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The divine economy: Evangelicalism and the defense of slavery, 1830–1865

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THE DIVINE ECONOMY:
EVANGELICALISM AND THE DEFENSE OF SLAVERY, 1830-1865

by

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ABSTRACT

The Divine Economy: Evangelicalism and the Defense of Slavery, 1830-1865

John P. Daly

Evangelical moralism was the ideological foundation of the southern defense of slavery between 1830 and 1865. By 1830, evangelical culture had begun to attain a remarkable ascendancy in the South and the United States as a whole. The sectional debate over the morality of slavery took place largely within the confines of evangelical conceptual categories.

In an era when religious ideas still permeated the life of the mind in America, the Old South was less culturally distinctive than historians have usually acknowledged. Southerners, through the medium of their evangelical world view, participated in mainstream nineteenth-century intellectual developments and modernizing trends. The obsession with bourgeois freedom, liberal economics, and material progress apparent in northern (and British) thought and society found expression in the slaveholding South. The southern encounter with Victorian modernity was most clearly reflected in the region’s main cultural product: proslavery arguments written by evangelicals.

Evangelicals’ individualistic view of the work ethic, freedom, and man’s relation to God constituted the premise of most proslavery tracts. Southern ministers popularized the
identification of individual morality with economic utility and success in a free market environment. They, likewise, promulgated a definition of freedom that equated liberty with moral self-discipline. On the basis of their prior defense of individual freedom and progress southerners supported slaveholding primarily as a form of ethical success—a providential result of and reward for individual virtue and self-discipline. This justification of particular slaveholders did not lead most southerners to an abstract vindication of the institution of slavery or critique of the ideal of individual freedom. According to the dominant proslavery argument, slaves still possessed the inviolable conscience and autonomous will that were the irreducible touchstones of Christian liberty. Southern slavery, therefore, did not contradict one explanation of personal and economic freedom. Proslavery spokesman maintained that any inequities in southern society resulted from an open and ongoing competition to develop moral will power. Racial and labor subordination originated in failure to develop character. On this fundamental level, southern evangelicals’ explanations of their economic order were not at odds with northern evangelicals’ understanding of free society.
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CHAPTER ONE

The Roots of the Divine Economy:
Evangelicalism and the Ethical Self

Who hath hardened himself against God, and hath prospered?

Job 9:4

But seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you.

Matthew 6:33

America's fiercest debate over the morality of slavery erupted in 1831. It was intimately linked to the sectional crisis that brought civil war thirty years later. The nearly suicidal violence of that conflict seems to imply that the combatants disagreed about the nature of morality itself, but that was not the case. Deep political divisions, after all, do not necessarily stem from deep cultural divisions.¹ Antebellum political debates were moralized, and moral debates were politicized as the sectional crisis deepened, but, as David Potter has noted, America at the outset of the Civil War had more "cultural homogeneity" than ever before.² An analysis of the dominant southern proslavery position confirms this cultural convergence and thereby dissolves the truism: "the South became increasingly isolated from the progressive ideology of the Western World."³
For a hundred years after the Civil War, politicians and historians analyzing the period made much of the antebellum South's alleged departures from national ideals. Emphasis on aberration salvaged the continuity of the nation's history and moral mission. Some critics held that southern culture had deviated, not only from the tenor and progressive course of American institutions, but from modern global patterns of development as well. Such thinking was common both among scholars who were horrified at the backwardness of the South and among southerners who believed their region had, with characteristic and commendable stubbornness, resisted the cultural power of a postbellum world that held it in scorn. Recent studies demonstrate, however, that the antebellum South participated in mainstream nineteenth-century moral, intellectual, and socio-economic developments. The region's leaders were often proponents of current doctrines. Southerners, then, sought to compete with the North for economic power in a thoroughly contemporary spirit. A modern, moral foundation for the South's position was laid out in pamphlets and pulpits before the war began as southerners explained how slavery had arisen in keeping with the "genius of the age."

The South and the North drew different practical conclusions from the same moral premises. As religious historian Samuel Hill has noted, "only a society so united could be so divided."
Antebellum cultural unity was evident in the northern and southern use of religious and moral language. In an era of national "evangelical hegemony," Hill found the vocabularies of the regions to be "nearly indistinguishable."\textsuperscript{10} How then did moral disagreements occur, moral oversight go unchecked? How did southerners preach equality and democracy and not feel like hypocrites? How did they disclaim responsibility for the plight of their slaves? Why did few abolitionists attack an emerging factory system that brutalized and denied freedom to its workers? And why did northerners instead feel threatened by a slave economy that did not directly involve them?

In light of the common moral culture of antebellum Americans, who understood agency, causality, and responsibility in theological and religious terms, these time-honored historical questions should not be posed until we have examined the religious temperament and cosmology of the era. Such an investigation will demonstrate the necessity of first establishing the following: how religious language and piety peculiar to the period constrained human action; how popular evangelical notions defined what could and could not be manipulated by human effort, what might and might not be comprehended by the human intellect; and the extent to which antebellum Americans saw themselves as agents at all. These issues demand attention because the debate over slavery arose from an ethico-social dilemma at the core of antebellum America's evangelical impulse.
The dilemma lay in the relation between moral order and individual power as it was then understood. To an increasingly consolidated and evangelical nation rooted in individualism, the question was of vital importance. The great intellectual obsession of the antebellum era involved explaining how economic growth and the autonomy of citizens together could support moral order, defined as social stability and Protestant religiosity. North and South, the evangelical formula affirmed that the personal moral restraint necessary for social stability would be promoted by increased individual power and material opportunity, as these were the fruits of moral restraint in the first place. That is, self-restraint preceded, produced, and preserved individual freedom and power. A survey of the sources makes clear that most public controversies of the era involved variations on this theme.

The evangelical movement originated as an effort to contain the threat to social order and religious adherence posed by individual autonomy. Evangelicalism's popularity arose from the confidence with which it asserted that not only could these seemingly mutually exclusive goods be reconciled, but that Americans were ideally positioned to reap the rewards of such a synthesis. It was a confidence with little time for hair-splitting. Rarely did evangelical pundits distinguish between the moral question of 'What am I to do?' and the pragmatic question of 'How do things get done?' In
America, they proclaimed, things got done through moral agency; moral agency was power.

The evangelicals marshalled considerable moral energy with this message, but the movement failed—on its own terms—to transform society. The movement’s claim that unfettered American institutions and individual improvement would by their very nature overcome any difficulty eliminated the challenge which had fueled evangelicalism. Refusal to admit the possibility of defeat or compromise was a hallmark of evangelical self-assurance. Such certainty undermined the battle against secularity. In its insistence that moral restraint irresistibly begot power—that the success of its program was pre-ordained—evangelicalism precluded investigation of its own principles and goals.

The central unexamined premise of this religious confidence was an equation of Protestant morality with self-interest, a move that hopelessly confused righteousness with worldly success. Ministers demanded that the possibility of winning material success through purely secular diligence be denied and, when such success appeared in spite of theory, that it be condemned. Yet evangelicals posited that same success as a motivation for religious self-restraint. Economic ends were good or evil depending on the means, or, more precisely, an individual’s attitude toward the means, used to attain them. Material rewards and social power, according to evangelicals, were produced by self-control,
which was a purely moral and internal act. God bestowed success on the deserving personality type.\textsuperscript{15}

The Evangelical Age and the South, 1801-1865:

Confidence and conflict were implicit in the historic roots of evangelicalism. The movement came to dominate the American moral and religious landscape after the Revolutionary War. Its concept of the self, tied to the evolution of Protestantism, was consonant with and justified by the course of individualism after 1787.\textsuperscript{16} Because ministers tended to sacralize the free institutions under which their denominations expanded, antebellum morality was an amalgam of the religious tradition of the Reformation (Puritan Calvinism in particular) and the materialism of the Enlightenment. It is no suprise, therefore, that nineteenth-century evangelicals reached seemingly utilitarian conclusions on what they deemed wholly religious grounds. Evangelicals who came to dominate the South brought this tradition to new soil and elaborated on it in ways that would not have been possible in any other social setting.\textsuperscript{17}

The problem of the self in its modern form, which finds individual power pitted aganist the burden of personal responsibility, is a child of the Protestant Reformation. The practical difficulty with the Reformation schema was that the benefits of self-direction (autonomy, intentional ability) brought the strains of self-dependence (responsibility and
Reformation thinkers and their American Puritan successors addressed this opposition ambiguously. The Protestant doctrine of the priesthood of all believers undermined the authority of ecclesiastical institutions, offering instead individual understanding and intuition as the means of establishing religious truth. A corollary of the Protestant model of authority, that the self was unaided, isolated, had the potential to unsettle its adherents. Therefore the New England Puritans, who espoused the Calvinist doctrine that individuals are helpless to effect their own salvation, were hesitant about making claims for the autonomous self. Obsessed as they were with the questions of salvation and damnation, Puritans took care not to celebrate the sufficiency of the unaided self. What was the point of autonomy, after all, if it could not win the kingdom? The evangelical movement, retaining in some degree the Puritan-Calvinist notions about the depravity and insufficiency of man, nonetheless offered a confident and comforting vision of salvation. Apparently unimpressed by contradictions that plagued Puritans, evangelicals extended the Reformation faith in individual comprehension of religious truth, preaching the efficacy of the individual in understanding and controlling moral action.

"Evangelicalism," as applied to the mid-nineteenth century denotes proselytizing Christian insistence on individual moral agency. When southerners advanced the
antebellum truism that "the American mind thus far is cast in a religious mold," the mold referred to was the evangelical idea of individual power. The southern Methodist minister and president of Randolph-Macon college, William A. Smith, gave a typical definition of antebellum religion when describing the basis of a public education: "it must be a strictly Protestant education--Protestant, at least, in its main feature: that is, every citizen [whatever his gospel] . . . is still individually and personally responsible to God and his country."23 "He is within the limits of his capacity a cause within himself strictly a self-acting agent and hence accountable."24 The mid-nineteenth century was characterized by a popular religious culture in which the autonomy Smith demanded was taken for granted and moralized. It was on the basis of these assumptions that the period was called an evangelical age.

Evangelicalism, however, was first and more technically, a style of Protestantism centered on the conversion experience and on a theology that stressed heartfelt individual proximity to God over communal or doctrinal definitions of piety.25 In America, this movement was associated with the advent of Methodism and with Baptist and Presbyterian participation in the Great Awakening. Theological flexibility and simple appeals to the "word and heart" allowed various denominations to participate in a general movement: southern revivalism.26 There was, for
example, room for Unitarians and Episcopalians under the "evangelistic" rubric because they tried, as New Orleans Unitarian Theodore Clapp put it, to "adopt a plan of preaching the simple doctrines of the gospel, instead of distinguishing the tenets of Calvin, Arminius, Edwards or Wesley." Movement preachers won souls throughout the South, but not necessarily for their own churches. Presbyterian Daniel Baker, a leading revivalist who worked the Old Southwest, remarked how he would sometimes win hundreds of converts at a single meeting, "not one" of whom became Presbyterians. He once joined a Methodist and Baptist in preaching a revival in a frontier community, whose converts proceeded to form an Episcopal church. 

This popular ecumenical spirit necessitated a de-emphasis of doctrine; indeed, it excused many ministers from intellectual rigor and they thereby managed to straddle the contradiction outlined above. Echoing Calvin, they preached human depravity, insufficiency, and dependence on Providence, thereby implying that individual salvation was uncertain, while simultaneously assuring believers that human effort could carry the day (an accomodation to a uniquely American pelagianism or Methodist Arminianism). Episcopal bishop Stephen Elliot of Georgia unashamedly trumpeted this precarious doctrine: "There is no inconsistency in calling on God and then telling you to do it." Had evangelicals emphasized doctrinal issues, they might not have embraced
individual agency so easily. There was, however, a compensation for, perhaps even a solution to, this intellectual contradiction in the conversion experience, which insisted that new believers be cognizant of their depravity and powerlessness to overcome sin before leading them into the presence of a God who would grant them the confidence they needed to make sanctified lives on their own.

Evangelicals offered believers knowledge of their personal justification much earlier in their lives than did traditional Puritanism. The Puritan paradigm held that, in acknowledging his innate debility, the believer through conversion would be transformed from a weakling into a dynamo. Yet in Puritanism, individuals did not act alone nor define their own conversion experience. Puritan doctrine demanded that believers affiliate in covenanted bodies that promoted group solidarity. Puritans were usually converted within covenanted structures, not in isolation.  

In evangelical denominations emerging out of the Great Awakening, religious style and the style of conversion in particular departed from the seventeenth-century Calvinist mode in claims made for the individual. Evangelicals, especially Methodists, who explicitly rejected Calvinism and "advocates of unconditional election and reprobation," usually did so because such doctrines undermined individual moral autonomy.  

As one vociferous opponent of predestination intoned, Calvinism had "no merit or demerit ... No one can know absolutely from his
character that he is among the saved." Evangelical converts in the nineteenth century were more self-assured, self-directed, and self-aware than their seventeenth or eighteenth century forerunners.

Evangelicals placed more emphasis on religious emotion and heartfelt experience of God’s presence than did their Puritan predecessors, in effect detaching conversion from a formal doctrinal locus. Styles of evangelical preaching first emerged during the eighteenth century when, both North and South, conversion and the religious morality that arose from it were first treated not so much as an initiation into a group’s holy mission, but as a private act of supreme individual importance. This was evinced in a new array of conversion behaviors, punctiliously identifying the exact moment of regeneration, which was often marked by convulsive bodily displays, groans, shrieks, and tears. These were followed by the mature convert’s repeated and lifelong descriptions of the experience in formal testimonies. Changes in congregations and definitions of conversion were enhanced in early nineteenth-century revivalism, in which the brand of southern evangelicalism that would come to dominate the region had its roots. Frontier revivals were gatherings of strangers who heard personal witnesses to the power of God. Converts displayed a catalog of intimate emotional responses to the offer of God’s love and power.
These behaviors argue for the presumption that the men and women of nineteenth-century revivals underwent a different experience than had seventeenth-century Puritan converts. The difference was made possible by the growth of scientific, technological, and market mechanisms over the course of the eighteenth century. In America these changes brought a shift in individuals' sense of their intentional ability and the articulation and acceptance of philosophies of personal power. This developed to such a degree that conversion, always regarded as an uncontrolled and otherworldly event, had by the time of the Second Great Awakening taken on some of the characteristics of a conscious "act." Nineteenth-century believers did not describe conversion itself in terms of self-initiation and control, but they did apply this vocabulary to the evolving religious conception of life as self-directed moral action.

Evangelicalism claimed that after regeneration the unaided self (with the presence of God) could transcend its own passions, tame its own instincts. Such an ethic was consonant with the secular mood of the day and offered a solution of sorts to keenly felt secular moral problems. In its assurance that man could apprehend and fulfill his responsibilities, evangelicalism mirrored Jacksonian America’s confident sense of national destiny. In a mobile and fast-changing society with few authoritative institutions to provide roles or moral signposts, it offered a model of
"right" behavior to non-believers who knew that they had
selves but were not sure what to do with them. Evangelicals
promised such people that, with some help from God, selves
could be integrated and personal destinies controlled.
(Transcendentalism spoke to some of the same needs, with a
more secular and blusteringly self-sufficient message.38)

In the nineteenth century, America was a republic of the
young. Demographic trends and geographic mobility produced a
landscape over-run with youth. Transcendental pundits and
educational reformers sought to direct immature energies
through calls for moral self-discipline and adult
responsibility. These campaigns coincided with explosions of
evangelical conversions. Ministers in frontier and rural
southern communities were frank about the social meaning of
conversion, calling it the beginning of "self-dependence."39
Conversion often marked the moment when young people ceased to
work for their parents and set out on their own. For young
women, the experience prepared the way for and eased the
transition to the responsibilities of married life and
motherhood. Whatever their marital state, religion provided
rural women with one of their only social outlets. Hyperemotional and deeply personal conversions also steeled
young southerners for the drudgeries most of them would face.
Conversion, however, was not simply a form of initiation,
training, or social control, although it contained elements of
all three. The experience invested the sacrifices of common
folks' lives with a moral and spiritual grandeur, an element of self-direction and choice.  

Evangelical conversion served to socialize those who experienced it; in convincing them of their powers of self-direction, it made them more effective citizens of a nation whose institutions did not define social roles. In addition to the more obvious transgressions that preceded his conversion, Presbyterian James Henley Thornwell, one of the South's leading theologians, said he had been guilty of a fundamental sin--telling himself that he was not culpable because he "was born without any agency." His conversion as a young man dispelled this evil and convinced him that "we all must be brought to see that all--under God--depends on ourselves." Another southern minister described the "most salutary influence of human agency" in more socially explicit terms: "It is in it we see the foundation God has laid for pure individualism." Baptist minister Jeremiah Jeter was converted as a youth in a rural Virginia revival in 1818. He echoed Thornwell in noting that, before regeneration, "it had seemed unreasonable that I should bear a self-imposed yoke."

**Individualism and the Evangelical Ideal: Virtue is Power**

American individualism, much propounded throughout the period, was an invitation to self-control. The growth of the young Republic demonstrated the wisdom of personal restraint
and the inevitability of the achievement of its moral mission. It was therefore easy for evangelicals to assume that the problem of personal autonomy had been solved in the new land. Evangelical arguments for individual responsibility were compelled and confirmed by social experiences and so appeared self-evident, irresistible. An isolating personal moral responsibility, not freedom, was the first principle of American public culture in the early nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{44} The history of the period makes little sense if this is not understood. The assumption that simple "personal freedom" was the core American value will make popular southern moral acceptance of slavery appear as self-contradiction, self-delusion, simple dishonestu, a mark of regional deviance, or a product of stupidity on a massive and odious scale.\textsuperscript{45} The horrors of slavery and racism aside, such readings grossly misrepresent southerners, whose fundamental understanding of morality and veneration of "freedom" was not at variance with that of their northern countrymen.\textsuperscript{46}

In his lectures at Randolph-Macon, William A. Smith regularly told southerners that "self-control is the abstract principle of freedom." In this aphorism, potential disparities between southern preaching and practice were neatly resolved, and the gulf between northern and southern ideals narrowed. As a form of freedom, self-control--self-restraint--was attainable by women, inmates, blacks, and paupers.\textsuperscript{47} As historian of freedom Orlando Patterson as
pointed out: "The fact that people consider freedom the most important thing in life is in no way inconsistent with a tolerance for the institution of slavery or, what amounts to the same thing, a lack of interest in promoting a policy of manumission." This manner of espousing of freedom describes the attitude of most Americans in both sections of the country in the first half of the nineteenth-century.

Southern Presbyterian James Henley Thornwell said that "true Freedom" was "discipline," and that as such it was universally available. He noted that "the lesson is the same however different the textbooks from which it has been taught." In their discussions of freedom, echoed by fellow southern ministers, Thornwell and William Smith paraphrased Francis Wayland, the northern Baptist minister and leading antislavery lecturer who wrote the nation's most popular book on moral philosophy. Wayland, in a more philosophical vein, said, "The truth that every man is responsible for all his actions to God, presupposes the right to universal freedom." Evangelical moralists battled over the practical implications of individual restraint, but they agreed that it was the cardinal element of freedom. They believed that anyone capable of practicing moral self-control had obtained true freedom and therefore could enjoy the good life regardless of material conditions.

Such reasoning on freedom is not as preposterous as it appears if one's first premises are theistic. Freedom had
long since been established as America's great good--its founding principle and social compass. Goodness, for evangelicals, derived from and was directed toward God. Freedom was properly construed, therefore, not as liberty to do as one chose, but as the ability to choose what Providence intended. The satisfaction of Providence with the social status quo was evident in the blessings it continued to bestow on the United States. Blessings would continue to flow only if the individuals who comprised the nation exercised the power, won through ecstatic conversion, to curb desires. Freedom as unrestraint was therefore anathema to ministers North and South, who agreed that under such definition "freedom is incompatible with a state of accountability."\(^{52}\)

Evangelical terms seemed to be at odds with broader and more obvious interpretations of "freedom." To listeners not schooled in moral theology, the Evangelical message appeared only to be: "You are free to contain yourselves within the roles society has set for you and, in mature acceptance of your fates, to justify yourselves to God. You are autonomous, not in that you have a range of options from which to select, but in that nobody else can win salvation for you. You are alone." If restraint produced freedom, freedom might mean any social condition that taught lessons of self-control and that encouraged willed acceptance of self-denial. Evangelicals did say that women enjoyed such a form of Christian freedom.\(^{53}\) Likewise, this traditional understanding of freedom gave
evangelicals a basis for tolerating almost any form of labor exploitation without blanching. Some important early-nineteenth-century moralists and social theorists, particularly in Great Britain and the South, did take these brutal positions. The pleasures of autonomy and rewards of self dependence, however, were not often subsumed under so limited a concept of liberty.

Many antebellum Americans described the choices of women, the poor, and "inferior" races in highly constricted terms, but their stances were rarely in line with general social thought and were out of tune with the vague optimism of Jacksonianism, popular evangelicalism, and, indeed, the national civil religion. All cultural languages, especially in their rendering of religious myths, obscure or make unexamimable some social realities. While this is achieved in most cultures through the restriction of options, it was accomplished in the United States through the appearance that all options were open. The myths of unlimited opportunity for improvement and of powerful individuals who overcome any obstacles implied that Americans need not attend too closely to social forces. In ethico-religious terms, antebellum Americans were rarely called to make direct choices between social order and individual autonomy, personal sacrifice and collective reward, or traditional values and material progress. As cultural historian Sacan Bercovitch put it, from at least the time of late Puritan homiletics on the American
mission, public religious doctrine had long been cast such that the "terms are not either/or but both/and." 55

James Henley Thornwell, one of the South’s leading intellects, demonstrated how his evangelical program could call for both self-restraint and pursuit of power, thereby satisfying his southern audience’s taste for "both/and" solutions. In 1861, on the eve of secession, he noted that "Virtue is power, vice is weakness," condensing the pervasive ideas of the era and making religious morality appear practical. 56 During the same period, political and moral scholar Beverly Tucker said much the same thing, although less pithily, to a Virginia audience, "power . . . Be assured, its ripening fruit waits to reward the votary of virtue." 57 If Protestant virtue--self-restraint--was power, it followed that the release of God-fearing citizens from social restraint and the growth of material prosperity would not result in an explosion of sin and selfishness. Evangelical insistence that absolute individual moral agency and responsibility before God were conducive to power, which would in turn breed further virtue, made ongoing expansion of economic prosperity and individual liberty not only unthreatening, but desirable--not only desirable, but mandated by heaven. William Smith held that even the masses of Europe would be driven toward democracy and prosperity by "the power itself, which their improved moral and social condition has rendered." 58
Under the "virtue is power" schema, of course, growth could only occur if Protestant Godliness were increasing. The message made evangelical profession and religious morality attractive, even essential. They were, as Thornwell put it, the only "conditions upon which we are authorized to hope for success." Pro or anti-slavery Protestant clergymen sought, like Thornwell, to point the way to ethical material prosperity. "Virtue is power," promised both that autonomy would conduce to moral order and that moral order would yield wealth. R.N. Sledd, pastor of the Market Street Methodist Church in Petersburg, Virginia, put the matter bluntly: "perfect submission to the disposal of God . . . [offered the] surest way to secure the accomplishment of the end we seek. It is thus that we have access to his sympathy and exhaustless resources." A success ethic, in other words, was not at odds with the evangelical ethic of self-restraint. Such credos came very close to the crassness of justification by outcome associated with utilitarianism and the secular success ethic of the capitalist industrial order. Yet, Thornwell, Sledd, and others arrived at and preached their message on religious grounds. Such a belief was possible because evangelicals had assimilated the materialism of utilitarian ethics into Protestant theological categories. Nineteenth-century evangelicals moralized economic rewards, linking morality with utility and self-interest. In so doing they dramatically
modified important doctrines of the ethical self from both the Enlightenment and eighteenth-century Protestantism.

**Enlightenment Ethics and the Enlightenment Self**

In the eighteenth century, the autonomy of the self was increasingly taken for granted, as evident in the emergence of greater individual control in conversion experiences, achievement of salvation, and determination of moral obligation. At the same time, the rationality and self-consciousness of the Enlightenment convinced many that secular, not traditional theistic, forces were the basis of individual morality. Utilitarian ethics (following Hobbes) in particular accepted self-interest as the primary motive for human behavior. Evangelicals called such selfishness "depravity" and saw it as a consequence of original sin. By the late 1740s, Americans had developed a social ethic of enlightened self-interest based on frank acceptance of individual acquisitiveness. The shift was not absolute, however. Enthusiasm about self-interest was tempered by an older religious ethic, by adjustments to Protestant apologetics in the Great Awakening, and by the emergence of evangelical denominations. The resulting marriage of the rational and the religious found secular moralists defending themselves in theistic terms, and conventional believers rejecting the ethics of Bernard de Mandeville, Benjamin
Franklin, and Adam Smith but resorting to self-interest in explanations of moral behavior.

The fusion of rational and religious was anticipated during the Great Awakening in Jonathan Edwards's idea that "self-love" was the power that moved the will to action. The mechanism of self-love demanded of practitioners a high degree of self-consciousness and keen observation of every action and emotional state, for "self-love is a man's love to his own good ... any good whatsoever that a man any way enjoys, or anything that he delights in—it makes it hereby his own good." Edwards's theological ethics were in several ways analogous to utilitarian concepts of moral action. He thought that without self-love men would remain inert and therefore be unable to seek or commune with God. Edwards' views on self-love were shared by other moral philosophers who influenced the evangelicals—in Edwards's time there was, for example, Bishop Butler, and also Lord Shaftsbury, who coined the term "self-control" in 1711. Dugald Stewart and Richard Whately carried the banner into the nineteenth century. The philosophy rested on the conviction that an accurately reasoned pursuit of self-love would inevitably direct one to God—the perfect love or good which alone could ultimately satisfy man.

Utilitarian thinkers of the Enlightenment, putting a different spin on Edwards's self-love, renamed the self's motivating force, most often calling it the "passions."
Where Edwards postulated an integrated set of desires that might be realized and satisfied by the self-loving man, "passions" comprised a less traditionally consistent set of elements. Instincts and bodily appetites, as well as lust for social power, the need for distinction over one's fellows, and other drives awakened only in a social context were included. In Enlightenment ethics, efforts to actualize desires led not to God but to punishment or reward. Through this process of trial and error, rational man would quickly learn to distinguish or pursue his greatest good in both social and private contexts. The goods thus perceived tended to be contingent or imperfect ends. Utilitarian thinkers, in America in particular, built their philosophy of mind on Locke's sensationalism, which, like their emphasis on bodily and social ends rather than absolute ones, and on passions rather than self-love, implied a divided or contingent self. Edwards had reached his more unified view of the self through his creation of "affections," a broader category than the "sensations" of the Enlightenment.

Enlightenment ethics did offer a vision of a unified self; in achieving an equilibrium of passions, persons might become, if not "complete," then as complete as one might rationally expect. Although he had fairly traditional religious beliefs, James Madison in his commentary on the Constitution in Federalist #10 remains the outstanding articulator of the American enlightenment's ethical style. A
government of checks and balances, Madison explained, not only mirrored the social clash of individual desires that modified social egotism, but also reflected the balance within the self that emerged through reasoned comparison of painful and pleasurable sensations. Equilibrium, for Madison, would solve personal, social, and political conflicts through genuine compromise. Such solutions were not perfect but "good enough," and offered a continual, moderated struggle rather than the perfect closure of the theologian. Madison indicated this when he said, "the causes of faction cannot be removed, and (that) relief is only to be sought in the means of controlling its effects."  

The Evangelical Self and Ethics: Character and its Rewards

The underlying similarity between Edwards's and Madison's views really emerges only when considered in light of the tremendous emphasis nineteenth-century evangelicals placed on the self and ethical action. Eighteenth-century descriptions of innate moral characteristics and compromises common to all men gave way to antebellum calls for a specific "good" personality type and what William Channing called a "self-forming power," and William Smith a "power of self-action." In Madison's political system and even in Benjamin Franklin's experiments with habit formation, the best an assertive self could achieve was an equilibrium of passions, a competitive compromise, a rational mediation between sensations. Passions
were accepted as part of the moral self, and the self was in balance. Edwards likewise integrated aspects of instinctual desire into the self-love that sought God, although he and Madison used different terms. Edwards's self was not an equilibrium, but in his system the moral self did contain appetites.

In contrast, the evangelicals posited a unique ethical self, a willing self that stood against desire. Frederick Ross, the Alabama New School Presbyterian minister and popular lecturer, defined sin as "just exactly self-will ... that is sin per se,"\(^7 \) indicating there was a wrong self with a wrong will. In his 1850 dictionary, Noah Webster thought it important to clarify that the term "will" denoted a specific morally positive force. "Will," he wrote, "is often quite a different thing from Desire."\(^7 \) The "right willing" evangelical self offered more power and a purer morality than did a Madisonian rational and self-interested pursuit of material desires.\(^7 \) Self-will, self-interest, and selfishness could be defeated rather than redirected, balanced, or contained.

With the development of the market economy and spread of democratic ideology in the Jacksonian period,\(^7 \) evangelical and southern culture passed from both its Puritan roots and Enlightenment potential into a character-based value system. A sense of the power of individuals to master passions and mold a distinct moral self dominated the cultural landscape.
"Force of character" became an American obsession. Southern ministers gloried in the shibboleth that "nowhere on the face of the globe is so much energy of character displayed." Evangelicals spoke a great deal about human depravity but in some senses had less respect for the concept than did eighteenth century moralists. Enlightenment passions—the term itself and the desires and appetites it denoted—were anathema to antebellum clerics. Passions were to be subdued if not crushed by the "true" self. The character ethic demanded internalized moral control, which through force of will would produce a conquering moral wholeness. The evangelical ethical self was much more inflexible than eighteenth-century models but was also less pessimistic.

The evangelical character ethic anticipated material and moral rewards never imagined by the philosophically more materialistic eighteenth-century ethicists. Like most antebellum moralists, North Carolina's inspector of public schools, Calvin Wiley Henderson, was not subtle about the nature of rewards that accrued to virtue. In "Protestant America," he wrote, the "Church [is] immediately paid in temporal benefits for its services: it receives an instant reward even in worldly blessings." More typically, ministers bypassed the church and placed worldly rewards directly in the hands of individuals displaying moral character. "I repeat: every person who does his duty receives a perfect recompense this side of the grave," was the blunt
refrain of Theodore Clapp.\textsuperscript{78} Clapp, a theological radical in New Orleans, identified himself as a Unitarian and an evangelical defender of southern institutions. On the issue of rewards accruing to character, however, his position was indistinguishable from that of conventional evangelicals. H.A. Holmes, a Baptist minister from Virginia, echoed Clapp: "An act performed . . . from a sense of duty--God's favor and God's authority being properly recognized, cannot fail of its reward."\textsuperscript{79} R.N. Sledd, in a widely circulated sermon, gave an even less qualified directive: "Godliness is profitable unto all things."\textsuperscript{80}

Evangelicals' suspicion of wealth (particularly their own), of growth, and of control or distinction over others has often been exaggerated by historians who have taken their critiques of selfishness and materialism at face value.\textsuperscript{81} Ubiquitous antebellum denunciations of selfishness rarely constituted normative critiques of wealth. Warnings were, instead, issued against the wrong kind of self: the weak-willed self that gave in to desire and the misguided will as represented by those who did not acknowledge dependence on God for the power they attained. Lack of will and the case of the powerful man who "pretends to a character to which he is really a stranger,"\textsuperscript{82} then, were perceived as the chief threats to the marriage of power and theistic virtue. Revivalist Daniel Baker preached a "both/and" solution to combat both dangers: "1.) It is the duty of every Christian
to be a man of business. 2.) It is the duty of every man of business to be a Christian." Baker was a Calvinist. His message on the call to Christian commerce might well have taken on an absolutist and retributive tone. The character ethic, however, dispelled traditional Calvinist tensions associated with calling. Baker even amended his statement above by assuring listeners that "it is a mistake that duties of religion conflict with life: they are perfectly harmonious."83 Fellow Presbyterian minister Joshua L. Wilson provided a more direct reconciliation of Christian faith and worldly life. "Christianity," he said, "made everything the best of its kind."84

Other evangelicals did not always share the Presbyterian educational background or need to address Calvinist doctrines, but they reached similar conclusions about wealth and moral duty. Baptist Jeremiah Jeter admired backwoods revivalists he had known in childhood but criticized them for insisting on "preaching without fee or reward." Jeter thought the early revivalists' greatest strength--the simplicity of their message of faith and heartfelt emotion--was also a liability for ethical understanding.85 By the time Jeter began to preach, Baptist leaders like Richard Furman were preaching "the importance of diligent improvement of all the means at our command." Furman’s doctrine of wealth was little different from that of Presbyterian evangelicals like Baker. Furman said that "talents are to be improved. One has the
talent of wealth. God has prospered him in the world." At the heart of most antebellum moral pronouncements on selfishness was a concomitant obsession with the nature of this "right" or normatively positive self.

Evangelicals held that the real purpose of individual effort was the attainment not of wealth but of moral merit. Americans were not to amass fortune at the expense of building moral character. Evangelicals insisted that God never rewarded pursuit of self-interested ends nor of secular godless diligence even if it resulted in otherwise morally acceptable ends. Utilitarian ethics had generally held that private vice (self-interest) could lead to public virtue. Evangelicals removed vice from the picture altogether. Private virtues would produce public rewards. A scriptural tract written by Howell Cobb of Georgia described the theological mentalite that supported the evangelical's ethical ideal: "However prudent and skillful we may be in the affairs of life, unless God's blessing be upon our efforts we cannot succeed; whenever therefore success attends our efforts we are to remember we are indebted to Providence for it."87

**Evangelical Providence**

The providential mentalite let evangelicals see themselves as moral agents engaged solely in acts of will that built character. They believed, therefore, that any success that came to them was wholly ethical. Rewards were morally
earned through the virtue-power of character, morally obtained from God's providential hand. These carrot-and-stick theological ideas had an enormous impact on antebellum social relations and conflicts. Had so many Christians not been convinced that God's hand routinely dispensed material rewards, more rational attention might have been given to individual interests, moral standards, and social analysis, both popularly and in the pulpits. "Providence" itself often came to denote the operation of divine social laws that must not be interfered with or questioned. The entire evangelical ethical imagination turned on the pivot of providentialist assumptions.

Evangelicals had a powerful sense that God was not an ineffable, airy phantom but an immanent governing power. They accepted Calvinistic (often Edwardean) doctrines of Providence as well as some eighteenth-century natural theologies. Both posited an immanent God who dictated physical processes and outcomes. Howell Cobb's description of Providence was a typically flexible synthesis of these two traditions: "Providence may be defined to be God's care manifested in every circumstance and event, over and above all human sagacity and prudence . . . . Providence is a subject requiring the profoundest study: it neither forces human conduct nor prevents it."88 Providentialism reflected the prevalent theory that God had not only created the universe but sustained it moment to moment.89 Nothing occurred by chance.
Thornwell’s defined "atheism" as "ascribing to luck or chance or fortune, what has been brought about by the dispensations of His providence," and also as "worshipping self" by having "ascribed to myself, the Good I have received."90

While making adjustments to individual power, educated Presbyterian ministers strove to maintain a Calvinist Providence and thereby turned a few theological somersaults. Thornwell, as did other Presbyterians, adhered to the Calvinistic Westminster Creed (1647) that stated, "God the great creator of all things, doth uphold, direct, and dispose, and govern all creatures, actions and things from the greatest to the least by His most wise and holy Providence."

Presbyterians in the nineteenth-century South had accommodated increased autonomy and natural theology to their creed. Thornwell’s colleague, Thomas Smyth of Charleston, echoed Cobb in his insistence that even the men who wrote the Bible "were acted on by the spirit, were acted upon as free and intelligent agents, and not as unconscious and senseless tools."91 Calvinists had never been as resigned to visitations of divine will as their opponents imagined. God may have brought storms, bountiful crops, or the death of a child, but the faithful had always looked for the meaning in these events rather than treating them with fatalistic acceptance. Calvin himself had asked, "What avails it, in short, to know a God with whom we have nothing to do? . . . Ignorance of providence is the greatest of all miseries and
the knowledge of it the highest happiness." Evangelical Calvinists extended their interpretation of Divine intervention to the lives of individuals. James Henley Thornwell, the central figure in the southern branch of Old School Presbyterianism, presented the issue in stark terms and made theological concessions in his application of Providence to daily life. "Providence of God" to him was a "scheme" that was "not fixed but progressive" and spoke to the "circumstances of individuals." Fellow Presbyterian Daniel Baker showed how this idea worked in practice. When a man he had just converted was killed by lightning while leaving a camp meeting, Baker gloried in how his convert had been rewarded and "called to heaven." When a popular Richmond theater, which Baker considered vulgar, burned to the ground killing 100 persons in 1811, he declaimed with evident satisfaction, "Hear ye the rod and who haith appointed it." 

Neither in public nor in their own minds did even conservative Presbyterians observe careful distinctions between God’s intervening hand and natural law. They switched back and forth (often unconsciously) between the two depending on the lesson to be taught. In isolated communities, pockets of real providential fatalism certainly remained before the Civil War. Most evangelicals applied fatalistic or Calvinistic interpretations of Providence only to fundamentally religious and moral issues over which men had little control—birth, illness, and death. Reverend Theodore Dehon preached on a
topic ministers had ample opportunities to master through the
necessity of frequent performance. In his Sermon on the Death
of Children he spoke of "happy death," and promised as
follows:

I will not detain you, to enlarge upon the fact,
that it was the hand of the Lord which struck
David’s child with the sickness, that terminated in
death. Whoever believes in his providence, and is
acquainted with his word, must know that all
disease act by his permission and are under his
control.96

Most evangelical Americans adapted more readily to
contemporary reactions against fatalistic doctrines than did
Calvinist ministers and the bereaved. Stephen Elliot of
Georgia flatly stated, "God works by means, we must not expect
in these days to receive help from Him through miracles."97
In a popular vein, moralist John Fletcher of Louisiana simply
said, "the Providence of God to man is practical."98
Evangelicalism’s doctrinal flexibility allowed for a synthesis
of Calvinist providentialism and naturalistic eighteenth-
century theology. William Buck, editor of The Baptist Banner
of Kentucky, laid out this synthesis in stark form: "God has
beneficent designs ...to employ human instrumentalities"99
Like evangelicalism, providentialism was a descendant of both
Puritanism and the Enlightenment, and therefore was not a
precise phenomenon. Ambiguity allowed ministers from various
denominations to emphasize different aspects of God's agency in the world, while compiling, despite the gamut of providential beliefs and attitudes in the antebellum period, a series of common conclusions about ethics.

Whether Arminian or Calvinist, Methodist or Presbyterian, evangelicals were obsessed with linking the morality and rationality of God through an accounting of his providential acts in the natural world. Eighteenth-century divisions and controversies over "general" or "special" doctrines of Providence had faded by the nineteenth century. Many evangelical moralists discarded this hairsplitting as casually as they dismissed reasoning about self-love:

An act to be morally right must be in conformity to a Divine law, of either a general or special application. But that infinite wisdom never gave a special law to conflict with a general law, neither can a special law abrogate or in any way impair one of a general nature.

Popular religious thought in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had focused on God's agency as revealed in cause and effect. At one extreme, deists had stressed the general Providence of a clockmaker God who worked through predictable natural laws. On the other hand, strict Calvinists still defended special providences through which God intervened directly in the natural order and directed individual action. Antebellum evangelicals, however, de-emphasized physical cause
and effect; they believed God's Providence communicated consistent moral lessons directly to individuals.

Evangelicals, who throughout the first half of the nineteenth century sought to demonstrate that causality was the expression of Divine omnipotence, found the mechanism they wanted in moral cause and effect. It not only endowed ethics with the authority of science and God; it also underscored the rationality and unity of Providence. Denying or explaining away human control of certain events was no longer necessary. The whole question of specific (secondary) and general (primary) causes in the moral universe was obviated.

In the nineteenth century, unexplainable or uncontrollable physical events that occurred in the absence of an apparent secondary cause were simply called acts of God. But in the majority of cases where there was an identifiable secondary cause, evangelicals still managed to draw attention to God's direct omnipotence by pointing out the moral lesson God taught or the ends he would accomplish through the event. Evangelicals could thereby accept that most events had a clear or yet-to-be-discovered secondary cause, while maintaining that God had invested every physical or Biblical event with a moral lesson on self-control. Calvinists in particular welcomed this new emphasis on morality because it restored an absolute and rational Providence, compatible with a high degree of personal autonomy and initiation of action.
Calvinists could be agents only when in tune with God's providential moral law. Other denominations too, believed that, having received an initial gift of free will, individuals were only powerful agents when they did not "work against" the moral laws of Providence.

Personal character, for the evangelicals, played as important a role in determining individual fate as did Providence. A life, after all, was an arena in which Providence instructed character through a series of moral trials. An individual could be as powerful as Providence, if through self-control it aligned itself perfectly with God's will. For the man of character, therefore, the trial was relatively easy to bear and to uninitiated observers might even have appeared to be rigged. The righteous would not find their ends frustrated by social forces greater than themselves, nor would they run up against "natural" barriers that checked their development. Providence aided the properly autonomous self; it was a source of ultimate power (and dependence) that made the radical move to individual independence unthreatening.
NOTES


24. Smith, 95.


27. Clapp, Autobiographical Sketches, 27.

29. Calhoon, "Individualism," 64. See also Boles, *Revival*, 43; *Kentucky*, 18-20.


32. Samuel Dunwoody, (M.E. South Cokesbury Circuit S.C.) *Foreknowledge and the Decrees of God: A Sermon* preached at Sharon Camp-meeting (Charleston: B. Jenkins, 1846), 4, 21. Dunwoody, like most Methodists, directly cited John Fletcher’s and Wesley’s apologies against Calvinism, and held that "the divine foreknowledge has no effect upon human actions," (6). Yet, like most southern evangelicals Dunwoody thought these doctrinal disputes, even such fundamental and diametrically opposed ones were unimportant: "though I differ with my Calvinist brethren, yet many of their ministers and members too I respect for sincere piety" and "hope to sit down with them in the kingdom" (32).


36. Charles Grandison Finney was an exception to this trend. See Charles G. Finney, *Finney on Revival* (Minneapolis: Dimension Books n.d.).


44. Alex De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. Richard Heffner (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 62-3. "It was never assumed in the United States that the citizen of a free country has the right to do whatever he pleases: on the contrary more social obligations were there imposed upon him than anywhere else. . . . subdues them compulsorily . . . it isolates them, and then influences them separately." The metaphor "American Freedom, America Slavery" was used well once and for a society that preceded the revolution by generations. The freedom-slavery dichotomy has become a point of confusion for discussions of the first half of the nineteenth-century and should be dropped as a term of analysis. See for example James Oakes, *Freedom and Slavery* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

45. Orlando Patterson, *Freedom: Volume I, Freedom in the Making of Western Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 3-5. Patterson sets up a tripartite definition of "freedom" in the Western tradition, in which "personal freedom" is but one element. Patterson's definition of freedom is not completely satisfying in my view nor does it take into account what I believe was the dominant formula of freedom in evangelical America, but his emphasis on the complexity of "freedom," which must be understood as a historical and sociological phenomenon and not simply a philosophical concept, is a vital correction to the normative (as well as political and
philosophic) use of the term. Patterson describes "personal freedom" as an absence of interference from others and a positive acknowledgement that one will act within certain limits so as to maximize this freedom by not restraining and coercing others. Patterson argues that this "note" of freedom in the "chordal triad" of the western concept is accompanied by the note of "sovereign" and "civic" freedom. Patterson's second definition of freedom is I think closer to the normative understanding of "personal freedom" which reigns today (and my own "monopartite" definition of freedom). Patterson uses both the terms "sovereign" and "organic" to describe this freedom; the second term is more satisfying (and closer to the definition of freedom I employ). "Organic" in this sense should read "instinctual" or "Nietzschean" freedom, that is freedom as "simply the power to act as one pleases, regardless of the wishes of others. (3-4)"


47. Smith, Philosophy, 48, 53, 265-66, 179, 279.

48. Patterson, Freedom, 321. See also his discussion of Paul, the birth of Christian individualism and conscience, and freedom in chapter nineteen, 325-344.


51. Francis Wayland, Sermons Delivered in the Chapel of Brown University (Boston: Gould, Kendall and Lincoln, 1849), 316, 305.

52. John Fletcher, Studies on Slavery: In Easy Lessons (Natchez: Jack Warner, 1852), 80. See also Proslavery Argument, 389; Richard Furman, Slavery, 14; Frederick Dalcho, Remarks, 14; George Armstrong Dodd, Conservative, 9.


59. Thornwell, "Danger and Duty," in *Life*, 588; see also 86, 94 on success and money.

60. R.N. Sledd, *A Sermon Delivered at the Market Street Methodist Episcopal Church, Petersburg VA*, before the Confederate Cadets on the occasion of their Departure for the seat of war, Sunday September 22, 1861 (Petersburg: A.F. Crotchfield &Co., Printers, Bank Street, 1861) Confederate Imprint: #4190, 17.


65. E. Brooks Holifield, *The Gentleman Theologians: American Theology in Southern Culture, 1795-1860* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1978), 131. Shaftesbury, Holifield points out incorporated the passions in the motivation to ethical action, despite his stress on self-control. In this he differed from Joseph Butler and Edwards on the meaning of self-love. Butler and Edwards had more influence on nineteenth century evangelicals than Shaftesbury (though especially among theologians he was important), but my main point is that even Edwards and Butler were engaged in a very different project from their evangelical heirs. Both men, on the issue of the self at least, shared a good deal more with eighteenth century rational moralists.


69. *Federalist*, 80.


73. H.H. Rivers *Elements of Moral Philosophy* (Nashville: 1859), and John L. Dagg, *Elements of Moral Science* (New Orleans: 1857), were two important southern moral texts that stressed character and will. Rivers, 144-146, Dagg 46-7.

75. W.A. Smith, 259.

76. Thornwell like most southern evangelicals also rejected "self-love." Life and Letters, 100, 142.


78. Clapp, Autobiographical, 96.


80. Sledd, Sermon, 12.


82. James Henley Thornwell, Discourse on Truth (Charleston: E.C. Counsell, 1856), 534.

83. The Papers of Rev. Daniel Baker, Catalogue 1096, Folder B; Historical Foundation of the Presbyterian and Reformed Church, Montreat, N.C., Sermon Book. There are three versions of this sermon in his own hand. They were adapted from Normand Smith or the Christian Serving God in his Business. See also Smith, Philosophy, 320, and Samuel Dunwoody, Sermon, 12, for the same dual demand.

84. Joshua Lacy Wilson, Relations and Duties of Servants and Masters (Cincinnati: Isaac Hefley & Co., Printers, 1834), 12. See also, W. Hamilton, Duties, 8; Neil McKay, Duties, 1.


86. Richard Furman Human Accountability A Discourse Delivered before the graduating class of Erskine college August 4, 1860. n.p. (Greenville Baptist Church); Southern Imprints South Carolina F #592591, Manuscript Collection University of North Carolina, 15. See also W.T. Hamilton (Methodist), The Duties of Master and Slaves Respectively or Domestic Servitude as Sanctioned by the Bible (Mobile: F.H. Brooks, 1845), 8.


98. Fletcher *Studies on Slavery*, 81; See also Smith, *Philosophy*, 23.


103. J.C. Mitchell (Pastor 2nd Presbyterian Church, Mobile), A Bible Defence of Slavery, and the Unity of Mankind (Mobile: J.Y. Thompson: 1861), 22.
CHAPTER TWO

The Roots of the Divine Economy: Evangelicalism and the Providential Order

Shall not the judge of all the world do right?
Genesis 18:25

Although evangelicalism was a heartfelt and vital reaction against the dry sermonizing of the eighteenth century, it relied on the earlier tradition of rational theology. Religious categories and questions were derived from the eighteenth century. American evangelicals’ moral philosophy in particular depended on British theologians’ glosses on utilitarianism. Anglican Archdeacon William Paley’s (1743-1805) and Bishop Joseph Butler’s (1692-1752) books were very influential and popular with evangelicals.¹ Both wrote natural theologies that gave rational responses against utilitarianism and skepticism. Evangelical ministers, by modifying Paley and Butler, developed moral and natural theologies for their own era. Richard Whatley and Thomas Chalmers in Britain, and Francis Wayland in America, popularized this rationalizing project via adoption of Scottish Common Sense Philosophy, but less famous southern ministers shared in it.
The individualistic society that emerged in the early nineteenth century encouraged evangelicals in their modification of natural religion. In their arguments for the existence of God, eighteenth-century natural theologians had concentrated on proofs of divine design or examples of divine benevolence in an ordered creation. Evangelicals instead focused on how the lack of external order in society could yield moral and internal "improvement." In America, the lack of social order was easily represented in the untamed frontier and institutionless social landscape. In a fast-changing, unstructured society, evangelicals looked for God where he was most needed. This was an intellectual development as much as a social one.

