

THE RIGHT REVEREND STEPHEN ELLIOTT:
POLITICAL INFLUENCE AND THE PROTESTANT
EPISCOPAL CHURCH 1841-1866

by

PAULETTE THOMPSON

(Under the Direction of Anastatia Sims)

ABSTRACT

By the 1840s, the South's religious and political convictions upheld slaveholders' social and economic views. These convictions permeated worship services in Georgia via the ministries. At the onset of the Civil War, spirituality provided an essential source of Southern strength in both victory and defeat. As fortitude subsided, religion also played a prodigious role in perpetuating the Confederate experience. For a generation, its theology had endorsed the South's social arrangement, asserted the morality of slavery, expunged Southern sins, and recruited the populace as God's devout guardians of the institution. Sustained by the belief that they were God's chosen people, Southerners rallied to the Confederate cause. Asserting great influence as the presiding Episcopal Bishop of the Confederacy, the Right Reverend Steven Elliott, Jr., aggressively participated in contriving a religious culture that

discerned threats to Southern society as challenges to
Christian civilization.

INDEX WORDS: Bishop Stephen Elliott, Jr., Protestant
Episcopal Church, Evangelical Protestantism, Civil War,
Georgia, Southern politics, Religion.

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PAULETTE THOMPSON

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PAULETTE THOMPSON

Major Professor: Dr. Anastatia Sims

Committee: Dr. Alan Downs
Dr. Craig Roell

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CHAPTER 1

HISTORIANS, RELIGION, AND THE CIVIL WAR

Generations of historians have debated the causes and consequences of the Civil War. Resulting analyses of the social, cultural, economic, and political distinctions that separated the regions have yielded an array of historical interpretations. Facing the onerous task of interpreting and chronicling the ideological divisions that thrust the nation into war, historians produced works defined by causation theories, what-if suppositions, and mind-numbing scrutinies of military strategy. Seeking to define the war in social, cultural, and economic terms, historians in the 1940s and 1950s produced works focused on the institution of slavery and the plantation system, paternalism, and slave resistance. With the emergence of social history in the 1970s came numerable volumes offering a "bottom up" view of common men and women to supplement the previous generation's portraits of the era's great politicians and military leaders.

Now, after a century of scholarly neglect, religion has emerged from its confined periphery as a significant contributing factor in the ideological divide that estranged North and South. From the 1980s onwards, historians have pondered the extent to which religion

framed the issues of the conflict. In 1980, Anne C. Loveland, writing primarily on Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterian clergymen, reexamined historical interpretations of Southern evangelicalism as a "'culture religion' shaped by and subservient to the ideology of the Old South." She argued that, at least on some issues, Southern evangelicals experienced a great deal of autonomy and challenged the Southern social ethos. Loveland analyzed a variety of primary manuscripts, newspapers, periodicals, sermons and other nineteenth-century writings, to focus on ministers' collective beliefs, assumptions, and values in the South Atlantic states. She concluded that the conversion experience and providential "calling" were the most influential factors shaping the evangelicals' views of themselves and the responsibilities of their office.¹

Loveland effectively demonstrated that, sharing common beliefs in matters of revivalism, the role of the church , and the religious instruction of slaves, the Southern clergy was almost entirely evangelical. In the forty years

¹Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order: 1800-1860*. (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1980,) 29.

preceding the Civil War, nearly all Southern evangelicals accepted the notion of the providential nature of revivals--delivering the message of conversion, which would reverse the South's spiritual declension and bring the multitudes to God. They viewed, "themselves and other Christians as a 'peculiar people' set apart by their profession of religion." Induced by the conversion experience to pursue eternal rewards, they abandoned earthly desires, and increasingly denounced the pursuit of pleasure and the accumulation of wealth, expressly within the church. Her evaluation of nineteenth-century sermons revealed that Southern evangelicals participated in and encouraged social reform, and viewed intemperance as a subversion of the family, the church, and the social order--responsible for crime, poverty, and idleness.² She asserted that the Northern abolitionist movement, aimed primarily at the religious community, aroused Southerners' suspicions of their ministers' views on slavery. Thus, as anti-slavery pamphlets and newspapers flooded the South, unanimously vehement reactions among the population required clergymen not only to protect themselves by asserting Biblical sanctions of the institution, but also

²Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, 130-139.

to criticize abolitionists as instigators of dissension and strife in the churches. Southern evangelicals relied on God to settle sectional differences, to resolve the issue of slavery, and to reconcile social ills. Thus, Loveland asserted, belief in the omnipotence of God and man's dependence on His will "formed the whole of their thinking" and "contributed...to the distinctiveness of Southern evangelical thought in the nineteenth-century."³

Taking a more narrow view than Loveland, E. Brooks Holifield's *The Gentlemen Theologians*, examined antebellum Southern religion through the lens of nineteenth-century elite clergymen. Attempting to revise the prevailing image of Southern religion that depicts a theology of emotionalism rather than rationalism, he asserted that the Southern elite clergy viewed themselves as the apostles of the unity of truth and the architects of a rational universe. On this foundation, they established a Southern orthodoxy that sought to integrate the whole of society into a harmonious macrocosm governed by omniscient wisdom. For the prominent Southern clergy, theology represented a reasonable, rational enterprise designed to advocate

³Ibid., 265.

Christian faith to an expanding class of educated and socially ambitious Southerners.⁴

According to Holifield, the careers of nineteenth-century Southern clerics exemplified the complex interrelations between religious thought, social organization, and politics in the antebellum period. Holifield contended that, in reaction to important changes in the Southern social order, the Southern clergy ordained themselves as the self-conscious guardians of tradition in an age of reason. With the growth of Southern towns and cities in the 1840s, they modified rational orthodoxy to accommodate the accompanying social and intellectual problems associated with cultural transition. Demographic change associated with increased European immigration and economic expansion undermined employment opportunities, wages, profits, and prestige of native-born whites, small shopkeepers and merchants; displaced enslaved laborers in unskilled and semi-skilled jobs; and created class conflict. The influx of immigrant workers that restructured the South's system of urban paternalism bolstered preexisting hierarchies, simultaneously reinforced the economic authority of the business elite, and increasingly

⁴Brooks E. Holifield, *The Gentlemen Theologians: American Theology in Southern Culture, 1795-1860* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1978), 4.

drew the educated and wealthy into Southern towns and cities, constructing a Southern "middle-class," who aspired to gentility. Urbanization in the predominantly rural South led to increased dependence on the city for ideas, information, business, entertainment and economic power.⁵

In their quest for the meaning of urbanity, Southern clerics perspicaciously propagated a theology that not only demonstrated their awareness of the new self-image of middle-class Southern urbanites, it also revealed their own social aspirations. Identifying with the growing mercantile and professional classes that aspired to propriety, Southern Protestant evangelicals nurtured their own conflicting self-interests. While their sermons depicted society in gradations of status, they also called for benevolence to the poor and criticized aristocratic display. The fight over slavery confirmed, throughout the South, the dogma of the divine contrivance of social inequality. To the clergy, Southern cities stood as illustrations of God's divine sanction of social stratification that separated servant from master and rich from poor. Thus, the clergy's appropriation of tradition was guided by their own middle-class self-aspirations as gentlemen, elevated and enlightened thinkers, and

⁵Holifield, *Gentlemen Theologians*, 10-11.

cultivated professionals. The Southern clergy became professors, staffed Southern colleges, taught moral philosophy, and wrote theology. Charged with symbolizing and conceptualizing the vision of reason in Southern society, Southern clergymen orated orthodox religious thought in the Old South. Reflected in nineteenth-century sermons, consciousness of social position reflected both the intellectual commitments and social compulsions of the clergy.⁶

Like Holifield, historian C.C. Goen's *Broken Churches Broken Nation*, presented an examination of the role of the nation's religious leaders. However, focusing on clergymen's inability to exercise decisive leadership, he demonstrated that the unresolved issue of slavery ruptured church unity along sectional lines, and served as a catalyst for political divisions. Denominational splits established a precedent for secession, and fostered suspicion and alienation between the regions. According to Goen, religious leaders' failure to address the issue of

⁶Ibid., 6-7.

slavery adequately forced the nation to turn to politics for a solution.⁷

Narrowing the focus of religious ideology, Bertram Wyatt-Brown's 1985 compilation of essays, *Yankee Saints and Southern Sinners*, explored the moral understandings of the two sections by comparing the social values of the North with those of the slaveholding South. In doing so, he concluded that notions of liberty, equality and honor held different meanings in North and South. Thus, Northern criticism that Southerners' concerns for the exigencies of slavery, race control, and tradition made them a morally and politically inferior region aroused Southern indignation. Wyatt-Brown's argument suggested that these differing ideologies weighed heavily on secession and war.⁸

In an in-depth analysis of these same issues, Richard J. Carwardine's *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America*, examined the relationship between religion and politics. In it, he asserted that in the quarter-century before the American Civil War, evangelical Protestants

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

⁸Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Yankee Saints and Southern Sinners* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1985).

engaging in politics profoundly shaped American culture and partisan sectional antagonisms. From the later stages of the Second Great Awakening onwards, varying perceptions of political duties and opportunities cemented the certainties that Southern evangelicals felt about the righteousness of their social arrangements and about the moral bankruptcy of Northern abolitionists and later Republicans. This certitude derived in part from their experiences as church members in contention with fellow communicants in free states and from a widespread belief that public standards of morality had degenerated under the political climate of the Jacksonian Era. Evangelicals believed that the absence of public virtue emerged from a burgeoning ungodliness in communal life. Carwardine's analysis revealed that their own self-interests combined with the economics of the era to bring evangelicals into the political arena as the clergy chose party affiliations in which attitudes about progress and morality coincided with religious views. Thus, beginning in the 1840s, partisan politics and Protestant evangelicals joined in reshaping American political culture.⁹

⁹Richard J. Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993).

Carwardine presented evangelical Protestantism as a principle subculture influencing politics in antebellum America. Arguing that evangelicals were deeply engaged in the processes of sectionalism, he evaluated the ways in which Protestant Christians, North and South, sought to develop their own interpretations of what was right for society. In the North, the Republican Party adopted the rhetoric of Northern evangelicals. Likewise, Southern Fire-Eaters and slaveholders borrowed the religious language and imagery of Southern clergymen. From this, Carwardine concluded that the alliance between evangelical Protestants and national political parties significantly contributed to the coming of the Civil War.¹⁰

In *The Coming of the Lord: Northern Protestant Clergy and the Civil War Crisis*, George M. Fredrickson argued that, "the conflict over slavery in the 1850s and 1860s gave the clergy and churches a new opening for the extension of an ecumenical Protestant influence in the affairs of the state." During that decade, political preaching extended simultaneously with a quasi-official campaign to recognize interdenominational Protestantism as the national religion. However, the envisaged "quasi-

¹⁰Ibid., 108-111.

theocratic Christian nation" foundered because of the politicization of religion during the Civil War era. Fredrickson explained that by the 1840s, the Northern clergy began to spiritualize rather than criticize the national economic progress. Embracing the revivalism and organized benevolence of the Second Great awakening, mainstream Protestantism recognized that persuasion, not coercion was the key to increasing denominational success.

The new emphasis on personal piety served the needs of women seeking an expanded role in social and moral reform, business owners demanding a disciplined workforce, and an emerging middle-class aspiring to ascertain order and virtue from the social and economic upheaval associated with rise of the market economy. They also recognized slavery as evil, however, they feared that abolitionists' tactics of denouncing the institution of slavery as sinful undermined not only slaveowners, but also slaves. From slaveholders, clergymen feared violence and disunion in retribution for abolitionists' efforts to enforce denial of fellowship. Rejecting demands for immediate emancipation, the Northern clergy feared that slaves were unprepared for freedom and lacked, "the same God-given capacity as whites to perform the duties of democratic citizenship," therefore forceful action would only serve to alienate them from

participation in the eventual demise of the system.

Counseling Christians on the virtues of patience, for the most part, Northern clergymen remained silent on the issue of slavery before the crisis of 1850s. However, rising frustrations over the expansion of slavery, led many to perceive the Fugitive Slave Act and Kansas-Nebraska as repudiations of traditional accommodations. As a result, by the 1850s, overtly anti-slavery sermons poured from Northern pulpits.¹¹

Fredrickson persuasively argued that as the political arena grew increasingly hostile towards the institution of slavery Northern evangelicals deemed their work essential to the republic's success. In doing so, the Northern clergy blurred the distinctions between Christian ideals and the realities of Northern society, and in the process, they undermined their own autonomy and cultural authority. By indoctrinating the belief that the conservative influence of religion would defend the political system from the excesses of democratic radicalism, Fredrickson concluded that with the outbreak of the Civil War, clerics

¹¹George M. Fredrickson, "The Coming of the Lord: The Northern Protestant Clergy and the Civil War Crisis." In *Religion and the American Civil War*, ed. Randall M. Miller, 110-130 (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

unified in a multi-denominational sponsorship of the Northern cause and the Protestant pulpit became the single most important source of Northern patriotic exhortation.

John Patrick Daly's *When Slavery Was Called Freedom: Evangelicalism, Proslavery, and the Causes of the Civil War*, examines a similar process South of the Mason-Dixon line. He asserted that before 1830, because "the South and the North drew different practical conclusions from the same moral premises," both proslavery and antislavery ideologies emanated from a hegemonic antebellum evangelical theology. After 1832, dissent over opposing interpretations of the same Scriptures affected a fundamentalist schism that ultimately divided the nation. He revealed that antebellum Southern evangelicals denounced slavery in the abstract. Rather than accepting slavery as a "necessary evil" or "positive good" he asserted, the coalescence of economics and evangelical providentialism enabled Southerners to defend slavery "in the particular"--as it was practiced in the South among evangelicals.

Daly illustrated how Southern revivalism adapted evangelical moral concepts to reconcile with regional economic prosperity. He contended that evangelicals' proslavery rationale resulted from their definition of slavery as a relation between morally responsible agents;

hence, they "formed an ideology of slavery consonant with their individualism and views of moral obligation."

According to Daly, evangelicals viewed slavery as an obvious byproduct of democratic progression, evidenced by God's benevolence and regional economic prosperity in the South. He contended that the ideology of moral and material progress that developed prior to 1831 provided Southerners' with a logical and complete explanation for and defense of their social practices.

Daly established that the debate over slavery regressed into an evangelical church schism that transformed religious secession into political secession and civil war. The sectional split enabled Southern evangelicals to popularize and politicize their vision of slaveholding and provided the ideological tools needed to enhance their own socio-political influence. Sermons legitimized the South's social organization and moralized economic racism.

By the 1840s, as the debate over slavery progressed, attempts by both sides to denounce each other reached a crescendo. Once regional definitions of economic success became a moral issue, Southern evangelicals began to define regional identity in terms of a rhetoric of character, where a man's honor determined his social status, while

Northern abolitionists condemned them by the same discourse. Because morality was the language of status in the nineteenth-century, North and South "declared themselves rivals for the same prize of economic and political power." For Northerners, "the main threat of the Southern proslavery movement lay in its attempt to appropriate the language of moral success." Taking a moral stand, Southern evangelicals maintained their uncompromising faith in Providentialism, exalted their own moral superiority, and glorified in the sectional explosion. By 1860, and continuing throughout the Civil War, proslavery evangelicals popularized the South's position, asserting not only that God sanctioned slavery--but also that they were the Chosen. Daly compellingly concluded that Southern evangelical culture was the glue of secession, and that the war only strengthened their convictions.¹²

Historian Samuel J. Watson's *Religion and Combat Motivation in the Confederate Armies* demonstrated that religion was "first and foremost a means of consolidation," enabling soldiers to control their fears. Watson re-

¹²John Patrick Daly, *When Slavery Was Called Freedom: Evangelicalism, Proslavery, and the Causes of the Civil War* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2002).

evaluated the historiography on religion and the will to fight in the Confederacy. He examined religion's function in the amalgamation of social, cultural and intellectual development and showed how these elements affected soldiers in the Confederate armies. He disagreed with previous scholastic emphasis on group cohesion, and asserted that while honor, fear, community, and cause were certainly motivating factors, evangelical religion provided the foundation of Southern identity, from which soldiers drew their motivation to fight.¹³

In *While God is Marching On: The Religious World of Civil War Soldiers*, Steven E. Woodworth examined the mainstream Protestant religion of the majority of Civil War soldiers. He asserted that despite the predominance of a Christian worldview, the nation emerged from the colonial era as two separate regions with diverging belief systems. Woodworth asserted that its Puritan heritage set the North on a path of divinity as it prepared to fulfill its destiny as God's "city on a hill."

In his analysis, Woodworth minimized the weight of Christian charitable organizations, temperance and

¹³Samuel J. Watson, "Religion and Combat Motivation in the Confederate Armies" In *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (Jan., 1994), 25-29.

abolition reform movements, and the rise in popularity of rival tenets such as Unitarianism and Transcendentalism, and neglected to point out how each of these shaped the religious beliefs of the urban and industrializing North. Woodworth deduced that the South's religious views grew as an extension of the region's conversion experience in the revival movement, its rural and agricultural landscape, and slave economy, but he failed to acknowledge the conversion experience as an element of Northern evangelicalism. However, Woodworth persuasively argued that abolitionists' belief in the power of moral suasion to convert slaveholders ultimately transformed slavery into a religious, then political, issue.

Woodworth explained that by the 1830s, Southern involvement in the nation's destiny increasingly took second place to a dynamic regional identity characterized by political affiliation and an agrarian lifestyle, all bound together by slaveholding. Departing from the reform and progress-focused mainstream theology, the South's commitment to biblical conservatism created a culture where the voluntaristic and revivalistic elements of evangelical Protestantism promoted a variety of Christianity that emphasized individual will and personal salvation. This growing divergence in Protestant theology loomed over the

nation, until "it swallowed up all the common ground of churches North and South into one great field of conflict," and effected a schism in nearly all denominations.¹⁴

Woodworth outlined a persuasive argument in which he asserted that by the late 1850s, denominational rifts among the Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians foreshadowed sectional tensions. He concluded that, "The rendering of the nation's three largest denominations along North-South lines was a first harbinger that the issues dividing the nation were becoming more important than those that bound them together." Swept up by a new wave of revivalism in the late 1850s, a nation suffused with Christianity encountered the secession crisis of the 1860s. Woodworth concluded that one of the most remarkable aspects of the Civil War may be how little it changed the nation. It was, he asserted, "the culmination of an old but vital and vigorous worldview, the completion of the original vision of a society ordered according to divine principles." Real change, according to Woodworth, comes only with a change in people's fundamental beliefs, with religion at the core of how one perceives the world. In the religious world of

¹⁴Steven E. Woodworth, *While God Is Marching On: The Religious World of Civil War Soldiers* (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2001), 20.

Civil War soldiers, nothing fundamental had changed. The nation's war was God's lesson and example for the world.¹⁵

From the later stages of the Second Great Awakening onwards, evangelical Protestant churches established themselves as the primary religious force in the nation. By the 1840s, the evangelical theology that dominated the Protestant religion cut across denominational lines, producing two distinctive religious cultures. Northern evangelicals allied with political leaders to denounce Southern mores, promote racial equality, and further their notions of social progress. Southerners strictly adhered to their own worldview for a generation after the American Civil War. Resisting pressure from industrialization of Northern victors, they maintained its defensive posture toward the preservation and justification of its heritage well into the 1960s. When war came, both sides saw themselves as God's "chosen people," armies of Christian soldiers and guardians of republican freedoms. Dissimilar interpretations of the Bible led to profound dissension over the meaning of Scripture, but Southern Protestant evangelical clergymen not only actively participated in the secession crisis, they sought to influence popular ideology. From their pulpits, they capitalized on the

¹⁵Ibid., 293.

opportunity to adopt spiritual sermons as political propaganda, petitioning the people to do their duty to God. North and South, religion helped interpret the purpose of the war.

