METHODIST RELIGION AMONG THE SOLDIERS OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

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This article gives a description of the religious experience of the ordinary Methodist soldier during the American Civil War of 1861-1865. The "holy war" rhetoric that issued from home pulpits, along with the model of the pious Christian warrior provided through Christian officers and generals, enabled him to retain a distinctively Christian character in the midst of the stresses and moral dilemmas of war. From his chaplains he heard preaching that was simple, direct, focused squarely on spiritual concerns, and called for urgent decision. His expression of religious devotion, even given the differences along this line which existed between Northern and Southern revivals, was of a less emotional type than that in evidence in earlier frontier revivals. His devotion was marked by prayerful dependence upon God and a reliance on the bonds of Christian fellowship, as brothers fought side by side against a common enemy. The battlefield tended to reduce the theological conflicts that arose out of the relative luxury of a peace-time situation. The survivors of the war would go on to face an increasingly more religiously and ethnically diverse America, in which the relative monopoly of Methodist revivalism would crumble in the religiously diverse world of the "gilded age."

Introduction

Two major church historians have recently essayed to consider the religious and moral underpinnings of the American Civil War. Harry S. Stout's *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War* has given us a rich and detailed description of wartime morality.[1] Mark Noll in *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* examines the theological and scriptural justifications for the War and how differing interpretations on the issue of slavery could not be resolved resulting in a War contrary to the Christian gospel all parties claimed to proclaim.[2] These extended treatments provide a

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[1] Harry S. Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War* (New York: Penguin, 2006).

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

broad sweeping canvas of the religious and moral dimensions of what was arguably the most nation-defining of American military conflicts.

In this article I would like to focus the lens on the religious experience of the ordinary Methodist soldier on both sides of the conflict. In order to do this, I will begin with a brief description of events in the Methodist Episcopal Church leading up to the division into North and South of 1845. I will then examine "the rhetoric of war" issuing from the Methodist pulpit, which provided a particularly religious paradigm through which the ordinary Christian soldier might interpret the horrors of war. Also significant in this regard was the religious orientation of some of the military leaders, and the role of chaplains. Perhaps most significant of all was the revivalism from which many of the soldiers had come and into which many others were brought through revival measures employed in the meeting of their spiritual needs. In closing I will attempt to summarise my findings in order to obtain a description of Methodist religion as it operated among the troops.

This paper is only a preliminary piece that is hoped will lay the groundwork for a more extensive case study of the attitude to the Civil War in the pages of *The True Wesleyan*, the official publication of the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion founded in 1843 on an explicitly abolitionist platform.[3] In that subsequent research I hope to resolve the question of whether an earliest pacifist stance among Wesleyan Methodists was replaced by the rhetoric of "holy war" in light of the national calamity. But for now I turn to Civil-War era Methodist religion in general.

Methodism and Slavery[4]

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[3] The standard denominational history is Ira F. McLeister and Roy S. Nicholson, *Conscience and Commitment: The History of the Wesleyan Methodist Church of America* (Marion, Indiana: The Wesley Press, 1976). Excellent chapters on denominational history are included in Wayne E. Caldwell, ed. *Reformers and Revivalists: The History of the Wesleyan Church* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Wesley press, 1992). Particularly helpful in covering the early formation period is Lee M. Haines, "Radical Reform and Living Piety: The Story of Earlier Wesleyan Methodism, 1843-1867," in Caldwell, 31-117. For developments in the post-bellum Church see Haines, "The Grander Nobler Work: Wesleyan Methodism's Transition 1867-1901," in Caldwell, 118-149.

[4] Focus on this issue does not assume that slavery was the sole cause of the "War between the States" but certainly the War cannot be understood apart from it and it was the abolition of slavery that was the most crucial aspect of the dispute among Methodists.

