

The Hermeneutics of Secession in the Valley of Virginia

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Abstract

This thesis examines the hermeneutics of a distinct region in Virginia during the secession crisis which preceded the Civil War. The Introduction establishes the unique histories, cultures, economics, politics, and religions of the people of the Valley of Virginia which caused the decision to secede to be one of nonconsensus. Chapter 1 explores how the people of the Valley interpreted the world through a biblical lens, especially the institution of slavery and the Union of the United States. In Chapter 2, I evaluate the hermeneutics of the pro-secessionists who believed the Union to be dissolved because the North had violated the sacred covenant between the states. In Chapter 3, I analyze the opposing hermeneutics of the anti-secessionists who believed the covenant of Union could not be broken. Close study of the Valley's hermeneutics of secession provides an explanation for why Civil War memory is contested and suggests the people of the Valley continue to utilize the hermeneutics of their ancestors in times of crisis.

Introduction to the Valley of Virginia

“Thus, rather than a vast geological melting pot, a basin of homogeneity stretching from ridge to ridge, the Valley was home to a society that more resembled the patchwork of its fields... Long after the Shenandoah had lost its backcountry characteristics, it still resembled Pennsylvania because so many religious traditions remained distinct.”

-Stephen Longenecker¹

The purpose of this thesis is to draw attention to a previously overlooked topic of Civil War religious history—the secession crisis. As in other areas of the United States, the people of the Valley of Virginia were highly religious and interpreted the world through a biblical lens; however, the variety of religious traditions in the Valley caused the decision to secede to be highly contested. Use of underutilized primary archival sources reveals pro-secessionists and anti-secessionists of the Valley had complicated hermeneutical positions historians have neglected. This thesis aims to close a gap in knowledge surrounding religion’s impact on the war by presenting the secession crisis in the Valley as an intra-South debate rather than a North-South debate. Nonconsensus in the Valley’s hermeneutics of secession was due to the unique histories, cultures, economics, politics, and religions of the people of the Valley.

The beautiful and fertile Valley of Virginia is a geographically isolated region between the Allegheny and Blue Ridge Mountain ranges which contains the Shenandoah River (see maps in Appendix A).² The first European settlers of the Valley of Virginia were German and Scots Irish immigrants who arrived in the United States, the British Colonies at the time, through the port of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. When the amount of available land in Pennsylvania

¹ Longenecker, 29

² For the purposes of this thesis, the Valley encompasses the counties of Rockbridge, Augusta, Rockingham, Shenandoah, Page, and Frederick and their respective cities. I was informed by Professor Don Gaylord that referring to the area I am examining in my thesis as the Shenandoah Valley is a misnomer as the geographical definition of the Shenandoah River Valley excludes Rockbridge County which is in the James River Valley. Culturally, the Valley includes counties east and west of the mountain ranges, in the Roanoke Valley, and in West Virginia. The decision to not use the cultural definition of the Valley is a result of limited time for archival research and an emphasis on the varied historical and religious traditions of the selected counties.

decreased, settlers migrated up³ the natural corridor formed by the mountains seeking cheap, fertile land. Eastern Virginia landowners also recruited immigrants to establish a frontier barrier between their plantations and the French and American Indians in the west. By the mid-18th century, most Valley settlers were freeholding farmers of Pennsylvanian German and Scots Irish descent. Stephen Longenecker notes “the upper Valley avoided the large disparities of wealth that characterized eastern Virginia,” and this economic trend continued even as the Valley lost its backcountry status and became less isolated.⁴ Wheat was the main crop with corn, oats, rye, clover, and cattle also cultivated and transported to the major cities of Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Richmond via the Valley turnpike (modern day Route 11), canals, and eventually railroads.⁵ With a growing market and stronger connections to major cities, the Valley became more involved in state and national politics.

The Valley’s politics were closely tied to its religion. Most of the religious groups had a tradition of opposition to political authority, and the Scots Irish’s Presbyterianism was strongly tied to rejection of English government and the Anglican Church.⁶ “Localism and resistance to distant authority figured prominently” in the Valley’s support of the American Revolutionary War and the emergence of republican and democratic styles of government.⁷ Political persecution in Europe also caused Valley residents to oppose the establishment of a state religion, forming a wall between religion and politics which would figure prominently in the debates on slavery and secession.⁸ As will be discussed later, the Valley, despite having less

³ The Shenandoah River is one of the few rivers in the world that flows North, so going “up” the Valley in local terms means traveling southwest towards Lexington and going “down” the Valley means traveling northeast towards Winchester.

⁴ Longenecker, *Shenandoah religion: outsiders and the mainstream, 1716-1865*, 16; Shanks, *The Secession Movement in Virginia 1847-1861*, 6

⁵ Longenecker, 83; Shanks, 6-7 & 16-17

⁶ Longenecker, 44-47

⁷ Longenecker, 51 & 32

⁸ Longenecker, 54-56

slavery than eastern Virginia, was an active participant in the peculiar institution. Nevertheless, strong ties to Pennsylvania and the presence of anti-slavery denominations like the Quakers, Mennonites, and Dunkers created a nonconsensus on slavery that contributed to the misconception that slavery in the Valley was milder than in other regions of the South.⁹ Longenecker remarks “party loyalty in the Valley correlated more closely to ethnicity and religion than to slave ownership,” and Valley representatives were more aligned with the interests of southwestern Virginia and the area which would become West Virginia than eastern Virginia and the more Southern states.¹⁰ In the antebellum period, the Scots Irish were Whigs and the Germans were Democrats, but opposition to the eastern Virginia elite was the main motivator for political participation.

The antebellum Valley was home to a plurality of religious traditions. The 1860 United States census gives the number of church buildings in the Valley for each denomination by which we can infer the religious sentiments of settlers. Methodists were the largest group followed by Presbyterians, Lutherans, Baptists, Dunkers, Episcopalians, Reformed Calvinists, Quakers, and Mennonites.¹¹ Religious affiliation was strongly tied to ethnic group with the Presbyterians being Scots Irish; the Lutherans, Reformed Calvinists, Dunkers, and Mennonites being German; and the Methodists, Baptists, Anglicans, and Quakers being English. Longenecker classifies the majority of the Valley’s denominations as “outsiders” because they were non-state churches with a history of persecution and dissent to political authority.¹² They also demonstrated “outsiderness” through how they acted in comparison to mainstream culture.

⁹ Longenecker, 114; Sorrells, “Francis McFarland and the Black Community: Placing McFarland within context of the Shenandoah Valley’s African-American Culture, 1860-1866,” 5

¹⁰ Longenecker, 121 & 123

¹¹ Longenecker, 67-68

¹² Longenecker, xi

The Presbyterians were opposed to English interference, and the Methodists' revivalism and emphasis on emotion caused other denominations to splinter into Old School and New School branches. The Dunkers, Mennonites, and Quakers were peace churches opposed to war and slavery, and their simple dress and manners physically separated their members from greater society. The diversity of denominations gave the Valley a blending of Northern and Southern religious attitudes which would come into play as the Valley faced the secession crisis.

The Valley of Virginia's histories, cultures, economics, politics, and religions distinguish it from other regions of Virginia and the South and make more similar to other border regions along the Mason-Dixon line. The natural corridor between the Allegheny and Blue Ridge mountains created a natural route for German and Scots Irish immigrants from Pennsylvania to migrate to new farming land where they cultivated wheat and other crops for export to market in major mid-Atlantic cities. The Valley's politics were closely tied to religion and ethnic group, but settlers were united in their opposition to the authority of the eastern Virginia elite despite participating in slavery; however, the peace churches opposed slavery and gave the Valley a moderate position on the institution. A variety of religious denominations flourished in the Valley and allowed settlers to position themselves as outsiders in relation to an encroaching mainstream society. Meredith Hays conceives of the Valley as a "social and cultural extension of Pennsylvania" because of its plurality of religious traditions, but the convergence of Northern and Southern practices and beliefs caused the Valley to be a more contested space. Longenecker argues "Thus, rather than a vast geological melting pot, a basin of homogeneity stretching from ridge to ridge, the Valley was home to a society that more resembled the patchwork of its fields."¹³ While this short introduction to the Valley of Virginia is too brief to truly capture the

¹³ Hays, 2; Longenecker, 29

attitudes of the antebellum Valley, it showcases how the Valley's inhabitants varied greatly in their ethnicity, politics, and religion. This lack of consensus heavily influenced how the Valley's people responded to the secession crisis and how they conceived of the crisis in religious terms.

The Valley of Virginia has a reputation in modern times for being a stronghold of Confederate and Lost Cause sympathy along with holding backwards or outdated views on political and social issues; however, popular beliefs about the Valley do not accurately represent the myriad of factors which contributed to the Valley's Civil War experience. The people of the Valley were strong supporters of the Union, conceiving of the United States in divine terms, until a major shift occurred in April 1861. While local historians have explored this shift in the Valley's loyalty, many have not considered the role religion played in the Valley's decision, and the historians who have studied religion's broader impact on the Civil War fail to give the religious interpretation of secession the attention it deserves. This thesis focuses on the "hermeneutics of secession," the term I use to describe how Valley residents used biblical interpretations of scripture to promote or oppose the act of secession. My work uses primary materials from Washington and Lee University Special Collections & Archives alongside secondary sources to examine the hermeneutics of secession. The primary materials are exegetical in nature and include diaries, books, letters, newspapers, speeches, and sermons from before, during, and after the Civil War. As with all archival work, the materials I present in this thesis are ones I was able to find and examine under a strict time limit and are by no means representative of all peoples or viewpoints in the Valley. Secession has strong ties to the institution of slavery; however, I have chosen to give more focus to secession due to the vast amount of preexisting scholarly research on religious interpretations of slavery. The primary sources I analyze also approach the relationship between the two topics with a greater emphasis

on secession. I have attempted where possible to explore how the authors relate secession and slavery and the reasons why they would choose to treat the issues separately. My hope is that this work will promote a new understanding of antebellum attitudes in the Valley of Virginia on religion and secession that will foster productive conversations about the period and how the hermeneutics of secession can help explain prevailing beliefs and modes of interpretation in the Valley today. Contrary to popular belief, the Valley of Virginia was not a hotbed of secession sentiment, and arguments for and against secession employed hermeneutics of scripture to justify the decision, ultimately shaping how the people of the Valley viewed the Civil War.

