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The Confederate Army & God

By: David T. Crum

Introduction

The United States Civil War produced some very dark days in American history. Ideas and values separated the North and the South. The whole world watched as America was at war with itself. Having been established as a nation that viewed God as an integral part of everyday life, nineteenth-century America was no different and revolved strongly around religion. Much attention is given to the Union soldiers and their fight for freedom, equality, and the overall abolition of slavery. Some may even correlate the acts of the North as righteous, as their fight for freedom and the deliverance of people from slavery could be directly influenced by the Bible. But what about the South? How did religion influence their decisions and cause?

It is a mistake to ignore the significance of people's religious beliefs during any time of conflict. The Civil War is filled with religious history. One could argue that religion truly shapes worldviews and leads people into conflict. With religious beliefs tied to one's worldview, the following questions remain: what role did Christianity play in the U.S. Civil War, and how did these beliefs affect the soldiers? More specifically, the religious history of the antebellum South and their views on slavery are investigated in connection to their relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the religious beliefs of the Confederate Army to include the role of military chaplaincy, preaching, overall faith, and religious conversions will all be examined to establish the importance of religion in the Southern forces. The South relied heavily on Christianity and sought guidance from their Lord and Savior.

Pre-War Religious History of the South

Christianity was dominant within the South. Most politicians viewed Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, often mentioning His sovereignty.¹ The South viewed their Northern counterparts as sinning "infidels" who threatened their religious future and freedom.² Viewing President Abraham Lincoln as more a deist than a Christian, many Southerners feared his beliefs.³ Deism is defined as "a belief in a God who created everything, yet has no distinct relationship with its world or the people in it."⁴ For the most part, Southerners were dedicated Christians who feared the North and its liberal practices within Christianity.

Often compared to President Thomas Jefferson, the late historian Edwin Gaustad writes the following regarding Lincoln: "Like Jefferson before him, Lincoln, though, remained aloof from institutional Christianity and displayed a restorationist sense of the impurity of all existing

¹ Traci Nichols-Belt and Gordon T. Belt, *Onward Southern Soldiers* (Charleston: The History Press, 2011), 13.

² Ibid.

³ Edwin Gaustad and Leigh Schmidt, *The Religious History of America* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 198.

⁴ Millard J. Erickson, *The Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 48.

churches.”⁵ Furthermore, Gaustad adds, “Lincoln was a seeking spirit, open to the religious experimentation that characterized the period’s effervescent religious democracy.”⁶ Lincoln’s views were arguably in deep contrast with many Southern politicians who sought to establish Christianity as the “one true” religion.⁷ Comparing itself to the North, the South criticized their opposition by neglecting to rely solely on the Lord, the Creator found in the Bible. Lincoln had a reputation “for never embracing Christianity.”⁸ On at least “eight occasions, mediums or sorcerers were known to visit the White House to provide prophetic visions.”⁹ Gaustad wrote:

That was particularly evident in the interest that he and his wife, Mary Todd Lincoln, took in spiritualism. That movement, in which mediums sought to communicate with the spirits of the dead, began humbly enough in Hydesville, New York, in the late 1840s with a series of mysterious knockings and rappings that many interpreted to be ghostly communications.¹⁰

The South had a strong reputation for embracing the God of the Bible and praying to the “Good Lord.” While positively Christians existed within both regions of the United States, Southerners felt they were more devoted to their faith. Sins such as “drunkenness, Sabbath-breaking, gambling and even profanity” were all considered serious offenses to an almighty God.¹¹ Southern historian Elmo Ingenthron wrote, “It was not uncommon, on Sunday morning, to see the master’s family and his slaves seated together in church.”¹² Lincoln never referred “to the nation as a Christian nation and was said to follow in the footsteps of Thomas Jefferson embracing a godless Constitution.”¹³

For many Southerners, Christianity defined the South; and, for that reason, they viewed the North and their beliefs as a serious threat to their way of life. Religious opinions most certainly further separated and motivated opposing forces in an all-out bloody conflict. The South felt they had more in common with the original Founding Fathers of the country. According to Southern logic, Christianity could not be separated from the government.