In 1784, at Baltimore, Maryland, the Methodist Episcopal Church came into being and, in keeping with John Wesley's convictions in regard to slavery, passed a rule that all Methodists should free their slaves within one year. But the rule was not enforced to any great degree and by 1816, the General Conference had reached a level of compromise on the question. Though the Church declared itself to be "as much as ever convinced of the great evil of slavery" it now seemed to have lost hope in the possibility of eradicating it.[5] *The Committee on Slavery* reported to the Conference that year its conclusion that "under the present, existing circumstances in relation to slavery little can be done to abolish the practice so contrary to the principles of moral justice."[6] By 1836, with the slavery issue proving to be a divisive one, threatening the unity of the visible Church, the General Conference held at Cincinnati, Ohio, was even able to issue a condemnation of abolitionism.

The South, with its "cotton culture," saw slavery spread rapidly and extensively. The Methodist Episcopal Church made concessions to slaveholders which increased its membership in the region and enabled the control of the denomination to rest in the hands of Southern clergy. By 1843 over 26,000 Methodists owned nearly 210,000 slaves, 1,200 of these being the "property" of preachers.[7]

Those in the Church who favoured abolition could not change the situation without changing the civil laws. Some states, such as North Carolina prohibited emancipation. In Georgia, an act of legislature was required before slaves could be emancipated. Virginia required that emancipated slaves must leave the state within a year of their emancipation or forfeit their freedom.[8] It is not surprising that in the face of such need for legislative changes many Methodists began to confine themselves to purely "spiritual" concerns within the existing status quo.

By 1844, only sixty years after the inaugural Christmas Conference in Baltimore, Maryland, Methodism was the largest Protestant church in America, with 1,068,000 members.[9] The

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[5] Donald G. Mathews, *Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality 1780-1845* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 302.
[6] Matthews, 28.
[7] Richard L. Troutman, ed. *The Heavens are Weeping: The Diaries of George Richard Browden 1852-1886* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 46.
[8] Matthews, 27-28.
[9] For the best study of American Methodism in its earlier period see Dee E. Andrews, *The Methodists and Revolutionary America, 1760-1800: The Shaping of an*

following year it would fragment into two denominations arrayed against each other on opposite sides of the slavery issue. Bishop James O. Andrew of Georgia became, in 1844, the first Methodist Bishop to hold slaves, albeit "inherited" through marriage. Considerable protests were registered, particularly from Northern ministers. In 1845 the Conference formed a "Plan of Separation" should it be needed, and on May 2nd 1845, two days after the rise of the Conference, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South was formed in Louisville, Kentucky, the vote being carried by ninety-four to three.[10]

The Rhetoric of War

When the Civil War was entered into, it was, in one sense, a continuation, in the arena of the battlefield, of the theological and political battles which had been fought already for several years prior to the outbreak of military hostilities. These hostilities were often expressed in the form of opposing religious crusades, each claiming that God was on its side.

The Methodist pulpit was to become a platform, on both sides, for strong patriotic invectives which sought to depict the soldiers as engaged in a holy war and their opponents as apostate, or worse still, demonically inspired, forces. Bishop Matthew Simpson of Indiana, ex-president of Depauw University, who was described as "an apostle of patriotism," delivered an address on *The State of the Country* during hostilities. An Ohio minister who was present described the climax of the sermon in moving fashion - "We could see him holding up the tattered flag and addressing it. The effect was electrifying..."[11]

Evangelical Culture (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000). David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005) covers global Methodism in thorough yet succinct fashion, but gives no sustained attention to the Civil War. He does however make the interesting observation that "the feminization of missions in the last third of the nineteenth century was partly the product of the social changes occasioned by the American Civil War, not least the death and disability of large numbers of men..." Hempton, 159.

[10] Troutman, 47.

[11] Chester Forrester Dunham, *The Attitude of the Northern Clergy Toward the South 1860-1865* (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1974), 4-5. Simpson would later preach Lincoln's funeral oration, cp. William Warren Sweet, *The Methodist Episcopal Church and the Civil War* (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, n.d. [c.1912]), 214-18.