Chapter 1: The Antebellum Valley: Pro-Slavery, Pro-Union

“Now when ultraists on both sides have shown their colors, we may leave them to the management of the uncorrupted classes of American citizens, who will doubtless give a good account of them—whilst we of West Virginia steer our course in the safe middle way.”

-Henry Ruffner¹⁴

This chapter demonstrates the centrality of the Bible in the lives of the Valley’s people. The beliefs of 19th century American Christianity caused the people to interpret personal and national events using the Bible. In the Valley, the hermeneutics of slavery were more diverse than in other regions of the South with different religious groups promoting, tolerating, or opposing slavery. The people were united in their love of the Union which made possible the existence of multiple denominations with conflicting views in a shared space and encouraged compromise. Beliefs about slavery and Union influenced how the people of the Valley reacted to secession, and debates surrounding these issues show how the people found it difficult to separate religion from politics. The hermeneutics of slavery and Union would complicate the hermeneutics of secession.

19th Century American Christianity

The Bible held a place of unrivaled importance in the antebellum United States. In 1860, the United States was home to about 50,000 Protestant churches, 77 synagogues, and 2,500 Catholic churches; the power of institutional religious organizations was at its peak with more funding and staff than the federal government; and two-thirds of Americans professed church membership with weekly attendance of religious services.¹⁵ Believers and non-believers alike

¹⁴ Ruffner, 7

¹⁵ Byrd, *A Holy Baptism of Fire & Blood: The Bible and the American Civil War*, 1-2; Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, 11-13; the two-thirds church membership is similar to today, but adherence to services and other church events was much higher.

interpreted the Bible through historical, literal, metaphorical, and allegorical lenses and quoted scripture for linguistic style.¹⁶ The language of the Bible was present in the mouths of the people, their hearts, their thoughts, and their actions and shaped how they viewed everyday life. David Chesebrough emphasizes that “One of the most important characteristics of religion in those years prior to and during the Civil War was the belief that God continually intervened in the affairs of this world.”¹⁷ God not only acted within people spiritually but physically in their lives.

Francis McFarland, an Old School Presbyterian minister for the Bethel congregation in Augusta County, wrote in his diary, “Sab.[bath] I am very sorry I could not preach today—our preparation Sabbath. But it is of the Lord” and “Sab. I could not stand without pain. Thought it best to remain in bed. I was sorry I could not preach, for there was a good Congⁿ [Congregation]. But the will of the Lord be done.”¹⁸ McFarland attributed times of pain and loss to God’s will but also times of protection and thanksgiving. On May 27, 1860, McFarland wrote, “I learned there was a destructive hail storm a few miles North of us. I thank God we escaped.”¹⁹ God, being active in the lives of believers, was an active participant in the history of nations with Mitchell Snay writing, “Secular and religious motifs were woven into the belief that America had a unique role in bringing the Kingdom of God to this world.”²⁰ The United States was God’s new Israel, and its people had the privilege of calling upon His name for interference. McFarland on January 4, 1861, a national day of fasting, humiliation, and prayer, wrote, “We had a good Congⁿ

¹⁶ Byrd, 3-4

¹⁷ Chesebrough, *God Ordained This War: Sermons on the Sectional Crisis, 1830-1865*, 5

¹⁸ McFarland, Valley of the Shadow diary transcription, entries for August 7, 1859 and November 6, 1859. The preparation Sabbath McFarland mentions is for Bethel’s upcoming communion festival, an important time in the Presbyterian Church that occurred only twice a year over the course of two weeks (see Longenecker, 44-45).

¹⁹ McFarland, diary entry for May 27, 1860, emphasis original. See also the entries for June 9, 1861, July 13, 1861, October 25, 1861, and many others containing thanksgiving to God for health, prosperous harvests, and safe travels.

²⁰ Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*, 5. On the view of a covenant between God and the American people see Noll, 18 and Eran Shalev’s *American Zion: The Old Testament as a Political Text from the Revolution to the Civil War*. On the repetition of history and apocalypse see Byrd, 8-9 and Snay, 167-168.

four Elders prayed appropriately. I prayed & made two addresses. *I trust God will hear his people.*"²¹ Americans' belief that God acted in the world introduced a paradoxical relationship between religion and politics.

After centuries of religious persecution in Europe, sects of Christians, like the Presbyterians and Quakers, Mennonites, and Dunkers in the Valley of Virginia, were suspicious of political authority and state control of religion; however, they also believed the government of the United States could only exist under God's divine providence. George Rable explains:

...to most Americans faith and freedom went hand in hand...Civil religion in America developed as a set of beliefs about the relationship between God and the nation that emphasized national virtue, national purpose, and national destiny...The creation and growth of the American republic therefore acquired transcendent meaning and signified the Lord's direct intervention in human history...Religious faith and civic belief reinforced each other as the nation's unfolding history and democratic institution became expressions of God's will.²²

Separation between church and state was essential for religious freedom, but this tenet did not prevent the American people from expressing religion in the public sphere. On the other hand, clergy and conservative laymen disliked the introduction of politics into the pulpit, especially on highly partisan issues, because it distracted from the mission of saving souls.²³ Despite this tension between religion and politics, the people of the antebellum Valley could not help but interpret the issues of slavery and secession in biblical terms due to the pervasive nature of the Bible in American society. Slavery and secession were political issues with moral significance, and when believers could not agree on the biblical solutions to these problems, conflict arose.²⁴

²¹ McFarland, diary entry for January 4, 1861, emphasis mine. Fast days, both local and national, were solemn occasions for Christians to appeal to God's providence and to repent of national sins. During the war, President Abraham Lincoln declared three fast days for the United States while President Jefferson Davis of the Confederate States declared ten fast days (see Byrd, 9-10).

²² Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War*, 3

²³ Snay, 38-41 & 79 & 159

²⁴ Snay, 41 and Noll, 4

Hermeneutics of Slavery

Due to popular myth, locals view slavery in the Valley of Virginia as “milder” than in eastern Virginia and the rest of the South.²⁵ The Valley did not have large plantations, but enslaved labor still formed an integral part of its economy with every 1 in 5 persons enslaved.²⁶ In the 1860 census, the enslaved population in the Valley varied greatly by county with Rockbridge County having the greatest proportion of persons enslaved at 23.7 percent, Augusta County having 20.7 percent, Frederick County having 14.7 percent, Page County having 11.0 percent, Rockingham County having 10.4 percent, and Shenandoah County having 5.5 percent (see Appendix A).²⁷ As typical throughout the South, the wealthiest members of society owned the majority of enslaved persons; however, they hired enslaved persons out to work on smaller farms as in the case of McFarland who did not enslave people but hired as many as four enslaved persons on a yearly basis to work on the family farm and do domestic chores.²⁸ Enslaved persons in the Valley mainly worked in manufacturing and on wheat farms, often alongside white farmers and hired white labor.²⁹ While the lack of plantation conditions makes slavery in the Valley appear less horrible, beatings, runaways, separation of families, and sales further South were common. Longenecker concludes, “The Valley, then was as typical on race and labor as any other Southern region. Though less dependent economically on bondage than other parts of the South, slavery was nonetheless ingrained in the Valley’s economy.”³⁰

²⁵ Longenecker, 114; Sorrells, 5; Noyalas, *Slavery and Freedom in the Shenandoah Valley During the Civil War Era*, xiii-xiv.

²⁶ Longenecker, 115; this fraction amounts to approximately 25,000 enslaved persons according to Noyalas.

²⁷ 1860 Virginia census; Rockbridge County likely had the highest percentage enslaved population because it was part of the James River watershed, making the transportation of agricultural goods produced by enslaved persons easier and more cost-effective (see Shanks, 6-7).

²⁸ Longenecker, 116. McFarland, diary entries for December 29 & 30, 1863 and January 6 & 7, 1864 show the complexities and cruelties of this practice.

²⁹ Longenecker, 117-118; Sorrells, 11

³⁰ Longenecker, 121

As stated in the introduction, denominational views on slavery varied throughout the Valley. The Presbyterians, Lutherans, and Baptists allowed clergy and members to own enslaved persons, and many enslaved persons attended church with their masters.³¹ Presbyterians enslaved persons at a higher rate than other denominations, and when the Presbyterian Church split into Old and New Schools in 1837, the main issue was theology and not slavery; however, scholars note that tension between reform and tradition also featured heavily in debates over slavery.³² The Lutheran Church split over a similar debate involving revivalism, and the church was noncommittal on slavery with clergy enslaving persons at a lower rate than the Presbyterians and other Southern denominations.³³ Baptist leadership opposed slavery, but members resisted and by 1845 the Baptist Church split into northern and southern branches over the institution.³⁴ Similarly, Methodist views changed over time. The denomination's founders were strongly anti-slavery, and an emphasis on spirituality and liberation appealed to many free and enslaved black people; nevertheless, ownership of enslaved persons grew among members (clergy could not enslave people), causing the denomination to leave the issue of slavery to lower church divisions. The Baltimore Conference to which Methodist churches in the Valley belonged took a moderate stance on slavery and remained silent.³⁵ When the Methodist Episcopal (ME) Church split into north and south branches over slavery in 1844, the Baltimore Conference remained within the ME Church, North although a few Valley churches entered the ME Church, South.³⁶ The Presbyterians, Lutherans, Baptists, and Methodists supported or tolerated slavery, and even when church leadership opposed the institution, members found justification for slavery in religion.