Slavery & Religion

⁵ Gaustad, *The Religious History of America*, 199.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Belt, *Onward Southern Soldiers*, 13.

⁸ Gaustad, *The Religious History of America*, 199.

⁹ Ibid., 202.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Belt, *Onward Southern Soldiers*, 17.

¹² Elmo Ingenthron, *Borderland Rebellion* (Branson: Ozarks Mountaineer, 1980), 14.

¹³ George C. Rable, *God’s Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 337.

One cannot study the Civil War without including the institution of slavery. The South's relationship with slavery was filled with controversy. After all, many proclaimed the Bible itself condemned this evil treatment. Clergy from both sides presented their arguments using Scripture, often separating entire denominations. President Lincoln eventually stated, "Both sides read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; the prayers of both could not be answered."¹⁴ In 1845, Baptist denominations separated due to the institution of slavery.¹⁵ Likewise, South Carolina Presbyterians split, forming their own chapter and stating, "Slavery is far from being a sin in the sight of God."¹⁶ Northern Presbyterians responded by proclaiming slavery was a "vicious sin before God and Man."¹⁷

It was not just the division between the North and South that caused much controversy regarding slavery. Some Southern preachers opposed the practice. A Baptist preacher from South Carolina, Richard Fuller, was on record stating, "The South must realize that slavery fosters indolence and luxury."¹⁸ Fuller sought "colonization to Liberia" as the best approach to end slavery in the country.¹⁹ In 1859, Texas Methodist preachers Solomon McKinney and Parson Blount were forced out of Dallas for "allegedly promoting freedom for slaves."²⁰ For his "offense," McKinney "endured seventy lashes" for his preaching on abolishing slavery.²¹ In the most severe punishment, a death sentence was carried out for anyone promoting the freedom from slavery. This was the case for Rev. Anthony Bewley, who was hung in "Fort Worth" for allegedly "plotting a slave insurrection."²²

Opinions on slavery separated individuals. Many clergy members in the South viewed "a slavery reform as inevitable."²³ Historian Traci Nichols-Belt writes, "Ministers expressed the need to secure slave marriages and family life, repeal laws against slave literacy, and punish cruel masters."²⁴ Some clergy argued that "slavery reform was needed to make the practice more biblical."²⁵ Nichols-Belt adds, "Slaveholders claimed that the Bible blessed slavery and further impressed a sacred duty on masters to be benevolent to their slaves."²⁶ Southern Catholics took a noncommittal stance on slavery.²⁷ The American Protestant Episcopal Church "never considered

¹⁴ Gaustad, *The Religious History of America*, 191.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ David B. Chesebrough, *Clergy Dissent in the Old South 1830-1865* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 31.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Chesebrough, *Clergy Dissent in the Old South 1830-1865*, 33.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, 34.

²³ Belt, *Onward Southern Soldiers*, 12.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁷ Ingenthron, *Borderland Rebellion*, 15.

slavery a sin.”²⁸ According to such Christians, the Bible never strictly forbade slavery, therefore, they saw no error in their ways. Of course, this argument was in error, as the practice of slavery found in the Scriptures was entirely different from what was practiced in America.

Nonetheless, the implications of slavery and the fight for freedom are evident. Lincoln was correct in his assessment, as two opposing sides claimed Scripture supported their ideology and opinions regarding slavery. It took a Civil War to decide the fate for the nation officially. Yet, it also remains important to study the influence of Christians throughout the war years.

Christianity & the Confederacy

Historians have long studied the relationship between religious beliefs and the Civil War. Civil War historian Eugene Genovese wrote about it, “claiming the South viewed itself as the David fighting the Northern un-godly Goliath.”²⁹ To put it simply, both sides felt God was on their side. The South was confident victory was theirs because they worshipped and honored the Almighty God. The First Battle of Bull Run is said to have further encouraged Southern soldiers that God was indeed with them.³⁰ Nichols-Belt writes, “Southerners believed the South was serving a just and stern God, but he would not abandon them, his people.”³¹ As the military conflict progressed, Christianity continued to play a large role in the Confederate army.

Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson both “supported and encouraged clergy” to be present with their armies.³² Christianity and the commandments of the Bible were imperative for many soldiers. Some soldiers demonstrated the importance of their faith by refusing “to engage in battles on the Sabbath.”³³ Likewise, many soldiers kneeled for “prayer before and after battles.”³⁴ Prayers such as the following were a regular occurrence within the Confederate Army.

O eternal God, who seest my weakness, and knowest the number and strength of the temptations against which I have to struggle; leave me not to myself, but cover Thou my head in the day of battle, and in all spiritual combats make me more than conqueror through Him that loved me. O let no terrors or flatteries, either of the world, or my own flesh, ever draw me from my obedience to Thee; but grant that I may continue steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; and, by patient continuance in well doing, seek, and at last obtain,

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Belt, *Onward Southern Soldiers*, 9.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 10.

³² Ibid., 11.

³³ Ibid., 12.

³⁴ Belt, *Onward Southern Soldiers*, 34.

glory, and honor, and immortality, and eternal life, though Jesus Christ our Lord.
AMEN.³⁵

George Taylor, who served as a chaplain of the twenty-fifth Virginia Regiment, stated, “The men generally want chaplains, and appreciate them, even if only moderately good and faithful.”³⁶ Military chaplains found themselves “preaching, conducting Bible studies and prayer meetings, and comforting and encouraging the wounded or sick.”³⁷ Nevertheless, the chaplains faced opposition. Chaplains were regularly discouraged as many soldiers embraced sin and ignored sermons.³⁸ The horrors of war were difficult to combat. Chaplains experienced the reality of sin perhaps more than ever before. Sins such as “Sabbath-breaking, lust, card playing and profanity” all increased during the war years.³⁹ The Confederate chaplains, however, remained determined to win souls for Christ.

Chaplains found themselves preaching more earnestly than ever before, proclaiming to soldiers “that God will be with the army who obeys Him and honors Him.”⁴⁰ A commonly heard declaration in messages was that “victory on the battlefield were not of their own doing, but of God’s will.”⁴¹ Officers in the Confederate Army did not overlook the importance of accurate biblical teaching. The Confederacy wanted the best Christian examples present to encourage its soldiers.⁴² Chaplain J. Williams Jones wrote, “The denominations generally appointed some of their best men to enter the army as missionaries and supplemented the scant salaries of the chaplains.”⁴³ A correspondent of the *Christian Observer* noted of chaplains:

It is a common opinion that our young men in the army are very wicked, but, judging from what I have seen in various camps, the charge is utterly unfounded. It would seem that their privations and sufferings have been greatly sanctified to them; and no doubt much is due to the labor of chaplains and colporteurs.⁴⁴

Baptist clergy preached to soldiers and civilians alike about the seriousness of “tobacco and smoking pipes.”⁴⁵ Likewise, an increase of “social dancing” was on the rise; Methodist and

³⁵ C.T. Quintard, *The Confederate Soldiers Pocket Manual of Devotions* (San Bernardino: Civil War Classic Library, 2013), 35.

³⁶ Rev. J. Williams Jones, D.D., *Christ in the Camp Or Religion in the Confederate Army* (Atlanta: The Martin & Hoyt Co., 1904), 224.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 235.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 234.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Jones, *Christ in the Camp Or Religion in the Confederate*, 234.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 241.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 274.

⁴⁵ Rable, *God’s Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War*, 250.

Baptist preachers urged “this is not a time to dance.”⁴⁶ They added, “All must be concentrated on the Confederacy cause and ensure they do not provoke God to anger.”⁴⁷ Preachers emphasized the seriousness of the war and the potential outcome it could have on the Southerners’ way of life.