The majority of Northern clergy pledged loyalty to the federal government displaying "an attitude of supreme hostility, disdain, and opposition toward the South."[12] Many preachers offered themselves for service in the cause of the Union's preservation, including the veteran circuit rider, Peter Cartwright. "Old as I am and stiff as I am," he declared, "I would shoulder my rifle now for the Union." One Northern minister, writing in the *Religious Herald* of 1862 wrote of the Southern ministers in a rather less than favourable light. "The most unmitigated set of villains they have in the South are the Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, and Episcopalian preachers...all talking secession...drinking mean liquor, and advocating the cause of Jefferson Davis and the devil."[13]

The civil religion of the American South was not committed to honouring the nation so much as to the preservation of state's rights, and the Southern way of life.[14] The Southern soldier did not fight just to hold on to his slaves, but in the cause of his own brand of patriotism, and in defence of his home. He also fought with a sense of divine sanction upon his cause, and a confidence, inspired by the power of the pulpit, that victory would be given to those whose cause was righteous. Biblical texts were often given a particularly local application. It was not uncommon to see the words of Isaiah written on battle flags, "I will say to the North, Give up; and to the south Keep not back!"[15]

> Such, indeed, was the violence of a separation in the years preceding the formation of the Confederacy that when the bugle calls sounded in Dixie, her preachers literally became ministers of flaming fire. It has been said that there is nothing more ferocious than a band of brigands led by vicious cutthroats, except it be a company of Scottish Presbyterians rising from their knees in prayer to do battle with the firm conviction that what they are about to do is the will of God. This storied zeal of the Highlander was to find its American counterpart in the inspired devotion of the embattled South.[16]

Both William W. Bennet in his *Narrative of the Great Revival Which Prevailed in the Southern Armies* (1877) and John William

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[12] Dunham, 134.
[13] Charles F. Pitts, *Chaplains in Gray: The Confederate Chaplains' Story* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1957), 22.
[14] Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause 1865-1920* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1980).
[15] Pitts, 37.
[16] Pitts, 20-21.

Jones in his 1887 work *Christ in the Camp*, selected Oliver Cromwell's soldiers as the closest to the Confederates "in religious motivation."[17]

The Methodist pastor, T.V. Moore, in a sermon preached at Nashville in 1870 couched his war rhetoric in distinctively religious terms. Religion always has inspired military prowess in battle, because a soldier who thinks his cause is that of God "will feel girded by more than human power, and shielded by a more than human protection, so that there shall descend upon him in the terrible shock of contending squadrons a baptism of fire that will nerve him to dare in the hour of peril what seems to mere human resources impossibilities." [18]

Christian Leadership in the Military

Both Generals Robert E. Lee and Thomas J. Jackson were devout Christians who approached the task of warfare in an almost devotional manner. Jackson was a Presbyterian deacon and "a man of constant prayer."[19] Both men sought God's wisdom in prayer at every significant moment of decision. Lee called for a strict observance of the President's call to prayer and fasting among his troops. He had an easy familiarity with his troops which gave earned him great respect, not only as a military leader, but even as a kind of religious prophet, to whose cause the Christian soldier was glad to rally.

On one occasion Lee was assured by Chaplain B.T. Lacy of the prayers of his fellow chaplains on his behalf. His face flushed, tears came to his eyes and he answered, "Please thank them for that sir, - I warmly appreciate it. And I can only say that I am nothing but a poor sinner, trusting in Christ alone for salvation, and need all of the prayers they can offer for me."[20] Pitt recounts another incident, with a rookie chaplain, which serves to illustrate both Lee's respect for the Church and his understanding of his men.

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[17] Wilson, 44.

[18] Wilson, 45. Moore's phrase "baptism of fire," when set against the backdrop of Holiness rhetoric, perhaps suggests the idea that combat could itself be seen as a sanctifying experience.