Evangelicals took it for granted that truth was obvious and unified. The Bible, reason, and individual experience all taught the same moral lessons and could never conflict. Eighteenth-century exegeses on God's rationality in the cosmos were accepted by evangelicals, who extended them to social categories. Nineteenth-century moral theology was an application of natural theology to a fallen and depraved humanity. It was also an addition of a "scientific" explanation of God's justice to eighteenth-century of "proofs" of the rationality and benevolence of His natural creation.
Natural Theology: Providence and Utility

Evangelical introduction of justice was a correction of among others, William Paley, the most popular natural theologian of the eighteenth century. In focusing on Paley, evangelicals were not necessarily critiquing and elaborating on the most profound strain of rational theology. Paley was an English Christian utilitarian and cosmic optimist who thought God’s universe in all aspects showed uncomplicated benevolence and design. More than any other figure, Paley was responsible for encouraging the evangelical habit of attention to physical phenomena (which Paley portrayed as physical miracles) as evidence in support of Christianity.³ Paley was well known in the southern United States, where his homey proofs of God’s hand in nature, presented in Christian Evidences (1794) and Natural Theology (1802), were appealing as both sermon material and folk wisdom. Ministers removed from centers of educated debate uncritically cited him as an authority on Protestant theology.⁴ His explanations of how God "planted forests" for men, made swamps and storms accomplish beneficent ends, designed the universe to meet men’s needs (by assuring that the only naked animal was also the only one who could make clothes), and injected happiness into the universe by such "bounties" as compelling men to procreate through pleasure rather than pain, appeared in countless sermon books.⁵ His Treatise on Moral and Political Philosophy (1785) and Natural Theology were also forerunners,
in caricature, of the evangelical tendency to fight utilitarianism by absorbing it.

Although educated southern evangelicals all knew and to some extent admired Paley’s theories, almost all severely criticized and often mocked his errors and the incomplete picture he gave of providence. Kentucky Presbyterian Nathan L. Rice gave the general evangelical assessment of his theology when he commented in 1845 that Paley "though a pleasant and ingenious writer, never was regarded as a giant on questions of morals." In retrospect this derision makes sense, for Paley was no evangelical. He held that the earth was a place of "probation," not "punishment." No evangelical could embrace such a message, not even Unitarian optimist Theodore Clapp who gave a typical southern theologian’s critique of Paley’s work. Referring to his doctrine on earthly "recompenses" and rewards, Clapp called him "the great Dr. Paley," but in the next breath said he was morally and spiritually "incompetent." "Life," Clapp reminded evangelicals, "was not intended to be a scene of enjoyment but a school of discipline." The "irresistible evidence of unbounded goodness and power in the natural world around them" were "the Creator’s moral achievements." God’s design was benevolent, yes, but for evangelicals his means and agency were moral and therefore not always pleasant. Paley showed God’s benevolent goals, but neglected His justice, agency,
and the incentives and disincentives he offered men in their struggle against sin.

Antebellum evangelicals, ambivalent toward Paley, more fully embraced Joseph Butler and his *Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature* (1736), which illustrated that justice, not happiness or freedom, was God’s end in designing the universe. Bishop Butler refuted deism, but like his contemporary, Jonathan Edwards, he was decidedly pre-evangelical in his acceptance of passions, and "self-love" in particular, in the organization of the self. Butler was attractive to evangelicals because he handled the passions with an eye toward building individual character—"probity" in his terms. Butler’s response to utilitarianism was more sophisticated than Paley’s and resembled evangelical glosses.

Butler held the Fall responsible for anomalies in the world, such as good’s coming out of evil, and private vices’ leading to public virtue (per Mandeville’s fable). He acknowledged these phenomena, but the conclusions he drew from them were not those of the utilitarians. Utilitarians held that, while the motivations of an act were personal and impossible to know, ethical consequences of action were verifiable; consequences, therefore, were the sole measure of conduct. For Butler and the evangelicals, on the other hand, positive consequences of private acts were evidence of God’s design for the uplifting of moral and social life. Butler
could therefore reason that consequences intended by the deity were an incontrovertible guide to ethical intentions. Butler was the perfect theological hero for evangelicals because he anticipated their combination of pure moral conscience with positive social consequences.\textsuperscript{10}

Butler was first re-formulated and popularized in the nineteenth century by Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847) in Great Britain and by Francis Wayland, the Baptist minister and president of Brown University (1827) in America. Despite his antislavery views, Wayland’s work \textit{Elements of Moral Science} (1835) was heralded in the South.\textsuperscript{11} Even when southern evangelicals criticized Wayland, they acknowledged how "extensively distributed" his works were and often mentioned how "there is no man whose character and writing I more admire."\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Elements of Moral Science} brought Joseph Butler renewed attention in the South; Wayland placed Butlerian ideas even more in line with nineteenth-century moralism. Wayland’s central theme in this regard—how moral law was as authoritative as science—was a subject already dear to southern evangelicals. For them, vice was punished and virtue rewarded with precisely the certainty of Wayland’s system. Wayland helped popularize and legitimize this evangelical obsession throughout America, but much of his inspiration—especially his use of Butler—came from contemporary British sources. Wayland’s key source was Chalmers’ \textit{Christian and Civic Economy} (1821). Chalmers
himself was known to leading southern evangelicals,\textsuperscript{13} who often reproduced his famous dictum that "the world is so constituted that if we were morally right we should be physically happy."\textsuperscript{14}

Wayland's and Chalmers' moral arguments resembled those Richard Whately (1787-1863) popularized. An optimist and Arminian, Whately had his admirers in the South but was more popular in the North. Whately was best known for his \textit{Historic Doubts Concerning Napoleon}, in which he used Hume's techniques for disproving miracles in the Bible to disprove the existence of Napoleon. Whately had a positive project that was less entertaining but more important. He christianized Adam Smith, emphasizing that moral reason both directed men toward, and was driven by, material reward and social progress, and he preached that man made himself with "the agency of the divine creator."\textsuperscript{15} This bizarre slogan of freedom was repeated by evangelicals across the United States. Wayland and southern evangelicals did not contradict Whately, although they did put a different twist to his thought by pointing out that the development of moral reason was in fact the development of character and was accomplished through trials and punishments administered by a divine schoolmaster.\textsuperscript{16} Important as Whately was, few American evangelicals knew or accepted rational theology in its entirety. Southern evangelicals, however, invariably reproduced three of his ethical dicta:
1. Moral guidance was not to be found in the Bible alone. Social developments and political economy too could direct Christians to the moral law.

2. As Whatley demonstrated, the Bible was the basis of the modern economy. He is most famous for discovering in Genesis a directive for the division of labor. Cain, after all, tilled, while Able raised the livestock. In much the same way, American evangelicals inevitably found in the Bible instances of Republican self-government, holy pioneers' development of natural resources, and racial slaveholding.

3. As modern economic experience was superimposed onto the Bible, God was introduced into the modern economy.

Whately and southerners alike were especially impressed with the way God made "faults and follies" or "apparent evils" work for desirable ends and reveal His benevolent design and moral law. Whately took examples from Wealth of Nations, pointing out that greedy merchants unintentionally fed London. Whately, like Wayland, believed this dynamic was created by the Fall. Men who acted out of greed were condoneable, but since God brought about general good through the process, pious individuals in tune with Providence could now perform economic acts for moral reasons, fully intending the positive consequences. Thomas Smyth of South Carolina, an admirer of Whately, also saw the way "God is bringing ...Good out of Evil," in the Malthusian law of population. God had made "men an exception" to the rest of nature so that by being
"productive beyond all merely natural increase, the highest moral benefits were at the same time secured.\textsuperscript{21} "God’s Providence," thus taught men the moral law of restraint via the "law of downward progress when not restrained."\textsuperscript{22} The horrors of starvation and competition in overpopulation were a result of man’s sin, but God taught a beneficial lesson in these evils by directing men toward restraint. Present or threatened calamities thereby became "admirable designs of providence for the triumph of good."\textsuperscript{23}

There were theological frameworks into which new economic and social ideas could be absorbed with a minimal perception of innovation or disruption. Elite southern ministers like Thomas Smyth could comfortably and sometimes casually combine liberal economic views and admiration for figures such as Whately with orthodox theology (and proslavery). Scholarly traditions of Reformed orthodoxy in America also stressed the utilitarian aspects of God’s moral government and of how the divine economy made apparent evils the occasion of positive good. New England’s "New Divinity" theologians were the most famous and sophisticated exemplars of this influential project. These eighteenth-century rational apologists for Calvinism and admirers of Jonathan Edwards were led by Joseph Bellamy (1719-1790). Bellamy’s most important theological dictum was that "God’s greatest and most glorious work is . . . to make sin in general, which is [the] greatest evil, the means of the greatest good."\textsuperscript{24} Leading Calvinist theologians
Samuel Hopkins (1721-1803) and Nathaniel William Taylor (1786-1858) further developed and popularized this aspect of Bellamy's work in the nineteenth century. There were not always distinct lines between orthodox, rational, and natural theology by the antebellum era.

Versions of the natural theologies of William Paley, Samuel Butler, Thomas Chalmers, and Richard Whately were reproduced in antebellum moral and theological tracts. Through the efforts of Francis Wayland and other popularizers, American evangelicals who had never heard of British rational theology or utilitarianism were treated to an abundance of sermons by ministers who had become Christian utilitarians by osmosis. By 1830 many American ministers were preaching the action of God in the political economy, unaware of the roots or implications of their arguments. Antebellum evangelicals accepted doctrines of Providence and traditions of natural theology that posited an immanent God behind all practical processes and outcomes. Social and natural laws of utility so compellingly described by De Mandeville, Franklin, Madison, and Adam Smith also fell under the hand of Providence. Jonathan Edwards's God, the new orthodoxy held, willed the utilitarian competition of interests. Only God could bring virtue out of vice, good out of evil. Only He could design this benefit-generating machine that was neither intended nor entirely understandable by any individual. In their critical
interpretations of utilitarianism, natural theologians and evangelicals alike attributed market forces to Providence.

According to evangelicals, God used competing personal instincts and self-interested social competition to direct depraved men to virtue and the moral law. Amateur moral philosopher John Fletcher of Louisiana gave a careful description of how, under Providence, apparent "evils" were in fact "laws which are found to have a direct tendency to progressive improvement."\(^{25}\) Because God was perfectly good, the "Chastening of the Lord operate for the moral and mental and physical improvement of the chastised." Believing that God issued punishment but was always benevolent, Fletcher added: "our idea of punishment is inadequate to express the full idea . . . . the law of God clothes the effect [of chastisement] in mercy and positive good . . . as schoolmaster to lead men back to virtue . . . if the mind cannot perceive the chastenings of the Lord are blessings, let it regard them as lessons. The whole Providence of God to man is upon this plan."\(^{26}\) With recourse to the doctrine of Providence, evangelicals were able to insist that God was both absolutely benevolent and just. Like the conversion experience, Providence overcame the conflict of evangelicals' simultaneous emphasis on both human inadequacy (rooted in original sin) and individual power in building character. "Let no one imagine that this position (agency) conflicts with the well-known fact that man is a fallen being. For although fallen he is still
accountable," warned W.A. Smith. Calvin Wiley Henderson said this aspect of Providence taught "a moral lesson, manifesting the innate depravity of man . . . and still advancing the general good of the world." Once the requisite moral lesson had been learned, an evangelical society could bypass the vice and wasteful striving after desires that utilitarians had taken for granted. God's moral law, as revealed in the natural world through human striving, was more efficient than utilitarianism because it required less sinful blundering. Having willed himself into alignment with the moral law, evangelical man was no longer required to slam blindly into walls while working out his destiny through trial and error. Evangelicals bordered on positing a utilitarian God. Citing Butler, Thornwell held that providences "have all been ordered for wise and beneficent results." Fletcher likewise concluded that "providences of God collectively ... terminate in the greatest good." A local denominational paper, The Baptist Banner of Kentucky, was less philosophic about this point: "God approves of that system of things which under the circumstances, is best calculated to promote the holiness and happiness of men." Religious southerners admitted that they were often overwhelmed by "how directly God was working for their interest."
The Scottish Common Sense School and Evangelical Moral Certainty

As popular evangelicalism bluntly and often banally identified moral behavior and power, it stressed the unity of truth in almost all intellectual categories: reason and faith, science and exegesis, nature and theology, moral and political economy. Natural theology provided intellectual justification for evangelical beliefs and encouraged confusion of self-interest and morality, but it was not the only tradition fueling evangelical fires. Ministers and intellectuals also drew inspiration from the Scottish Enlightenment. The Scottish school of philosophy cheerfully upheld common sense experience. It therefore required little tampering to fit the form disputation often took in democratic America. American evangelicalism's sweeping social influence was in large part attributable to its confining itself within terms of rational debate. It was possible to maintain this disputational style until the advent of Darwinism and the outbreak of the Civil War.

In the antebellum period, even theologically orthodox ministers made casual concessions to rational doctrines. Presbyterian Thomas Smyth, like most evangelicals, proved his points by appealing to "Natural causes .. or .. all-wise God leaving our readers to adopt either or both methods." Smyth was flexible on this point because like all evangelical intellectuals he was sure "the Bible will be found equally
harmonious with reason and science." Protestant intellectuals assumed that all natural processes would manifest God's providential hand and that therefore few respectable scholars would embrace radical conclusions. All was well. Thought derived from Scottish moral philosophy helped legitimate and insulate this intellectual project.

Evangelical belief was its own a priori defense, based on common sense and conscience. This assumption was grounded in Scottish Common Sense Realism. The doctrine of common sense gave providentialism and virtue-power the appearance of philosophic validity. Evangelicals had long attempted to reconcile natural law with a God capable of direct intervention. The Scottish philosophic school solved the puzzle, making the contradiction inherent in the idea of a God who made individuals make themselves seem more rational. By drawing on the common sense arguments of Thomas Reid (1710-1796) and Dugald Stewart (1793-1828), evangelicals could assert that God had created the minds of people so that moral sense and reason could directly apprehend His creation and laws. One of the attractions of Francis Wayland's moral writing was that he had evangelicalized common sense philosophy. When southerners wanted to dispute one of Wayland's conclusions, they appealed to Reid and Stewart, who were "greater men than Dr. Wayland."

Reid, modifying Locke, had argued that the perceiving mind knew the "real world" directly and immediately. Reid
quickly moved from this blunt philosophic realism to a project dearer to his (and the evangelical's) heart. He demonstrated how every rational person could arrive at an uncomplicated and unmysterious perception of the "facts of nature" and the more definite "facts of scripture."41 Every individual could perceive the signs of divine presence in the natural and social order, he noted, and thus discover clues that validated the special Bible revelation. Reid also used philosophic realism to find general moral impulses in human beings, including a natural propensity to be honest. This and his Biblical interpretation brought him scholarly derision, but his ideas remained popular with evangelicals because he gave individuals relatively unqualified authority to determine reality.

Dugald Stewart's *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* (1792) gave Reid's ideas the appearance of being scientific. Stewart explained how God had built a moral law into the universe. In Stewart's system, there were principles prior to experience, an order outside the mind, which human understanding could perceive. (The mind was neither simply a reactor mechanism for physical processes and experiences, nor a repository of mediating ideas.) This was the rational basis for the evangelical beliefs that the Bible held "one moral lesson" and that "the whole universe has a moral meaning," which was "one grand consistent course of Divine Providences... the end of every change."42 For Stewart and
evangelicals, nature appeared deranged only because man was immoral. Logical inconsistencies in the natural world, and brutality and injustice in the social world were not the results of a flaw in God's design, but of original sin. God's law and rational order were already in place and waiting to be revealed. God indicated the law through revelation and in his acts. Because he was perfectly just, his creation was perfectly consistent, and his laws therefore could be extrapolated through observation of persons and physical phenomena.

On this basis antebellum evangelicals concluded that the will of God could be known through personal experiences. W. A. Smith put it this way: "the will of God is the only rule of right . . . that which in itself is the right is the will of God. . . . What then does he will? In regard to the present subject of inquiry, we can only judge that which he wills from that which he has done." 43 Physical and social phenomena were not a higher authority on the law than the Bible, but supplements through which God made known his ongoing plans for mankind. There were "two sources of the will of God . . . (1) revelation and faith 2) . . . the observation of the facts uniformly developed in the material and moral world." 44 Like biblical and physical facts, moral "facts" could never contradict each other.

Evangelicals and Dugald Stewart thought that punishment followed directly upon sin (or error) and reward upon virtue.
Antebellum moralists believed that "Sins and afflictions are well understood to be always and inseparably connected as cause and effect." The trained mind in apprehending the cost of wrong action (sin) could apprehend a moral law from experience. The sinful was the impractical: every time I do X or see X done, bad consequences follow; therefore, doing X is a violation of God's moral law. In this way experience would eventually build up an accurate picture of the moral law and, if character developed in accordance with it, personal improvement would inevitably follow.

James Henley Thornwell cited Reid and Stewart as the basis of his claim that "Religion may be introduced as a matter of science." Thornwell thought this common sense system was particularly useful for the teaching of "moral science" in public schools because "schools have a higher object, the formation of character." Reason discovered laws of cause and effect--the design of the physical world--but conscience or "moral sense" was the key to discovering the ethical laws through which nineteenth century providence specifically acted on individuals. The only moral law apprehended was, of course, "self-government."

Evangelicals, like previous theological innovators, rewrote the moral lexicon. Character was the quality of self-control, the will that overcame desire. Conscience, according to Stewart and Reid, was the faculty that chose correctly between alternative selves. Conscience coordinated the
operations of the mind and indicated the right and wrong selves for character to build on or destroy. Evangelicals' uncompromising denunciations of self-will and selfishness made little sense without this doctrine. Evangelical character, after all, was a powerful will and preoccupation with oneself. Conscience contained these energies and directed them to moral pathways. Conscience was "the moral and responsible agency" of the mind.49

By the 1830s American evangelicals had become preoccupied with combatting moral and social disorder. Democratic self-reliance offered an opportunity to practice private vices. Evangelicals sensed a potential explosion of sin within strangers and of chaos in the Republic, but their confident energies were directed toward raising a generation of disciplined Protestants, armored to face temptations. Jacksonian America directed moral and political campaigns against speculation, fashion, sabbath breaking, ignorance of the Word of God, dueling, cruelty, idleness, secret societies, sexual indulgence, crime, disordered minds, and drunkenness.50 They understood these problems not as demographic or economic phenomena but as the aggregate expression of the sinfulness of individuals. Their literature therefore emphasized moral cause and effect over analysis of social or material conditions. The strategy made sense on its own terms, for, as has been shown, evangelicalism offered
believers direct access to and understanding of a God who had a specific plan for their every action. As their everyday project, evangelicals thought of themselves as moral agents building these powers. The rectification of society would be won, not through reasoned strategies or incremental programs, but through each convert’s constant, intense study of himself. God came down to stand before each man and woman, walking beside them, writing on the blackboard of events, slapping wrists, pointing to opportunities for improvement.

In the moral sphere it was easier for increasingly self-conscious individuals to sustain a sense that God’s Providence was directly involved in every personal act. The advantages for the evangelical message were clear. At the personal level of conscience, providence was less remote, less complicated, and less falsifiable. Evangelicals defeated Deism’s distant God, but in philosophic terms antebellum evangelicals added to the God of design a utilitarian God working with individuals for their advance on earth.

The Evangelical Reception of Free Institutions

Evangelical ethics involved a practical as well as an intellectual adjustment to Enlightenment ideas. Particularly in the South, members of evangelical denominations had participated in the American Revolution and absorbed the Lockean and Jeffersonian-Republican critique of centralized government. In the 1850s southern evangelicals still
routinely appealed to the authority of "the immortal Locke." Conservative evangelicals, whose social views were comparatively static and hierarchical, identified themselves as "Jeffersonian Republicans." Methodist Iveson Brookes of South Carolina, typical in the antebellum period, denounced Jefferson’s religious experimentation, but of "Mr. Jefferson’s views on government," he maintained, "I have always been an admirer." They were, for Brookes, the foundation of "rational liberty ... based in scripture." This judgment was rendered because Jefferson’s political ideas had allegedly been influenced by his studying of a Baptist church in Virginia. Many evangelical ministers exaggerated the significance of this incident in Jefferson’s intellectual heritage. They likewise accepted an expanded and moralized version of American Enlightenment anti-institutionalism.

For evangelicals and Lockeans alike, institutional structures necessarily undermined the efficacy of individuals. Institutions were government-organized structures (such as established churches) through which citizens passed and were shaped. Institutions, evangelicals feared, would diminish not liberty, but individual moral responsibility. This seeming rejection of liberty was countered by evangelical confidence that the American Revolution and Republican experiment had opened an institutionless field in which individual acts of moral self-denial would attain providential rewards. Godless thoughts, indulgence of passions, would, of
course, bring punishment, which taught self-discipline. In short, the character of American institutions mirrored providence’s system of rewards and punishments. John Fletcher of Louisiana was a conventional anti-institutional moralist. In 1852 he wrote that "individuals in a relation to each other under an institution are supposed to bear such comparison to each other as will permit the laws of God, influencing the relation to be beneficial." Individual moral advancement was more important than any organization. When such structures were unavoidable, they were to "coincide with the laws of God." This meant that any institution must allow "the accumulation of character." Individuals were answerable only to providence, but if "the strong arm of the law ... compels them to habits of useful industry, then this law [was] exemplified." Providentialists provided a proto-bureaucratic justification for innovative penal and legal institutions that quickly developed in the American Republic. The justice of God’s providence was perfect, and so was perfectly consistent in its treatment of individuals. Institutions that were designed to mirror the providential ideal, therefore, were uniquely regimented and standardized, and expected to bring self-acting improvements.

For southern evangelicals, the more obvious lesson taught by the Revolution was that institutional thought, to say nothing of institutions and institutional innovation, was no longer necessary. Individuals could make it on self-
dependence alone. W.A. Smith proclaimed that "Self-control" was the "influence of our free institutions or rather the tendency of the great principle of liberty (as embodied in our civil and religious institutions) which, with all true Americans, is a kind of instinctive belief." John Adger, an even more conservative antebellum southern minister and critic of human rights philosophy, worshipped this aspect of the Revolution: "this progress of liberty it may well be the will of the Almighty Ruler to extend until free institutions become universal." This was practical wisdom. "Men," for Adger, were "nowhere on earth governed mainly by force. Moral means are mightiest."

Moderate and less scholarly evangelicals, like Methodist minister Samuel Dunwoody of Kentucky, skipped anti-institutional poetics and cut right to the point: "the government of these United States . . . are of God." Baptist William Buck, also of Kentucky, believed that "self-government" was "the Great Founder of nature's law." America could rest secure that in " Republics . . . in all ages of the world, God has intimated his preference for that system of government . . . . Moses gave to Israel the first model of representative government." Political self-government was no more than the necessary first condition of establishing providence as the only national institution. R.N. Sledd encouraged southerners in this work with descriptions of the rewards to follow: "If . . . we be qualified for self-
government, and for the appreciation and enjoyment of the blessing of freedom: then we have an inalienable moral right to that state, and to the unmolested fruition of its advantages.\textsuperscript{64} Social advantages and outcomes were no longer part of an eighteenth-century calculus of goods. After the Revolution, the American political landscape was aligned with providence, the dispenser of lessons—the perpetual-motion machine designed at the creation, which had been hindered throughout history by a myriad of flawed institutions.

Many of these same religious attitudes had been prevalent at the time of the Revolution. In 1775 Samuel Adams addressed doubts about whether the colonists could defeat Britain in emphatic religious terms:

> Are we able to support the measures which will secure independency? The answer is plain and easy. Though all the world may think we are not, yet \textit{God}, it appears, thinks otherwise ...I say \textit{God} thinks otherwise because every part of his providential proceedings justifies the thought. We may then know what part we ought to take. \textit{God} does the work, but not without instruments ... We may affect humility in refusing to be made the servants of divine vengeance, but the good servant will execute the will of his master. \textit{Samuel} will slay \textit{Agag}.\textsuperscript{65}

The success of the Revolution confirmed Americans in their sense that moral character meant more than military power. In
his first inaugural address the Virginia slaveholder who led America to victory proclaimed America's foundational moral and social irrationalism: "No people," Washington said, "can be bound to acknowledge and adore the invisible hand, which conducts the Affairs of men more than the People of the United States. Every step, by which they have advanced to the character of an independent nation, seems to have been distinguished by some token of providential agency." This message had always been in the theological imagination of ministers who supported the Revolution. Calvinist Abraham Keteltas in his evocatively titled work God Arising (1777) reduced the Revolution to "the cause ... of heaven against hell--of that kind parent of the universe against the prince of Darkness." Keteltas, like other colonial Americans, routinely ascribed uncontrollable national calamities and unexplainable social forces to God. Antebellum evangelicals extended these attitudes to the mundane socio-economic affairs of individuals.

Conservative Theological Acceptance of the Revolution

Evangelical ministers who, like Keteltas, adhered to authoritarian theologies, were attracted to and enhanced the anti-institutional credo of the Revolution. For conservative moralists, independence produced a sense of dependence upon God. Naming the individual as the locus of power in America, enabled evangelicals to attribute individual frustration or
success to a Divine purpose. In theory, no other power than God governed the autonomous self. The immanent God’s control of all outcomes insured that the autonomy of individuals would not serve to create new evil. Ministers took comfort in the belief that punishment of declines in zeal would drive fallen citizens back to religious faith and moral responsibility.\(^6\)

An institutionless landscape offered no source of compulsion but God, and no locus of blame but the self. The development of liberty in America was not the progressive freeing of the self from institutions but the unfolding of revelation. Reverend John Adger, writing in the conservative *Southern Presbyterian Review*, in 1849, explained the freedoms cited in Revolutionary documents:

> All mankind have an inalienable right to obey God rather than man. This right can be invaded innocently by none—it can be surrendered innocently by none. If all mankind have a right to obey God, they have also a right to learn God’s will, and so far it is true, as Doctor Wayland says, that "everyman’s mind is his own."\(^6\)

"Free my people from institutional dependence," Adger seemed to say, "that they may know God." This call was consonant with freedom of religion, but contrary to the spirit of American jurisprudence.

In the antebellum period, Calvinist Old School Presbyterians in particular held that a codified right to personal freedom was irrelevant because all men were under
"the great moral school of humanity." The Southern Presbyterian Review, to which Adger and James Henry Thornwell were frequent contributors, insisted that the model for inalienable freedom and happiness lay neither in an unfallen "state of nature" nor in the American wilderness, nor even in the Garden of Eden. Adam had never been "free" in the garden because he was not free to eat the fruit without dire consequences. He appeared to be free and happy only because, in obeying a moral imperative, he had achieved self-discipline, even if he was unaware that he was doing so. That he was unaware of having done so was beside the point. Evangelical Calvinists, following Edwards, could therefore hold Adam responsible for the Fall because he had previously demonstrated agency. Evangelicals thought that recapturing the straightforward accountability of the Garden necessitated conscious achievement of Adam's moral state through conversion.

The bringing forth of food through field labor was not an arbitrary punishment imposed by God but a perfect lesson calculated to compel a measure of discipline and point the way back to virtue. The curse requiring Adam to scratch the ground was far from an "evil." James Henley Thornwell, among countless others in his era, traced the American work ethic to this primal founding: "The sterility of the earth is, no doubt, in itself considered an evil; but in its relation to a man, who has lost his integrity, and to whom labor has become
a burden, it is a needful stimulus to industry, and so is overruled into a blessing." For evangelicals, the responsibility for learning this lesson preceded civil rights. The primal founding, after all, preceded the founding of America.

Thornwell helped frame the statement signed by the General Assembly of the Old School Presbyterian Church of the Confederate States of America in 1861, and stating as follows: "As to the great declamation about human rights, we have only to say that human rights are not a fixed, but a fluctuating quantity. . . . There is a minimum without which a man cannot be responsible, there is a maximum which expresses the highest degree of civilization and of Christian culture." The moral law (Protestant virtues and faith), which determined both rights and freedoms, was fixed, historically and logically prior to freedom and rights. Discussion of rights and the winning of freedom in the Revolution were possible only because the Constitution and national institutions accorded to, or at least did not interfere with, God's providential scheme. Conservative evangelicals preached, on this providential basis, a politically informed institutional innocence that rationalized inequities and divisions in the status quo. "The truth is, the education of the human race for liberty and virtue, is a vast Providential scheme," wrote a committee of Presbyterians headed by Thornwell; "God assigns the precise place [any man] is to occupy in the great moral
school of humanity. The scholars are distributed into classes according to their competency and progress. For God is in history." The conservative’s God graded on a scale and "as you go up, the number of rights increases, but the number of individuals who possess them diminishes."76

Conservative evangelicals thought the United States and its Protestant citizens had attained the highest degree of civilization and Christian culture. The nation’s documents and doctrines on rights and freedom were, however, neither goals nor fundamental principles and were certainly not moral laws.77 They were descriptions of how citizens’ adherence to the moral law was expressed and might best be facilitated at that historical moment. Human rights fluctuated depending on circumstances.78 Late twentieth-century popular views on morality and national documents tend toward the opposite conclusion: human rights are fixed and the moral law fluctuates according to circumstances. It is easy to forget that these earlier Calvinistic and evangelical interpretations of "rights" and "free" institutions dominated popular thinking on the subjects in the nineteenth century. The anti-institutional message of the Revolution, which was potentially radical, would not have found such widespread acceptance without the conservative theological accommodations made to it by churchgoers and clerics.

Conservative southern ministers accommodated more to the logic and utility of free institutions, than to individual
rights. Educated and orthodox theologians were primarily concerned with moral dilemmas, such as how to insure a sense of duty and obedience. After the Revolution, the religious and social climate precluded the securing of obedience through hierarchical institutional restrictions. 79 In order to preserve moral order elite ministers had to make a virtue out of the nature of political authority in America. Reverend Jasper Adams, President of the College of Charleston, did so in a revealingly blunt address to graduates in 1834: "The problem presented for solution to those who, in any form, are called to the difficult undertaking of governing others, is, to secure the requisite obedience, and the greatest good of the greatest number, at the least possible expense of restriction. . . . That government is most wise in its principles and salutary in its effects, which, with the fewest possible penalties and restrictions, furnishes the greatest number of encouragements (motives) to good conduct in the citizen. Under our institutions, we partially govern ourselves, and mutually aid in governing each other; and consequently, our encouragements are as many, and the penalties and restrictions imposed on us are as few, as slight, and as unexceptionable as our passions and tempers will permit them to be." 80 Among the less politically and intellectually sophisticated evangelicals, who constituted the majority, these religious understandings of the Republican
experiment not only discouraged restrictions, but encouraged popular expectations of social mobility and material progress.

**The Divine Economy: Dominant Understandings of Free Institutions**

In the nineteenth century, as generations of evangelical Americans grew up under free institutions, the revolutionary experiment embodied in these institutions was often taken for granted. It had become a sacred reality—a cultural myth. One component of the myth, picked out for sacralization by evangelicals, was America's free economy. This was the nation's great anti-institution. Before the Civil War few Americans thought of the economy as a free institution. Much as the Revolution had disestablished religion and put citizens under the obligations of God's will, evangelicals assumed economic systems had also been dis-established. Providence would unfailingly allocate the fruits of moral exertion and penalties of improvidence in the Republic. The economy was not an institution; it was just God's economy. "The Divine Economy" was exactly the term William A. Smith attached to the providential system of worldly reward and punishment. During the disasters of the Civil War in 1864, the Reverend W.E. Warren in Georgia was promising southerners a "Vindication of the Divine Economy." At the same time, Calvin Henderson in North Carolina bemoaned the nation's corruption of "the divine economy" by greed and by ignoring
Evangelical discouragement, such as Henderson's, was retrospective.

The more progressive aspects of this providential doctrine had been given great weight, before the War, as they conformed with the experience of the early Republic. The evangelical idea of a divine economic system was vindicated by manifestation and accumulation of power throughout America. By the 1830s westward expansion, the rapid development of infrastructure, and the burgeoning market economy provided overwhelming material evidence in support of evangelical confidence in the capacity of moral character to find its reward from God. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that evangelicals were obsessed with the providential and moral aspects of economics. For most Americans, Christian economics were the basis for understanding the political economy and for calculating self-interest. The doctrine of Providence was the convention through which putatively self-less and otherworldly evangelicals could discuss their interests, responsibilities, and agency in the worldly economic universe. By and large, the same practical conclusions could be reached from "the principles of the divine economy" as from those of political economics and expediency. The confusion of these two modes of thought became apparent in the Jacksonian period and was expressed in the popular assertion that morality was power.
Southern evangelical ministers saw political economy as yet another branch of science that manifested the unity of truth. The absolute morality and rationality of God extended to America’s economy. The economy was therefore a source of authority. W.A. Smith settled controversies on this basis. "Principles of political economy alone considered .. settle this question," he was fond of pointing out. He shored up his evangelical credentials, however, by adding that "from well-established principles of political economy, it is morally certain." Certainty and morality united in every evangelical argument. Most ministers appealed directly to the divine economy, bypassing political theories. The natural, providential economic system was the only legitimate system: "by the sphere of fervid and rigid economic systems, the most salutary influence of human agency is destroyed," an anonymous southern minister told the New York Daily Times. "It is sheer tyranny to interfere with its spontaneous operation. It is the steady corrective if left to its direct agency."

In an America free of institutions, individual and national benefits--economic, political, and even religious--were automatically received in direct proportion to the individual’s degree of alignment with God’s agency. "In a free country, upright generous, pure, disinterested principles must of necessity triumph over those which are narrow selfish and unrighteous," as radical evangelical Theodore Clapp insisted. This applied as well to religion: "It is perfectly
safe in a free country to tolerate all forms of religion, because the principle of reverence in man, uninfluenced by coercion, can never lead to any species of immorality. If Roman Catholics become more numerous in this republic than any other sect, the fact will prove conclusively the superiority of their teachings." He added, of course, that such an outcome was "hardly possible" and the "protestant denominations" would carry the day.\textsuperscript{93}

The obvious material and physical success of Protestant morality, rather than its number of church-members, captured the imagination of the generation.\textsuperscript{94} Josiah Priest, a popular publisher of exegetical guides in the South, included hosannahs in his books to how "in the short period of a day. The magic wand of science and Christianity are waived over the great wilderness," which has thus "disappeared."\textsuperscript{95} Antebellum southern evangelicals were not the Bible Belt fundamentalists who rejected and feared progress and technology in the early twentieth century. Many southern ministers used technological metaphors to illustrate the power of Providence against human efforts to seek, analyze, or dictate economic outcomes. "Steam, in all its applications, was argued against and rejected; yet it has prevailed. So the electric telegraph," Frederick Ross reminded Alabamians.\textsuperscript{96} Jeremiah Jeter tried to settle a biblical dispute over whether or not laughing was forbidden by scripture (Jesus never laughed) with an appeal to a familiar, more acceptable act:
"He never traveled in a railway car or in a steamboat, but that fact furnishes no reason why we should not do it."97

Material and economic advancements were important primarily because of the illustration of individual moral progress they provided. "If we are teachable," Calvin Wiley Henderson told southerners, "this wilderness will lead us to our vineyards." As the wilderness dramatically disappeared, the conclusion that Americans were learning their moral lessons well was hard to resist. Material advances were further proof, hardly needed by ecstatic converts, that "it is in the moral view that our national superiority stands forth prominent." To "the great question: Is man capable of self-government?" the answer "of the generation (was) - Onward!"98

**Conservative Ministers and the Economy**

By the antebellum period conservative evangelicals feared a free economy no more than they did freedom of religion. James Henley Thornwell, like other southerners who looked to rapid social change and mobility, celebrated the self-acting nature of the divine economy. Under "the inscrutable Providence of God" he rested assured that "institutions of communities are on a whole, those which are best adapted to their degree of moral progress."99 Thornwell was more interested in preserving the status quo by guarding against the disasters that would ensue if men tried to rush or anticipate Providence than in guaranteeing future rewards.
Yet he believed that there was a moral imperative to leave the economy and society open to progressive change. John Adger, who was theologically and socially more orthodox than Thornwell, subscribed to much the same economic philosophy. America, according to Adger, was the nation in which individuals could claim "whatever they can legally and meritoriously acquire, our true and only titles to liberty and property are inheritance, or honest and legal acquisition, both dependent upon the discriminations of Providence." Adger hated the phrasing of the Declaration of Independence but thought the United States provided the model of progress for the rest of the world because it set up "free institutions" in which God alone discriminated between individuals.

Highly educated, well-heeled gentlemen theologians of the South, versed in apologies for the unity of truth, believed they stood to gain the most from a divine economy. "The law giving superior rule and government to the moral, intellectual, and physical superior is as unchangeable as the law of gravitation." John Fletcher knew this meritocratic law of gravitation was a power "we attribute to God." The Louisiana conservative was no more worried that this law of Providence could be successfully overturned than New School Presbyterian Frederick Ross was that arguments would deter the development of the telegraph and social mobility. Whether ministers stressed social stability or growth and mobility,
they all presumed that America was constructed such that individual moral effort was reflected in social outcomes. At the individual and national level, evangelicals described America as a naturally operating and fully moralized meritocracy.

The Strength of Southern Belief in the Divine Economy

The Revolution had established an institutionless order in which God and the individual were the only loci of social power. The economic inequities this order bred were not merely "natural," as Marx pointed out, they were the index of individual moral power. Cultural and ideological analyses derived from European categories and social divisions, whether Marxian or otherwise, never yield satisfying pictures of "conservative" Americans.105 This is particularly true in descriptions of the early nineteenth century, when many southern conservatives subscribed to democratic and progressive doctrines that gave pause to some British liberal intellectuals and reformers. Southerners were conservative in so far as they thought the divine economy was an uncomplicated reality that did not require analysis. The majority of southerners, like antebellum Americans in general, wanted progress, but they inflexibly insisted on the preeminence of character and did not really know how the engines of technology and the market ran. They merely preached the "practical points of morality, such as, justice, sobriety,
chastity, fidelity, honesty, industry, obedience" and assumed
the divine economy would allocate payoffs fairly.\textsuperscript{106} This was
the dominant national position. The evangelical culture of
simple faith in a divine economy did, however, have
particularly widespread resonance in the South.

Southern culture, for the most part, was evangelicalized
after the American Revolution. As a result, early nineteenth-
century religious doctrines became the cornerstone of the
region's popular morality and social thought. The groundwork
had been laid for unquestioning acceptance of personal
conversions and understandings of scripture. The apologies of
natural theology and Scottish common sense shored up
evangelical theology with similarly simple articles of faith.
Most important, the American Revolution established belief in
a starkly individualistic society as the hallmark of national
character. To this belief, evangelical ministers amended God's
providential power. These doctrines were more than elitist
pronouncements, more than pulpit aphorisms. They were rooted
and revealed in popular culture. Southerners who had neither
heard of Dugald Stewart, Francis Wayland, or James Henley
Thornwell, nor listened very carefully to a local minister,
knew that they could make moral judgements based on the pure
force of personality. More fundamentally, they knew that no
earthly source of judgment was superior to their own. The
unity of truth assured that faith, the moral rules of the
Bible, and the material world would justify their position.
God, the moral good, and the material goodies flowed one from the other through the conduit of the individual.

A national or a regional world view based on evangelical morality may appear to have been too rife with the potential for anarchical disaster; too laced with confused, crass reasoning; too demanding of individual character; too optimistic; to have ever been believed by rational men. It is important to remember that the leading religious minds of the age were even more likely to present moral and social ideas in these terms than were stump preachers and politicians. Evangelical moralists endowed these doctrines with the authority of philosophic science and incontrovertible theological laws. Henry May reached the inevitable conclusion when he analyzed this didactic form of moral science--based in evangelical cosmology, Scottish Common Sense, and democratic free enterprise--that dominated America in the 1830s: "At its worst American moralism could justify anything."

Evangelical ministers categorically stated, of course, that the divine economy would never serve a secular end, especially one that undermined individual agency. Still, their faith that God would never vindicate selfishness allowed them to come very close to legitimizing an ethic of pure self-interest while decrying such worldly motivation. The distinction between "virtue is power" and "outcomes of power are virtuous" was never drawn carefully prior to the Civil
War. A sacralization, not a mere defense, of slaveholding was implicit in the moral discourse that promoted this confusion.
NOTES


15. Richard Whatley, "On the Origins of Civilization: A Lecture to the Young Men's Christian Association," (1854), 19; Quoted in Hilton, Age, 54. See also Charles Kingsley, Water Babies, 183: "I just sit here and make them make themselves," both Kingsley's and Whatley's images of Nature's and God's rule could have been the evangelicals' slaveholding slogan.

16. Wayland, Elements of Moral Science, "after a government of force has been established, and habits of subordination have been founded... As they advance in intellectual and moral cultivation, it may advantageously become more and more elective; and in a suitable moral condition, it may be wholly so," quoted in William Smith, Philosophy, 53.


20. Smyth, Unity of Races, 334. On admiration of Whatley see 126. See also Dunwoody, Sermon, 4; Citizen of Georgia, Remarks, 29-30. All evangelical southern defenders of slavery used a version of this argument. Highly educated Presbyterian ministers who were versed in Northern and British apologies on political economy, most closely mirrored Whatley and Wayland. Benjamin Morgan Palmer typified the more pessimistic version of this argument when he said "it pleases God to allow evils which check others that are greater," (Her Peril and Her Duty, 12). James Henley Thornwell, who admired Whately (Life, 125) gave the more popular and optimistic (morally and economically) version of this doctrine when he called slavery, "a condition though founded in a curse from which the Providence of God extracts a blessing," (Duties, 33).


22. Smyth, 78.

23. Smyth, xxv.

24. Quoted in Ahlstrom, Religious History, 408.

25. Fletcher, Studies, 398-9.

26. Fletcher, 80-1.

27. Smith, Philosophy, 97.


29. Thornwell, Duties, 15. See also Life, 87, for a critique of utilitarianism and 265 for a providential subsuming of its categories.

30. Fletcher, Studies, 419.

31. William Buck, Slavery, (reprint from "Banner" n. 11, 1849), 5. See similar statements in W.T. Hamilton, The Duties of Master and Slaves Respectively or Domestic Servitude as Sanctioned by the Bible (Mobile: F.H. Brooks, 1845), 17; Citizen of Georgia, Remarks Upon Slavery (Augusta: S.R. Sentinel Office, 1835), 23; Clapp, Autobiographical, 162; Thomas Roderick Dew in Proslavery Argument, 325; Neil McKay, Duties, 6; Clapp, Sermon, 41-2; Josiah Priest Biblical, 255.

32. E.N. Elliot, ed., Cotton is King and Proslavery Arguments (Augusta: Prichard, Abbot and Lewis, 1860), x.

no. 1 (Spring, 1986), 5, 7. See also Holifield, *Theologians*, 3-4, and passim.

34. Smyth, 120.


44. Fletcher, *Studies*, 393. For comparison to a northern "radical" evangelical and abolitionist see Albert Barnes, *Barnes on Slavery*, 92-3: "the will of God may often be learned from the events of his providence. . . . when a certain course of conduct always tends to certain results, when there are laws in operation in the moral world as fixed as in the natural world . . . the revelation of the mind of God in such a case is not less clear than were the announcements of his will on Sinai." "If a certain course of conduct, long pursued and in a great variety of circumstances, leads uniformly to health, happiness, and property, we are in little danger of inferring that it is in accordance with the will of God. If it leads to poverty and tears, we are in as little danger of error in inferring that it is a violation of some great law God has ordained." Southern evangelicals did not differ
greatly on this point; they merely insisted on the unity of truth, while a very few northerners called this a "higher law" than the Bible. Mostly northerners and southerners divided on what they found using this technique, both in the social world and the Bible.

45. Henderson, Trials, 16; Fletcher, Studies, 185; Frederick Dalcho, Remarks, 14.

46. If a self-controlling evangelical minister observed, for example, that every time he came to services inebriated, he was incapable of delivering his sermon, he would be on firm and orthodox grounds if he concluded that God disapproved of drunkenness. He might on the same principle have noted that every time he failed to give his sermon his congregation was pleased, and that God therefore must frown on sermons. The Scots had endowed him with common sense, however, and he knew when to stop.

47. Thornwell, Life, 308, 329.


50. Marty, Righteous Empire, 31-85.


52. Smyth, Unity, 373, also 126, 312, 342. See also William Smith, Philosophy, 66; Thornwell, Life, 329; J.C. Mitchell, A Bible Defence of Slavery, and the Unity of Mankind, 19; A Southern Farmer, A Defence, 27.

53. Iveson Brookes, A Defence of the South Against the Reproaches and Encroachments of the North: In Which Slavery is Shown to be an Institution of God intended to form the basis of the best social state and the only safeguard to the permanence of a Republican Government, Rare Books #7563720. (Hamburg, S.C.: Printed at the Republican Office 1850)
"Woodville near Hamburg S.C." Feb. 20 1849, to the editor of the *Christian Review*, 29-30. Thornton Stringfellow, "Scriptural View," in *Cotton is King*, 503; William Smith, *Philosophy*, 66; Clapp, *Autobiographical*, 126; A Georgia Baptist (Hues), *Remarks*, 20. See also Thomas Roderick Dew in *Proslavery Argument*, 454 for admiration of Rousseau and Jefferson by another conservative (also Thornwell, *Life*, 463). In their most public statements, these men were not critics of political liberalism (or the political mission of the French Revolution).


55. Fletcher, *Studies*, 84.

56. Fletcher, 86.


58. There is a long controversy on the extent to which the South shared in antebellum "reforms." The institutional reforms Rothman describes occurred to a limited extent in the South (Rothman, 60-1, 130, 191, 201, 207, 209, 227). See also Blaine Brownell and David R. Goldfield, eds., *The City in Southern History: The Growth of Urban Civilization in the South* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1977); Brownell, "Introduction: Urban Themes in the American South," *JUH*, 2 (February, 1976), 130-45; Leonard Curry, "Urbanization and Urbanism in the Old South" *JSH*, 40 (February 1974), 43-60. Providential ideas could very easily support such proto-bureaucratic innovations, especially in penal institutions, hospitals, urban order, and orphanages. I think religious and moral impulses were in place in the South to support the "discovery of the asylum" and modern institutional development. However, southern faith in providentialism (and its anti-institutional expression in America) was so strong and unexamined that they expected automatic (God given) economic and institutional development. See John B. Boles, *The Great Revival*, 183-203, on the more individualistic and otherworldly applications of southern evangelicalism and absence of radical reform.


60. Smith, 265-6. See also *North and South*, 31; Citizen of Georgia, *Remarks*, 16.

62. Samuel Dunwoody, *Sermon upon the Subject of Slavery* (Columbia: S. Weir State Printer, 1837), 32.


70. *Minutes of the Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of the Confederate States of America*, vol. I (Augusta, Georgia: 1861), 55.

71. *SPR*, 1849, 2 March, 1849, 569. Cultural historians have often mistaken the nature of the "Garden of Eden" metaphor (and analogy for America) in the early Republic. It was primarily a religious and moral image for the majority of Americans and had little to do with pastoral release, peace, or happiness. See for example R.W.B. Lewis *The American Adam* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1955) 90-110; and David W. Noble, *The Eternal Adam and the New World Garden* (New York: Grosset and Dunlop, 1968), 7-30. For more ambivalence, tension, and
even strife in the pastoral garden image and its easy defeat and incorporation under images of control and technology see Lewis Simpson "Slavery and the Culture of Alienation" in The Dispossessed Garden: Pastoral and History in Southern Literature (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1975), 34-64; and the outstanding work of Leo Marx, The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964). The Calvinistic and later evangelical images of the garden constituted one reason for the easy defeat of the pastoral and the incorporation of authority, control, and technology into "the garden," which Marx documents in the antebellum period.

72. Holifield, Theologians, 187-191. See George Armstrong Dodd, Remarks of a Conservative, for an Old School Presbyterian Calvinist's more unforgiving, classical statement of Adam's fall being willed so God could damn some and save others.

73. Thornwell, Life, 240, 434; Fletcher, Studies, 80.

74. Thornwell, Duties, 32.

75. Minutes, 56-9. See also an even more conservative statement on this aspect of rights in George Armstrong Dodd, Remarks of a Conservative, 9.

76. Minutes, 56-9. See also Thornwell's, Duties, 43; John Adger, Doctrine, 21-28; Nathan Lord, A Letter of Inquiry to Ministers of the Gospel of all Denominations on Slavery (Boston: Petridge and Co., 1854), 6-7.


78. Joshua Lacy Wilson, Relations and Duties of Servants and Masters (Cincinnati: Isaac Hefley & Co., Printers, 1834), 13; Thornwell, Duties, 33.

79. Holifield, 153. See also Boles, Revival. For arguments that southern conservatism was rooted in hierarchical ideals see Larry Tise, Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987); Matthews, Religion, 170-1; Loveland, Social Order, 125.

81. The term itself was popularized by New England theologians associated with the "New Divinity" movement and Edwardsean visions of Providence. It referred originally to God's economy of salvation and became associated with the "governmental theory" of the Atonement, which was fully articulated and promulgated by "New Divinity" in the late eighteenth century. Both abolitionists and proslavery forces in the antebellum period applied the term more loosely to God's moral governance of the world. Since they moralized economic behavior—particularly through their obsession with the work ethic—the phrase encompassed the economic order. See Sydney Ahlstrom, A Religious History, 306, 409.


84. Joseph Dorfman, The Economic Mind in American Civilization, 1606-1865 (New York: Vintage Press, 1946), II: 705-9. Political economics, as formal branch of study, analyzed the generation of capital with relation to the power of the state. Providential economics was concerned with the "accumulation of character" in relation to the power of individual virtue.


86. Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 213. Tocqueville used a perfect phrase for this impulse—"virtuous materialism"—which he held to be "a species of religious morality." See also Marsden, Fundamentalism, 13, on the uniformity of evangelical beliefs about political economy in the nineteenth century.

89. Smith, 262 (my emphasis); also, 294, 295.

102. Adger, 11. See also *North and South*, 29: on how "tact and talent have opened a higher field" in the South. Also 25: on how the South operates on "merit" and men there are given a better chance to "demonstrate character."