³¹ Longenecker, 127

³² Longenecker, 128 & 73; note that although the majority of Valley Presbyterians remained in the Old School, a number of churches joined the New School; Snay, 115-118

³³ Longenecker, 73-75

³⁴ Snay, 134-138

³⁵ Longenecker, 143-149

³⁶ Snay, 126-134

The Quakers, Mennonites, and Dunkers opposed slavery as a violation of the golden rule. Present in Augusta and Rockingham counties and the northern Valley, the peace churches' presence caused those areas to have lower enslaved populations, and they offered black people partial equality with white members though the amount of acceptance depended on the attitude of the congregation. The Quakers were strong abolitionists, and many of the Friends migrated from the Valley in the late 1700s and early 1800s to live in the free territory of Ohio. Despite being anti-slavery, the Mennonites and Dunkers viewed abolition as impractical because Virginia law made life for emancipated persons difficult as did the Valley's prevailing racial views. Many members rightfully feared the inflammatory language of abolitionists would cause slaveowners and other Valley settlers to become more outspoken and harsher in their defense of the peculiar institution.³⁷ The peace churches were not active in the fight against slavery, but they offered an opposing religious view as they would in the secession crisis.

Members of slaveholding denominations justified slavery using multiple interpretations of scripture. They claimed that according to natural law, "some form of submission was perfectly natural in any social order" and God placed enslaved blacks under the control of their white masters for the development of their race.³⁸ Slaveholding thus created a mutual responsibility between enslaved person and master, and a system of ethics or "doctrine of paternalism" developed in which the master promoted the enslaved person's social, economic, and religious welfare.³⁹ George A. Baxter, president of Washington College from 1799 to 1829 and a pastor of Lexington Presbyterian Church, wrote that giving religious instruction to "coloured people" is a duty which "cannot be neglected longer, without bringing great guilt, both upon the country and

³⁷ Longenecker, 25-27 & 38-39 & 137-142

³⁸ Snay, 68 & 79; Longenecker, 127; Chesebrough, 145-147

³⁹ Snay; 85; Sorrells, 12; Longenecker, 132

the church.”⁴⁰ This reasoning also extended to the importance white denominations placed on including enslaved persons in services even though this practice provided whites with more opportunities for controlling blacks; however, a genuine desire to provide enslaved persons with religious instruction did exist.⁴¹ Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson famously ran a Sunday School for enslaved persons in Lexington and taught them how to read and write which was against Virginia law.⁴² Alongside natural law and the doctrine of paternalism was the justification for slavery on the basis of biblical integrity and opposition to abolition.⁴³ Baxter wrote, “we are fully persuaded that the word of God has placed this delicate subject on its proper ground, and that any attempt to legislative upon it, in opposition to the dictates of scripture, would be presumptuous.”⁴⁴ Since Mosaic law gave instructions for slavery and neither Jesus nor the apostles condemned the practice, attacking slavery was attacking the Word of God. Thus, the majority of the people in the Valley viewed slavery as a divinely ordained relationship necessary for the stability of society and to suggest otherwise was heresy.

Not all Valley citizens believed slavery to be a moral good or found its justification in scripture. Joseph Addison Waddell, editor of the *Staunton Spectator* before the Civil War, wrote in his diary:

This thing of speculating on human flesh is utterly horrible to me...Slavery itself is extremely repulsive to my feelings, and I earnestly desire its extinction everywhere, when it can be done judiciously, and so as to promote the welfare of both races. Yet I am no abolitionist. The day for emancipation with us has not come, and we must wait God’s time. For the present all that the most philanthropic can do is to endeavor to ameliorate the institution; but it is hard to do this in the midst of the mischievous interference of outside fanatics.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ George Baxter papers, Folder 17, Box 2, WLU Coll. 0003

⁴¹ Longenecker, 128-129 & 131-132

⁴² Sorrells, 20

⁴³ Longenecker, 135; Snay, 20 & 60-62 & 65

⁴⁴ Baxter, Folder 17, Box 2, WLU Coll. 0003

⁴⁵ Joseph Waddell, Valley of the Shadow diary transcription, entry for October 15, 1856. A Presbyterian, Waddell enslaved a man named Moses that he inherited from his father. Waddell wrote, “Moses has also been his own master, really, since he fell into my hands, as he was, indeed, long before.” (See note 5 accompanying the diary).

Like the Mennonites and Dunkers, Waddell knew the immediate abolition of slavery would create an uproar and disprove of the abolitionists' efforts, instead trusting God would act at the proper time. Abolition never gained support outside of the Quakers in the Valley, but the idea of it warranted an editorial in the *Lexington Gazette* calling for preachers to "Keep [abolition] out of the churches, separate it from religion, and it will soon die out among political tricksters and demagogues."⁴⁶ The tension between religion and politics led to distrust about using the church pulpit to enact civil change.

Religion also influenced non-moral arguments about slavery. Before abolition rhetoric became common in the 1850s, the Valley was home to supporters of the colonization and gradual emancipation movements. Colonization, or the resettlement of free and enslaved blacks to Africa, was prominent in Virginia and North Carolina and aimed to create a white homogeneous society.⁴⁷ When western Virginians and North Carolinians realized the sentiment of eastern citizens of those states was changing, they switched to the promotion of gradual emancipation. In 1847, Henry Ruffner, president of Washington College from 1829 to 1848, published a copy of an argument he presented to the Franklin Society, the debating society of Lexington, on the gradual abolition of slavery in western Virginia at the request of several prominent community members including Samuel McDowell Moore and future governor John Letcher.⁴⁸ The pamphlet's reasoning was economic and white supremacist but contained religious language. Ruffner argued, "slavery is a pernicious institution, and must be gradually removed...No man of common sense, who has observed this result, can doubt for a moment, that the system of free

⁴⁶ *Lexington Gazette*, April 12, 1860, "Conservative Views"

⁴⁷ Snay, 23

⁴⁸ Ruffner, *Address to the People of West Virginia: Shewing That Slavery Is Injurious to the Public Welfare, and That It May Be Gradually Abolished Without Detriment to the Rights and Interest of Slave Holders*, WLU-Coll-0102.

labor promotes the growth and prosperity of States, in a much higher degree than the system of slave labor.”⁴⁹ Slavery is wrong, not because of its impact on enslaved persons, but because it prevents white western Virginians from achieving economic and political power on par with eastern Virginians. Slavery’s impact is apocalyptic, “Old Virginia was the first to sow this land of ours with slavery; she is also the first to reap the full harvest of destruction,” so Providence must provide the solution, “May heaven direct your hands to the course directed by patriotism, by humanity and by your own true interest.”⁵⁰ Ruffner and the supporters of his pamphlet believed the Valley to be a middle ground where change could occur:

Now when ultraists on both sides have shown their colors, we may leave them to the management of the uncorrupted classes of American citizens, who will doubtless give a good account of them—whilst we of West Virginia steer our course in the safe middle way, and seek to remove the plague of slavery from our limits, without incurring the charge of ultra-abolitionism on the one hand or of proslaveryism—or whatever it may be called—on the other.⁵¹

The desire for this change was undoubtedly white supremacist, but the pamphlet was popular in western Virginia for providing a solution to a problem Virginia’s legislature had promised to solve for decades; however, the rise of abolitionism created backlash to the pamphlet. In 1860, Moore had to defend himself and the region at a state convention by declaring, “The people of my section of the State are as sound on the subject of slavery as those of any other sections. They are true to all the institutions of Virginia, and will ever remain so.”⁵² The pamphlet caused eastern voters to view Letcher as “not sound” on slavery which almost cost him the gubernatorial election in 1859 and continued to haunt his career throughout the Civil War.⁵³ Nonslaveholding white farmers also opposed slavery for their own benefit. Snay claims they held an alternative

⁴⁹ Ruffner, 2 & 10

⁵⁰ Ruffner, 14-15 & 51

⁵¹ Ruffner, 7

⁵² *Lexington Gazette*, March 1, 1860, “Proceedings of the Convention: Second Day—Tuesday.”

⁵³ *Lexington Gazette*, June 7, 1860, “Mr. Bell on Slavery;” Shanks, 59

social vision that “stressed a radical ethic of subsistence, liberty, and a fear of manipulation and dependence.”⁵⁴ Though people from traditional slaveholding denominations rejected slavery for non-religious reasons, they likely still believed the religious justifications of slavery.