As it is today, faith could not be separated from their mission with many individual leaders and soldiers within the Confederacy. General Lee was known for his dedication to the Christian God.⁴⁸ Jones wrote, “General Lee was emphatically a man of prayer. He was accustomed to pray in his family and to have his seasons of secret prayer which he allowed nothing else – however pressing – to interrupt.”⁴⁹ Lee read his Bible daily and was “said to have evangelized soldiers and encouraged Bible distributions amongst the men fighting.”⁵⁰ Lee was known for being a man of family and faith. Raising his seven children by the principles of Christianity was non-negotiable as he saw “faith as the most important part of life.”⁵¹ When told Confederate Christians regularly prayed for him, Lee humbly responded, “I am a poor sinner, trusting in Christ alone, and I need all the prayers you can offer me.”⁵²

Lee is known for a “mass spiritual revival that was said to have converted tens of thousands of soldiers.”⁵³ Christian film producer Ted Baehr writes, “Ironically, Robert E. Lee’s greatest legacy is perhaps as a peacemaker rather than a warrior.”⁵⁴ Historian George Rable echoes the reputation of Lee, writing:

Robert E. Lee would go down in Confederate history as the ultimate Christian soldier, an outcome that would have surprised the young Lee, who faithfully attended services and prayed, but also fretted about his sinfulness and waited until age forty-six to join the Episcopal Church.⁵⁵

Lee regularly encouraged young soldiers and led them to faith. Following the war, Lee was on record as stating the following:

⁴⁶ Ibid., 251.

⁴⁷ Rable, *God’s Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War*, 251.

⁴⁸ Jones, *Christ in the Camp Or Religion in the Confederate*, 60.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 61.

⁵¹ Ted Baehr and Susan Wales, *Faith in God and Generals: An Anthology of Faith, Hope, and Love in the American Civil War* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 81.

⁵² Rable, *God’s Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War*, 137.

⁵³ Baehr, *Faith in God and Generals: An Anthology of Faith, Hope, and Love in the American Civil War*, 83.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 85.

⁵⁵ Rable, *God’s Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War*, 137.

I want you to take a message to your friends. Tell them from me that it is unworthy of them as women, and especially as Christian women, to cherish feelings of resentment against the North. Tell them that it grieves me inexpressibly to know that such a state of things exists, and that I implore them to do their part to heal our country's wounds.⁵⁶

On the faith of Lee, Confederate Chaplain J. Williams Jones wrote:

If I have ever come in contact with a sincere, devout Christian – one who, seeing himself to be a sinner, trusted alone in the merits of Christ – who humbly tried to walk the path of duty, looking unto Jesus as the author and finisher of his faith, and whose piety constantly exhibited in his daily life, that man was General R. E. Lee.⁵⁷

Often directly tied to Christianity within the Confederacy was Stonewall Jackson. Jackson refused to partake in “dancing, card playing, smoking and drinking,” noting his Christian faith as his foundation of life.⁵⁸ Jackson strongly believed in the sovereignty of God, and both of his daughters were married to Presbyterian pastors.⁵⁹ Jackson supported slavery, urging the practice permitted by the Bible for “some reason.”⁶⁰ Baehr writes, “Unlike some owners, however, he believed blacks were human beings who had a right to be treated with kindness and respect. For Jackson, slaves were children of God with souls to be saved.”⁶¹

Being a Presbyterian deacon himself, Jackson felt he was “carrying out God’s will” on the battlefield.⁶² Belt adds, “Prior to and during the war, Jackson began every task by first seeking blessing of God, and he finished his tasks by offering thanks to God.”⁶³ Known as one of the greatest military figures of all time, Christianity defined Jackson. He and his second wife “read the Scriptures and Shorter Catechism nightly.”⁶⁴ Further, he “refused to write or send mail on Sundays and avoided dancing and theater.”⁶⁵ On repentance, he gave up “whiskey realizing he enjoyed it too much.”⁶⁶ He was a proud Presbyterian who believed in a Sovereign Creator

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Jones, *Christ in the Camp Or Religion in the Confederate Army*, 81.