The Civil War is the most studied event in American history and dispute over its causes and consequences remains as vigorous now as a century ago. By studying the religious component of the Civil War, historians strive to explain how the nation sundered over the very principles on which it was founded. The political strife of the early nineteenth century ignited in the 1860s. Ultimately, the involvement of religious leaders in the political arena equated to a merger between church and state that facilitated an ideology in which theology superseded democracy to defend the economic interests of the wealthy, with little regard for the rights of those at the opposite end the socio-economic scale.

No history of such a dramatic contravention would be complete without an account of the political preachings of the Right Reverend Stephen Elliott. Revered by his Southern contemporaries as a man of intellect and virtue, Elliott counseled the Episcopal community, and indeed, all Georgians, in matters of faith and politics through one of the nation's most harrowing experiences. From the

sectional crisis of the 1840s and 1850s through secession and beyond Savannah's surrender, his widely distributed sermons glorified the Confederacy and instructed Episcopalians on the corresponding virtues of Christianity and Southern patriotism. As an elite clergyman, his position as Southerner and religious advisor shaped his views and embodied the ideology and conventions of his race, class, and religion.

Biographies of the Right Reverend Stephen Elliott, whose career as Bishop of the Diocese of Georgia spanned a quarter-century, date from immediately after his death in 1866 through the 1960s.¹⁶ His biographers argued that Elliott's convictions derived successively from his duty to God, to church, and finally, to Georgia. With clear

¹⁶Thomas M. Hanckel, *Sermons by the Right Reverend Stephen Elliott, D.D., Late Bishop of Georgia. With a Memoir by Thomas M. Hanckel, Esq.* ed. Alexander McClelland. (New York, NY: Pott and Amery, 1867.), Special Collections of Henderson Library, Georgia Southern University. The majority of which sermons were published after his death in 1866, and were compiled by various family, friends, fellow clergymen, and Savannah parishioners: Dwyn Mounger, "History as Interpreted by Stephen Elliott." *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, Vol. 44, No.3 (1975); Virgil Sims Davis' 1964 Thesis entitled, *Stephen Elliott, A Southern Bishop in Peace and War*, (Athens; University of Georgia Press, 1964.); also, Hubert Bond Owens', *Georgia's Planting Prelate, Including an Address on Horticulture at Macon, Georgia, in 1851 by the Right Reverend Stephen Elliott, Jr.* (Athens; University of Georgia Press, 1945.)

conviction, he embraced the state's rights doctrine. Elliott considered the dominion of the individual states as the only true and conservative element of the Constitution. Therefore, to Elliott regarded state sovereignty as the only effective means of checking the usurping powers of a central government slanted by "the self-interests of class, the mad passions of party, or the wild delusions of the populace."¹⁷ Ultimately, Elliott believed, the nation's freedom emanated from an honest, genuine, and practical love of country, best expressed in a just and generous love of one's home state.

From the 1860s through the 1960s, scholars painted Elliott as a man of his time, dutiful to God and country with strong paternal inclinations and sectional loyalties. The Right Reverend Stephen Elliott, Jr., was a learned scholar, lawyer, and celebrated orator, a teacher and founder of institutions of higher learning, a husband and father, a missionary and slave-owner, but he saw himself as foremost a man of God. He represented a generation of "political preachers" whose pulpits served to carry spiritual messages about the meaning of life to a politically divided nation. An examination of Elliott's

¹⁷Hanckel, *Sermons by the Right Reverend Stephen Elliott*, iv.

thoughts and actions, interpreted from his widely distributed sermons, written from the 1840s to the 1860s, provides insight into the moral struggles of a man of great intelligence, morality, and patriotism during the period of the greatest political instability in United States history. In the 1970s, historian James P. Shenton described the process of historical reinterpretation as "a reflection of the changing needs and interests of new generations... [which] reflect the profound forces that operate to bring about social change."¹⁸ Time changes historical perspective, allowing historians to develop new, previously unnoted analysis of familiar events. This study reinterprets Elliott's words and actions to present an early twenty-first century perspective on a significant period in American history.

Other scholars, intent on preserving the paternalistic legacy of men like Elliott, neglected to address the tensions between the sacred and secular realms of American culture faced by the white-elite clergy. This account presents an interpretation of elite white Southerners' struggle to reconcile the contradictions between their social, economic and political ideologies and their moral

¹⁸James P. Shenton, foreword to *The Road to Secession* by William Barney (New York, NY: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1976,) ix.

precepts, and offers illumination into the ongoing conflict between economic affluence and spiritual prosperity.

In the course of attending to their ministerial duties, Bishop Elliott and his Southern contemporaries speciously interpreted Scripture and influenced the ways that their parishioners conceived the sectional crisis and cohered to the South's cause. Their Biblical reinterpretations defended their worldly establishments, thus implicating Southern churches in a violent conflict to support the social, political and economic institutions that sustained the public status and wealth of the elite-white class with little regard for those at the opposite end of the socio-economic scale.

In many ways, Elliott followed the pattern established in the preceding historiography of religion and the Civil War era. As a Southern elite clergyman who endured the tumultuous decades from 1840s through the 1860s, Elliott helped create a legacy of Southern honor in which man's hubris and God's glory coexisted. According to some historical accounts, Elliott attempted to "moderate and subdue" the Episcopal Church's involvement in political affairs before secession, becoming zealously supportive of the Confederacy only after Toombs, Stephens, the Cobbs and other Georgia politicians had cemented the state's

endorsement of war.¹⁹ Nonetheless, by 1862, Elliott was the senior and presiding bishop in the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Confederate States.²⁰ Consequently, his influence reached beyond the boundaries of his own diocese. Others have characterized his words and demeanor throughout his tenure as “[an] approach largely prevailed to [until] the end that nothing was done which would permanently alienate Northern and Southern churches.”²¹ A newer perspective might conclude that Elliott erroneously allowed his own earthly ambitions to obscure his religious convictions. By sanctifying Georgia’s social and economic hierarchies, which balanced on slavery, Elliott and others misguidedly confirmed the social, political, economic, and racial mindset of Georgians that shaped all social relations in the state for a more than a generation.

Elliott’s story reminds us that religion is a powerful social tool. It demonstrates that clergymen and politicians in particular should be held to a higher standard of public conduct. They must choose their words carefully and act deliberately because of the far-reaching implications of

¹⁹Roger Warlick, *As Grain Once Scattered: The History of Christ Church Savannah, Georgia, 1733-1983*. (Columbia, SC: The State Printing Company, 1985), 84-85.

²⁰Ibid., 85.

²¹Ibid.

their thoughts and deeds. Political rifts dividing twenty-first century Americans are neither as deep nor as wide as those that separated Northerners and Southerners in the nineteenth-century. Nonetheless, contemporary Americans continue to struggle to reconcile the contradictions of our own times. Today, as in Elliott's time, religion serves to add meaning to life and helps to define our unique place in history. Like previous generations of Americans, we seek divine guidance when debating our most cherished political principles and moral values.

From the Great Awakening onwards, evangelical clergymen had politicized religion in a way that affirmed the status quo, and, in the process, they shaped the political consciousness of their congregations.²² Therefore, whether deliberately or inadvertently, Elliott's Biblical exegesis not only offered his parishioners the capacity to interpret their unique place in society, but also secured the state's social, economic, and political culture into Georgia's religious ideology.

²²Gary B. Nash, "The Transformation of Urban Politics, 1700-1764." In *Colonial America, Essays in Politics and Social Development*, edited by Stanley N. Katz, John M. Murrin and Douglas Greenberg.--4th ed. (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, Inc.), 1993.

After the war, despite transgressions, Elliott swallowed his pride and set aside his personal views for the greater good. With the wisdom of hindsight, he pressed the issue of reunion, and encouraged Georgians to look to the future. After all, old social arrangements had already been altered, and God's divine guidance would set the proper course toward the construction of a new society.²³ However, to Georgians, the horrors of the recent war represented a failed revolution, not an attempt to "accomplish something new, but to defend something old-- loosely defined as the Southern way of life."²⁴ For Elliott's parishioners, notions of provincialism and personal connection with God became a cohesive mechanism deeply imbedded in Southern habits of mind. Coping with the difficulty of acknowledging defeat, Georgians faithfully adhered to many aspects of the state's antebellum structure, with the same abiding certainty, for a century after Elliott's death.

His story serves to illustrate that no one possesses the ability to separate his personal circumstance from the economic and political realms of his generation. Elliott

²³Warlick, *As Grain Once Scattered*, 90-93.

²⁴Emory M. Thomas, *The Confederacy as a Revolutionary Experience*, (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press),

and other Southern clergymen claimed to find Biblical justification for slavery, inequality, and, ultimately, secession. Like other ministers before and since, nineteenth-century Southern clergymen used religion to fuel partisan politics. As a result, they surreptitiously replaced spiritualism with materialism and unwittingly contributed to the destruction of the world they cherished.

The pages that follow offer insight into an episode of United States history inconceivable by modern standards. Elliott's words, reinterpreted here, present a different view of his priorities and help to explain the mindset and fallibility of a man of God whose pulpit sanctioned the cruelty of slavery and the atrocities of war. In the words of British historian Edward Hallett Carr, "The function of the historian is neither to love the past nor to emancipate himself from the past, but to master and understand it as the key to the understanding of the present."²⁵

²⁵<http://www.age-of-the-sage.org/history/quotations/history_historians.html>

CHAPTER 2

"ALTERS SHALL BE UNTO HIM TO SIN:" ECONOMICS, RELIGION, AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE IN ANTEBELLUM GEORGIA

History deals in generalities--it sets forth great results, public events, and national transactions, on which the destinies of Peoples may turn and be determined--tells of the wrecks and triumphs of Nations and of Races, but gives none of the details, nothing of that inner life of the great actors who produced these results..., biography enters, with minuteness, into the private thoughts of the individuals, their manners, customs, habits and tempers, and it is these that create, form and direct the opinions and actions of the masses...the examination of their trains of thought,...the recollection of their utterances,...cannot fail to improve the heads and hearts of those who may come after them...

Hon. Solomon Cohen, 1867.²⁶

A. Economics, Social Structure, and the Rise of Slave Culture

The evolution of Georgia's cotton culture coincided with the growth of evangelical Protestantism and the expansion of the Episcopal Church in the state. A brief overview reveals the impact of a progression of eighteenth-century events that came to dominate the state's nineteenth-century economic, political, and social development. Following a long-standing agrarian tradition, Georgia produced a variety of commodities for export to England. The domestic manufacture of homespun cotton cloth

²⁶Solomon Cohen, *Eulogy on the Life and Character of the Rt. Reverend Stephen Elliott, D.D., Bishop of the Diocese of Georgia and President of the Georgia Historical Society*, (Savannah, GA: Purse and Son, Printers, 1867).

was discouraged in colonial Georgia; instead, Great Britain attempted to induce colonists to produce silk.²⁷ Although silk was unsuccessful, by 1773, increased production of rice, indigo, and other agricultural resources provided Georgians with a variety of marketable commodities and subsequently increased the colony's dependence on the slave trade. Prior to the American Revolution, government policy encouraged planters to acquire large tracts of land in the upland region of the colony, creating a widening gap in the distribution of acreage. During the war, British occupation and fratricidal warfare redistributed economic, social, and political power in the state. Land speculation and fraud revealed the elitist nature of Georgia's social and political structure.²⁸ Loss of income from the export of tobacco, rice, and indigo financially devastated planters along the rice coast, and the unavailability of imported textiles forced a reliance on homespun cloth as an alternative to British wool. At that time, planters in the coastal plains region began to experiment with the cultivation of cotton. By the end of the war, the four

²⁷M.B. Hammond, *The Cotton Industry: An Essay in American Economic History, Part I The Cotton Culture and the Cotton Trade* (New York: The McMillan Company, 1897), 11-19.

²⁸Numan V. Bartley, *The Creation of Modern Georgia* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1983), 12.

southernmost states began to furnish enough raw fiber to supply Northern manufacturers.²⁹ Thus, reliant on slave labor, British manufactured goods, British markets for the sale of local agricultural commodities, and the extension of credit from British backers, Georgia and the other southernmost colonies suffered considerably from the financial devastations brought on by the Revolutionary War.³⁰

In the 1780s, cultural and economic diversity emerged as planters from Virginia and North Carolina, attracted by land policies, resettled in Georgia. In 1789, the first cultivation of sea-island or long-staple cotton occurred at the Sapelo Island plantation of former British loyalist Frank Levett. Unlike rice and indigo, cotton did not require heavy initial investments. Despite the difficulty of preparing the fiber for market, improvements in cultivation spurred rapid expansion of the cotton culture and restored the region's economic prosperity between 1786 and 1792.³¹

²⁹Hammond, *The Cotton Industry*, 22-33.

³⁰Ibid., 20-21.

³¹Ralph Betts Flanders, *Plantation Slavery in Georgia* (Cos Cob, CT; John E. Edwards Publisher, 1967), 55.

The rise of the British textile industry coincided with agricultural change in Georgia. Southern planters recognized that the profitability of cotton production necessitated a cleaning device to speed the process of separating cottonseeds from fibers. In 1792, the state appointed a committee to secure the construction of such an invention. Though he never reaped the financial rewards, in 1793, Yale graduate Eli Whitney, visiting the Savannah home of Revolutionary War hero Nathaniel Greene's widow, Catherine Littlefield Greene, built a machine that successfully removed the last obstacle to the spread of cotton culture. Within a decade, cotton came to monopolize Georgia's economy and govern the arrangement of its culture. From the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards, cotton production and distribution influenced all facets of life throughout the state.³²

The westward migration of the cotton belt combined with other factors to expand the state's dependency on slave labor. At the same time, it also created new opportunities for acquiring plantations.³³ Prior to 1750, slavery was illegal in Georgia. At the time of the American

³²Hammond, *The Cotton Industry*, 20-33.

³³Bartley, *The Creation of Modern Georgia*, 15.

Revolution, however, nearly forty-five percent of Georgia's coastal population was human property, owned by a small minority of wealthy landholders.³⁴ By the 1790s, about twenty-five percent of Georgia's rice planters owned an average of 12.1 slaves, with slaves comprising only thirty-five percent of the state's population. The number of slaves in western Georgia increased by one-hundred-three percent from 1790 to 1800, and by another seventy-seven percent in the next decade.³⁵ By the end of the 1820s, the ratio of slaves to the free population had increased to forty-four percent, at the same time that erosion and constant cultivation in the eastern piedmont region diminished the land's fertility.³⁶

In 1798, the inclusion of the federally adopted three-fifths ratio into the state constitution combined with the increase in Georgia's upcountry slave population to create social tensions between slaveowners and small farmers in predominantly white counties. Westward expansion and explosive population growth in the state opened up new fertile lands, leading to the creation of forty-six new counties between 1820 and 1840. The land, distributed

³⁴Ibid., 5-13.

³⁵Flanders, *Plantation Slavery in Georgia*, 55-62.

³⁶Bartley, *The Creation of Modern Georgia*, 15.

through a state lottery system, gave every adult white male a chance to win the rights to purchase independent homesteads for only a few cents per acre, an opportunity to fulfill the era's social ideal of independent farming.³⁷ Searching for fresh lands, slaveholders moved their chattel westward, resulting in a population explosion in the 1830s that was marked by the expansion of Georgia's cotton economy, the plantation system, and the growth of railroad networks.³⁸ By the end of the 1830s, the state produced more cotton than anywhere else in the world, creating a social edifice that rested on the labor of its half-million slaves. Cotton's profitability not only revitalized slavery in Georgia, it secured a position as the state's principle cash crop, and bolstered the Southern economy so that by the 1860s, Southern plantation owners had amassed the majority of the nation's wealth.³⁹

B. The Episcopal Church in Antebellum Georgia

At the same time that Georgia was undergoing social, demographic and economic changes, the Episcopal Church likewise experienced a revolution of sorts. Outside of

³⁷Anthony Gene Carey, *Parties, Slavery, and the Union in Antebellum Georgia* (Athens and London; The University of Georgia Press, 1997), 11-18.

³⁸Carey, *Parties, Slavery, and the Union*, 1-10.

³⁹Bartley, *The Creation of Modern Georgia*, 16-17.

work, religion dominated life in colonial Georgia. It provided Georgians with a sense of community purpose, an explanation of the world, and hope of an afterlife. In their missionary efforts, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel had sent the zealous John Wesley, a rigid High Church man, to the colony of Georgia in 1735 to establish Christ Church. However, after only twenty-one months in Georgia, controversy arising from his involvement in an infamous romantic triangle prompted Wesley to announce his decision to return to England. Following Wesley's departure, the Society dispatched George Whitefield to the colony in 1739. His evangelical preaching style and participation in the Great Awakening profoundly influenced religious services, traversing denominational lines along the Atlantic Coast from Georgia to New England and across the Atlantic, rendering an ecumenical challenge to established churches, especially in the South. However, while both men are associated with the founding of Methodism, neither ever left the Church of England. By 1750, with the completion of the construction of Christ Church in Savannah, Anglicanism witnessed a general increase among both white and black parishioners in Georgia.⁴⁰

⁴⁰Raymond W. Albright, *A History of the Protestant Episcopal*

Least affected by Revivalists' non-elitist message of salvation through faith rather than reason, and God's grace alone rather than good works, Southerners, including most Georgians, rejected the collapse of deference for established institutions which elsewhere spawned the colonial political and intellectual break from Britain. By 1769, Christ Church in Savannah and St. Paul's in Augusta were the only two Episcopal churches in the colony, with a combined congregation of about 2500 communicants.⁴¹

In the pre-Revolutionary era, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel made several unsuccessful petitions to the Crown for an American bishop. Because Episcopal ministers received support locally, the church's constituency posed political and psychological impediments to the growth of the denomination. In the South, a region where social custom dictated deference, the lay vestry objected to the office of bishop, believing him an agent of the British government whose status and authority threatened their own. Often elected officials and members of the ruling elite, these opponents feared loss of autonomy and the political and social implications

Church. (New York, NY: The Macmillian Company, 1964), 38-39.

