths that a deserter could cause.

Many deserters failed to return home and instead found themselves in unfamiliar territory, at risk of capture by roving bands of the Confederate home guard. Without a support system, and under threat of imprisonment and potential execution, some deserters became threats to the communities in which they were hiding.

News of violence perpetrated by deserters spread through newspapers, and pages were littered with stories of former soldiers committing crimes. Especially heinous acts received heightened attention, though most accounts were simply short descriptions of the action. One such article titled, "Shot By Deserters", found publication in the February, 17, 1864, issue of *The Confederate.* In describing the murder of a Confederate captain by deserters, the paper simply listed a short description of the killing, revealing that three runaways had attacked and killed Capt. L. M. Secrest in his home.[74] Short articles obfuscated the horror that these kind of attacks forced upon those who witnessed them. The story of Mary, Andrew and Elliot Johnstone, however, illuminates the chaos that could occur when a deserter or group of deserters became desperate.

In the second week of June 1864, a band of deserters wrought terrible violence upon the Johnstone family. Mary Elliott Johnstone, her husband Andrew, and their six children had just finished eating dinner in their home in Flat Rock, NC, when a band of five men rode up to the house seeking feed for their horses.[75] Andrew left his wife and son inside as he spoke with the arrivals and explained that he had no hay to spare. The disappointed men then asked for food, a request that Andrew met, taking the men inside to eat at the table just used by his family. As a repayment for Andrew's offer, one of the strangers drew a pistol and shot him in the chest; the mortal wound killed Andrew an hour later.

Elliott, Mary and Andrew's eldest son, returned fire with his own weapon, killing the murderer and forcing the remaining men to flee. In the span of a few seconds, two men were killed and blood filled a room that just an hour before held a family dining in peace. Mary Johnstone and her family were left distraught by the senseless killing, and the security and peace they once found in their home dissipated. The family's life changed immediately. Elliott, fifteen years old, was sent to South Carolina to avoid a reprisal from the roving band. Mary Johnstone's letters became filled with her attempts to understand the senselessness of her husband's murder. She believed the traumatic event to be divine punishment, writing to her mother, "[God] has thought it right to punish your poor child by taking her greatest blessing away and she can only try to be submissive."[76] Events like the murder of Andrew Johnstone brought death and disruption to the heartland of the Confederacy, and fueled the anger of men like John Paris.

While disconnected by both time and distance, executed Confederates and victims of Wilmington's yellow fever outbreak are connected through the religious interpretation of their deaths. Ministers' interpreted both desertion and disease as scourges from God testing the resolve of the Confederacy. In Wilmington, devoted clergy members like John Prichard and Henry Drane viewed yellow fever as a test of faith, and they vowed to help their community preserve through the epidemic. John Paris interpreted the decimation of the Civil War as a message from God, stating: "war is the scourge of nations. God is no doubt chastising us for our good."[77] In doing so, Paris followed the example of many other southern preachers in representing the war as a rod used to beat unholy actions out of the country. Paris also viewed desertion as a refutation of God's divine plan for the

eventual supremacy of the Confederacy, and it was the duty of true Christian soldiers to avoid the temptations of home and remain in combat.

Both events also changed the meaning of death for those that witnessed them. Executions acted fundamentally as a punishment for an act of betrayal and, by hanging from a scaffold, soldiers suffered the same fate as Judas. Paris argued that death by execution did not serve to glorify the South, but rather brought an endless stain of infamy down upon a deserter's family. Paris also questioned the immortality of the hanged men, and implied that the executions provided proof that these men remained unrepentant sinners to their last breaths. In Wilmington, the same feelings of local loyalty that led to desertion in the confederate army may have helped to strengthen the bonds that the diseased city relied on during the yellow fever epidemic. Religious leaders and medical staff fought against yellow fever as if fending off an enemy force, and they despaired as the town suffered heavy losses. Despite the strength of inter-denominational partnerships created by the contagion, John Prichard, Henry Drane, and hundreds of others fell to the disease. The number of corpses overwhelmed carpenters and gravediggers, and death itself lost its meaning as a peaceful transition. Residents of Wilmington died alone, enduring the pain caused by yellow fever, and with the knowledge that they would be just one of many claimed by the disease that day. On the home front, as on the battlefield, ministers spread the message of endurance through struggle and did their best to weather the new methods of death that war rained on Confederate civilians.