[19] Rev. J. William Jones, *Christ in the Camp: or Religion in Lee's Army. Supplemented by a Sketch of the Work in the Other Confederate Armies* (Richmond: B. F. Johnson & Co., 1888), 88-9. Jones gives a sketch of ten other Christian officers, who were models of piety, 42-143.

[20] Jones, 50.

> [N]ot conversant with military terminology, [the rookie] understood the order for a parade in full dress uniform to mean that he should appear in the vestments of his communion. Accordingly, he put on his pure white robe of office and took his place in the ranks of his regiment. All around he could hear the soft laughter of the soldiers at the "green chaplain." However, it is reported that as his regiment passed in review, General Lee lifted his hat and said, "I salute the Church of God."[21]

No doubt such examples of the devout Christian warrior would serve to assuage the conscience of many who may have felt twinges of conscience regarding the ethics of war, or whose courage threatened to fail them in the heat of battle. They would also be a contributing factor to the success of revivals among the troops for, generally speaking, officers of both sides proved to be keen supporters of and participants in revival measures.

The Ministry of Chaplains

In both Federal and Confederate armies, Methodist chaplains were in the majority. This is probably not a reflection of their greater devotedness, but rather of the sheer numerical strength of the Methodist Episcopal Church at that time. William Warren Sweet lists 487 Methodist chaplains serving in the Union army.[22] Among the Confederates there were a hundred and forty-one Methodist officers and ordinary soldiers, and two hundred and nine chaplains.[23] Jones provides a list of chaplains from just two Confederate Corps (Hill's and Ewell's).[24] Of eighty-six chaplains, thirty-six were Methodists, twenty Baptists, twenty Presbyterian, six Episcopal, three Roman Catholic and one Lutheran. Four former Methodist chaplains would later become bishops - Enoch M. Marvin (1866), John C. Keener (1870), John C. Granberry (1882), and Atticus G. Haywood (1890).

The Reverend Lucius C. Matlack, a staunch Northern Methodist and abolitionist served three years in active service, first in a year of chaplaincy work, and later as a field officer of cavalry, "not

[21] Pitts, 61-62.
[22] Sweet, 138-39.
[23] Sweet, 222, 224.
[24] Jones, 358.

infrequently heading a charge of cavalry in line of battle."[25] The use of such an example is not to say that spiritual and military responsibilites were never experienced in tension. This is illustrated by the popular and humorous story of the Confederate chaplain who, in the heat of battle, took off his clerical coat and hat, laid them on the ground and said, "Now, lay there, sanctification, until we finish whipping these Yankees!"[26]

While still an active Methodist bishop, H.H. Kavanaugh served as chaplain to the Sixth Kentucky Regiment. Thomas Owens, of the Fourth Kentucky Regiment, described Kavanaugh's selfless labours among the troops.

> Many a time [have I] seen him trudging along on foot with the boys through the mud, leading his horse, ready to be used by the first footsore and exhausted comrade whose needs were made known to him. And thus he was ever ready to minister to the bodily as well as to the spiritual comfort of the men. Who can wonder that his influence for good was so potent among them?[27]

Georgian Bishop James O. Andrew, whose ownership of slaves had earlier sparked off the schism in the Methodist Episcopal Church, wrote to chaplains in the Confederate Army, in a manner designed to be an advisory description of their duties:

> It may be that the circumstances which surround you may offer but few facilities for public preaching, but remember that the pulpit is not the only place where the faithful pastor will preach - in private, by the wayside, in the tent, in the hospitals by the bedside of the sick or wounded soldier; there especially is your place. Be much with the sick, wounded and dying - there, while life is ebbing out, when the past is painfully remembered, and the future looms up gloomily before the vision of the dying patriot, when he thinks of home and loved ones there, and feels that his earthly mission is almost ended, then preach Jesus to him, talk to him of the cross and pardon, and of heaven, and kneel beside him, and in the language of pleading, earnest faith, commend his departing spirit to the God who made him, and the exalted Redeemer who died for him, rose again and ever liveth to intercede for him, and then, when the vital spark is extinct, give him Christian burial.[28]

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[25] Lucius C. Matlack, *The Antislavery Struggle and Triumph of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1881; 1969 reprint), 370-71. Matlack was one of the founders, in 1843, of the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion.
[26] Pitts, 99.
[27] Pitts, 94.
[28] Pitts, 51.