⁴¹Ibid., 40-41.

associated with the governing order and authority of the office. Because bishops pledged an oath of allegiance to the Crown rather than to the church, civil leaders regarded the creation of an episcopate as an appendage of the monarchy, with secular and spiritual powers. Consequently, the term "bishop" conjured up images of aristocracy and the impending encroachment of Parliament into colonial affairs. Financial limitations also hindered attempts to establish an American episcopate, as most parishes lacked adequate local resources to support a bishop's privileged lifestyle. Thus, combined with the social aspirations of the vestrymen, economic and political motives thwarted attempts to adapt the English system to America.⁴²

The lack of authority and tradition that would have been furnished by the presence of a resident bishop, therefore, undermined the church's prospects of expansion. The absence of an aggressive Anglican program in the Southern states opened the frontiers of the region up to evangelical Baptists and Methodists. The Church of England's negligence in providing bishops orphaned the church at the outbreak of hostilities between England and

⁴²James Thayer Addison, *The Episcopal Church in the United States, 1789-1931* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), 54-57.

the colonies. Without the backing from the British, and with no bishops in the states, ardent opposition to any state influence in ecclesiastical matters forced the church into a dependence upon the voluntary assistance of its members. Strongest support for the Revolution developed in the South, especially Virginia, although only one Anglican minister in Georgia supported the Revolution. Forced to develop their own leadership and resources, Americans modified the British system allowing for the rebirth of Anglicanism. Thus, the Revolution provided a milieu in which a new American church, with native-born leadership, could purge political concerns, maintain traditional values of social deference and hierarchy, and appeal to a wider and more receptive audience.⁴³

In 1779, with the focus of the war shifting to the South, in an effort to secure the rights and property of the church by identifying with the Church of England, an Assembly in Annapolis gained the interests of the Maryland legislature, which offered to establish the church. The Maryland assembly adopted a resolution in 1780 to draft a charter of incorporation that included a "Declaration of Fundamental Rights and Liberties," which set forth the

⁴³Albright, *A History of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, 37-41.

basic tenets that guided the church for the next century.⁴⁴ Unwilling to concede authority to the state, in May 1783, the first representative convention of the church in Maryland officially adopted the title, "Protestant Episcopal Church," and immediately initiated policies to reorganize the church and modify its liturgy to preserve the traditions of apostolic succession.⁴⁵

The Revolutionary rhetoric that professed freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and economic freedom to all individuals begat degenerating effects on the conservative position of the church and had contradictory regional consequences on relations between the church and state, North and South. In the North, newfound independence brought with it provincialism in the eyes of the church. The Northern colonies benefited most from newfound economic independence, while the church there suffered a loss of clergymen. Northern Anglican clerics tended to have strong loyalist affiliations. As such, many fled into exile to either England or other British possessions. Clerical expulsions, voluntary or otherwise, linked the Anglican clergy as a class to loyalism, and reduced the ministry by

⁴⁴Ibid., 125.

⁴⁵Ibid., 125-127.

nearly forty-two percent.⁴⁶ In the South, however, in the aftermath of war, beginning the process of reorganization while the new nation coped with the growth and adaptation of independence, the church gained strength and underwent a re-awakening.⁴⁷

Past links to the Church of England had been broken, and the nation existed as thirteen independent entities, with the church regarding itself as a separate unit in each state. In the South, unlike the Baptists and Methodists, in the decade from 1779 to 1789, the Anglican Church suffered comparatively slow growth, impeded by its British associations and the generally privileged status of its constituency. Struggling to build an episcopate, the church also reacted slowly in its adoption of evangelicalism. During this era, the Diocese of South Carolina supervised the church in Georgia, and, while evangelical revivalism in other denominations appealed to the largely frontier population of the new state, the Episcopal Church remained primarily concentrated in urban areas.⁴⁸

⁴⁶Nancy L. Rhoden, *Revolutionary Anglicanism; The Colonial Church of England Clergy during the American Revolution*. (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1999,) 101-103.

⁴⁷Addison, *The Episcopal Church*, 52-58.

⁴⁸Albright, *A History of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, 141-160.

The process of church reorganization began soon after the close of hostilities, but the arduous task of unification proved difficult. As the Americans struggled to balance national sovereignty against state's rights, Anglicanism in the South regained authority through its constituency, which retained its elite members, and came to include the middle and lower classes as well. Attempts to maintain vestiges of the privileges of an established church proved futile.⁴⁹

Prior to the Revolution, clergymen had traveled to England for consecration. Afterwards it became necessary for the church in the United States to have its own link to the Church of the Apostles. In 1783, Dr. Samuel Seabury of Connecticut arrived in England seeking recognition for an American line of succession and asking for consecration through the English line of bishops. His refusal to take an oath of allegiance to the King rendered the Church of England legally unable to assist him. Determined to achieve recognition, Seabury proceeded to Scotland, where he sought and achieved the office of Bishop through the Jacobean line of apostolic succession.⁵⁰ By the time the

⁴⁹Addison, *The Episcopal Church*, 51-58.

⁵⁰Followers of James I, first Stuart monarch of England and Scotland who established the Episcopal Church in Scotland.

first American Episcopal bishop returned home, the clergy and laity had begun a movement to organize a national church--to be independent of all foreign authority and with full power to regulate its own affairs.⁵¹

With Seabury presiding, the task of unification began with the first of three General Conventions, in Philadelphia on September 27, 1785. Bitterness and resentments caused numerous delays that prevented finalization of formal national church confederation. Even at this early stage of consolidation, regional differences foreshadowed the prospect of schism as each church appointed committees to consider the episcopate, the liturgy, and the constitution. In a second session of the General Convention, set for June 20, 1786, misgivings created ambivalence and frustrated the process of adopting an ecclesiastical constitution and prayer book. Clergymen from some states declined to participate in an assembly of former Tories, and other states entirely lacked representation. Nevertheless, the convention determined that a fully established episcopate must necessarily

They believed that the Church of Scotland was the "true" Church of England, and maintained that the "divine right" of kings was sanctioned by apostolic succession. The Church of Scotland broke with the Church of England after the ascension of Charles I.

⁵¹Ibid., 58-59.

precede any doctrinal modifications. To obtain the episcopate, delegates approved a written request, delivered to the Archbishop of Canterbury, in which they asked the Bishops of England to confer consecration on candidates properly chosen by state conventions. Requesting the power to consecrate non-British bishops, British archbishops petitioned Parliament, who, on June 26, 1786, granted authority. However, the enabling act limited such consecrations to only three American bishops to establish the line of succession without requiring oaths of allegiance to the king and archbishop.⁵² At the third General Convention at Philadelphia, in 1789, the church unanimously adopted a constitution and set of canons, authorized a prayer book, and achieved church unity as the "Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States."⁵³

Slowly, the Episcopal Church evolved from an entity of widely scattered, loosely connected fragments into a sound ecclesiastical network. Inadequate financial support and lack of a well-trained clergy limited the Episcopal Church to its established dioceses, with only four states obtaining bishops by 1790. In the post-Revolutionary era,

⁵²Albright, *A History of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, 132-133.

⁵³Addison, *The Episcopal Church*, 51-62.

from 1790 to 1811, the growth of the church coincided with the fusion of the social, cultural, political and intellectual development of the nation. During this period, all churches reported a general demoralization among Americans. For Episcopalians the task of conforming to the new American nationalism meant the separation of ecclesiastical authority from secularism. Slow to follow the expansion of the frontier regions as the nation's population moved its economic base westward, the church suffered setbacks as it struggled to overcome its urban confines and affiliation with the Church of England.⁵⁴

At the closing of the eighteenth century, political warfare in Europe generated animosities within the church in the United States. Following the Napoleonic Wars, anti-Catholicism dominated American and British sentiments. The influence of European philosophic rationalism produced dissension among Episcopalians between those who supported France and those who favored Great Britain. Because both nations repeatedly seized American ships and dishonored American sovereignty, in an attempt at neutrality, President Thomas Jefferson enacted the Embargo Act of 1807. The closing of American ports to foreign ships effected

⁵⁴Albright, *A History of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, 162-163.

devastating consequences on the Southern economy, generated a powerful impact on political thought in the United States, and created party strife among Episcopalians. New emphasis on voluntarism, denominationalism, and patriotism effected changes in the hierarchical structure of the church. Though the Episcopal Church had preserved its ecclesiastical heritage, differing interpretations of the importance of clerical function severely inhibited the coalescence of a national church.⁵⁵

Immediately following the War of 1812, industrial progress sparked rapid economic recovery in the nation's southern region. In Savannah, a new generation of city-dwelling wealthy cotton merchants sent their sons westward seeking fortunes on the cotton frontier.⁵⁶

Following the war of 1812, the Episcopal Church witnessed the rise of a new generation of evangelical leaders who created tension between the Catholic and Protestant factions. Party strife intensified between High Church men, led by John Henry Hobart of New York, who expressed loyalty to the Catholic element, and ardent Low Church evangelicals, led by Alexander Viets Griswold of the

⁵⁵Rhoden, *Revolutionary Anglicanism*, 144.

⁵⁶Thomas L. Stokes, *The Savannah*. (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1951,) 218-222.

Eastern Diocese, who stressed the Protestant. Both factions agreed on the necessity of theological training, and in the decades between 1820 and 1840, the Episcopal Church dedicated itself to the education of young men and established seminaries throughout the country. Rapid westward migration in the 1830s and the success of the revivalists exacted fundamental changes within the Church, and produced a generation of evangelical clergymen, increasing in numbers from fifteen percent of the Episcopal clergy in 1820 to fifty percent by 1840, whose missionary zeal enlivened the spiritual vigor and power of the Episcopal Church, especially in the South.⁵⁷

By the 1830s, ministerial concern for the use of the liturgy emerged as opposition to the England's 1832 Reform Bill, which expanded the British electorate and diminished the influence of the gentry, and brought about a second revival in the church. Perceiving a threat to the constitution and rights of the church, clergymen at Oxford University envisioned the church as a median between evangelicalism and Roman Catholicism and sought to revitalize the church by resuscitating certain Catholic doctrines and rituals. Publishing a series of tracts stressing the doctrine of apostolic succession and urging

⁵⁷Addison, *The Episcopal Church*, 148-152.

the clergy to revisit doctrines and rituals omitted from seventeenth century liturgy, the movement won support among students--while university authorities and a large majority of bishops rebuked the movement as treasonous. Though many of the leaders of the movement later apostatized to Rome, the revival of religious tradition nonetheless renewed reverence, order, and splendor in worship, with fortified emphasis on the pious existence and individual asceticism of Christians, in the church in England.⁵⁸

The Oxford Movement effected a party split within the American church between high and low churchmen. Completely independent of the state, the American church agreed with the church in England in doctrine, discipline, and worship. However, the dominant High Church party, including the Bishop of Virginia, cautioned that the nature and design of the movement and its "erroneous and strange doctrines" jeopardized the Church as, "contrary to God's Word, which so threatened her peace and purity."⁵⁹ Agitation between evangelical "low" and "moderate" churchmen, agreeing with

⁵⁸Addison, *The Episcopal Church*, 152-156.

⁵⁹William Meade, in *A Memoir of the Life of the Late Right Rev. William Meade, D.D., Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Virginia, by the Right Rev. J. Johns, D.D. with a Memorial Sermon by the Rev. William Sparrow, D.D.* (Baltimore, MD: Innes & Company, Publishers, 1867,)

the Hobartians on spirit and emphasis more so than in the essentials of doctrine or polity, deflated the relevance of apostolic succession, disconcerting the High churchmen and leading to an internal ecumenical rift.⁶⁰

The American church like the Church of England, trained its clergy in the meaning of apostolic succession and the elements of the Eucharist. In 1843, John Henry Newman wrote a series of "Tracts for the Times," asserting that a simple and bold teaching style was what the church needed most. His writings labeled the movement "Tractarianism" and won a decisive number of converts in the church in the United States, coinciding with a wave of evangelical revivalism circulating throughout the South, thus influencing a new generation of church leaders.⁶¹

Within this dynamic age of religious, political, economic and social transformation, Stephen Elliott, Jr., became Bishop of the Diocese of Georgia. Long considered as the religion of the elite, Episcopalianism in Georgia remained largely limited to the planter class of the state before 1844. If not from an Episcopal background, many of the state's aspiring planters converted as they acquired

⁶⁰Albright, *A History of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, 186.

⁶¹Addison, *The Episcopal Church*, 153-156.

wealth and social status. However, most Georgians reserved suspicion for the Episcopal Church and its liturgy. Though he publicly denounced Tractarianism literature, Elliott recognized that to attract a wider audience, the church should organize a ministry better trained to interact among ordinary people. In order to erase the church's negative image, Elliott observed that the church required an entirely different class of clergymen, native to the region and better able to communicate with all classes of people on familiar terms. Quietly working to bring the church to the masses, Elliott implemented the policy of building unadorned edifices throughout Georgia, enticing hundreds of rural communicants to join the Episcopal ranks. In 1855, Elliott first publicly addressed his concerns about criticisms of the church, asserting that while he stood for change within the Protestant Episcopal Church, he concluded that neither the episcopacy nor the liturgy bore the sole responsibility for its restricted expansion. Rather, Elliott believed, the church's formality and customs towards candidates for the ministry determined its destiny as an exclusive institution and hampered its ability to bridge the barriers of class prejudices. To fulfill his desire to bring the gospel to yeomen, poor whites, and slaves, Elliott assumed responsibility for maintaining and

supervising the preparation of a native-born Georgia clergy. He continuously adapted the precepts of evangelicalism to the specific needs of his own diocese.⁶² For the next two decades, in response to growing Northern criticism, he joined with Southern clerics of all denominations to develop a Southern rhetoric of religion and honor, replicated in the press, which dispensed the political discourse that directed the South through the conflict of the 1850s and into the 1860s, as the nation erupted into war.⁶³

From the later stages of the Second Great Awakening onwards, varying perceptions of their political duties cemented the certainties that Southern evangelicals felt over the righteousness of their social arrangements and about the moral bankruptcy of Northern Republicans. Educated Southern evangelical clergymen occupied social positions in all ranks of the social hierarchy. As a small minority of the eight-percent of Georgians who resided in its towns and cities, the clergy drew a vision of themselves and their place in the world. From necessity,

⁶²Virgil Sims Davis, "Stephen Elliott, A Southern Bishop in Peace and War," (Thesis, Athens; University of Georgia Press, 1964,) 38.

⁶³Albright, *A History of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, 169-185.

they became sensitive to the values and expectations within the South's system of social hierarchy. In doing so, they reinterpreted scripture, perhaps unconsciously, to protect and preserve world of the white-elite class, as well as to promote their own social status. Regardless of denomination, Protestant clergymen united in a belief in the sovereign and intrusive powers of God, Biblicism, evangelicalism, and the legitimacy of the Southern social structure.⁶⁴

The sweep of religious revivals across Georgia and the rest of the South throughout the 1830s and 1850s strengthened evangelicals' commitments to their sense of calling and of righteous duty and offered them a special place in Southern society. Masters of the jeremiad, they regarded sermons as the crucial element in collective worship and believed it their duty to examine and admonish their community and culture. Frequently containing denunciations of certain aspects of local, regional, or national culture, evangelical sermons from the 1830s onwards provided the framework for Southern nationalism.⁶⁵

⁶⁴Kenneth Moore Startup, *The Root of All Evil: The Protestant Clergy and the Economic Mind of the Old South* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1997), 4-11.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 6-8.

Religious services stressed the fundamental elements of Southern heritage in which the dictates of honor garnered the reward of power. Unlike the North, which, driven by the Market Revolution, conducted business by industrial means, the South maintained a policy of reciprocation, where a man's reputation and hospitality dictated social status.⁶⁶

In Georgia, Bishop Stephen Elliott was a member of that elite clergy, part of the social regime who marshaled the rhetoric and goals of Southern politics--defense of slavery, conservative economics, and limited central government. He and other Southern evangelicals preached that all aspects of the Southern way of life rested on Christian concepts that upheld regional conventions and mores. Predicated on the fundamental commitment to political and economic expansion that depended on the extension of slavery, the Episcopal clergy in Georgia defended the state's honor against the rising power of free-soil Republicanism and abolitionist propaganda. Southern religious leaders evoked the Word of God to justify the man-made notions of "honor" associated with the social, economic, and political constructs that amassed to form the worldview of Southern elites and the aspiring middle class in Georgia.

⁶⁶Wyatt-Brown, *Yankee Saints*, 65-80.

Since the nation's inception, religious and political leaders had struggled with the contradictions of slavery, yet remained unable to resolve the issue. As early as the inclusion of the three-fifths compromise, debates in Congress resulted in concessions to maintain the federation. By 1819, the elevated intensity of the debates over the admission of Missouri to the United States, and the resulting Missouri Compromise in 1820, briefly quelled sectional frustrations, but foreshadowed political disruption. Following the Mexican War, the acquisition of 500,000 square miles of new territory disrupted the harmonious nationalism of the 1840s. Sectionalism disconcerted the national balance between North and South, igniting political strife that would dictate events over the next two decades. As the friction over the expansion of slavery persisted, Georgia's governing minority reasoned the continuous westward expansion into newly acquired territories essential to slavery's survival and vital to their continued dominance over Southern society. Slaveholders guarded their social supremacy, predicated by a power that hinged on the loyalty of the non-slaveholding majority of Georgians who feared the social and economic consequences of emancipation. To promote that loyalty, the planter class fervently avowed their beliefs that without

slavery's expansion, the demographic concentration of slaves would lead to a racial catastrophe that would endanger all of white society.⁶⁷

In this sense, clergymen and planters depended on one another. Georgia planters required a moral defense of their social hegemony. Clergymen sought esteem and fulfillment of their ministerial calling; evangelical Protestantism was the cord that bound them together. In their interpretation of the Bible, Southern evangelicals found God's sanction on slavery and the South's social arrangement. Moreover, even in defeat, Elliott and his contemporaries maintained a defensive posture, absolving Southern sins and venerating the social and economic institutions of their way of life-- and they never faltered.

⁶⁷William L. Barney, *The Road to Secession; A New Perspective on the Old South* (New York, NY: Praeger Publishers, 1972), xiii-xv.

CHAPTER 3

"FOR WHITHER COULD EVEN THE WINGS OF A DOVE..." THE MAKING OF A CONFEDERATE CLERIC

Stephen Elliott, Jr., was a third-generation descendant of successful Georgia merchant and rice-planter James Habersham. Captivated by the preaching style of George Whitfield as a young schoolmaster, the progenitor had accompanied the evangelist to Georgia for reasons that he asserted were, "only known to God and my own soul." Having gained social prominence as superintendent and financial manager of Bethesda orphanage in Savannah, and council president for the royal government, Habersham played an instrumental role in advocating the necessity for slaves in the colony. Believing in the uplifting benefits of Christianity, he stressed a patriarchal commitment to their physical and spiritual welfare.⁶⁸

In 1771, Habersham served as royal governor of Georgia when, on the verge of the independence movement, internal strife divided Georgians into factions, and, in the Habersham family, pitted father against son. Fearing civil war in Georgia, the elder Habersham expressed his loyalty to Britain, left Savannah, and traveled North to improve his health. His death in 1775

⁶⁸W. Calvin Smith, "Georgia Gentlemen: The Habershams of Eighteenth-Century Savannah" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, 1971), 384-389.

united his sons, John, James, and Joseph Habersham--Elliott's maternal grandfather--as the three became active leaders in Savannah's liberty party, and served in the Continental Army. Inheriting and dividing the Habersham estate, which included three plantations, fourteen thousand acres, and two hundred slaves, the sons engaged in politics at the end of the war.