103. Holifield, 12, 28-48. For similar attitudes (plus frustrations that their characters were not finding their natural rewards and recognition) among the intellectual elite, see Drew Faust, *A Sacred Circle: The Dilemma of the Intellectual in the Old South, 1840-60* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977) and *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1982).


106. Frederick Dalcho, *Practical Considerations Founded on Scripture, Relative to the Slave Population of South Carolina* (Charleston: A.E. Miller, 1823), 32-3.


CHAPTER THREE

The Southern Modification of the Proslavery Tradition, 1701-1831

Relatively to some persons and to some times slavery may be good . . . or more accurately a condition though founded in a curse from which the Providence of God extracts a blessing.

James Henley Thornwell

Americans regarded slaveholding as a vaguely moral sign of success long before the antebellum period. Slaves first arrived in the colonies in 1619, and by the time of the Revolution there were slaveholders in twelve of the thirteen colonies. From Aristotle to Locke, from Moses to George Whitefield, slaveholding had been accepted as a legitimate exercise of power; the burden of proof was therefore on those who opposed it.\(^1\) Abolitionists had to articulate every step of their outrage for themselves, whereas, by the end of the eighteenth century, all theoretical elements needed for the defense of racial slaveholding were already available to the prospective Western apologist.\(^2\) In the nineteenth century, the case for the defense was advanced further by thorough and zealous advocates from south of the Mason-Dixon Line.\(^3\) Evangelical moral language and concepts of power gave new life to the claim that good men could hold slaves. Slaveholding was a traditional mark of success, and a moral defense of
slavery was implicit whenever Americans who considered themselves good Christians held slaves. By the 1830s, such men lived primarily below the Mason-Dixon Line. Evangelical moral ideology coalesced and attained ascendancy in the South in this period, sacralizing regional realities.

The southern proslavery ideology evolved through a process of self-recognition, gradual declaration of long-implicit attitudes, historic developments, and everyday experience in the slaveholding states. Beginning slowly after the American Revolution and unfolding with increased visibility and intensity between 1831 and the Civil War, a self-conscious proslavery society arose in the Cotton South. Although a forthright and intense attachment to slaveholding was at times a remnant of an outdated patriarchal ideal, the unique feature of southern proslavery was its emergence within the antebellum culture of competitive individualism. A Protestant culture founded on individuals with strong personal commitments to slaveholding existed nowhere else on earth. The addition of the moral energy and intensity of evangelicalism to the southern formula made it more remarkably unique. Moral and Biblical justifications of slaveholding constituted the first, and remained the most widely disseminated, form of southern proslavery. It would be hard to exaggerate the importance of ethical and exegetical arguments in solidifying the South in defense of slaveholders' rights and righteousness. Such arguments were the basis for
a popular proslavery bond, the heart of the consensus which made the sectional crisis possible.⁶

Most ministers who galvanized southern moral support for slaveholding denied that they were "proslavery."⁷ The moniker fits nonetheless. These men repeatedly insisted that good christians could hold slaves, that slaveholding was moral, and that virtuous acts could result in one's becoming a slaveholder. Secular proslavery spokesmen also held that slaveholding often had progressive, practical results. Good slaveholders, they maintained, gave the institution its character, that is, goodness. As moral individuals, they were more powerful than (originally corrupt or value neutral) institutions. This formulation allowed proslavery spokesmen to denounce the historically evil institution of slavery, while defending southern practices⁸: slaveholders in the evil form of slavery were bad men; the southerners were good and the source of their wealth was therefore untainted. Good—and especially Christian—slaveholders supposedly redeemed the institution of slavery. The consequences of this simple apology for individual slaveholders were profound. Any understanding of antebellum proslavery must begin here.

Evangelical proslavery centered on the moral defense of slaveholders—a stance which still provides the clearest distinction between proslavery and antislavery camps. Racism was at the heart of southern proslavery, but it was also at the heart of antebellum culture. Virulent racism did not
prevent Americans from opposing slavery, but conviction of the Christian character of slaveholding usually did prevent a citizens--North or South--from attacking slavery. Antebellum Americans defined and denigrated blacks in ways that advanced their own interests and confirmed their understandings of themselves. Biblical accounts of God’s ordination of slavery among his peculiar people and of righteous men’s holding of slaves impressed Jews, Catholics, Lutherans, Congregationalists, and a variety of biblically traditional sects with and without attachments to slavery.

The first concession of evangelical denominations to the morality of slavery appears in an eighteenth-century decision that converted slaveholders were not necessarily committing sin. Abolitionists declared themselves by refusal to grant this concession. These pressures came to a head and divided the nation when the question of whether slaveholding would be allowed in western territories was raised. Protestant moralism provided the language used by antebellum Americans to discuss power and wealth, and now erstwhile theoretical debates more directly concerned the status of new territory, the acquisition of wealth. Was slaveholding, then, a natural, moral form of success? Could a region occupied by slaveholders and slaves be consistent with Providence? Could it promote self-government? These were the practical points on which Americans divided into opposing camps.
Southerners' affirmative answers to these questions were, in the main, pragmatic, even eclectic, rather than theoretical and dogmatic. They took a surprising variety of positions, rarely defending slavery in the abstract or as a positive good, and abandoning the plea, influenced by the Enlightenment and dominant during the Revolution, that slavery was a necessary evil.\textsuperscript{13} None of these rubrics meant much to southerners, influenced as they were by evangelicalism. For them, slavery as an abstract "social system" could never be a good in itself; good was the attribute of a particular sort of converted individual. Enlightenment era and political moralists spoke of "necessary evils," but in evangelicals' uncompromising moral cosmology, evil was neither necessary nor tolerable. Necessity was dictated by Providence, to which no evil could be attributed.

Evangelical moral philosophy led the antebellum shift toward a less compromised, more ideological defense of slaveholding. This new stance constituted a practical, logical advancement of the political and evangelical accommodation to slavery made at the Constitutional Convention. In the late eighteenth century, most Americans believed that slavery, as institutionalized dependence, was neither good nor practical, and so would fade before the action of natural forces.\textsuperscript{14}

Intellectual developments and massive unforeseen events between the Revolution and the antebellum explosion of
proslavery publications changed the tenor of arguments North and South. Nineteenth-century providentialism, for example, formalized the Revolutionary-era appeal to practicality. For the providentialist, social cataclysms were indications of divine will, and resultant power was regarded as the fruit of proper moral organization. Necessity and evil were divorced.\textsuperscript{15} America’s rage for the emergent science of political economy in the late 1820s was due largely to the new thinking’s compelling vision of necessity. These economic laws were quickly evangelicalized by identifying them with God’s inexorable purposes.\textsuperscript{16}

In the South, William and Mary political economist Thomas Roderick Dew was the central articulator and popularizer of these rapidly coalescing languages of economics and evangelicalism.\textsuperscript{17} In 1832 he published a description of the economic and moral necessity of slavery. Other southerners saw in Dew’s proslavery a confirmation of their certainty that southern slaveholders were "sanctioned by divine authority" and "the great law of necessity."\textsuperscript{18} His "simple statistics" provided a powerful tool enabling a fleet of southern ministers to hear the voice of God in the popular science. Hailing the economic course of providence discovered by Dew, they defended slavery against a newly mature abolitionism.

Dew, immersed as he was in British economics, was a cogent interpreter of the economic and social life experienced by his generation of southerners. During the first thirty
years of the century, the cotton economy, the slave population, and the evangelical movement all grew at tremendous rates. Looking back on this prosperity from the 1830s, as Dew did, evangelical southerners saw new and incontrovertible evidence of divine pleasure. To their minds, evil practices were destined to reveal their true faces and fail, and were therefore impractical. Yet slaveholding had become more practical (profitable) after both the Revolutionary settlement and the close of the slave trade in 1808. Could it then be evil? More important to evangelicals, after the Great Revival of 1801 they saw the most worldly and unchurched part of the country, home to genteel elitists and the dietistical Jefferson who once said unitarianism would be the regional creed, become the bastion of evangelical orthodoxy. Whether these phenomena were viewed as practical results or providential machinations, southerners took them as vindications of slaveholding.

This was especially true of evangelicals who had expressed doubts about slavery through their participation in the colonization movement, centered in the South before 1830. Many proslavery spokesmen maintained that they had been converted to a defense of slavery from earlier uncertainty about it. After the Revolution, many southern evangelicals and enlightened members of the slaveholding elite, Jefferson among them, had strong reservations about slavery. These groups were not hostile to slaveholders
themselves, nor were they promoters of emancipation. They did suspect, however, that slavery brought the corruptions of luxury and institutionalized power and thereby the threat of socio-economic decay. And they knew for certain that slaveholding brought unwanted association with blacks. The colonization movement provided a popular refuge for such southerners. Dew's main feat in 1832 was his unmasking of the impotence and impracticality of this already fading program. It was apparent to Dew that God was frustrating the antislavery movement at every turn while blessing the kingdom of cotton and evangelicalism, which were stealing across the land with an ease that had to be divinely inspired. The only parallels for such success were found in the rise of the nation of Israel from the slaveholder Abraham and in the story of his descendants who emerged from the wilderness to forge a slaveholding kingdom.

A number of proslavery ministers, sociologists, and economists (though initially not Dew) took these southern and Biblical phenomena as proof of the defensibility, even necessity, of the institution of slavery in a viable Christian society. At the time of the Revolution, advocates of slavery as a positive good and model of hierarchical social relations denounced Jeffersonian misgivings. In the antebellum period, their intellectual progeny defended their institution as the cornerstone of the Republic. In the proslavery mainstream, however, the natural prerogatives of
individualism and free institutions laid the foundations of social thought. The status of slavery would be determined by the progress and judgment of a moralized free economy.

In much the same way as evangelicals denounced utilitarian morality while reconstituting it through a new set of intentions and series of providential rewards and punishments, southerners also rejected the Founding Fathers's so-called necessary evil compromise with slavery and yet retained most of their practical conclusions. Providentialism gave southerners a way to attach evil to slavery and criticize it in the abstract. Providentialism enabled southerners to denounce the slave trade, non-southern slavery, and the abuses of slaveholding in the South as acts of evil men, while maintaining that these sins did not reflect on the virtuous intentions, acts, and power of Christian slaveholders.27 To the proslavery mainstream, the activity of individual southern slaveholders was positively good, and slavery was defended in the particular—as it was practiced in the South among those who understood the providential economy.

**Formal Defenses of Slavery, 1701-1831**

The antebellum view of the question was informed by long-standing proslavery notions—biblical, racial, and philosophic. It incorporated some old arguments into the very different context of its moralism, regionalism, and emphasis
on individual power. Defenses of slavery, when provided at all, had always been easiest to undertake in static, hierarchical societies with long-established legal structures and traditions of class deference—an ideal to which pre-Revolutionary southerners aspired, even if they did not recreate it. The early literature of proslavery was written by persons for whom the virtues of such social arrangements were self-evident, many of whom felt their interests or emotional well-being threatened by democratic social change. Proslavery arguments were first published in the Boston area and later issued elsewhere in the North—the center of education and publishing in colonial America. Writers in the North continued to defend slavery long after it was abolished there.

The institutionalized privilege and social subordination inherent in slavery were attractive to wealthy, vocal minorities North and South, particularly after the Revolution, when they found themselves in a society they did not entirely comprehend but in which they felt the status and ideals most regarded as their birthright might be taken away. On that point at least, the democratic implications of the Revolution were clear.

In 1700 Samuel Sewall (1652-1730) wrote *The Selling of Joseph, a Memorial*, anticipating the American Revolution and later abolitionist arguments. Sewall wrote that "through the Indulgence of God to our first Parents after the Fall, the outward Estate of all and every of their children, remains the
same as to one another. So that originally, and Naturally, there is no such thing as slavery. ... It is most certain that all Men, as they are Sons of Adam, are Co-heirs, and have equal Right unto Liberty, and all other outward comforts of Life."28 This Puritan doctrine of liberty offended Sewall's fellow judge on the Superior Court of Massachusetts Colony, John Saffin, author of A Brief and Candid Answer to a Late Printed Sheet Entitled, the Selling of Joseph (1701). Saffin owned at least one slave and dealt in slaves occasionally, but this was not the main point of contention between the men--Sewall was a slaveholder also. What Saffin objected to was Sewall's social vision:

That all men have equal right to Liberty... seems to invert the Order that God hath set in the world; who hath ordained different degrees and orders of men, some high and Honorable, some Low and Despicable; some to be Monarchs, Kings, Princes and Governors, masters and commanders, others to be subjects and be commanded.29

Sewall's denial that God had commanded "sons of men to keep in their respective places, Orders, and Degrees" threatened not just slavery but the entire social order. Saffin claimed that attacks on black slavery undermined the white bond servitude vital to the northern economy and social structure. Saffin scolded and mocked Sewall, saying that it was a "breach of good manners to treat a Prince like a Peasant. And this worthy
gentlemen would deem himself much neglected if we should show him no more Deference than an ordinary Porter."  Five years later, Reverend Cotton Mather echoed Saffin in his support of slavery (though not of the slave trade) in *The Negro Christianized*. Because opponents of slavery failed to meet these challenges, it was widely assumed that proslavery forces had won the engagement.  

Sewall was a truer precursor of antislavery ideas than Saffin and Mather were of southern proslavery arguments. The latter’s strain of proslavery did reappear, however, in the work of subsequent political and theological writers. This is not to imply that a body of proslavery literature accumulated steadily from colonial times until the Civil War. Before and during the antebellum period, slaveholding was rarely questioned where it was economically viable, and therefore required no defense. Puritans, democrats and evangelicals alike took comfort in panacean visions of masters generously leading their slaves out of heathenism. Guilty consciences were rare. As in the Sewall-Saffin dialogue, proslavery publications were usually responses to unpopular criticism. Silence, however, was the norm. Proslavery declarations usually took the straightforward form of slaveholding. This proslavery argument was widespread and consistent over long periods with little formal apology for the practice.  

Saffin and Mather were familiar with racist and Biblical justifications of slaveholding that pervaded Western culture.
Racist religious ideologies based on scripture (e.g. the curse of Ham in Genesis 9) were used to justify enslavement of Africans before slavery was instituted in America.\textsuperscript{32} Saffin’s presentation of Bible passages typified exegetical legitimations of slaveholding.\textsuperscript{33} He repeatedly pointed out that the God of the Old Testament had sanctioned slaveholding. After all, his prophets, Patriarchs and chosen people all held slaves: Noah condemned Ham’s descendants to slavery, two Decalogue commandments affirmed the master-slave relationship and Leviticus 25 gave license to the holding of foreigners in perpetual bondage. Like all subsequent Biblical proslavery writers, Saffin gave greater emphasis only to Pauline acknowledgements that slavery was consistent with Christianity (Ephesians 6).\textsuperscript{34}

Two exegetical arguments that greatly impressed nineteenth-century proslavery apologists, however, were largely ignored by Saffin and Mather: although he preached in a slaveholding society, Jesus never condemned slavery; and Paul, in his letter to Philemon, sent a runaway slave back to his master. The Puritan writers made scant use of these passages because they did not foresee the need to answer a perfectionist critique of slavery. Nor did they recognize in Philemon a Biblical parallel to the Constitution’s fugitive slave law. Such exegesis awaited ministers attuned to the Bible as a primer for the design of a new society. Saffin and Mather, like their successors, emphasized passages pertinent
to their age, the problems of which were of no concern to the evangelicals who later defended slavery. The Puritans read Paul's analogy between man's body and the Church in 1 Corinthians 12 as a sanction of social organicism and ecclesiastical hierarchy. "God hath set," according to Saffin, "different Orders and Degrees of Men in the World, both in Church and Commonweal." \(^{35}\)

This brand of proslavery was doomed by the Great Awakening and the American Revolution, even if slavery was not.\(^{36}\) Saffin's and Mather's proslavery writings were almost forgotten, and their isolated ideological descendents had to adapt traditional proslavery hierarchicalism to critique contemporary democratic impulses. In New England during and after the Revolution, the defense of slavery was taken up by occasional writers more interested in maintaining traditional social and intellectual hierarchies than in preserving slavery. Congregational and Episcopal ministers, for example, made a case for limits on Revolutionary dismantling of social distinctions (limits which would protect their own status) by playing on nascent fears about emancipation. In one of the only published debates of the 1770s containing a formal defense of slavery, Harvard graduate Theodore Parsons, wishing to demonstrate the consequences of overstepping conservative limits on the natural-rights philosophy of the rebellion, evoked the images of masses of freed blacks and of amalgamation. Manipulation of the slavery issue, which was
hardly the issue at all, enabled Parsons to demonstrate that hierarchy and "degrees of authority and subordination" were essential to a properly ordered society.\textsuperscript{37} Although the outcome of the War and the process of emancipation in the North undercut Parsons' traditional proslavery premises, diehard northern Federalists in the 1790s and after made similar appeals.\textsuperscript{38}

When the social prerogatives of clerics and propertied governing elites became subject to democratic reforms, many Federalist ministers thought their complete personal ruin was immanent. Frightened about the stability of social order and anxious to reassert clerical authority, they resorted to scare tactics, claiming that current trends would result in the dismantling of all order, including privileges of race, with the atheism and social anarchy of the French and Haitian Revolutions to follow. In the 1790s, then, traditionally conservative New England ministers of the Federalist party often became political alarmists, but they were far more likely to manipulate issues like the French Illuminati "conspiracy" than slavery. When slavery was a subject of sermons, Federalist ministers usually felt threatened by it and saw blacks as potential Jacobins who should be kept out of the nation rather than in slavery. Fear of servile insurrection and expanding numbers in the lower orders made antislavery more attractive to reactionary ministers like Samuel Hopkins, Jedediah Morse, and Timothy Dwight.\textsuperscript{39}
It was during the early national period that fragments of Saffin's and Parson's proslavery ideals reappeared among admirers of the Federalist Party. Charles Ingersoll, Robert Walsh, and (most notably) James Paulding wrote apologies for American nationalism in European terms. Directed at Old World critics, these writings stressed that retention of divisions between master and slave in a large part of the nation signalled that American Republicanism had not fallen prey to radicals and social experiments, that Orders and Degrees had not been foolishly obliterated. As Charles Ingersoll pointed out, "were it not for the slaves in the South there would be but one rank."

Former Federalist and antislavery clerical leaders and educators, like Timothy Dwight (President of Yale from 1795) and Samuel Smith also flirted with these positions during the second decade of the nineteenth century. They did not support slavery, however. What interested them about these arguments was their conservative social vision. Traditional proslavery dialectics resurfaced among Northern clerical elites only after 1830. Like Federalists and conservative nationalists who favored slaveholding, antebellum northerners spoke out for it in order to protect and promote interests concomitant to slavery, namely Biblical traditionalism and social and theological authority. John Henry Hopkins, Episcopal Bishop of Vermont; John Hughes, Bishop of New York and leader of the Catholic hierarchy; and Old School theologians like
Princeton's President Charles Hodge, wistfully extolled the "grand system of ORDER and GRADATIONS and mutual dependence" found still in slavery but rare elsewhere in an era of national religious and democratic experimentation.⁴³

Appeals to this fading strain of proslavery hierarchicalism and institutionalism continued to be heard through the Civil War, but there was little popular commitment to them.⁴⁴ The paucity of formal defenses of slavery between 1790 and 1820 and the aura of defeated northern elites clinging to those that did appear were evidence that the tradition some had hoped would be the basis of a national proslavery ideology was losing authority. The history of proslavery publications before the antebellum period is an aspect of northern social conservatism; southern proslavery during that period was expressed in the daily practice of race control and modes of economic production that were time-honored elements of the region's Revolutionary Republicanism. A southern proslavery ideology was not articulated until nineteenth-century liberal doctrines were absorbed in the region. As long as the defense of slavery was associated with traditional social conservatism, few Americans made an overt commitment to the institution.

Proslavery in the South in the 1820s

The isolated burst of proslavery writing in Charleston after the failure of the Denmark Vesey slave insurrection
conspiracy of 1822 revealed that while traditional proslavery ideas persisted, doubts about them had arisen during the protracted time of relative silence. Neither Revolutionary-era acceptance of slavery as a necessary evil nor patriarchal, hierarchical appeals to social order satisfied the first proslavery pamphleteers of the nineteenth-century South. E.C. Holland, editor of the Charleston Times, treated the problem first and showed that misgivings about slavery in the era of the American Revolution even had an audience in elite enclaves of the least democratic state in the country. Holland’s Refutation of the Calumnies Circulated against the Southern and Western States (1822) was not a moral defense of the institution. It was more in the spirit of the "necessary evil" justifications.\textsuperscript{45} The catastrophe Charlestonians thought they had narrowly avoided gave reason enough for mental conflicts about slavery.\textsuperscript{46} Holland, however, did not extend his skepticism to the Charlestonian’s role in the event. His confidence in southern conduct presaged antebellum arguments:

If then we are unhappily afflicted with an evil, the curse of which is felt and acknowledged by every enlightened man in the slaveholding states, it should be a matter of sympathy, rather than rebuke, particularly when it is recollected that it was not of our own creation.\textsuperscript{47}
Holland drew on Thomas Jefferson's and Robert Walsh's arguments and laid blame for the origins of slavery and the slave trade on Britain and "Northern and Eastern" interests. His argument was tepid in comparison with that of antebellum evangelicals who claimed ad nauseam that sin lay with non-southern perpetrators of the trade and that the divinity, in its wisdom, had assigned virtuous (and pitiable) southern slaveholders to christianize the slaves and, eventually, all of Africa.

Holland himself was unfamiliar with evangelical theology and moralism. Wanting to move beyond the "necessary evil" defense, however, he drew on racist Old Testament traditions--culled from Senate speeches on the recent Missouri Crisis--only to establish that slavery served a divine purpose. By his own admission, he said nothing "novel" on the subject and was alternately critical of the institution and adamant about its ancient inviolability. Exposition of a complete social vision arising from the "necessary evil" defense would be the work of later commentators, immersed in contemporary theological world views, who saw conversion of the slaves as essential to their case. In contrast, because of the Vesey conspiracy's links to the "African Church" and antislavery religious ideas, Holland feared the "perils from swarms of missionaries" and "religious itinerants and apostolic vagabonds."
Statements like Holland's encouraged Frederick Dalcho, an English-born Charlestonian and Episcopal divine, to publish a comforting Biblical defense of slavery. It was to be expected that Dalcho's approach would be more traditional than Holland's. He relied heavily on British commentators and extolled the "chain which binds together the various orders of our community, which must not be broken." In the same vein, he emphasized how in the "sober, rational," and conservative aspects of "worship of the Protestant Episcopal Church there is nothing to inflame the passions." Vesey's role as a religious exhorter prompted Dalcho to underscore the sobriety of Episcopal practices which, because of the "order and language of that Church being precomposed cannot be perverted." Such denominational cheerleading in the wake of the crisis revealed Dalcho's unhappiness with democratized church practices. Although his racial fears were typical of later southern spokesmen, in his uncertainties about post-Revolutionary democratic tendencies, Dalcho was not a mainstream antebellum proslavery ideologue. He departed from that tradition in his failure to assert that slavery was consistent with the nation's political heritage:

The celebration of the Fourth of July belongs exclusively to the white population of the United States. The American Revolution was a family quarrel among equals. . . . In our speeches and orations, much, and sometimes more than is
politically necessary is said about personal liberty, which Negro auditors know not how to apply, except by running parallel with their own condition.\textsuperscript{54}

Such was Dalcho's only comment on American democracy and individual liberty. He denounced the slave trade and admitted that he "would most readily apply the remedy [for slavery], if we knew what it was." These typical concessions aside, he showed none of Holland's interest in "the Republican form of government" and no Revolutionary hesitancy about the institution.\textsuperscript{55} Dalcho's proslavery cause was limited. He sought only to demonstrate the safety of his church as a means of converting the slaves and, secondarily, advance the old truism that "slavery is not incompatible with the principles and profession of Christianity." Steeped as he was in racial and Biblical traditions, Dalcho did not see why slavery was an issue of great concern.\textsuperscript{56}

Dalcho's conservatism was implicit. That could not be said of the last important Charlestonian to join in the opening flurry of proslavery publishing. Edward Brown's \textit{Notes on the Origin and Necessity of Slavery} (1826) was provoked by neither religious conservatism nor the Vesey crisis but rather by his personal politics and intellectual interests. Brown's proslavery was more idiosyncratic and transitional than Holland's and Dalcho's, and historically more important. Holland, in the Revolutionary tradition, had nothing good to
say about the institution of slavery and borrowed on proslavery traditions primarily for racial arguments and justifications for southern conduct. Dalcho, more comfortable with hierarchical arguments, glossed over the social meaning of southern slavery. He could not explain how the traditionalism so dear to him might apply in the American case. Brown shared this conservative dilemma but offered a solution. He tried to find new grounds for proslavery and the use of the master-slave relation as a model for general social stratification.

As his new heuristic tool and the impetus for his proslavery argument Brown employed the emerging science of political economy.57 Like Dalcho, Brown’s connection to England was close, and he was steeped in Malthus. He was also locked into the three-tier English class structure and had a tin ear for American politics and little familiarity with slavery in the South.58 In the end, he failed to derive from the ideas of Ricardo, Malthus, and Adam Smith a compelling or accurate picture of the development of American slavery, society, and politics. That would be the contribution of Thomas R. Dew six years later. Brown was not influential, but he anticipated the course of southern ideological development. He and other American enthusiasts were impressed not by the figures, nexuses, calculations and laws of political economics but by the particular authority with which they could be made to support moral and social conclusions. The new science was
enlisted in various causes; Brown was only one of the southerners excited by it in the 1820s. Political economy became fashionable in the colleges at this time and was quickly turned on slavery, usually to show its unprofitability when compared to free labor. Brown, in contrast, concluded that the new science indicated the necessity of old social forms. Although he drew on Whitemarsh Seabrook's shorter pamphlet from the previous year, Brown was the first southerner (although somewhat lukewarm and unsophisticated when compared with later antebellum intellectuals) to try to construct such an argument and combine it with conventional Biblical proslavery.

The arguments Brown advanced in 1826, although never taken up by later apologists, are worthy of study. Like New England conservatives, he held as an axiom that "the division of mankind into grades and the mutual dependence and relations which result from them constitute the very soul of civilization." In his gallimaufrous style, Brown conflated this doctrine with the division of labor principle. His use of Smith and praise for middle class society were perhaps coherent in an English context (and in the British proslavery from which he borrowed), but his application of British social theory to America was hard to sustain. With Malthus, Brown believed that laborers must be kept at dependence wages. With such wages as "keep laborers sober and honest no longer existing," Brown claimed, "they will rush headlong to the
gratification of their passions." How then to guarantee dependence wages in America, where wages were high? The answer: slavery would eliminate the dangers of an over-paid laboring class.

Brown thought one needed "slavery in a country where wages are high, on the principle that exorbitant wages give power to the laborer . . . . this tending to produce perfect equality, which is destructive." Not even the most reactionary cranks used political economics in this way in the 1850s. Some antebellum conservative intellectuals developed instead a proslavery argument from the *immiseration* of laborers. Subject to the inhumane demands of profit maximization, wage laborers, it was claimed, lived under a brutal, unacknowledged form of slavery. In contrast, southern slavery was described as a god-given moral imperative which guaranteed security to laborers and guarded against social chaos. Brown's argument did not contradict this position, but his belief that slavery was a check on the pernicious effect of high wages was never a popular formulation. Antebellum Americans, generally, did not glory in the negative Malthusian checks, which evangelicals called the "blighting hand of Providence," except as they pointed to the moral restraint that could prevent calamities. Brown's views were more in sympathy with upper-class British beliefs in a retributive economy and denials of the possibility of economic growth, forms of intellectual pessimism rejected even by
southerners who feared growth, to say nothing of evangelicals.\textsuperscript{68}

Brown is a curious footnote in the development of intellectual proslavery: he anticipates both Dew's use of economics in a popular context and latter elitist arguments for a conservative social order, yet his work lacks depth and influence. He looked to bygone social forms (and to Europe) rather than at the society at hand.

Not so Richard Furman, whose \textit{Exposition of the Views of Baptists} (1823) was the most important proslavery statement to come out of Charleston in the 1820s. Another precursor of the popular moral defense of slaveholding in the Old South, Furman's argument gave form to the long implicit reconciliation of slavery with the Revolutionary heritage. Like Dalcho, Baptist minister Furman (1755-1825) wrote in order to propagate his denomination's views and to reassure Charleston's leaders that Christians could be counted on to support slavery despite the religiously inspired Vesey plot. Furman was a slaveholder and a central figure in the Baptist movement in the South.\textsuperscript{69} Evangelicals like Furman had more explaining to do than Dalcho's Episcopalians. The Baptist and Methodist churches had far more black communicants than any other group and so were more likely to be associated with the "African christians" of the conspiracy. Furman's views, solicited by Governor John L. Wilson, appeared in pamphlet form before Dalcho's.\textsuperscript{70}
The peculiar and local Charleston circumstances that prompted Furman's *Exposition* guaranteed that his pamphlet—like other proslavery documents of the time and place—would be without a wide audience and would address some concerns that did not appear in the later antebellum tidal wave of defenses. Tension between populist evangelicals and the governing elite had largely diminished in the South as a whole by 1823 and would dissolve altogether after the 1830s, but the old frictions were still of consequence in Charleston when Furman issued his pamphlet. Sensitive to the sore spots of his dual audience, Furman occasionally subjugated issues of morality and policy to the civil authority. This move involved some hedging, as ever fewer southern evangelicals could agree that slavery was a purely civil concern. Evangelicals were increasingly reluctant to concede moral authority to the government as God's representative on earth or maintain that the spirituality of the church removed political questions from the perview of church members or ministers. Standards of right conduct and social, political, and religious organization were increasingly judged by the degree to which they originated from and were conducive to the actions of autonomous individuals. Furman's arguments for slavery mostly reflected this trend, which was the logical conclusion of evangelical and Revolutionary accommodations with slaveholding.
Many of Furman's statements offer the first formal glimpse of arguments proslavery spokesmen would repeat and elaborate on after 1830. The morality of slaveholding, for example, was a dominant concern of both Furman's work and that of the antebellum era generally. He said he wrote to show that the "Providence of God" had saved Charleston from the slave revolt and needed to be "acknowledged for the future protection of the city," and to put forth "the moral and religious view" of slaveholding to "the satisfaction of scrupulous consciences." The necessary evil defense was inadmissible on these terms. "To pious minds," Furman reported, "it has given pain to hear men, respectable for intelligence and morals, sometimes say that holding slaves is indeed indefensible, but that it is necessary and must be supported. . . . on this principle mere politicians, unmindful of morals may act." Realizing that a less compromising ground was needed for scrupulous consciences, Furman was forthright in his insistence that a master might hold slaves "according to Christian principle" and that evil attached to slavery only through "the individual who abuses his authority." This dissolution of the meaning of institutions into the discreet acts and circumstances of individuals became more pronounced in antebellum proslavery. The moral code of the New Testament justified preoccupation with personal intent. Traditional Biblical arguments focused on the sanction of slavery as a social
arrangement. Furman paid more attention to duty under specific circumstances than to generalized roles. The difference between the two approaches was exemplified in Furman’s treatment of the Golden Rule. If the New Testament were to be interpreted in support of slavery, that doctrine had to be rendered equivocal. The traditional way of accomplishing this was to insist that the Golden Rule never applied to what Furman called "the order of things" or to assigned social status.\textsuperscript{77} The meaning of the "others" one was "to do unto" lay in social categories. A master was to do to slaves "what were he a slave (he) could consistently wish to be done to himself (as a slave)."\textsuperscript{78} This linguistic shell game was a traditional and antebellum southern favorite.

Yet Furman’s particular attention to the Golden Rule was new to proslavery. His essay demonstrated how, before its clash with perfectionist abolitionism, evangelical moral language required that the question of slavery must be worked out by southerners, especially by Christian slaveholders, within the framework of an individual ethic. Evangelicals saw slavery as a relation between morally responsible agents. "Though they are slaves," Furman wrote, "they are also men: and are with ourselves accountable."\textsuperscript{79} This was no boon to slaves, regardless of its theoretical advance in recognition of their humanity, for to white minds it saddled slaves with the burden of the institution. Furman’s application of the Golden Rule was a case in point. He believed that "our
desires do [should] not become a standard to us." In other words, it might be generous for a master to free his slaves and natural for a slave to want freedom, just as felons, children, poor farmers, even proslavery ministers would like others to make their lives easier, but such desires did not constitute a rule that placed obligation on others. On the contrary, people were responsible for bearing their own burdens. They should not seek after "comfort or to mitigate the inconveniences of life" except when comfort came from curbing desire, facing responsibilities, and building moral character.

Antebellum southern whites—even the nonreligious—did not describe comforts and advantages as such. For them, what might appear to the envious and ignorant poor as the blessings of arbitrary fortunes were in fact the natural outcomes of virtue. The good man should no more revel in them than he would in the correct answer to a mathematical problem. Slaves and opponents of slavery would do well to stop bellyaching and work out their own salvations with the materials afforded them by Providence, which was all their masters had done. Furman and a host of antebellum southerners countered antislavery applications of the Golden Rule by saying in effect that "if I were a slave I would not expect my master to free me." In other words, "do unto your neighbor as he would have done unto him, if he knew what he should and might reasonably want done." In making this argument, southern evangelicals were
not simply offering a cynical paradigm for Christian slaves but were stating the evangelical understanding of human action quite apart from the slavery issue. The evangelical project involved the denial of personal desire and the discernment of the divine will for their every action. Evangelicals—ministers in particular—tried to convince themselves that this was the basis of all their conduct. Their prayer was "thy, not my, will be done."

Why should not slaves be expected to do the same (and be faulted in so far as they did not)? It might be natural to assume that the ruling race stressed the rewards of renunciation of gain and acceptance of the rigors of labor only when they needed to justify keeping slaves in their place, but it should be said—in noting the deadly seriousness and commitment behind the seemingly most outrageous proslavery arguments—that evangelical spokesmen often took a similar approach to their own positions in the moral and political economy. Proslavery minister Basil Manly made a characteristic comment in his diary that it seemed "a prodigious slavery to be a pastor of a city church these days," and James Henley Thornwell made a similar comment in a private letter:

It (his divinity school job) is to me a dungeon, and I go to its duties like a slave whipped to his burden. Nothing keeps me there but the fact that God's Providence has put me there, and I am Afraid
to leave without some marked intimation of the Divine will. Perhaps a day of greater usefulness may come; or perhaps the Almighty may open a way for my escape.”

Not suprisingly, neither Thornwell nor Furman thought they were obligated to release their slaves.

Furman’s Exposition gives some of the first signs that evangelicals were forming an ideology of slavery consonant with their religious individualism and views of moral obligation. His ideas were unoriginal, but their context and the energy with which they were expounded were new. Furman was working toward the "moral and religious view" of the issue that would complement southern views on individualism and freedom. Two unique features of proslavery in the Old South were that many defenders of slavery defined the institution in contractual terms, and that a majority thought slavery would end naturally at some point.” Their arguments were the result of their defining of slavery as a relation between morally responsible beings and, as such, a valid byproduct of democratic development.

Despite his unique situation, Furman anticipated these positions. Furman was writing before abolitionist criticism and mostly for conservative Charlestonians, and he was willing to appeal to traditional visions of slavery and the plantation as a "little community." Yet the models of voluntary society and abstract freedom of individuals were already appearing in
Furman’s *Exposition*. According to Furman, slavery achieved what was accomplished "in a free community, by taxes, benevolent institutions, bettering houses, and penitentiaries." He granted that no one had a right to enslave another man, but pointed out that a man may "be divested of it [liberty] by his own consent, directly or indirectly given." Furman’s definition of freedom made blacks responsible for their own condition: "While men remain in the chains of ignorance, terror and under the dominion of tyrant passions they cannot be free." His high-minded constructions, which would become rallying cries for antebellum evangelicals, had the effect of making blacks, as accountable beings and potential owners of moral power, responsible for their own enslavement. If men had put themselves in such a state, then they could take themselves out. "When Africans in our country might be found qualified to enjoy freedom," Furman claimed he would be "happy in seeing them free."

These banal apologetics had departed from established proslavery logic. Traditional hierarchical ideals were not critical to these newer formulations or to their appeal. The historical proslavery canon informed confident southern stances in a vague generalized way and the very structure of slavery forced some common conclusions, but antebellum proslavery ideology had its roots outside the tradition. Furman had no coherent ideological framework. He represented,
rather, the development of a cluster of ideas, attitudes and events that were coalescing in the period of adjustment between 1790 and 1831.
NOTES


2. Tise, Proslavery, 97-103, 122.


6. C.C. Goen, Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schisms and the Coming of the American Civil War (Macon: Mercer University Press: 1985), 105-7 and passim.


Slavery (Washington: William M. Morrion, 1841), 56. James Henley Thornwell, Rights and Duties of Masters (Charleston: Steam-power Press of Walker and James, 1850), 17; Thornwell here commented that defenses of slavery "in their abstract forms can be characterized as little less than monstrous."


34. Reprinted in Moore, History, 251-6.

35. Moore, 88.


37. [Theodore Parsons and Eliphalet Pearson], A Forensic Dispute on the Legality of Enslaving Africans (Boston: John Boyle, 1773), 8.

38. Tise, Proslavery, 41-56, 204-38.


40. Tise, Proslavery, 41-54.

42. Ingersoll, *Inchquin*, 106.


47. [Edwin Clifford Holland], *A Refutation of the Calumnies Circulated against the Southern and Western states . . .* by a South Carolinian, (Charleston: A.E. Miller, 1822), 27.


52. Frederick Dalcho, *Practical Considerations Founded on Scripture, Relative to the Slave Population of South Carolina* (Charleston: A.E. Miller, 1823), 5, 20-21 and passim.


60. [Whitemarsh Seabrook], A Concise View of the Critical Situation and Future Prospects of the Slaveholding States (Charleston: A.E. Miller, 1825).


64. Brown, 30.


76. Furman, 8, 9.

77. Furman, 9.

78. Furman, 10.

79. Furman, 16.

80. Furman, 9.


86. Furman, 14-5.
CHAPTER FOUR

The Role of Evangelicalism in the Emergence
Antebellum Proslavery, 1751-1846

Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed. And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren, but rather do them service; they are faithful and beloved partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort.

1 Timothy 6:1-5

The existence of dutiful Christian slaveholders was crucial to Richard Furman's reasoning. His arguments from this premise in 1823 were similar to those expressed in a private letter defending his own slaveholding to critics in his denomination in 1807. The Exposition was in this context merely the first formal revelation of a process that evangelicals had been involved in for years: the conversion of slaveholding society. This process led to a new kind of proslavery. Two important groups in the South participated in the evolution of evangelical proslavery. First was the conversion and evangelization of southerners who owned slaves, believed slavery to be right, or simply accepted it as an unquestioned social reality. These southerners were given a strong moral language with which to express their views, a powerful sense of self-affirmation, and often a sense that
they were accepted by God.\textsuperscript{2} Second was the conversion of evangelicals, including ministers from outside the South, to the possibility and potential of Christian slaveholding.\textsuperscript{3}

Southern evangelicals in the mid-eighteenth century were largely outside the political and religious establishment and so associated slavery with the worldly corruptions of the upper class. Their three denominations—Presbyterian, Baptist, and proto-Methodist—were often opposed to slavery during the period.\textsuperscript{4} Classification of their position on slavery is a semantic matter: evangelicals were hostile to slavery insofar as they saw it as a bar to Christian profession. This last issue was the only pro or anti stance with which they were consistently concerned.\textsuperscript{5} As the cultural barriers between them and slaveholders came down—as slaveholders and slaves displayed the signs of ecstatic conversion evangelicals revered and as evangelicals gained social prominence\textsuperscript{6}—denominational strictures and individual minister’s antislavery statements abated.

Historians have made too much of these developments: at these two points might arise accusations of compromise and corruption, which always make for good theater. The Methodist General Conference, for instance, unambiguously backed off from its 1784 Discipline rule against slaveholding,\textsuperscript{7} and some leading evangelists confessed to their diaries that they soft-pedalled anti-slavery attitudes in order to have access to souls on plantations.\textsuperscript{8} We see this story now as fascinating
and tragic, but it was not the only story. Most evangelicals
stuck to spreading the gospel. The phasing out of antislavery
sentiment rarely involved a conscious decision. Slavery did
not so much bring something new and corrupting to
evangelicalism as evangelicalism brought something new to the
South.

As slaveholders seized the evangelical message and
antislavery ministers found the institution did not bar the
way to conversions, and even found themselves holding slaves,
the evangelical rationale for criticism of slavery dissolved.
Leaders troubled by slavery were increasingly outnumbered and
answered in their own tones. When Thomas Coke, antislavery
spokesman and John Wesley's representative in America, brought
the Methodist rule against slavery to his co-religionists in
Virginia in 1785, he met a near universal rebuff, the
intensity of which startled him. Southern ministers John
Leland and David Barrow helped the Baptist General Committee
of 1790 draft a straightforward statement on the "horrid evil"
of slavery and asked that legislative action be taken against
it. Regional Baptist churches reacted like Coke's Virginia
Methodists. By the first decade of the nineteenth century few
Baptists in the South questioned slavery at all.

More important than dramatic confrontations between
antislavery clerics and lay converts were the vastly more
numerous instances of proslavery ministers who preached to
southern proslavery choirs. George Whitefield dominated the
Great Awakening with his evangelical message; his 1751 espousal of slavery for Georgia was not as well-known. He thought that settling of the colony with slave labor, an obvious necessity, would provide an opportunity to Christianize blacks, which would make them better servants. Samuel Davies, credited with Presbyterian growth in the South during the Great Awakening, accepted slavery in Virginia. Davies had a more subtle understanding of the implications of Christian slavery than Whitefield; the slave conversions he had won impressed him with the compatibility of slavery and a liberating gospel message. Deveraux Jarratt, who advanced the cause of southern Methodism during the same period, himself remained an Anglican because of the Methodist rule against slavery. He was one of many Virginia evangelicals who took issue with Coke when he came to the South. Jarratt looked forward to the end of slavery "as soon it may be consistent with public and private utility," but he would not pronounce it contrary to Christian principle, as he was convinced such a position would contradict the Word of God—a popular stance in the Old South.

Unlike these great originators of the evangelical movement, Francis Asbury did not support slavery, but he became reconciled to it in much the same way as Davies. Asbury was "deeply affected" by black conversions at Methodist meetings after he came over from Britain and then became Bishop for the newly established American sect in 1784.
the Virginia Methodist Conference of 1809 Asbury made his famous statement that the ameliorating of the condition of slaves through conversion would be wiser and do more "practical good" than would pushing for emancipation. His remark has been taken as the unmasking of a racist, a sell-out, a cowardly retreat. The import of this confession to his diary has been exaggerated.\textsuperscript{18} It shows only that over twenty-five years of experience, Asbury had concluded that slavery did not confound or corrupt evangelicalism.\textsuperscript{19} By 1809 this was his tacit assumption about the institution. He realized that evangelical growth did not imply antislavery, particularly in the South where "Methodists, Baptists and Presbyterians in the highest flights of rapturous piety still maintain and defend it." The piety of proslavery whites was not as "affecting" as that of slaves, but Asbury seems neither to have questioned it nor considered it incomplete.\textsuperscript{20}

The Presbyterian General Assembly made the first overt recognition of slaveholder piety in 1797 when the session voted on the issue of slavery. As recorded by David Rice, a leading anti-slavery minister in Virginia and Kentucky, the Assembly determined in its vote:

Is slavery a moral evil?
Yes.
Are all who hold slaves guilty of moral evil?
Negative.\textsuperscript{21}
It is important to understand that this position on slavery was never really abandoned in the South. Proslavery emerged in the nineteenth century as the burden of argument and the ideological and intellectual climate shifted to the second question—the status of individual slaveholders. Power was increasingly seen to flow from the moral organization of individuals. If slaveholding were not a moral evil in special circumstances, the first question—the status of the system and its power to corrupt individuals—lost its original (or potential) force. In subsequent discussions of slavery, the condemnation of the institution as a whole became an abstract concession not relevant to American "circumstances."

The evolution of the official Methodist Discipline on slavery followed the same lines. It moved from an attempt at a general condemnation of the institution of slavery with an accompanying rule of faith that Methodists must not hold slaves (amended by a delay to study the "expedience" of this act) in 1784, to the dissolution of the view of slavery as an institution and the denomination's systematic approach to the question (and not coincidentally the very power of the Methodist Conference itself) in the 1808 rule that let local bodies "form [their] own regulations." Slavery and thought about slavery were decentralized. Individuals were conceded the power to determine and shape the meaning of the social system in which they were enmeshed. On a purely contextual and structural level divorced from the specific
issue, this shift between 1784 and 1808 was in tune with the general form of ideological and institutional adjustment growing out of the Revolution.

Of course, slavery was a very specific issue and the Methodist stance, like the clearer Presbyterian position, had the effect of lifting the onus of critiques of the institution by admitting there were cases—or, as the 1796 Discipline said, "circumstances"—in which Christians rightfully held slaves. The system of slavery supposedly had no power that compared to the apriori and formative one of moral individuals and was described by the next generation as a function of this force. The ultimate implications of this cognitive adjustment were expressed in Methodist parson William Brownlow's popular defense of slavery in the 1850s: "bad men abuse negroes, good men do not and in all cases, the abuse arises from the character and disposition of the master; and not from the system."25

In the 1840s Presbyterian scholar and minister Nathan Rice's proslavery stance showed the same roots and even more explicit inability or refusal even to think in terms of institutional power. "It is common nowadays to declaim against 'the system of American slavery.' ... I confess myself unable to understand precisely what is meant by this phrase. It is not at all clear to my mind that there is any such thing as a system of American slavery ... [It] relates exclusively to individuals."26
Nathan Rice maintained he was teaching the same doctrine as his antislavery Kentucky forbearer, David Rice. Nathan in the 1840s claimed that the Synod of Kentucky and David Rice in his 1792 *Slavery Inconsistent with Justice and Good Policy* had criticized "what is called the system of slavery" and that he agreed with the critique in so far as any such thing existed.\(^{27}\) Despite the evolution of ideas over two generations (and chasm in spirit) that separated the two Rices, there was some practical truth in Nathan Rice's claim. David Rice's antislavery rhetoric had been aimed primarily at the state constitutional convention in 1792, urging them to do away with slavery because "slavery naturally tends to sap the foundations of moral and consequently political virtue ... [and the] prosperity of a free people."\(^{28}\) Disapproval of slavery at this abstract level had not induced Rice to free his own slaves, even in his will, which was executed in 1816. Rice accepted the 1797 General Assembly rule defending certain slaveholders and thus became an example for later southerners of slaveholding on Christian principle.\(^{29}\)

The gap between Revolutionary-era ministers and defenders of slavery in the 1840s is easy to exaggerate when exceptional figures like Francis Asbury and David Rice are the point of comparison. When even these men made an accommodation to American slavery, it is hardly surprising that there was a more widespread and less equivocal acceptance of slaveholding in their own time, and also modifications of evangelicals'
vague antislavery stances during the first decades of the nineteenth century.

It was hard for ministers who participated in the rapid evangelicalization of the South after 1801 to sustain Rice's fears that slavery would drain the foundations of moral virtue in the region. This was especially true when they could point to religious figures like Rice and politicians like Jefferson who made such critiques in the abstract, but did not think the holding of slaves would sap their own virtue. There was apparently a right way to hold slaves, a kind of man with a fund of virtue that could not be sapped by threatening surroundings or social roles, or so concluded a generation of ministers after 1801, many of whom, like Nathan Rice, led the defense of slaveholders in the 1830s and 1840s.

Northern Ministers in the South Supporting Slaveholding, 1801-1846

William Winans (1788-1857) was one of many evangelicals raised in the North who became leaders of churches in the South and advanced such arguments in support of slaveholding. Winans was Pennsylvania born and went to Mississippi in 1810 to be a Methodist circuit rider. Winans's private writings, like Richard Furman's in 1807 and Francis Asbury's in 1809, give a glimpse into the evolution of a new defense of slaveholding in a period with few formal defenses of the institution. Winans, like Asbury, had been deeply impressed
by the conversion experiences of blacks, but, unlike Asbury, he became a slaveholder himself. Originally Winans achieved this station because his wife held slaves. Ministers who made lucrative marriage alliances with planters' daughters were commonplace in the antebellum period, and this way of being first involved in slaveholding was important. Slaves, for these ministers, seemed naturally to come to them in the course of things as an outgrowth of the selfless acts of falling in love, successfully spreading the gospel, or gathering a flock. Whether ministers became slaveholders through marriage or inheritance, the occurrences reinforced their predilection to see material benefits as bestowed, not sought. They then tended to qualify antislavery or to describe slaveholding in the South in these terms. Winans like most defenders of slavery believed God had "put" slaves in his hands. The purpose he thought was to train them for "self-dependence and self-government."

Because Winans had to explain his slaveholding to his family in Ohio in 1820, he provides a more conscious explanation of this process than southern evangelicals for whom slaveholding would often be a familiar act, even when they did not engage in or disapproved of it. Winans' letters in response to his brother's disgust with his engaging in slaveholding were very like the Presbyterian General Assembly's vote on similar questions in 1797. Winans recorded
an imaginary dialogue, presenting his brother's objecting questions and his own answers:

1.) "Shall we make slaves of the Negro?"
   "I would spill my blood in supporting the negative."

2.) "Shall we retain them in slavery when it is in our power to make them free?"
   "No!"
   "May a Christian hold them?"
   I answer, "Why not?"