Chaplains kept a personal record of their pastoral acts. Beside each soldier's and officer's name were columns listing his spiritual condition (either "Christian," "unsaved," or "backslider"), "the date that concern for his soul was noted, the date of conviction by the Holy Spirit, the date of his professed experience, a notation of witnesses to this profession, the account of his being accepted by the men of his chosen denomination for baptism, and a record of his baptism."[29]

In contrast to the frequently heard "war sermons" in pulpits back home, the average chaplain focused squarely on spiritual matters - the need for conversion and holiness.[30] Jones reports on the evangelical tone of the preaching and worship in the Confederate army.

> Chaplains...determined not to know anything among [the soldiers] save Jesus Christ and him crucified...[T]he grounds of the war were not discussed; constitutional and historical questions were passed by. The sermons in the camp would have suited any congregation in city and country, and with even less change might have been preached to the Union armies. Eternal things, the claims of God, the worth of the soul, the wages of sin...and the gift of God which is eternal life...these were the matters of preaching...The hearers were besought to immediate and uncompromising action for the time was short...There was no stirring up of bad blood; no inflaming of malice and revenge. The man of God lifted up, not the Bar and Star, but the Cross, and pressed the urgency, "Who among you is on the Lord's side?"[31]

It is not surprising that, in the light of this style of preaching, which in its directness and urgent appeal to decision has always been a preparation for and accompaniment to periods of spiritual awakening, we should see revivals break out among the troops. We turn now to a description of those revivals, and a further consideration of their contributing factors.

Revival Outbreaks

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[29] Pitts, 58.
[30] Gorrell Clinton Prim, Jr. *Born Again in the Trenches: Revivalism in the Confederate Army* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1982), 7-10.
[31] Jones, 9-10.

In both Northern and Southern regiments, revival meetings were held during extended camps. One New York regiment held a thirty-day revival meeting during which one hundred and twenty-five soldiers professed conversion.[32] Though there were certainly times of spiritual awakening among the Northern troops, it was the Confederate armies which, perhaps in keeping with the unique character of Southern religion, would see the most intense revivals. The first took place in the Army of Northern Virginia in the winter of 1862-1863, following the Battle of Fredericksburg. This was followed by awakenings among the troops encamped along the Rapidan River in 1863-1864. In the closing months of the War further revivals took place along the lines from Richmond to Petersburg. A smaller revival took place in the Army of Tennessee, at Dalton, Georgia among General Joseph Johnston's troops. Anywhere between 15,000 and 50,000 troops were "born again" during the course of the War.[33]

After the Second Battle of Manassas, 23 August to 1 September, the Fall of 1862 was spent encamped at Bunker Hill. A chapel was built at the urging of General Paxton, and services were held there daily. By February of 1863 religious zeal was on the increase. Evangelists came to preach, group discussions followed services, and prayer meetings followed group discussions. Many were converted and baptized. The soldiers made large contributions to assist the citizens of Fredericksburg.[34]

S.M. Cherry's report to the Methodist Tract Society, in May of 1864 gives us a vivid picture of revival conditions.

> The army was in the midst of a most extensive revival at the beginning of the month. Protracted meetings were being held in almost every brigade; thousands of soldiers were thronging our crude camp altars, hundreds were nightly asking for certificates of Church membership. About three hundred were baptized on the first day of May, and the great work seemed to be growing in depth and interest all the while. Officers and privates were unusually serious and much impressed by the preaching of the Word, and bowed together at the place of prayer...Not less than five hundred professed to find peace in believing the first week of the month, and two thousand were publicly seeking salvation.[35]

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[32] Sweet, 140.
[33] Wilson, 6.
[34] Pitts, 13.
[35] Jones, 587.