⁵⁸ Rable, *God’s Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War*, 63.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Baehr, *Faith in God and Generals: An Anthology of Faith, Hope, and Love in the American Civil War*, 63.

⁶² Belt, *Onward Southern Soldiers*, 24.

⁶³ Ibid., 25.

⁶⁴ Rable, *God’s Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War*, 137.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

active in all parts of his life. Towards the end of the war, Jackson was accidentally hit by friendly fire (which eventually killed him) and stated:

Why, gentlemen, be quiet. Don't be bothered. If I live, it'll be for the best, and if I die, it'll be for the best. God knows and directs all things for the best for those whose trust is in Him, and my trust is in Him.⁶⁷

Further last words of Jackson showcased his submission to God's will: "You find me severely wounded, not unhappy or depressed. I believe it has been done according to the will of God, and I acquiesce entirely in His Holy Will."⁶⁸ When he realized it was Sunday, "drifting in and out of consciousness," he stated, "It is the Lord's day. My wish is fulfilled. I have always desired to die on Sunday."⁶⁹

Like Lee and Jackson, Jefferson Davis claimed God was with the South. Davis argued, "The expansion and success of cotton in the South further proved" God was with the Confederacy and was consistently blessing them.⁷⁰ Davis viewed the Confederacy as "preserving the constitution and fighting for the free government," which the original Founding Fathers had established.⁷¹ Davis responded with the following when receiving the first Confederate version of the Bible, "The Bible is a beautiful specimen of Southern workmanship, and if I live to be inaugurated the first President of the Confederacy, on the 22nd of February, my lips shall press the sacred volume which your kindness has bestowed."⁷²

Davis regularly "called for days of fasting" and often compared the Confederacy to Israel.⁷³ Interestingly enough, Davis was often compared to Moses fleeing from "Lincoln, known as Pharaoh with a hardened heart." Such rhetoric supported the Confederate cause as they viewed the Union as the invaders of the land, often comparing such accounts to Israel being invaded in the Scriptures. To further support their argument, they viewed the "burning of Southern houses and plundering of homes and businesses as direct evidence that God was not with the Northerners."⁷⁴

From various leaders in the South, it was evident that religion played a crucial role in the war. One common theme was the sovereign will of God being sought in all aspects of military engagements. When a loss occurred, or when victory was obtained, all glory was given to God.

⁶⁷ George Truett, "The Grace of Patience" (sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, TX, November 29, 1942), <http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/search/collection/fa-gwt> (accessed May 5, 2022).

⁶⁸ Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War*, 261.

⁶⁹ Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War*, 261.

⁷⁰ Belt, *Onward Southern Soldiers*, 20.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁷² Jones, *Christ in the Camp Or Religion in the Confederate Army*, 148.

⁷³ Belt, *Onward Southern Soldiers*, 23.

⁷⁴ Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War*, 152.

Soldiers as well found themselves constantly seeking God and His will. Historical accounts claim, “Confederate soldiers were largely converted in mass revivals.”⁷⁵ An “estimated one out of five Confederate soldiers were said to have decided for Christ, or a total of 150,000 conversions.”⁷⁶ While authenticating the number of genuine conversions is nearly impossible, these conversions demonstrated that Christianity made its way through the Confederate Army in a powerful spiritual wave. A story often shared by D.L. Moody explained how a Christian “hymn saved one Union soldier’s life.”⁷⁷

On one occasion, Sankey sang this song, “Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us,” at a public gathering. Afterwards, one of the guests pulled him aside and asked if Sankey had served on guard duty on a particular night in a particular place. Sankey, who had served in the Union army, said that he had. The other man said that he had served in the Confederate army. On the evening in question, he had started to shoot a Union soldier when the Union soldier began to sing “Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us.” The Confederate soldier, who had often heard his mother sing that song, couldn’t do it. Singing “Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us” had saved Sankey’s life.⁷⁸