Winans explained that the Christian "does real service to those Negroes he purchases from unbelieving masters" and "may I believe keep a good conscience while he participates in this misfortune of our country." Although Winans was an early and vocal opponent of abolitionism in the Methodist Conference, he was always a colonizationist rather than a proslavery publicist. He did think slavery was a curse, but much more clearly than Rice or Asbury he was trying in 1820 to describe and defend an evangelical form of slaveholding.

Similar private writings by Heman Packard, a Presbyterian originally from Massachusetts, show how converted slaveholders became evidence against the curse of slavery. Packard also came South to the Gulf states, in his case Louisiana, to start a ministry. The explanation for the movement of northern-born ministers to the South in this period is no mystery. Massachusetts in particular had both a general out-migration
of young men and a specific tradition of training young men to the ministry, and the South had a comparatively weak religious heritage but a tremendous expansion after the Great Revival of 1801. In addition, in this period the Gulf Coast towns particularly had money to set up churches and attract ministers. While Baptists and Methodists could easily raise up ministers from the local lads who had the call and could support themselves as farmer preachers, Presbyterians had both stricter qualifications for the ministry and usually the wealth (and social ambition) to arrange for trained leaders.\(^34\) Young ministers like Packard naturally and often quickly identified with the region whose growth—religious and otherwise—supported them.\(^35\)

Packard did not become a slaveholder, but like Winans he did have to answer questions about his connection to slavery. Ministers routinely wrote letters of recommendation for church members who moved and wanted to join churches in their new areas. Packard wrote such a letter for a member of his New Orleans church to the North Bridgewater Presbyterian Church in his old home of Massachusetts. He, like Winans responding to his family, had to answer reservations about slavery and the church before North Bridgewater would accept the New Orleans migrant as a member in good standing of an acceptable congregation. Packard’s replies to the formal queries showed a characteristic proslavery unwillingness to take moral concerns past the status of individuals:
2.) Is the New Orleans church a slaveholding church?
Ans: As a church it is not. The sexton and organ blower are free white hired.
3.) Is it composed of slaveholders?
Ans: In part. Some hold slaves, others do not.
4.) Are they slaveholders from choice?
Ans: Some of them are and others I think are not.
5.) Do they think American slavery right?
6.) Consistent with Christian principle?
Ans: One [slaveholder] thinks it an evil and wishes it done away. Another gives thanks ours is not a religion of emancipation but a religion that teaches the duties of servants to their masters.\textsuperscript{36}

Packard then described his communing with slaveholders as the justification for accepting southern social arrangements:
The holy spirit is evidently present. The table of the Lord is spread. I sit down and feel that it is good to be there. The Great head of the Church knows all the abominations of slavery without possibility of mistake, and he knows just what he does when he communes with and blesses slaveholders.\textsuperscript{37}

Packard was not ready to make this an argument in favor of slavery, but most of the basis for such a redefinition was already implicit in his stance. If converted slaveholders or
ones "on Christian principle"—such as Winans believed himself to be—were seen as the rule rather than an exception within a accursed system, then southern slavery could appear and be presented in a positive light for early nineteenth-century northern emigres, let alone southern evangelicals.

It did and was. Neither a critique of nor reservations about slavery were noticeable in Theodore Clapp's encounter with southern society. Clapp went to New Orleans in 1821 to take over the Glebe Street Strangers Church. He was a Unitarian and democratic optimist from Massachusetts and wrote one of the first proslavery arguments in the 1830s.38 Another of the earliest proslavery statements to come out of the South was written by Charles Farley, also a Unitarian from Massachusetts who came South—in Farely's case to Richmond, Virginia.39 Ministers like Clapp and Farley who were informed of the most current trends in moral science and in social theodicies and rationalizations from educational and urban centers of the North (and England) often had an advantage in composing theoretic defenses of slavery in a democratic milieu. Liberal theology and progressive social philosophy were not an impediment to proslavery.40

In fact, Clapp in the 1820s (and Farley by 1830) made a much more complete reconciliation with slavery than Packard, Winans, or even Furman. Clapp did not become a slaveholder, but when he came down the Mississippi by steamboat in 1821, he was overwhelmed by the Christian virtue of slaveholders.
Clapp, unlike Packard or Winans, did not come from a denomination with an antislavery tradition (although he was raised a Congregationalist, he cannot be given a denominational label at all) and had little sense of sin. Christian profession in masters, combined with his faith in America's inexorable progressive mission, was enough of a sign to Clapp that the South was on an untroubled path to "moral excellence" and "improvement." Louisiana, for Clapp, was a place where "true religion reigns and flourishes." In 1822 he met one of his first Louisiana slaveholders and recorded that "a more pious, upright, self-denying, humble, generous man never lived." He thought it was a shame that such a man was ignored as a national hero because he was a southerner, and Clapp asked, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" This particular slaveholder gave money to Clapp's philanthropic and church endeavors.

When Clapp defended slavery fourteen years later, he emphasized that "we read in the book of Genesis that God showed his approbation of Abraham's character and conduct by raising him to an extraordinary degree of temporal prosperity." God "gave" slaves to Abraham for this reason, which showed, for Clapp, "God dealing in slaves." This was a more ideologized version of Parson Winans description of how he had originally been connected with the institution when slaves were bestowed on him. Clapp's fellow Unitarian and even earlier proslavery publicist, Charles Farely, similarly
explained how Christians could continue to participate in slaveholding with a good conscience. Winans had given the example of purchasing slaves from "unbelieving masters" with the intention of improving their condition. Farley took this as the model of how most slaveholding actually came about in the South and would continue, through "the righteous motives of individuals," particularly "Christian philanthropists" of "foresight," who could anticipate how God intended to bring future good out of evils. Such foresight was, in Farley's and other evangelicals' views, a duty dictated by improved moral and religious sense and knowledge. Slaveholding through the slave trade may have been originated for evil reasons, but "circumstances alter cases—and the thing which today is sin, becomes at some future time virtue. Slavery might be sin in the sixteenth century in this country and its existence a moral obligation in the nineteenth."'

Farley (and Winans) anticipated arguments to be applied more widely and fully by later proslavery southerners. This position concerning the modification of moral rules and duties by historical and individual "circumstances" was taken by almost every evangelical defender of slavery, including Old School Presbyterians like James Henley Thornwell. Moral precepts which were held not to have been given in scripture—such as "men should not hold other men in slavery" or "parents should not strike their children"—were not moral imperatives. Depending on who was hitting a child or holding a slave or
going to war and why, the act was not only justified but would have beneficial results. This was why James Henley Thornwell warned that "Good and evil it should never be forgotten are relative terms." The character of the man involved determined how the rule or duty applied. For men of inferior character in the seventeenth or eighteenth century or men who were "neither Protestants nor Americans," the abstract condemnation of slavery applied. Nineteenth-century Americans of foresight and moral sense, however, controlled themselves and thereby controlled their surroundings. The meaning and consequences of their actions were not dictated by forces outside themselves, to which they had to adjust or conform. Slaveholding in short would not corrupt them; in fact they had the power to determine what slavery would become, even though, in the abstract rule of right, slavery was an evil.

In this vein, Kentucky Baptist minister William Buck described in 1849 the origin of American slavery and the slave trade: "we can but think it is perfectly compatible with the purity and benevolence of God that from the beginning, he should have intended it for good, notwithstanding that wicked men have originated it and intended it for evil." These were "men wholly uninfluenced by moral or religious impulses" and were thus "selfish" and "justly chargeable with moral wrong. . . . God may and we believe will over-rule slavery, even in the hands of such moral monsters to his glory, in the social and moral elevation of the slaves." Such slaveholders and
traders could in "no sense appeal to the example of scriptures for justification." But the important point, as for Farley, Winans, and Packard, was "that there is another class of slaveholders":

Christians . . . . who hope for the time when slaves in this country shall be so advanced in the arts, in sciences, and religion as to be perfectly capable of self-government.

In 1849 the Kentucky Baptist felt "confident that there are countless thousands of slaveholders in this country who hold slaves in fear of God." 

Southern Evangelicalism and Support of Slaveholding 1801–

If northern ministers who came South during the relatively quiescent period for proslavery between 1801 and 1831 arrived at conclusions similar to William Buck's, it is hardly surprising that southern evangelicals produced similar and stronger arguments after 1831. Winans, Packard, and Clapp may have come to their justifying of slavery by being convinced of the possibility of righteous slaveholders, but many southern slaveholders and their implied supporters had a much more direct route to the sacralizing of slavery in the same period: they were converted to a sense of their own righteousness. The waves of revivals across the South between 1801 and 1831 became a tacit argument in favor of slavery.
Many southerners experienced consciousness of election through conversion in religious revivals. The conversion experience—the moment of inner satisfaction that told a believer he was in direct communion with God—encouraged a strong regional identification since it was often fixed in time and place. It was this sense of power and elation in the grace of God that justified evangelicals and their worldly activities.\(^5^2\) How could God do anything other than approve of slaveholding since southerners held slaves, believed in slavery, or were immersed in such a society when God signally blessed and saved them? "Thousands and tens of thousands of slaveholders have made profession of the religion of Jesus Christ at the very time they owned slaves," one minister pointed out, adding, "the slaveholder gives all the proof that scripture requires of the change in his heart."\(^5^3\)

Many who experienced conversion and participated in revivals in the period of evangelization of the South were no more ready to doubt slavery than they were to doubt their own religious experience, especially when they could point to Biblical parallels to their experience and conduct. "There are Christians and Christian churches in the slaveholding states," reported Presbyterians in the Southern Christian Herald, "and they sometimes enjoy seasons of religious reviving from the presence of the Lord. But it is Scripture truth, that God does not answer the prayers and bless the
labors of men living in sin. He does hear and bless those involved in slaveholding."  

Before southerners came to defend slaveholding after 1831 as a condition "bestowed upon the virtuous," as one nonslaveholder described it, slaveholders had to be seen and see themselves as sharing in evangelical virtues. Often this presented no great difficulty, as ministers frequently held slaves. James Smyle, one of the first Biblical proslavery spokesmen in the 1830s, estimated that 75 percent of his fellow Presbyterian pastors held slaves in the region. He himself owned nearly thirty when he published his defense of slavery in 1836. Smyle's estimate was high, but more accurate counts of Baptist ministers put slaveholders at over 40 percent, and most ministers reported at least occasionally hiring slaves for work on their home and church grounds. They lived their proslavery arguments before they published them.

Ministers' views were easily put before the public not only in pulpits but in the religious press, which was in a period of surging growth between 1820 and the Civil War. The Methodist Christian Advocate was the largest newspaper in the world in 1830. Proslavery ministers were often editors of the regional newspapers and periodicals that sprung up as the slavery issue divided the major evangelical denominations by 1846. In isolated rural areas itinerant ministers were often the major source of information about the outside world
and the Bible was the source of the only abstract ideas many people in these areas encountered. It was indeed a book with passages whose literal meaning recognized slavery, especially when accompanied by clerical encouragement. Clergy were the most frequent defenders of slavery, and their role as cultural leaders and controllers of education secured wide audiences for their views and gave them an unrivaled power to shape moral discourse. Such men with day-to-day connections to slavery were enough to have guaranteed the symbiosis of power and piety promulgated in proslavery.

Yet the general conversion of slaveholders was vital to ensuring broad moral support for slavery, especially in the period before 1831 when evangelicalism was spreading and slaveholding losing its association with worldly, genteel society. A more unified culture insured unified support of slavery. Without such unity ministers and nonslaveholding evangelicals might have continued to see slavery as a threat or slaveholders on Christian principle as exceptions, and so have avoided publicly supporting slavery. As important, had there been no wave of revivals that penetrated the elites and brought evangelical culture and language to every level of southern society, the slaveholding and slaveholding-supporting public might not have expressed their commitment to slavery in contemporary, politically unthreatening terms. Many of the earliest and most vocal proslavery ministers did not hold slaves and retained suspicions of slavery that were overcome
by the presence of "Bible-worshipping" masters or master-worshipping Bible passages. Fred Ross, who freed his slaves before the antebellum period, argued that because of revivals, "the master's relation to God and to his slave is now wholly changed," and he believed the South "stands exactly in that nick of time and place, in the course of Providence, where wrong, in the transmission of African slavery ends, and right begins." Samuel Dunwoody, a nonslaveholding Methodist minister and one of the first of his denomination to publish a proslavery tract in the 1830s, also thought ill-will in masters was being "generally melted down before the sunshine of evangelical truth." Dunwoody typically held to a "general view of slavery" as "an evil" and assumed "god would bring lasting Good out of present evils." He, however, considered it a "syllogism" that "God as he is infinitely wise, just and holy never could authorize the practice of moral evil. But God has authorized the practice of slavery, not only by bare permission of his Providence, but by the express provision of his Word." This Biblical and historic fact did not justify the system: "we are willing to give it up as altogether indefensible, but that Christians may lawfully hold slaves, in some particular cases." God authorized only "the right of a Christian to own a servant, whom he invariably treats with kindness." Dunwoody added that "whenever we have followed
this plain scriptural course, success has generally crowned our efforts."\(^{66}\)

The successful scriptural course Dunwoody spoke of was that of denouncing slavery in the abstract and upholding it in particular cases—increasingly the particular case of the entire South. This course had been successful because the settlement of a consistent stance on slavery in the evangelical denominations had followed a similar path. It was also considered the scriptural verdict. God chose Abraham and "blessed him while he held slaves."\(^{67}\) In Luke 7, after curing the Centurion’s servant: "Our Savior commended a slaveholder as the best of men." Through the spread of evangelical profession and conversion in the South, ministers thought they again saw the savior commending and blessing righteous men who held slaves. When Paul spoke of "believing masters" in Timothy 4, it was further confirmation that this was a special case.\(^{68}\)

The South began to be accepted as a special case itself, as the model of the heretofore exceptional chosen master was seen and redefined as the rule. Slavery was supposedly being remade by the power and principle of the new evangelical men filling the South. Slavery remained an evil in the abstract, but, since special individuals could participate in it without evil, the South as a whole could be, as proslavery minister Joseph Wilson wrote in 1834, "a derivation from all common examples." In all common examples a system of slavery was
wrong; "American servitude," on the other hand, "was an anomaly." It was a short step from this early evangelical position to later religious and economic arguments that a system of slavery per se did not exist in the South at all. In a religious formulation it was "a peculiar condition of servitude, regulated by law, having no parallel in profane history, instituted by God." The peculiarity sprung—as in the circumstances and cases in denominational statements—from the perception of southerners that they were a peculiarly religious people, chosen and approved by God. This situation may not have had parallel in profane history; it did in the Bible.

Southern evangelicals often described the scriptural sanction as a "discovery" of the 1830s. Although they and others perceived a shift in their arguments on these grounds, this was the tail end of a process, rather than a leap in logic or attitude. Ministers, particularly nonslaveholding ones, had not appealed to a Biblical sanction of slavery on a regional basis—on the basis of a peculiar people rather than persons—until they began to perceive a society of converts or a converted society after a generation of evangelical growth and emerging cultural dominance. As this occurred, ministers who would defend slavery after the 1830s were converted to and often converted by scriptural evidence and sanctions that now seemed to describe the society they perceived (or fervently hoped they were creating). The
discovery of (or shift to) the biblical argument became possible as the Bible passages on slavery appeared in this new light.

Part of the discovery was rhetorical. The evolving approach to Bible reading and "searching the scriptures" adopted from the common sense school put an enormous emphasis on the language of discovery as a whole.74 Proslavery ministers put big store in the objectivity with which they approached any moral question.75 Long-standing Biblical arguments were often known or available. Simple appeals to authority and tradition, however, were not morally or intellectually satisfying to the evangelical personality. Calm individual searches of scripture--with reception in the heart and communication to the conscience--were. It was requisite to describe the truths perceived as discoveries. As the Bible contained a moral law applicable in all personal and historic circumstances, there were always new applications to be found. Evangelical moral philosophy encouraged ministers to locate biblical facts and match up all the physical and social facts they experienced with them. The psychology of such scriptural arguments illuminates a fundamental aspect of the evangelical's personality that applied in everyday situations. A nonslaveholding itinerant who defended slaveholders on Biblical grounds once became hungry while travelling between two churches. He noticed some bees and discovered the appropriate sanction: "Industrious creatures--
is it right to rob them? But I suppose they were made for the use of man? ....Our Savior a honeycomb did eat. Let everything have a Bible warrant!"76

More important than the rhetorical and psychological needs expressed in the discovery of the biblical sanction were the evangelicals' reading of scriptural examples in new contexts. Southern proslavery minsters did not find general institutional sanctions as had Saffin. The paucity of written defenses of slavery on Biblical grounds among evangelicals during the first fifty years of the Republic was rooted in their rejection of this older abstract proslavery stance. Evangelicals in the period avoided appeals to scripture on the slavery issue and were occasionally hostile to biblical proslavery (or denied the Bible supported slavery) because of its association with such hierarchical positions. In the 1830s, many evangelicals were still reluctant to invoke a Biblical warrant, believing they had already rejected such an argument. When Presbyterian James Smylie of Mississippi put out one of the first Biblical arguments of the 1830s, he "gave great offense" to other ministers and to his congregation by appearing to trot out the old abstract vindication. Smylie's view of patriarchy and the master-slave relation as a characteristic social organization were fairly traditional. The support Smylie found for them in the Bible was, likewise, comparatively unqualified.77 Most antebellum southerners were ready to swallow this retrograde argument neither whole
nor in this form. The more populist evangelicals were discovering and framing a Bible argument that was another matter. It grew from the scriptural sanction of individual cases of Christian slaveholding that had often been presented as exceptions at the turn of the century in evangelicals' otherwise hostile statements and attitudes about the system of slavery. Over a generation these exceptions had been turned into rule, and Bible passages were being explained in this context, in tune with an emergent moral style.

Ministers in the antebellum period could come to a defense of slavery through perception of new providential facts in the South, new institutionally innocent social ideologies, or examples of new readings of scripture. When the arguments were arranged to sanction the morally accountable actions of a peculiar people, rather than to justify an abstract social organization, biblical proslavery won many converts.

Evangelical defenders of slavery often gave just such a presentation of their move toward moral acceptance of slavery. Amasa Converse, born in Lyme, New Hampshire, moved South to become a leading editor of religious papers, such as the Southern Religious Telegraph, for Presbyterians. He prided himself on his "even temper and objectivity" and protection of "rights and liberties of the press."78 Although his was an extreme case of a shift in views on slavery, it was not unlike those recorded by many southern evangelicals:
In my youth I believed slaveholding was a sin per se; such was my view of it when a student of theology (1817), and I endeavored—in debate—to maintain the right of the slave to commit murder to regain his freedom. Some years later an examination of what scriptures teach on the subject convinced me that the doctrine was false and pernicious. ...The exercise of power becomes sinful only when abused in violation of the great law of love.⁷⁹

In their proslavery pamphlets southern defenders of slavery often provided more nebulous testimonies to the evolution of their views. Matthew Ewart remembered the time before 1830 in these terms:

I freely admit that I satisfactorily convinced myself, as to the fact that slavery is indeed and in truth a moral relation and humbly confess that I did not always think so; but searching scriptures brought me to a very different conclusion.⁸⁰

Southerners long committed to slavery could proclaim an ethical and exegetical version of their traditional attitudes and actions once these arguments and confessions were in circulation. Politicians were the segment of the southern population that continued a tradition of defending slavery as a positive good. They often reframed their social and political proslavery rhetoric and combined it with religious glosses. President John Tyler was more honest than most in
admitting the convenience of evangelical language of "moral character" and Providence for the non-evangelical advocates of slavery: "I sir, even I, do firmly, if not faithfully, intellectually, if not religiously, believe in a great and good over-ruuling special Providence . . . . Which justifies slavery itself, in the abstract, and has made me wonder and adore a gracious special Providence."81 Tyler's fellow politician and slaveholder Robert Barnwell Rhett, Sr., father of the famous fire-eater Robert Barnwell Rhett, Jr., was more typical in his claims to true conversion on the issue and his dropping abstract categories for individual ones. He sent Biblical proslavery pamphlets to his son and friends with this personal addendum to his conclusions after reading them:82

If slavery is contrary to Christianity, undoubtedly it should be abolished. If it is a sin to hold slaves in bondage, undoubtedly they should be liberated. Reviewing the word of God in all reverence, I cannot but believe that I am sinless, so far as my slaves are concerned, serving in my moral and religious accountability.83

This statement exemplifies the general and informal southern acceptance of slavery that had arrived by the 1830s. Rhett's conversion to an evangelical and moral explanation of his well-established commitment to slavery may have been the regional model. There were, however, still those in the South with true reservations about slavery and many more whose
commitments to slavery were accompanied by reservations. New grounds for the scriptural and moral argument (based on a special personal and regional relation to God) and ubiquitous attention to it provided a justification of southern society that could be presented as consistent with their evangelicals' and others' previous convictions and reservations about slavery.

Baptist minister Jeremiah Jeter accurately linked his personal turning point on the issue of slavery with the regional one. Jeter was born and brought up in the midst of slavery in rural Virginia at the beginning of the century. "Of the system of slavery," he remembered, "my early impressions were not favorable." Although he "grew up with a determination never to own a slave, ... whether slavery was right or wrong was a question which [he] did not consider." His views changed when he was engaged to marry "a lady who held slaves" and was faced with both a "practical question" and a moral dilemma. He found that none of the slaves wanted to go to Liberia and that he did not have the means to set them up in freedom. He also came across the popular Biblical proslavery arguments of fellow Baptist minister and Virginian Thronton Stringfellow and found the "scriptures were more favorable to slavery than I had been." He concluded that "slavery is not always right," but "under the circumstances" he had a "solemn obligation to hold and rule them for their interest and for my own."
Jeter explained the evolution of the regional proslavery commitment in the same terms. At the turn of the century "prevalent opinion in Virginia was not that slavery was in all cases sinful, but that the system ...was fraught with many evils, economical, social, political, and moral and should as soon as possible be abolished." Yet when individual and practical confrontations with the issue continually ran into "obstacles," the "more the matter was examined" over the first thirty years of the century, "the result was a marked change in public opinion.""85

T.R. Dew: Historicizing and Ideologizing the Moral Defense, 1832-

Although Jeter's Virginia was the site of Nat Turner's slave revolt and had an unusually strong antislavery tradition--both of which circumstances may have worked to make the shift in public opinion seem more marked, Jeter did not fix any date or event for the shift.86 His own move to a more confident and self-conscious stance came in the 1840s. His views and those he reported as prevalent at the beginning of the century opposed the abstract system of slavery. He correctly marked that Virginians and other southerners stopped thinking about slavery and social power in these institutional terms, but the time of this popular shift in emphasis--let alone of when it became a conscious argument--is not easy to pinpoint.
The turning point Jeter noticed on the issue of slavery has traditionally been identified as coming after 1831. There is no mystery in locating the emergence of proslavery ideology after this point. Both Turner's revolt in Southampton and William L. Garrison's launching of the *Liberator* and radical abolitionism took place in 1831. Following these events in the winter of 1831-32 the Virginia Legislature debated and rejected several plans of emancipation and colonization. In 1832 Thomas R. Dew (1802-1846) wrote his influential proslavery *Review of the Debate in the Virginia Legislature*. Despite the inevitable linking of the watershed events, Garrison was completely unknown to Turner and Dew. It was not until 1835, when abolitionists began a campaign to inundate the southern mails with antislavery literature, that proslavery publication took off. Although Dew's arguments were crucial in confirming and theorizing southern accommodation to slavery and were representative of future ideological trends, the events of 1832 did not push the region toward proslavery.

The year 1832 marked neither a turning point in southern opinion nor an opportunity for southerners to articulate (or appropriate) a long-standing proslavery argument imbedded in the South (or an intellectual tradition from elsewhere). The 1830s brought, and Dew's writing signalled, the growth of the national obsession with the unity of moral and material
progress, and of the ideological tools and activity to explain it in the South. 89

There was nothing inherently in favor of or opposed to slavery in these cultural and intellectual developments. The spread and development of (1) evangelical visions of individual virtue and power, (2) the astonishing economic transformations of the times, and (3) ideologies of moral and economic sciences occurred in both the North and South before and through the slavery debate. They brought a new era of antislavery, or, more accurately in the case of abolitionists, a new urgency to antislavery sentiment. 90 It was also primarily the ideology of moral and material progress and not the threat of abolitionism that conditioned and fueled proslavery fires. By the 1830s, convincing and attractive formulations of the connection between moral and material progress took on the guise of imperatives in both regions. Dew was one of the first to present proslavery in these terms and to raise the stakes on committing to the order of Providence in the South.

Dew equated the "moral and economic view" of the question of slavery and did so with authority. 91 His main fields of study at William and Mary--political economy, history, and moral philosophy (Dew was one of the only nonclerics to teach moral philosophy in the South 92)—were ideally attuned to the project. Dew was also a slaveholder from an old Virginia family. Just recently returned from Europe (1824-1826) and
just thirty, he was familiar with both American slavery and current social and intellectual developments.

The dismal science and moral science as they were developing by the 1830s gave unequivocal and unforgiving laws of duty and development, of moral and material necessity. Now, plans for emancipation and colonization, and southern slavery itself, either fell within the purview of these laws, or they did not. Dew rendered verdicts on these questions in the uncompromising tone of the evangelical pulpit on the consequences of sin. When dissecting emancipation, Dew found that "the evidence was not speculation in political economy--it was geometrical demonstration." 93 Plans in the Virginia legislature for colonization ran up against forces that "as sure as the moon in her transit" would render them ineffective. 94 It was "in both an economical and moral point of view, that," Dew held, "we cannot upon any principle of right or expediency give it [emancipation] our sanction." Dew employed potent intellectual and theoretical, as well as rhetorical, developments to support his linking of material and moral arguments.

Dew preached laissez-faire and Malthusianism. 95 Legislative schemes for colonization and emancipation were dismissed on the grounds of both unequivocal theories. The very idea of deliberating on schemes for dismantling the economy constituted a conceit in Dew's eyes. Any such plan would involve the "government entering into the market with
individuals" and tend to "destroy the great principle of responsibility" by interfering with property.\textsuperscript{96} Colonization plans and the Colonization Society in particular were puffing up a "little machinery and grandly proposing it as an engine."\textsuperscript{97} Attempts to buy slaves and transport them to Africa foundered on not only the tremendous cost (estimated at one hundred million dollars), but also the expanding slave population itself and the immutable "law of nature" that stood behind it. Malthus had shown the dangers of "tampering with the elastic and powerful spring of population."\textsuperscript{98} The removal of a large number of slaves would only increase social space and the rate of expansion of the black population. The result would be a drain of money and resources (the total value of which Dew put at two hundred and six million dollars in Virginia) to colonize slaves but not necessarily a decrease in slave population. The laws of population "would operate like the blighting hand of Providence," if not respected.\textsuperscript{99} The engine that mattered to Dew was "the great law of necessity ... about which it is utterly useless to argue." Slaves would be "only gradually emancipated through the operation of self-interest."\textsuperscript{100}

At first this largely negative argument for slavery seems to be only a dismal economic rather than a moral view. It was true that the first version of Dew's \textit{Review}, titled "The Abolition of Negro Slavery," published in the \textit{American Quarterly Review}, was heavily economic in emphasis. Dew,
however, even in that essay aligned his arguments with a Biblical and ethical view. In the subsequent versions of his Review, those that reached the southern public, he added moralism and Biblicism to help build proslavery optimism. This was crucial to the influence and appeal of the Review. Dew framed his political economics for a popular perspective and reached a wide audience, as the earlier South Carolina publicists, Whitemarsh Seabrook, Edward Brown, and Thomas Cooper had not. The laws of political economy were bleak and perhaps pointed to a social crisis as well as to the end of slavery, when immiserated labor would became a cheaper alternative to slaves.\textsuperscript{101} Dew himself in his later academic writing speculated on how enslaved laborers and a more permanent slave society might be the only bulwark against this brutal and socially disruptive process.\textsuperscript{102} Yet in the 1830s and in his most publicly influential work, Dew did not take this ground. Theistic and moralistic viewpoints rescued the categories of the dismal science and southern slavery from a purely negative vindication and predictions of a dire future.

Laissez-faire homiletics took on different implications when supplemented by hints at God's purposes. Self-interest was not the irreducible principle behind inexorable events or the engine of future developments. Necessary and inevitable laws manifested the "God of nature."\textsuperscript{103} Overwhelming economic barriers to colonization and emancipation followed the outline of God's hand. "Every principle," Dew interjected
into his economic analysis of colonization, "when rightly understood, demonstrates the benevolence of the Deity even in this world."104 Dew's statistics on slavery in Virginia were meant to awaken the Old Dominion (and the South) to the overwhelming reality of slavery's establishment. Despite putatively well-intentioned sentiments against it and schemes to wish it away, it had been and was "increasing and spreading--"growing with our growth, and strengthening with our strength."105 Slavery, since it was inescapably a "necessary result" beyond the manipulation of legislatures or hopes of philanthropists, "marked some benevolent design ... by our Creator."106

Dew saw two linked progressive benefits: the moral lessons of labor (and racial control) slavery provided and the material advancement of the region. God was "impelling forward the civilization of mankind" through slavery as well as free labor. Virginia could rest assured that "the snails pace at which she has hither to been crawling is destined to be converted into the giant's stride and this very circumstance of itself will defeat all the gloomy predictions about the blacks. ... time and internal improvements will cure all our ills."107 In the meantime, southerners should not again be so vain as to presume on the timing and outcome of God's plan. Slavery might well end, but this was for God to work out in his own way. Dew used the example of Israel's removing of itself from slavery in Egypt and colonizing of
Canaan. He said, "Beware of imitation unless assisted by the constant presence of Jehovah."\textsuperscript{108}

Dew, likewise, tamed Malthusianism and pessimism about Virginia's economic future with invocations of "moral power."\textsuperscript{109} Malthusian laws had to be susceptible to moral modification in Dew's view. A benevolent God would not leave men in a biological and economic trap that foresight and will could not overcome. The slow growth of Virginia's population was blamed on the inefficiency of slave labor during the debates. Dew followed the lead of Malthus' second (and every subsequent) edition of \textit{An Essay on the Principle of Population} (1803) and downplayed scarcity (or calamity) as the sole block to population growth. Dew thought that, like Scotland, Virginia could experience prosperity without population expansion: "the preventive checks (moral restraint) are in full operation in Virginia ...they always mark a high degree of civilization--so that the slow progress of population in Virginia turns out to be her highest eulogy."\textsuperscript{110} Dew, like proslavery ministers, would not accept that calamities and retributive collapses were unavoidably built into the divine economy. Where moral restraint and exertion were in place, not just prevention of cyclical calamity, but continued growth could be achieved.

Free labor also had a less threatening aspect when conceived, not as a material force in itself, but as an influence on "our moral and religious character."\textsuperscript{111} A
competitive labor market as a simple function of economic law implied the end to slavery. When the cost of free labor fell near subsistence, slavery would become a poor and probably inviable economic choice. Dew, however, supported the "doctrine of the superior productiveness of free labor." He acknowledged, "We are, in the main, converts to this doctrine." He could have spoken for many proslavery ministers on this point (in so far as they understood the doctrine). Free labor was not attractive to southern spokesman because of the market in labor it created. Free labor instead effectively taught to individuals "the necessity of labor" and demanded that they build "character" by pursuing "constant exertions." Where the free laborer was moral, he remained productive and then only did the system attain superiority. Dew drew on Mill and Adam Smith to argue that the material and religious advantage of free labor was its removal of idleness as a matter of course. Free labor, according to Dew, was not going to undermine slavery; slavery was accomplishing the same ends, "upon attendant circumstances." Slavery achieved this same end under the historical conditions that developed in the South where there had been a "deterioration in character" among early white settlers in the tropics.

Dew with the vast majority of proslavery spokesmen thought that the current character of the population had changed. They refused to defend slavery in the abstract
because they thought it would have been easier if it had never been introduced.\textsuperscript{117} God, however, was overcoming the "original sin of introduction" by using slavery for the "taming of man and rendering him fit for labor."\textsuperscript{118} Slavery provided one way--and perhaps a temporary way--for this to be accomplished. Since southerners were inescapably obligated to participate in this divine process, Dew argued, they had nothing to fear. In the United States, slavery was more likely to end through becoming more like free labor (and, Dew hoped, perhaps bringing its industrial advances) than through a disastrous clash with it. Dew thought a calamitous crisis for slavery "will never in all probability occur."\textsuperscript{119} The South could look forward to continued progress and "maintain its ground triumphantly against free labor" through "steady perseverance in the system now established."\textsuperscript{120}

Dew's greater emphasis on and interjection of moral and evangelical arguments into his popular work helped bolster his economic positions and faith in southern progress. Materialist arguments from political economy that seemed to point to a crisis for slavery took on a new light when secular and sacred arguments merged and a single path to progress appeared. If laws of material progress seemed to be against the South, moral progress in the region could counteract them. Dew in this vein relied on history to vindicate the South--both its future development and special past. Like most evangelical defenders of slavery, Dew held that "with regard
to the assertion that slavery is against the spirit of christianity, we are ready to admit the general assertion."\textsuperscript{121} Circumstances, as with the argument for the superiority of free labor, made the South—here and now—an exception. Besides the fact that according to Dew "there was no rule of conscience or revealed law of God which can condemn us," the South like Israel was a unique case.\textsuperscript{122} The region was developing a special relation to God and a mission to preserve Christian order. Southerners in general shunned the "selfishness which withers and repels everything around it." Men of talent and virtue had become involved in slaveholding in the South, and Dew believed that a rule of conscience or duty against slaveholding would have the effect of "withdrawing the good and religious from society."\textsuperscript{123} Dew, in other words, defended not slavery in general and in the abstract but in the particular economic circumstances of the South in his era. He, however, constructed such a defense on the basis of the most contemporary intellectual doctrines. So while he did not defend all slavery, slavery as a social system, or as an ideal, he did provide southerners with a relatively logical and complete explanation and defense of their social practices.

The Implications of Dew's Arguments for the Moral Defense

The minor moral and evangelical glosses Dew put on his arguments were insignificant compared to his arguments
additions to the southern and evangelical position on slavery. Dew, by rendering many of his arguments in these popular forms, effectively linked the long-developing evangelical accommodation to slavery with the intellectual terms that made it coherent. Contemporary laissez-faire doctrines, especially as Dew presented them, were perfectly attuned to theorizing of the southern evangelical position on slavery. Evangelicals had slowly left the issue to individuals and stopped addressing their criticisms of the system as a whole. As early as the 1797 Presbyterian General Assembly, when this pattern had first emerged, evangelicals had resolved the apparent contradiction in their position (between an abstract condemnation of slavery and specific defense of slaveholders) by an affirmation: the issue was "of so much importance that the consideration of it [would] be put off til a future day." This was in large part the Revolutionary settlement as well. By the 1830s, both Dew's theories and history could turn what might have been a sign of indecision or compromise into wisdom and a coherent, consistent course of action with a positive future.

Evangelicals had relied upon the drift of events, whose benevolent direction was assumed to be in God's hands. Dew's approach consisted of an abstract justification of the evangelical decision to leave the issue to private judgments and to leave systematic criticisms aside. The glory of Dew's classical economics was that it offered a systematic
explanation of having no systematic approach to large-scale social questions. It provided both an imperative not to engage in systematic critique or tampering with the process and a promise that individuals acting in their unified moral and material interest could ensure progress and stability. Leaving of the issue to individual principles and drift became a positive principle and general strategy of itself. Dew put theological and moral glosses on his laissez-faire doctrines, suggesting that the barriers to antislavery and laws of necessity were laws of God. Ministers and future proslavery writers could make this an explicit argument. Where Dew had used cash figures produced by slavery to ask "Do not these very simple statistics speak volumes on this subject?", fellow Virginian and best-selling proslavery minister Thorton Stringfellow thundered at the end of his examination of similar figures in his Scriptural and Statistical Views: "Is not this fact, like all those examined, God's Providential voice? and does not, in these facts, He speak a language we can read and understand?" Dew's progressive economics became a framework in which a whole variety of southerners could explain their stance on the issue and believe they shared a common ideal.

Even the delay and uncertainty of antebellum southerners with reservations about the institution, in fact the whole history of the southern Founding Fathers and founders of the evangelical movement, could be presented as part of a
consistent approach to the issue and a sign of regional strength. It was right to have tested emancipation and antislavery, but Dew argued that the "experiment has been sufficiently tried." The tradition of antislavery among the Virginia founders was not a contradiction of a proslavery stance. "Washington," a proslavery moralist said in expanding on Dew's argument, "emancipated them (his slaves) with the hope . . . [that they were] fitted for freedom or that they would be benefitted by their own self-control." In the historic context, such a stance could not be considered antislavery:

Washington therefore could not consistently oppose slavery as a wrong to the slave, nor conscientiously believe it to be wrong; because he would not oppose that which he could not overcome. It is against the prophetic character of Washington's mission ever crowned with success . . . to presume his hostility to slavery as a wrong or his opposition to it in a moral view when he knew, as we know, the emancipation of the slaves to be wrong itself; and impossible even if right. Being a good antebellum moralist, this southern spokesman added that the last possibility could not be entertained because "right holds a just and heaven derived superiority over wrong."
Dew popularized both the difficulty of emancipation and the condition of free blacks who had supposedly been part of this "experiment" as arguments that slavery had to be morally defensible. While Washington had not foreseen this outcome, God had (through the laws of Moses). "He foresaw that all efforts to eradicate these evils would be in vain," wrote a minister in 1837, "as became a wise lawgiver he adapted them into his system--adapted them to counteract their pernicious tendencies. Wonderful!" Men presumptively criticizing and attempting to dismantle slavery were not following God's plans. His will did not work in this way. Only by embracing the biblical directives of slaveholding might the system gradually progress, modernize, and perhaps disappear. Matthew Estes, who wrote popular Biblical defenses from Mississippi, maintained that Dew "opened the eyes of the South" to this potential of a slave economy and the "ground of abstract right" it provided. The message implanted in the Bible on slavery and role of Israel that the South was re-enacting were stories of economic development. "Ancient slavery was a training ground," according to Estes, in which slaves were "trained to habits of industry." The Israelites had "settled the land of Canaan" where "forests had to be felled--cities, villages, and towns built up and improved." The "national wealth was increased" and "profitably directed" as a "division of labor emerged."
Dew had demonstrated that market laws were in operation in slavery and could not easily be dismantled, even if this were desirable. Yet for Dew and certainly for evangelical defenders of slavery, the point was not to presume to interfere with the purposes of God that had to be working out through slavery. The moral training to industry (and its racist implications) was more important than the building of industry. Ministers assumed that attempts at eradicating slavery appeared to run up against insurmountable barriers because God had providential purposes for slavery. Presbyterian J.C. Mitchell thought even the British antislavery forces would have to come to this conclusion:

They acknowledge their inability with all their wealth and power to extinguish slavery. They are beginning to recognize the fact, so patent to all who are not blinded by prejudice, that the finger of God is in this whole matter; that he will order and control the affairs of all nations in such a manner as to subserve the interests of his kingdom.¹³⁴

The point for Dew and proslavery spokesmen after him, however, was that no choice had to be made between the purposes of Christendom and the best interest and prosperity of the South. This was not a new connection; "scripture and sound policy" had been vaguely linked in the earliest proslavery petitions to the Virginia Legislature after the
Revolution.\textsuperscript{135} Antislavery at the same time had made a similar speculative link. Dew noted Jefferson's famous objections to "the moral effects" of the institution, which undermined self-government in masters and slaves alike. Jefferson claimed to "tremble" for the country when he remembered "god was just" and would punish the country if this persisted. In 1832 Dew thought he was in a position "to boldly assert that the fact does not bear Mr. Jefferson out in his conclusion."\textsuperscript{136} Where Jefferson could only conjecture, antebellum southerners thought they had new incontrovertible tools of analysis and evidence that explained their past and future. Methodist minister William Smith took Dew's correction of Jefferson further.

Smith gave a more explicit application of both moral science and economic analysis. Jefferson's oversight according to Smith was his "assuming in this remark, that the providences as well as the attributes of the Deity are against the slaveholder."\textsuperscript{137} Since "no people on the globe have shared more largely in the blessings of a bountiful Providence than those of the Southern States of this Union," slaveholders could not possibly be morally corrupt and unable to govern their passions. So it was not surprising that "in the progress of civilization and religion they have advanced more rapidly than any community in the country." Slavery had "daily for a long series of years become more and more practical." This would simply not have been possible "if those who oppose
it (abolition) were really 'proslavery' men in the bad sense
in which certain persons understand this phrase, that is, men
who, on the subject of slavery wickedly do what they know and
feel to be wrong. . . . It is not mere belief, nor is it mere
honesty, that produces results in practice; but it is the
reception of truth in an honest heart, which can never fail to
result in practice." Southern slaveholders and proslavery men
had achieved results in practice, so Randolph-Macon's moral
philosopher argued that this proved they had honest and
morally unassailable hearts.¹³⁸

Antislavery forces reasoned from the same heritage and
the coalescing language of moral and material progress to very
different conclusions. If slavery at the time of the
Revolution was considered evil in the abstract and was
expected to fade before the sunshine of evangelical truth and
free institutions, its subsequent growth and spread were the
growth and spread of an evil. This practical event was then
evidence of the growth and spread of private vices and
corrupted--not converted and honest--hearts in the South.
Thus, the new sense of urgency and inflexible resolution among
antislavery forces was directed against the very point upon
which southerners had developed their most long-standing
proslavery position: the moral standing of slaveholders. Dew
had argued that the stakes had changed on the slavery issue;
abolitionists showed the South this was true. The intellectual
trends Dew was immersed in and prosleyzing were even more
developed and widespread in the North. The path to progress and social commandments of God seemed mysterious to fewer and fewer believers in both regions as the antebellum era unfolded. Neither God nor what abolitionist Wendel Philips called "God's laws of political economy" laid down any rule that could be easily compromised.¹³⁹
NOTES


3. Essig, Bonds of Wickedness, 134.


5. For two contrary views see Bailey, Shadow on the Church, 22, 50. Essig, Bonds, 5, 6-10.


7. Even in the 1780s most Methodist statements against slavery were equivocal, containing escape clauses like "whenever possible."


11. Minutes of the Baptist General Committee, . . . 1790 (Richmond: John Apern, 1790), 5.


31. Tise, *Proslavery*, 177-8, determined that 60% of the ministers who defended slavery originally became slaveholders in these fashions.


34. Loveland, *Social Order*, 30-64.

35. Heman Packard Papers, Historical Collection of the Presbyterian and Reformed Church, Montreat, N.C., #4236.

36. Heman Packard Papers, Historical Collection of the Presbyterian and Reformed Church, Montreat N.C., #4236, Packard to North Bridgewater Committee, 1846, 1.


40. The most popular proslavery arguments in the South issued from ministers very informed about (and usually in favor of) modern economic development or progressive democratic optimism. Many of these ministers made far more accommodations to Arminianism and liberal theology than has been recognized. (See Genovese, *Dilemma*, 43, for another account of the minimal influence of orthodox Calvinist theology on ministers' social thought--whatever their professions. Genovese, however, makes this point in support of an interpretation that gives far too much sociological coherence to divine's economic and social
thought). Other than the Northern educated and Unitarian, one of the most popular proslavery ministers, Frederick Ross, was a New School Presbyterian who eventually embraced radical theology. As popular as Ross was Methodist William Brownlow, who like Ross was a unionist and proponent of liberal economic and democratic visions. Secessionists James Thornwell and William Smith were also the proslavery publicists most familiar with Chalmers, Whately, Kant, and trends in moral science in the North. Smith was, in addition, close to being a liberal optimist on the issues of political and economic progress. The most popular publicist of all, Stringfellow, had less education, but also an economic and statistical fetish that went far beyond Dew's moral and providential economics. Familiarity also bred contempt, and revival of a tradition of true conservatism among intellectuals more willing to rely on social and institutional analyses of power than their ministerial counterparts. These men were more likely to come to pessimistic conclusions on the basis of classical economics and to see liberal society and economic growth and progress as inexorable forces headed for crisis that had to be fought or avoided, whereas ministers—when they could even think in these terms—thought these forces could be moralized or overcome through moral effort and reform. See discussions of Simms, Harper, Calhoun, Hammond, Fitzhugh, and other intellectuals in Genovese, Slaveholders Dilemma, and in my chapter Six and Seven.

41. Clapp, Autobiographical, 124, 167, 11-12, 53, 123, 171-190. Even other proslavery ministers rarely shared this opinion. Louisiana slaveholders, especially since many "were neither Protestant nor American," often were singled out for the "abuse" of a legitimate power. In this way ministers in other regions tried to prove they did not tolerate evils connected with slavery. See Rice Debate, 150. Brownlow, Debate, 94. Ross, Slavery Ordained, 133.

42. Clapp, 55, 109.


44. Farley, Slavery, 8-9.

45. Farley, 10.


47. James Henley Thornwell, Rights and Duties of Masters (Charleston: Steam-power Press of Walker and James, 1850), 32.

48. See a typical example in W.T. Hamilton, The Duties of Master and Slaves Respectively or Domestic Servitude as Sanctioned by the Bible (Mobile: F.H. Brooks, 1845), 14.

49. Buck, Slavery, 11, 18.

50. Buck, 17, 22.


52. Boles, Great Revival, 131-4 on conversion experience and 9-26, 45-51, 88-9, and passim on its importance in the South.


60. See Clapp, Autobiographical, 168; for a good description of this social phenomenon. Also James Striling, Letters from the Slave States (New York: 1968 [1857]), 120; and Boles, Kentucky, 87.


64. Samuel Dunwoody, A Sermon upon the Subject of Slavery (Columbia: S. Weir, 1837), 25, 4, 10.

65. Dunwoody, 12, 22.


67. [William Hobby], Remarks upon Slavery. By a Citizen of Georgia (Augusta: S.R. Sentinel Office, 1835), 7. Hobby was another of the early defenders of slaver raised in New England who could hammer back at abolitionists in their own terms of "moral law" and material progress.


70. Howell Cobb, *Scriptural Examination*, 121.


73. Tise, *Proslavery*, 42. E.N. Elliot, *Cotton is King*, viii, xiii, xx.


82. Rhett was himself one of the early defenders of slavery in the 1830s: see Robert Barnwell Rhett, *Address to the People of Beaufort and Collection Districts, Upon the Subject of Abolition* (N.p., 1838). In this speech, Rhett did not give as
much attention to the moral and Biblical argument, which he confessed attachment to a few years later.


85. Jeter, 69-70 (my emphasis).

86. Jeter, 123. Jeter like many evangelicals was not particularly worried by the Turner Revolt, which he called a trifling thing. His main association with the event was that he "well remembered" the day vividly because, like Turner, he was impressed by the "green appearance" of the sun. See Jeter, 174.

87. Faust, Ideology, 8.

88. Tise, Proslavery, 7.

89. Genovese, Dilemma, 5, 21.


92. Farmer, Metaphysical Confederacy, 162.


95. See Allen Kaufman, Capitalism, Slavery, and Republican Values: Antebellum Political Economists, 1819-1848 (Austin: University of Texas, 1982), for a complete account of Dew's economic ideas. See also Alison Freehling, Drift Toward Dissolution, for a differing interpretation.


101. Cooper, Lectures (1826), 106-7. George Tucker embraced an even stronger version of this argument, see Genovese, Dilemma, 16.


114. "Abolition," 51, 73, 74. See also Citizen of Georgia, Remarks, 28; Fuller and Wayland, Debate, 123.


117. "Review," 243, 451. See Adger, Human Rights and Slavery, 13, for the best discussion of evangelicals' perspective on this issue. In the key section Adger maintained that "Comparing the present advantage of our white population with what might have been had not the negro been introduced, the Christian people of the South have never yet said that slavery is a positive blessing."


125. Dew realized that "skepticism" on religious matters was no longer respectable. See T.R. Dew, *Southern Literary Messenger* 2 (November, 1836), 768.


131. Hoit, 49.


CHAPTER FIVE

Southern Religious Unity and the Challenge from the North, 1831-1846

Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, that the name of God be not blasphemed. These things teach and exhort. If any man teach otherwise, he is proud knowing nothing, doting about questions, and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing gain is godliness. From such withdraw thyself.

1 Timothy 6:1-5

The appearance of radical abolitionism and the subsequent growth of a moderate antislavery movement in the North after 1831 hastened and confirmed the transition that was already occurring in southern ideology. Innovative critiques of slaveholding had the effect of reinforcing long-standing patterns of religious identity in the South. In the slavery debate southern evangelicals reenacted familiar roles that had served them well in previous controversies. Although the parts were predictable, the lines were still being perfected. The slavery debate brought more conscious applications of contemporary moral science and economic philosophy to regional myths and hopes. Both antislavery and proslavery evangelicals were learning to adopt the aggressive didacticism of the era in order to express their righteousness and to demand
recognition of their progressive mission and their material
due.

The whole moral debate over slavery could be rendered as
a footnote to the confrontation between two versions of a
fervent belief that moral virtue had to lead to success.
Whereas southern evangelicals took slaveholders’ profitable
results in practice as proof of pure motives, the same
confusion was manifest in the abolitionist argument that
merely by taking a virtuous stand against an evil slave
system, the desired outcome would be practically achieved. If
proslavery moralists held that a practical outcome proved the
actions of the powerful to be virtuous, abolitionists via
their emphasis on moral suasion tended to insist that virtue
was power. Although theological and academic debates could be
reduced to this dichotomy, the lines of battle were not so
distinct in the public mind, nor even in sophisticated face-
to-face disputes. Abolitionists found it necessary to appeal
to the power of practical outcomes, claiming that since
slavery was morally wrong, it must be unprofitable and would
eventually collapse.² By the same logic, southerners held
that since the slave economy prospered and grew, it had the
characteristics of a christianized free institution and of a
progressive moral reform.