It is interesting to note that the "barking and jerking exercises" and the fainting spells, so typical of earlier frontier camp meeting revivals were conspicuously absent from the Civil War revivals.[36] Perhaps the sobriety and awfulness of battle conditions placed a restraint on such outbursts. The 1857 Holiness Revival, under such Methodist notables as Phoebe and Walter Palmer had exhibited greater orderliness and calm than earlier revivals, such as those at Cane Ridge, and Red River. This type of Holiness revivalism exerted a continuing influence well into the War, and probably left its mark on Civil War revivals, particularly in the North.[37]

Causes of the Revivals

We have already noted the influence of Christian officers and chaplains, and their support for, and contribution to, "revival measures." It is also likely that the rhetoric of war which was heard from home pulpits before coming to the front served to enable the soldier to resist in considerable measure the moral laxity that war time situations invariably bring. Of course, this article deals with the Christian soldier, as one uniquely prepared to receive the spiritually invigorating effects of revivals. Southern ministers "portrayed the army as a carrier of the contagion of morality, and of evangelical Christianity. The clergy insisted that the typical Southern soldier came from a religious family and was...receptive to religious influences."[38] No doubt, many atrocities were committed by soldiers of both sides, as is the case in all wars, and unofficial marauders often wreaked havoc on the suffering populations. But these are not the subject of this research.

Benjamin Lacy lists a number of contributing factors ("instrumentalities") to the success of revivals among the troops.[39]

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[36] Prim, 14.

[37] On the Holiness movement in this period see Melvin Easterday Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century* (Metuchen, NJ and London: The Scarecrow Press, 1980); Charles Edwin Jones, *Perfectionist Persuasion: the Holiness Movement and American Methodism, 1876-1936* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1974); John Leland Peters, *Christian Perfection and American Methodism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press, 1985); Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform; American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

[38] Wilson, 43.

[39] Benjamin Rice Lacy Jr. *Revivals in the Midst of the Years* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1943), 124-26.

In addition to godly officers, and chaplains, with which I have already dealt, he lists a number of other factors:

1. Letters from pastors and friends, many of which have been preserved and "breathe a spirit of devotion" and "an earnest solicitude for the spiritual well being of the soldier."[40]

2. Prayer meetings, which were well attended

3. Tract and Bible distribution. Printing presses sent a steady stream of literature to the front, until the record of a million pages a week was finally reached.[41]

Wilson adds a few other contributing causes:

1. Well organized denominational efforts to meet the spiritual needs of the troops.

2. The already devout character of the troops, many of whom had come from revivalist backgrounds.

3. The decline of confidence following losses in the second year of the war, and the constant threat of death.[42]

Prim's list, in addition to many of the factors already mentioned, includes:

1. The high level of co-operation in interdenominational work.

2. Hospital visitation by chaplains.

3. An initial sense of divine favour through early victories, and a corresponding call to repentance, prayer, and fasting, when subsequent defeats seemed to indicate the loss of the divine favour.

4. The organization of the army, which meant that zealous Christians would daily "rub shoulders" with unbelievers and the less committed.

5. Organizations specifically developed to meet the needs of the troops - Christian Associations (youth and young adult groups, somewhat like the Y.M.C.A.), and non-sectarian "Army Churches."[43]

The churches back home rallied in support of the soldiers on the field. Meetings for prayer and the practice of fasting were observed. A year into the war, President Jefferson Davis set apart Friday 28 February as a "day of fasting, humiliation, and prayer." He urged the people to "repair to the only Giver of all victory and [to] pray for His protection and favor for our beloved country, and that we may be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us."[44]

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[40] Lacy, 124.
[41] Pitts, 31.
[42] Wilson, 7.
[43] Prim, 19-44.
[44] Pitts, 35.