The Valley’s position on slavery was Southern despite the presence of dissenters. In a public address, Moore captured the beliefs of most settlers:

...the slaves of this country were the best fed, the best clothed, and most contented laboring class in the world. The other, that the Creator, in permitting the institution of slavery, as it exists in this country, designed to confer, and did confer, a great and signal benefit on that portion of the African race. He said it was well known that he, in common with the whole population of Western Virginia, and he believed a majority in Eastern Virginia, entertained the opinion in 1832, that slavery, was an evil, which it was highly desirable the State should, if possible, get clear of...He believed that the great change of opinion on the subject which had taken place, was owing to some extent, to the course pursued by the Northern abolitionists; but principally, to the conviction, on the minds of all reflecting men, that no practicable scheme could be devised, by which we could get clear of that portion of our population. It was obvious to all that they could not be emancipated and remain among us...and the inevitable consequence would be, that the whole of the inferior race, on the first outbreak, would be utterly exterminated.⁵⁵

Moore’s speech reflects how religious justification began with an emphasis on the enslaved person-master relationship as divinely ordained before transitioning to a defense of the integrity of scripture and an effort to keep church and state separate. Non-religious arguments containing religious language also contributed to this change in sentiment. Variation on slavery existed across time, space, and denomination, and the primary sources illustrate the history of religion and slavery is more complicated than most books would suggest. Nonconsensus on slavery would become nonconsensus on secession.

⁵⁴ Snay, 72

⁵⁵ *Lexington Gazette*, April 5, 1860, “The Substance of an Address Delivered by Hon. S. McD. Moore, at a Meeting of a Large Number of the Citizens of Rockbridge County, in Lexington, on Monday, the 5th of March, 1860.”

Hermeneutics of Union

Love of the Union united the Valley of Virginia. The United States was God's chosen nation, the new Israel, and as the *Central Presbyterian* held, God "kept this continent veiled from the view and knowledge of mankind until, in the procession of ages, the auspicious Era came, when the curtain was raised, disclosing the magnificent spectacle of a new world thrown open for the reception of a race ordained and trained by heaven to be worthy of the heritage."⁵⁶ Centuries of religious persecution made Valley residents suspicious of state involvement in religion, but they believed the new republican form of government could only prosper if God ordained it. Erich Ames explains, "This idea that when antebellum Americans referred to Union they meant something that both included and transcended the nation-state is of critical importance...Equating the Union with God's divinely ordained church reflected a view of the Union as a sacred, inviolable institution."⁵⁷ The people of the Valley believed the United States could only exist as a Christian nation and resisted any efforts they viewed as destroying national harmony.

As sectional conflict grew between the North and South through the 1830s to the 1850s, the Valley's people positioned themselves as defenders of the true Union spirit, neutral mediators between the extremes of abolition and the expansion of slavery.⁵⁸ With geographical, cultural, economic, political, and religious connections both North and South, the Valley was well equipped to fulfill this sacred duty, and the mission of unity pervaded all aspects of the public sphere. The *Lexington Gazette*, a Whig party publication, had under the editorship of Alphonso

⁵⁶ Snay, 187; the *Central Presbyterian* was a Presbyterian Church publication headquartered in Richmond, but many Valley residents, including McFarland, were avid readers and contributors.

⁵⁷ Ames, "'United in Interest and Feeling': the Political Culture of Union in the Virginia Borderland, 1850-1851," 9 & 110

⁵⁸ As evidenced by the Ruffner pamphlet

Smith the motto of “Let us cling to the Constitution as the mariner clings to the last plank when the night and tempest close around him.” This quote places the Constitution of the United States in a position not unlike the Ten Commandments, the law of God which His people must follow, especially in times of disaster. On January 5, 1860 the newspaper’s yearly “Carriers Address” was a poem with powerful religious language and imagery that lambasted sectionalism as being a false idol. The diatribe specifically targeted churches as being the cause of disunion:

Shall the Pulpit scorn its mission of love
 And false to God and country prove,
 Still outrage law with fanatical rant.
 And Heaven insult with blasphemous cant.
 Holding our laws as the veriest [sic] trifles
 Compared with the strength of powder and rifles;
 Shall doctrines of treason, rapine and blood
 Be all that the Pulpit teaches as good,
 Nor will it e’er from its blasphemy cease
 To utter again its message of peace?
 Shall demagogues base tempt fresh agitation
 To vex and disturb the peace of the nation,
 And ever intrigue for some selfish end
 With counsels which only to evil tend?⁵⁹

Sectionalism was more dangerous than regular sin because it threatened the cosmic order. In a letter to the editor “Old Mortality” expanded on the Valley’s view, “We always considered sectionalism as dangerous in one end of the country as in the other. As to the iniquities of the two and their abuse of each other it is very like the Devil and Sin rating each other on their respective complexions.”⁶⁰ While Old Mortality is likely not focused on the theological implications of his statements, they reveal deep-seated inclination in the Valley imagination to conceive of worldly events in heavenly terms. The writings of A. H. H. Stuart, a prominent Virginia statesman from Staunton, provide another example of this phenomenon. He wrote,

⁵⁹ *Lexington Gazette*, January 5, 1860, “Carriers Address;” please see Appendix B for the full poem

⁶⁰ *Lexington Gazette*, January 12, 1860, “Communicated: A Correction with a Little Addenda”

Providence designated the two sections for each other. We are as necessary for each other's prosperity as man and woman. The Union has welded us together, and I am ready to exclaim in the language of the ritual which sanctifies the most endearing relation of life, "Those whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder"... Again, I beg leave to point you to the dangers of these sectional organizations. Again, I invoke you to recur to the prophetic warnings of Washington, against all such organizations.⁶¹

Stuart's argument invokes two important aspects of the Judeo-Christian tradition, covenant and prophecy. Covenants were agreements which bound the two parties in blood not only to each other but also to the God, and breaking a condition of a covenant was a serious offense that turned the blessings of the covenant into curses.⁶² The Union was thus a divine, contractual entity between the North and South which could not be divided without divine consequences. Stuart presents Washington's Farewell Address as prophetic. The language of prophecy in the Bible is closely related to the maintenance of covenant, and to not heed the warnings of the prophet increases the intensity of national disaster. When writing in support of the Constitutional Union party, the editor describes the how the Union and its blessings are under divine providence,

We are struggling for no abstract dogma, the decision of which either way can have no other effect than to increase and prolong the fierce sectional strife which is agitating the country: but we are fighting for peace, for the supremacy of the Constitution and the Laws, for the best interests of the nation, in defence [sic] of our institutions, and for the perpetuity of our Heaven blessed Union.⁶³

The Union was holy, and any politics associated with its maintenance or destruction were inherently religious.⁶⁴

⁶¹ *Lexington Gazette*, February 9, 1860, "Letter from Hon. A. H. H. Stuart;" he also writes, "But we must remember that our Union, like the marriage relation, imports obligations of a reciprocal character."

⁶² Hayes, *Introduction to the Bible*, 78 & 118-119 & 129

⁶³ *Lexington Gazette*, July 26, 1860, "Organize for the Struggle"

⁶⁴ See also *Lexington Gazette*, August 9, 1860, "Political;" despite the title of the article, the language is more religious than political.

The religious language of Valley newspapers increased as support for sectionalism reached a critical point. Responding to the threat of secession, the new editor of the *Lexington Gazette* changed the newspaper's motto to "The Union must be preserved."⁶⁵ J. S. McNutt devoted the paper to promoting the Constitutional Union party in the upcoming election of 1860 and selected articles which framed the contest as one for the soul of the nation. In one article, Moore proclaims, "As to the notion that any State has a right to secede from the Union at pleasure, it was a monstrous absurdity: as well might the donor of the ground on which a church was erected, insist upon his right to dig away the foundation and cause the building to tumble into ruins."⁶⁶ He echoes scripture's language of rejecting the cornerstone, a rejection of blessings for curses. Colonel Baldwin of Augusta, "regards the Union as the palladium of our liberties and the hope of the world, and let anathema maranatha be upon the heads of all who would raise their hands to destroy it."⁶⁷ *Anathema maranatha* can be translated as "let the curse of the Lord come," and the phrase reveals how strongly Valley residents felt about disunion. A writer to the editor also declares, "May the curse of Cain light on all Disunionists, I care not to what party they belong, until they repent "in dust and ashes."⁶⁸ The integrity of the Union was foremost in the minds of Valley residents as secession began to be proposed in conjunction with the election of Abraham Lincoln.

In the election of 1860, the Valley once again found itself the source of a variety of viewpoints. John Bell for the Constitutional Union party and Stephen Douglas or John Breckinridge for the Democratic party were the popular candidates.⁶⁹ Though the Whigs in the

⁶⁵ *Lexington Gazette*, August 23, 1860

⁶⁶ *Lexington Gazette*, April 5, 1860, "The Substance of an Address Delivered by Hon. S. McD. Moore"

⁶⁷ *Lexington Gazette*, September 6, 1860, "Speech of Col. Baldwin"

⁶⁸ *Lexington Gazette*, September 27, 1860, from "one of the staunchest whigs of Rockbridge"

⁶⁹ The Democratic party experienced a split over slavery with Douglas viewed as the Northern candidate and Breckinridge viewed as the South candidate (see Shanks, 107).

Constitutional Union party portrayed Douglas and Breckinridge as promoters of sectionalism, especially the latter, their supporters in the Valley opposed secession.⁷⁰ Surprisingly, the people of the Valley did not view the election of Lincoln as cause for secession, and several town and county mass meetings passed resolutions stating so before election day; however, the resolutions made provision for secession: “We are for pursuing every constitutional means to defeat Lincoln; but if he is elected by the people of the United States, constitutionally, we are for obeying the laws under his administration, so long as those laws conform to the Constitution of the land.”⁷¹ Valley residents clung to the Union and encouraged voters to perform their sacred duty for the future of the nation. When commenting on a speech of Colonel Baldwin, the editor of the *Lexington Gazette* wrote, “When on the day of election the old patriarchs of the mountains with their children and grand-children come up from every lane and by-path of the country, to cast a final vote for the glorious whig cause, we have one wish for the Col., that he may hear the shout that will rend the heavens, *The Union forever.*”⁷² Preserving the Union was a multi-generational, sacred effort that united citizens of the Valley.