Endnotes

[1] Desertion as a disease is a common allusion throughout secondary materials, though a more direct comparison can be found in Mark A. Weitz, *More Damning Than Slaughter: Desertion in the Confederate Army* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), xviii.

[2] Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 4.

[3] David R. Petriello, *Bacteria and Bayonets: The Influence of Disease in American Military History* (Philadelphia: Casemate Publishers, 2015), 154.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Margaret Humphreys, *Yellow Fever and the South* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 3-4.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid., 19.

[8] Doctors often struggled to differentiate yellow fever from other seasonal sicknesses until patients were already dying. This confusion helped to delay recognition of yellow fever. Additionally, military and civilian leaders often did not want to announce that an epidemic was in progress for fear of sparking a panic. See Andrew McIlwaine Bell, "'Gallinippers' & Glory: The Links Between Mosquito-borne Disease and U.S. Civil War Operations and Strategy, 1862," *The Journal of Military History* 74, no. 2 (April 2010): 402.

[9] Andrew McIlwaine Bell, *Mosquito Soldiers: Malaria, Yellow Fever, and the Course of the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 15.

[10] Humphreys, *Yellow Fever and the South,* 39.

[11] Bell, *Mosquito Soldier*, 15.

[12] William T. Wragg, "Report on the Yellow Fever Epidemic at Wilmington, N. C. in the Autumn of 1862," *Confederate States Medical & Surgical Journal* 1, no. 2 (February 1864): 17. Though historians generally accept the *Kate* as the cause of the outbreak, there are scraps of dissenting evidence. William T. Wragg, a surgeon who reported on the outbreak after it concluded, argued that a victim had already died to yellow fever before the *Kate* arrived and he staunchly believed that the filthiness of the city was to blame, with odors from puddles and pits of garbage producing the sickness.

[13] Editorial, *The Daily Journal* (Wilmington, NC), September 16, 1862, 2.

[14] Editorial, *Wilmington Journal*, September 18, 1862, 2.

[15] J.D. Huffman, *Memoir of the Rev. John L. Prichard, Late Pastor of the First Baptist Church, Wilmington, N.C.* (Raleigh: Hufham & Hughes, Publishers, 1867). This memoir served less as a written account of Prichard's life and more as an edited collection of Prichard's correspondence. The author rarely interjects and allows most of the letters included within the work to speak for themselves, only adding substantially to the story after Prichard died. While it is possible that Huffman may have left out letters or even altered them, much of what is revealed through this account is corroborated through the accounts of local newspapers and the records of other citizens.

[16] Ibid., 105.

[17] Ibid., 122.

[18] Ibid., 145.

[19] Ibid., 148.

[20] Ibid., 161.

[21] Henrietta M. to Mary, September 19, 1862, Foxhall Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill.

[22] Huffman, *Memoir of the Rev. John L. Prichard*, 151.

[23] Henry Drane to Mary, October 23, 1862, Foxhall Family Papers.

[24] "A Letter from Charlotte," *The Daily Journal* (Wilmington, NC), October 6, 1862, 2.

[25] Henry Drane to Mary, October 23, 1862, Foxhall Family Papers.

[26] Benjamin Miller, *In God's Presence: Chaplains, Missionaries, and Religious Space During the American Civil War* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2019), 98. Miller found instances of "wartime ecumenism" between Catholics and Protestants throughout the war.