Prayer meetings among the troops were used with great success. President Lincoln, in an interview with a group of abolitionists, referred to the fervent prayers of the rebel soldiers. They prayed, he said, "with a great deal more earnestness, I fear, than our own troops, and expecting God to favour their side, for one of our soldiers, who had been taken prisoner, told Senator Wilson, a few days since, that he met with nothing so discouraging as the evident sincerity of those he was among in their prayers."[45] In addition to being sincere, these prayers were also seemingly well focused. The Confederate praying soldier was one who truly *prayed*. "He does not tell the Lord the news of the day, or recount to him the history of the country."[46]

In most Confederate regiments religious services were held daily. The day began with prayer and ended with either a prayer meeting or an evangelistic service. Either a layperson or a minister might conduct these services. "A Presbyterian chaplain from North Carolina wrote that sometimes they felt as if they were in camp meeting rather than in the army expecting to meet an enemy."[47]

Bibles and New Testaments flowed to the troops in a flood tide. The British and Foreign Bible Society, in response to an offer to purchase Bibles, donated free of charge, 15,000 Bibles, 50,000 New Testaments, and 250,000 copies of the Gospels and Psalms bound together.[48] Tracts came in even larger numbers. Lacy examined twelve tracts from the period, all of which had been published by the Methodist Tract Society. The titles of just a few are enough to indicate the response which they were intended to invoke: "The Soldier's Last Gift to His Mother"; "The Wounded, or A Time to Think"; "The Two Steps to Immediate Conversion"; "Repentance"; and "The Contrast - The Child of God versus the Child of the Devil."[49]

Generally speaking, the level of interdenominational co-operation in nineteenth century America was considerably higher than it has been at any time since (in spite of the emergence of the modern ecumenical movement). This was no more evident than during the Civil War, and was one of the significant contributing factors to the success of revivals. The Methodist missionary E.M. Marvin, who would later be elected to the episcopate in Tennessee

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[45] Prim, 13.
[46] Wilson, 130.
[47] Pitts, 58.
[48] Lacy, 126.
[49] Lacy, 125.

helped to organize the "Army Church," an interdenominational fellowship, organized roughly along Methodist lines. This, along with similar organizations such as the "Christian Association," would become "a potent factor in preparing the way for and conserving the results of the great revival which swept through all the Southern armies."[50]

This is not to say that the old denominational "sticking points" were completely removed. On one occasion, a group of Primitive Baptists built a pool and a Baptist minister, "Brother Cochran," baptized all the Baptists while the Methodist, "Brother Jewell," baptized the Methodists. Some of the Methodists desired to be immersed and "Brother Jewell" obliged. Others knelt at the water's edge and received baptism by affusion (pouring). The Baptist preacher spoke no word of criticism, but he rushed to the water's edge to give each *immersed* Methodist a rigorous handshake, while completely ignoring those who had not been immersed. Jewell viewed it with amusement and said of Cochran, "He was one of the purest men we ever knew."[51] Baptismal services were often conducted in full view of the enemy's picket line with no shots being fired from that quarter. Both Federal and Confederate troops reciprocated this privilege.[52]

In addition to the orderliness of the 1857 Holiness Revival, mentioned above, the particularly Methodist form of revivalism was also known for its emphasis on prayer and its catholic spirit. It exhibited "no sectarian rivalry [and] continued to exert powerful influences after the war's outbreak. Estimates of its total number of converts have varied from 500,000 to well over 1 million."[53] The impact of the Palmer's brand of revivalism was felt most powerfully in the Northern states, but the Confederate preachers exhibited a similar generosity of spirit. According to one first hand impression, the Southern preacher in the camps "has no use for any theology that is *newer than the New Testament*, and he indulges in no fierce polemics against Christians of other denominations."[54] This relative freedom from denominational rivalries gave the revivals a chance to proceed without the stumbling blocks that might have occurred if

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[50] Pitts, 59.
[51] Pitts, 60.
[52] Pitts, 57.
[53] Keith J. Hardman, *Issues in American Christianity: Primary Sources with Introductions*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), 165.
[54] Wilson, 130-31.

doctrinal distinctiveness had been rigidly maintained or enforced upon the new converts.