The threat of secession caused preachers and other religious leaders who normally did not involve themselves in politics to use their talents to maintain the Union. McFarland wrote, “This the day of the election of Pres.^t & Vice Pres.^t of U.S. I went to Greenville & voted for Bell & Everett. I have never voted for Pres. Before but for Gen. Harrison. Now I thought it my duty. I feel great anxiety about the result of this election...”⁷³ The state of national affairs was so pressing the seventy-two-year-old McFarland made the journey to the polls to vote for the

⁷⁰ Shanks, 113

⁷¹ *Rockingham Register*, quoted in the *Lexington Gazette*, November 1, 1860; see also from the same *Gazette* issue, “Preamble and Resolutions adopted by the Rockbridge Bell & Everett Club, Friday, October 26, 1860” and the *Gazette*, August 9, 1860, “Ratification Meeting in Rockbridge.”

⁷² *Lexington Gazette*, September 27, 1860, “Col. Baldwin’s Speech,” emphasis original

⁷³ McFarland, entry for November 6, 1860

second time in his life. The *Central Presbyterian* could also not remain silent and published an article on 1 Kings 12 warning how Israel's civil war led to the ruin of both sections.⁷⁴ A. H. H. Boyd, preacher at Loudoun Street Presbyterian Church in Winchester, gave a sermon on "The Benefits We Enjoy as a Nation." While few church members could argue with thanking God for fertile soil, a republican form of government, and intellectual and religious freedom, Boyd used the second half of his sermon to advocate for preserving the Union.⁷⁵ Despite knowing "of no greater curse that could befall the church of God than for it to be united with the state," he declared, "These are times when it is perfectly legitimate for the pulpit to notice the difficulties that environ the nation, and to bring the principles of Christianity to bear with a view to a proper adjustment of existing differences which endanger the peace and well-being of the country."⁷⁶ Religion could interfere in matters of state if the issue was of moral importance. Boyd went on to list the dangers that threatened the Union, particularly the party system, infidelity (socialism and abolitionism), and "the spirit of sectionalism."⁷⁷ Boyd, like many Valley residents, placed the blame for growing secessionist sentiment on Northern abolitionists who denied that slavery was an "innocent relation" that is "clearly recognized in the Word of God" and who have "divided Churches, destroyed the peace and unity oftentimes of families, converted the pulpit into an engine of destruction, instead of making it the great instrument for promoting truth and harmony in the community."⁷⁸ The South had understandable grievances with the North, but Boyd warned, "Infatuated indeed must be that man who, *for trivial causes*, under the promptings of

⁷⁴ Snay, 203-204. In this case, the South is identified with the Southern kingdom of Judea while the North is identified with the Northern kingdom of Israel; interestingly, we will see this same biblical passage appear in the argument for secession, except with the parties reversed.

⁷⁵ Boyd, "Thanksgiving Sermon: Delivered in Winchester, Va., on Thursday, 29th November, 1860;" please see Appendix B for quotations from the sermon relating to the benefits as well as quotations that relate to the place of God in the lives of His people.

⁷⁶ Boyd, 14

⁷⁷ Boyd, 12

⁷⁸ Boyd, 13

revenge, or of passion of any kind, would desire to see this Union of States dissolved, cemented as it was, by the blood of our revolutionary ancestors, and productive, as it has been, of richer blessings than any other government upon the face of the earth;” however, Boyd supported secession under the right circumstances.⁷⁹ He argued, “violation of the original compact between the States, and without any constitutional remedy...that the sundering of the ties that unite us as one people would be justified by the law of Christianity,” echoing the covenant rights of a wronged party.⁸⁰ Boyd preferred a peaceful separation, yet

And if that fails...I would unhesitatingly say to the South, and every Southern man who has a particle of self-respect remaining, would *then* say to the South, TO YOUR TENTS, O ISRAEL. IN THE NAME OF THE GOD OF JUSTICE AND OF RIGHT, SET UP YOUR BANNERS. IF GOD BE FOR US, WHO CAN BE AGAINST US.⁸¹

A mixture of scripture from 1 Kings 12:16 and Romans 8:31, this statement clearly calls for secession, but Boyd follows it with a plea for Christians to call upon God:

Act not upon the idea sometimes suggested, that the Almighty will not permit this nation to be rent asunder, because of its influence upon His kingdom in the world. Remember that He has not unfrequently, in His Providence, brought judgments upon nations which seemed to be necessary to the advancement of His cause upon the earth. Our hope, my brethren, is in God. Invoke His mercy. Pray that He would so guide and control the destiny of this great community, that we may continue a truly united people, recognizing each other’s rights, and ever aiming to honor God, and to promote the highest interest of the family of man.⁸²

Boyd knew much would be lost in a civil war, and he ended his sermon by stating “Christianity requires obedience to the constituted legal authority, so long as it does not infringe upon the laws of God.” As we shall see in Chapter 2, the religious leaders of the Valley believed secession would be detrimental to the nation and only justified it if the covenant of the Constitution was broken.

⁷⁹ Boyd, 15, emphasis original

⁸⁰ Boyd, 15

⁸¹ Boyd, 16, emphasis original. “To your tents, O Israel” is said by the Northern tribes.

⁸² Boyd, 18

To the displeasure of Valley residents, Lincoln won the election of 1860. Virginia's electoral votes went to Bell, but, at the local level, Breckinridge received a majority of votes in Frederick, Shenandoah, and Page counties; Bell received a majority in Augusta and Rockbridge counties; and Douglas received a plurality in Rockingham County (see Appendix A).⁸³ Shanks claims party loyalty rather than support of secession or slavery determined voting, and this view is consistent with the Scots-Irish of the southern Valley voting Whig and the Germans of the northern Valley voting Democrat.⁸⁴ McNutt, expressing his dissatisfaction at the election results wrote,

Of only one thing we feel sure, Virginia is right. God bless her—our mother, noble old Virginia. She was first in the struggle for Liberty—first in the Convention of 1787—her voice has ever been lifted with the power and calm dignity of unsullied integrity for Liberty and Union. And again she has spoken in a voice not to be misunderstood, to the madmen of the North, and to the madmen of the South. Her voice will be heard and heeded, and if need be her strong arm will be felt to drive back, come from what quarter they may, the Gauls from the Citadel.⁸⁵

The citizens of the Valley continued to hold the middle-ground and maintained that secession was wrong unless Lincoln violated the Constitution; however, discontentment grew as South Carolina seceded on December 20, 1860 and Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas soon followed.⁸⁶ Eastern Virginia newspapers like the *Richmond Examiner* and *Richmond Enquirer* pushed for a state convention, and their articles made secession popular among young people.⁸⁷ In a letter to his mother, John Cochran of Augusta County wrote, “We speak now of the United States as of a nation that has passed away as of a government that has lived out its allotted time and passed away into the dim past. More glorious things are looming

⁸³ Shanks, 115; see also Longenecker, 158

⁸⁴ Shanks, 116-118

⁸⁵ *Lexington Gazette*, November 8, 1860, “Nil Desperandum”

⁸⁶ Shanks, 123 & 137 & 134

⁸⁷ Shanks, 120-122. The *Winchester Virginian* was the press machine of Virginia Senator James M. Mason and supported South Carolina's action; however, the *Staunton Vindicator* maintained Mason “is no more a representative of Western Virginia than is the Emperor of the French,” quoted in the *Lexington Gazette*, October 25, 1860.

up in the now near future.”⁸⁸ Cochran made use of 2 Corinthians 5:17 to frame secession as the birth of a new, more holy nation. Hays notes, “Many word battles resulted between the young life and the older people,” and several incidents at Washington College and Virginia Military Institute occurred to the ire of the Lexington public as students raised secession flags and the staff took them down.⁸⁹ On January 14, 1861, the state legislature of Virginia passed a bill calling for a state convention and election of delegates to said convention; the current state legislators were elected in 1859 and were not representative of the current attitudes of Virginians.⁹⁰ The people of the Valley waited and prayed for peace as campaigning began for the special election.

Religion was the lens through which many people in the United States, including those in the Valley of Virginia, viewed their lives. They believed God acted in the history of the people and the nation, and only the divine could create unity despite nonconsensus in the political realm. Slavery in the Valley was not as widespread as in eastern Virginia and other parts of the South, but conditions were horrible, and many people justified the institution by appealing to natural order and the Bible. Nevertheless, groups like the Quakers, Mennonites, and Dunkers and a few individuals viewed slavery as an evil even if they did not support abolition. Love of the Union was strong in the Valley, and people often referred to the Union in sacred terms. As the threat of secession increased, the people of the Valley vowed to preserve the Union as long as the constitutional covenant between North and South remained intact. In the election of 1860, the Valley was the home of support for all candidates besides Lincoln; however, residents remained united in opposing secession even as the lower South seceded and public attitude changed in

⁸⁸ John H. Cochran, Valley of the Shadow letter transcription, Augusta County, December 21, 1860; emphasis original.

⁸⁹ Hays, 12 & 23-24

⁹⁰ Shanks, 150

eastern Virginia and among young people of the Valley. With connections both North and South and a deep religious conviction that God formed the nation, the Valley waited and prayed for peace. If the United States was God's chosen country, what right did Virginia have to secede? Curses would come upon the heads of the people who broke the holy bond of the Union. Whatever should happen, the people of the Valley trusted in God's providence.

Chapter 2: Pro-Secession, “To your tents, O Israel!”