[27] Ibid., 156.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Joe Mobley, *Weary of War: Life on the Confederate Home Front,* Reflections on the Civil War Era, ed. John David Smith (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2008), 11.

[30] Henry Drane to Mary, October 23, 1862. Foxhall Family Papers.

[31] "The Fever," *The Daily Journal*, October 13, 1862, 1.

[32] "Our Situation," ibid.

[33] Huffman, *Memoir of the Rev. John L. Prichard*, 123.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Henry Drane to Mary, October 23, 1862. Foxhall Family Papers.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Huffman, *Memoir of the Rev. John L. Prichard*, 146.

[38] Ibid., 155.

[39] Ibid., 173.

[40] Henry Drane to Mary, October 23, 1862. Foxhall Family Papers.

[41] Thomas J. Farnham and Francis P. King, "The March of the Destroyer": The New Bern Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1864," *The North Carolina Historical Review* 73, no. 4 (October 1996): 471.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Gertrude S. Carraway, *Crown of Life: History of Christ Church New Bern, N.C. 1715-1940* (New Bern: Owen G. Dunn, 1940), 169.

[44] Mobley, *Weary of War*, 15.

[45] Bell, *Mosquito Soldiers,* 53.

[46] Mark A. Weitz, *More Damning Than Slaughter: Desertion in the Confederate Army* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), ix; A completely accurate account of the total numbers of deserters may be ultimately impossible to compile given the lack of confederate records that survive, as well as the underreporting of negative statistics that was common during this era. Weitz also discusses how desertion features heavily in

private correspondence and print material but official sources often feature this topic less frequently.

[47] Weitz, *More Damning Than Slaughter*, 142.

[48] Peter Bearman, "Desertion as Localism: Army Unit Solidarity and Group Norms in the Civil War," *Special Forces*, 70, no. 2 (December 1991): 324.

[49] Bessie Martin, *Desertion of Alabama Troops from the Confederate Army: A Study in Sectionalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), 258.

[50] Bearman, "Desertion as Localism," 326.

[51] Ibid.

[52] John Paris, *A Sermon: Preached Before Brig.-Gen. Hoke's Brigade, at Kinston, N.C., on the 28th of February, 1864, by Rev. John Paris, Chaplain Fifty-Fourth Regiment N.C. Troops, Upon the Death of Twenty-Two Men, Who had Been Executed in the Presence of the Brigade for the Crime of Desertion* (Greensborough, NC: A.W. Ingold & Co., Book and Job Printers, 1864), 9.

[53] Diary of John Paris, Feb. 5, 1864, John Paris Papers, 1828-1905, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

[54] John Paris, *A Sermon*, 6.

[55] John C. Inscoe and Gordon B. McKinney, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia: Western North Carolina in the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 164.

[56] William T. Auman, *Civil War in the North Carolina Quaker Belt: The Confederate Campaign Against Peace Agitators, Deserters and Draft Dodgers* (Jefferson, NC, McFarland & Company, Inc., 2014), 9. Auman states that this newspaper was the largest in the state, and that Holden's position as editor amplified the discontent of those who wanted peace.

[57] Inscoe, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 80-87.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Auman, *Civil War in the North Carolina Quaker Belt*, 1. Auman has isolated fifteen counties in North Carolina's Piedmont that he believes acted both as hotbeds for Unionist sympathies and the setting of violent deserter hunts.

[60] Weitz, *More Damning Than Slaughter*, 142.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Paris, *A Sermon,* 8.

[63] Ibid., 4.

[64] Ibid., 9.

[65] Ibid., 14.

[66] Ibid., 12.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 27-28.

[70] Paris, *A Sermon,* 9.

[71] Ibid. Paris even claimed that if his brother deserted, he would rather change the man's name than be associated even tacitly with him, so that "I, and my, children after me, might not feel the deep and lasting disgrace which his conduct had enstamped upon [the name]."

[72] "Corresdence [*sic*] of the Raleigh Confederate," *The Greensboro Patriot,* February 18, 1864, 3.