Joseph survived his brothers into the nineteenth century and, as family patriarch, trained his sons as cotton merchants and factors in the post-revolutionary commercial world of Savannah. Leaders in Georgia's social and economic affairs, the Habersham family gained influence as political leaders during the period of economic development that followed the War of 1812. As prosperous merchants, physicians, and ministers, the Habershams had wielded much influence in Georgia. Thus, Stephen Elliott, Jr., would continue a hundred-year family history begun in 1737--socially, politically, economically, and spiritually entwined with development of the state.⁶⁹

Described by admiring contemporary Henry Rootes Jackson, a politician, clergyman, and Confederate general, as a Southern representative, "with the best of Southern blood in his veins; with the most exquisite of Southern Culture in his manner, with all the fire of Southern emotion in his heart,...the living

⁶⁹Ibid., 384-389.

embodiment of that lost but lovely Southern Civilization,"⁷⁰ Stephen Elliott, Jr., typified what historian Brooks Holifield termed a "gentleman theologian." Born in 1806 into an upper-class Southern family, Elliott was the son of Esther Habersham, granddaughter of James Habersham, and distinguished South Carolina scholar and botanist, Stephen Elliott. The senior Elliott served as the first President of the Bank of the State of South Carolina, was a founder of the Medical University of South Carolina, and authored a comprehensive study on the botany of the Low Country in Georgia and South Carolina. Young Elliott exemplified all of the characteristics of Southern gentility. Highly educated, his literary instruction began at age six in attendance at Mr. Hulbert's private school in Charleston. He entered the Harvard sophomore class of 1822 at age sixteen. One year later, at the behest of his father, Elliott transferred to the junior class at South Carolina College with full recognition of his academic credentials. Graduating with third highest honors in 1825, he studied law in Charleston for two years with the distinguished South Carolina attorney, and his father's intimate friend, James L. Petigru. He gained admittance to the

⁷⁰Henry Rootes Jackson, *Eulogy on the Late Right Reverend Stephen Elliott, Bishop of Georgia, and President of the Georgia Historical Society, Pronounced in Accordance With a Resolution of that Society, On 12th February, 1867, Its Anniversary* (Savannah, GA: Purse and Son, Printers, 1867), 7.

bar in 1827. Using his literary knowledge, Elliott briefly worked as an editor for his father's periodical, the *Southern Quarterly Review*, while simultaneously practicing law for several years.⁷¹ Later relocating to his birthplace in Beaufort, Elliott succeeded a prestigious retiring lawyer in an established practice. He dabbled in horticulture and botany, an interest he inherited from his father. Abandoning the law in 1828, he supported higher education, serving as chaplain and professor of Sacred Literature and Christian Evidence at South Carolina College for five years.⁷²

While attending a revival in Beaufort, South Carolina, in 1832, Elliott, spellbound by the evangelical preaching style of Presbyterian minister, the Reverend Daniel Baker received the "calling" to the ministry. Baker's message, proclaiming a dedication of love rather than fear in God, proselytized Elliott, and the next year he entered the ministry.⁷³ In 1833, Elliott enlisted as a candidate for the ministry of the Protestant Episcopal Church. Diligently committed to his

⁷¹Hanckel, in *Sermons by The Right Reverend*, v.

⁷²Hubert Bond Owens, *Georgia's Planting Prelate, Including an Address on Horticulture at Macon, Georgia, in 1851 by the Right Reverend Stephen Elliott, Jr.* (Athens; University of Georgia Press, 1945), 9.

⁷³Virgil Sims Davis, *Stephen Elliott, A Southern Bishop in Peace and War* (Thesis, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1964), 38.

curriculum, he was ordained in the fall of 1836 as a deacon in the Protestant Episcopal Church. One month later, he accepted a faculty position at Carolina College.⁷⁴ Following a controversy over the religious views of the former president of the college, a drastic decline in enrollment prompted the resignation of the entire faculty.⁷⁵ Elliott was elected to fill the vacancy as Professor of Evidences of Christianity and Sacred Literature, an appointment that quickly restored confidence in the school. In 1840, Elliott resigned his position to fulfill his newly assigned duties as bishop of the Diocese of Georgia. At age thirty-five, Elliott was unanimously elected the first Protestant Episcopal Bishop of Georgia, and consecrated at Christ Church in Savannah on February 28, 1841. Elliott aggressively expedited the task of regulating and developing the strewn and disorganized Protestant Episcopal Church in Georgia. Within ten years, the jurisdiction of his diocese, which contained only six churches and about three-hundred members at his consecration, had expanded to cover 58,000 square miles. In the process, Elliott consecrated sixteen new churches and

⁷⁴Ibid., 40.

⁷⁵Davis, *Stephen Elliott*, 38-39.

traveled thousand of miles into the frontier of rural Georgia, confirming hundreds of communicants.⁷⁶

At the Nineteenth Annual Convention of the Diocese of Georgia, on May 3, 1841, at Christ Church in Macon, Georgia, Elliott presided as bishop for the first time. In addition to his diocesan duties, Elliott possessed a passionate zeal for education and missionary work. In 1842, he proposed a plan to establish an Episcopal institute of higher learning to educate the state's children according to the principles of the church. He executed his vision, founding the Georgia Episcopal Institute at Montpelier in 1841.

Taking a leave of absence from his diocese, Elliott, along with Bishops James Hervey Otey of Tennessee and Leonidas Polk of Louisiana, spent much of 1859 and 1860 founding the University of the South at Sewanee, Tennessee. A school of theology, the university flourished, specializing in the religious education of young men. In addition, Elliott zealously stressed the need to Christianize slaves, preaching that their eternal souls rested on the shoulders of white Southerners. He traveled the South, advancing the evangelization of slaves, and established several black churches, including two in Savannah, St. Stephen's

⁷⁶Edgar Legare Pennington, "Stephen Elliott, First Bishop of Georgia," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, Vol. VII, No. 3 (September 1938), 206.

and St. Paul's Free Church, an extension of his Savannah River mission.⁷⁷

Elliott's character and heritage demanded that he be a man of honor, a trait inherent within the South's social structure and considered by Elliott as best expressed through a father's duties to his extended family. His sermons indicate his unfaltering devotion to his commitments as a Christian, a conservative and paternalistic evangelizing slaveowner, and a loyal Southerner. Advocating women's education and the evangelization of African American slaves, Elliott established and administered institutions providing for each purpose. Arguing for the sanctity of slavery, Elliott viewed abolition as atheism; therefore, Southerners had a divine mission to protect that to which God himself had assented. As the whole nation looked to the resolution of the slavery issue, he emphatically believed, "that the Negroes should be protected against their would-be political friends; protected in the South where he knew that the greatest missionary work in the world had been, and was being done for this alien race."⁷⁸ As conflict over the issue inflated "Into that mighty conflict which ensued, Bishop Elliott

⁷⁷Ibid., 228-231.

⁷⁸Sarah Barnwell Elliott, *The Right Reverend Stephen Elliott, Jr. D.D., First Bishop of Georgia, 1841-1866*. William C. Granberry Collection, Georgia Historical Society, MS 2183, Scrapbook 1, Box 3.

threw himself with all the enthusiasm of his soul, and he never disavowed his deeds and never repented them.”⁷⁹

During three of the most turbulent decades in American history, one man’s influence demonstrates the powerful role of religion on public opinion and policy. In 1841, newly appointed to the Episcopal Diocese in Georgia, Bishop Stephen Elliott, Jr., inherited jurisdiction over a diverse and growing state divided into distinct geographic and demographic regions. Although the state’s coastal region hosted a variety of religious groups including Catholics, Moravians, Jews, and Presbyterians, Lutherans, Baptists, and Methodists claimed an overwhelming majority of the state’s churchgoers by the 1840s. Georgia’s cities contained the majority of Elliott’s three hundred Episcopal communicants. In the western region, a sparsely settled frontier wilderness, Episcopalians were a loosely organized, small minority among the white settlers moving into Creek lands.⁸⁰ Nonetheless, Elliott heartily embarked on his duties organizing and expanding the scattered and disorganized church.⁸¹

⁷⁹Hanckel, in *Sermons by the Right Reverend*, 15.

⁸⁰Russell Preston and Barbara Hines, *Savannah, A History of Her People Since 1733* (Savannah, GA: Fredic C. Beil Publishing, 1992), 21-27.

⁸¹Pennington, “First Bishop,” 203-209.

In Elliott's first year as head of the diocese, a generous Savannah benefactor procured 700 acres in Monroe County, a spot of land known as Montpelier Springs, and presented it as a gift to the church for the purpose of the establishment of a new Episcopal Church and educational facility. To prepare himself for this new venture, Elliott traveled the state consulting with planters on new agricultural methods.⁸² He envisioned that the school would pay operating expenses by managing a stock farm to be cultivated by a slave force, owned by the institution. He introduced a financial plan in which he conceived that the school would "furnish the best education, together with all such accomplishments as christian [sic] parents should desire for their children, at a cost far below the usual charges." Elliott imagined that the only burden upon the school would be instructors' salaries, which tuition money would support. "Another striking advantage of this plan is its expansiveness," Elliott projected, "It can be enlarged upon the same principles of arrangement to any extent, and twenty schools may be supported as easily as one....the capital required to be invested in land and negroes for their support, will diminish in proportion as the schools increase."

⁸²Ibid., 211-212.

Elliott pledged to furnish the schools with the best faculty that could be procured. He believed that any future success should be left to "the citizens of Georgia to determine whether they will educate their children at their own doors, at diminished expense as compared with northern [sic] education,...or whether they will still continue to drain the State of its resources and subject their children to the temptations necessarily incident to a residence remote from parental influence." Extended absence from the "climate of the South" presented unwanted and unwelcome danger at the most crucial period in a young Southerner's life. Elliott's concept combined education with instruction in "rural economy."

Not that the boys will be required to labour [sic] at all: but if the farm be well cultivated and skillfully arranged, they may be taught many lessons of management and economy, to be turned to good account in after life...A long residence, during years of boyhood, upon a well kept and well arranged farm, will impress upon the eye and upon the feelings a habit of order and neatness which will make the most of them, afterwards attentive to these things in their own domestic relations. They will be trained in the best mode of performing their duties as the owners of slaves and the masters of human beings for whose souls they must give account.⁸³

Originally a co-ed school, the institute evolved into the Montpelier Female Institute, but lacking sufficient enrollment

⁸³Stephen Elliott, *Bishop Elliott's Annual Address to the Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church, in the Diocese of Georgia* (Savannah, GA: W.T. Williams, 1842).

to support operating expenses, closed in 1855. The school's failure ultimately led to Elliott's financial ruin.⁸⁴

Amidst the growth and economic activity of the times, new fields of opportunity emerged for the Episcopal Church. As cotton and slave labor characterized the foundation of Georgia's political and economic structures at the beginning of the nineteenth century, they simultaneously and profoundly shaped the state's religious and social structures.⁸⁵ Along the coast, one-half of Georgia's slave-owners were Episcopalians, and in their slave labor force, Bishop Elliott recognized immense possibilities to expand the number of Episcopal communicants in his diocese. As the state's population expanded westward, Elliott began traveling thousands of miles in his first years as bishop. Granted many opportunities to meet leading Georgia planters, he zealously advocated the white man's responsibility for the religious uplift and enlightenment of the state's slave population:⁸⁶

Yet among all that vast multitude there is not heard the voice of a single Episcopal pastor. From the bluff to Darien there are to be seen plantations

⁸⁴Pennington, "First Bishop," 228-231.

⁸⁵Bartley, *The Creation of Modern Georgia*, 13-17.

⁸⁶Pennington, "First Bishop," 214.

containing thousands of slaves...and still no master tells them of their souls and of their Savior.⁸⁷

The plantation system and slave labor created a veritable aristocracy in an elite class of Georgians who ranked among the richest families in the nation by the 1860s. Comprising the top two percent of the state's property holders and holding the majority of its wealth, Southern planters possessed twice the per capita wealth of their Northern elite counterparts and five times that of the average Northerner. The plantation economy they created divided the state into three distinct geographical, political, and cultural regions and supported traditions of self-sufficiency while suppressing industrial development, thereby offering little opportunity for nonagricultural business enterprise.⁸⁸

Elliott believed that the Episcopal Church was the most qualified to meet the exact needs of Georgia's slave population. Convinced by his observations of their "religion of excitement," Elliott determined the situation on Georgia's plantations warranted sound religious instruction.⁸⁹

⁸⁷Elliott, *Journal Protestant Episcopal Church, 21st Convention, Diocese of Georgia, 1843.*

⁸⁸Bartley, *The Creation of Modern Georgia*, 16-17.

⁸⁹Pennington, "First Bishop," 210.

As conflict arose between the elite planter class and the non-slaveholding majority, Georgia's improved railroad system increased the availability of low-priced midwestern food, and simultaneously decreased the state's production of food crops. As self-sufficiency of the plantations dwindled, Georgians developed a heavier reliance on the cultivation and export of cotton. Providing the bulk of the nation's exports, Georgia planters formed a dependence on Northern merchants for finance, transport, manufacture and trade of cotton and other Southern goods.⁹⁰ Paradoxically, the state's demographics and social order produced an economy that required only diminutive importation of luxury items. British demand for cotton produced the stimulus for the development of new processing techniques, which in turn sustained the subsequent economic boom that encompassed the South. Industrialization in Great Britain created a pattern of trade perfectly suited for Georgia's labor system. From commerce, planters, merchants and traders, primarily residing in the coastal region, gained power and prestige from the production and export of cotton. Georgia's goods, transported to New York to exchange for European goods and marketed primarily in the North, played

⁹⁰Bartley, *The Creation of Modern Georgia*, 24-25.

an equally vital role in the economy of Northern Atlantic states, but left little opportunity for social mobility among the state's lower classes. As bitterness and class conflict escalated, threatening social cohesion within his diocese, Elliott preached against the sins of greed and lust, and offered consolation:

This seems to be very hard, this duty of the Christian, to be always laboring, and never seeing the fruit of that labor; to be the instrument of God's dealing, and yet to be obliged to wait until the end before we can comprehend them: but it has ever been the lot of the faithful.⁹¹

As a resident of Savannah, Bishop Elliott dwelled among a small minority of Georgia planters who maintained their hegemony through the pursuit of professional and political careers. His parishioners included lawyers, doctors, merchants, and other wealthy urbanites who invested their money in slaves and land. Many escaped the rural isolation of plantation life by residing part-time in the city, leaving care of the plantation to an overseer. Georgia's cities operated as extensions of agriculture rather than independent industry, functioning as marketing, transportation, and farming service centers. By successfully integrating agriculture and industry, these wealthy Georgians created a small but prosperous class of

⁹¹Elliott, "Ninth Sermon," in *Sermons...*, 85.

merchants and professionals, including the clergy, who resided in the city and depended on the surrounding plantations for clients.⁹²

To the clergy, Southern cities illustrated God's sanction of social stratification, and Elliott sought to establish himself among Georgia's cultivated professionals. Yeomen farmers, increasingly drawn to Georgia's cities, sent their sons to Savannah for formal education, creating an aspiring middle class determined to join the ranks of the business elite.

In his address to the opening session of the newly established Savannah Medical College, Elliott considered the opening of the school a momentous occasion. The South's population had enlarged such that the demand for physicians far outweighed the supply. To that point, "one or two Medical Schools [sic] were sufficient for the whole union...." Other cities like Charleston and Baltimore had successfully competed with Philadelphia in medical education. However, the greatest dereliction of the older institutions had been a failure to recognize the South's need to keep pace with the nation's growth and progressiveness. It had been a miscalculation to assume

⁹²Bartley, *The Creation of Modern Georgia*, 20-21.

that Southern students could gain practical knowledge in Northern schools. Georgia therefore had a social obligation to train its youth regionally in order that they "understand more thoroughly the peculiar types of disease with which they will be called at once to grapple." Now, according to Elliott, having already taken her place among the great commerce centers of the world, Savannah must prepare to assume its position, as the newest center for medical training in the South:

Before a city can aspire to embrace within its bosom literary institutions of any magnitude, it must attain a certain extent of resource and population--it must give warrant that it shall be able to furnish such appliances of education as will place it upon a level with older and more advanced communities. ...Mere physical progress can never elevate a city...unless a refined taste grows up with...commercial spirit.

Savannah forms just such a local centre and has just such a connection with and an influence upon a large section of our Southern country. It is naturally connected by climate and disease with all that territory...from the Savannah river [sic]to...the southernmost point of Florida...to the Alabama river[sic]..Its Medical College...will become the natural school for all the Physicians which that wide extent of country will demand...We can scarcely yet conceive what is to be the future of this our city...All our present prosperity, our rapid extension, our swelling population, are but the beginnings of a growth which shall make Savannah a metropolis worthy of the Empire State of the South.⁹³

⁹³Stephen Elliott, *An Address, Delivered at the Opening of the First Session of the Savannah Medical College, on the 7th November, 1853* (Savannah, GA: George N. Nichols, Book and Job Printer, 1853).

As Georgia's economy grew progressively more enmeshed with slave culture, Elliott, like his great-grandfather, committed himself and the church as missionaries in "that portion of the earth, the temperate zone, which gives us a climate and soil securing us the most indispensable staples of food and clothing for the world." Elliott asserted that the South represented the pinnacle of culture and refinement. He deemed the South's social arrangement as one "which classifies society in the way best calculated for intellectual cultivation."⁹⁴

As a Southerner and slaveholder, Elliott accepted the separation of society into two distinct races as natural and providential. His views both reflected and led the majority of Episcopalians in Georgia. With Elliott's influence, the Episcopal Church experienced exponential growth among both Georgia's African American and white populations.⁹⁵

Taking seriously his commission to the slave population of the state, Elliott stressed that, "the

⁹⁴Stephen Elliott, *Annual Address Before the Clariosophic and Euphradian Societies of the South Carolina College*, 1859 (Charleston, SC: Steam Power press of Walker, Evans, &Co. 1860), 14-15.

⁹⁵Wayne Mixon, "Georgia." in, *Religion in the Southern States; A Historical Study*, ed., Samuel S. Hill (Mercer University Press: Macon, GA, 1983), 88.

religious instruction of our domestics and of the Negroes upon plantations, is a subject that never should be passed over." Commenting on the growth of the movement to bring Christianity to the slaves in Georgia, Elliott observed:

During the last week I visited the mission upon the North side of the great Ogeechee river, under the charge of the Rev. William C. Williams. A neat country Church has been erected by some of the planters of that side of the river, which was sufficiently completed for services, but not for Consecration. I officiated in it on Sunday the 18th of April, when eight candidates were presented for Confirmation, the first fruits of the labors of their earnest missionary. Mr. Williams is pursuing the only plan which will be of any service with this class of our population, identifying himself with their spiritual condition and going in and out among them as their pastor and guide.⁹⁶

Well educated in legal theory, jurisprudence, political economy, theology, ecclesiology, historical studies, and political theory, Georgia's planter-elites related to their Northern and European counterparts as intellectuals. Elliott recognized his Southern contemporaries as learned scholars in moral philosophy, and Greek and Roman classics whose "inheritance of high culture and unstained integrity"⁹⁷ justly drew upon the greatness of ancient societies. As they constructed a worldview reinforced by close consideration of the political,

⁹⁶George F. Bragg, 1863-1940. *A History of the Afro-American Group*. (Accessed, November 6, 2005 from <http://docSouth.unc.edu/church/bragg/bragg.html>), 37-39.