¹⁶When all Israel saw that the king would not listen to them, the people answered the king,
 “What share do we have in David?
 We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse.
 To your tents, O Israel!
 Look now to your own house, O David.”
 ...¹⁹So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day
 -1 Kings 12:16&19⁹¹

The people of the Valley of Virginia continued to fight for the Union until they believed the sacred covenant to be irreparably broken. The resulting pro-secessionists were a varied group consisting of people more loyal to Virginia than the federal government, people who wanted to form a coalition of border states, and people who advocated for immediate secession upon Lincoln’s election. Secession and slavery had a complex but undeniable relationship as debates surrounding both subjects related to the covenant between the states. Pro-secessionists found religious justifications for secession in scripture, especially 1 Kings 12:1-24, the passage which narrates the separation of the Northern Tribes of Israel from the Davidic monarchy. While most pro-secessionists were staunch Unionists throughout the secession crisis, once Virginia seceded, they quickly transferred their loyalty to the Confederacy. Over time, the horrors of the Civil War and resistance to Reconstruction buried the Valley’s memory of Union sentiments. The Valley’s pro-secessionists held a unique, complicated position, causing the Valley’s decision to secede to be one of nonconsensus and thus not sufficiently explored or accurately represented in popular accounts of the war. Once the covenant of Union was broken, the pro-secessionists sought to establish a new, more holy nation.

⁹¹ NRSV; I will use the NRSV for all biblical quotations in this thesis because the distinct religious traditions in the Valley would have used different versions of the Bible. The Presbyterians would not have used the King James version of the Anglican Church and the Lutherans, Mennonites, and Dunkers would have used German versions.

The Conditional Covenant

As calls for secession increased after Lincoln's election, the people of the Valley sent delegates who shared their views to Virginia's special state convention in February of 1861.⁹² A. H. H. Stuart led the Unionist faction of the convention which sought to prevent Virginia's secession from the Union through any possible means. The delegates did not believe secession to be constitutional but opposed federal coercion of the seceded states and maintained Virginia could only leave the Union through revolution. The Unionists allied with the moderates who did believe secession was constitutional to form a conservative party and prevent the ardent pro-secessionist delegates from hastily removing Virginia from the Union.⁹³ Secession was the last and least desired method to remedy the state's grievances with the federal government.⁹⁴ In a speech that almost resulted in the delegate being burned in effigy or driven from Richmond, Moore radically

denied that cotton was king, discredited the rumors of "coercion" by the Federal Government, and declared the doctrine of secession to be "the most absurd and ridiculous notion that was ever presented...[The advocates] make government nothing but a rope of sand, and the most solemn compact that men can enter into is to be set aside by one of the parties to it."⁹⁵

Moore also argued Virginia, if the state seceded at all, should join "a border-states confederacy" and not the Southern Confederacy because Virginia's interests lay neither with the North nor the South.⁹⁶ Baylor advocated the more popular conservative view that "secession was nothing more than revolution, and expressed his opposition to embracing it, but he pledged himself to oppose

⁹² Shanks, 138 & 142-190; Samuel McD. Moore, A. H. H. Stuart, George Baylor, John B. Baldwin, John F. Lewis, Algernon S. Gray, Robert Y. Conrad, and John Letcher were important delegates from the Valley.

⁹³ Shanks, 159-160

⁹⁴ Shanks, 150-151

⁹⁵ Shanks, 164 & 258; see also *Lexington Gazette*, April 4, 1861, "Virginia State Convention"

⁹⁶ Shanks, 164; *Lexington Gazette*, February 21, 1861, "Virginia State Convention;" the editor of the *Gazette* noted "The idea of a Central Confederacy seems to be gaining ground in this section of country" on January 3, 1861.

“coercion.””⁹⁷ The conservative delegates of the convention thus placed themselves and their state in a delicate position contingent on the Lincoln administration not committing any act which their constituents would view as coercive. In the interim, the conservatives attempted to formulate a compromise between Republican statesmen and the extreme pro-secessionists of the convention.⁹⁸ Concerned citizens of the Valley organized town meetings to communicate their own resolutions to delegates, with the amount of secessionist sentiment varying greatly even among similar locales—in Rockbridge, the Kerr’s Creek community wished to remain in the Union even if the federal government violated the Constitution while the people of Collierstown were prepared to secede.⁹⁹ Overall, the integrity of the Constitution remained paramount. A. H. H. Stuart exemplifies the position of many people of the Valley: “My view of the true policy of Virginia is, that she should remain in the Union until all Constitutional means of obtaining redress for the past and security for the future shall have proved fruitless.”¹⁰⁰ The Unionists would continue in to maintain the Union as a conditional covenant as tension grew.

Slavery and Secession

In the Valley, arguments for and against immediate secession involved slavery. The Unionists claimed the institution of slavery could survive only if Virginia remained in the Union under the covenant between the states. The editor of the *Lexington Gazette* wrote,

⁹⁷ Shanks, 165; The conservatives defined “coercion” as “the use of force for collecting the revenue, enforcing the Federal laws, and retaining or repossessing the forts wherever the state as a political organization offered resistance” (Shanks, 191).

⁹⁸ After the desired Crittenden compromise failed in Congress several times, the conservatives worked with delegates the Virginia legislature had previously appointed to form a Peace Conference for the purpose of constitutionally addressing the issues between the North and South. The Peace Conference members drafted a series of resolutions less favorable to the South, but this compromise satisfied neither the extreme Republicans nor extreme pro-secessionists (Shanks, 145-146 & 151-152 & 161 & 260 & 170-175).

⁹⁹ *Lexington Gazette*, January 17, 1861, “Union Meeting on Kerr’s Creek;” February 7, 1861 satirical article on the difference between the communities depicts them preparing for civil war.

¹⁰⁰ *Lexington Gazette*, February 7, 1861, “To the People of Augusta County”

Our opposition to Virginia's going into a Southern confederacy, has been on account of the institution of slavery. We are devoted to that institution. Whilst we acknowledge that it has some evils connected with it, we believe that its general tendency is to elevate the condition of the African race... We have believed from the first, that if the Southern States unite together in a Southern confederacy, slavery will be driven out of Virginia.¹⁰¹

Entry into the Confederacy would quickly turn Virginia into a free state because enslaved persons would be able to escape to a separate nation which had no obligation to return enslaved persons to their enslavers, unlike under the current Fugitive Slave Law. Furthermore, Virginia's economic interests would continue to differ from the states of the lower South, especially if the Confederacy did not prohibit a foreign slave trade; Virginia had everything to lose and nothing to gain from joining the Confederacy.¹⁰² In a letter to the editor, "Old Mortality" challenged extreme pro-secessionists to "view Disunion in all its aspects, in its immediate as well as its future effect upon the country, and especially its bearing on the "institution of slavery"—the question which seems to have generated the present commotion... *a disruption of the Union of these States seals the doom of African slavery in the South.*"¹⁰³ A. H. H. Stuart also informed the people of the Valley that secession would lead to the emancipation of enslaved persons, "probably emancipation in blood."¹⁰⁴ The Unionists of the Valley understood with keen foresight how secession would likely lead to civil war and would undoubtedly destroy the institution of slavery, yet they would support Virginia's secession under dire circumstances. Thus far, slavery appears to be a rhetorical device Unionists used to prevent secession; however, the Constitution, the covenant which Unionists and extreme pro-secessionists alike claimed the North was threatening to break, protected slavery.

¹⁰¹ *Lexington Gazette*, March 7, 1861, "The True Policy for Virginia;" see also *Lexington Gazette*, November 29, 1860, "Is the Election of Abraham Lincoln to the Presidency a Sufficient Cause for the Dissolution of the Union?" and February 14, 1861, "A Southern Confederacy"

¹⁰² Shanks, 163-164

¹⁰³ *Lexington Gazette*, December 6, 1860, "Precipitation," emphasis original

¹⁰⁴ *Lexington Gazette*, February 7, 1861, "To the People of Augusta County"

Slavery was a clause of the covenant between the states, and when Unionists argued for Lincoln's administration to respect Virginia's full property and rights, they argued for the preservation of slavery. In a letter to the editor, "Virginius" states

Can the Union be preserved, consistently with the rights and equality of the States? *This is the question...let us make one last great effort to preserve the Union and the Constitution in their integrity, that the interests of all may be secured, and that the blessings with which we have been favored may be enjoyed by our remotest posterity. We would say to our Northern brethren, that we of the South love the Union—love it dearly; but that there is something which we love still more dearly, namely, the rights and equality of the States. We demand these, nothing more; we will be satisfied with nothing less.*—¹⁰⁵

The people of the Valley feared the unconstitutional end of slavery would lead to other violations of the Constitution, particularly actions which would threaten the ability of Virginia to self-govern within its borders. The editor of the *Lexington Gazette* declared

That is that inalienable right of self defence [sic] which no form of words, no constitution of government can either give or take away. When it comes to this we have a right to adopt the most efficient remedy, whether it be peaceable secession, or any more generally admitted form of revolution...Let Lincoln proceed to deliberate violation of the sacred charter he swore to "preserve, protect and defend," and from the North, the South, the East and the West, men will rise up as one man, for the defence [sic]—not of the South, but of the Union and the Constitution.¹⁰⁶

Slavery was part of the constitutional covenant, so it could only be ended through constitutional amendment. If Lincoln violated the covenant, then Virginia was free from any covenantal obligations. The complicated relationship between secession and slavery suggests the Unionists of the Valley were more concerned with the encroachment of the federal government than the preservation of slavery because they accepted Virginia's secession knowing it would destroy the institution; however, they always maintained slavery was the condition of the Constitution the North would be most likely to violate. Did the Unionists use the protection of slavery under the

¹⁰⁵ *Lexington Gazette*, February 21, 1861, "Whither Are We Drifting?," emphasis original

¹⁰⁶ *Lexington Gazette*, December 20, 1860, "Wrongs and Remedies"

existing Union to prevent the pro-secessionists of eastern Virginia from pursuing an immediate separation as the Unionists attempted to reconcile Virginia with the federal government or were they naively assuming the Confederacy would not fight to preserve slavery? Did they understand the consequences of secession but not the dangers of demanding Virginia's full rights and equality? Unfortunately, the Unionists' genuine but paradoxical and confusing position would allow the radical pro-secessionists to prevail.