Some soldiers maintained a strong Christian worldview, and others were new converts who distanced themselves from their “fellow soldiers who drank and cursed.”⁷⁹ Furthermore, prayer meetings and hymn singings were a regular occurrence around campfires.⁸⁰ One convert shared:

When I entered the army, I was the chief of sinners. I did not love God, nor my own soul, but pursued the ways of unrighteousness with ardor, without ever counting the cost. I studiously shunned preaching and our faithful Chaplain, lest he should reprove me; and when he was preaching in the camp I would be in my tent gambling with my wicked companions. One day he presented me a tract, entitled, “The Wrath to Come,” and so politely requested me to read it that I promised him I would and immediately went to my tent to give it a hasty perusal. I had not finished it before I felt that I was exposed to that “wrath” and I deserved

⁷⁵ Rable, *God’s Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War*, 207.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ D.L. Moody, “Savior a Shepherd Lead Us” (sermon), <https://sermonwriter.com/hymn-stories/savior-like-shepherd-lead-us/> (accessed May 5, 2022).

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Rable, *God’s Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War*, 204.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

to be damned. It showed me so plainly where and what I was that I should have felt lost without remedy had it not pointed me to that glorious “Refuge,” which I trust has indeed been a refuge to me from the storm; for I now feel that I can hope and trust in Christ.⁸¹

Another clergy member shared a similar heartfelt account:

A young man said to me after the battle: “When I was going into the battle, I put my trust in God, and He has brought me through untouched, and I am grateful to Him.” And the tears stood in his eyes as he spoke. He was an unconverted man when he went into the fight. Last night at preaching, while referring to the incidents of battle and how God had preserved them, many tears fell, and many countenances spoke louder than words undying gratitude to the God of all grace.⁸²

On one occasion, a Confederate chaplain, “James Sheeran witnessed Confederate soldiers stealing supplies from a Union store to include coffee, sugar, and other articles.”⁸³ Such behavior violated direct orders from General Lee. Declarations conveyed to all commanding officers that “No soldier was to molest any of the citizens, or take any private property, and any soldier caught plundering would be shot.”⁸⁴ For any soldier violating such an order, there was little excuse. “General orders were printed, and mass distributed to all camps engaged in Northern cities upon Lee’s command.”⁸⁵ Lee was firm in establishing respect and Christian discipline. He wanted his soldiers to be model citizens instead of like the invaders of the South. One chaplain wrote, “It is refreshing to see so many young converts, all in their freshness and vigor, serving the Lord and full of redeeming love.”⁸⁶ He added, “Our meetings are assuming a new and interesting phase. All the recent converts meet twice a day by themselves, and pray and talk over their wants and necessities to each other, and everyone who attends must lead in prayer.”⁸⁷

With fellow soldiers falling dead and death a harsh reality, many young converts found hope in Jesus’ message of peace and salvation.⁸⁸ One chaplain shared a story of a dying soldier:

⁸¹ Jones, *Christ in the Camp Or Religion in the Confederate Army*, 191.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 420.

⁸³ Patrick J. Hayes, *The Civil War Diary of Rev. James Sheeran C.Ss.R.: Chaplain, Confederate Chaplain and Redemptorist* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 550.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Jacob Hoke, *The Great Invasion of 1863, or General Lee in Pennsylvania* (1887), (Scotts Valley: Createspace, 2017), 122.

⁸⁶ Jones, *Christ in the Camp Or Religion in the Confederate Army*, 343.

⁸⁷ Jones, *Christ in the Camp Or Religion in the Confederate Army*, 343.

⁸⁸ Rable, *God’s Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War*, 203.