The majority of Americans with less well-defined
positions on slavery and religious commitments and biblical
ideas more vague than those of the abolitionists or proslavery
ministers easily arrived at similar conclusions by 1860. They could agree with T.W. Hoit, author of a very widely circulated proslavery tract: "If it [slavery] can be shown to be right, then it is expedient, if wrong, then it cannot be shown to be expedient."3 Naturally, most Americans either denounced or defended slavery depending on whether it was personally expedient. Popular, evangelical ideas about morality, however, obscured the picture. Evangelicals' cognitive assumptions about the nature of God often were their basis for determining self-interest and thus colored their perceptions of what was expedient. While many southerners reached a moral accommodation to slavery on the basis of expediency, it was also possible in evangelical America to reach a belief in the expediency of slavery on the basis of putatively ethical and religious ideas.4 Although it is often difficult to determine which justification was prevailing, the latter reading better explains the strong commitments to slavery and the confident unified act of secession by a majority of southerners, most of whom would never own slaves (or even consider owning them). Belief in a divine economy gave both slaveholders and nonslaveholders an economic motive for preserving slavery, which was inextricably tied to their perceptions of their individual power and material self-interest.5

The same concurrence of the languages of evangelical morality with those of personal power and economic interest were crucial to the popular antislavery consensus in the
North. David Brion Davis found that even among the radical—often Christian perfectionist—antislavery forces there was an "extraordinary conjunction of two seemingly antithetical realms of language, thought, and rhetoric: the evangelical appeals to sin, guilt, retribution, and deliverance...and a highly utilitarian analysis of punishment, nutrition, land use, labor incentives, productivity, and revenue." It was as easy for any citizen in the North to share in the religious and moral arguments against slavery as it was for southerners to embrace (the infinitely more tragic) biblical proslavery. The benevolent, malevolent, and merely acquisitive sounded so much alike.

Given bifurcated roots of both northern and southern moralism, the ethical and evangelical debate over slavery was inherently politically divisive. Ideological commitments in both regions were made and expressed in the seamlessly sacred and secular terms that identified virtue with economic success. The burdens placed on this mythic formula were explosive. Neither antislavery nor proslavery advocates could really criticize, debate, or examine their moralistic premises. Each section in the eyes of the other was using a shared sacred language for profane purposes. Worse than error or enmity, this constituted corruption and betrayal, the sins of the false convert. Southern pulpits were to ring with denunciations of Yankee heretics in these terms, but abolitionists first levelled this charge against southern
ministers and slaveholders. Each side in effect accused the other of a form of blasphemy.

The Confrontation with Abolitionism

Such criticism from outsiders, besides hastening the development of the proslavery consensus, cemented two well-established aspects of southern religiosity.

First, evangelical Protestantism in the South had tended toward insularity and homogeneity in order to combat the worldly, gentrified society (and established Anglican Church) that had predominated in the region during the eighteenth century. Ministers and the faithful consciously adopted the roles of religious outsiders rejected by the world, even when the dominance of the fashionable elite and established church had over society was questionable. Revivalism, which climaxed in the early nineteenth century, often assumed aspects of a cultural crusade. By 1830 southern evangelicals had begun to achieve their remarkable sway over regional culture. If it was still fashionable to be part of mannered, elite circles in the antebellum South, it was not fashionable to be skeptical. Evangelical profession was not only respectable but increasingly a token of respectability. Just at this point when southern evangelicals' internal enemies were disappearing, abolitionism arose as a convenient target for the deep-seated us-against-the-worldly-and-corrupt-them energies of the region's religious folkways. So the struggle
with antislavery not only perpetuated patterns of southern religiosity, but also provided believers--ministers in particular--with a familiar, comforting role and a struggle in which to engage the faithful.

Second, and for much the same reasons, abolitionist critiques confirmed growing southern self-righteousness. Most movements do not become fully self-conscious until under assault. Abolitionists directed their attacks at the moral status of slaveholders. Since southern evangelicals shared much of the religious background of northern antislavery forces, they had also focused on this issue when developing their rapprochement with southern social practices. Abolitionists raised questions that southern evangelicals had already for all practical purposes decided and dismissed--or at least had long practiced denying.

The answering of abolitionist arguments was then a self-confirming process that followed familiar channels. Southern evangelicals were not prepared for the advent of radical abolitionism. They were, however, fully prepared not to take the abolitionist critique seriously. Its portrait of southerners' moral and religious experiences and standing came as a shock because its implications were simply unthinkable below the Mason-Dixon Line, where citizens considered themselves particularly religious.
Struggle over Conversion:

Abolitionists questioned the religious experience of slaveholders and by implication that of the entire region, often including the slaves. Southerners came to similar conclusions about the questionable piety of abolitionists and increasingly stereotyped all northern religion on the basis of moral and scriptural arguments against slavery that they considered heretical. Anti-abolitionist arguments in large part became an exercise that reconfirmed southern evangelicals’ sense of their personal election and regional religious unity. The emphasis on the conversion experience and the evangelical basis of identity in the South was deepened by the confrontation with abolitionism. This was particularly evident in the exegetical exchanges that were the focus of anti-abolitionist publications in the 1830s and 1840s. Reference to the Bible passages legitimating slavery provided first a reminder that slaveholders could be accepted by God and then an opportunity for southern apologists to recall their own conversion. Disputes between northern and southern Christians, therefore, were inevitably locked into the language of conversion rather than persuasion. Debate was not possible on this issue, only division.

The emergence of abolitionism in the 1830s at first appeared to some to be a threat to the entire southern evangelical movement. The birth of modern antislavery might have revived the old suspicion in the South that evangelical
religion was linked to antislavery (because evangelicals had been hostile to slaveholding elites and conversion to Christianity had occasionally been a ground for slaves to sue for freedom in colonial times), a suspicion Richard Furman had taken pains to discount in 1822. Abolitionists connected with Garrison's *Liberator* (1831), Lewis and Arthur Tappan's American Antislavery Society (1833), and the antislavery postal campaign (1835) advanced religious arguments and had close ties to northern revivalism. If similar messages had emerged within or merely been associated with southern pulpits in the public mind, then the southern religious landscape could have been thrown into turmoil. "The cause of religion was, and unless the mad cause of abolitionism is checked, still is rapidly advancing in the South," warned the popular 1836 anti-abolitionist tract usually attributed to the pen of William Drayton. Drayton himself, however, pointed to the reason the cause would continue to advance in the South: "Of the numerous and exemplary clergy of the South, not a man can be found willing to sanction the course of northern fanaticism." Since "all the clergy of the South lend their express sanction [to slavery]," Drayton believed the whole region would react against "imputations on their purity and holiness."9

The southern evangelical ministers who produced the vast majority of proslavery publications saw a different threat in this aspect of abolitionism. Abolitionists were devising
arguments that undermined the authority of the scriptures and by implication questioned the legitimacy of the subjective religious experiences on which evangelical Protestantism was grounded. Alexander McCaine, a minister and southern delegate to the Methodist General Conference, perceived such a crisis for the faith looming behind abolitionist attacks on slaveholders as sinners. He accurately summarized the logic of these criticisms: "If slavery be 'a great moral evil,' no slaveholder has enjoyed or can enjoy, the grace and favor of God, as long as he owns slaves, and dying a slaveholder he is prevented from entering the kingdom." McCaine disagreed with the abolitionist argument because many southerners had observed or themselves experienced how "God communicates his grace and spirit to the slaveholder." McCaine asked, "Is their testimony to pass for nothing? Now this testimony is true or it is false." Had slaveholders experienced conversion as they said? If abolitionists continued to say such professions were false, McCaine believed that "religion itself receives a mortal stab and the infidel rejoices over the advocates of the cross. . . . If the testimony of the slaveholder can be thus easily set aside as being hypocritical, the testimony of the abolitionist can be set aside also." McCaine did not see this as an internal weakness of evangelical subjectivism and didactic moral science, but as betrayal by the abolitionists, who were undermining the evangelical movement. Worst of all, as McCaine said in his
classic southern reaction to abolitionists, "They hate whom God loves."\textsuperscript{10}

Presbyterian Nathan Rice came to the same point of dispute over conversion in his famous public debate with fellow Cincinnati Presbyterian Jonathan Blanchard, an antislavery minister and defender of abolitionism on Biblical grounds.\textsuperscript{11} Rice constructed a proslavery argument on the basis of Lane Theological Seminary professor Calvin Stowe's (Harriet Beecher Stowe’s husband) admission that "Christ does accept" slaveholders. Rice then argued against antislavery evangelicals:

There are Christian ministers who are involved in slaveholding, but who nevertheless are owned and blessed of God. Moreover it is a fact that many of the most efficient ministers in the free states were converted, if converted at all, in revivals in the slaveholding churches, and in answer to the prayers of those slaveholding Christians.\textsuperscript{12}

Rice thought there were only three possible explanations for this phenomenon: "God hears the prayers and blesses the labors of the most abominable criminals, or these revivals are all spurious and the converts are hypocrites, or abolitionism is false."\textsuperscript{13} Rev. Blanchard, Rice's antislavery opponent, identified this attitude toward "revivals in slaveholding churches" as the source of southern proslavery arguments. Although he was willing to admit that there were "genuine
conversions in them," he suspected not that abolitionism was in error but rather that "the slaveholders’ hopes may be false."  

Antislavery Presbyterians often went much further, questioning the genuineness of conversion in the South. Southerners accepted not only slaveholders’ conversions but also those of slaves and members of other denominations. Southern evangelicals tended to downplay theological differences in revivals and to set broad and simple standards for the acceptance of conversions. A New England Old School Presbyterian commenting on Nathan Rice’s proslavery position noted the predominance of Baptist and Methodist affiliation among slave and slaveholder converts. The antislavery minister admitted the phenomenon of southern revivalism. He simply discounted its validity:

I find there were 422 churches of the Hard Shell Baptists in Georgia. If slaves are members of these antinomian churches, whose lax morality is proverbial, it will not be contended that they have gained much by this kind of religion.

He likewise disputed the entire "influence of Methodism, in its arminian doctrines, its violent impulses of animal feeling, its tempests of passion, its wild and unaccountable ecstasies." The antislavery Presbyterian had no "confidence in the real conversion of the great mass of its professors ...or the fruits of its revivals."
In contrast, Southern Presbyterian revivalist and conservative Calvinist Daniel Baker made most of his converts from other denominations and confessed, "I love warm, animating, lively evangelomos preaching." Even southern Presbyterians who engaged in theological disputes with Methodists made no such distinctions about converts and were offended by abolitionist caricatures of southern revivals. Two of the most popular proslavery ministers, Presbyterian Fred Ross and Methodist William Brownlow--both Tennessee-raised Unionists--were entangled in a vicious theological dispute over predestination that included an accusation by Brownlow that Ross was "a man of color." Neither man, however, questioned slave conversions or revivals in the other's denomination. Southerners directed such energies toward the North. When in 1858 Brownlow engaged in the most famous public debate between a proslavery and an abolitionist minister in 1858 with Alexander Pyrne of New York, Brownlow dismissed the enormous wave of revivals in the North in 1857 as "spurious." Pyrne in a similarly refined version of the abolitionist argument dismissed southern religion in toto and asked repeatedly of Brownlow, "When shall he be converted?"

Baptist and Mercer professor Patrick Hues Mell was more humble in stating the southern position prior both to the sectional crisis and to schism in his denomination in 1845. Abolitionists he noted were "in the habit of making invidious comparisons between New England and southern Piety. We know
we have little piety to boast ... we lay claim to no other character than to that of sinners; but we thank God, that a large and increasing number in our midst have 'a good hope' that we are sinners saved by grace." 18 In deference to his northern co-religionist Francis Wayland, Mell took a similar conciliatory approach to his moral and Biblical defense of slaveholding: "there is no doubt that there are many cruel masters ... that there is much licentiousness in the slaveholding states cannot be denied, but I would that we had evidence that it is confined to this side of the Mason-Dixon Line." 19 B.F. Stringfellow, Missouri Baptist layman and organizer of proslavery "defense" forces in the region, writing in 1854 after more than a decade of further sectional dispute, saw no reason for conciliation and took the regional definition of true conversion and piety to its logical conclusion. "Modesty is no longer a virtue," Stringfellow announced, "slaveholders are more truly religious than the sons of Puritans." Righteous Puritans he pointed out had settled the North while the South was colonized by censurable "adventurers in search of fortune, by Chevaliers of Charles who in sheer hatred of the pious affected loose morals, a contempt for religion." Yet in the 1850s Stringfellow found "slaveholders" were "content with old-fashioned humble christianity" while the sons of Puritans "'run after strange Gods.'" Stringfellow confessed, "We are more or less at a loss to comprehend such a revolution .. What is it which has
converted the indolent, thoughtless southerner into the humble, orthodox Christian?"²⁰

Struggle over Scripture:

The ministerial cliche of the 1850s, which held that the southern states were the true descendants of the Puritans and champions of "orthodox and evangelical religion," was a result of the stereotypes that arose as southerners compared their scriptural views to those of radical abolitionists in the 1830s and 1840s.²¹ Part of the homogeneity—and occasional cooperation—between southern Protestants of different denominations was a product of their emphasis on the simple message of the Word over and against sophisticated theological speculation. In the slavery debate this became an argument for the superior social organization (and unity) of the South. Northern biblical and theological speculation was associated in southern minds with dangerous social experimentation. Both lines of danger seemed to be exposed in northerners' religiously inspired calls for the dismantling of southern racial controls. A number of abolitionist arguments that denied the authority of certain biblical passages or explicitly advocated a higher law than the Bible received the same rapturous attention in the South as the scriptural passages that acknowledged slaveholding. When acceptance of these proslavery texts became a test of biblical fidelity, it was then easy for southerners to say that all antislavery
spokesmen deliberately corrupted or rejected the Bible in the manner of the radicals.

The process of exchanging scriptural views with northerners added to the South's sense of its own special fidelity to the Bible and relation to God. Southerners thought abolitionists either did not understand the Bible or did not know God's will, and they suspected them of perverting both. From the southern perspective the Bible offered an ideal source of vindication. If the Bible explicitly ordained slaveholding, as southern churchmen were sure it did, then to condemn slaveholding outright as a sin was to insult God's Word and betray His Will. Inasmuch as evangelical Protestantism was an experience and scriptural quotation a method of discourse shared with abolitionists, the Bible provided a perfect weapon for exposing abolitionist pretenses and winning allies for the South. Many strict exegetical proslavery writers had thought literal proofs from Biblical quotation might "drive abolitionists to the wall and compel them to take an anti-Christian position and by so doing compel the whole Christianity of the North to array itself on our side." Proslavery evangelicals found in this strategy several proofs of the strength and superiority of the South's biblical stand and faith, but few northern Christians were not converted to the southern position.

For one, while most northern clergymen did critique abolitionism, even those northern ministers who produced
biblical proslavery arguments were fighting their own battles and not the South's. Charles Hodge, president of Princeton and leader of northern Old School Presbyterians, was typical of northern anti-abolitionist allies of the South. Hodge did not encourage southern moral, theological, and political aspirations, but he understood the effect of Biblical proslavery in the region:

They [the South] are sure that their accusers can not be wiser or better than their divine Master, and their consciences are untouched by denunciations, which they know, if well founded, must affect not them only, but the authors of the religion of the Bible.\textsuperscript{25}

Northern anti-abolitionists, despite their virulence and the lead they took in formulating proslavery tracts based on scripture in the early 1830s and 1840s, were more interested in defending the authors of the Bible than the South or its labor system. They, like pre-Jacksonian defenders of slavery, hailed from the older commercial and office-holding elites that were troubled by the economic and social dynamism implicit in antislavery reform.\textsuperscript{26} Simon Clough of New York was one of the earliest and most effective anti-abolitionist publicists. Yet in his 1834 tract he stressed that "he proposed merely that [abolitionism] is inconsistent with the Bible."\textsuperscript{27}
Ohio New School Presbyterian minister William Graham in a similar vein primarily protested that abolitionism was "injurious to the moral power of the scriptures." Graham became more theologically and socially conservative in the 1840s, moving to the southern dominated Old School wing of his denomination after 1837, but the limits of his antiabolitionism and his distance from southern proslavery were clear. Before the abolition controversy Graham had freed his own slaves and moved from the South never to return--dying in Pennsylvania. Dr. William Sleigh of Philadelphia followed the same ideological pattern. He issued vitriolic anti-abolitionist attacks unsurpassed in their racism and Biblical traditionalism. Sleigh, however, had no interest in southern evangelical and moral ambitions. Many of the religiously based northern attacks on abolitionism issued from Catholics and high church Episcopal and Congregationalists who like Clough, Graham, and Sleigh were as dismissive of southern religion and politics as they were of modern antislavery. The *US Catholic Intelligencer* began its campaign against abolitionism in October 1831 and also insisted that "we are friends [both] of well regulated freedom [and] the credit of our southern neighbors." Yet as the slavery debate grew more heated, Catholic spokesmen and journalists coupled their proslavery with denunciations of "bigoted Protestant" biblical divisions and the "Protestant moral theology" which had to be "studied on the map: it varies with latitude."
Nevertheless, the support southern biblical arguments received in the North affirmed the evangelicals' sense of their unassailable moral and religious stance without diminishing their growing sense of regional conflict and distinct righteousness. William Hamilton, a northern born proslavery Methodist who ministered to the heavily slaveholder Government Street Church in Mobile, reminded southerners that however much Northerners "opposed the violent spirit of Garrison," they also disliked slavery.\(^{33}\)

After pressing the literal proofs of the sinlessness of slaveholding, southern evangelicals took more comfort from the responses of their northern enemies than of their friends. They were sure that abolitionists had been driven to their damning anti-biblical and unorthodox positions from a desire to attack slavery on Christian grounds. A rural southern Presbyterian revivalist described the biblical issue at stake: "all our notions of property, all our abstract reasoning upon inalienable rights, the natural freedom and perfect equality of man, and all our principles of moral science, with their applications must be brought to the infallible standard revealed from heaven."\(^{34}\) Southern evangelicals did not reject these putatively liberal notions. They affirmed and insisted on their basis in scripture. Abolitionists made the same claim. It was the tactics of antislavery forces in presenting their literal proofs that revealed their unorthodoxy, not a naked rejection of Biblical authority
itself. Northerners appeared to align the Bible with the standard of liberal theory, rather than derive these political principles from the standard of heaven. Proslavery evangelicals did not accuse abolitionists of explicitly rejecting inerrant revelation. Instead, abolitionists "tortured the Word of God" in order to present "a pretended revelation from God," just as they made similar disingenuous claims to conventional conversions. It was precisely the abolitionist attempt to appropriate the language of conversion and literal biblicism that offended southerners like Frederick Ross:

I would as soon have the Pope at once in his fallible infallibility as ten or twenty, little or big, antislavery Doctor of Divinity priests, each claiming to give his infallible rendering, however differing from his peer. I never yet produced this Bible in its plain unanswerable authority, for the relation of master and slave, but the antislavery man ran away into the fog of Hebrew and Greek.

Proslavery southerners accused northern abolitionists of using the Bible to defend their position, whereas the proslavery forces believed they themselves defended slavery because the Bible did so.

When abolitionism arose in the 1830s, the first southern response to its biblical arguments was often plain bafflement. First, it seemed "strange that anyone would dispute" slavery
on such a basis. They assumed truth was unified and uncomplicated. The novelty of the Christian abolitionist movement itself was usually less disturbing to southerners than the novel biblical arguments the movement employed. In 1837 a Baptist writing under the pseudonym of "a southern farmer" demanded "simplicity" in interpretations of the Bible. He, like many proslavery spokesmen after him, labelled the abolitionists "Gnostic" heretics on this basis. Their biblical approach provided a "grace limited to the wise." The impetus for this criticism was the abolitionist argument that its reforms were sanctioned by the "spirit" of the biblical Word taken as a whole, rather than set passages. This approach has often been associated with the doctrine of a "higher law," but only a few abolitionists elevated an innate moral faculty over the literal word of scripture in the way they elevated the rule of Christianity and conscience above their duty to the written political law.

Abolitionists claimed to have derived their scriptural imperatives from direct passages, particularly the Golden Rule. Southern evangelicals frequently acknowledged this as one of their opponents' most powerful arguments. The gnostic dimension to which southerners objected in abolitionist arguments involved the supposed discovery of a condemnation of slavery planted in the New Testament by Christ and the apostles and unfolding in history. Antislavery
forces admitted that Christ and the apostles had not directly condemned slavery, but they argued that the gospel message when properly evangelized to all of society and put into practice would inevitably destroy the institution. This biblical belief accounts both for the abolitionists' dual conviction that they had to convert the South in order to destroy slavery and for the South's inability to do away with slavery as proof of spurious conversion claims and secret corruption.

The progressive element of the abolitionists' message did not offend southerners. All evangelical Protestants shared their hope, and most with the exception of Hard Shell and Antimission Baptists, shared in the project. Southern Protestants likewise thought the American voluntary religious environment was the place and their era the time in which this original gospel goal was being recovered. Most proslavery evangelicals went along even further with antislavery theology and Biblicism. They agreed in theory that converting and christianizing all of society would change the character of slavery and that it would in all likelihood pass away.

To southerners the religious heterodoxy within the abolitionist message, coinciding with their social and racial heresies, was twofold. First was the claim to have discovered Christ's and the apostles' secret intentions about how slavery was to be eliminated: by the denunciation of slaveholding as a sin. This seemed to be directly contradicted by the word of
scripture and the conduct of Christ and the apostles; therefore only a gnostic interpretation could make this strategy a biblical directive. Second, abolitionists asserted knowledge of when this gospel and millennial goal was to be achieved: immediately. This immediatist project defined abolitionism and was even more widely identified in the South as atheistic than was the northern New Testament argument. It appeared to take—in southern eyes to usurp—its authority from not a mere gnostical understanding of revelation but a new revelation. "A southern farmer" reflecting on Garrison and the Tappan brothers' arguments asked, "Has another star appeared in the East?" Kenuckian Joshua L. Wilson, one of the first evangelicals to respond publicly to abolitionism, asked in 1834: "Where did the reformers make these discoveries?" Whatever the abolitionist claims, Wilson insisted it was not the Bible. Wilson (who resided in the Cincinnati hotbed of antislavery and theological controversy) would unsuccessfully level heresy charges against antislavery leader Lyman Beecher in Presbyterian courts the following year.

Methodist minister Samuel Dunwoody, also an early proslavery spokesman from Kentucky, wrote against the novelty, gnosticism, and implicit heresy of abolitionism in 1837:

It appears to me to be very remarkable, and something surprising too, that such a large body of evangelical ministers should spend so much time in crying out with so
much vehement zeal against what they are pleased to call the great evil of slavery when they have no Scripture warrant for so doing. . . . One ground of error into which the anti-slave-holders have fallen, is that of substituting a train of metaphysical reasonings, for the plain letter of the Word of the Lord.\textsuperscript{43} Dunwoody was a nonslaveholder and considered slavery in the abstract "an evil and one of fearful magnitude too."\textsuperscript{44} His initial objection to abolitionism was its "system of reasoning," which implied that "a flood of infidelity would soon deluge the church of God."\textsuperscript{45} Other early southern responses to abolitionism came from ministers in the border states who encountered abolitionists and argued that they were claiming a special revelation. Daniel Baker, also a nonslaveholder like Dunwoody, had a similar reaction to "rabid abolitionist" Biblical errors when ministering in Kentucky and Ohio in 1834.\textsuperscript{46} The Kentucky \textit{Catholic Advocate} in 1836 in a series of articles entitled "Abolitionism" declared them a "new sect," since they had no clear Biblical base.\textsuperscript{47}

Abolitionist claims that their project was launched on normative Christian principles, which southerners initially disbelieved and attempted to debate and discredit, were completely dismissed by the early 1840s. After 1837 a few radical abolitionists did in effect form a new sect with a new extra-scriptural revelation. Garrison's and more often Theodore Parker's increasingly extremist religious and
biblical views were almost welcomed in the South because they vindicated evangelical suspicions. Elite theologians associated the radicals with the biblical innovations in German academies in the 1830s. Educated ministers often identified Germany as an entire nation caught up in "gross infidelity." Few abolitionists or southerners knew of these intellectual developments, but southern academics were acutely aware of them and could facilely associate abolitionists with them.

The year 1835 was crucial for publication of both abolitionist and radical theological material. The antislavery postal campaign (and southern legal reaction against it), David Fiedrich Strauss's Leben Jesus, which demythologized Christ's biography, Wihelm Vatke's historicizing of ancient Judaic religion, and Christian Baur's hermeneutical and historical analysis of the early church letters all appeared that year. Like the coincident emergence of Garrison's Liberator and the Turner insurrection, these events had no real connection, and even their simultaneity were not noted at the time. Yet the symbolic link between the beginning of modern abolition and a bloody slave revolt had enormous popular (and paranoid) appeal and a measure of logical plausibility. Gentlemen theologians made no less powerful a connection between the realization of their two worst fears: (1) the decline of scriptural and theological (as
well as ministerial) authority (2) a popular movement that made such infidelity politically and socially relevant.

The combined threat of antislavery and rationalist secularity could easily be associated. Southern evangelicals realized that antislavery forces almost never rejected the inspiration of scriptures. This was in fact one of the leading causes for all their theological confrontations being so acrimonious, insoluble, and fratricidal. Proslavery ministers, however, were certain that antislavery arguments legitimated, and would inexorably result in, a purely materialist theology and society. On this level sophisticated criticism of modern theological trends legitimated popular beliefs that antislavery forces were unconsciously or secretly doing the devil's work and making a grab for political power. The two horns of an enormous beast had poked through the ground in Germany and New England in 1835. Antislavery arguments were leading in the same direction as German neologisms. Everything including Scripture would be reduced to an earthly measure. In 1848 Old School Presbyterian John Adger was irritated that antislavery forces would not drop their evangelical biblicism and admit that a purely naturalistic and political motive inspired them: "Let the Christians of the North take their stand then ... fairly and openly as apostles of civil liberty. Let them preach a crusade of natural rights; but let them not tell us that their Master came to do such work, or that the gospel evangelically
preached would soon put an end to slavery."49 Twelve years later New School minister Frederick Ross still acknowledged that abolitionists did not "deny the Word of God, but I do affirm that their argument does."50

It was even easier to make the connection between modern scriptural infidelities and antislavery by drawing attention to the few radical abolitionists who did reject the Word. Unitarian Theodore Parker, for example, not only accepted Straus's theories of the historical Jesus but also directly combined the most scandalous theological approaches with abolitionism, believing them to be mutually supporting and inseparable.51 This was a political nightmare for antislavery evangelicals and a theological nightmare even for Unitarians, but it was a dream (or at least a prophecy) come true for southern theologians. Parker's most infamous contention was that Jesus was not necessary to Christianity, because Christianity was synonymous with a universal moral law apprehended by conscience. This gave abolitionists direct access to an ultimate Christian authority beyond tradition and scripture. Parker explicitly jettisoned the popular antislavery arguments based on an unfolding or millennial critique of slavery implanted in the New Testament, while he kept an avowedly progressive view of the historic development of Christianity.

Southerners, therefore, could accuse northern evangelicals of being one step away from Parker's infidelity,
or worse, of corrupting Scripture by finding Parker's message in it (as he had not claimed to do). For this reason Patrick Hues Mell, a proslavery Baptist divine, claimed that biblical antislavery activists were all "like the neologists of Germany who apply the knife to sacred scriptures." Parker, at least, admitted his heresy. Mell thought the typical abolitionist was a "hypocrite," who in order to denounce slavery had "to invoke the 'spirit'--ghost?--of the Bible murdered by him for that purpose."\(^{52}\) Antislavery forces were claiming authority based on the divinely inspired words of the Bible while practicing German apostasies. The majority of educated ministers, let alone the southern public, did not bother to analyze or listen to the theological and Biblical fulminations of the radicals. They quite seriously determined that radical abolitionists were insane. "Dangerously insane" was the usual verdict in the late 1830s and early 1840s, when the full significance of the radicals' religious and racial arguments was realized in the South.\(^{53}\)

Apparent departures of radical abolitionists from revelation and reality created confidence for southern evangelicals. Many concluded that radical abolitionism was simply "a religious delusion" that the South need not fear. God would never allow it to triumph.\(^{54}\) Some evangelicals went further and concluded that the radicals were furthering Providence's plans for the South. Right through the Civil War a number of proslavery minister even declared their admiration
for the abolitionists on this basis. According to these ministers the abolitionists had forced southerners to think about slavery in simple terms of right or wrong, Christian or un-Christian, thus further awakening and unifying the South. Southern evangelicals disliked abolitionists answers to their for us or against us questions about emancipation but liked the form of the question. Garrison's uncompromising stand on principle embodied an ideal of all evangelicals and put the question of slaveholding's biblical and moral status on terms southern ministers welcomed. As a proslavery Methodist said, "If these men are right, we are wrong." Either "God's holy Word condemns slavery" or "God's Holy Book does not condemn it." Abolitionists were not only useful instigators, they were exemplars: southerners "may deplore their error yet we cannot but respect their constancy and their zeal. Our part should be to exhibit equal firmness, with a gentler spirit." 

Frederick Ross was more pithy on this point, saying simply of the abolitionists' extremism, "God made them do it." Much like T.R. Dew, Ross particularly welcomed their destruction of the colonization movement and thought this was God's way of showing that even that mild form of antislavery was "premature," impinging on the providential development of the southern economy. Ross was more enamored of later abolitionist arguments (in which Parker took a lead) about a "slave power conspiracy" because these even "more brought out,
in the Providence of God, that the slave power has been and is gaining ground in the United States . . . This is the tone of the past and present speech of Providence on the subject of slavery.\textsuperscript{57} According to Ross, the national "moral soil needed ... deep plowing," which the slavery debate had provided. The "moral agitation" had brought greater attention to the voice of Providence and insured that many "now read the Bible who never examined it before, with growing respect."\textsuperscript{58} Looking back from the 1850s Ross saw how even the heresy of abolitionism had fulfilled the purposes of spreading the true gospel.

Most ministers concluded that new respect for Scripture was confined to the South and needed no abolitionist agitation to bring it to fruition. By the time Ross achieved popularity in the 1850s southern ministers had long since simply stereotyped all northern religion on the basis of the biblical "errors" of radicals. In 1841, when Thornton Stringfellow sat down to write the best-selling proslavery tract, he was, like other southerners, aware of the great apostasy to the North with which he had to contend:\textsuperscript{59}

It is to be hoped that on a question of such vital importance as this to the peace and safety of our country, as well as to the welfare of the church, we shall be seen cleaving to the Bible, and taking all our decisions from its inspired pages. With men from the North, I have observed for many years a
palpable ignorance of the divine will, in reference to the institution of slavery. I have seen but few of them who made the Bible their study, that obtained knowledge of what it did reveal on this subject.\textsuperscript{60}

Scriptural proslavery arguments reinforced the southern sense of their region's being the redeemer nation's righteous remnant that still maintained fidelity to God's word and should receive His reward.

**The Struggle over Evangelical Leadership:**

**Evangelical Antislavery and the Denominational Schisms**

Whatever the benefits of abolitionist religious agitation in the South, abolitionist heresies did not discredit antislavery in the North or force moderate northerners to admit they opposed slavery on political grounds. Biblical arguments for antislavery flourished, and most northerners continued to espouse antislavery on the grounds of dominant evangelical beliefs.\textsuperscript{61} Most antislavery evangelicals conceded that there had been slaveholding in the biblical world while pressing the view that implementation of the Bible message would necessarily destroy slavery. Nonetheless, some defensive answers to southern biblical arguments were produced, matching literal proof with literal proof in order to prove that "no Patriarch ever held a slave."\textsuperscript{62} As much as the arguments of radicals, these moderates' arguments
convinced southern evangelicals of the general disingenuousness of all northern religion. If few northerners took part in this scriptural apologetic (or radicalism), fewer still thought it discredited antislavery.

Some antislavery evangelicals frankly admitted that biblical and doctrinal manipulations were preferable to southerners making a test of faith out of the least attractive features of the inspired Word. Even some supporters of southern slavery warned evangelicals that they ought to "let the Bible no more interfere [in the question of slavery] lest we put the good book in a false position." Antislavery forces did sometimes see the challenge offered by southern biblical proslavery in these terms of a choice between orthodoxy or antislavery: "If we must have infidelity of either type I much prefer that type of unbelief which is questionable in its theory to the most orthodox theology, when [orthodoxy is] so cruel, wicked and inhumane in its practices." A group of northern conservative Old School Presbyterian ministers explained to southerners why they could still associate themselves with a cause that had many unorthodox leaders and some weak scriptural champions. They reminded southern evangelicals that God had before given "signal success" to "infidels like Parker" as a means of achieving His ends: the infidel "Jehu executed God's judgment on the house of Israel" just as "Finney has been the means of
conversion to many, [though] you would not justify the extravagances and fanaticism of this remarkable man."\(^{65}\)

The example was lost on proslavery evangelicals. When even conservative ministers identified themselves with the projects of scriptural manipulators, southern evangelicals realized they had exposed the pretenses not of antislavery but of their northern brothers in faith. Apparent northern use of a shared evangelical message, mission, and culture was, as one southerner wrote in 1837, a "mask" for secular ends "endangering the cause of religion itself."\(^{66}\) Moderate antislavery arguments were more threatening to southern evangelicals than were the immediatism and moral suasion of the abolitionists. The former positions were not only much more popular in the North, they were also lodged in the evangelical denominations, employing their more practical and deceptively orthodox morality.

The evangelical churches' organizational and annual conferences had long constituted one of the principal occasions for northerners and southerners to encounter each other in institutional settings. Participants in these meetings were well informed about developments outside their congregations and aware of the personalities and preoccupations of their regional counterparts. The inescapable logic of a sectional division within these churches was apparent to leading proslavery ministers from the moment antislavery became a moral force. William Smith of Virginia
was urging a division from the northern apostates in the
General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church before
1836. William Plumer of Richmond spoke for slavery at the
1837 General Synod Meeting that split the Presbyterian Church.
Plumer was subsequently chosen moderator of the predominantly
southern Old School wing. Converse Amasa had been calling
for a separate southern assembly even before this momentous
meeting. Baptist William Brantley had announced before 1837
that southern Baptists were "a separate people" from their
northern counterparts. Smith, Plumer, Amasa, and Brantley
were all either from the border states or among northern
emigres to the South. Not coincidentally, all--Smith and
Plumer in particular--were also well versed in the formulas of
the current moral science and ready to reduce arguments about
slavery to didactic alternatives.

The division of the evangelical denominations preceded
those of the political parties and the nation primarily
because of the kind of men involved. Evangelical leaders were
not politicians. As proslavery southern Baptist and
colonizationist Richard Fuller commented, "Politics is a
science of compromises, but religion allows no compromises
with evil." These religious and often intellectual leaders
also made the first and most fervent commitments to the mid-
nineteenth-century ideology of a formalistic faith in
individual characterer (virtue-power) and a divine economy,
which they helped popularize and politicize in the era. A
leading historian of proslavery has recently addressed this matter: "Although proslavery clergymen practiced evangelical religion, the diaries, journals, and personal correspondences hardly reflect these realities. Whereas proslavery clergymen endorsed religious forms and practices publicly from the pulpit, in their private lives they seemed concerned heavily with social and financial success. . . . They all had a will to power." This analysis is exaggerated and in many ways inaccurate, but it does highlight a key reason for the rapid and acrimonious splits in the evangelical churches. Evangelical leaders who behaved in the manner described above were not being hypocritical or ignoring their beliefs; they also preached the will to power that lay at the heart of evangelical morality. Moral virtue was exalted as the key to power, character as the key to virtue, and will as the key to character. These men uncompromisingly lived what they preached. An assembly of leaders from a movement increasingly committed to didactic formulations of this moral ideal and campaigns to bring social and individual conformity to the ideal were not likely to find much common ground once their different definitions of financial success became clear.

Not just the personalities in these meetings but the purposes of them exacerbated the point of potential contention. The denominational assemblies met to distribute funds and seats of leadership. Once regional definitions of success became a moral issue, control of power and finances
within the denominational structures were inevitably discussed on the same basis. The sectional splits in both the Methodist and Baptist denominations—the two largest in the nation—clearly followed this pattern. The Presbyterian split of 1837 was not as clearly sectional nor as concerned with whether slaveholding was a moral form of success. (This, however, cannot be said of the subsequent sectional splits in 1857 when the New School split into northern and southern wings and in 1861 when the Old School similarly split after southern secession.) The development of evangelical moralism itself, rather than its sectional applications, first touched off alarms within Presbyterianism.

It was not surprising that such controversy came first and only in the denomination that had a comparatively strict theological and educational emphasis. By the early 1830s, Presbyterian moral reformers and Charles Finney’s revivalism were celebrating individual efficacy and exposing the long-developing departure of Americans from the Westminster Confession (which Finney claimed never to have read) and Reformed tradition. Although the "New School" impulse to democratize theology, reform, and church government initiated controversy and division, slavery still played a crucial role. Many southern Presbyterians who were sympathetic to New School positions or to flexibility on these theological and other issues went with the Old School when it was clear that most antislavery forces were in the New School faction. Albert
Barnes, the chief theological heretic on trial from the New School faction in 1837, was also a leading publisher of biblical antislavery. Presbyterian theological orientations also helped guarantee that the 1837 split would not be purely sectional, as all the subsequent antebellum evangelical schisms would be. Abolitionist theological heresies and the strength of traditional biblical sanctions for slaveholding held many northern Presbyterians to the predominantly southern Old School wing in the 1837 split.

The Methodist break in 1844 was more straightforwardly sectional and concerned with moral success and slavery. The controversy causing the split in the Methodist Conference centered around whether Bishop James Andrew could retain a position of power and leadership in Methodism after becoming a slaveholder. Although Andrew was willing to resign, his fellow southern ministers would not allow it because he was a perfect case to prove their point about slavery and the providential economy. Andrew, like so many southern ministers, had become a slaveholder through marriage. Southern Methodists could argue that his slaves had not been sought or bought but bestowed as if from God’s will and not Andrew’s self-will. When it became clear that the Methodist Conference would not also bestow power on Andrew, the Conference agreed to a regional division "as brethren beloved in the Lord." This facade crumbled four years later when
the two sides contended in court over another measure of moral power: division of the funds and territorial jurisdictions.74

The Baptists' more decentralized organization split a year after the Methodists' over similar issues involving funds and leadership of missions. The mission and publishing boards, which controlled these areas, were the only national institutional connections among Baptists. The sectional split among Baptists had the ironic effect of more clearly defining and strengthening commitment to conference structures--particularly in the South. Reverend William Johnson commented at the first Southern Baptist Convention meeting in 1845 that ministers would now be free "to promote slavery as a Bible institution" within a stronger organization.75 The ministers themselves realized a more immediate benefit. Southern Baptists would no longer have to meet in forums where, as Reverend Thornton Stringfellow put it, "our characters are traduced."76

The Effects of the Church Schisms on Proslavery

The church schisms gave southern evangelicals both greater freedom to promote their vision of slaveholding and more powerful organizational and ideological tools with which to complete their capture of southern culture. The evangelical publishing empire, for example, was now fully under sectional direction. Proslavery arguments were increasingly directed toward other southerners rather than
against the North. Evangelical proslavery teachings were ubiquitous in the South—indeed its major cultural product—and could appear almost anywhere, in any form. The renewal of missionary work to the slaves in the 1830s was inseparable from religious proslavery, and the movement continued to grow as a forum for evangelical nostrums in the antebellum period.

Dissociation from northern evangelicals made it easier for many ministers to proselitize a Christian slaveholding ethic more aggressively. The slavery debate provided ministers with a ready-made verbal and political weapon with which to press their projects. Ministers in the newly independent sectional denominations adapted northern evangelicals' stereotypes of southern moral laxity and conduct to their own purposes. They easily employed such critiques to call for conformity to evangelical standards and professions in the South—thereby enhancing socio-political influence for evangelicals. Northern antislavery also provided a convenient threat against southerners who did not pay lip service to the regional prestige of evangelicalism and who thereby aided and abetted the enemy by proving their stereotypes of impious, impulsive southerners. Ministers in effect held that their position in the biblical and moral debate on slavery obligated the South to display a front of evangelical orthodoxy and unity. As Presbyterian minister Robert Dabney commented, "To enjoy the advantages of the Bible
argument in our favor slaveholders will have to pay the price."78

The price was not steep. Evangelizing of slaves had long been under way, and its upswing in the 1830s was never as controversial as had been its inauguration before the turn of the century. Slaveholders were more likely to share in evangelical culture themselves by the 1830s, or to see religious indoctrination of slaves as bolstering the institution. The renewed vigor of the missionary movement in the antebellum period was mostly the work of a few dedicated ministers--Charles C. Jones prominent among them--who approached and organized it in the fashion of the reforms endemic at the time.

The goals and results of the proselytizing of a Christian slaveholding ethic were always more vague than those of the mission to the slaves. The most sweeping legal changes, involving the legitimation of slave marriages and literacy, came only under pressure from the dissolution of the institution during the Civil War. Evangelical defenders of the morality of slavery had never made legal reform an explicit project before the war; instead they called reform via more respectable and benevolent standards of "Christian mastery" or "stewardship," which would supposedly mitigate physical mistreatment of slaves and encourage their spiritual and intellectual uplift. By promoting this slaveholding ethic, southern evangelicalism--like all powerful ideological
movements--gave a name to a process already well under way. The institution of slavery and practices of slaveholders had been evolving rapidly since the close of the slave trade in 1808 and the subsequent rise in prices of slaves. As historian Willie Lee Rose observed, the institution of slavery was not the same from start to finish over its two hundred and fifty years, and the antebellum stage of the institution was characterized by "the domestication of domestic slavery." The close of the slave trade put a financial premium on ameliorating slave’s diet, housing, and health, which also became ways to perpetuate subordination of blacks. 

Therefore, the price that masters had to pay for their proslavery defense by ministers was that of attributing the economic behavior they were already engaged in to Christian motives.

Proslavery ministers were explicit about the practicality of their slaveholding "reform" ideals in the debate over the morality of slavery with both abolitionists and evangelical antislavery forces and in their subsequent proslavery moralizing to southerners. In 1841 Methodist T.C. Thornton replied to abolitionist critiques that southerners treated their slaves well only out of interest: "Well be it so! Christ approved it (slavery) . . . for his master’s interest. What objection can there be to all this?" That ameliorative acts and attitudes by antebellum slaveholders were interested and necessary proved they were natural and providential as well as
biblical: "self-interest and self-preservation are powerful motives to human action. Man is a creature of motive—he cannot, he does not, and his God never commands him to act without motive... He protects us physically, morally, and politically from all harm and all foes."^81

The calls of proslavery ministers for religious unity and moral homogeneity in the South drew on similar powerful motivations. This project was not a call to action so much as it was a call to acknowledgement of an emerging reality and the crediting of it to evangelical impulses. The South was already more homogeneously Protestant than the rest of the nation. The drive for evangelical uniformity would have been a success even without the campaign to promote it by the new regional churches. The South remained overwhelmingly native-born and Baptist or Methodist across the antebellum period, while Catholic immigration and new religious movements grew rapidly in the North from 1830 through the War. Proslavery propagandizing from strictly sectional pulpits, however, gave ministers an opportunity to define this process and identify it with the spread of the evangelical ethic and personality in the region. While northern society was moving more rapidly toward the Victorian modernity embedded in evangelical culture, in strictly religious terms the South was growing more completely evangelical Protestant while the North was becoming less so.
NOTES


6. See the outstanding work of Daniel Walker Howe on northern evangelicals particularly, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 150-181 (Chapter seven), 18, 33, 227. Howe describes how the special force of evangelicalism in the era was due not only to its synthesis of economic and moral values, but its simultaneous popular and progressive appeal. A dynamic bourgeoisie (154) in the North shared a language with the populous. The same dynamic was at work in the South, and the vulgar economic appeal imbedded in the message issuing from elite pulpits contributed to this dynamic in both regions. See also Howe, "The Evangelical Movement and the Political Culture in the North during the Second Party System," *JAH*, March 1991, 1217 (1216-1239).

7. David Brion Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress*, 211.


25. Charles Hodge quoted in E.N. Elliot (ed.), Cotton is King (1861), 847.

26. Northern biblical proslavery authors of the 1850s like Episcopal bishop John Henry Hopkins and Catholic bishop John Hughes, who were discussed in chapter two, and Presbyterian Henry Van Dyke of Brooklyn, Dutch Reformed Pastor Samuel B. How, and the most famous northern publicist Nehemiah Adams, all shared these elite origins and social fears. Nehemiah Adams had been especially impressed by the deference and submission of slaves in the South and wished he could see similar behavior from the lower classes in Boston. See Nehemiah Adams, A Southside View of Slavery: Three Months at the South in 1854 (Revised ed., Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1969) 25, 44. See also Samuel How, Slaveholding not Sinful: Slavery, the Punishment of Man's Sin; Its Remedy, the Gospel of Christ (New York: Arno Press, 1971 [1855]); Henry Van Dyke, "The Character and Influence of Abolitionism," Fast Day Sermons (New York: Rudd and Carleton, 1861).


30. Dr. William Sleigh, Abolitionism Exposed, Corrected: By a Physician; Formerly Resident of the South (Philadelphia: J Sharp, 1838) 7, 28.


38. Bondage a Moral Institution, Sanctioned by Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and the Preaching and Practice of the Savior and his apostles, By a Southern Farmer, (Macon: Griffin and Purse, 1837), 22.


40. These antislavery beliefs have often misleadingly been labelled "post-millennial" and contrasted with the more traditional "premillennial" beliefs that supposedly dominated the more backward South. This dichotomy is not helpful in sorting out antebellum stances on slavery and regional religious distinctiveness. Northern evangelicals often had no clear post-millennial theology, and antislavery forces in particular alternated their "post-millennial" carrots with "premillennial" sticks and Jeremiah's. American evangelicals and southern ones in particular did not pay much attention to theological niceties on this or other points of doctrine. Southern evangelicals shared in the general optimism pervading antebellum America that for lack of a more specific term can simply be called "millennialism." The evangelical movement itself and its more culturally pervasive moralism were built on redemptive conceits and hopes that gave a vague millennial tinge to everything its advocates said. Southerners were
comparatively less optimistic than the rest of the nation, but this element in the region is often wildly misread by historians examining southern pronouncements about the future of the nation and the world at large as the era progressed. Southerners transferred their redemptive hopes to themselves as they became pessimistic about the mission of the nation as whole. Southerners certainly cannot be categorized as pre-millennialists in this era. Whether or not the region can be identified as post-millennial or millennial is very hard to determine because the overwhelming characteristic of pre-War southern religious pronouncements is the lack of any explicit millennial theories or statements at all. See the discussion of this issue in chapter Six.

41. Bondage a Moral Institution, Sanctioned by Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and the Preaching and Practice of the Savior and his Apostles, By a Southern Farmer, (Macon: Griffin and Purse, 1837), 42.


43. Samuel Dunwoody, A Sermon upon the Subject of Slavery (Columbia: S. Weir, 1837), 18.

44. Dunwoody, 30.

45. Dunwoody, 18.

46. Baker, Life, 207-8. Other of the earliest proslavery responses to abolitionism came from recent northern emigres to the South, rather than southerners who had frequent contact with northern society. Besides Theodore Clapp and Charles Farley, William Hobby, the author of the ananymous Remarks Upon Slavery; Occasioned by Attempts to Circulate Improper Publications in the Southern States. By a Citizen of Georgia, (Augusta: Printed at the S.R. Sentinel Office, 1835), was one of the first to print a proslavery reaction to abolitionism and was another such emigre.

47. Catholic Advocate, April 12, 1836.


57. Ross, 113. Ross was referring to Theodore Parker’s abolitionist tract *The Slave Power* (1852), rather than the Republican Party’s political theories of a slave power conspiracy.


60. Stringfellow, *Stringfellow in favor of Slavery* (Richmond, 1856), 6. Also in E.N. Elliot (ed.), *Cotton is King* (1861), 461.


72. Immigration made Catholicism the largest by the end of the 1840s.


75. *Southern Baptist Convention Annual* (1845), 19.

76. Stringfellow, *Cotton is King*, 497.


80. This included, as shall be seen in the next chapter, the perpetuation of harshly racist and intrusively "paternalistic" elements of the antebellum phase of slavery.

CHAPTER SIX

Proslavery versus Antislavery Evangelicalism, 1846-1861

I have no fear that we can leave them [freed
slaves] where the rest of are, in the hands of God
and subject to that great law which feeds the
industrious and sometimes lets the idle starve.

Abolitionist, Charles Storey, 1862

Proslavery moralizing was not changing southerners’
image primarily of slaves or slavery, but of themselves, and
in comparison to the "reforms" of slavery this ideological
campaign was driven by more power and practical content.
Evangelical ministers provided southerners with uniform terms
of personal and regional identity and with a cogent way to
express their interests and destiny. If the prescription of
benevolence to slaveholders, the search for subtler and more
internalized means of slave discipline (discussed in more
detail in the following chapter), and the claims that southern
slavery was increasingly characterized by such a regime relied
mostly on rhetoric, the values behind the rhetoric were real.
The evangelical movement was leading the South away from
traditional physical penalties and social shaming as the means
of self and social control. Southerners were beginning to
embrace the attributes of mid-nineteenth-century modernity and
the Victorian character ideal: strict self-discipline,
internalized guilt, personal consistency, practical
rationality. These trends appeared more clearly in the region's work-ethic and market-oriented economic activity, handling of prisoners, education, and discipline of children in the home, than they ever did in slaveholding. The genuine social content of these values, however, was strikingly apparent in the southern attempt to defend slavery on the basis of these standards.