⁹⁷Elliott, *Annual Address*, 11.

economic, social, religious, and philosophical issues of the day, they viewed progress in terms of moral and material expansion. Staunchly defending individual freedom and republican virtue amidst the astonishing transformation of modern times, Georgia's ruling elite championed themselves as the saviors of both. They embraced the transformations in material life associated with the industrial revolution and discerned the global spread of Christianity as an inevitable by-product of western Christian progress.⁹⁸

Elliott was part of Georgia's social elite who believed that being Southern was a matter of status in a homogeneous society. "And out of this condition of society--a society of men of wealth and leisure--ought to arise that patronage which shall give us learning of every kind."⁹⁹ As early as the 1820s, the elite found in their studies confirmation and support for their adherence to the hierarchical structure inherent in slave society. Influenced by a wave of revivalism, slave-owners increasingly welcomed moral and material progress as it related to their view of themselves. Considering themselves

⁹⁸Eugene D. Genovese, *The Slaveholder's Dilemma: Freedom and Progress in Southern Conservative Thought, 1820-1860* (Columbia; University of South Carolina Press, 1992), 1-5.

⁹⁹Elliott, *Annual Adress*, 15.

to be the legitimate heirs of the time-honored social and spiritual foundations of what they deemed the constructive elements in feudal society, elites formed an ideology that held that genuine progress could only proceed within a stratified social order. To the ruling elite, only the South's organic social structure stood for progress and modernity, devoid of the evils that plagued European bourgeois societies. Responding to abolitionists, they asserted that equality for all was merely an aberration created by fanatical infidels whose greed threatened the founding principles of the nation's republican ideology. Believing that the support and protection of the laboring masses demanded a stratified social order in which honor, patriarchy, paternalism, and deference were crucial elements, they considered Northern capitalism as a pitiless exploitation of labor that would plunge the nation backwards toward barbarism.¹⁰⁰

Despite Elliott's labors to expand the church's influence, the Episcopal Church remained generally confined to the state's urban districts. The English tradition of formal worship held little appeal for Georgia's rural masses, who demanded an unadorned message of salvation and

¹⁰⁰Genovese, *The Slaveholder's Dilemma*, 6-8.

damnation to determine their eternal fate. Elliott's attempts to convince the clergy to employ more fervor and less scholarship into church services attained little success in rural Georgia, while the number of urban ministries under Elliott's jurisdiction increased by 250 percent in the twenty years between 1841 and 1861.¹⁰¹

During this same period, the nonslaveholding population of the state increasingly grew in proportion to that of the total white population. Georgia's cities tied its planters to the rest of the South and to Northern and European industry. With labor-intensive cotton spreading westward, slaveholding altered Georgia's demographic character. The slaveholding minority that controlled Georgia's politics comprised only three percent of state's population by 1850. The state's growing economic stratification certified their ascendancy. Unlike manufacturing, cotton provided no economic incentives or social mobility, except to the planters.¹⁰²

As the increasing geographic concentration of slave property wealth in the hands of a declining number of its

¹⁰¹Mixon, *Religion in the Southern States*, 88.

¹⁰²Gavin Wright, *The Political Economy of the Cotton South: Households, Markets, and Wealth in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1978), 32-36.

citizens formed the political economy of antebellum Georgia, the small but powerful planter class that dominated the fertile Savannah River valley "plantation belt" secured political control by successfully exploiting Georgia's geography to protect their own economic interests. By separating the two nonslaveholding regions, they ensured the social deference of the majority by reinterpreting and employing religion as the oracle by which they maintained social dominance.

In the period from 1840 to 1850, political patterns were not shaped by religion alone, but increasingly politicians exploited denominational tensions, which often coincided with sectional and political prejudices.¹⁰³ During the secession crisis, the emphasis on politics temporarily allayed cultural and economic divisions within the state, imparting a temporary compromise between the classes.¹⁰⁴ However, by 1860, approximately one-half of white Georgians did not own slaves, and only a small number benefited from the expansion of slavery. The majority of slaveowners possessed between three and five slaves, while the opportunities for social mobility dwindled in the

¹⁰³Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics*, 118-119.

¹⁰⁴Mark A. Weitz, *A Higher Moral Duty: Desertion Among Georgia Troops During the Civil War* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 11.

state. Tax digests indicate that assessments were based on property holdings and that the richest twenty percent of the state's population paid three-fourths of the tax bill, purchased expansive tracts of the most fertile lands, and acquired increasingly larger numbers of human property. By 1860, a small group of merchant-planters paid the majority of the state's tax revenues and increasingly controlled local and state politics.¹⁰⁵

Throughout the South, slavery flourished in areas that supported plantation agriculture. In the areas along the Appalachian ridge, poor soil and rugged topography outlined a barrier to the western spread of slavery in the South. Along the eastern coast and the banks of the Mississippi, rich alluvial soil sustained large cotton plantations, containing the majority of the nation's human property. By 1860, fewer than one-quarter of Southern slaveowners possessed more than ten slaves and most owned less than five. Less than one percent of all Southerners owned five hundred or more slaves.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵Timothy James Lockley, *Lines in the Sand: Race and Class in Lowcountry Georgia, 1750-1860*. (Athens and London; University of Georgia Press, 2001), 24-25.

¹⁰⁶William J. Cooper, Jr. and Thomas E. Terrill, *The American South: A History*. Vol. 1, 3rd edition (Boston, MA: McGraw Hill Companies, Inc., 2002), 192-197.

In Savannah and other urban areas of the state, those employed as artisans and shopkeepers found some measure of social mobility by supervising African-American laborers. Others bolstered their social position by working as overseers on plantations with absentee owners, slave patrollers, boatmen, wagoners and peddlers. For the remainder of whites, economically marginalized by the growth of the plantation society, subsistence farming and unskilled labor created a social order in which racial distinctions emerged as an important social determinant.¹⁰⁷

Pushed into the less fertile areas, mountains, and pine barrens, Georgia's small, nonslaveholding, yeoman farmers and immigrants were relegated to home industry, manufacturing, and the cultivation of food crops. Unable to compete with labor-intensive cotton production, these small landowners posed no real economic threat to the social hegemony of the planter-elites. Analytical data indicates that these self-sufficient farmers, with no direct economic relationship to the plantations, produced only a few bales of cotton per year. This same evidence demonstrates an ever-widening gap in capital, along with the overriding and

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 1-57.

increasing economic importance of slave property.¹⁰⁸ As the sectional conflict intensified, Georgia's social inequality undermined popular political support for the planter-elite minority and continued to shape the state's reaction throughout the secession crisis.¹⁰⁹

The state's economic growth contributed to the unique structure of its social organization. From the 1860s onwards, small farmers and artisans with no direct stake in slavery and little real opportunity to fulfill their own social ambitions represented the only serious challenge to planters' political hegemony.¹¹⁰ Most yeoman slaveholders worked aside their slaves in the fields. Georgia's nonslaveholders participated in a widespread practice of employing slaves from nearby plantations to work in their fields on Sundays. This increased contact between the races in the rural areas of the state, while the variety of trades pursued by free and enslaved blacks throughout the state created competition between poorer whites and African Americans in cities.

Beginning in the colonial era, urban slaveholders discovered great economic practicability in training their

¹⁰⁸Wright, *Political Economy*, 15-29.

¹⁰⁹Weitz, *A Higher Moral Duty*, 13-15.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, 10-17.

own slaves as coopers and carpenters rather than employing white skilled laborers, forcing poor Georgians into an economic dependency similar to that of African Americans. In Georgia, the economic prosperity of black artisans weakened the social distinctions between the races; mechanics and artisans reacted by petitioning the state legislature for regulations to restrict the economic pursuits of free blacks and limit the geographic mobility of slaves.¹¹¹

As competition between black and white workers in Georgia continued into the antebellum period, shopkeepers, peddlers, and rural slaveless farmers openly engendered a biracial interaction that rejected the authority of elites by developing profitable, though not always legal, trade relationships with slaves. By the 1840s, planters recognized the economic impact of these trade relationships and perceived them as attempts to undermine traditional patterns of racial subordination. In response to the social and cultural turmoil associated with an increasing awareness of the uniqueness of the state's social arrangement, Georgia planters formed the Savannah River Anti-Slave Traffick Association in 1846, in an effort to

¹¹¹Lockley, *Lines in the Sand*, 57-75.

deter trading between white non-slaveowners and blacks. Rejecting the ideology of racial distinction, poor white nonslaveholders displayed a dissident class affinity with African Americans. Poor whites and slaves alike rejected the supremacy of elites in a social system designed to ensure their economic and social marginalization. To diminish threats to their social hegemony, planters employed the clergy as agents who increasingly stressed racial solidarity by repeatedly emphasizing the ties of family, gender, and race that bound all white Georgians.¹¹²

Because the social position of the clergy was not well defined, personal wealth, family honor, and formal education for preparation into the ministry helped delineate the role of Southern clergymen in Georgia. Bishop Elliott was representative of the Southern Episcopal clergy in this age of geographic and demographic change. As the South experienced a cycle of growth in towns and cities in the 1840s, the clergy modified rational orthodoxy to accommodate social and intellectual problems associated with cultural transition.

Identifying with the growing population of mercantile and professional classes who aspired to gentility, Elliott and other ministers propagated a theology that demonstrated

¹¹²Ibid., 163-167.

an awareness of the new self-image of aspiring middle-class Southern urbanites, as well as their own social aspirations. Religious in the South dogma promulgated depictions of society in which social and economic distinctions were natural and providential. Hence, "the righteous and the unrighteous are so mingled in domestic and social life, are so bound together by ties of association and love and relationship, that the punishment of one reacts upon the other, and the sorrow of one is the affliction of the other," Elliott pronounced.

Southerners, bound by honor and duty to abide by the Word of God, must accept the sanctity of their social arrangement for, "even if ...you could have wings like a dove, you could not fly anywhere that would give you rest. That must be wrung out of labor, out of duty, out of suffering, out of imitation of Christ. That must be won not by flight, but by endurance; not by a cowardly desertion of the post at which God has placed us, ...Submission to God's will, whatever that may be, it the first step towards it."¹¹³ God himself ordained the South's social hierarchy; therefore, for Elliott, consciousness of social position reflected both intellectual commitments and social

¹¹³Elliott, "Oh That I had Wings Like a Dove," [n.d.], in *Sermons*, 3-9.

compulsions.¹¹⁴ Like every member of Southern society, Elliott had a duty and purpose. He recognized his own duty as merely an inevitable obligation to carry out God's work and believed that no Christian should shirk his divine responsibilities:

But what a long chase man has...how he toils and sweats away the beat years of his life in looking for rest in change; how he chafes against the fetters which he supposes are keeping him away from happiness and peace! ...And it will go on forever. Nothing can alter it, for it is in man himself, and in the condition which sin has forced upon the world...but still is it the cry of nature, and not of faith!

For whither could even the wings of the dove bear any Christian, safer and better than the place where God has put him?¹¹⁵

By mid-century, regardless of socioeconomic status, all white men, united through familial, community, religious, and racial bonds, perceived and accepted class distinctions in gradations of wealth and social status. Planters rested at the top of the social structure; townsmen and artisans fell in the upper and middle classes; small slave-owners, yeoman farmers, poor tenants and laborers resided at the bottom of the hierarchy. Wealth equaled public power in Georgia. Nevertheless, regardless of region, occupation or wealth, seasonal agriculture and

¹¹⁴Holifield, *Gentlemen Theologians*, 7.

¹¹⁵Elliott, "Wings of a Dove," 3-4.

white male privilege shaped the lives of all Southerners; coexistence and cooperation, deeply rooted in patterns of exchange and obligation, characterized Georgia's economy.¹¹⁶

By the time of the sectional crisis, faith had sustained Georgians for more than a century. Poor whites and African Americans, initially attracted to evangelical theology by its message of spiritual equality, had long worshiped alongside elites in interracial church services. At the beginning of his career, Elliott expressed his belief that, "The impression is that the Negroes are averse from the services of our church. It is a great mistake except so far as that aversion may have arisen from ignorance or neglect." Elliott instructed, "Let a clergyman of the Episcopal Church settle anywhere in the midst of them and make himself comprehended among them and minister ... and prove himself their friend and teacher, and very soon will they welcome him to their hearts with the same true affection with which they now cling to those who now labor among them." In 1847, Elliott's hope was, "that our Episcopal planters will take this matter into consideration and make arrangements for the employment of missionaries of their own church, so that masters and servants may worship together in unity of spirit and in the bond of peace." In

¹¹⁶Carey, *Parties, Slavery, and the Union*, 17-18.

Elliott's view, interracial worship "would tend very much to strengthen the relation of masters and slaves by bringing into action the highest and holiest feelings of our common natures. There should be much less danger of inhumanity on the one side, or of insubordination on the other, between parties who knelt upon the Lord's Day around the same Table, and were partakers of the same Communion."¹¹⁷

However, as the sectional crisis mounted, the evangelical Protestant clergy increasingly claimed jurisdiction over temporal matters. Because women and African Americans outnumbered white males in all Georgia congregations, clergymen reinterpreted theology to reinforce secular social hierarchies. In an attempt to restrict blacks from attending services that increasingly emphasized messages of social and economic independence, Georgia's churches segregated services. Likewise, more and more, religious services asserted the social dominance of white men and stressed the duties and proper roles for all members of society. By adopting familial power structures, evangelical churches deliberately reinforced the symbolic dominance of white males. Elliott and other clergymen reinforced the notion that regardless of wealth or social

¹¹⁷Bragg, *A History of the Afro-American Group*, 37-39.

status, the duty of all men, as heads of household, was to assemble their wives, children, and slaves in order to instruct them in the ways of piety.¹¹⁸

As the nation drifted ever closer to disunion, Southern politicians, newspaper editors, lawyers, and professors adopted evangelical methods and religious metaphors, which for Georgians confirmed the holy sanction of their social orthodoxies. The Southern clergy thought themselves divinely commissioned to examine and admonish their community and culture. Their sense of calling and moral obligation granted a detachment from society, which they believed afforded them a unique position in the social hierarchy.¹¹⁹ The clergy believed that they bore the God-given responsibility to reprove and direct their parishioners. Despite their own economic affluence, throughout the antebellum period Southern clergymen admonished the lust for and pursuit of commercial wealth. In 1859, Bishop Elliott delivered two sermons addressing the pressures of society on the lives of Southern Christians, illustrating the moral and civic obligations of each member of society:

¹¹⁸Lockley, *Lines in the Sand*, 140-157.

¹¹⁹Startup, *The Root of all Evil*, 4-5.

Is there not something wrong in the framework of a social state which arranges its work that in order to have it faithfully performed, the higher duties of domestic life must be neglected? This evil is not confined to one class of society; it is the pervading evil of the whole country. The politician, the lawyer, the clergyman, ...the merchant, are all so occupied with the duties of their profession, that they must exercise a stern resistance to the exaction of the times, ...And it will prove fatal to all the best interests of society unless it be corrected... In our rush to greatness and power, we are overlooking the natural laws of all our social relations; and they will some day [sic] vindicate themselves before all the world with a fearful retribution.¹²⁰

Regardless of happenstance, Elliott advised, "...THE MAN is still the father, the husband, the master, with duties which none can absolve him from, ...Any work which absorbs him so entirely that he cannot fulfil[sic] these, is work more than he ought do,--work from which he should break away rather than sacrifice his children to it." Above one's moral and domestic duty, according to Elliott, any other unnecessary work constituted a violation of God's law. A man's duties, "arising out of his presence, his authority, his example, his instruction--are far more important than procuring wealth."¹²¹

As for women's place in society, Elliott believed that pious mothers bore the responsibility of educating their

¹²⁰Elliott, "Twelfth Sermon: The Busy Man's Religious Difficulties," in *Sermons*, [n.d.], 118-119.

¹²¹Ibid.

children in religious exercises by instilling the basic tenets of repentance and faith. Standing as "angel of the domestic circle," a wife was obligated to act as comforter to her husband, guide for her children, mistress of the servants, and the controlling spirit of the household.¹²²

Elliott addressed the proper role of womanhood:

It is surprising how little Christians look to the Scriptures for a sure role of duty...the value of the Bible consists in its enunciation of general principles, meant for all people and for all times.

Nothing is more important for the comfort and happiness of a domestic circle than that a house should be well ordered; and this generally suppose to be the providence of the woman. Public duties, professional occupations, the necessity of providing for the family, all force the man away from his home...This casts upon the woman the management of things at home, of children, of servants, and generally of the social relations of the family. Upon her are supposed to depend the neatness, the comfort, the happiness of home. If these are not secure, she receives the blame; and even when they are secured,...she is very apt to suffer from the tongue of criticism. No wonder then that there many...who are tempted to neglect,...their religious duties, for they fear they may neglect their domestic ones. To all such, Christ lays down the important principle, that if one or the other has to be laid aside, religion is the "one thing needful," and everything ought be sacrificed for *that*.¹²³

Devoutly committed to a rigorous code of honor, Southerners had come to embrace an ideology based in rhetoric of the Revolution to glorify the providence of

¹²²Elliott, "The Busy Woman's Religious Difficulties," in *Sermons*, [n.d.], 128-138.

¹²³Ibid., 122-138.

power and race. The ethic of honor that formed the religious and secular mind-set of the South increasingly unified all white men as the political conflict of the 1850s escalated. Growing economic prosperity, political ideology, and evangelical Protestantism further united white men, despite disparity in wealth.

From the early 1830s to the end of the nineteenth century, partisan politics divided white men politically, won their loyalties, and eventually consumed the nation. Initially reluctant to intercede in non-religious spheres, Bishop Elliott was among a growing number of evangelical Protestant clergymen engaging in politics who profoundly shaped American culture and partisan sectional antagonisms. Elliott advised Georgians to take comfort even when "the poison is beginning to show itself in outbreaking [sic] corruption in children, in servants, among our companions in society," and that "We can shape character, opinion, and feeling: but once shaped we have no more power over them." He advised, regarding the issues that were dividing the nation:

God is ever...compelling the indifferent and the unbelieving to bring his purposes to pass...And in a like manner are we all the unconscious instruments of God in working out his purposes...pursuing...what we consider the regular routines of life...

We cannot trace the history of nations in its connection...has every individual of the human race

been silently working out the purposes of God...and nations, all the way back to promise in the Garden of Eden...had been made to do the same...

I might cite instance after instance of this sort, but it is unnecessary. These are enough to show the course of God's dealings,...The world goes on naturally...each nation appears to be working out its manifest destiny: but yet in the end, that comes to pass which God has foreordained;¹²⁴

In a moment of seemingly personal reflection, Elliott expressed the difficulty of his own duties, and those of his fellow clergymen. He believed the clergy uniquely qualified to act as counselors in the effusive atmosphere of economic, social, and political divisiveness:

How little the world understands the difficulty there is in preaching the Gospel...the struggle which the human heart undergoes in setting forth publicly and faithfully those revealed truths which constitute what the Scripture calls, 'the foolishness of preaching'...What man needs is not advice, is not instruction in mere worldly duty, is not a constant lecturing upon what he ought to do...it is *power* to make it operate upon the will; and then the *power* to enable it to do right...But when the pulpit is fulfilling its true design--then it assumes a very different aspect. It becomes a very distinct instrument for spiritual good, and can be wielded only by those who have been taught what is His wisdom and His will!¹²⁵

The post-Revolutionary ideals of liberty, equality, and rights of man had threatened the institution of slavery, North and South, and the nation witnessed the rise

¹²⁴Elliott, "What I Have Written, I Have Written," in *Sermons*, [n.d.], 26-31.