Nonconsensus on Conditionality

Unlike the conditional secessionists who remained committed to the Union until the last possible moment, the extreme advocates of secession in the Valley were a vocal minority. In Lexington, Judge John W. Brockenbrough led the secessionist faction which argued, "the Union that the Constitution gave us no longer exists" and called for a united South to peacefully secede from the Union.¹⁰⁷ At a meeting of the people of Rockbridge County to discuss the secession crisis, the *Lexington Gazette* recounts the extreme secessionists causing trouble:

amidst the disorder & confusion, one of the sympathizers of plucky South Carolina, raised his voice above the noise of the assembly, and proposed three cheers to South Carolina, which were given by some 60 or 70 persons. Thus the meeting was broken up...If the vote of the county were taken, we do not believe there would be as many as 250 votes for secession.¹⁰⁸

The incident disturbed many Unionists of the county, and "Aliquis" wrote to the editor that he "witnessed with extreme disgust and mortification the close of the meeting on Monday. The only consolation I have is that it was not the work of the orderly well-behaved people of

¹⁰⁷ *Lexington Gazette*, January 24, 1861, "communication between voters and John W. Brockenbrough;" hilariously, the article is riddled with misspellings and typographical errors, suggesting the editor of the newspaper or typesetter was not pleased with Brockenbrough's position. Brockenbrough would later serve in Virginia's delegation to the Peace Conference, likely to the disappointment of many Valley residents (Shanks, 173-174).

¹⁰⁸ *Lexington Gazette*, January 10, 1861, "Meeting of the People of Rockbridge on Monday last"

Rockbridge.”¹⁰⁹ The biography of Elisha Franklin “Frank” Paxton, who was a strong pro-secessionist and became a Brigadier-General in the Confederate army, informs the reader the secessionists of the Valley were unable to “overcome the large majority opposed” to them.¹¹⁰ While unpopular with the older residents of the Valley, secession appealed to the youth, especially college students. The Washington Literary Society of Washington College debated whether Virginia should join the Confederacy, and the final vote was forty-three in favor and eight opposed.¹¹¹ Students also angered the citizens of Lexington by raising pro-secession flags at the college and Virginia Military Institute.¹¹² As the crisis worsened, one student gave a speech asking whether the spirit of the American Revolution which encouraged young men to “protect their “altars”, & their “fires”, and, to fight in “Freedom’s holy cause”” was still alive.¹¹³ The speech ended with “Sic semper tyrannis.”¹¹⁴ The pro-secessionists of the Valley viewed the election of Lincoln as a threat to slavery and the civil and religious freedom of the Southern states. The covenant of Union was permanently broken. With conflict between the Unionists who accepted conditional secession and the ardent pro-secessionists, the people of the Valley of Virginia could not reach a consensus on how to solve the secession crisis, but the different parties would soon find themselves in agreement.

¹⁰⁹ *Lexington Gazette*, January 17, 1861; Aliquis is Latin for “someone.”

¹¹⁰ Paxton, *Memoir and Memorials*, 4

¹¹¹ *Lexington Gazette*, February 28, 1861, “The Twenty-Second;” the students who argued in the negative were from Rockbridge and Augusta counties

¹¹² Hays, 23-24; see also W. G. Bean, *The Liberty Hall Volunteers: Stonewall’s College Boys*, 6-7

¹¹³ Unknown student, WLU Coll. 0455, 5-6; this speech likely influenced the name and motto of the Liberty Hall Volunteers, the company of students who volunteered for the army after Virginia seceded, which was “Pro aris et focus” (lit. for altar and for home; W. G. Bean, *The Liberty Hall Volunteers: Stonewall’s College Boys*, viii & 9 & 13)

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* 13

The Covenant Broken

Lincoln's inaugural address did little dispel secession sentiment in the Valley. In a letter published in the *Lexington Gazette* Moore wrote he was "surprised to find, that many sensible people have looked upon the Inaugural of Lincoln as very warlike, and as threatening coercion."¹¹⁵ Even the Unionists of the Valley viewed Lincoln's speech as endorsing coercion of the Southern states, but they would not allow Virginia to secede until an undeniable act of coercion occurred.¹¹⁶ In a private meeting with Lincoln on April 4th, Baldwin warned "if there is a gun fired at Sumter—I do not care on which side it is fired—the thing is gone...Virginia herself, strong as the Union majority in the Convention is now will be out in forty-eight hours."¹¹⁷ Baldwin's prediction unfortunately held true, and when Lincoln called for 75,000 troops on April 15th after the Confederates fired on Ft. Sumter on April 12th, Virginia's divided convention united to oppose Lincoln's act of coercion.¹¹⁸ On April 17th, the convention passed the ordinance of secession with eight-eight for and fifty-five against.¹¹⁹ The Valley's delegates were divided on the ordinance; however, many who voted against secession retroactively approved the ordinance at the behest of their constituents or to prove their loyalty to Virginia (see Appendix A).¹²⁰ Shanks describes this change:

Baldwin declared that while many people did not believe in the right of secession, they did believe in the right of revolution, and so, "in the face of Lincoln's "aggressive" policy

¹¹⁵ *Lexington Gazette*, March 21, 1861, "Extract of a Letter from Hon. S. McD. Moore, to a friend in this place;" see also McFarland, diary entry for March 6, 1861.

¹¹⁶ Shanks, 174-178; Conrad and his conservative allies proposed a final series of resolutions for reconciliation which occupied the convention for the month of March; however, William H. Seward and other Republican leaders were unable to keep their promises to members of the convention concerning the evacuation of Fort Sumter (Shanks, 179-190). The editor of the *Lexington Gazette* wrote on March 14, 1861 that "It is thought by those best informed as to the movements of the administration, that it has been decided by Lincoln's cabinet to evacuate Fort Sumter;" for the resolutions see the report from the Committee on Federal Relations, *Lexington Gazette*, March 14, 1861, "Virginia State Convention."

¹¹⁷ Shanks, 193

¹¹⁸ Shanks, 198-204; see also *Richmond Dispatch*, "Change of Sentiment in Augusta—Leaving of Troops, etc." as reported in the *Lexington Gazette*, April 25, 1861

¹¹⁹ Shanks, 204

¹²⁰ Shanks, 208-209; see also Longenecker, 44 & 259

“there are no union men in Virginia now.”” Several former staunch Union members of the Convention from this section advocated the acceptance of secession rather than permit Lincoln’s “despotism.”¹²¹

On May 23rd, the people of the Valley voted for secession.¹²² Former Unionists became pro-secessionists, reluctantly voted to show solidarity with the decision of their state, remained at home, or changed their votes due to coercion from extreme secessionists.¹²³ Many people in the Valley did not vote for secession lightly as they understood Virginia would be leaving the sacred covenant of Union to enter a civil war. Presbyterian minister and trustee of Washington College Francis McFarland wrote,

I voted...to sustain the action of the Convention as Revolution, for it is such. This is the most painful vote I ever gave. The Course of the Administration making actual war upon the South to compel them to remain in the Union, or return into it, see[m]ed to leave me no alternative. I mourn in bitterness over the state of things, but Va. did all she could for peace.¹²⁴

Despite the pain of secession, the pro-secessionists were resolute in their choice. The editor of the *Lexington Gazette* wrote,

The time has now come for us to bury party differences and party strife. We may hope for the best, but we must prepare for the worst. We must be united. Let us still act calmly and deliberately, but let us act together...we must hold ourselves in constant readiness to defend our firesides and our homes. When the soil of Virginia is invaded, or her rights are trampled, we hope that every son she has will be ready to buckle on his armor to fight and die in her defence [sic].¹²⁵

¹²¹ Shanks, 209; see also Longenecker, 162 and Hays, 25

¹²² Shanks, 213; see election results in May 30, 1861 *Lexington Gazette*

¹²³ Moore declared, “I would take the part of the United States government against all the other governments of the earth; and I would take the part of the people of Virginia against all other States. Go where she will, I will be with her, unless she disgraces herself by going where she ought not. I will fight for Virginia to the last hour, and although she goes against my consent, I will still be bound to follow her fortunes. My idea of patriotism compels me to go for my country against all other countries; for my own family against all other families on the face of the earth” (*Lexington Gazette*, April 4, 1861, “Virginia State Convention”). See also *Lexington Gazette*, March 14, 1861, “Speech of Hon. John T. Harris, of Virginia, in Favor of, Conciliation and the Union” and May 23, 1861, editorial on treating people who are still Union men with respect.

¹²⁴ McFarland, diary entry for May 23, 1861, emphasis original

¹²⁵ *Lexington Gazette*, April 11, 1861, “The Prospect Gloomy”

Analyzing the political ramifications of secession, Ames argues, “Valley Unionists thus did not secede because the Union was unimportant, but precisely because it was so important.”¹²⁶ While powerful and representative of the peoples’ feelings, Ames’ statement fails to understand the religious importance of the Union as a sacred covenant. Most people of the Valley always maintained a provision for separation if the Northern states broke the covenant of Union first.