The Struggle over the Character Ideal:

The character ideal, therefore, was central to the process of ideological formation and self-definition in the antebellum South. Its appearance in the debate over the morality of slavery was not simply a result of the need to answer northern arguments about southerners' lack of character or moral will. Antislavery forces attacked southern moral behavior on the grounds of this ideal, stressing the slaveholders' inability to control their sexual passions and the region's failure to curb impulsive and violent temperaments. "It is in accordance with the general law," lectured moderate antislavery leader Francis Wayland, "that those who enslave the bodies of others, become in turn the slaves of their own passions." This had a tendency to "confound the moral character" of southerners whose "uncontrolled will," according to the Baptist moralist, was "steeled against every motive of conscience."
Moderate antislavery evangelicals were, like abolitionists, reviled in the South, but few proslavery spokesmen rejected their moral standards or terms of criticism. Indeed, proslavery arguments employed the same rhetoric to describe abolitionism. The movement was a violation of a strictly controlled character, according to its southern critics, because it was based on mere "impulse of feeling." In early proslavery pamphlets Tappan and Garrison were described as "allied to the worst passions," and having the "character" and "wildness" of a "fanatic." An abolitionist acted liked "a child." Southerners generally described proponents of the movement as embodying the same character flaws and threats as did blacks.

Southern ministers thought antislavery arguments based on the Golden Rule betrayed northerners' loss of personal restraint, as well as the dangers of their racial, social, and sexual heresies. Methodist T.C. Thronton took a mocking approach toward this critique of abolition, intimating that the antislavery Golden Rule meant simply that "every man (and woman too I suppose) to his liking, as the old woman said when she kissed the cow." In 1835 William Drayton already thought it a "marvel that the abstractions of abolitionists have never led women to rise up." Of course, his main concern and that of subsequent proslavery commentators on the unrestrained antislavery reading of the Golden Rule was what blacks "would have others" do for them. Southerners invariably predicted
a "black president" and "amalgamation" as the "disgusting" outcome of the antislavery ideal. Despite the obvious racial and rhetorical scare tactics employed in its promulgation, the character ideal was more than a device for answering antislavery on its own grounds and building regional stereotypes.

Southern evangelicals, after the church schisms, put even greater stress on the formulas of character and conscience in publications aimed at fellow southerners rather than at replying to northern critics. Thereby they both answered northern criticisms and appropriated them as a spur for southerners who were not defining their conduct on the basis of evangelical standards. Baptist Iveson Brookes used his proslavery arguments "to exhort sister states" in the South to "with shameface confess that we have lived too much at our ease and have not exerted to the extent of our ability the opportunities afforded for the culture of genius and talents which God . . . [has] given us." Brookes then ran through the typical antislavery list of southern shortcomings, agreeing that the South was "too exclusively agricultural" and that "proper levels of education and literature [were] not attained." Brookes, however, looked forward to the day when the South could "overwhelm them [northerners] with statistics" on "manufacturing, railroads, and canals in every quarter" of the South. The South needed further character-building, but Brookes rejected the antislavery criticism that the requisite
moral and religious resources were not in place in the region: 
"We are represented as being now a posse of degenerate 
ignoramuses and heroes of the bowie knife ... is it true? .
.. degeneracy? If we look to the department of religion do
Manleys, Fullers, and Howells indicate a degeneracy since
Furmans, Mercers, and Brantleys?"8 Brookes's list of his
brother southern Baptists--and supporters of slavery--could
have included Patrick Hues Mell, who had a similar view of
critiques of southern character and violence. Mell admitted
that "Christian masters" were "tempted to treat slaves
harshly" but insisted that this made southerners supe.ior
moral athletes because "temptations themselves if resisted, do
us no harm but the reverse." Slaveholders--according to
southern evangelicals--had great opportunities to curb their
desires and build habits of self-control and "individual
character."9

Even proslavery intellectuals who rejected evangelical
individualism and proslavery positions would rarely deviate
from the argument that slaveholding was a mark of and builder
of character and that the character ethic was the measure of
respectability in the region. William Harper, state
chancellor of South Carolina, defended slavery in the "naked,
abstract" as "the sole cause" of hierarchical and organic
civilization. Harper, however, was also the son of a
Presbyterian minister and insisted repeatedly that slavery
"elevated character" in masters and built a "severity of
decorum," which destroyed "aristocratic" manners. Likewise, James Henry Hammond, South Carolina's shamelessly cynical governor, openly hypocritical proslavery intellectual, erstwhile child molester, and stranger to even the crassest and most superficial forms of evangelicalism, would not challenge the character ethic in his 1845 proslavery Letter to an English Abolitionist (Thomas Clarkson). Despite Hammond's pleas for the superiority of the "primitive and patriarchal system" of society and personal conduct, he accepted that it would "tarnish the character of a people to acknowledge a standard of honor" and that it would be "inappropriate" to defend this alternative standard (at least in public). Hammond maintained that the "evils" of the honor ethic, particularly "frays, duels, and murders," were confined "mostly in the frontier states of the Southwest."

Evangelicals also admitted and even celebrated the immorality and irreligion of the frontier in order to prove that conversion and character were sweeping them away. Thornton Stringfellow pointed out that Texas, like colonial Virginia, had been settled by the "most lawless set of adventurers who ever lived," but "even out of these materials" evangelical "character" and slaveholding "could secure the highest results of human progress."

The massive campaigns for evangelical standards of respectability went on side by side and often overlapped with the torrent of proslavery moralizing coming from the pens of
ministers involved in both campaigns. Proslavery ministers were frequently involved in the central campaign to provide and foster contemporary standards of childrearing. Proslavery evangelicals preached the values of internalized guilt and moral self-monitoring, which were common to contemporary British and northern religious awakenings. Southerners also obsessively linked conscience and character-building to domesticity. In response to abolitionist charges about "gross beastly licentiousness" in slaveholding areas, southerners often admitted such cases, pointed to northern urban prostitution as a similar failing, and then asserted that the major influence on southern mores lay elsewhere: "The restraining influences that oppose gratification of sensual desire are virtuous principles instilled by parents into children . . . Have we not virtuous mothers to instill earnest principles in our youth?"^{13}

The tendency of the regional moral debate to lapse into economic statistics as the antebellum period progressed was particularly pronounced on this issue. The census of 1850 was endlessly raked for providential proofs of character lapses in the opposing region. Prostitution was often directly tied to homelessness in the evangelical imagination, and southern ministers found in the census a tantalizing discrepancy between domiciles and population in New England, where "70,243 families [were] without a home." This brought a typical antebellum hosannah from B.F. Stringfellow to the influence of
southern homes with children ensconced in them "there to learn the lessons of virtue . . . rather than expose them to the corrupting influence of the public house: there is no mother who would not toil with aching bones to guard her daughter with the shield of the domestic hearth. At home virtue flourishes, abroad vice takes its seed . . . the earth of the cabin is the bed of man's integrity, of woman's purity."

Antislavery forces hit back using lagging southern statistics on literary production, manufacturing, and especially educational (and reform) institutions. Many proslavery ministers were already involved in promoting reforms in these areas before the sectional debate reached a crescendo after 1850, and all conceded in their proslavery tracts that "we admire their (northern) efforts in the cause of education."¹⁴

Reform campaigns associated with conscience, character, domesticity, and childrearing were comparatively underdeveloped in the South; proslavery evangelicals admitted this much. They, however, insisted (relatively accurately) that this was a case of physical underdevelopment rather than a case of a paucity of adherents to evangelical profession or to its rhetoric of respectability. Southerners believed they had laid the moral foundations for educational reform, so they did not doubt that the physical progress would follow to rival the North's. Southerners were certain that they would catch up anyway, because the religious foundations under the North's schoolhouse were decaying. A Baptist proslavery tract
lamented the deficit of southern "intelligence," but mentioned that the author's state had attempted "to organize a system of common schools. Instruction failed, because of the sparseness of population. . . . Georgia was settled a century after Massachusetts. Who will say that she, a hundred years hence, will not have passed far beyond the position now occupied by Massachusetts."

Further in the wilds of Texas and Alabama during the late 1830s and early 1840s, Presbyterian Daniel Baker conceded that "it is said, and I fear with too much truth, that we in the South are an impulsive people." Baker used this antislavery critique to discuss, not slaveholding, but the need for southerners to be more "systematic in organizing" and "foresighted" in their approaches to charity, reform, education, and childrearing. A common school system was often out of reach, but organized households were not.

Advice to parents about forming unyielding evangelical characters and consciences was thus at the center of the enormous campaign for distribution of sermons and tracts in the South, as in the rest of the nation. Baker himself was famous for children's sermons and pious literature, in which he gave typically horrific warnings about the effects of impulsive behavior. "Oh my dear little reader, never indulge in angry passions," he pleaded after graphically describing the body of a nine-year-old suicide victim who had allowed his thoughts to wander into violent channels. The exercise of
force of character against one's youthful instincts meant little without conscience to guide it, so Baker focused on giving younger children standards of self-reflection, foresight, and internalized guilt. In his popular Daniel Baker's Talk to Little Children, a six-year-old girl's proper response to the question "What is your soul?" was "My think," to which Baker added for his pious young audience, "Don't you think, child? Well, see you do think." James Henry Thornwell once wrote to "congratulate" a friend on the death of his young son, assuring him the boy was in heaven, where the best of all possible things was happening to him: "his education was continuing." Baptist Richard Furman interlaced similar and even more demanding rhetoric about conscience among his sermons and tracts addressed to adults, in which he reminded them always to "look to the weight of individual responsibility." Furman's popular tract on Human Accountability shows the ubiquity not only of these models of personality but also of proslavery. This tract did not address the issue of slavery, but when Furman quoted the Biblical injunction "to every servant the master says 'occupy till I come,'" he casually reminded southerners that since he was sure they knew slaves were to occupy themselves with heavenly thoughts, not material circumstances, whites were to do likewise. His vision of the constant self-reflection necessary to proper mental organization was arresting. Furman told his audience always
to anticipate "an individual as well as a general judgment" at which "the daguerreotype of your whole life shall be held up before you."^{20}

Strong consciences and characters were primarily advocated as necessities for proper parenting.^{21} Tracts on childrearing stressed that "if parents do not govern themselves, they can never govern their children."^{22} Such moral formulas were always presented as irresistible physical laws of cause and effect. If individuals governed their instincts, they automatically affected and had control over their physical surroundings—even their children. Daniel Baker included the following story in his advice to parents. He had encountered the "best behaved" children he had ever seen amid the squalor of the town of Houston in 1840. When he asked the mother the secret of their remarkable behavior, she replied, "No secret sir, except I control myself."^{23} Baker assumed that the instrumental connection between this internal act on the part of the mother and the resulting conduct of the children required no explanation—which it did not, given evangelical assumptions about "moral force."^{24}

The Character Ideal and Racial Identity in Evangelical Proslavery

Similar lessons on the inevitable effects of failing to form character and proper habits of conscience often appeared in proslavery tracts. Evangelicals' strict character-based
construction of self-identity encouraged unforgiving proscriptions against perceived disorder or deviance in others. Antebellum believers were anxious to perceive and preserve an automatic and absolute rule of punishment for the development of an improper personality. This was the flip-side of the rewards for (what southerner evangelicals considered their own) self-control. Matthew Estes of Mississippi stressed that a single lapse into dishonesty or petty theft on the part of a young man would guarantee that he "will never recover his lost character . . . [and] will ever feel the scorn, contempt, and neglect of society."\textsuperscript{25} The Reverend George Junkin, an educator in Virginia and Ohio, directly used such lapses to support slavery: "Some parents take no control over their children. They are too lenient, and have too little conscience to feel the obligation to rule their household." This gave children "freedom from all restraints; and of course they become pests of society, and, ultimately the inmates of penitentiaries and candidates for the gibbet. . . . so masters are bound to keep their servants in bondage until they are fitted to be free."\textsuperscript{26} Changing patterns of white identity and social discipline clearly had implications for the prevalent forms of racism that supported slavery. Proslavery evangelicals' definition of slaves as school children being restrained and trained for self-government rather than as savages, sambos, or perpetual children simply ensured re-creation of the cycle of racial
superiority and subordination in a new phase of slavery. Indeed the emphasis on character among evangelicals may have heightened the tensions implicit in the dynamics of racism.\textsuperscript{27} Racism, like proslavery and the institution of slavery itself, was not a static, monolithic, or isolated phenomenon.

Whites had long used negative stereotypes of blacks to reinforce their own self-image and sense of esteem.\textsuperscript{28} Evangelical character constructed a new identity for nineteenth century southerners, and so traditional racist images and dynamics were recast to perpetuate myths of white supremacy. From the time of the first English encounters with Africa during the period of exploration and colonization, religious moralism had been central to the dynamic of racism. Christian imagery of the realms of light and darkness, good and evil, easily translated into racial categories. Blacks became the locus of generalized debasement and enslavement in much the same way that English representatives of "Christian civilization" were supposed to control and repress their own "darker" selves. English proscriptions and battles against their "inner-blackness" and "animal-like passions" of dark instincts, particularly sexual ones, were associated with and projected onto Africans.\textsuperscript{29} Next to the Bible, Mungo Park’s \textit{Travels, in the Interior of Africa}, filled with psycho-sexual myths about blacks and "orangotangs," remained the work most often cited by defenders of slavery, including evangelical ministers.\textsuperscript{30} Of course, stereotypes of blacks as savage and
highly sexualized enabled whites to rationalize their physical, economic, and sexual exploitation of them. Such distorted perceptions of black behavior, however, also had arisen—and were perpetuated—because they denied whites' own brutality and preserved their religious identity and sense of moral order. Projection of the categories of saved and damned, good Christians and heathens, onto racial differences assured white believers they had achieved a proper measure of moral and spiritual elevation over the general run of God's creatures.

The constructions of African heathenism, savagery, and outlandishness prevalent in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries should have had little relevance to the racial views of proslavery ministers who often had slaves as members of their congregations. But racism had always had little to do with the objective behavior and beliefs of blacks and much to do with the cultural and psychological needs of whites. Given the traditional dynamic of racism in America, the fact that blacks were no longer "heathens" in the antebellum era mattered less than the fact that white southerners were no longer colonial Englishmen or nominal Anglicans. Evangelicals' obsessive self-monitoring introspection and stress on self-restraint preserved, when they did not heighten, the tensions implicit in the historical (and psychosexual) origins of American racism. Despite the biblical proslavery emphasis on the christianizing of slaveholding and
the conversion and uplifting of the slaves, the evangelical movement channelled white supremacy into contemporary modes of expression rather than narrowing the traditional gulf between the races.

Although the chasm between the races was not significantly modified by nineteenth-century evangelical concepts, the evangelical movement repudiated many earlier racist constructs and practices, as it had colonial religious and political ideals. Antebellum evangelicals, particularly educated ministers, rejected the traditional hierarchies of race, nature, and the heavens that placed blacks closer to higher animals and whites to the realm of angels, which had been formalized in the Great Chain of Being. Evangelicals always pledged their allegiance to belief in the unity of races. "There is no such thing as gradations from brute natures to that of human: for man stands alone being the image of God," pronounced Josiah Priest in his Bible Defense of Slavery. Priest's typical statement was an aside in his popular collection of an unbroken litany of biblical and psycho-sexual attacks on blacks—all of which were amended by the still popular claim to "not have written a word out of prejudice against blacks."

Priest, a former harness-maker from New York, was sadly representative of the evangelical's tendency to depart from many of the racist arguments from creation or permanent curses, but to recast brutal white
supremacy in the framework of a competitive struggle to build moral character.

The popular biblical argument from Genesis 9 was included in the new rhetorical trend. Genesis 9 supposedly described how the black race had descended through Noah's son Ham, whose offspring had been cursed with enslavement. Antebellum abolitionists as well as proslavery southerners accepted that blacks were "the children of Ham."\(^{35}\) The story explained the origins of racial differences. Southerners cited its divinely sanctioned institution of human bondage to prove that slavery could be acceptable to God. Although some proslavery spokesmen used this ancient biblical tradition to argue that all blacks were forever relegated by God to the status of slaves, most evangelical spokesmen stressed that Ham (and his current descendants) "brought himself into his sad dilemma."\(^{36}\) Sweeping racial dichotomies no longer stressed the ascendancy of civilized human over heathen beast, but moral victors over vanquished—not in competition with each other but, as ministers were forever sermonizing, "with themselves."\(^{37}\) Thornton Stringfellow provided the standard formulation of character-based racism and competitive proslavery:

The slave race is placed upon a common level with all other competitors for the rewards of merit; but as the slaves are inferior in the qualities which give success among competitors ..., [they find]
poverty or die out by inches degraded by vice and crime, unpitied by honest and virtuous men. Should the time ever come, when emancipation in its consequences will comport with the moral, social, and political obligations of Christianity, then Christian masters will invest their slaves with freedom, [masters] who without any agency of their own, have been made in this land of liberty, their providential guardians.\textsuperscript{38}

Under certain conditions evangelical constructions (such as Stringfellow's) of the personality and of providential economy produced even greater racist pressures and horrors than did traditional formulas alone.

The Christian prescription of character-building put whites' tendencies both to associate blacks with the passions and to project their own repressed instincts onto slaves into an ominous new context. Proslavery Presbyterian Nathan Rice defined Christ's mission as "declaring a war of extermination against all the guilty passions of this earth."\textsuperscript{39} "Extermination" was a word that invariably appeared in moral defenses of slavery, especially in reference to free blacks, "prematurely" emancipated slaves, and Indians.\textsuperscript{40} As in other aspects of southern proslavery, T.R. Dew led the way in citing the travels of "Mungo Park" and describing how the "decree of Providence had gone forth," promising "total extermination" against those with weak character. Dew, like evangelical
ministers, concluded that slavery was "humane" because "there is nothing but slavery [to] eradicate the character of improvidence" that would otherwise bring extermination.

The vision of extermination offered by evangelicals was inevitably providential--never a plan or action executed by the righteous but a natural self-operating outcome of God's law and an individual's own failings. The development of force of character produced material benefits; "inferiority of character" issued in punishment. Dr. Matthew Estes, an admirer of Dew, described how "ultimate extinction" of those who did not make themselves "fit for freedom" was a result of the progressive and utilitarian nature of Providence: "Ultimate extinction . . . why should we lament such an event? . . . The extinction of a tribe, or even a whole people, is not more to be lamented than the extinction of one generation to make room for another. God cares nothing for the pride of man: he executes his purposes regardless of the whims and caprices of men . . . [and] does that which promotes the highest good of universal humanity." Much of this language in southern proslavery applied to free blacks and Africans; slavery was not considered an instrument of extinction. Estes, for example, qualified his prediction about racial extermination by noting that "the same race in the United States has made some advance in civilization":

Protestant Christians constitute the only portion of the globe in a progressive state. . . . The
destiny of all the inferior grades of mankind with the exception probably of the negroes is extinction—and extinction, too, much earlier than most people imagine.\textsuperscript{43}

Most slaves after all were Protestant Christians in 1843 when Estes made this argument, which fit the "reform" aspirations of evangelical proslavery. Such claims were also a ready answer to the antislavery contention that slavery corrupted black character.

Nonchalant contemplation of "utter extermination" in ministers' as well as other southern spokesmen's proslavery rhetoric often went hand in hand with praise for slave's moral advancement.\textsuperscript{44} Leading Baptist apologists Stringfellow and Iveson Brookes singled out the slaves' "dress and order" in church as proof that they were "daily improving" and "more elevated in character."\textsuperscript{45} The evangelization of slaves was compatible with a thorough-going white supremacy because, as one biblical proslavery tract emphasized, "the moral superiority of the master over the slave . . . consists in a greater elevation of character."\textsuperscript{46} This author added that "were it not for the restraints of [the slaves'] Christian religion," these "beings of impulse" would still be fit for "a blast from heaven as [the one that] ripped out Sodom and Gommorah!"\textsuperscript{47} Since white southerners had adopted stricter and more refined definitions of their characters, caricatures of mere looseness and inferiority of character in
christianized and "daily improving" slaves were enough to insure perceptions of a gulf between the races as great as that seen between seventeenth-century "Christian Englishmen" and "African savage heathens." Both nineteenth-century progressive providentialism and the evangelical emphasis on repression and eradication of the instincts and emotions associated with blacks encouraged virulent racial attitudes.

Discussions of religious exercises and gatherings present an exception to the general pattern of character-based racism in evangelical proslavery. Despite its overwhelming obsession with self-restraint and discipline in its followers' personal and social life (conduct in "the world"), the southern evangelical movement legitimated displays of emotional impulse in its religious services. Antebellum believers actually looked forward to the era's long church meetings and revivals because they offered a needed place of release. Even extreme racist proslavery ministers like Iveson Brookes who took the minority view that slavery was perpetual, argued that character was lost in "any white person putting himself upon the level with a negro in anything other than religion." Proslavery spokesmen who contemplated racial extermination had no qualms about praising the way slaves' "possess great earnestness and zeal in their religious devotions .... more earnestness and zeal than the whites themselves .... infidelity among them is almost entirely unknown." In religious practice alone white standards of emotional and
instinctual restraint used to label and attack blacks were partially relaxed. Although southerners, once within the walls of evangelical—often biracial—churches, may have modified the intellectual and psychological construct fostering character-based racism, there were more definite historical and practical roots for this aspect of religious proslavery. Slaves had responded overwhelmingly to the evangelical message of Methodists and Baptists. Whether or not white worshippers in the decades before the Civil War treated slaves more nearly as equals in biracial congregations, there is ample evidence that evangelicals had done so at the turn of the century before they had achieved respectability and dominated slaveholding.\textsuperscript{50} This experience at least found echoes in the later proslavery produced by evangelicals who were still ministering to and often actively promoting the mission to the slaves.\textsuperscript{51}

Recognition of the religious morality of slaves naturally served a propagandistic function in the slavery debate and in several ways reinforced white supremacy. The Reverend Fred Ross condescendingly proclaimed that the slaves were the "most susceptible to social and religious love, of all the races of mankind."\textsuperscript{52} This was little different from similar statements about women’s religious propensity and moral elevation used to perpetuate subordination. Submission and slavery to Christ were prominent themes of evangelical sermonizing—as Old School Presbyterian James Sloan rhapsodized
in his proslavery tract, "Christians do not belong to themselves."\textsuperscript{53} This standard extended beyond the church walls to canonize slaves’ and women’s social roles, whereas it was not deemed appropriate to Christian manliness or the force of character they were expected to display in their social roles. A proslavery pamphlet by a Presbyterian minister’s son recorded that "it is not degrading for a slave to submit to a blow—neither is it to a priest or woman."\textsuperscript{54} The evangelical character ideal could be the basis for recasting traditional forms of racial subordination even as it dismantled their time-honored intellectual justifications and ameliorated some of their abuses.

The practice of moralizing on the theme of character formation was crucial to the racist justification of slavery and the development of an evangelical slaveholding ethic and labor discipline (to be discussed in the following chapter), but the wider socio-economic meaning and influence of this orientation was enormous. Southerners had already made claims to greater evangelical piety in their debate with abolitionists. In their arguments about the character ideal, they proceeded to establish an absolute and automatic relation between improper moral organization and failure on the one hand, and proper organization and the resultant "force of character" manifested in all relationships and actions on the other hand. Southern evangelicals then defined regional identity in term of the rhetoric of character. The proslavery
focus on the proving and building of regional character, therefore, demanded recognition of southerners' providential right to political and economic power, as well as their right to hold slaves. The evangelical ideal of character connected all of these positions. Louisiana Methodist T.C. Thronton explained the link in a classic evangelical passage: "As rights are most evidently conditional, the proper measure of them is to be found in the character of the man. . . . There is nothing of exaction in one man's possessing rights more extensive than another, for they are almost instinctively awarded to him." Southern evangelicals who were spreading the doctrines of character and conscience in the region, therefore, understood Yankee claims to superior character and conscience as inextricably an assertion of national pre-eminence. In response, proslavery evangelicals were declaring that their standards of conduct were transforming households, children, and occasionally benighted frontier regions. "The Southern States," the Reverend William A. Smith asserted, "always great in the councils of the nation--are always and everywhere the true friends and invincible supporters of Protestant freedom, or the rights of conscience." 

Evangelical antislavery activists were busy not in disputing this doctrine of rights and freedom, but in establishing the opposite conclusion. Southerners lacked character, and their consciences were dead to their responsibilities toward slaves, so it inevitably followed that
the region did not merit political and economic reward or control over its surroundings. Georgia Methodist minister and educator A.B. Longstreet seized on the Wilmot Proviso of 1846 as the direct outcome of antislavery moralists' "undisguised purpose." The proposal would have denied any of the land won in the Mexican War to southern expansion. Longstreet, however, pointed out in his series of proslavery *Letters from Georgia to Massachusetts* that southerners had already attained the right to control over these areas through their development of evangelical personalities and will. Longstreet, quoting a citizen of Georgia who had written to the editor of the *Western Continent*, informed Massachusetts of the universal resolve in his region: the "sons [of the South] do not intend to be fibbed out of their character."57

**Sectional Definition of Character and Providence**

Historians have long noted the vulgar features of the nineteenth-century character ideal, which trumpeted the self-mademan and the nation's manifest destiny. Proslavery spokesmen boasted of their "individuality of character" and insisted that in the South "a man of real merit has a finer opportunity to demonstrate his character and realize distinction than anywhere in the world."58 Enormous claims were made for the efficacy of individual will, and a vast field of material rewards was promised for virtuous exertion.59 The equally vital moral emphases of this
mentalite are not always explicated because they are highly irrational and contradictory.

American Protestants of the nineteenth century engaged in a simultaneous exultation and denial of individual abilities through their emphasis on character. Antebellum ministers and parents attributed enormous powers to individual will but insisted that such exertions be directed only toward a limited set of moral goals and internal acts of discipline. They also spoke of the innumerable spiritual and material "fruits" waiting to be plucked by those who strove against sin, while maintaining that the whole outcome was absolutely dependent on character formation and God's Providence.60 "Do your duty," one proslavery minister instructed, "and leave the consequences to an over-ruling Providence."61 Therefore a key to ethical success as preached by evangelicals, as an explicit corollary to the character ideal, was that political or economic organization for the purpose of attaining of wealth was unnecessary. In fact, to employ such techniques in order to seek or even analyze material power was insidiously atheistic.62 In the 1850s southerners judged the Republican Party and especially Hinton Rowan Helper to be guilty of these sins. These culprits betrayed a lack of faith in God's moral ordering of the universe by implying that lasting success was obtainable through mundane, demoralized means—such as the setting aside of territory for one group's benefit or the
marshalling of cold statistics to prove equal opportunity a myth.

Men who did not allow individual character to find its reward betrayed the faith of the age. This constituted both the antislavery accusation against the South and the southern denunciation of antislavery. Southerners, according to antislavery activists, had built and maintained an artificial economic "system" allowing those who avoided labor to receive its rewards. Unitarian abolitionist William E. Channing argued that slavery violated the sacred order of Nature because it blocked advancement when "a slave surpass[es] his master in intellect . . . or moral worth." It seems hard," argued antislavery evangelical Jonathan Blanchard, "that the hand made hard with toil should not feel the cash it earns." The New York Antislavery Standard commented upon John Calhoun's death that he "is only to be regarded as one who was a systematic robber of the poorest of God's children." The slaveholder ate his bread in the sweat of another man's brow. In coercing and controlling the labor of other men, the slaveholder brought more than his own individual character to bear in economic competition. By building their own distorted moral system of desert and discipline, slaveholders thwarted that based on character. Slaveholders, in other words, were assuming the role of God.

Worse, when northerners instructed slaveholders about their monumental heresy, southerners attempted to deny the
sin. Antislavery ministers were sure this explained the proslavery evangelicals' "unwilling[ness] to discuss the right or wrong of slavery in the abstract--so that while single exercises of injustice may be condemned, a system of injustice may be vindicated."\textsuperscript{67} Attempts by southerners to preserve the unnatural economic system both proved their prideful, evil intentions and prophesized punishment and disaster from Providence. Horace Mann spoke in Congress in 1848, warning of the sweeping threat posed by this artificial economy: "Slavery diminishes the productive capacity of all operatives, bond and free, by cramping their minds and reducing them to mere machines. . . . Can Christian philanthropy or enlightened patriotism, look without fear and horror upon the corruption of the old political faith?"\textsuperscript{68} Although the Reverend Blanchard was more guarded in conceding that "careful distinction should be kept up between the sinfulness of slavery in itself, and the personal wickedness of slaveholders," he concluded that the "system" itself constituted a "violation of the Kingdom of God on earth . . . . It must therefore be destroyed that the Kingdom of God may come."\textsuperscript{69}

The most sophisticated version of the providential antislavery argument appeared in Edward Beecher's concept of "organic sin."\textsuperscript{70} Beecher, like his father Lyman and sister Harriet, was immersed in the long tradition of Puritan (Congregational) theological speculation. The idea of organic
sin grew from the tradition of covenant theology that assumed a national or community responsibility for the fulfillment of God's moral directives. The sin of an individual in the nation or community was not a solitary transgression against duty but a violation of the covenant—and therefore a threat to the entire body politic. New England abolitionists who were troubled in conscience about slavery saw its wrongs not simply as evil in themselves but as a reflection on (and direct threat to) their personal moral standing.

Beecher directly applied his theory of organic sin to the system of slavery. Sin was built into the institutional operations of slavery. This argument not only made the transgressions of evil slaveholders (which all the defenders of slavery acknowledged) reflect on the moral standing of everyone, but also made irrelevant the southern claim that "good Christians" redeemed the master-slave relation. Even these "good" slaveholders (whose existence most abolitionists conceded) were inevitably involved in sin by their participation in the system. Many radical abolitionists used this concept of sin as the rationale for attacking all slaveholders, but many more used it as an escape clause, which allowed them to be "charitable" to individual slaveholders but uncompromising on the issue of slavery. Antislavery gradualists were particularly attracted to such arguments about the "social wrong" or "social sin" of the South. Such a monumental and unnatural organization of society would
collapse of its own weight if the forces of Providence were left to their devices.

Few proslavery spokesmen would even consider the existence of a possibly evil "system" of slavery, let alone the concept of organic sin. Proslavery spokesmen protested that the antislavery charge "that American slavery is a system of spiritual despotism, is not true. ...The charge therefore that the principle of slavery is a principle which aims at the usurpation of the rights of God over the human soul is as false as it is monstrous and impossible." The antislavery argument that the sin was in the system was impossible because it implied that southerners had taken on God's role and so far had compelled Him to acquiesce in their sin. God had clearly not destroyed the system, so if it was a violation of His Kingdom on earth, abolitionists were accusing God of incompetence or of complicity in sin. If there were a "system" of slavery in the South, it was "a system of Providence." This system arose from the southerners' alignment of their society--perfectly according to conservatives--with God's actions and commandments, and not from implementation or deliberate perpetuation of their own system.

While most proslavery spokesmen acknowledged flaws in aspects of the legal and political system of the South, they did not conclude that this undermined the validity of southern slavery as a whole. The few proslavery evangelicals who
criticized the legal system itself did so to reach the opposite conclusions from the one implied by the abolitionist argument about organic sin. The legal system could be reformed or destroyed without ending slavery, and if the legal system stayed in place, the Christian slaveholder was not implicated in its wrongs. "Distinction says the venerable Dr. Chalmers," insisted David Rice, "ought to be made between a system and individuals unwillingly involved in it."\textsuperscript{74} Sin did not attach to the good slaveholders.

The most moderate of proslavery apologists usually would not entertain even this concession of unwilling involvement. William Smith stated simply that the idea of social sin meant that despite a man's character he was "compelled to commit sin. This certainly cannot be true."\textsuperscript{75} For Smith, slavery was a "system (so far as it is a system simply)" because of its perfect compatibility with free government and the unfailing operation of individual conscience and self-control demanded of southerners by the Bible. This last test was the basis of the "profound principle of truth or error which makes it a system."\textsuperscript{76} Smith reminded antislavery forces that "the right or wrong of an action in itself considered, is determined by . . . the moral character of the \textit{actor} by his intention in the performance."\textsuperscript{77} Individuals controlled the moral nature of not only the personal but the institutional consequences of slavery. Smith maintained that under the free institutions and government of the South it was impossible for
sin to be imbedded in a tyrannical or organic legal system (especially in the laws against manumission) that had grown up around slavery: "we are not absolutely compelled to be slaveholders. If government be as it undoubtedly is, the agent of the people, and the people choose, they are certainly competent by this agent to free themselves from this institution."^{78}

Historians have often labelled antebellum southerners as having an "older religiousness" than the rest of the nation. The debate on the issue of social sin reveals that one of the religious distinctions between the regions was in fact New England’s older religiousness. The younger South was built more exclusively on evangelical (and post-Revolutionary) ideals of individual character and accountability. The South shared little of the long tradition of New England covenant theology or of its Puritan town (and commonwealth) emphasis on communal responsibility for sin. One of the earliest southern responses to abolitionism in the 1830s involved objection to New England abolitionism’s "rest[ing] upon a contracted view both of the agency of man, and the purposes of the Deity."^{79} Southern believers did not participate in a strong tradition of thinking of and relating to God in terms of, or of achieving their own ends through, covenanted structures. Another southern minister was similarly disturbed by the use of "the stern spirit of Puritanism . . . not as a religion; but as a social law." He reported, "New England impressed me
as being developed on the creed that the individual man is completely subservient to society," and he concluded, "I cannot receive this idea of human life... I am one of those who believe that, in certain respects, men are so constituted by an all wise Nature as to be a law unto themselves. ...If our maker can trust them, why not we?" In contrast, New England because it was "a compact mass[,] the idea of their character is the idea of something built up on an architectural rule."

Most southern minsters were simply baffled by the antislavery arguments based on the concept of social sin. In 1844 Southern Baptist Richard Fuller denied there was any social aspect to sin: "the Gospel operates gradually and indirectly... chiefly through Christian character in individuals... its direct business is never with masses but individuals." Old School Presbyterian James Sloan--almost certainly drawing the argument from Fuller's proslavery debates--puzzled over Francis Wayland's arguments about the "social evil" of slavery and simply gave up. He concluded that this incoherence resulted from a lapse in intellect by "this usually clear and intelligent author." At the Methodist General Conference in Baltimore in 1842, Alexander McCaine of Edgefield district, South Carolina, puzzled over a moderate antislavery minister's statement the "the sin [of slavery] is in the system":

Of all the strange and unintelligible things that were advanced in debate, nothing surprised me more than the above statement; because it was uttered by one of the most long-headed, clear-sighted, and discerning men in the church. How he came to adopt such a sentiment I know not, unless it was because he was unwilling to admit that slavery is not a moral evil. I hope he will allow me to suggest to him a review of his principles, on the following grounds: Is a "system" accountable? Can sin be in the "system," separate from the moral agent? Can a "system" be punished? ... My brother I mean no disrespect when I attach a note on your hypothesis. You are involved in a labyrinth, and do what you will, you will never get clear of your difficulties until you take the Bible as your guide.84

The typical proslavery evangelical did not even bother to puzzle over this charge. Instead, like McCaine in the rest of his speech at the Methodist Conference, they attacked the way "abolitionists would disturb the settled order of Providence."85 Proslavery spokesmen were sure that abolitionists were the ones subverting character and building up a "well-organized system" in violation of the natural plan of Providence.86 Thornton Stringfellow strove to describe the basic social heresy of abolitionists: "they are organized," he decided.87 Conspiratorial terms were
predicated of abolitionists as soon as they gained public notice. Southerners reviled their "premeditated designs" and "acts of systematic hostility," which were "prosecuted through the medium of the post office." 88

Josiah Priest's popular paranoid proslavery tracts traced the source of the abolitionist conspiracy to the typical culprit: "It is a thing of British origins, of Lordly birth, aroused in that cradle of despotism (House of Lords)--as has been every opposing principle and plot against American republicanism." 89 The germ of abolitionism, according to A.B. Longstreet, had been transmitted to New England where it found receptive carriers in the long degenerating tradition of Puritan theological speculation and "tricky" Federalist politics. Longstreet, looking back accusingly to England's role in the War of 1812, contrasted "France and England--the one a reformer; the other an intermeddler, and yet you (Massachusetts) took sides with the latter." Longstreet thought this anomaly could be traced to the difference between "Hamilton your mentor in politics and Madison mine." 90

Longstreet more dramatically compared the dangerous religious spirit that Puritan abolitionism was fomenting in the North with the more farseeing piety of the South: "By your magic arts, a spirit has been waked up which baffles all description, and all philosophy. This--what shall I call it--I was going to say hell-born but it seems to have too much religion in it for that. Enthusiasm?--this Massachusetts, this
satanic puritanism. There is but one expedient left, which is to hold up the mirror of the future before it."91 Not surprisingly, Longstreet in 1846 predicted that abolitionists would soon disastrously attempt to usurp the roles of the U.S. government and of God. Both the implicit atheism and the governmental conspiracy of abolitionists were revealed in their fundamental sin. They were, as one proslavery spokesman succinctly put it, acting "as if they were the vice regents of Providence." Abolitionists wanted to determine what type of property could be held and who could hold it. If the legal or political system ever became their instrument, this would "destroy the operation of individual conscience" in the whole nation.92

Southerners were sure that such antislavery attitudes and activities hindered the unfolding of the Kingdom of God. Abolitionists not only threatened social disruption but betrayed a corrupted pride in their own "abstract" reasoning and ability to manipulate nature and society.93 The Reverend A. Campell of Bethany College, Virginia, typically accused abolitionists of being "more in love with their own opinions than the rights of man."94 The Reverend Nathan Lord argued in his proslavery tracts that "such Christian men (abolitionists) really, though unconsciously, counteract the better intentions and established course of Providence."95 Iveson Brookes gave the more strictly Biblical and evangelical judgment on abolitionists' speculative hubris: "it represents
the very principle upon which sin entered the Garden."96 In short, abolitionists, in trying to anticipate and outrun God's plan, were analyzing social questions conventionally and correctly left alone. Such conduct was not popular in either section of the nation. For southern evangelicals in particular it begged the question. If the South had set up a system contrary to the will of God, as abolitionists themselves asserted, it had to fail. Why then were abolitionists trying to destroy slavery by their own acts? Did they not trust God? One anti-abolitionist tract asked rhetorically: "Shall we adopt a plan of our own devising because from unbelief we doubt the efficacy of the Divine Plan?"97 Another early proslavery argument similarly queried: "Who should question His moral ability to accomplish the benevolent object (ending slavery)?"98 The true path of faith, character, and success according to evangelicals was to act in a way that confirmed, as Reverend Benjamin Morgan Palmer put it, that "Providence must govern man, and not that man should control Providence."99 Southerners thought that not just abolitionists, but antislavery forces and—as debate wore on to 1860 when Palmer made this statement—the entire North failed this test.100

William Smith described how reform movements could not "force an entrance through" the "door of Providence." Such attempts were impractical as well as impious since there was "no power" that could stand before the "enlightened popular
mind and will [which] must prevail." Smith compared the liberating successes of Providence's "moral nature" to a "tariff" rather than "direct taxes" since "its results march forward without observation." Smith then found a more ministerial analogy, "or, more to the point it is like the 'Kingdom of heaven,' which comes without observation." "But on the other hand," Smith cautioned, "if the movements in question are the work of only a few master spirits who have mistaken the actual condition of the masses, who have not yet risen to the moral condition of freedom, they will be found fighting against God." Smith drew a parallel between the failures of the Colonization Society, the Revolutions of Europe in 1848 (for which he had nourished hopes), and the future of antislavery: "a premature resistance in either case 'has its reward'--great suffering and a vast accumulation of guilt, but not success." Lack of results offered the clearest proof that antislavery activists were fighting Providence. "Is a single slave set free?" asked Leander Ker who ministered in Florida, "--not one. What is the worth ...[of] vaporing?" "What have we gained?" wondered a southern minister, "Has the way to relief been opened? Has Providence come forth from its darkness and provided means of delivery?" Jefferson Davis asked a similar question in the 1850 Congress after refusing to discuss the right or wrong of slavery "as an abstract proposition." Whatever the imperfections of slavery, Davis
saw no use in discussions of them by the voices of antislavery: "Why not denounce criminal laws, declaim against disease, pain, or poverty as wrong?" Proslavery writers in the 1840s had often been less politic about this aspect of antislavery. Antislavery activists were simply "improvident, "pampered stipendaries, "idle dreamers," and "do nothings" who "must be discarded by this practical do something age." The only quality worse than the impracticality of antislavery reform in southern eyes was its practicality—and the practical bent of mind of the entire North which it exposed. This seemingly schizophrenic accusation was not a product of southern insecurity or desperate proslavery propagandizing; it was a logical outgrowth of the evangelical mentalite of the age. Antislavery forces, for example, levelled much the same charge against the South. Patrick Hues Mell was exasperated by the way antislavery forces with "one breath tell us [the South] we are self-interested and greedy, and the next that . . . [slavery] tends to make us regardless of money and ignorant of its value." The surest way to bring personal or general economic and social ruin was to try to find or construct a means to secure self-interested ends. In the evangelical imagination a personality or society premised on deliberate self-interest was both impractical and dangerous. Southerners were thus also accusing the North of being too greedy to be successful; too rational to be sane.
"The men of the North are a peculiarly 'calculating' people," B.F. Stringfellow noted. He was, therefore, not surprised to find statistical evidence of a greater incidence of insanity, "among a people cold, calculating in temper [only] claiming to be particularly sober, temperate, practical." Conservative proslavery intellectuals like James Henry Hammond often linked this failing to the North’s "artificial, money power system" which was "cold, stern arithmetical . . . working up human lives with engines." Thomas Roderick Dew in a more popular vein attributed northern economic heresies and social problems to personal greed: "that cold, contracted, calculating selfishness." "Self," agreed Rev. Leander Ker, "is the source of it all."

Proslavery evangelicals arrived at the most concise diagnosis of the general disease behind northern outbreaks of insanity and greed: "Isms." Abolitionism was simply the worst manifestation of this impious breed of "modern speculation," as James H. Thronwell labelled it in 1841. The definitive list of "isms" in the 1850s usually included at least (in order of most frequent appearance) atheism, agrarianism, socialism, Fourierism, Mormonism, red republicanism, communism, and perfectionism. Thomas Smyth tried to abbreviate the list of northern offenders in 1860 and still came up with "atheists, infidels, communists, free lovers, bile-haters, and anti-Christian levellers."
"Isms" then was a necessary simplification. This label also indicated the characteristic of the North (and specific movements within it) that most offended southern evangelicals: a "devotion to artificial constructiveness," which "arraigns Providence and dictates its course of procedure."115 "By the sphere of fervid and rigid economic systems," a proslavery minister warned, "the most salutary influence of human agency is destroyed."116 Thornton Stringfellow similarly warned that the prime "design [of the] savior ... is to impress strongly upon the human mind that character deficient in correct moral feeling, will prove fatal to human hopes in a coming day." Character was a force of will and agency that southern evangelicals began to fear might be turned to purely secular ends. Antislavery activity and the development of northern society made this specter more threatening. Frederick Ross contemplated the debate over slavery and the emerging sectional schism in 1856, pronouncing on the real point of division: "The question is in a nutshell; it is this: shall man submit to the revealed will of God, or to his own will." If the choice were the second (as he believed the antislavery one to be) Ross wondered, "What is the progress and end of it? Some will suggest that all is the result of a fortuitous course of atoms ... Alas some, the Notts [followers of the southern biologist-phrenologist who advanced the theory of a separate and inferior creation\evolution of blacks], say man was created millions of years ago ... while other some say
man is the result of development from ... monkey.\footnote{117} Some southern intellectuals anticipated a next step in the progression of Ross's thought. "They will then succeed to qualifying man, a being fit to govern the universe," forecasted Johnathan Fletcher after ruminating on the logical conclusion of northern theories of social development and antislavery.\footnote{118}

These were not the fears and accusations of isolated, romantic southerners out of tune with and refusing to accept the developments of the age. Most northern evangelicals rejected similar sins (and were nervous about modernizing trends), and the form of their sectional accusations against southerners was comparable. Central to the evangelical project, both North and South, was an attempt to embrace the expanding mental and material horizons of nineteenth-century Americans, while containing them within morally and religiously prescribed bounds.\footnote{119} Therefore the evangelicals' proslavery and antislavery both paradoxically included elements of clarity (even presence) and delusion.

Primarily because of the character ideal, each section better understood the material forces at work in (and determining the future of) the other's social system, than those of its own. The self-interested motives and "self-will" the evangelicals were called on to repress and therefore would not acknowledge in their own actions, they quickly identified in others.\footnote{120} As shown, evangelical southerners who wrote
biblically based defenses of slavery were often incapable of acknowledging slavery as a social system (institutional construct) at all. Likewise, antislavery evangelicals were usually incapable of discussing northern free-labor as a system instituted by human agency: it resulted rather from the absence of any institutional manipulation and reflection. Abolitionists were exceptional in developing a moral vocabulary that demanded a systematic analysis of the social sources of power—at least in the South. They even tried to explain the South's "judicial blindness" both to social reality and to contradictions in its moral self-defense.\textsuperscript{121} Through their arguments, some in the North were able to critique slavery and to recognize the brutal ethic and institutionalized greed at its core.\textsuperscript{122} The mass of antislavery activists, however, skipped the analysis and simply attacked southerners as deliberate conspirators and hypocrites.

From the southern perspective the North was guilty of similar sins, because it covered self-interested motives with specious moralism in attacks on slaveholders. Southern evangelicals detected hypocrisy in the abolitionists’ analysis of the southern social system.\textsuperscript{123} Abolitionists’ "abstract reasoning" on freedom and equality did not seem to apply to inequities in northern society. "This levelling system then is intended exclusively for southern men," T.C. Thronton complained.\textsuperscript{124} Southern evangelicals suggested that
northerners return Indian land or cut the hours of mill-workers before they demand that the South dismantle slavery. A general charge against northern hypocrites was also popular among the pious: "However they may condemn the relation of master and slave, they would not be so ready to dissolve the relation between themselves and their fortunes." Northerners embodied the sin of Mammonism (worship of money).

A few elite southerners--intellectual counterparts to abolitionist radicals--were able to criticize free labor systematically as almost no one in the North or the rest of the world could. Sociological, academic, and political doctrines, rather than reforming sensibility, informed these southerners' critiques. Yet, as with abolitionists' sensitivity to southern structural realities, these radical proslavery ideologues--George Fitzhugh and Henry Hughes outstanding among them--directed and demonstrated their analytic powers on northern institutions and trends of modernization. Fitzhugh's *Sociology for the South* would have been more appropriately titled "Sociology of the North," which was its alternate title. Fitzhugh detected an underlying pattern of consolidation that could be described by Comtean materialism "lurking in the system of free society." The North had mere sociological patterns; the South had a society, which, at least in Fitzhugh's public work, was always assumed to be the natural embodiment of Christendom.
bifurcation was easily accepted among less ideologically and intellectually self-conscious southern believers, who skipped the sociology but were well-prepared to embrace the conclusion. The North was a land of isms, schisms, and calculating Yankee materialists, while the South was a land of pure, unified religion where the Kingdom was naturally unfolding free of impious intermeddling with its progress. As it is easier to see the thunderhead in the distance than the one overhead, it was easier to see an enormous, unnatural system of greed far to the North or South. Only in the other section (and economic order) dwelt a monster powerful enough to frustrate cherished (democratic and) evangelical values and visions of the future and unfamiliar enough to secretly intend such corruption.

As the debate over slavery progressed in the 1840s, the mutual attempts to identify those calculating power outcomes, those promoting a system for achieving these ends, and those thus interfering with Providence and threatening social disaster and divine retribution, reached a crescendo. "This great battle with abolitionists, has not been fought in vain," declared James Henley Thornwell at the end of the 1840s, "... a real progress has been made in the practical solution of the problems which produced the collision. ... The world is now the theatre of an extraordinary conflict of great principles--the foundations of society are about to be explored to their depths and the sources of social and
political prosperity laid bare." The 1850s, a decade of crisis, would end with an extraordinary conflict between the free labor and slavery systems, but these were not the great principles to which evangelicals, like Thornwell, referred. Thornwell saw himself as the champion of natural providential development and prosperity against the challenge of conscious abolitionist manipulation of the economic order and socialistic system-building.\textsuperscript{130} Antislavery publicist O.B. Forthingham, writing two years after Thornwell, also saw the coming clash of principles entirely in moral and religious terms. He found that inequities and prosperity in the North "are providential" while "slavery on the other hand is an institution, which the conscious will of man has built up. . . . Pauperism involves no direct guilt. Slavery is essential guilt."\textsuperscript{131} Who were "calculating"? Who were looking to expediency and self-interest? Who were planning and building "a piece of machinery" to deliver material rewards that reduced men themselves to mere machines or things? Who were organizing and consolidating an artificial system to guarantee their wealth and power? Who, thereby, were undermining my values? Blocking the force and attainments of my virtue and character? Blighting the flowering of an evangelical empire? The answer always lay on the other side of the Mason-Dixon line.
Debating the Divine Economy

Sectional Prosperity and Morality

The general religious debate over the morality of slavery, which began in the 1830s and peaked in the 1840s with the sectional schisms in the evangelical denominations, accelerated contemporary developments in southern ideology. Southerners accused antislavery forces of dangerous hubris for their attempts to anticipate and affect the future course of Providence. This criticism was not rooted in Bible Belt fatalism; most southerners rejected not the theological project but its application against slavery. Proslavery spokesmen claimed that the South in its current social arrangements merely accepted and aligned itself with the course of Providence. During the abolition controversy, southern evangelicals began to emphasize not simply their faith in the Bible message but the Bible's special manifestation in the region. The South increasingly adopted the role of the chosen, and even "redeemer," segment of the nation. Such proper organization of course would bring appropriate rewards. Evangelical southerners did not eschew the northern search for God's single law of moral and material progress but made claims to superior knowledge of it. The slavery debate hatched this decisive ideological development in both regions. Its popular and political appeal and consequences extended far beyond the pulpit.
Evangelical proslavery made explicit appeals to visions of economic prosperity and progress, which would follow from and confirm regional righteousness. Baptist Thornton Stringfellow, besides being the best-selling proslavery author, was also the best exemplar of this project. He compiled economic and demographic statistics to support his biblical proslavery in order to describe the contemporary operation of Providence and "demonstrate the relative prosperity [of the South] ... in religion / in morals / in the acquisition of wealth / in increase of native population."\(^{132}\)

For Stringfellow, a causal chain connected belief, to morality, to prosperity, to regional expansion. He accorded it the authority of science, and, given his view of southern religiosity, concluded axiomatically that "prosperity, unequaled in the annals of the world, has attended us."\(^{133}\)

Presbyterian Nathan Rice, noting in a public debate over slavery the insolvency of his abolitionist opponent's Cincinnati church, maintained that one clear proof of the morality of slavery was the evidence that "churches [in] Kentucky are quite as prosperous as those in Ohio."\(^{134}\) This was a pervasive attitude among evangelicals North and South. Historian Daniel Walker Howe has insightfully reminded modern readers of how blunt and unshamefaced such connections were in the era: "the people we are studying, not the subsequent historians, brought economics and religion together. Nineteenth-century people did not typically oppose
Christianity and culture, or morality and self-interest, the way twentieth-century people have come to do."  