[73] "Public Execution," *The Confederate* (Raleigh, NC), February 17, 1864, 2.

[74] "Shot By Deserters," *The Confederate* (Raleigh, NC), February 17, 1864, 2.

[75] Ralph Emms Elliott to Ann H. Elliot, June 16 1864, Elliott and Gonzalez Family Papers, 1701-1898, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill.

[76] Mary Johnstone to her mother, June 17 or 24, 1864, ibid.

[77] Ibid., 12.

CONCLUSION

During four years of bloodshed the tenets of the good death, established in the beliefs of North Carolinians through the sermons of their ministers, faced challenges both on and off the battlefield. War prevented soldiers from dying in the midst of their families, gave them no ability to record last words, and often resulted in burials in a mass grave. Ministers attempted to counter this reality through changing the meaning of death to be one of sacrifice for the nation. How, when, and where someone died no long mattered. So long as the white southern soldier died serving the Confederacy, ministers such as Joseph Atkinson and R.H. Lafferty purported that death would bring newfound glories. Immortality both in heaven and in the annals of Confederate history books yet to be written awaited the South's dead men.

The good death of the Civil War was one befitting a soldier, and Tar Heel clergy maintained that families should now find comfort in the knowledge that dead soldiers had fallen while following both God and the Confederacy's command. For those who suffered the loss of a family member or friend, these promises often did little to nullify their pain as they struggled to grieve without the closure provided by a corpse. A reinterpretation of death did little to change the immediate pain of loss. Still, religion provided answers about the unceasing wave of casualties, and civilians, mourning the dead and fearing for the safety of the living, grasped onto holy words with just as tight a grip as nervous soldiers on the eve of battle.

Civilians in Wilmington faced these struggles firsthand as yellow fever ravaged their city. The ferocity of the epidemic led to burials conducted without coffins, shrouds, or internment services, exposing citizens to conditions seen on battlefields. The swiftness

and seemingly randomness of death during the outbreak terrified those trapped in the city. Dying from yellow fever was not a peaceful transition, and with dozens dying every week both citizens and ministers became desensitized to the carnage. John Prichard represented God's will as both the source of Wilmington's scourge and the balm which would prevent death, though in the end he too succumbed to yellow fever. Noncombatants' direct interaction with the horrific effect of disease would repeat itself across North Carolina and the greater South, challenging the assumptions about death and burials in the places where epidemics took root.

John Paris represented the execution of Confederate deserters as a punishment that refuted their status as Christian soldiers. Their deaths served no higher purpose than to warn others lest they be tempted to risk desertion, and Paris believed that the very decision to abandon the Confederate cause showed that the executed were not truly Christian. In death, their nature as traitors was revealed. The end of the war cemented the disparaged memory of executed deserters. For the most zealous defenders of the Lost Cause theology, both deserters and those who had taken a Union oath to lay down their arms, were viewed as traitors who had helped bring about the loss of an otherwise unified nation.[1]

With the Confederacy decisively beaten in April 1865, white southerners began to question if the sacrifices of so many dead had really accomplished anything.[2] Reconstruction saw free blacks and newly freed men, women, and children celebrate the fall of a nation established to protect America's system of chattel slavery. Union forces occupied much of the South, including Wilmington and New Bern, protecting the newly freed and reminding white southerners of their military defeat. Despite their losses, white

southerners would again find new meaning in death through the violent reestablishment of the pre-war social and political order in the South. Statues rose in town squares throughout North Carolina and the former Confederacy after the war ended, serving as memorials that both honored fallen white soldiers and solidified the power living whites still held over southerners of color. Thus, through marble and granite, the immortality Protestant theologians promised to Confederate soldiers was fulfilled.

Endnotes

[1] David Williams, *Bitterly Divided: The South's Inner Civil War* (New York: The New Press, 2008), 248.

[2] George C. Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 393.

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