¹²⁵Elliott, "Not Ashamed of the Gospel," in *Sermons...*, n.d. 44-54.

of social reform movements including voluntary manumission. Increasingly debated by the 1820s, territorial expansion brought the question of slavery to the forefront in national politics. Political compromise temporarily resolved the issue through the 1830s, despite increasing attacks from Northern critics. In the 1840s and 1850s, when the "Southern way of life" came under attack from abolitionists, without exception, antebellum Southern whites venerated American founding fathers. Republican ideology set the parameters of political conflict, despite the widening gap between theory and practice. Factions and parties divided white men politically in Georgia throughout the antebellum period, belying regional unity. Citing Jeffersonian republican ideology as the basis of state's rights doctrines, Georgians redefined republicanism, armed themselves with an ideological weapon against perceived Northern aggression, and constructed a proslavery ideology to preserve and protect their own social and racial superiority.¹²⁶

In Georgia, evangelical Protestantism presented the perfect forum in which to administer the precepts of social hierarchy because religion increasingly bound Georgians

¹²⁶Carey, *Parties, Slavery, and the Union*, 14-15.

into a homogenous society. Dating from colonial times, biracial church services in Georgia had offered both white and black congregants theoretical equality as fellow converts to religion. However, by the 1850s, Southern revivalism adapted evangelical moral concepts to reconcile with regional economic prosperity, and segregated services to assuage qualms about slavery among whites. Elliott stressed that each member of society carried with him an obligation, despite diffidence towards the South's social arrangement. He asserted that the clergy's onus was "directing the minds of men aright in religion...persuading them that they have especial work to do for God...Much of our work is common to us all,...Our Lord has given every man...his own peculiar work...But, each individual and each position in life has something peculiar to itself, and our duty is to understand what that work is."¹²⁷

Increasingly defensive, evangelicals' proslavery rationale resulted from their definition of slavery as a relation between morally responsible agents; hence, they formed an ideology of slavery in agreement with their own views of individualism and moral obligation. Evangelicals ironically observed slavery as an obvious byproduct of

¹²⁷Elliott, "Fiftieth Sermon: Watch Ye Therefore." in *Sermons*, [n.d.], 557-558.

democratic progression, evidenced by God's benevolence in matters of regional economic prosperity. The ideology of moral and material progress that developed provided Georgians with a logical and complete justification for and defense of their social practices.¹²⁸

Employing the clergy as instruments of economic and cultural conscience, Georgia's elites constructed a regional identity based on a rigorous code of Southern honor, in which a man's reputation among his peers took precedence. Drawn from Jeffersonian republican ideology and Jacksonian heritage, they created a Southern way of life that paid homage to traditions of republican ideals, agrarianism, racial slavery, aristocracy, individualism, romanticism, and evangelical Protestantism. Southern honor served as a means to create and bind a privileged group and classify the ranks of its members.¹²⁹ Notions of provincialism and personal connection with God became a cohesive mechanism deeply imbedded in Southern habits of mind.¹³⁰

¹²⁸Daly, *When Slavery Was Called Freedom*, 30-56.

¹²⁹Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s-1880s*, (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 56-57.

¹³⁰Emory M. Thomas, *The Confederacy as a Revolutionary Experience*, 1-22.

As early as 1853, amidst intensifying sectional dissension, the Right Reverend Bishop Stephen Elliott's public verbalizations took on an increasingly political tone. Offering assurance to his Southern contemporaries and parishioners, he avowed that despite criticism, the South would be vindicated, for theirs was God's own chosen social structure and, come what may, they must stand together to preserve it:

And if any people ever needed the very highest culture, it is we, the people of the South. We need it not only for our practical defense, but for the maintenance of our position among the nations of the earth...In former days each nation stood apart, and, when it was separated by distance from another, cared little for its opinion. But now the whole world is so knit together...We are in the world, and of the world...It is idle to say we care nothing for man's opinion...And our position is,..., a most peculiar one...We are connected by race, by color, by language, by literature, by a common Christianity, with the best toned and cultured people of the earth, but because we maintain the institutions of our fathers, that world is attempting to sink us to a lower level than themselves...

We take like passive children, their publications, and fed our young upon them, even though the deadliest poison of infidelity and moral corruption be mingled in them. We build up their marts of business, their schools of learning, their resorts of fashion and of health, and permit our own to languish and die. And when we have done all this, the thanks we get are taunts for our lack of culture, are curses upon an institution which is obliged to bear the brunt of our folly and our indifference.¹³¹

¹³¹Elliott, *Annual Address*, 11-14.

Elliott considered that "keeping our wealth at home," was the simplest solution for the current condition of the nation. He felt that the South had but one option, to separate itself economically from the North:

By circulating it in the channels of our own enterprises, by covering our land with the materials of culture, by supplying our young with the apparatus of learning, by training our sons to the pursuits of specialties, by sternly determining so to work our advantages,... as that they shall advance our own glory and vindicate our position. And all this we do without injury or even offense to anybody, for it is only in accordance with the declaration of the Bible...And what is true of the individual, is true of the State, which is the common father of us all. Where are we to look, but to ourselves? Upon whom to depend, but upon our own wisdom and the God of justice?¹³²

At the end of the 1850s, every Georgian knew and recognized his own place in the social hierarchy. As the decade ended, westward expansion drew into question notions of individual liberty and economic destiny. With the passage of two bills, which foreshadowed the depth of regional animosities, Southerners began to perceive changes in national policy as affronts and repudiations of regional accommodations. When Congress convened in 1850, Southerners opposed California's admission as a free state and demanded stricter enforcement of fugitive slave laws. Northerners opposed any law that required them to return

¹³²Ibid.

slaves to Southern planters. The issue of slavery in the nation's capital entered into the debates, and caused such acrimony as to prevent the appointment of a Speaker of the House.

Henry Clay's Compromise of 1850 temporarily restored congressional harmony. In 1854, Southerners perceived the revocation of the Missouri Compromise line and the inclusion of the doctrine of popular sovereignty into the Kansas-Nebraska Act as a failed experiment. They exulted the 1857 Supreme Court decision in *Dred Scott v. Sanford*. However, in 1859, radical abolitionist John Brown's raid on the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry struck fear in the hearts of Southern slaveowners. And, with slavery at the foundation of all these issues, the nation diverged. As Southerners looked to their God for confirmation of their beliefs, religious leaders offered rational defense through biblical interpretation.

As sectional differences intensified, Elliott envisioned an ultimate outcome in which the South would become "a whole nation, unique in its history and peculiar in its institutions...set apart and miraculously preserved...to predict His coming."¹³³ Upon that

¹³³Elliott, "The Well of Living Water." In, *Sermons...*, 71.

conviction, he garrisoned himself and relinquished his
Diocese into God's hands.

There is one way that seemth right to man, but the end
thereof are the ways of death.

--Proverbs 16:25 KJV

CHAPTER 4

"THE WATCHMAN SAID, THE MORNING COMETH AND ALSO THE NIGHT...," CLERICAL INFLUENCE AND THE CIVIL WAR

What influence, in fact, have ecclesiastical establishments had on society? In some instances they have been seen to erect a spiritual tyranny on the ruins of the civil authority; in many instances they have been seen upholding the thrones of political tyranny; in no instance have they been the guardians of the liberties of the people. Rulers who wish to subvert the public liberty may have found an established clergy convenient allies.

-James

Madison¹³⁴ Vying for social, political and economic independence, Southerners invoked God's favor in their pursuit of liberty in 1860. Eliciting popular support, Southern politicians and clergy united and capitalized on the opportunity to adopt spiritual sermons as political propaganda. One of the most zealous advocates for the Confederate cause was Episcopal Bishop Stephen Elliott of Savannah. As senior Bishop in the Church of the Confederacy, he wielded much influence in one of the most violent periods of American history. From secession until Savannah's surrender, his widely distributed sermons electrified Georgians with grand expressions of righteousness and reverence for Southern traditions,

¹³⁴President James Madison, *A Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments*, addressed to the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia, 1785.<<http://www.newagedatabase.com/quotes.htm#Madison>>

glorified the Confederacy, and instructed Episcopalians on the virtues of Southern patriotism. Disputes over states' rights and economic differences played a role in the conflict, but slavery proved to be the overriding issue that prompted the destruction of the Union. Four years of great spiritual trial plagued all churches, both North and South. Nationally, clergymen faced the difficult task of delivering hope and sustaining faith in a nation at war. According to Southern prelates, only God's arbitration could resolve the dispute; the fate of the nation and the continuance of slavery could be reconciled only by the victory of the righteous. Throughout the maelstrom, Confederate clergymen of all denominations invoked the Bible, summoned the Constitution, and revered the founding fathers to bolster Southern morale and fortify the cause.¹³⁵

The South's political institutions reflected slaveholders' economic views. Replicated in religious institutions, these convictions permeated worship services in Georgia via the ministries. At the onset of the Civil War, with the realization that the nation could not endure half slave and half free, spirituality provided an

¹³⁵Clyde L. Manschreck, *A History of Christianity in the World*, 2nd ed., (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1985), 293.

essential source of Southern strength in both victory and defeat.¹³⁶ As the South's will to fight subsided, religion also played a prodigious role in perpetuating the Confederate experience. For a generation, its theology had endorsed the South's social arrangement. Sermonizing that God ordained slavery, they asserted its morality while expunging Southern sins, and recruited the populace as God's devout guardians. Now, sustained by the belief that they were God's chosen people, Southerners rallied to the Confederate cause. Slavery, which had long been considered their unique mission, was central to their crusade. To preserve it, they sacrificed everything, attempting to create a new nation for the deliverance of Southern convictions and traditions.¹³⁷

In times of war, passion and prejudice obscure Scripture; arrogance and defiance rule the hour. Such was the case with the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Confederate States of America.¹³⁸ As the sectional crisis

¹³⁶Ibid., 294-295.

¹³⁷Richard E. Beringer, Herman Hattaway, Archer Jones, William N. Still, Jr., *Why the South Lost the Civil War* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 95.

¹³⁸Joseph Blount Cheshire, D.D., *The Church in the Confederate States: A History of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Confederate States* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1912), 10.

escalated into war, the Southern Episcopal clergy provided a sense of community and helped create a religious culture that discerned threats to their society as challenges to Christian civilization. In Georgia, the clergy not only actively participated in the secession crisis; they sought to influence popular ideology. Not only assenting to slavery, they had for a generation proclaimed that God sanctioned the institution. As early as 1860, Georgia's Episcopal Church leaders moved into the core of the heated political atmosphere, staunchly allied to the political dogmas of their parishioners, neighbors and associates.¹³⁹ Southern pulpits converted into political platforms to enlighten citizens and convey Confederate ideology. The Right Reverend Steven Elliott of Savannah became one of the most avid promoters of the Southern cause. Like his grandfather, he assumed a proactive revolutionary stance, fortifying Georgia in preparation against its would-be invaders. In 1860, Georgia was the second largest state east of the Mississippi with the largest number of people, voters, slaves and slaveholders of any state in the Lower

¹³⁹Charles Reagan Wilson, "The Religion of the Lost Cause: Ritual and Organization of the Southern Civil Religion, 1865-1920" *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol.46, no. 2, (May 1980), 220.

South. As South Carolina prepared for disunion, decades-old social divisions created internal strife that politically separated white men in Georgia. Secessionist slaveholders represented thirty-seven percent of the total population of the state. Nevertheless, the fate of an independent South hinged on the loyalty of the sixty-three percent of Georgia's voters who were Unionist nonslaveowners.¹⁴⁰

The national election of Abraham Lincoln assured South Carolina's secession from the Union in 1860 and forced Georgians to decide where their allegiances lay. Throughout the state, prominent politicians debated Georgia's participation in the secession movement. All attention turned to Milledgeville, a small town created solely for political purposes in the geographic center of the state, where legislators convened for public debate. Governor Joseph E. Brown offered conflicting proposals for Georgia's course of action when he warned that Lincoln's election represented an immediate menace to slavery in the state, fervently heralding the racial inferiority of the state's enslaved population. However, he rejected immediate secession and opposed a conference with secessionist South

¹⁴⁰Ibid.

Carolina. As Georgians debated disunion, prominent politicians such as Robert Toombs, Alexander Stephens, and brothers Thomas R.R. Cobb and Howell Cobb, gathered to vote on immediate secession.¹⁴¹

On January 2, 1861, Governor Brown urged Georgia's nonslaveholders to back the slaveholders' revolution in order to protect the white race from the threat of Lincoln's menace, and ordered state militiamen to capture the federal installation at Fort Pulaski in Savannah's harbor. On January 19, 1861, the Georgia Convention voted, 166 to 130, to secede. Fifty-one percent of Georgians favored immediate secession; however, the governor erroneously published the election results claiming a fifty-eight percent majority of the vote.¹⁴²

During the political crisis, the Protestant Episcopal Church publicly stated a policy of neutrality, officially separating itself from political involvement. As six other states collaborated in the wave of secession, the rift was mirrored within the Protestant Episcopal Church. One by one, the Diocese of the Episcopal Church in each Confederate state withdrew its affiliation to the Church of

¹⁴¹William W. Freehling and Craig M Simpson, *Secession Debated: Georgia's Showdown in 1860* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), vii-xxi.

¹⁴²Ibid.

the United States. This deliberate chasm reflects the indistinguishable influences of the Church and the State throughout the Confederacy.¹⁴³

Several days prior to the decision to secede, Elliott had instructed the Episcopal clergy that in the event of secession they should omit the words "President of the United States" from their prayers, and substitute the words, "thy Servant, the Governor of Georgia."¹⁴⁴ As war escalated, Elliott, like other Episcopal clergymen, found himself powerless to desist from political involvement.

Elliott constantly used his pulpit for furthering the Confederate cause, but as head of the Diocese, his influence transcended municipal boundaries. In a January, 1861, address to the Thirty-ninth Annual Convention of Protestant Episcopal Church of the Diocese of Georgia, Bishop Elliott pronounced himself and his fellow clergymen blameless in the tumultuous circumstances:

Hitherto we have assembled as an Ecclesiastical Council, with no cares resting upon our hearts save those which have concerned the Church of Christ. Today we feel most painfully, in addition to these, the sorrow which arises from the severed ties of friendship and of country...Today the whole land is resounding with the

¹⁴³Cheshire, *The Church in the Confederate States*, 9-13.

¹⁴⁴T. Conn Bryan, "Churches in Georgia During the Civil War," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 33(March-December, 1949): 284.

preparation for war...with those who,... were our countrymen and our brethren. Hitherto our Church has moved undisturbed through all the storms which have agitated the civil State. Today a stern necessity is laid upon us to examine relations which we fondly hoped would be indestructible...As an ordinary rule, the Church has but little to do with political events...avoided all entanglement with parties and their unceasing conflicts...which have agitated and convulsed the Union... she can lift up her clean hands and a pure heart and appeal to the God of Heaven that she has had no part or lot, in producing the strife which is rapidly marching to dip its feet in blood.¹⁴⁵

He reasoned that as an ordinary rule, the Church had abstained from political involvements, but Elliott suggested, the organization of the church emulated the Constitution of the United States. Therefore, like the government, the Church's own bicameral system of representation, tied each Bishop to his province by "...an indestructible covenant extant only within that jurisdiction." Should he resign his charge, the Bishop would forfeit his authority forever. Because the sovereignty of each jurisdiction connoted severed relations with the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States, "...the Church of the United States has trammeled itself with constitutional and canonical provisions which forces the Church and its Bishop into this attitude."

¹⁴⁵Right Reverend Stephen Elliott, *Address to the Thirty-ninth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church, in the Diocese of Georgia*. 1861.
<<http://docsouth.dsi.internet2.edu/imls/elliott39/elliott.html>>

This legitimate detachment of sovereignties thus forced each cleric to adhere to the doctrines of the State. Secession converted his utmost obligation into the praise of God and the dignity of the Confederate government. Amendment of individual Diocesan constitutions became imperative, so that the Southern churches could simultaneously preserve unity and satisfy jurisdictional exigency. Instructing the clergy of their covenant to the laymen, the State, and the Confederacy, Bishop Elliott directed them to prepare for formal secession from the Church of the United States:¹⁴⁶

The State, which is co-terminous with our Diocese, has confederated herself with other states, which have in a like manner resumed their delegated powers, forming an entirely new government....These States are no longer, in any sense, a part of the United States, and consequently the Bishops of these States or Diocese,...are no longer Bishops of any of the United States. They are now Bishops of the Confederate States.¹⁴⁷

In accord, the Episcopal Dioceses of the seceded states voted unanimously to resolve that the secession of their representative states, now under jurisdiction of the newly formed government, rendered it necessary to dissolve relations with the national church. They adjourned, agreeing to reconvene at a General Convention of the Confederate States at a date to be determined.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶Elliott, *Address to the Thirty-ninth*, 1861.

¹⁴⁷Ibid.

¹⁴⁸Henry Thompson Malone, *The Episcopal Church in Georgia, 1733-1957* (Atlanta: The Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Atlanta, 1960). 96-97.

In October, the Episcopal Diocese in the Confederate states resumed organization efforts. Meeting in Columbia, South Carolina, church leaders adopted a new constitution based on the one they had recently renounced.¹⁴⁹ By November 1861, the nation was fully engulfed in war. Early victory at Manassas gave the Confederates a false sense of invincibility. As rhapsody resounded throughout the Confederacy, the Episcopal clergy likewise exulted. At the forefront of political activism, in his fast-day sermon on November 15, 1861, Bishop Elliott reminded worshipers of the heroic sacrifices that were being made so that the Confederacy could take her place among the nations of the world. As he likened the current political situation to that of their Revolutionary forefathers, he advised the congregation that theirs, too, was a revolutionary struggle. While actions were arising quickly, the provocation of these events had been brewing for a quarter-century.¹⁵⁰

Elliott preached that all hope for the future be placed in God, but he also solicited faith in Jefferson

¹⁴⁹Ibid, 98-99.

¹⁵⁰Elliott, *"How to Renew Our National Strength," A Sermon Preached in Christ Church, Savannah, On Friday November 15th, 1861, Being the Day of Humiliation, Fasting, and Prayer*, (Savannah: 1861).

Davis as a revolutionary. Davis's program for a defensive war demonstrated the same forethought as that of the founding fathers, and followed the logic of all wars for independence. Patience and persistence, along with God's anointing, would win the war. This would be, Elliott advised, a lengthy confrontation with an enemy superior in numbers and equipment. He predicted that preservation of its military manpower, in the defensive posture, could eventually triumph over an army of aggressors who "will soon be tired of such a warfare, for they must carry it at enormous expense...while we shall be in the midst of all our resources." However, as he praised God for the Southern successes, the Bishop cautioned against forecasts of a short war, and warned of the penance for the sin of hubris:

A hasty quarrel may easily be settled, but a quarrel which has been festering for a quarter of a century, must be fought out...I can see no room for hope of an early or decided settlement of this question...The assertion of national rights has always produced long wars, because the one party is striving to regain a prestige which it has lost, while the other is battling for its right...The recollection of our revolutionary war should teach us what to expect in a struggle of this sort. Nothing was more foolish than the circumstance of that war...and yet, from wounded pride, from unwillingness to give up the brightest jewels of the British crown, it was protracted for seven long years. And so it will be with this; success will be alternate, but never decisive....