Before southern nationalists and political ideologues expanded their analysis of foreign markets into the chimera argument of "Cotton is King," the Christian economics embedded in evangelical proslavery fed more populist and general economic expectations. Presbyterian Fred Ross regaled his proslavery audiences with predictions "of 1,250,000" people walking the streets of Charleston by 1953, and Virginia Baptist Jeremiah Jeter reported the common local belief that Lynchburg would rival London. Although many proslavery evangelicals who made these arguments were unionists and Whigs, "King Cotton" southern nationalists made sure to draw on this fund of religious optimism when pitching their case for southern economic and political independence. Economic nationalist J.D.B. DeBow included biblical proslavery alongside his appeals to "the interests in slavery of the southern nonslaveholders" to assure them that through "honesty and industry" and "adhering to the simple faiths of the gospel" anyone in the region could expect to become a slaveholder in "the happiest and most prosperous and powerful nation on earth." Often these appeals of southern nationalists in the 1850 were not so clearly manipulative of the regions religious culture. Spokesmen like E.N. Elliot, editor of the definitive pre-War proslavery compilation Cotton is King, did not explicitly separate their regional
propagandizing from their own (and their era's) biblical and Christian framework, language, and economics. Elliot, like Stringfellow, identified the South with "HE who ever favored those walking under the banner of truth and righteousness" and who "appointed the institution of slavery among his chosen and peculiar people [Israel], and under his divine goodness made it to that favored nation the great source of happiness and unexampled prosperity."^{138}

As most defenders of slavery were not working for or assuming a separate southern nationality, they had to give particular attention to the moderate antislavery contention that "diminishing of national wealth be proof of variance from the ordinance of God."^{139} T.R. Dew had inaugurated the era of mature proslavery with a similar argument demonstrating the converse. He argued that the applicability of current market theories to the circumstances of the southern economy and the profitability of slavery proved slavery to be a divine ordinance in that time and place. Moderate antislavery evangelicals like Francis Wayland altered the context of such southern apologetics by emphasizing the progressive trends of the national economy. Wayland framed debate by proposing, "slavery whether in light of political economy, of philanthropy, or of Christianity ..if it can be defended on either of these grounds its defense should be attempted. If it cannot be so defended, but on the contrary can be shown to be at variance both with virtue and self-interest, the sooner
we are convinced of this the better." He then proved slavery was "a moral evil" because it was "ruinous [to] national prosperity." In the 1850s Methodist minister and abolitionist Abram Pyrne took Wayland's argument further, expressing the common belief that the sin of slavery was "the great incubus resting upon the material growth and progress of our country." This position was used to dismiss arguments like Dew's by demanding a comparison of the southern economy to the best possible socio-economic arrangement—the one that had to be closest to the perfection of heaven and so bound to triumph in the end, whatever past prosperity or current conditions might seem to justify. Although forms of argumentation like Wayland's and Pyrne's gave antislavery a more inspirational and popular basis in the North, they had similar effects on proslavery in the South. It is often as hard to separate the developments in northern evangelicals' ideology from issues raised by confrontation with the South, as it is to distinguish the southern "need to refute" antislavery from the logical development of southern evangelicalism.

Intense focus on progress and a national comparative framework as the tests of prosperity had applications and even sources in proslavery. T.R. Dew had entertained appeals to future economic development as an escape clause from the contemporary weaknesses and evils of the slave economy, which he and other southerners acknowledged. While Dew had
privately dropped this stance (and dropped dead) by the time the Wilmot Proviso (1846) made the dominant direction of national economic expansion an obsession, similar invocations of progress by proslavery moralists flourished in the 1850s. W.D. Brown of Kentucky rehearsed the typical balancing act:

That there are evils growing out of the institution . . . as all . . . admit. We go further, we admit that it is a moral and political evil of vast magnitude, as is proven by the low state of public morals in the South, and by comparison of the slave states with the free, in general improvement and prosperity.¹⁴²

Brown then ran through a standard statistical comparison of his Kentucky with Ohio showing the former’s lamentable "injudicious investment in capital."¹⁴³ If this premise resembled the logic of evangelical antislavery, the intrusion of a progressive perspective (and of superior southern providential prophetics) dispelled relative southern economic and moral failings: "Time is not far distant when these iron bands of commercial intercourse will traverse the sunny regions of the South, as well as the sterile plains of the North. . . . the telegraph . . . will be extended . . . mostly if not wholly upon slave territory." This development did not imply serious restructuring or reform in the South, but would come as a "natural result of the present existing state of things."¹⁴⁴
Various arguments filled the gap between southern promise and performance—and the gap proslavery moralists presented was not always as wide or as honestly described as Brown's. One approach was similar to Dew's: because the South had a unique economic environment, its labor system and material lag were results of the best possible application of the same market laws at work in the rest of the nation. Misguided northern agitation and interference with this would have no positive effect and could only distort the natural development of the region. Matthew Estes insisted in his proslavery pronouncements that the division of labor operated in slavery and would "infinitely increase" wealth. "Destroy slavery," he bluntly told antislavery forces, "and you put a stop to all progress, and improvement at the South."¹⁴⁵ This implied that the purported goal of moderate antislavery was either self-defeating or a cover for just such a destructive project.

Even in the 1830s proslavery spokesmen did not rely solely on the negative appeals that "the North has retarded her [the South's] onward progress" or that "the South is more profitable than any scheme which northern abolitionists can devise," as one early pamphlet put it. The next step, as with W.D. Brown twenty years later, was to predict that the "South is destined to rival, perhaps outstrip, her more fortunate sisters in wealth and prosperity."¹⁴⁶ Proslavery advocates saw even the most glaring southern shortfalls in the war of statistical comparisons as portents of future prosperity and
vindication. In 1854, B.F. Stringfellow of Missouri pointed out that the most obvious of northern abundances was a form of illusory wealth outside providential pathways: "the boasted increase of population in New England is not so much the result of natural increase as of foreign emigration . . . . consider whether such increase be evidence of prosperity. . . . Providence in its wisdom does regulate the natural increase of population . . . population may by artificial means be increased far beyond its natural increase."¹⁴⁷ Southern evangelicals expected visible evidence of God’s finger in material events equal to that in the Words of His revelation. Their obsession with economic statistics, prosperity, and future development reflected an attempt to read Providence and ascertain that their society was a natural expression of evangelical individualism. Methodist William Brownlow insisted in 1858 that the slave economy would fulfill "our ends as well as the ends of Providence, which . . . are in perfect harmony."¹⁴⁸ Despite his virulent racism and proslavery, Parson Brownlow remained a staunch Unionist through the War. Sectionalism often sheltered threatened religious values and preserved a sense of moral order, before its use to proclaim economic, territorial, and political ascendancy.
The Divine Economy and the Issue of Emancipation

Confrontations over emancipation, much like those over slavery's place in the future development of the nation, heightened consciousness of and solidified commitments to regional formulations of the divine economy. "Virtue is power" became an article of faith justifying the increasing focus on God's laws of political economy in both regions. Northern arguments directed against slavery on the basis of these laws often had the unintended effect of drawing more attention to this ideology and solidifying it as the dominant species of social legitimation in the South. The issue of emancipation extended ideological uses of providential economics for legitimating moral stances that went beyond appeals to regional prosperity. Although that strand of argument had the greatest popular appeal, pro and antislavery ministers also delved into the intellectual issues of conscience, rights, and freedom behind the mentalite of the era.

Evangelicals assumed that material progress and market economics were just the superstructure of a moral order built on Christian individualism. Francis Wayland defined this religious base of nineteenth-century individualism at the beginning of his debate over the morality of slavery against fellow Baptist moderate Richard Fuller of South Carolina:

"Every individual of our race was placed on earth to work out his own salvation . . . surrounded by every temptation he must come off the conqueror
over every moral enemy or else perish, under a most aggravated condemnation. ... The Christian with these incentives and advantages, is left to apply for himself in each case the principles of the gospel. He is left to act at his own discretion, according to the dictates of his conscience, to cultivate a Christian disposition, and thus become a law unto himself. 149

This doctrine was not a point of debate between Fuller and Wayland or most northern and southern evangelicals. One need only realize how much of Social Darwinism was already implicit in the social vision of evangelicals to see that the justification of a brutal system of racial subordination was as natural a conclusion from these principles as was a libertarian crusade. For this reason, Wayland’s version of the antislavery argument had profound influence in the South. Wayland’s and Fuller’s oral debate at the 1840 Baptist conference in New York was one of the first and most highly publicized of such encounters. In combination with the exchange of letters both men sent through the Christian Reflector that was collected and published in 1844, the debate inspired Thornton Stringfellow’s popular biblical proslavery pamphlet and the influential published debates between Presbyterians David Rice and Jonathan Blanchard in 1845 and Methodists William Brownlow and Alexander Pyrne in 1858. Wayland’s antislavery was also, for example, the focus of the

Wayland provided a moral and political vocabulary and referent that helped clarify and lend authority to the ideas and attitudes southern evangelicals employed in support of slavery. Both Richard Fuller and David Rice turned Wayland's definition of conscience to proslavery purposes. "My first argument," began Rice's proslavery, "is founded upon the admitted fact that the great principles of morality are written upon the human heart, and, when presented do communicate themselves to the understanding and consciences of all men." Richard Fuller showed specifically how southerners accepted slavery in conscience by imagining an attempt to have laws legalizing "piracy and adultery" passed in South Carolina (or attempts to describe a "Christian adulterer"): "These enactments are felt by all to be impossible, while no such emotions are excited by slavery; a truth in itself showing that, in the instinctive consciousness of mankind, slavery is not necessarily in the category of crimes." Fuller was only the first and most dramatic example of a southern spokesman quoting directly from
Wayland’s *Moral Science* to establish the theoretical and theological bases of his proslavery.

It often took only a slight change in emphasis of antislavery arguments like Wayland’s to frame a coherent explanation of the southern proslavery position. Wayland, for example, complained that "I never found one (proslavery spokesman) who would be willing to introduce slavery into this country, were it not established." He believed the South therefore had a duty to move against slavery:

The ground which is at present taken by the South in regard to the question of slavery seems to be of recent origin. At the time of the Constitution, I suppose it to have been very generally acknowledged throughout this country that slavery was an evil and a wrong and that it was, tacitly at least, understood to be the duty of those states in which it existed to remove it as soon as practicable.\(^\text{152}\)

This interpretation of the constitutional settlement was one of the main reasons that the slavery debate revolved around questions of what was "practical." Wayland’s presentation of the constitutional compromise on slavery left an escape clause very reminiscent of the denominational statements about emancipation issued at the end of the eighteenth century. If southerners determined that the time had not yet come to remove slavery, the obligation described by Wayland was still as much a reason for doing nothing about slavery as
for dismantling it. Southerners, therefore, saw no need to deny Wayland's account of proslavery (which was accurate on southern attitudes toward the introduction of slavery) or the traditional approach to slavery in America; they merely refuted the imputation of novelty and of violation of the Founding compact by proslavery forces. "This charge is unjust," E.N. Elliot wrote, and with most defenders of slavery he plausibly maintained that "earlier and later writers both stood on substantially the same ground."\(^{153}\)

Moderates on the antislavery platform presented a version of the national tradition and standard of civil rights that was greeted with similar bewilderment by proslavery evangelicals. Southern evangelicals did not see that these adversaries' view of freedom and emancipation founded on the admixture of Christian morality and human rights was very different from their own proslavery position. The resemblance of evangelical antislavery philosophy to their own standards was just further proof to southern believers that slavery was not necessarily a contradiction of democratic and Christian principle. Jonathan Blanchard used Wayland's definition of "human rights" to argue that the Declaration of Independence had been "running down for the last fifty years" in the South.\(^{154}\) When Blanchard then proceeded to explain how democratic "governments may with just reason withhold civil rights without sin,"\(^{155}\) his southern debating opponent Nathan Rice wondered why slaveholding was singled out as sin:
Surely the principles of the Declaration of Independence are running down with the gentleman himself. Will he please point us to the principle in the moral law, which permits us to deprive the colored people of certain important rights, but teaches that we shall not deprive them of certain other rights?\textsuperscript{156}

Blanchard clarified his point by explaining that deprivations of civil rights ("voting," "interracial," "social rights") were only permissible so long as the sin of slaveholding was abolished:

\begin{quote}
I said that as ministers of Christ, when we have freed the slaves from their masters, abolitionists have done with them.\textsuperscript{157}
\end{quote}

Blanchard unlike the majority of northerners was an abolitionist and so was willing to draw an uncompromising line that defined minimal rights.

Gradualist antislavery ministers' views of rights and emancipation left open clearer lines of argument through which southern evangelicals could easily and unapologetically pass slavery. Francis Wayland explicitly described the role of the divine economy before, during, and after emancipation in the South (and the nation since the two were still of a piece in 1843 when he wrote):

\begin{quote}
The soil will neither become diminished in quantity, nor inferior in fertility [by
emancipation). The number of laborers will be the same. The only difference I can perceive would be that the laborer would then work in conformity with the conditions God has appointed, whereas he now works at variance with them; in the one case we would be attempting to accumulate property under the blessing of God, whereas now we are attempting to do it under His peculiar malediction.

...I would gladly discuss this subject as a question of Political Economy.

...I have offered no suggestion as to the manner in which emancipation, whenever it occurs, shall be conducted.158

These last two statements about the end of slavery were inextricably linked in the dominant version of evangelical antislavery. If slavery were under a malediction of God and the laws of political economy, it would pass away soon. The only question concerned how southerners would choose to accept this reality. "I willing leave it (the manner of emancipation)" to the South, Wayland concluded, adding that this was the "almost universal opinion of Christians of every denomination in the Northern States."159 This laissez faire attitude toward emancipation, if not toward antislavery commitment, was little different from southern evangelicals' tradition of accommodation to slavery.
It is not surprising, given this view of emancipation, that proslavery pamphlets inevitably offered political and religious formulations of the northern evangelical ideal. "This [slavery] is an evil," an early ministerial proslavery tract closed, "which under a free form of government will work out its own cure."¹⁶⁰ Twenty years later the Reverend W.A. Smith closed his proslavery tome of 1857 by noting that the slavery problem "will be found to solve itself."¹⁶¹ Radical abolitionists may not have shared this political faith, but the majority of moderate antislavery forces in the North did. In fact, many northern evangelicals in the antebellum period retained a passive attitude toward the slavery question on this basis, as had most Americans prior to the 1830s.¹⁶² Northern evangelicals who published proslavery in the 1840s and 1850s were usually enamored of this approach. The Reverend Nathan Lord of Dartmouth asked Americans to leave slavery to "God's natural and moral Providence," which would "in due time" bring emancipation when Americans could "safely and usefully do without it, as the grown man puts away childish things."¹⁶³

Some southern ministers expressed this providential ideal with less certainty about the time frame or about the likelihood of any transformation of the master-slave relationship. Old School Presbyterians were most likely to take these positions. John Adger was conservative in tone and left both questions open: "are we then asked whether we
believe slavery among us will be perpetual? We say, as far as Christianity is concerned, we do not see why it might not be perpetual, and yet we do not see reason to say that it will be so. It is a question for speculation or rather it is a question not for speculation, for how can we judge beforehand what God intends to do? It is then more properly a question of Providence." Bitter reactionary George Dodd Armstrong expected perpetual slavery and insisted Christians should not speak of "when Providence" would end slavery but "if Providence" will do so. The Reverend James Sloan of Mississippi was even less reticent in his reactionism:

And if preaching the pure and simple truths of the gospel tend to break down the system of domestic slavery, we say, let it go. But we have no fears on this point. The communication of spiritual truth never does work mischief. Although such conservative providential doctrines still had a measure of influence (especially among Old School Presbyterians), their conclusions about the permanence of slavery were those of a small minority among proslavery evangelicals.

The proslavery-antislavery clash took place within a larger framework of socio-political and ethical agreement. Most proslavery evangelicals accepted the antislavery moral logic. As one southern minister commented in the 1850s, "if it is such an evil as you represent, Christianity must uproot it.
So you say--so we say. . . . trust christianity to effect its divine work."¹⁶⁶ These visions of the end of slavery had almost nothing to do with direct steps southerners planned to take to free their slaves. Slavery and other evils would pass away through and by the divine economy. Southern Methodist William Seat encouraged southerners to always look for a "gradually progressive" millennium as well as a change in slavery. Richard Fuller also believed that "it is true God has unfolded gradually his plans and purposes" and through the spread of the gospel was bringing the "removal of all social and political evils by the purifying influence of individual character."¹⁶⁷ Immediate or explicit millennial expectation was not an aspect of proslavery; most southerners had clearly tied such events to a time without slavery or when it had been "made quite a different thing."¹⁶⁸ Yet many southern evangelicals shared in the general optimism pervading antebellum America that for lack of a more specific term can simply be called "millennialism." The evangelical movement itself and its more culturally pervasive moralism were built on redemptive conceits and hopes that gave a vague millennial tinge to everything its advocates said.

The Divine Economy as an Inter-regional Ideology

Although evangelicals North and South clearly provided convenient sacralizations of regional patterns, the larger moral consensus preceded and survived the antebellum division
over slavery. The general evangelical ideology of a divine economy must not be facilely reduced to a function of either sectional, economic, or religious motivations. To do so would be to ignore the most characteristic aspects of antebellum confrontations with social realities. Historians, for example, have long argued over how antislavery language served to legitimate an emerging industrial, capitalist order in the North. No one, however, has been able to show precisely how the attacking of one economic institution was conceived as a way of promoting the other. When accusing antislavery activists of bad faith, critical historians, like proslavery sociologists before them, show that abolitionists did not develop a social critique against the free market's moral outrages and suffering workers. The point is well taken, except for the fact that few antislavery activists developed such a critique against slavery.

Most of the abolitionist arguments that do examine the social system of the South still resolve themselves into discussions of sin (and primarily the sin of slaveholding, rather than the humanitarian objection to slave suffering. Demoralized suffering, not physical suffering per se—or new thresholds of personal sensibility to it—concerned most reformers). Abolitionism, much like religious proslavery, primarily promoted and legitimized not any institutional arrangement but a religiously and politically informed institutional naivete, clearly reflected in the very act of
attacking slavery via moral principles due to which success would simply be bestowed. Edward Beecher assured abolitionists after the riots against them in Alton that "supreme devotedness to God" was the characteristic "which if first produced will secure all else." Biblical antislavery spokesman James C. Birney more carefully explained this strategy of abolitionists: "[we] insist principally on the sin of slavery, because our main hope is the consciences of men, and it requires little logic to prove it is always safe to do right." Even when moral suasion became an unpopular doctrine in antislavery circles, the excitement over the evangelical formulas of moral agitation persisted and grew in the North.

The crisis antislavery provoked in the nation and the War itself, were glorious proof that to take a stand on moral principles was to produce direct physical results. Ministers North and South gloried in the sectional explosion because it appeared to demonstrate the practical relevance of their stock in trade. This antislavery (and proslavery) emphasis on moral "feeling" has been mislabelled romanticism. In its evangelical context this moralistic formalism was closer to the spirit of didactic scientism with its obsessive focus on cause and effect. When Harriet Beecher Stowe wondered, "but what can any individual do [about slavery]?
and advised, "they can see to it that they feel right," or when William Lloyd Garrison said masters were being opposed by
"a feeling against which they cannot stand," they were appealing to a power equivalent to the law of gravity or to a loaded and cocked gun. Success would come to the antislavery enterprise, as to other enterprises in the United States, through a natural, irresistible divine order—a process not requiring explanation.

The overwhelming element of these evangelicals’ mentalite was a blindness (willed or not), a refusal to examine or acknowledge self-interested motives and forces in any of their social acts. The moral universe of northern and southern evangelicals precluded or at least proscribed such social and self-awareness. Belief that individual morality must be the key to power served to rationalize slaveholding as well as antislavery, emerging industrialism as well as populist protest, emerging imperialism as well as isolationism. For this reason evangelical formulas were indestructible in the nineteenth century. They provided a forum for ongoing social struggles. If individual morality was indeed believed to be the root of power, and believers sought reform on the basis of this world view, or, worse, cherished it not just as a mission or national myth but a sacred reality, then it is hard to imagine how such people could rationalize or promote a specific social arrangement. They would be largely incapable of addressing social realities at all. Evangelicals’ formalistic focus on will always threw the onus for ultimate social corruption and reformation back onto individuals.
Cynical capitalists and southern slaveholders alike could find reasons to love pieties that by their very nature obscured and discounted the lasting reality of group dominance. (By likewise inculcating a belief that no corrupt power was beyond the redemptive reach of crusading righteousness, the formula also served as an ever-flowing source of naive, optimistic moralism that inspired American reform movements.)

Fundamentally the antebellum push for reform, symbolized by antislavery, offered vindication of the power of selflessly motivated Christian virtue. The ending of slavery through moral suasion would of itself banish a greater nightmare by proving that an enormous system of raw selfish force could not triumph over pure moral will. Proslavery ministers who wanted to convert slavery into a true "Bible institution" in the South had similar hopes for their project. A uniformly Christianized slave empire and master-slave relation would give the ultimate proof that there was nothing evangelical effort could not convert to the purposes of the Kingdom. Either antislavery success or proslavery "reform" would validate evangelicals' claims about the relevance and promise of the Christian message in American society. The fear of the increasing irrelevance of the evangelical message was the unacknowledged threat that inspired strenuous moral denial and vigorous proselytizing by the pious of the generation. Even if all society—not just the region above or below one—had seemed corrupted by worldliness and selfishness they would not
doubt virtue's power but assert it, and to affirm the coming
doom of the corrupt. Every perception of or attack against
social corruption constituted a simultaneous denial of its
lasting power and reality. This formulation inspired
complacency as much as reformation. Antebellum southerners
did not deviate from this pattern. Obviously contradictory
moral or economic world views were not at the heart of the
regional rupture on the issue of slavery. The critical
point of dispute lay elsewhere.
NOTES

1. Richard Fuller and Francis Wayland, Domestic Slavery Considered as a Scriptural Institution (New York: Lewis Colby, 1845), 39, 37.

2. Josiah Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, (Glasgow Ky.: Walker and Richard, 1852), 442.


5. Drayton, Vindicated, 481.


8. Iveson Brookes, A Defence of the South Against the Reproaches and Inchroachments of the North: In Which Slavery is Shown to be an Institution of God intended to form the basis of the best social state and the only safeguard to the permanence of a Republican Government (Hamburg, S.C.: Printed at the Republican Office 1850), 30-1.

9. Mell, Slavery, 12.


20. Furman, 18.


23. Baker, 249


27. The struggle to develop character and will, likewise paved the way for and may have been the key source for the harsher, psuedo-Darwinistic forms of racism in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Evangelical proslavery spokesmen emphasized the unity of races and fought the few advocates of biological racism who appeared in the 1850s, but as Gertrude Himmelfarb--the great chronicler of the intellectual
Revolution of Darwinism—"the idea of development, it was discovered, had always been present in the Christian view of the divine economy; Darwin had only borrowed it and returned it with interest." Evangelicals reached Social Darwinistic racial conclusions on non-biological grounds. Darwinian science in the United States in the latter half of the nineteenth century often made the failure to develop character a biological and racial trait in addition to being a long-standing moral one. Gertrude Himmelfarb, Darwin and the Darwinian Revolution (New York: W.W. Norton, 1959), 394.


31. This sixteenth-century racial construct (with ancient antecedents), however, was still used in almost unchanged form in proslavery justifications even on the eve of the Civil War. See William Brownlow in his 1858 Debate, 214, 264; also James Sloan, The Great Question Answered, 49.

32. For the most educated—and often surprisingly unorthodox on racial doctrines—discussion of this issue see Thomas Smyth, The Unity of Human Races: Proved to be the Doctrine of Scripture, Reason, and Science (New York: George Putnam, 1850). See also J.C. Mitchell, A Bible Defence of Slavery, and the Unity of Mankind (Mobile: J.Y. Thompson: 1861). For a less educated, more racist, and to modern readers utterly bizarre and incoherent version of this argument see Samuel Baldwin, Dominion; or the Unity and Trinity of the Human Race: with the Political Constitution of the World, and the Divine Rights of Shem, Ham, and Japheth (Nashville: E. Steveson &
F.A. Owen, 1858). Baldwin's works and their intricate exegetical and prophetic arguments were popular and accessible to antebellum audiences. Both Mitchell and Smyth were part of the evangelical attack on what Mitchell called "the insidious appeal made to the prejudices of slaveholders, by some who deny the unity of the human race (29)." He was referring to the few biological arguments that appeared in the 1850s speculating that blacks were the product of a separate creation or biologically determined subspecies. Smyth in refuting this argument made arguments not usually associated with southern authors in the 1850s: "Where is the man that can prove he is a pure caucasian? There is not one (45)." Mitchell (24) made a similar argument. Smyth also identified Africa as the "center and origin of the human family" (45) and also, through the Egyptians who he speculated were black (55), the center and origin of much of Greek civilization (63). The point is not that these ministers challenged southern racism or slavery—they did not, but they do demonstrate the considerable intellectual latitude open to southerners behind the "Cotton Curtain."

33. Priest, Slavery, 228.
34. Priest, 424.
36. Leander Ker, Slavery Consistent, 9.
37. Frederick Ross, Slavery Ordained, 123.
38. Thornton Stringfellow, Cotton, 520-521.
40. James Sloan, The Great Question Answered, Or is Slavery a Sin in Itslef (Per Se)? (Memphis: Hutton, Galloway, & Co., 1857), 78. For identical examples see A.A. Porter, Our Danger and Our Duty (Charleston: E.C. Counsell, 1850), 6; A.B. Longstreet, A Voice from the South: Comprising Letters from Georgia to Massachusetts and to the Southern States "The Wilmot Proviso is aggressive, revolutionary, and subversive of the Constitution and its guarantees to the slaveholding states" (8th edition) #588779 Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, (Baltimore: Samuel E. Smith: 1848) 1st ed (Baltimore: Western Continent Press, 1847), 17; J.C. Mitchell, A Bible Defence of Slavery, and the Unity of Mankind (Mobile: J.Y. Thompson: 1861), 7, 32; J.B. Ferguson, Address on the History, Authority and Influence of Slavery (Nashville: John T.S. Fall, 1850), 11; Bryan Tyson The

41. [William Drayton], Vindicated, 92.

42. Estes, Slavery, 243, 251.


44. William Gilmore Simms, Proslavery Argument, 222. James Stirling, an antislavery traveller and acute observer in the South, was amazed at antebellum southerners' mania for the phrase "utter extermination." He perceptively noted: "It is not difficult to guess which race they propose to exterminate; but the extermination of four millions of people is no such simple matter, though passionate editors talk so glibly of it." James Stirling, Letters from the Slave States (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1857), 52.

45. Iveson Brookes, Defence, 17; Thornton Stringfellow, Cotton is King, 491.

46. Josiah Priest, Slavery, 299 (my emphasis). See also Cotton is King, 599, 719.

47. Priest, 197, 247, 301.


51. Patrick Hues Mell, 39.

52. Frederick Ross, Slavery Ordained, 68.


54. William Harper in Cotton is King, 598. See also [Drayton], Vindicated, 94; Danial Baker, Life, 244; Josiah Priest, Bible, 57; Matthew Estes, Slavery, 136-137, 251.

56. Smith, *Lectures*, 275. (my emphasis)


60. See Beverly Tucker’s address to students in *Proslavery Argument*, 27: "Personal purity of character, individual integrity of purpose ...never sacrifice it to be expedient ...even to attain power. Be assured its ripening fruits awaits to reward the votary of virtue."


62. In order to ascribe outcomes to human efforts alone, one had to presume that power could be secured ere regardless of divine will. Individuals who claimed to do this was doubly dangerous because they were instituting a system of rewards and punishments other than God’s and God would be bound to bring disaster in the wake of such schemes. As important, any individual who did not accept the automatic operation of the divine economy, surely did so because their moral character was flawed. Such men practiced rational manipulations of the economy because they had not merited favor, or the rewards they had received made them ambitious for more than character alone procured. At a purely practical level, this reflected the way in which everyone in American society who had any material power was instantly arrayed against speculation on how it was bestowed. If the means could be explained in solely mundane terms, then not only was God subordinated, but economic rewards were demoralized and their holders characters were thrown into question. So although this doctrine was popularized on evangelical, theistic, and profoundly anti-intellectual bases, its socio-economic and ideological
function was perfectly coherent. For sophisticated
descriptions of the interaction of religious and economic
factors in Jacksonian politics and ideology see Harry L.
Watson, Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America
(New York, 1990) 172-175, 185-186; Daniel Walker Howe, The
Political Culture of the American Whigs (Chicago, 1979);
William Shade, Banks or No Banks: The Money Issue in Western
Politics, 1832-1865 (Detroit, 1972); William Brock, Parties
and Political Conscience: American Dilemmas, 1840-1850
(Millwood, N.Y., 1979).

63. Richard Fuller and Francis Wayland, Domestic Slavery
Considered as a Scriptural Institution (New York: Lewis Colby,
1845), 119, 234, 308.


65. J. Blanchard and N.L. Rice, A Debate on Slavery ("Upon
the question: is slavery in itself sinful and the relation
between master and slave a sinful relation?") (Cincinnati: Wm.
H. Moore & Co., 1846), 46.

66. Quoted in Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, (Glasgow Ky.:
Walker and Richard, 1852), 481. (my emphasis)

67. Smectymnuss, Slavery and the Church, 7-8, 40.

68. Quoted in Brookes, A Defence of the South Against the
Reproaches and Inchoamements of the North 25.

69. J. Blanchard and N.L. Rice, A Debate on Slavery, 170,
308, 168-169.

70. Edward Beecher, Antislavery Record (Boston, 1845). Also
see Emancipator 19 November, 1845; AFAS Reporter October,
1845, 65-66; Robert Meredith, The Politics of the Universe:
Edward Beecher, Abolition and Orthodoxy (1968), 106-112.


72. Priest, Bible, 345-6. This protest was also connected to
William Paley’s definition of slavery as a relationship
entered into without benefit of a contract. Antislavery
forces used Paley’s definition of slaves as "chattles"—people
reduced to things or instruments of another’s will—to attack
slavery. Proslavery forces rejected this description of
slavery as they rejected the idea that there was a social or
even legal "system" set up on this "metaphysical
impossibility" in the South. See Chapter four below.

73. James Paulding, Slavery in the United States (New York: Har
Harper and Brothers, 1836) 12.
74. J. Blanchard and N.L. Rice, *A Debate on Slavery*, 84, 156.


76. Smith, 35.

77. Smith, 37.

78. Smith, 13.

79. *Bondage a Moral Institution ... By a Southern Farmer*, 7.


83. It is not surprising that a Methodist like McCaine most openly expressed an unfamiliarity with theories of sin built on a covenental or contractual view of human and divine agency. Of all the major evangelical groups, Southern Methodists had fewest historical or theological traditions tied to New England or strict Reformed heritage. Methodists also put little emphasis on theology in general and were almost completely the product of a popular, post-Enlightenment, and post-revolutionary movement in America. Northern Methodists at least had social and geographical connections to New England and so especially for ministers involved in the antislavery movement there was some basis for absorbing ideas about social sin. McCaine was probably correct that the main attraction in such arguments for northern Methodists was that they allowed antislavery ministers to avoid watering down their condemnations of slavery, while avoiding openly rejecting Biblical traditions (or slaveholding Patriarchs) and southern co-religionists. See Donald Mathews, *Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality, 1790-1845* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965).


85. McCaine, 14.

87. Stringfellow, *Cotton*, 505.


89. Priest, 422.


91. Longstreet, 26.


96. Brookes, *A Defence of the South*, 34.


98. *Bondage a Moral Institution*, By a Southern Farmer, 16.


100. Southern conventions about the efficacy of individuals and their causal horizons were not as expansive as the North's. The comparative under-development of the South in the areas of entreprenurail innovation, manufacturing, and participation in the market (as well as in conventantal religion and contractual law)--all of which slavery helped foment and perpetuate--ran parallel to this conceptual lag. This difference in sensibility, however, was only comparative. Antevelopment northerners as well as southerners were engaged in the desparate attempt to hold on to both the traditional providential ideas of total dependence on God and American ideals of the unlimited power of individuals. The tensions implicit in this ideological project contributed the sectional crisis, and the project did not survive the Civil War. See Haskell, "Conventions" in Bender ed., *The Antislavery Debate*, 7, 230. John Higman, *From Boundlessness to Consolidation: The Transformation of American Culture, 1848-1860* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969). George Fredrickson, *The

101. William A. Smith, Lectures, 251.


103. Smith, 251.

104. Ker, Slavery Consistent, 28.

105. Jefferson Davis, Speech of Mr. Davis of Mississippi on the Subject of Slavery in the Territories, February 13, 14, 1850, 17.


107. (Patrick Hues Mell), Slavery, 30.

108. B. F. Stringfellow, Information, 10, 22.


111. Ker, Consistent, 18.


113. Thornwell, "The Relation of the Church and Society" (1851) 19; The Collected Works (4 Vol.) 4:393.


115. North and South, 19.


117. Ross, Ordained, 81.

118. Fletcher, Studies, 94.

119. Southerners engaged in the ultimate acts of "self-will" and usurpation of Providence by cynically qualifying themselves fit to govern the very bodies of God’s children (and the body politic of God’s country). Northern
evangelicals also saw slaveholders as the Americans most likely to engage to flirt with atheism and modern intellectual speculation. Jefferson's example had not lost force, and Harriet Beecher Stowe's Augustine St. Clare was a a more cynical manifestation of this southern intellectual specimen. Harriet Beecher Stowe Uncle Tom's Cabin, (New York: Signet, 1981), 200-202.

120. For an excellent discussion of these issues in the Jacksonian political culture see: Lawrence Kohl, The Politics of Individualism: Parties and the American Character in Jacksonian America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 22, 27, 50, 60.


123. Jenkins, Proslavery, 222.

124. Thronton, Inquiry, 15.


130. James Thornwell, Rights and Duties (1850), 13, 14-6.

132. Stringfellow in *Cotton*, 523.

133. Stringfellow, 544.


141. Brownlow and Pyrne, *Debate*, 139.


143. Brown, 482-3.

144. Brown, 484.


146. *South Vindicated* 119, 121.


149. Fuller and Wayland, *Debate*, 91-5.


152. Fuller and Wayland, 123, 15.


155. Blanchard and Rice, 90.

156. Blanchard and Rice, 53.


158. Fuller and Wayland, 119-121.

159. Fuller and Wayland, 122.


166. *North and South*, 32, 20, 22.


168. Fuller and Wayland, 270.

170. James Birney, Bible, 130.


CHAPTER SEVEN

Evangelical Proslavery and Free Labor Theory, 1850-1861

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Galatians 5:1

Servants be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; not with eye service, as men-pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service as to the Lord, and not to men; knowing that whatever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free.

Ephesians 6: 5-9

The clash over the morality of slavery primarily focused on whether the institution undermined self-dependence—how it taught or did not teach the lessons of self-discipline to slaves and slaveholders. This was a question rooted more in conflicting visions of labor discipline than in ideals of personal freedom and equality. Fundamental disagreement arose over how men were best situated to learn self-restraint. James Henley Thornwell acknowledged that the debate over slavery between northern and southern evangelicals turned solely on this point: "Moral responsibility . . . this question comprises . . . the whole moral difficulty of slavery." If slavery did not allow God's system of rewards
and punishments for self-control to function, southern evangelicals, like their northern counterparts, thought it constituted a threat to the whole nation. All evangelicals held that the placement of men in a position to learn self-discipline produced moral order, freedom, material progress, and the growth of religious adherence.\(^2\) A large body of people within the nation who were not being so schooled inevitably retarded progress toward full religion, full morality, and full wealth. Questions of equality and rights were ancillary. For Thornwell as for most antislavery evangelicals "the real question" was that of "whether it (slavery) is incompatible with the spiritual prosperity of individuals; or the general progress and education of society."\(^3\)

The secondary question of whether slavery for blacks involved a negation of or a racial exception to a concrete notion of freedom was hardly addressed at all in the slavery debate.\(^4\) Southerners held that the operation of the same divine moral law that made whites free, made blacks slaves--for the time being. In a similar vein, antislavery moralists felt little need to discuss the details of the eventual end of slavery, let alone what release from slavery (freedom) would mean for blacks. They held only that slaves needed to be released in order to come under the operation of the divine economy and to learn what that freedom taught.\(^5\)
Proslavery evangelicals were profoundly offended by this aspect of the antislavery movement, not simply because it threatened their property or nebulous southern honor but because "the great principles that influence human life, morality and religion are everywhere and always have been the same." It was blasphemy to imply either that the timeless authority of the Bible did not sanction slavery in Alabama as it had in Israel or that the divine economy was not in operation everywhere. Dispute on these intertwined issues brought the most serious divisions among evangelicals. Their world view led them to expect that Bible facts would align with the social facts familiar to them. When sweeping socio-economic changes and individual power were moralized, the kinds of material progress and individual success a region had experienced were very important. The South, in short, had a moralized form of success and labor discipline that the North did not. A clash of moral and biblical interpretations was therefore inevitable. Even if the Bible had not offered support of slavery, southern evangelicals would have found it anyway (as they did with racist arguments), as in some senses antislavery forces did for their moral-power project. Proslavery stood on firmer biblical traditions than did antislavery, but southern evangelicals' world view and the slavery debate revolved around nineteenth-century visions of moral free-agency, not traditionalism (or a clash between scripturalism and rationalism). Proslavery spokesmen ventured
into this contemporary arena as unapologetically as antislavery advocates made claims to literal Biblical authority for their reforms.

Debating Self-discipline and Free Labor

Although some southern intellectuals constructed proslavery critiques of free labor in the 1850s and provided justifications of slavery in the abstract, the dominant proslavery position equated slavery and free labor. Ministers in particular sought to demonstrate that slaves had the same opportunities open to them as any moral agents. Northerners and subsequent historians found this stance so patently unbelievable that they dismissed it as a product of rhetorical excess, which did not reflect any widespread southern values. However proslavery confidence that slave labor might stimulate and discipline rather than demoralize was largely born of the optimism of evangelical Protestantism. It is hard to dismiss this world view as tangential in the South, especially when it was so vital to a racist construction of black character. Mature proslavery in the 1850s was in no way a realistic description of southern slavery, but it does open a window on the culture of the ruling race.

Historians have found the southern argument that slave labor was compatible with the Protestant Ethic very difficult to categorize. Southern slavery with its static hierarchical structure was the antithesis of social mobility, progress,
growth, and change in status—in short, any work ethic. Analyzed theoretically, internal imperatives or self-government had nothing to do with its labor discipline. Rational pursuit of self-interest through the market or acts of foregoing short-term gratifications—gratifications which most likely would not even exist—mean little to slaves. Yet the documents testify that many proslavery ministers did not question these values and in fact insisted that slavery could not stand in the way of the system of rewards ever-present in the divine economy. It is true that the proslavery work ethic was only one strain—though a crucial one—in the corpus of southern ideological and intellectual pronouncements. But characterizing these mature proslavery tracts of the 1850s as merely elite or propagandistic productions rather misses the point of the origins of the documents’ language in widespread religious ideas. If evangelical concepts and conventions are understood, the cultural puzzle of the origins of bourgeois imperatives and capitalist longings of the ruling race is less jumbled. Many free labor and free market assumptions could be accepted on evangelical grounds, and if the market was not highly developed in the South and its labor discipline was almost non-existence on plantations, the same cannot be said for the forces of evangelicalism. Given the unique religious and political development of the southern United States, the ruling race could have been culturally bourgeois, while slavery was structurally otherwise. The tensions and
peculiarities of the moral and evangelical defense of slavery appear to arise from just such an attempt to "see" slavery through the cultural lenses of a free economy.

Whether or not proslavery evangelicals' equation of slavery with free labor had such wider cultural resonance, the history of proslavery is distorted if this propagandistic project is ignored. Most historians have emphasized the southern rejection and critique of free labor standards in the 1850s. The mass of proslavery documents--written by and for southern evangelicals--reveal a much more ambivalent stance. Several free labor concepts could be highly supportive of slavery, rather than antagonistic to it. There is at least no denying that southern evangelicals used the pieties of the work ethic and several of the more explicit free labor theories of the 1850s for such purposes.

While southern claims that slavery was an expression of the Protestant ethic had always lacked credibility in the North, they appeared more implausible and threatening as a popular and coherent free labor ideology coalesced in the region in the 1850s. Southern proslavery disturbed and offended the North precisely because it obscured the distinction between freedom and slavery and made the pieties of the work ethic look like manipulative myths. The institution of slavery not only degraded labor in the nation, proslavery degraded free labor ideals at just the time in the mid-century when population growth, immigration, economic
consolidation, and the expansion of wage labor in the North made faith in these ideals an obsession. Northerners anxious for reassurance that American labor unfailingly procured the rewards of individual independence did not like to hear that slaves were an example of laborers engaged in this process of moral and material uplift. If these values were to be preserved and mean anything within the rapidly changing North, some lines had to be drawn between slave and free society.

Early in the slavery debate antislavery activists had identified three features of slavery that were unmistakably in contradiction to the work ethic and a free labor economy. First, individuals (men) were supposed to enter into labor through voluntary contract on the basis of their legal self-ownership: slaves were chattel. Second, proper contractual labor had to be justly compensated: slaves had neither wages nor property rights. Third, a labor market had to be in place that allowed the opportunity for potentially unlimited social and physical mobility: slaves were offered no incentives or means of changing their employments, status, or residence. Southerners were unwilling to concede that there were such clear lines between free and slave labor. Popular free labor theory in the 1850s exalted the distinctions between slavery and a free economy, not because southerners rejected these ideals, but because southerners purported to share them and be co-equal competitors for economic leadership of the nation on this basis. Proslavery spokesmen often tried
to describe slaves as laborers with all the intrinsic rewards and opportunities of the work ethic open to them.

Southerners professed that they honored the theory of the contractual and consensual nature of legitimate labor discipline. Ministers maintained that slaves labored voluntarily, and slaveholders were anxious to exact such statements from slaves.\footnote{12} James Henley Thornwell provided the most intellectually penetrating evangelical proslavery in the 1850s. Yet he joined ministers who made the seemingly irrational equation of slavery and free labor, when he insisted southern labor was "not involuntary servitude."\footnote{13} Thornwell elaborated on his dismissal of the definition of southern slavery as a unique form of "involuntary" labor:

If by involuntary be meant, however, that which results from hearty consent, and is accordingly rendered with cheerfulness, it is precisely the service which the law of God enjoins. Servants are exhorted to obey from considerations of duty . . . whether in point of fact, their service, in this sense shall be voluntary, will depend upon their moral character. But the same may be said of free labor.\footnote{14}

Thornwell added that the "the laborers in each case are equally moral, equally responsible, equally men" because southern slavery was merely "one of the conditions in which God is conducting the moral probation of man."\footnote{15} Fred Ross
likewise defined slavery as "belonging to the same category as master and hireling ... slavery as a system of labor, is only one form ... [God used] to elevate man."\textsuperscript{16}

The definition of slaves as laborers was the starting point of all southern arguments that slavery did not contradict national standards of social discipline. Biblical proslavery tracts held that the South's "peculiar policy and institutions (were) in harmony with the genius of republicanism, and the true spirit of christianity" in labor discipline as in all else.\textsuperscript{17} Unitarian abolitionist William Channing popularized the northern counter argument that slavery was properly defined by Bishop Paley's phrase "obligation to labor without consent or contract."\textsuperscript{18} Channing and the North also adopted Paley's corollary that slaves thereby lost their human dignity by being reduced to a "thing" or object of another man's will.\textsuperscript{19} Thornwell called this definition of slavery "ridiculous" because it degraded slaves from their "rank of responsible and voluntary agents."\textsuperscript{20} Since proslavery spokesmen like Thornwell had defined slaves as laborers, they could then invoke the inherent dignity of work against the antislavery stance. Southerners argued that an attack on slavery constituted an assault on the sacred obligation to labor and the irrepressible moral nature of labor performed.\textsuperscript{21} Baptist Patrick Mell stated "that in no part of this Union is labor held in more honorable estimation" than in the South.\textsuperscript{22} T.W.
Hoit echoed this boast and asserted slavery could not be immoral because "labor degrades no man." In 1857 Presbyterian James Sloan wondered how abolitionists could argue that slavery was a sin per se and asked rhetorically, "Is then labor sin in itself?" Slaves were laborers, not chattels; therefore Thornwell argued that necessarily "ideas of personal rights and responsibilities pervade the whole system."

Thornwell's idea of voluntary slavery was not his private fantasy. In the 1830s Theodore Clapp—a Louisiana Unitarian and ex-New England compatriot of Channing—had taken a stance that anticipated Thornwell's and later southerners' veneration of labor and the inalienable power of the individual moral will. Clapp also discounted the possibility of chattel slavery and arrived at this position via a confrontation with Channing's use of Paley. "Others cannot enslave us," preached Clapp, "they cannot stop our thoughts. . . . He [the slave] enjoys the most precious attributes of man, who can turn his mind, by absolute effort of his will. . . . from frivolous and vain to honorable and useful employments. All of this the slave is at liberty to do." James Henley Thornwell made virtually the same point in the 1850s when he stated slave labor expressed "voluntary homage to law."

Other southerners insisted they defended "voluntary slavery." After proslavery advocates denied slaves were
chattels, they often came up with alternatives to the term "slavery" to describe southern labor. "Liberty labor" and "regulated liberty" were some favorites; several ministers used the oxymoronic designation "free-slave." Joseph Wilson, a Presbyterian minister and father of Woodrow Wilson, cited the King James Version of the Bible's use of the term "servant." He explained how this showed southern labor to be neither exceptional nor properly called slavery:

Servants, not in the rigid sense which slavery seems to imply, yet in a sense sufficiently obvious and strict . . . may be the voluntary or involuntary doer of offices which must fall to the lot of someone . . . even in those regions from which come the most heated denunciations of a slavery which, existing among us, differs at best from their own in degree. 

The question of how blacks were supposed voluntarily to choose slavery when they did not have the right to legal self-ownership was circumvented by the evangelical belief that the Bible was the de facto law of the land (and irresistibly the "over-ruling" law anyway).