Of course *intra*denominational enmities, based as they were on North-South divisions, would remain during and for a long time after the War. "While the war was at its peak, Methodist... denominational leaders in the North had asked for, and received, orders from military commanders giving them power to depose pastors in occupied territory considered to be disloyal...This was also interpreted to permit the forcible ejection of pastors appointed to parishes by bishops of pro-Southern sentiment."[55]

Reluctant to admit defeat, the Southern spirit of defiance lived on in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South whose bishops issued a Pastoral Address in August of 1865 at Columbus, Georgia. "Whatever banner had fallen or been furled, that of Southern Methodism was still unfurled; whatever cause had been lost, that of Southern Methodism survived."[56]

Conclusion

From the preceding we are able to give some description of the typical religious experience of the ordinary Methodist soldier during the Civil War. The "rhetoric of war" that had issued from home pulpits, along with the model of the pious Christian warrior provided through Christian officers and generals, enabled him to retain a distinctively Christian character in the midst of the stresses and moral dilemmas of war. If he were a Confederate soldier he may have seen himself as engaged in a "holy crusade" to repel the Northern invader from his beloved homeland. If he were a Union soldier, he might have drawn upon a competing "holy war" vision, which saw the future of the nation depending on the abolition of the evil of slavery, in order that the United States might fulfil its "manifest destiny" as a light to the nations.

From his chaplains he heard preaching that was simple, direct, focused squarely on spiritual concerns, and called for urgent decision. After all, who knows but that the next charge or skirmish might be his last? The prospect of being shot down in the flower of youth, and leaving behind a grieving mother, to enter an uncertain eternity, provided the motivation for a positive response to the opportunity of making his peace with God. The genuine pastoral

[55] Pitts, 120-22.
[56] Pitts, 75.

concern of the chaplains, at his side when wounded and when dying, provided an authentication to their preaching, which might otherwise have been just another species of rhetoric.

His expression of religious devotion, even given the differences along this line which existed between Northern and Southern revivals, was of a less emotional type than that in evidence in earlier frontier revivals. Perhaps the unavoidable horrors of war contributed to this more sombre approach. The expectation of death has a tendency to eliminate from religious experience all that is frivolous or extraneous, and to bring about a deep and serious piety. This devotion is marked by prayerful dependence upon God and a reliance on the bonds of Christian fellowship, as brothers fought side by side against a common enemy.

War also tends to reduce the theological conflicts that arise out of the relative luxury of the peace-time situation. Denominational chaplains, and ordinary Christian laymen in uniform, could agree to disagree more readily when salvation seemed the paramount concern. Overemphasis on confessional distinctions is more likely to arise in the theological seminary or the home parish than on the bloody field of a Gettysburg or a Fredericksburg. The soldier could respond to a simple message in heartfelt repentance, and along with his fellows could be given an opportunity to pray, and to worship, and even to preach, "as a dying man to dying men."

In the theological reflection of such postbellum thinkers as Philip Schaff and Horace Bushnell, Methodists played their part in making that great sacrifice whereby the nation was reborn and, in the mingling of Northern and Southern blood, its unity "cemented and forever sanctified."[57] The survivors of the war would go on to face an increasingly more religiously and ethnically diverse America, in which the monopoly of Methodist revivalism would crumble and it would become but one of many options in the urbanized religious supermarket of "the gilded age."

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[57] Edwin Scott Gaustad, *A Religious History of America* (San Francisco: Harper, 1990), 177.