We have been hearing, of late, a great deal more about the skills of our Generals, about the valor of

our troops, about the cowardice of our foes, than about God as our shield and defence [sic]....If we cherish this vain glorious temper, God will assuredly lay his hand upon those very things of which we boast.¹⁵¹

At the beginning of 1862, Georgians viewed warfare and its horrifying consequences as only distant spectacles. In February, the inauguration of a permanent Congress regenerated faith in the divine mission of the Confederates. As the South rejoiced the birth of the new nation, in Georgia, religion merged with nationalism. On February 28, 1862, Bishop Elliott glorified God for delivering the Confederacy through its first year of political existence. He pronounced that the radicalism and greed of Northern abolitionists and industrialists caused the failure of the old union. Asserting that they propagated the moral deterioration of the nation by contaminating the immigrant labor force with indoctrinated hearsay, these infidels spread fear that the South's slavery jeopardized Northern liberty. Wiley Northern politicians, whispering sin and mischief, had incited the desolation and corruption that had forced the South to secede. Therefore, Elliott professed, their revolution was, "as much a moral as a political necessity." No sooner

¹⁵¹Elliott, "How to Renew Our National Strength," (Savannah: 1861,) 6-7.

had the framers died, than northern zealots had begun to manifest their torrent of evil into the very foundations of the principles hallowed in the Constitution. Even if slavery had never existed, some other disharmony would have ripped apart a nation that would forsake its own framework. Because Northern infidels had apostatized biblical principles, bloodshed was necessary, according to Elliott. If God's will was to be accomplished, the South had a moral obligation to revolt against the despotism of the North. It ought to cleanse itself from the wanton precepts of a seditious government and supplant it with a new one grounded in God's wisdom:¹⁵²

At such a moment it is well for us to pause in the wild career of action and consider profoundly the great principles which must lie at the foundation of our national structure, ere we may feel assured that it is builded [sic] upon a rock...All nations which come into existence ...must be born amid the storm of revolution, and must win their way to a place in history through the baptism of blood. And this, because no people would throw off a beneficent government, and an oppressive one will always strive to perpetuate its tyranny by arms and violence...If we wait for...peace...we shall permit the moulding [sic] process of our future to have been finished ere we examine the form and shape which it is likely to put on. Our new wine will have found its way into old bottles...and our labor and suffering will have been in vain and for nought.¹⁵³

¹⁵²Stephen Elliott, *"New Wine Not to be Put in Old Bottles," A Sermon Preached in Christ Church, Savannah, on Friday February 25th, 1862, Being the Day of Humiliation, Fasting, and Prayer, Appointed by the President of the Confederate States* (Savannah, 1862).

¹⁵³Elliott, *New Wine*, 1862.

As the war raged on, the Confederate defeats at Shiloh and Ft. Pulaski, in April 1862, wrenched Southern spirits. When earlier exultations subsided, and bloodshed haunted Southern consciences, confidence in the Cause diminished. Bishop Elliott attempted to renew his parishioners' hope and rekindle the spirit of the South's mission. If the Confederacy's success depended on the continued belief in the sanctity of slavery, Georgia's clergy had been laying the groundwork for a generation. Convincing parishioners of the divinity of the institution, and their sacred obligation to defend it, clerics' attitudes towards the dividing question equated with the pervasive Southern mindset. Many Episcopal clergymen owned slaves, and therefore had a moral responsibility to their own bondsmen and women, and to the economic interests of an entire segment of North American society.¹⁵⁴ Allegiances inevitably surrendered to the Confederacy and the salvation of the Southern way of life.

In 1862, President Jefferson Davis became an active member of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Richmond, endearing him to the clergy. His conversion had a profound

¹⁵⁴James W. Silver, *Confederate Morale and Church Propaganda* (Tuscaloosa: Confederate Publishing Company, Inc., 1957), 15.

effect on the Episcopal Church. As "the" church of the Confederacy, its capacity as political advocate shaped Southern postures towards both economic and foreign affairs. Davis adopted the dual personas of president and pope, prescribing days of fasting, prayer, and humiliation. Beseeking to consider current tribulations as God's will, religious leaders urged their congregants to sustain faith in God's hallowed design for the nation.¹⁵⁵

In response to President Davis's proclamation calling for a day of Thanksgiving and prayer, Bishop Elliott delivered a sermon designed to strengthen the cause of the Confederacy. In it, he strove to reassure Southerners that theirs was the chosen society. He offered not only biblical arguments in defense of slavery; Bishop Elliott reminded the congregation that upholding the institution was the South's sacred burden. Through this war, God had appointed them as its saviors:

On the 16th day of last May...I was bold enough to utter the following sentiments: "In my opinion the real troubles of our enemy are just about to begin...A few weeks after these utterances were made, commenced the series of victories which culminated on the 30th day of August...in the battles of Manassas and Richmond... I reproduce these words today, not to claim for myself any spirit of prophecy, but because the conclusions then enunciated were deduced...from

¹⁵⁵Beringer et al., *Why the South Lost the Civil War*, 268-270.

premises laid down in the word of God... My purpose is to justify the ways of God to man, even when those ways have been forced...to pass through seas of blood.¹⁵⁶

Though the war was rapidly exhausting Southern material and spiritual resources, Elliott reminded his dutiful listeners that God had provided them with two assets which would guarantee their spiritual, political, social, and economic survival-- cotton and slaves. These rewards, he offered, gave witness to God's grand design for the Confederacy. As God's ordained guardians of His Southern utopia, the faithful need look no further than the Bible and their own back door. Here, they could find the explanation for their crucible. They must endure, for only when the word of God had been spread across the globe, could Christians claim fulfillment of their mission. The South alone held the key to that achievement.¹⁵⁷

By examining the religious condition of the world, Elliot contended, the influence of Christianity steadily drove out the deceptive influences of Islam, Hinduism and

¹⁵⁶Stephen Elliott. *"Our Cause in Harmony with the Purposes of God in Christ Jesus."* A Sermon Preached in Christ Church, Savannah, on Thursday, September 18th, 1862, Being the Day Set Forth by the President of the Confederate States, as a Day of Prayer and Thanksgiving, for Our Manifold Victories and Especially for the Fields of Manassas and Richmond, KY. (Savannah, 1862)

¹⁵⁷Elliott, *Our Cause*, 1862.

Confucianism. Only in Africa, where many had tried and failed, was Christianity's spread thwarted. The so-called "dark continent" swarmed with godless nature-worshippers who remained unimpressed by Christian missionaries, many of whom died spreading the gospel. However, with the Southern white race as the "Almighty Artist's" apprentice, fine-tuning the truly consecrated instruments of God, He was preparing them for their ultimate destiny. God had purposefully stationed the black race in the South to protect them from blasphemers in the North. Until the time which Lord himself chose, the slaves would wait for their return to Africa to propagate the Christian faith, and the Confederacy would wait for victory on the battlefield, both races working together to accomplish God's divine purpose.¹⁵⁸

While others searched for the causes for success and failure in the valor and skills of the army, in foreign influences, and in commerce and trade, Elliott saw the "poor despised slave" as the source of Southern security. Believing that God would not let the aims of man interfere with his divine arrangements, Elliott argued that those who looked at slavery superficially permitted themselves to be

¹⁵⁸Ibid., 1862.

detached from scriptural decrees by the "trivial things", the material conditions, that necessarily accompany all forms of bondage. Nonbelievers neglected to acknowledge that God had kept the descendants of Abraham and Jacob in bondage in Egypt for four hundred years, preparing them for the discipline to become a nation among nations. Herein lay the roots of the current deterioration:

They have passionately decided that God could have nothing to do with an institution bearing upon its face the evils and miseries which attend the enslavement of any people...

The great revolution through which we are passing certainly turns upon this point of slavery, and our future destiny is bound up with it....

The inability any longer to procure slaves through importation, forced upon masters in these States a greater attention to the comforts and morals of their slaves. The family relation was fostered, the marriage grew in importance, and eight hundred thousand slaves who inhabited these States at the closing of our ports in 1808, have, in the short space of fifty years, grown into four millions!...When slavery was once again endangered by the very scanty profits which were yielded to the planters by their old staples of indigo and rice,...God permitted a new staple to be introduced...the staple of cotton, which seems to have no limit to its consumption,...and the slave rose once again in importance, and God used self-interest to check the disposition towards emancipation.¹⁵⁹

In 1862, Confederate hopes of British recognition escalated during the *Trent* affair. However, while settlement of the crisis momentarily tempered the threat of war between the Union and Great Britain, the blockade of

¹⁵⁹Ibid., 1862.

Southern ports forced the Confederate government to leverage its safeguard. Increasing economic pressure on Europe, the Confederate government used cotton as a political and diplomatic agent for winning recognition. The South unofficially withheld cotton, and sanctioned crop destruction in an effort to force intervention and recognition from England and France. Union victory at New Orleans failed to provide both European nations with the anticipated free flow of cotton, thus sustaining the prospect of foreign intervention.¹⁶⁰

Recognizing the practicality, Lincoln shifted the focus of the war to slavery.¹⁶¹ Initially, England viewed the issue of emancipation as a vindictive war measure designed to bring down King Cotton from within. Fearing that servile insurrection would upset its entire commercial relationship with the American States, the British government delayed intervention in hopes that a decisive Union defeat would demonstrate the futility of the war. Only news of a Confederate victory at the Second Battle of

¹⁶⁰Howard Jones, *Union in Peril: The Crisis over British Intervention in the Civil War* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 80-135.

¹⁶¹Frank Lawrence Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy: Foreign Relations of the Confederate States of America* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1931), 33.

Manassas again strengthened the potential that England would be pulled into the war.¹⁶²

News of the carnage at Sharpsburg was followed by a far more significant event. On September 22, 1862, Lincoln delivered his preliminary proclamation vowing that, on January 1, "all the slaves in all the rebelling states would be free." This bold maneuver changed the character of the war and encouraged talks of intervention because of the possibility of slave revolt.¹⁶³

By 1863, the Northern assertion of preserving the Union transformed into a consummate battle for the abolition of slavery, delaying European recognition and intervention as the South had anticipated. Union victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg sealed the fate of foreign intervention on behalf of the Confederates. As the tides of war turned, Confederates found themselves recast on the world stage as sinners guilty of moral turpitude and suppressors of inherent liberties. By the spring of 1863, all hopes of foreign intervention on behalf of the Confederacy dissolved, and resentments began to emerge.

¹⁶²Ephraim Douglass Adams, *Great Britain and the American Civil War* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1958), 97-101.

¹⁶³Jones, *Union in Peril*, 224-230.

King Cotton toppled from his throne, and Confederate morale plummeted.¹⁶⁴

On the moral defensive, and teetering on economic collapse, Southerners began to register guilt over slavery, and question God's providence. Internal dissensions caused by widespread discontent with conscription exemptions for slaveowners, suspensions of the writ of habeas corpus, economic inflation, and military defeats intensified longings for peace.¹⁶⁵ More loyal to the Cause than many of the politicians with whom Elliott had originated this independence movement, Georgia's Bishop once again politicized the pulpit and denounced England's failure to recognize the Confederacy's sovereignty:

There has been for some time past a deep and wide spread yearning for peace. It has exhibited itself in the greediness with which the people of the Confederate States have listened to every rumor of intervention that has floated across the Atlantic,...When the peace that is longed for is embodied in words, it invariably includes the ideas of entire independence and complete nationality...with no entangling alliances binding us for the future...The courage of the Confederate States is not failing, but its passive endurance is sorely taxed...because it cannot at once strike to the earth all the enemies who encompass and goad it,...

¹⁶⁴Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy*, 427-494.

¹⁶⁵Ellis Merton Coulter, *The Confederate States of America* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1950), 526-527.

What could foreign mediation effect?...Mediation can do us no good. It might embarrass us and place us in a false position before the world, but it could not advance us one step towards honorable peace...

The general action of the European powers has been adverse to the early recognition of Governments founded upon revolutionary movements...

War is a great eater...it devours cities and nations...it devours religion,...it has its moral and political lessons, and God is keeping us perchance under its cruel yoke that we may learn them ere we assume our place among the nations of the earth.¹⁶⁶

From the beginning of the war, Confederate morale suffered repeated barrages, both in battle and on the home front. Conscription laws had not only failed to reconcile the problem of replenishing the corps depleted by fatalities, they also caused considerable internal conflict. News of the defeats at Gettysburg and Vicksburg raised mounting uncertainties about God's purpose in the war. Fear and discouragement provoked a rise in desertion rates and severely taxed faith. From July, 1863 onward, internal dissension caused by political schisms, states-rights arguments, and slavery effected a significant abandonment of the South's morale.¹⁶⁷ The fate of the

¹⁶⁶Stephen Elliott, "Samson's Riddle," *A Sermon Preached in Christ Church, Savannah, on Friday, March 27th, 1863. Being the day of Humiliation, Fasting, and Prayer, Appointed by the President of the Confederate States* (Savannah, 1863).

¹⁶⁷Beringer, et al., *Why the South Lost the Civil War*, 264-267.

Confederacy hinged on the commitment and perseverance of the Southern populace, and in the South, the church carried the strongest influence in shaping individual conscience and conduct.¹⁶⁸

As faith in the Confederacy waned, deserters and draft-dodgers, whiners and cowards, profiteers and skulkers, became the objects of condemnation. Denounced in sermons throughout the South and accused of demoralizing devotion to the crusade, they alone bore the responsibility for military failure. Disloyalty to the cause had offended God, and only faith and humility could restore His grace in the Confederacy. Patriotism and Christianity were synonymous in the eyes of God, and ecclesiastics set the highest example of sustaining both. Whether directly in military service, or ministering to the laity, religious leaders kept the garrisons and citizenry steadfast and loyal during the war.¹⁶⁹

Once again, Elliott evoked the fundamental principles of the Constitution. The question of their right to secede had already been settled by the forefathers. The rights of self-government granted to the colonies remained valid in

¹⁶⁸Silver, *Confederate Morale and Church Propaganda*, 64.

¹⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 72-81.

the current struggle for independence. They had a solemn right to alter and abolish an unjust form of government, and to devise a new one that would affect their safety and happiness. The Confederacy had constitutionally dissolved her bonds with the enemy, through conventions of popularly elected assemblies. According to Elliott, whereas eighteenth century revolutionaries rebelled against wrongs to individual civil liberties, these modern-day freedom fighters revolted to amend the wrongs inflicted upon the South, which threatened their whole social condition.¹⁷⁰

In August of 1863, the Bishop warned that the Confederate defeat at Gettysburg was God's damnation over abandoning the cause. For their faithlessness, the South warranted the vengeance of the Lord:

We are in peril of our cause...a day of blood and slaughter and captivity rose upon us...It is a visitation from God, to teach us our own weakness...to make us understand that present victory and final success depend altogether on his presence and his favor....

We have assumed a very grand...position, and we cannot, without utter shame...abandon it....

Many, very many,...have been insensible to their duty and have neglected the great trust committed to their charge, and for this, punishment has fallen upon us...

¹⁷⁰Stephen Elliott, "Ezra's [sic] Dilemma," *A Sermon Preached in Christ Church, Savannah, on Friday, August 21st, 1863, Being the Day of Humiliation, Fasting, and Prayer, Appointed by the President of the Confederate States*(Savannah, GA, 1863.)

Why then, you will ask, if God is so clearly on our side, are we so sorely pressed and made to bleed at every pore?...Those upon whom God is intending to make a nation to do his work upon earth, are precisely those whom he tries most severely...His purpose is to give them not merely victory, but character; not only independence, but righteousness; not peace alone, but the will to do good...for moral discipline, gives strength and power...The law which God has established for nations as well as for individuals...must be gained through the discipline of suffering...¹⁷¹

If the Confederacy had any hope of regaining God's grace, it must follow the example of Ezra and, through fasting and prayer plead before God for true repentance. Only self-examination and soul-searching could lead each one of them to find his offense to God. Criticism of others, vanity, over-confidence, greed, and presumptuousness were the sins for which they should ask forgiveness. Warfare could not be left coldly to the government and the army; it was the cause of every member of the new nation. Conscription and impressments, fasting and prayer were worthless until the fires of patriotism reignited with the passion that had sparked the war.¹⁷²

In 1864, the fate of the Confederacy rested on the shoulders of its military leaders. By spring, Confederate strategy was simply to hold on until the election in

¹⁷¹Ibid., 6-17.

¹⁷²Ibid.

November with the hope that war-weary Northerners would replace Lincoln with a President who would recognize Southern independence and end the war. Forced by the impending election to reassess the objectives of war, Lincoln understood that his chances for reelection hinged on Union success in the battlefield. In March, he placed Ulysses S. Grant in command of all Union forces, and devised a strategy for the wholesale destruction of the Southern will to fight. Concerned with Robert E. Lee's Army of Virginia, Grant sent William Tecumseh Sherman to Georgia to confront Joseph E. Johnston's Army of Tennessee.¹⁷³

Unlike Lincoln, Jefferson Davis' six-year term freed him to focus on the task of forcing Northerners to feel the burdens of war. However, he also realized the gravity of military victory. Recognizing the political implications of the impending election, Davis relieved General Johnston of his command and assigned General John Bell Hood to confront Sherman in the fields. Abandoning Johnston's defensive strategy, Hood launched a campaign of attack, confronting Sherman's troops on the outskirts of Atlanta. In a series of intermittent bombardments, Sherman forced Hood to realize the inevitability of the fall of the city. Hood

¹⁷³Bruce Catton, *The Civil War* (Boston, MA; Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), 202-217.

retreated southward, as Union armies invaded on three sides, and on September 2, 1864, Union forces occupied Atlanta.¹⁷⁴

In October, one week after Lincoln's reelection, Sherman left Atlanta and prepared to wage total war on the citizens of Georgia. He requested permission from Grant to cross Georgia from Atlanta eastward to the sea, in a plan to systematically destroy the Southern economy and simultaneously shatter Confederate will. Expelling civilians from Atlanta, he reorganized his army, adopted the scorched earth policy, and led his Union army on a mission to cripple the military resources of the Confederates. Sherman authorized his men to forage liberally for provisions, and to appropriate horses, mule, and wagons. Intent only on attacking the hearts and souls of Southerners to annihilate Confederate spirit, Sherman ordered his men to abstain from the destruction of private property, limit trespassing, and curb the use of vulgarity. Corps commanders were ordered to destroy Southern property only in the event that residents harbored rebels or disrupted Union advance. In areas where the Union army marched unopposed, soldiers would take only enough to

¹⁷⁴Ibid., 224-233.

sustain themselves. If assaulted by guerillas or bushwhackers, the soldiers would retaliate imposing a relentless devastation upon the Southern countryside. To preserve provisions, Sherman instructed his men to discourage slaves from following the army.¹⁷⁵ Georgians vilified Sherman with exaggerated stories of unmitigated disaster and defeat that followed the Union army. As word of his actions in Atlanta reached other areas, Georgians across the state feared Sherman's vengeance. Stories of rampant horror portrayed the Union march as an assault in which the army devastated and impoverished civilians as well as soldiers, destroyed railroads, burned private property and provisions, slaughtered livestock, and confiscated slaves while systematically demoralizing the State. Nevertheless, Sherman had accomplished both his military mission and his strategy to destroy Confederate will. Throughout the State, refugees turned to Governor Joe Brown for assistance as Union soldiers confiscated

¹⁷⁵Anne J. Bailey, *War and Ruin: William T. Sherman and the Savannah Campaign*. The American Crisis Series, Books on the Civil War Era, no. 10, (Wilmington, De: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 2003), 17-33.

provisions and Confederate leaders ordered destruction of supplies and livestock to prevent confiscation.¹⁷⁶

While Georgia's Confederate leaders rebuked the Davis administration, and attempted peace negotiations, religious leaders endured their mission to the Cause. Even on the threshold of the Confederacy's collapse, the Episcopal clergy tenaciously regarded the war as God's will. Military defeat and the shortage of rudimentary necessities rendered the populace unresponsive to religious appeals. Awaiting federal occupation, public interest in religion and certitude in the Confederacy waned. Meanwhile, the ministry of the Episcopal Church poised steadfast to revive patriotism, and prepare the laity for atonement.¹⁷⁷

In his September 1864 address to the assembly at Christ Church, Bishop Elliot prepared parishioners for the invasion of Savannah. Rather than mourn the fate of the Confederacy, Georgia should prepare for the approaching havoc. The South had opened herself up to assault, and Georgia, like her sister states, would endure the fiery trial of despair. This hardship would enable Georgia's

¹⁷⁶William T. Sherman, *Marching Through Georgia: William T. Sherman's Personal Narrative of His March Through Georgia* (New York: Arno Press, 1978).