Many of the most delusive and unbelievable elements in proslavery arose from evangelicals' general and ongoing will to believe that objective conditions in their lives or regions meant less than biblical or providential realities. Thornwell looked not to southern slave laws but to the letters of Paul
to discount chattel slavery, which "precluding as it does every idea of merit or demerit . . . never seems to have entered the head of the Apostle. He considered slavery as a social and political economy betwixt moral, intelligent, responsible beings, involving reciprocal rights and reciprocal obligations. . . . a moral character attaches to their work." 32 Baptist Richard Fuller simply used the idea of biblical injunction and moral duty to argue "my own servants are placed under a contract, which no instrument of writing could make more sacred." 33 Methodist William Smith argued slavery had to be voluntary because the Bible so described it when Romans 6:16 and Ephsians 6:5-7 commanded servants, "Do the will of God with Good will. We must certainly understand it was the duty of those [biblical] slaves to give both assent and consent to their condition." 34 Presbyterian James Mitchell gave a similar translation of Corinthian 1, which he claimed instructed slaves "care not for being slaves, but even if you can be free, prefer to remain as you are." 35 T.C. Thronton gave a more racist and popular explanation of the voluntary nature of slavery. The practice originated and was constantly re-initiated through slaves' own moral will rather than through a pre-existing duty:

People may by their ignorance and vices not only prove, but actually render themselves unfit . . . they make themselves slaves. Yes! slaves of the most degraded character! Who will admit slavery, as
a permanent institution of a country is right? Not one perhaps. For although slavery, from its great liability to abuse, may become the greatest evil that can befall a man, yet it is certain that it may be a voluntary, and indeed sometimes a necessary relation . . . for some people for a time.\(^\text{36}\)

Baptist William Buck gave a more technical definition of this voluntary act: "Africans are made slaves by their own implied consent."\(^\text{37}\) Slave labor southerners said was "a training ground . . . improperly called slavery."\(^\text{38}\)

If southern evangelicals supposed slaves to be laborers under a course of elevating discipline improperly called slavery, slaveholders could not properly be called owners or even masters. Bryan Tyson admitted bluntly in his proslavery apology that "the word master sounds badly to many [in North Carolina] even to me."\(^\text{39}\) William Smith found a term more appropriate to the times by designating a slaveholder an employer or "a chief director, one who governs or directs either men or business."\(^\text{40}\) Patrick Mell aligned slaveholders' role more directly with the work ethic: "9 out of 10 masters undergo as much physical labor in the field as their negroes do. . . . There are some few rich men here as well as in N.E., who unhappily, bring up their children in idleness. . . . our sons and daughters yield to none in industry."\(^\text{41}\) The evangelical construction of mastery
differed significantly from the classic rationalization of slavery as the means of freeing a class of superior men for leisured pursuits. Proslavery advocates associated with East Coast planter elites, like South Carolinians James Henry Hammond and state chancellor William Harper, advanced the "mud-sill" argument of slave labor in the 1850s. According to this theory, all societies needed a class of drudge laborers. Whether or not a given society instituted slavery, the mud-sill level of employment would be occupied. "God," in the words of Chancellor Harper, did not intend that all men should be "cultivated morally and intellectually." Following Aristotle, Harper speculated that "natural slaves" existed everywhere in the ranks of mankind. Slavery--especially racial slavery--within a Republic had the advantage of clearly separating these men and their kind of work from the rest of society. The insecurities and interest of those in the mud-sill would not infringe on the body politic if they were enslaved. This freed the citizenry to pursue the higher calling of Republican democracy in America since white citizen would relate to each other as equals rather than competitors. The "compensation" for the degradation of the slave race in Harper's philosophy was "the elevation and purity of the other." All the defenses of slavery as a positive good that were perfected in the 1850s employed arguments akin to Harper's in order to prove slavery was a vital basis--or the only "cornerstone"--of Republicanism.
The influence of this apology has been exaggerated, particularly its paternalistic corollary that chattel enslavement was not simply a positive but the superior labor system. Most evangelicals disliked this argument. Harper for instance admitted that a "slave has no opportunity of raising himself to a higher rank in society, and that he has therefore, no inducement to meritorious exertion," but he saw this as a benefit because slaves earned the "compensation [of] security." The image of workers resting content with guaranteed food and shelter horrified antislavery evangelicals as the grossest kind of materialism, sensualism, and inducement to indolence.45 According to abolitionists, even the best face southerners could put on slave labor still constituted a corrupting sin akin to masters' idleness and comfort. The positive good theory of slavery, however, extended the material security enjoyed by slaves to a number of spiritual and mental ones. A.P. Ushur and James Henry Hammond argued that slavery saved the worker from the frustrating and exhausting anxiety of striving or searching for higher wages and employments.46 The variety of ways these arguments could be employed to favorably contrast the position of slaves to that of English or northern factory workers—as a guard against the insecurities of over-work, unemployment, sickness, old age, etc.—had long been in circulation and have been catalogued by historians.47 The clash of "the hierarchical ideology of slavery as a positive
good" with free labor theory, however, ceases to be the central ideological event of the 1850s when it is put in the perspective of the majority proslavery position.48

Chancellor Harper's hierarchical apology described the exact kind of labor system antislavery evangelicals attacked and that proslavery evangelicals refused to defend. Harper climaxed his defense of slavery by declaring:

If slaves have less freedom of action than other laborers, which I by no means admit, they are saved in a great degree from the responsibility of self-government."49

Proslavery evangelicals would not admit such a system existed; they thought that taking credit for saving slaves from the responsibility of self-government about as acceptable as taking credit for saving them from Jesus. Evangelicals usually deplored the proslavery argument that slaves obtained the benefits of "less labor" and "less accountability" because they were "beings for whose every act the master is held accountable."50 In evangelical rationalizations, slaves were responsible agents and masters directors of labor, not of men. This idealized labor system presented opportunities not only for greater labor and accountability, but also for the compensations and inducements of meritorious exertion. Evangelicals built their proslavery fantasies on very different cultural and conceptual models than those of elite devotees of slavery as a positive good. Ministers's and
laymen's formulas did not signify less proslavery commitment with any less censurable or horrifying consequences in the region, but they do give evidence for a southern world view less hostile to free labor ideals.

The definition of slaves as laborers was just the first step in placing slavery under the sanctions of the work ethic. Evangelicals claimed slaves received biblical "wages," much as they were under the protection of a biblical contract and guarantee of their self-ownership.\textsuperscript{51} Thornton Stringfellow provided the typical statement on slaves' compensations:

God has ordained food and raiment, as wages for the sweat of the face. Christ has ordained that with these whether in slavery or freedom, his disciples shall be content. . . . I answer that ours are hired servants, too, and not slaves.\textsuperscript{52}

In addition to the Adamic obligation to labor, Ecclesiastes 6:7, Ephesians 6:1-13, Timothy 6, Titus 2, and especially Luke 10:7 ("the laborer is worth his hire") and Thessalonians 3:10 ("Neither shall he work nor shall he eat") were standard fare in proslavery justifications and free labor explanations of the wage system. Antislavery spokesman Francis Wayland declared these biblical passages "are everywhere appropriate at this moment; and just as appropriate to free laborers as slaves."\textsuperscript{53} Wayland knew that proslavery apologists insisted slaves received wages, so he used the biblical injunction that masters and employers "give that which is just and equal"
(Ephsians 6) to prove southern slavery violated its own code. His position was similar to an earlier critique of the South popularized by abolitionist William Goodell, among others. In *Slavery Tested by Its Own Code* (1835) Goodell explained why even those slaves who received sufficient food and clothing did not attain the standard of free laborers:

> Wages to be "just and equal," must be sufficient to the support of the laborer, not as a mere animal, but as an intelligent and moral being. Something which he can earn without consuming all his time, so as to leave no adequate space for rational improvement and social enjoyment. Slavery, of course, did not pass the test.

Not surprisingly, proslavery forces were unwilling to concede this point. Introducing *Cotton is King* (1859) the massive and final compilation of proslavery arguments, E.N. Elliot noted that in Goodell's form of abolitionist argument the "idea here conveyed is that of compulsory and unrequited labor. Such is not our labor system." In the 1830s, Theodore Clapp had already sketched the relation of master to slave as "simply to enjoy the benefit of his labor during a term of years, for a fair and reasonable compensation." These long-standing proslavery visions left an incomplete description of a moral and modernizing labor system. Benefits bestowed at the master’s behest did not fully accord with
labor's inherent dignity and ability to find its own level of reward.

Slave success stories—counterparts to proslavery tales of self-made slaves—filled out the evangelical's picture of southern labor in the 1840s and 1850s. Baptist Richard Fuller diagrammed the evangelical myth of a flexible plantation labor:

When that [work assigned] is performed, the slaves—to use a phrase common with them—are "their own master." You will find slaves tilling land for themselves and selling various articles of merchandise for themselves... they will speak of their rights and their property... as they could if free. To use another of their phrases—they do all this "in their own time."58

Conservative Baptist Iveson Brookes believed everyone had to prosper "if free to carry out their industrial pursuits;" slaves were in such a position so the "more industrious of part of them procure even the luxuries of life."59 Thornton Stringfellow avoided the corrupt designation "luxuries" and instead emphasized how slaves worked their own property and acquired skills and advanced employments. Slaves "inherited portions of their masters estates," became "tradesmen of every kind," and "nearly all have an income of their own."60

Methodists T.C. Thornton and William Smith gave verbatim accounts of slaves' opportunities. "Their own time," Smith
lectured, "is usually employed by the more provident in cultivating a garden . . . or in various ways earning a few dollars." Thronton used the examples of exceptionally provident slaves; "among us are various mechanics and others, who have by industry and frugality, purchased housewares," and one by "his labor and industry (in his garden), buys 30 and 40 dollars worth of books at a time." Other proslavery spokesmen collected testimony from masters about slaves who pursued the ultimate labor inducement and form of property holding--purchasing themselves:

No instance is known of the master's interfering with their little acquisitions; and it often happens, that they are considerable enough to purchase themselves and family. . . . Other slaves who are more provident, employ a portion of their holy days and evenings in working for themselves. In this way, those who are at all industrious are enabled to appear as well dressed as any peasantry in the world. . . . In each case, much depends on the industry and management of the party.

The industrious also naturally escaped the punishments of other cases: "vicious idle servants are punished with stripes." Slave success stories had the advantage such "exceptional" cases always provided; they proved that the vast
majority of blacks continued to render themselves slaves for life. Evangelical plantation legends were also powerful ideological material because they were not fictions. Slaves acquired a variety of skills in a variety of job, compensation, and labor conditions. A few bought their freedom and became decently educated, and most slaves tended gardens to help keep themselves fed. Of course that such cases existed despite the labor system and white attitudes never seems to have occurred to southern apologists. When proslavery evangelicals did not take all the credit for blacks' triumphs, they noted how blacks' chances for autonomous exertion vindicated southern respect for the natural operation of the providential economy. Besides, proslavery forces believed the "slaveholder finds it in his interest to lift the more intelligent slave into situations of higher responsibility." Southern evangelicals' reaction to the greatest moral explosion of the 1850s—Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852)—often fell into this pattern.

Although some ministers wrote dreadful proslavery novels in response, such as Nellie Norton (1861) and Aunt Philby's Cabin (1854) and many demanded Harriet Beecher Stowe write a similar expose of the urban North or Britain, southern ministers also lauded examples from the novel. Presbyterian rabble-rouser Frederick Ross told a proslavery crowd that "every incident in the book occurs at the South" and urged them "to hunt down Simon Legree who whipped Uncle
Methodist academic Albert Taylor Bledsoe in his sophisticated proslavery work *Liberty and Slavery* (1856) found more positive confirmation of the southern view of slavery within Stowe's pages. The whole nation would see that southern slavery produced "not brutes, but a George Harris--or an Eliza--or an Uncle Tom. . . . We cannot possibly conceive, indeed, how Divine Providence could have placed them in a better school of correction." Edward Pringle wrote one of the longest southern reviews and replies to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In his conclusion, he assured southerners that if Stowe's view of slaves was right and slavery "disappears because of an increased energy and higher character in blacks, it will have had its day of usefulness." White southerners could not be guilty, they had left the way open for whatever good providential development brought out of slavery.

Whether or not general emancipation awaited at the end of the process, evangelicals wanted to demonstrate that individual slaves had the opportunity to prove their character and achieve upward mobility. William Smith worried in 1856 that abolitionism destroyed the "divinely sanctioned process" whereby the "voluntary principle was discriminating those in the moral condition of freedom." Smith thought that the colonization movement had served as such a safety valve for slave achievement, but even with its demise merited slaves would find their level: "Are they indeed fitted for political sovereignty? That . . . some among the slaves may be so, I
think is more than probably true. . . . [It is] usually awarded them with great unanimity by southern people."\textsuperscript{72} Other proslavery spokesmen were less introspective, declaring simply that those who would make "provident citizens . . . generally become free."\textsuperscript{73} Baptist William Buck, an ex-colonizationist like Smith, still hoped for a "rapidly approaching" removal of blacks from the South and identified the unfailing test for when slaves had worked their way toward emancipation.\textsuperscript{74} According to Buck, many in the South "hope for the time when the slaves of this country shall be so advanced in the arts, in science and religion, as to be perfectly capable of self-government--\textbf{assured that when that is the case they will be useless as slaves, [at] that [point] their owners will cheerfully surrender them.}\textsuperscript{75}

Emancipation could be pushed far into the future or well into the past without sacrificing the sanction of the work ethic or a flexible economy with competitive labor rewards. Biblical and divine sanctions made either option easy to cite. The trick in sustaining the illusion of a labor order built on merit and equal opportunity is determining how recently and how often equality has to have been guaranteed. One biblical proslavery tract simply declared: "the races set out with equal opportunity, at the subsiding of the flood, but who has won the prize of power--of social and mental improvement?"\textsuperscript{76} The more popular evangelical position stretched out the horizon of slaves' gradual schooling. "The Israelites were in
bondage in Egypt," lectured T.C. Thronton, "[and a] second captivity in Babylon, could hardly prepare them for self-government." A tract from the 1850s made the same biblical argument: "If indeed our fair and sunny South is the Egypt of this new Israel, can you not await the birth of its Moses and Exodus to the promised land?" The flexibility and providential nature of the southern economic order, not faith in advancing black character, inspired the majority of proslavery dreams of the end of the labor system.

Most proslavery evangelicals were more concerned about the total welfare of the region rather than the peculiar destiny of the slaves. Mathew Estes responded to the question, "Shall slavery ever cease?": "I reply that it will." "The abolition of slavery can never be effected in any community, until Slavery has ceased to be beneficial to all parties; until it wears out . . . [as it] fell into decay in our northern states." Estes, with the majority of proslavery advocates, thought the point "when mechanical industry shall have partaken of the general progress—in a word when . . . all things . . . shall have attained the maturity of manhood" was far off, but others did not. Howell Cobb in his *Scriptural Examination of the Constitution of Slavery in the United States* (1856) argued "that the time will not be a very long time" before population growth would bring a natural phasing out of slave labor:
There will be an extinction of slavery whenever the density of population of the United States shall be so great that free labor can be procured . . . at a cheaper rate and under less onerous conditions.  

The proslavery longing for the next stage in the development of the South's modernizing and fully moralized meritocracy often combined with the longing to be rid of blacks.  

As Methodist A.B. Longstreet wrote to Massachusetts about the slaves, "most of [us] are just as sick of them as you are of their masters and their masters are of you."  

Southerners often saw evils in slavery and felt it a burden even though they felt no personal responsibility (or guilt) about its existence. Fred Ross's proslavery vision of the soon to arrive transition out of the slave economy and labor system combined the gamut of proslavery biblical, economic, and racial hopes. Black labor (the children of "Ham" to Ross) would be displaced by Chinese immigrants (the children of "Shem") who were "a law abiding people without castes, accustomed to rise by merit to highest distinctions. . . . Shem, then, can mingle with Japheth in America."  

This would fulfill the biblical prophecy in Genesis 9 and insure the southern transition to a free labor economy.

Antislavery forces despised the southern attempt to bring slavery under the aegis of freedom. Despite arguments such as Fred Ross's and William Buck's about emancipation and the eventual move to free labor in the South, most evangelical
proslavery showed how slave labor already completely fulfilled the moral and religious standards of self-discipline. Francis Wayland recognized the southern tendency to admire free labor and attempt to describe slavery as "really identical." Wayland accurately described proslavery southerners' claim that "in all respects slavery makes no difference between the slave and any other man." After noting that a slave's position was supposedly "precisely that of a freeman," Wayland sarcastically commented to a proslavery minister: "I am not certain dear brother that I clearly understand the nature of that domestic slavery which you defend." Pennsylvanian Stephen Colwell also correctly pointed out that southerners "uphold slavery as a moral industrial institution." Northerners willing to be moderate on the slavery question in the hope that the South would naturally make the transition to free labor were discouraged to hear in the 1850s that the South's current order had passed through this test. A second aspect of the proslavery equation of slave labor discipline and self-disciplining free labor threatened popular northern sensibilities to a greater extent than the flexible evangelical planation legend. This threat, of course, was the southern description of the northern labor system.

No subject connected with the slavery debate has been misunderstood more than the issue of the southern critique of the northern wage labor system. There was first of all no
uniform proslavery project or position on this matter. The 1850s brought widespread debate and obsessive speculation about how and if labor as an expression of self-discipline in America unfailingly produced personal freedom and abundance. Population growth and national consolidation as well as the slavery debate pushed this issue to the forefront of American's minds and pushed all kinds of social thought to their logical (and extreme) conclusions. The proslavery assertion that southern labor fell within the confines of the key tenets of Protestant individualism and the Protestant ethic exemplified the trend.

There were certainly other possible ultimate arguments and intellectual outcomes. For one, in the 1850s some proslavery scientists abandoned the biblical time-line and unity of races to argue blacks were a product of a separate creation and inferior species rightly enslaved. In another more widespread stance, proslavery economists and sociologists described slavery as the perfect labor system since it avoided the "cash nexus" and contradiction between capital and labor purportedly sweeping free society. The most sophisticated antebellum southern economists and intellectuals did not always rely on or leave unquestioned the formulas of popular faith and thought, which often dissolved social contradictions and were normally were sheltered from introspection. The southern argument in the 1850s that slavery constituted a form of free labor in many ways resulted from evangelicals'
attempts to protect the pieties of the work ethic and convention of the consistency of the providential order from contradiction.

Proslavery intellectuals who attacked free labor in the 1850s had often abandoned individualism and embraced social hierarchy. Charlestonian novelist and poet William Gilmore Simms was a particularly interesting case in point because he had in the 1830s made proslavery arguments in line with evangelical formulas. He, however, became crankier and less optimistic by the 1850s. Simms defended slavery "per se" on "higher ground," which included the Bible and a vision of the work ethic that sounded more aristocratic each year. Simms came close to advocating slavery for everyone (regardless of race) but men like himself, who naturally drove themselves mercilessly and achieved perfect self-government. "Pity is," Simms commented in his proslavery of the 1850s, "that the lousy and lounging lazzaroni of Italy, cannot be made to labor in the fields, under the whip of a severe task master! They would then be much freer." Simms extended this argument to Americans who he found "are singularly susceptible of the ridiculous." He described the slavery debate in such terms:

The clamor about liberty and slavery is . . . the most arrant nonsense. License they mean when they cry liberty--and we may add . . . license they mean when they cry slavery. The right to govern
themselves requires, first, a capacity for such government . . . the capacity requires long ages of preparation, of great trial, hardship, severe labor and perilous enterprise.\textsuperscript{98}

Much of the mainstream evangelical proslavery position and definition of freedom was implicit in this statement, but Simms said of the capacity for self-government, "I will not even believe it to exist in the United States."\textsuperscript{99} Such a belief would have destroyed the entire evangelical moral project. Proslavery ideologues like Simms and James Henry Hammond—who like Henry Hughes and Josiah Nott were explicitly skeptical of revealed religion—were not really discussing the same formulas of success and self-government that evangelicals had in mind. The ideas of moral power and moral causation disappeared in Hammond's account of a natural aristocracy: "all power and honors of this country are won mainly by intellectual superiority."\textsuperscript{100} The general run of the citizenry, as an earlier proslavery conservative had commented, "are compelled to action by our wants or our passions, not by our metaphysical refinements."\textsuperscript{101} These proslavery aristocrats were most often the advocates of "the primitive and patriarchal" as the "most sacred way."\textsuperscript{102}

Criticisms of the cash-nexus and alienation of labor from capital in free society became prevalent in a variety of proslavery publications in the 1850s. Yet there was considerably less serious ideological and analytic weight
behind these critiques of capitalism than contemporary understandings of the issue would suggest. The arguments against competition were not accessible to the popular mind. More important, only a few ministers and intellectuals who made these points appreciated the economic winds that buffeted the nation or intended these critiques to encompass the free labor system as a whole. Fear about the cash-nexus and competitive-mindedness between capital and labor were just as prevalent in the North.\textsuperscript{103} James Henley Thornwell, Iveson Brookes, James Sloan, and William Smith among other educated ministers hailed the mutuality in labor relations in the South.\textsuperscript{104} Yet abolitionists and paternalistic factory proprietors in the North maintained that the relationship between capitalists and wage-earners in the free states was one of mutual dependence.\textsuperscript{105} Iveson Brookes, like many southerners, believed that the "nonslaveholding states contain in their social system the elements of their destruction."\textsuperscript{106} Brookes, however, was primarily attacking the "excessive ill-gotten gain" of the region, not its fast emerging modern civilization or the cash-nexus at its center.\textsuperscript{107} Many southerners lambasted New England "capitalists" for their greedy attempt to take advantage of the competitive labor-market and "purchase labor at the cheapest possible rates," without implying this was inevitable development of economic law.\textsuperscript{108} Evangelicals generally demonstrated the superiority of their moral organization, not their labor system.
Southern evangelicals were anxious to equate slavery and free labor, and their proslavery often labelled northern labor "as involuntary as slave labor." 109 This was an insult and assault on the North in antislavery eyes, and historians have too often assumed it also constituted a serious southern attack on the ideals of free society and labor. Proslavery evangelicals were drawing no such dichotomy; they did not consider slavery particularly involuntary nor in any sense a term of abuse. They sought to prove the same moral law was in operation in both regions and had produced both forms of labor. Evangelicals quite openly admitted--unlike a number of other proslavery ideologues--that slavery was not the only, best, or even a necessary form labor assumed under the rule of Providence. 110

Many conservative evangelicals, however, pushed this argument close to the positive good view that slavery represented the economic wave of the future and that the rest of the nation's labor practices (and the world's as far as they did not already) would come to look more like the South's. 111 Was slavery a form of free labor or free labor a form of slavery? The line was not always clear in evangelical pronouncements that used providential economics rather than economic philosophy as their category. Conservative Presbyterian James Sloan exemplified the ambiguities in an absolute version of the evangelical equation of slavery with free labor:
Slavery may be properly defined to be a certain relation which labor sustains to capital. Wherever there is capital there will be servitude. You may call this relation free or slave labor—whichever you choose—but it is a matter of very small importance in a practical view whether the service rendered be voluntary or involuntary. . . . If this be the boasted liberty of the freedom-shriekers then the freeman is only so in name, while the reality is wanting.\textsuperscript{112} Sloan clearly thought free labor a form of slavery, but he complained about antislavery forces illusionary demands for liberty, not the subordination in free labor. Sloan argued "Christians do not belong to themselves," so "the real difference [between free and slave labor] is only in the mode of punishment" Providence designated for "idleness."\textsuperscript{113} Sloan's fellow Old School Presbyterian James Henley Thornwell was considerably more open to the end of slavery and growth of liberty within slavery; and in the North, Thornwell believed service to God "is a free service."\textsuperscript{114} Thornwell, however, made statements similar to Sloan's that clarified the involuntary aspect of free labor:

What is that makes a man a slave? . . . We answer the obligation to labor for another, determined by the Providence of God, independently of the provisions of a contract. . . . God's command is
often as stringent upon free laborer, and determined, with as stern a mandate, what contracts he shall make. Neither can be said to select his employments.\footnote{115}

The obligation to labor was involuntary in both regions.

Southern accounts of how free labor forced men into harsh employments most often described a practice they accepted. After all, "proslavery" ministers were unlikely to consider such assignations to labor a denigration of northern society or anything else. The context of southern evangelicals' discussions of free labor in the 1850s resembled proslavery use of women's (and Indians') position. Historians have hailed the brilliant widespread southern critique of free labor that emerged before the Civil War,\footnote{116} but no one has pointed to the similar assault on the degradation and enslavement of women (and Indian land) in proslavery.\footnote{117} That, of course, is because southerners intended no such thing and displayed no such sensitivity; they accepted the practices toward women. The same was usually true of free laborers. Fred Ross discussed women in the same terms used to discuss the restraint and unfreedom in northern labor, "the slave is held in involuntary service? So is the wife." He pointed out that when women made the decision to marry "for herself, how often and soon it, does it become involuntary." Ross continued to support feminist views, "I know how superior you are to your husbands... Nay, I know you may surpass him in his own
sphere (business). . . wish to run away or kill him.\textsuperscript{118}

The reason for such discussion was obvious and even more obvious in other proslavery tracts:

Females . . . they may be found of better faculties, and better qualified to exercise political privileges, and to attain the distinction of society than men. Yet who complains of the order of society by which they are excluded?\textsuperscript{119}

The proslavery point usually was not that free laborers'--anymore than women's--positions constituted dangerous cases of injustice, but that slave labor was an equivalent case of divine justice. James Henley Thornwell tried to tell antislavery activists that the "arguments against slavery are not peculiar to slavery. They are incidents to poverty."\textsuperscript{120}

Thornwell knew that northerners thought poverty often called forth the exercise of denial and moral virtues, which produced achievement or drove men to labor. Southerners put slavery in the same category. This was rarely the same thing as exalting slavery as the ideal labor practice.

Most evangelicals did not run analogies to women's roles, poverty, or free labor to demonstrate the limits of their criticism of the northern labor and defense of slave labor; they just stated them. Benjamin Morgan Palmer remains infamous as the Presbyterian divine who ignited much of the lower South with his biblical proslavery sermon in support of secession in the winter of 1860-1861. Yet even in this fire-
breathing proslavery and southern nationalist tract meant for consumption in Dixie, Palmer caught his breath when it came to elevating slave above free labor:

[It is] not necessary here to inquire whether this is precisely the best relation in which the hewer of wood and drawer of water can stand to his employer. Still less are we required, dogmatically, to affirm that it will subsist through all time.121

Albert Taylor Bledsoe in his 1854 Liberty and Slavery claimed to stand aghast that northerners thought proslavery meant a general advocacy of slave labor.122 Bledsoe thought such an absurd argument as enslaving northern laborers to bring them under the benefits of southern practices was a product of antislavery propaganda. He, like even other educated and well-read Virginians, remained unaware that his contemporary George Fitzhugh indeed suggested this. Bledsoe stuck to his typical Methodist phrasing of the justice of slavery: "it is not always and everywhere wrong." He, however, admitted that the slavery debate had pushed a few southerners to the "monstrous dogma that it is always and everywhere right!"123

Rather than re-clarify the limits of their defense of slavery, many southern apologists foreswore any intent to denigrate free labor when describing the slavery's similarities to northern labor or unique benefits.124 Although B.F. Stringfellow praised the ability of slavery to "identify the interests of labor and capital," he quickly
added "our purpose has not been to see moats in our brother's eye." This led to a discussion of the advantages of free labor and northern education. T.C. Thronton insisted evangelicals denounced cruel masters just as northerners did "lewdness in the treatment of poor factory girls." Thronton discussed the "14 hour days" in these factories, not in order to object to factory labor but to antislavery criticism of the South. He provided northerners with a parable of the proper attitude toward labor subordination: if southerners suggested "poor girls and boys in the factories should be worked 6 or 8 hours...what would Massachusetts say? Mind your own business." When Mathew Estes argued "in Great Britain, theoretical slavery does not exist; but practically it exists in its worst forms" and that in the North "laborers are driven to it [rough work] by necessity or authority," he criticized neither. He added, "slavery would be highly injurious to our northern brethren." T.W. Hoit's proslavery pamphlet of 1860 had even wider circulation than B.M. Palmer's, partly because it was intended for a national audience that would preserve the union. He concluded, "slavery is the left hand of our body politic. Free labor the right." James Williams proslavery plea of 1860 followed an emerging southern pattern. "[There] can scarcely be said to be such a thing as free labor," lectured Williams, "they must work or starve! ...I only refer to this state of things as a fact which none will deny. Not by way of complaint." Neither
did he "deny the evils of slavery . . . nor the great benefits which have resulted to mankind from free labor."\textsuperscript{131} Williams, like the Reverend Palmer, supported secession at the push because he "opposed [slavery] in abstract" but thought "the slave states should have the benefit of that inexorable necessity which without any agency of their own, left them no alternative."\textsuperscript{132}

As proslavery matured in the 1850s, many evangelicals tried to describe their regions' labor practices in terms of moral self-discipline and popular free labor theory. Southerners insisted not only that slavery could be justified on the basis of christianized market economics and democratic standards, but also that southern society manifested the prosperity and dynamism associated with these ideals. Continued appeals to progress and cries of northern interference with the providential scheme of rewards sealed the gap between proslavery images of southern economic ascendancy and actual performance in the 1850s. This material contradiction disturbed southerners more than the gulf between their moral (and political) veneration of personal autonomy and their practice of racial slavery.

Even those southern evangelicals who perceived some gap between their ideals of individual opportunity and southern labor practices very effectively blurred the line between freedom and slavery by obscuring what was and what ought to be
in the South. In the 1850s ministerial calls for reforming and modernizing slave discipline in line with the standards southerners had evoked in the slavery debate served to make a flexible and progressive picture of slave labor more realistic. The minority of proslavery ministers who preached a reforming version of the southern work ethic showed the potential of slavery to function like free labor. "Remedying it," said the Reverend A. Campell of Bethany College, "will form a prominent feature of the New Economy." Like southerners who understood the economic lag of their region yet found the potential for change, progress, and ultimate vindication of the Cotton South, many evangelicals preached that they were already part of a movement afoot in the South which would bring reality in line with the rhetoric of a proslavery work ethic.

**Evangelicals’ Ideal of Slavery in the 1850s**

During the 1850s, southern evangelicals made more elaborate and explicit assertions about the character-building nature of slave labor in their private as well as their propagandistic tracts. Despite most southerners' uncritical professions about the intrinsic rewards and moral value of slave labor, many evangelicals presented the proslavery work ethic as a potential that the South needed to achieve, rather than a reality that merely had to be described. Within the South there arose a new form of proslavery pronouncements
directed at masters that stressed the individual "Rights and Duties" embodied in slave labor and the master-slave relationship. Masters's main duty in this pietistical literature involved providing religious instruction for the slaves, but evangelical advise also encompassed the subjects of labor discipline and economic rationality. Much like their flood of character-building advice to parents and children, evangelical proslavery spokesmen emphasized the need for Christian masters who would move slaves in moral paths by internal mechanisms of control. Ministers insisted that slaveholders take up the Bible, rather than the lash. According to evangelicals, self-controlling Christian masters had the most effective control over their slaves and the most efficient plantations.

Evangelicals extolled predictability and uniformity in masters in the certainty that what was most practical and profitable mirrored the providential scheme of punishments and rewards. In theory Christian masters (and in some proslavery visions a rationalized and Christianized legal system or government) would provide a dispassionate and predictable—swift and sure—scale of discipline and advance for slaves. Evangelicals thought a clear system of rewards and punishments would thus facilitate slaves' internalization of plantation discipline and uplift their individual moral consciousness. James Henley Thornwell thought such a system of rules and rewards "would inspire a sense of personal responsibility—"
certain degree of manliness and dignity of character ... a security to the master, an immense blessing to the slave."\textsuperscript{138} The suggested standard for whipping and punishment, however, was vague and contradictory: "Punishment should be \textit{sure} and \textit{certain} but always \textit{just} and \textit{merciful}" and "Masters are required to govern their slaves with dignity and mildness but \textit{inflexible firmness}.\textsuperscript{139} More specific was the advice on the minimal requirements ministers thought were outlined in scripture for food, shelter, clothing, and privacy. Advice on a system of rewards made up the bulk of this literature.\textsuperscript{140}

In the 1850s when mature free labor theory symbolized a growing awareness that negative labor incentives were not the most effective or desirable motivations for hard work and self-discipline, evangelicals interested in modernizing southern slavery maintained the lash was becoming obsolete in the South. The Southern Baptist Convention circulated essays by its ministers extolling a "system of rewards" for slaves as "an incentive to industry." Henry McTyrie gave the rationale for this campaign:

\begin{quote}
Whilst I would scorn the idea of bribing servants or children to do their duty, I would hold it not only as kind, but as a moral duty, to reward those who did well, and all in proportion as they did well.\textsuperscript{141}
\end{quote}

Several ministers tried to find a scale for weighing which servants were "Christ's freemen" (Col. 4:1). Jesse Ferguson
called for slaves who might be fit for freedom to have it after "their qualifications being submitted to a proper umpire;" others advocated a "mediator." Tracts on The Right and Duties involved in slavery invariably maintained that slavery was a relation between "rational, intelligent, responsible agents." Slaves it was argued could be motivated both by the compensations and opportunities provided by masters, as well as by their proper understanding of the benefits of self-discipline and of themselves as moral agents.

The proslavery work ethic appeared in sermons directed at other southerners about the "Biblical rights" of virtuous slaveholding, rather than in sermons directed at slaves. Versions of the ethic were most often built on Ephesians 6: "Servants be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as unto Christ; not with eye service, as men-pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service as to the Lord, and not to men." If put into practice by a "reforming" Christian master, this vision could be a new kind of nightmare for the slaves. Interpretations varied, but the implication in biblical proslavery was clear: slaves ought to work at all times and like they meant it. Methodist William Hamilton believed "an ungrateful, sullen, or idle servant is not a Christian." James Sloan similarly demanded Christian slaves be the most obedient; he noted "this is necessary that men see religion is
not a mere form but a reality." To many ministers this meant that slavery would inevitably take on elevating Christian attributes as all masters and slaves became Christians. Then slaves would work willingly—truly "free" labor—because they understood the moral nature of the work and its rewards. Presbyterian Joseph Wilson described the goals of the proslavery work ethic in these terms:

Masters are, for this end even required to guard their tempers—firm, consistent, orderly, paternal government, which will suitably mingle the mercy of punishment with the justice of reward. In short the master . . . will find himself unequal to the task in all its length and breadth; unless he himself become a Christian [and] thus welcome down a world covered with righteousness—slavery freed from its stupid servility on one side and its excess of neglect or severity on the other, and appearing to all mankind to contain that [divine] scheme of politics and morals.\textsuperscript{146}

If this patently appeared not to be the case, it was only because the great test upon which southern values and Christian civilization would prove themselves had not been completed.

Under the pressures of the war and dissolution of slavery in the 1860s, this reforming rhetoric reached a new pitch and had some practical legal consequences.\textsuperscript{147} It is, however,
doubtful that the proslavery work ethic was often motivated by or produced widespread reforming zeal in the 1850s or before. Even in the tracts of minsters highly critical of the unbiblical aspects of southern slavery, their calls for improvement were never very far removed from regional boosterism and dreams of a perfected and powerful slaveholding South. The evangelical view that the South would come to look more like the rest of the nation in both its labor discipline and economic power provided a ready rationale for belligerent secession. The self-critical and reforming potential of the proslavery work ethic did not emerge clearly until the possibility of southern defeat and the need for a proslavery theodicy to explain it (and keep the cause alive) became an overwhelming reality.

Mature proslavery in the 1850s reflected both a desperate, fervent hope and a sadistic, interested demand that slaves internalize the work ethic and acquire an appreciation for the intrinsic value of their labor. Evangelicals in effect insisted that slaves, like free laborers, should work of their own initiative and as hard as if their own interests and advancement were at stake—as many evangelicals believed was the case. This brand of proslavery was an uneven mix of proscription and description aimed largely at fellow southerners rather than slaves or the North. Evangelicals expressed a—sometimes critical—desire to modernize and
improve southern slaveholding, while also offering an idealization of slavery as a labor practice that was already as morally unassailable and economically progressive as free labor. This last claim was not only implicit in the evangelical accommodation to slavery, but also necessitated by southern ministers' stance in the slavery debate. They had long argued that slavery rested on foundations of Christian individualism, much as did northern society. In the face of a hostile free labor ideology some elite southerners abandoned faith in the possibility that an unfailing, fully moralized meritocracy was being achieved on this continent. Most southern evangelicals, however, were never prepared to abandon this optimistic faith and in the end were willing to jettison the Union in order to keep their proslavery version of the dream intact.
NOTES


2. Andrew Lipscomb, North and South, 22.

3. Thornwell, Duties, 30, 34.

4. Elkins, Slavery, 206. Higham, Boundlessness, 14-15. C.C. Goen Broken Churches, Broken Nation, chapter five. Stewart, Holy Warriors, 55 ("The genius of the abolition movement is to have no plan").

5. Bender, Antislavery Debate, 140.

6. Fletcher, Studies, iv-v.


8. As many historians have scathingly noted, given the proslavery claim that slave labor embodied the Protestant ethic, Fogel and Egerman’s Time on the Cross was perhaps the most logically consistent proslavery tract ever written. If it had been written in 1857, we could say the book drew out the ultimate implications of many southern proslavery documents. Yet, Time on the Cross also went so far as to suggest the pieties of the "proslavery work ethic" had been implemented throughout the South. The most vociferous proslavery ministers never made such a claim, even if some maintained that a christianized work ethic was the future shape of the labor system and that they knew of plantations—often their own—where it was being implemented. Both Time on the Cross and Stanley Elkins’ Slavery made the mistake of positing a much needed theoretical discussion of capitalist dominance in the South primarily on discussions of and evidence about slaves. Slavery’s form labor of discipline and racial dimension, let alone their effects on slaves’s beliefs or behavior, are the most contradictory places to take a discussion of market forces and a means-end calculus. Both books made extreme analyses that ignored the cultural contradictions in capitalism in order to give logically consistent—and unrealistically homogenized—portraits of race and punishment. The flexible market forces of Time on the Cross with their suspiciously benign effects on slave suffering, went to one theoretical extreme. While the brutally consistent means-end calculus of Elkins capitalist
masters with their total institution and totally degraded Sambos, went to another. But by concentrating on the obvious flaws in the descriptions of slave behavior and master brutality; many historians have failed to ask if these were perhaps the right theoretical discussion applied to the wrong subject. Both the authors of *Time on the Cross* and Elkins (intentionally or not) tell us volumes about the intellectual and cultural perceptions of the ruling race. The voluminous evidence of the ruling race’s capitalist culture they dug up and the powerful theoretical tools they used to describe it, did not have to be projected on to the structural mechanisms of slave labor (let alone the personality and behavior of slaves).


15. Thornwell, 24, 43.


17. Priest, *Bible*, 415.


42. *Harper’s Memoir*, in E.N. Elliot (ed.), *Cotton is King* (1861), 576.


48. Richard Ellis and Aaron Widavsky, "A Cultural Analysis of the Role of Abolitionists in the Coming of the Civil War," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32 (January, 1990), 113. For a more concise and nuanced version of this argument see Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "The Fettered Mind: Time, Place,
and the Literary Imagination of the Old South," Georgia Historical Quarterly LXXIV, no. 4 (Winter, 1990), 637.


52. Thornton Stringfellow, Stringfellow on Slavery in E.N. Elliot (ed.), Cotton is King (1861), 500-502.

53. Richard Fuller and Francis Wayland, Domestic Slavery Considered as a Scriptural Institution (New York: Lewis Colby, 1845), 81.


56. E.N. Elliot (ed.), Cotton is King (1861), vi.


58. Richard Fuller and Francis Wayland, Domestic Slavery Considered as a Scriptural Institution (New York: Lewis Colby, 1845), 151.

59. Iveson Brookes, A Defence of the South Against the Reproaches and Inchroaches of the North: In Which Slavery is Shown to be an Institution of God intended to form the basis of the best social state and the only safeguard to the permanence of a Republican Government (Hamburg, S.C.: Printed at the Republican Office 1850), 47, 45.

60. Stringfellow, Cotton is King, 495.
61. Smith, *Slavery*, 300.


64. Niell McKay, *Slavery and the Obligations of Masters*, (unpublished) #410 Page 7, unnumbered sermon folder, Historical Collection of the Presbyterian and Reformed Church, Montreat N.C., (1855?), 8: "If they do not improve their privileges it is their own fault." See also James Sloan, *The Great Question Answered, or is Slavery a Sin in Itself* (Memphis: Hutton and Gallaway & Co., 1857), 288.


69. Albert T. Bledsoe *Liberty and Slavery*, in E.N. Elliot (ed.), *Cotton is King* (1861), 416. See also B.F. Stringfellow *Information for the People: Two Tracts for the Times* (Boston: Alfred Mudge & Son, 1855), 10.

70. [Edward Pringle], *Slavery in the Southern States By a Carolinian* (Cambridge: John Bartlett, 1852), 53.


75. Buck, 16.


79. Matthew Estes, *Defence of Negro Slavery* (Columbus Mississippi, 1846), 186.

80. Estes, 229.

81. Estes, 186.

82. Howell Cobb, *A Scriptural Examination of the Constitution of Slavery in the United States* (Perry, Ga.,: By the Author, 1856), 22. Many conservative southern economists and proslavery intellectuals thought this population trend would not effect the tropical regions where slavery would remain vital. Others argued more insightfully that population density and consolidation of the economic and social order would make it easier to retain any form of labor or political subordination. See *Cotton is King*, 613. See also the complex argument that fits both minster and economist into a conservative (and dominant) wing of proslavery thought in Eugene Genovese, *The Slaveholders' Dilemma: Freedom and Progress in Southern Conservative Thought, 1820-1860* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 33-40.


85. Ross, *Ordained*, 280, see also 30.


88. Wayland, 240.


92. Josiah Nott and Joseph Cartwright led this project. See *Cotton is King*, 719.


113. Sloan, *Question*, 207, 225. See also 68.


115. Thornwell, 24.


119. E.N. Elliot (ed.), *Cotton is King* (1861), 554.

120. Thornwell, *Duties*, 43.

122. See John Adger, *The Doctrine of Human Rights and Slavery, in Two Articles*, from the "Southern Presbyterian Review" for March, MDCCCXLIX (Columbia: I.C. Morgan, 1849), 13, for a nuanced and ingenious version of this proslavery argument.


126. Thornton, *History of Slavery*, 86. See the same argument in Heman Packard Papers, Historical Collection of the Presbyterian and Reformed Church, Montreat, North Carolina, #4236, Packard to North Bridgewater Committee, (1846?), 2.


128. Matthew Estes, *Defence of Negro Slavery* (Columbus Mississippi, 1846), 185, 228.

129. Estes, 29.


132. Williams, 154.


138. Thornwell, Rights and Duties, 46.

139. Sloan, Question, 233. Estes, Defence, 257. See also Thornwell, Duties, 25; Thronton, History, 66.


143. Thornwell, Right and Duties, 19, 21.


CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusion: The Role of Evangelical Ideology in the Crisis of the Union, 1850-1865

Slaveholders must demonstrate in a large way, and by visible results, that slave labor is as profitable to you and as useful to the world as free labor is at the North or can be at the South—that it is not inimical to common schools, the improvement of the soil and the progress of manufactures. . . . We can only prove our view by obtaining prosperity.

Augusta Chronicle, May 17, 1849

If the Old South was not as culturally anomalous as many historians have argued, then the southern sanctification of slavery may tell us a great deal about both how antebellum Americans understood the moral foundations of their society and why a moral debate over slavery led to a national crisis. Henry Ward Beecher, the greatest ministerial apologist for all things bourgeois and conventional in the North, realized the main threat of the southern proslavery movement was its attempt to appropriate the national language of moral success. Beecher lectured in 1861:

It is this that convulses the South. They wish to reap the fruits of liberty from the seed of slavery. They wish to have an institution which sets at naught the laws of God, and yet be as refined and prosperous and happy as we are who obey
these laws; and since they cannot, they demand that we shall make up to them what they lack. The real gist of the controversy between the greatest number of the northern and southern states is simply this. The South claims that the United States government is bound to make slavery as good as liberty for all the purposes of national life. That is the root of their philosophy. . . . They don’t any longer talk of the evil of slavery. It is virtue, a religion. It is justice and divine economy!\(^1\)

Despite Beecher’s shock at hearing his sanctification of the northern order on the lips of slaveholders, it is not clear what economic activities evangelical moral proscriptions could have prevented in the North, let alone the South. The individualistic and otherworldly evangelical ideology of a divine economy was tremendously flexible. The best proof of the flexibility of evangelical language was how it served to legitimize slaveholding. Evangelicals’ mix of moralism and practicality was very ambiguous and often encouraged the selfishness it purported to rebuke.

Although evangelicals never clearly distinguished between pursuit of moral success and utilitarian pursuit of economic self-interest, the world views were not identical and evangelical concepts had unique implications and consequences. The crucial difference between simple selfish economic calculation and virtue calculation (between political and
providential economics) was that the latter was more wholly personal and therefore manipulable. A heavy dose of religion and the imaginary made divine economic thought flexible and optimistic. The divine economy, however, was uniquely inflexible on a key point: the character ideal. This self-image was inseparable from evangelical ideas about attaining ethical, economic, and individual success. Antebellum character may have been impressive, but it was ultimately an exaggeration of individual power and a delusion about morality. The ideal was unrealistically premised on and promised the continued absolute efficacy of individuals.

Even before the Civil War, character and self-direction were beginning to have to answer to a consolidating material process and social interdependence. By the 1850s, conventional opportunities for prosperous farming were closing down, and slaveholding in the South and capital in the North were concentrating. These successes evangelicals were powerless to control much less stop and could only attempt to define. Most Americans denied that individuals could be so diminished and little understood the sources of these threats. They could not identify the process that was undermining their values and sense of individual power; they could only define it in terms of cultural corruption and betrayal. While northerners identified the threat as slavery, southerners eventually identified greedy and politicized northern hostility to slavery as the principal threat to
social order. For each, the other was as an inversion of the evangelical cultural ideal, onto which all the aggression and frustration rooted in the failure of the evangelical self to live up to its character ideal could be projected. Christian virtue in practice, Americans were disappointed to learn, neither led to autonomy nor freedom from social institutions. The ideal was too counter-factual to bear such energetic insistence that it would be brought into reality.

In the public mind, evangelical moralism was rarely distinguished from the more secular, Jacksonian ideal of a naturally operating meritocracy. Individual effort, meaning hard work, no more led to or guaranteed individual power than virtue did. Jacksonian insistence that all men could be self-made and that there was a field of opportunity and reward open to all, was being given the lie in the economic and geographic arena, as evangelicalism was in the moral arena. National and religious myths work best untested. When they are as deluded as the Jacksonian myths--rooted as they were in an exaggerated exaltation of personal efficacy, demands that the citizens of a real and conflicted nation conform to them, are bound to issue in crises. The antebellum clash over slavery reflected just such popular insistence that regional realities conformed to moral and national myths.

The overly-optimistic antebellum expectations of individual success through moral discipline were killed on the battlefields of the Civil War--free labor republicanism as
much as proslavery nationalism. The former passed more slowly and silently, only because the latter died so suddenly and spectacularly. When it came to preserving their vision of religion and individualism, both sections lost the Civil War. The North and West in the Gilded Age drew on the fund of moral success produced by "the Holy War for freedom" in order to ease the demise of antebellum expectations and transition to a more secular society. For southern religious culture the Civil War was a greater discontinuity, in large part because defeat and economic ruin forestalled "the great discontinuity": the dechristianization of individual intentions and social understanding. Although the seeds of such developments had long been planted in the region, the South's religion became fatalistic, conservative, anti-intellectual, and anti-technological after the Civil War to a degree that would have been as unfamiliar to most evangelicals in the years before the War as it is to those evangelicals who have now sacralized the satellite dish.
NOTES


6. Political historians have argued that the North-South conflict had been containable when it was a moral debate about slavery but when sectionalism became politicized, a crisis became inevitable. Yet morality was the language antebellum Americans used to discuss social and political power. Democratic government was supposed to hold back any group from organizing and controlling social and material power. A national meritocracy was assumed to result when limited government operated successfully. Therefore a highly moralized discourse of merit was contested and contained in antebellum American politics. "States' Rights" rhetoric in the South and "Slave Power Conspiracy" rhetoric in the North were not fundamental ideological and cultural beliefs in their own rights, but political strategies to guard and shelter a more individualistic and moralized world view.

Antebellum Americans placed the burden of their moral and economic crisis on politics in the 1850s. Both sections looked to classic source of interference with liberty identified by democratic ideology: political conspiracy and central government institutions. The government in fact was not centralizing; clear evidence that the central dilemma (and referent for analyzing reality) of the era was not primarily political. A political breakdown in the 1850s was not the central precondition or trigger that allowed a long-contained moral issue to enter and destroy the political arena; political paranoia and governmental breakdown (and subsequent centralization) followed upon the crisis in moral discourse. The role of antebellum democracy guaranteed that politics would reflect and then become an expression of the cultural

7. Sacvan Bercovitch, American Jeremiad, 123-68.


9. The great crisis of the Civil War was a startling example of how quickly America became two nations when separate myths of the morally self-made man emerged. Both providential proslavery and free labor politics were desperate attempts to preserve the dream of morally self-made men, despite the competitiveness and consolidation of the 1850s. When two versions of the work ethic were abroad in the land, Jacksonian nationalism effectively split since that creed was the pivot of national unity.

The basis of antebellum unity and nationalism was fundamentally a faith in meritocracy that evangelicals sheltered from rational examination (and institutionalization) more fiercely than a theocracy of Imams shelter their creed. The national creed did not achieve or reflect a consensus among Americans, but instead it was an often desperate and contested attempt to contain and render meaningful a storm of opposing personal and regional interests. What held these faiths together and preserved national unity—preserved a sense of a shared creed—was an unlimited geographic mobility and relative material prosperity. Abundance disguised disparate beliefs and interests by allowing many different visions of moralized economic activity to be rewarded and thus appear to be the source of personal success and the national norm. Most Jacksonian Americans imagined great success for themselves and insisted they in some way suffered and denied themselves to earn it. When success came to many of them, they were neither ready to question the reality and power of their own values nor ready to listen to anyone who did. This creedal nationalism stabilized the young nation so long as personal expectations were limited and simple rewards were widely available. The trends on both scores in the antebellum period were in the opposite directions. Americans' expectations on the moral and material fronts were grander and more dogmatic after two generations of having cherished pieties of individual moral success confirmed in the economic and geographic arenas. As important, more visible, more spectacular, and less popularly attainable models of economic success appeared as society became more consolidated.

Northerners and southerners in the 1850s saw more citizens with forms of successes unavailable to them and fewer clear paths to personal success and independence. Slavery and free labor were code words for pools of economic success in
the nation that were denied to a citizen solely on the basis of his region of residence. For a nation of expansionists and optimists, this made the finite field of success open to any individual a frightening reality. What should have been a period of great stability in America—combining economic expansion with consolidation and increasing regional interdependence—became a horrifying crisis because antebellum Americans were not culturally attuned to accept the reality of national consolidation. See John Higham, From Boundlessness to Consolidation: The Transformation of American Culture, 1848–1860 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969).

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