Tell my father that I have tried to eat my meals with thanksgiving. Tell him that I have tried to pray as we used to do at home. Tell him that Christ is now all my hope, all my trust, and that He is precious to my soul. Tell him that I am not afraid to die – all is calm. Tell him that I believe Christ will take me to Himself, and to my dear sister who is in Heaven.⁸⁹

The chaplain continued, the “death was witnessed by about twenty fellow soldiers, and the effect upon the feelings of all was very marked.”⁹⁰ Soldiers exercised “courage by spreading the Good News among each other.”⁹¹ Historian George Rable writes:

This harvest of souls often grew from small seeds. A few men began gathering informally; one soldier would read a passage of Scripture, offer a prayer, and sing a hymn; anyone who wished could then give his testimony. In this manner, some two-thirds of the men in one artillery battery confessed their faith.⁹²

The Southern army simply felt God was with them. When they won, they felt “their beliefs were reaffirmed as God would not be with a loser.”⁹³ Soldiers constantly sought God for guidance and comfort.⁹⁴ With a war that produced “over 625,000 soldiers dead,” perhaps the reality of death and the fear of the future assisted in spiritual conversions.⁹⁵ While the war at times brought forth the reality and seriousness of sin, it also showcased the importance of life. It allowed time for soldiers to reflect on their lives and relationship with an Almighty God. Hence, Lee and other Confederate leaders realized the service of military chaplains was drastically needed, for death was inevitable in this bloody conflict.

Southerners viewed the Union policy and practices as a threat to God Himself. For many, God determined the outcome as they argued His Sovereign Will was carried out. While defeat was unbearable for many in the South, leaders such as Lee thought of it as an act of the sovereignty of God being demonstrated in history. For Southerners like Lee, their faith never seized. The facts remain that Christianity played an important role in the Confederate Army. The soldiers experienced the presence of God. Thankfully slavery ended. The reader can find comfort that Jesus Christ was present on both sides of the conflict, providing eternal salvation to many souls.

⁸⁹ Jones, *Christ in the Camp Or Religion in the Confederate Army*, 343.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War*, 303.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid., 307.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Geoffrey Parker, *The Cambridge History of Warfare* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 238.

Conclusion

Religious beliefs played a large role in the Confederacy. While there were serious misinterpretation errors regarding the institution of slavery, it would be a mistake to deny that genuine Christians existed in the Southern army. Even before the war broke out, many in the South were urging for a “slavery reform.” But such a large number of Southerners relied so heavily on slavery that they had no clear idea of how to embrace reform. People like Lee fought for their home state versus the idea of slavery. Nevertheless, the slavery taught in the Bible is neither comparable nor compatible with the slavery adopted in the southern United States. Christianity prevailed as freedmen and freedwomen, all made in God’s image, gained their independence.

The Confederate Army regularly referred to God as the sovereign One who decided their future. God did decide. Slavery ended, the Reconstruction began, and a country soon was forced to unite. Despite horrible bloodshed and many lives being lost, God’s sovereignty was evident as mankind was free. From the beginning of history, God has been with all who believe and trust Him, and the same was true during the Civil War; God was in the hearts of those who believed in Him.

The point is well made that victors write history. However, the student of Christian history must never forget children of Christ have always been present on both sides of major wars. Believers and unbelievers fought on both sides. While the realization of sin and the fall of mankind was prominent, God’s love remained with those who called upon Him for salvation and peace. The lesson to be learned from the Civil War for the modern-day Christian is simple: much pain, suffering, and destruction occur until the Lord Jesus Christ returns to rescue His people. While it is understandably difficult to comprehend the evil and destructive acts of mankind, such events are nevertheless part of history that must occur for the children of God to be called home finally. When Christ is not the center of one’s life, chaos follows.

The nation at the time of the Civil War, similar to today, wrestled with sin. And much like today, chaplains and other Christians took advantage of such opportunities to share Christ in a time of need. Ultimately, close to one million Americans died in the Civil War, but we can find comfort that the Gospel was shared throughout each battle campaign and even to those dying of their wounds. Jesus promised hard days to come (famine, disasters, and war), but He also promised eternal glory to all who believe in Him.

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