¹⁷⁷Cheshire, *The Church in the Confederate States*, 135-165.

elites to demonstrate their sense of noblesse oblige and elevate the state in the eyes of future generations. The stories of the valiant individuals who endured unwavering for the cause would bless the state for generations.

Elliott resolved that the assault on the State was an inevitable result of the covetousness, low-mindedness, indifference, and apathy with which individuals had reacted to their government's call for war materials. The time had come to arise and annihilate the invaders; otherwise, subjugation would be justly deserved.

God remained on their side, he explained, but where He had once brought them victories in battle, He now provided the strength to rally around the government, and heal the dissensions among the authorities. Only this would guarantee the future of the white race in the South. This was God's war; He had conducted it and He alone would terminate it--when his designs had been fulfilled. Man had succeeded only in creating bloodshed and death, God's purpose must rule.

In a show of his patriarchal duty, Elliott offered to manumit his own slaves, volunteering the funding for their passage to Liberia. He interpreted their refusal to leave as divine evidence of God's will that the South guard and

protect those whom He had placed in their care.¹⁷⁸ As for the slaves, God brought this war to show the world how little they cared for the freedom the philanthropists offered. The slaves had not fled in large numbers to the enemy; instead, the enemy had come to the slave. Slaves had been bestowed the bitterest fate, betrayed and beguiled at the hands of their so-called liberators; Elliott ventured to estimate that one-half of those who had fallen for the deception and had been deprived of the protection of their masters had now perished, having gained nothing from their emancipation. If nothing else, the world now recognized the mistake of removing the slaves from their normal condition of servitude. Peace would come soon, but by God's design:

When these two purposes shall have been effected, our punishment through the dispensation of death, and the overthrow of man's folly and fanaticism, then we may look for peace-and not until then! Therefore it is that I repeat, "Vain is the help of man." I have no faith in national platforms and Presidential election; no expectations from European recognition...no trust in the power of cotton, or in the failure of money. I look to God for his help, and in due time it will come.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸Sarah Barnwell Elliott, *The Right Reverend Bishop Stephen Elliott, Jr. D.D.; First Bishop of Georgia, 1841-1866*. (no date.)

¹⁷⁹Stephen Elliott, "Vain is the Help of Man," *A Sermon Preached in Christ Church, Savannah, on Thursday, September 15, 1864, Being the Day of Fasting, Humiliation and Prayer, Appointed by the Governor of the State of Georgia* (Macon, GA: 1864).

On December 10, 1864, Sherman reached the outskirts of Savannah with 62,000 Union soldiers, summoning Confederate General William J. Hardee to surrender. Rather than let his forces be taken, Hardee and his 10,000 Confederates rigged a pontoon bridge from rice flats and crossed the Savannah River into South Carolina. Taking with them artillery, baggage wagons, and Bishop Stephen Elliott, Jr., Confederates made one of the most successful retreats in the course of the war. The city surrendered with virtually no incident, and reverted allegiance back to the United States. Sherman passed through quickly, leaving Savannah physically intact, and went on to blaze a trail through South Carolina.¹⁸⁰

In April 1865, after the fall of Richmond, Lee surrendered to Grant; the war ended with 600,000 Americans deceased. Within four months, Bishop Elliott returned to Savannah, and resumed his official duties. Because of his close personal friendship with Elliott, Bishop Hopkins, the presiding Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States wrote to all of the Southern bishops inviting them to attend the general convention in Philadelphia on

¹⁸⁰Lee Kenneth, *Marching Through Georgia: The Story of Soldiers and Civilians During Sherman's Campaign* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1995), 308-324.

October 4. The issue of reconciling the splintered Church enlivened Elliott's exhortations on behalf of Southern nationalism. No less the true patriot, he suggested postponement of immediate ecclesiastical reunion until Georgia's civil government had been restored to its proper status. Skeptical of an impulsive reconciliation, Elliott urged that the Georgia diocese should keep faith with its Southern sisters until a council of the seceded Dioceses determined the appropriate course for reunification. Convinced that a hasty reunion might reopen wounds of the recent discord, Southern bishops agreed to reconvene in September for mutual council before the national General Convention scheduled for October at Philadelphia. Of highest distinction among the bishops, Elliot embodied the South's nationalist sentiment amplified by the war. Because of the difficulty and expense of travel, and the failing health of many anxious and aging clerics, he canceled the proposed September meeting. Apprehensive about Northern sentiments regarding reconciliation, Elliott abstained from attending the General Convention awaiting a disclosure of the attitudes and events from the two Southern bishops in attendance.

Meagerly represented by deputies from Tennessee, North Carolina, and Texas, most other dioceses awaited the

guidance of Bishop Elliott. Only the bishops of North Carolina and the Diocese of the South West appeared at the Convention. Safeguarding the interests of their absent Southern brethren, they nobly refused to take their seats in the House of Bishops or to resolve the issue of church unity until the entire South had been properly re-embraced by the church in the United States. The members of the Convention warmly welcomed their Southern associates and took careful measures to avoid hurtful topics that might cause further damage to Southern egos in the anguish of defeat. Bishop Atkinson refused a notion to give thanks for the reestablishment of the national government because while his people accepted the results of the war, they were not thankful for the outcome. Instead, voting to offer thanksgiving for the restoration of peace and unity, the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States set aside resentments produced by past political strife, renewed old friendships, and reunited as one church.¹⁸¹

¹⁸¹Cheshire, *The Church in the Confederate States*, 211-249.

EPILOGUE

Beginning in the 1790s, wealthy Georgians contrived a worldview in which Christianity and a hierarchical communal structure were the greatest determinants of social and economic success. Nationally, from the 1830s to the 1850s, widespread economic changes resulted from westward expansion to the Pacific, the industrial revolution, the urbanization of the nation, and an influx of immigrants. In the 1840s and 1850s, the war with Mexico, the California gold rush, the Compromise of 1850, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and the rise of the Republican Party set off a chain of events that fused the link between religion and morality.¹⁸² Conflict existed among Georgians between slaveholders and non-slaveholders, merchants and farmers, but when sectional differences threatened the lifeblood of the state, a common religion served to unite all white Georgians in their endeavor to preserve the state's autonomy. For nearly a generation before 1860, secession had been a staple of Southern rhetoric. When war came, regardless of social position, most white Georgians, rich and poor, supported the war for the same reasons--to preserve their unique place in the social hierarchy. The clergy was no exception.

¹⁸²Addison, *The Episcopal Church*, 137.

When the war ended, Southerners continued to look to their religious leaders to explain the causes of defeat. Though they still defended the original right to secede, one by one, in November of 1865, all of the Southern Dioceses passed resolutions removing the word "Confederate" from their Prayer Books, substituting "United", and nullifying the Church in the Confederate States.¹⁸³ Because church wounds healed more swiftly than those in the nation at large, Elliott made it his duty to provide parishioners with solace and compassion throughout the process of reunion. Until his death, he ushered Georgians through the first stages of the reconciliation of the church and the nation.¹⁸⁴

In his first sermon upon his return to Savannah after the war, Elliott counseled his communicants, "This trail of our faith is brought home to us...at this moment of our reunion, in a most striking manner; and my earnest prayer for both you and for myself is, that it might end in a triumph of that faith, and that we may have grace given us to 'be still', and to know that it is God who has overruled everything to the purposes of His will, and that

¹⁸³Malone, *The Episcopal Church in Georgia*, 108-111.

¹⁸⁴Albright, *A History of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, 252-255.

without his permission nothing could have happened which has happened." Despite Confederate defeat, Elliott held, the South remained at the mercy of God's Providence. "...we bow in humility and with thanksgiving...that he who has foreordained all things is driving them on their rightful consummation." The time had come, Elliott stressed, to put past resentments aside because, "...so long as we fasten our thoughts...upon human agents...our most dangerous passions are kept alive: our anger, our wrath, our bitterness, our hatred, our uncharitableness,...that these unchristian passions can be soothed and quelled." What was after all, the Christian faith if not, "a belief in a scheme which,"...is to go on, until the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of Christ?" The chaos and destruction of the past four years had simply been part of a divine purpose, but one link in God's plan "...Every link in the history of nations is a link likewise in the chain of events, which is to bring about that result."¹⁸⁵

Since, according to Elliott, Southern defeat was part of a larger divine scheme, he counseled Georgians to accept their fate, "We are not placed here on earth to direct the

¹⁸⁵Elliott, "Be Still," in *Sermons*, 478-479.

purposes of God. We are the mere instruments created to carry them out...We have only to look back, to trace the history of the church," he reminded them. Like Abraham, the South had sacrificed, and like Noah after the Great Flood, and Adam and Eve after their expulsion from Eden, the entire nation had received God's Command to, "...Be still, and know that I am God,'..." Yet, only the South had remained true to their Christian duty, and though the situation seemed irreparable, their spirits would be, "quieted and soothed," once they recognized, "God's love in all that has disturbed it; and it mingles with its submission, a patient waiting upon the Lord for the manifestation of His goodness and wisdom."¹⁸⁶

On December 22, 1866, Bishop Elliott died. However, sectional resentments fostered decades before the war lingered long after the fighting ended. Prevalent in an 1864 analysis by Robert Livingston Stanton, a Professor in the Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church in Danville, Kentucky, and former President of Oakland College in Mississippi, are the seeds of bitter criticism of Southern churches that lasted well into the era of Reconstruction. Stanton charged the Southern clergy with, "giving eloquent voice to the cause of treason." Explicitly

¹⁸⁶Ibid., 480-481.

naming Bishop Elliott and the Protestant Episcopal Church in his indictment, he identified the Reverend as, "part of an ambitious group of intellectual Southern elites that controlled public opinion." Stanton characterized Southern clergymen as traitors who, "fearing without just cause that the Administration now in power, ...designed to destroy slavery in the whole country,--or if not believing this, pretending at least to believe it, and taking this ground before the people,...induced the States to rebel, that they might give the institution greater expansion, security and power, and, with God's permission, perpetuate it for ever."

"The real truth of the cause," he denounced:

Deliberately and solemnly holds the Southern Church and the Southern ministry,...to a vastly higher responsibility for the inception, advocacy, progress, and the consequences resulting of this treason and rebellion, than any other class among the Southern people...Bishop Elliott, of Georgia...and, indeed nearly all the influential ministers of all the Protestant denominations in the South,--took early position and gave the whole weight of their social and official influence in direct aid of the rebellion."¹⁸⁷

Stanton's sentiments not only summed up two decades of bitter sectional resentments, they also demonstrated an

¹⁸⁷Stanton, Robert Livingston, *The Church and the Rebellion: A Consideration of the Rebellion Against the Government of the United States; and the Agency of the Church, North and South, in Relation Thereto* (New York: Derby and Miller, 1864), 36-174. (Available online at <http://moa.cit.cornell.edu/moa/> Accessed November 3, 2005).

astute assessment of the significant role that Elliott and other Southern clergymen played in winning support for secession and war.

Whereas Stanton charged Southern clergymen with, "frenzied fury and disregard of the truth," Elliott's Southern associates viewed him as, "the very impersonation of the Priests and Prophets of the past."¹⁸⁸ To Southerners, Elliott, "united a strength of conviction, and a firmness of purpose, which would not yield an iota of principle."¹⁸⁹ Elliott's death left a hole in the heart of the South and, "had he been simply a patriot, or simply heroic, he might have sunk into apathy--so far as the socio-political condition of the country was concerned...But there was something loftier than heroism, holier than patriotism; and that was duty...From his own great sorrow, he turned to the...sufferings and necessities of others. He buried the dead heroes of a dead cause...and

¹⁸⁸Cohen, *Eulogy on the Life and Character*, 14.

¹⁸⁹Richard Wilmer, *In Memoriam. A Sermon in Commemoration of the Life and Labors of the Rt. Rev. Stephen Elliott, D.D. (Late Bishop of Georgia,) Delivered in Christ Church, Savannah, GA., on Sunday, January 27, 1867, by the Rt. Rev. Richard H. Wilmer, D.D. Bishop of Alabama* (Mobile: Farrow & Dennett, 1867), 9.

the wonder is only lost in a proper appreciation of his own comprehensive character."¹⁹⁰

Bishop Stephen Elliott was man of God and of honor. He was a Southern patriot and patriarchal slaveholder. He had demonstrated his viewpoint for two decades prior to 1860. In eulogies from 1866 to 1867, fellow clergymen extolled Elliott's virtues throughout the South. The spirit of his words lived on in the hearts, minds, and words of his Southern contemporaries. Unlike "loyal" clergymen, Southern clerics remembered the war as a justifiable bid for independence. Unquestionably, slavery had been the cause. Its destruction not only modified the aristocratic worldview of Southern elites, it shaped the state's postwar characteristics throughout the era of Reconstruction. Immediately following the war, politicians and preachers in Georgia and throughout the South, adopted a defensive stance on, "that lost, but lovely, Southern civilization."¹⁹¹

Elliott's perspectives from 1841 onwards are evident in his sermons, speeches, and public addresses. Beyond these documents lies only speculation as to the scope of his commitment to the restoration of national ties. In

¹⁹⁰Jackson, *Eulogy on the Late Right Reverend*, 18.

¹⁹¹*Ibid.*, 7.

1887, Richard Hooker Wilmer, Episcopal Bishop of Alabama, set out to record the, "thoughts of...one who had lived a long life during an eventful period of the country's history." In it, he spoke "plainly on matters political, social, and ecclesiastical—of Northern and Southern men, etc."¹⁹²

He blamed, not all Northerners, but "that fanatical, and at times dominant element, which having waged a destructive war (and for that it becomes me to make no moan), and after having destroyed our wealth, and laid to waste our territory, and revolutionized our domestic and political life, persistently aims at our humiliation, still plies us with ignominious epithets, and, use a vulgar current phrase, 'still waves the bloody shirt'."

Wilmer recorded his reminiscences because, he said, "I have a special fear that our young people, as they recede farther and farther from our times, will gather their views of the recent past from partisan histories rather than from sacredly preserved traditions." He expressly wanted to ensure that future generations would know that the men of his generation "were men who exemplified through life every trait of honor and loyalty." Wilmer could not endure the

¹⁹²Richard Wilmer, *The Recent Past from a Southern Standpoint: Reminiscences of a Grandfather*, 2nd Edition, (New York, NY: T. Whittaker, 1887), 4-10.

thought that men like he and Elliott would go down in history as "tyrants to their servants, rebels against their government, and traitors to their country." His hope was to preserve for posterity the Southern "view of this matter."¹⁹³ As a fellow Southern Bishop, slaveholder, father, and grandfather, the logical assumption is that Bishop Elliott would have echoed Wilmer's posture.

For sixty-six years, Bishop Stephen Elliott, Jr., awoke every morning to a world where a man's social honor and moral character took precedence. His life as member of the elite upper-class shaped the convictions of his beloved South, where the pervading ideology justified the existence of slavery as a natural and ordained facet of everyday life. Elliott was not a hypocrite, rather he was as he professed--a Southern patriot and devout man of God. He followed the traditions that upheld the values of his ancestors, a hundred-year old philosophy deeply embedded in the Southern ethos. Like his predecessors, Elliott's inability to step outside the perimeters of his own worldview obscured his judgment. By interpreting slavery as the South's most valuable resource, he had replaced spiritualism with materialism and committed his greatest mortal offense. At the end of his career, beleaguered and

¹⁹³Ibid., 12.

penniless, Elliott remained thoughtfully steadfast to his convictions:

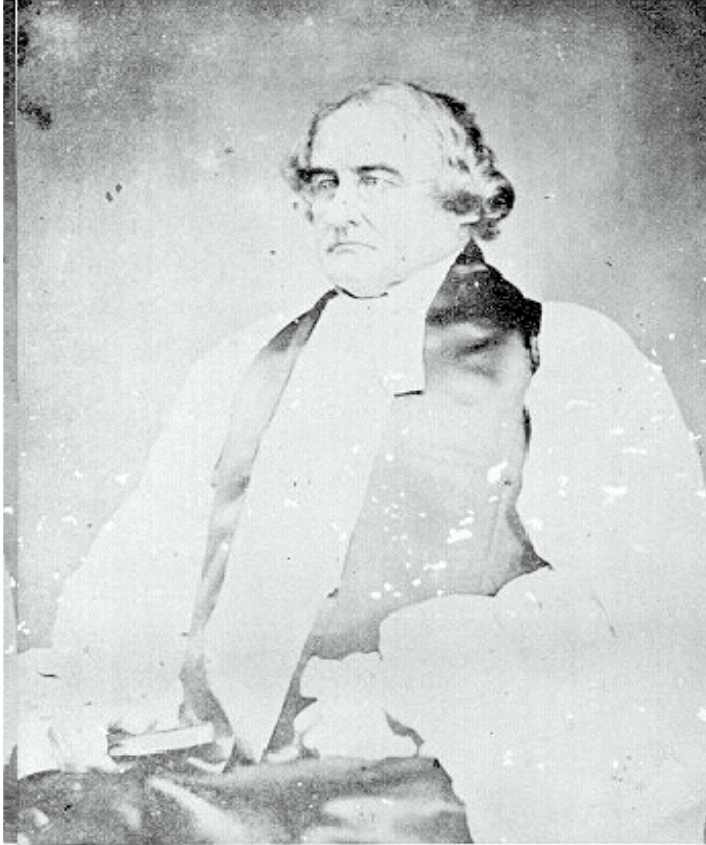
Just as the preaching of the Word of God is the savor of life unto life to some, and the savor of death unto death to others, so are the events of God's providence...temptations involving our future condition are far more than we are willing to acknowledge. We are now in a very trying position; one requiring great soberness and watchfulness;...our temptation is, that it is not our duty to be 'be still' and to recognize God as in the midst of our affairs...Loss, suffering, chastisement, and even death, are no tokens of God's displeasure...We have no ground for despair. Things never stand still...What today is encompassed in clouds and darkness...is to-morrow[sic] rejoicing in sunshine.¹⁹⁴

The Lord foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples. But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.

--Psalm 33:10,11¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴Elliott, "Be Still," in *Sermons...*, 486.

¹⁹⁵<<http://home.att.net/~quotations/bible.html>>



The First Bishop of Georgia: The Rt. Rev. Stephen Elliott, 1841-1866.

Figure 1. The First Bishop of Georgia: The Rt. Rev. Stephen Elliott, Jr., 1841-1866
<<http://www.stpaulsalbany.org/history.htm>>

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