The pro-secessionists of the Valley justified their actions by reinterpreting the Bible. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the people had a deep conviction that God divinely ordained the creation and destruction of nations; furthermore, they believed abolitionism and industrialization had caused the North to become a land of iniquity.¹²⁷ Southerners believed Northerners were encouraging a “dangerous apotheosis of the individual” and, through secession, they would be separating from a wicked people who had broken the covenant which lay at the foundation of the nation.¹²⁸ Snay explains how, “Like the saved sinner, the South experienced a new birth with secession, breaking its former connection with sin and beginning a new life as an independent nation.”¹²⁹ God’s blessing of the Union as the new Israel then transferred to the more obedient, holier Confederacy.¹³⁰ The North had broken the covenant, so the South was free to secede and establish a new covenant.¹³¹

Hermeneutics of 1 Kings 12:1-24

1 Kings 12:1-24 describes the separation of the Northern Tribes of Israel from David’s United Monarchy after King Solomon’s son Rehoboam vows to increase the peoples’ duties to

¹²⁶ Ames, 130

¹²⁷ Snay, 60-62 & 167-168; Chesebrough, 193

¹²⁸ Snay, 62 & 129-130 & 147-148 & 164

¹²⁹ Snay, 172

¹³⁰ Chesebrough, 227; Snay, 193

¹³¹ Rable, 36

the crown (see Appendix C for full quotation). This passage was the scripture pro-secessionists most quoted.¹³² The pro-secessionists of the Valley identified Virginia and the South with the Ten Northern Tribes who rejected the rule of a despotic king, Abraham Lincoln. As Jane Isabella Watt White, wife of minister William S. White of Lexington's Presbyterian church, describes, the people of the Valley viewed secession as the result of an imbalance in economic, political, and religious power between the North and South. Watt White wrote in her diary that

This war is the most unnatural, unheard of and wicked war ever known in the intervals of history I suppose. The South has given no provocation of the north. Indeed the North have been getting rich out of the south, and so far from injuring them, we have done them great favors. We have almost worshiped them, giving them the highest places in our churches, colleges, and schools...Even the best people at the North seem to be possessed with the devil...They know that she is only doing what she reserved the right to do on entering the Union at least Virginia did...But what meddles they have made war upon us, thereafter to desolate every hearth there in Virginia indeed to exterminate us all. Of this they are endeavoring to do. But our battles show that the Lord is on our side.¹³³

Secession was not only an act of restoration of the original covenant but an act of self-defense God ordained. In a letter to his mother, Hugh A. White wrote "Our cause is right... We are now in this condition. God has placed us in it. Our duty to him, as well as to our country, our liberties & our homes demands that we must fight."¹³⁴ The Civil War was a holy war to protect the sacred covenant and the Valley. The editor of the *Lexington Gazette* wrote

The South is united to a man in defence [sic] of our rights. We fight for our homes, our wives and children, whilst Lincoln and his host of Yankee greasers are making a war of aggression, stimulated by the desire of gain on the one hand and a miserable fanaticism on the other. With these feelings animating our hearts we do not fear the result.¹³⁵

The people "will never surrender to his despotic rule."¹³⁶ The pro-secessionists use of language similar to 1 Kings 12:1-24 allowed them to redirect the cause of secession and the war away

¹³² Snay, 192

¹³³ Watt White papers, diary entry for June 28, 1861

¹³⁴ Watt White papers, letter from Hugh A. White to his mother, April 25, 1861

¹³⁵ *Lexington Gazette*, April 25, 1861, editorial note

¹³⁶ *Lexington Gazette*, April 25, 1861, "The Departure of the Troops"

from the institution of slavery and toward defense of home and the true American spirit of government. In a letter to the editor “Rockbridge” explained that

Many people seem to think, that because Virginia has seceded, she is therefore now warring on our once glorious, blood bought Union. The father of lies never invented a greater one. We are warring only on “higher law” fanatics and cutthroats at the North, who, together with numberless demagogues, have been showing for long years the bloody harvest we are now reaping. Virginia together with the South may be crushed and killed, (which Heaven in mercy forbid!) but, conquered to submit, she never can be, until all the noble and true men, women and children are killed. No, never, never, at least this is the firm belief of an old man of Rockbridge.¹³⁷

The pro-secessionists believed they were fighting against the despotic government of Lincoln and the wickedness of the North to protect their homes and economic, civil, and religious institutions. While they did not directly quote 1 Kings 12:1-24, pro-secessionists used language that embodied the separation of two factions of a nation God ordained. This parallel to history allowed pro-secessionists to make a quick transition from secession to holy war although scripture does not immediately narrate war between the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

Hermeneutical analysis of 1 Kings 12:1-24 shows pro-secessionists of the Valley identified themselves with the Northern Kingdom of Israel although they failed to fully commit to the historical comparison. The scripture reads,

¹Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had come to Shechem to make him king...³and Jeroboam and all the assembly of Israel came and said to Rehoboam, ⁴“Your father made our yoke heavy. Now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke that he placed on us, and we will serve you.”

...¹²So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king had said, “Come to me again the third day.” ¹³The king answered the people harshly. He disregarded the advice that the older men had given him ¹⁴and spoke to them according to the advice of the young men, “My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.”
¹⁵So the king did not listen to the people, because it was a turn of affairs brought about by

¹³⁷ *Lexington Gazette*, May 23, 1861, letter to the editor by “Rockbridge”

the Lord that he might fulfill his word, which the Lord had spoken by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam son of Nebat.

¹⁶When all Israel saw that the king would not listen to them, the people answered the king,

“What share do we have in David?

We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse.

To your tents, O Israel!

Look now to your own house, O David.”

...¹⁹So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day

...²¹When Rehoboam came to Jerusalem, he assembled all the house of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin, one hundred eighty thousand chosen troops to fight against the house of Israel, to restore the kingdom to Rehoboam son of Solomon. ²²But the word of God came to Shemaiah the man of God: ²³Say to King Rehoboam of Judah, son of Solomon, and to all the house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the rest of the people, ²⁴“Thus says the Lord, You shall not go up or fight against your kindred the people of Israel. Let everyone go home, for this thing is from me.” So they heeded the word of the Lord and went home again, according to the word of the Lord.¹³⁸

The geographic directions of the tribes do not provide the strongest parallels for pro-secessionists, but they could identify the biblical figures with men of their own times. The pro-secessionists painted Abraham Lincoln as King Rehoboam because they interpreted Lincoln’s April 15th call for troops as an act of coercion against the seceded states and an unconstitutional declaration of war without the approval of Congress. Furthermore, the pro-secessionists could compare the two generations of Rehoboam’s advisors to the Northern Democrats who wished to prevent war and the Republicans whom Southerners believed wanted to subjugate the South. Watt White viewed the North’s leaders as despotic, writing “Cruel, wicked Yankees. Cruel Lincon [sic], cruel Scott, cruel Seward, cruel Blair, cruel Chase. What a crew. Truly the scriptures are fulfilled. “When the wicked bear rule, the people mourn.””¹³⁹ 1 Kings 12:1-24 does portray Rehoboam and his young advisors as fools for unwisely answering the Israelites’ demands for decreased financial hardship. Solomon built extensively during his reign, including

¹³⁸ See full quotation of the passage in Appendix C

¹³⁹ Watt White papers, diary entry for July 23, 1861; she quotes Proverb 29:2

the First Jerusalem Temple, and waged several wars which placed an extreme burden on the people. While the pro-secessionists of the Virginia were more likely to complain about their burden resulting from the Northern states not adhering to the Fugitive Slave Law, Moore argued that the other Southern states seceded not for slavery but dislike of tariffs.¹⁴⁰ Watt White also viewed the North as not relieving the burdens of the South, writing,

Our cause is a just and righteous cause. Theirs is cruel, wicked, oppressive, devlish [sic] and God knows it. O let the wickedness of the wicked come to noight, but let the righteous prosper. Good Lord be pleased to defend my dear precious sons...O most holy and righteous God thou knowest that we have not injured our enemies, or our country, on the contrary we have exercised great forbearance under their oppressions and done them good all the days of their lives, but they will not let us live in peace, neither will they let us depart in peace...¹⁴¹

Unlike the Southern Kingdom which allows the Northern Kingdom to separate without war due to a warning from God, the United States and Confederacy waged war. The pro-secessionists and even the Unionists as we will see in Chapter 3 believed God ordained the war, but 1 Kings 12:1-24 states God ordained the division of David's United Monarchy but not war between the kingdoms. The agency of the biblical figures is unclear as will the agency of the Southerners be as they begin to recognize they are losing the Civil War. Reflection on past events allows the writers of 1 Kings 12:1-24 to establish a narrative in which a series of events brought on by human incompetency is God's will, but the pro-secessionists are unable to do the same until Reconstruction. Beyond using "To your own tents, O Israel!" as a rallying cry for the war, the pro-secessionists did not continue with comparisons to the Northern Kingdom because the Bible condemns the Northern Kingdom of Israel as wicked and idolatrous.¹⁴² The worship centers Jeroboam establishes in Bethel and Dan with golden calves aid Northern interpreters who wish to

¹⁴⁰ *Lexington Gazette*, April 4, 1861, "Virginia State Convention"

¹⁴¹ Watt White papers, diary entry for July 20, 1861

¹⁴² See Boyd, 16

depict the South as idolatrous to slavery and Richmond as an illegitimate center of government.¹⁴³ After a series of proxy wars between the Northern and Southern Kingdoms under foreign powers, the unapologetically sinful people of the Northern Kingdom fall under the rule of the Assyrians who carry them off to a foreign land, causing the people to be lost to history as the Ten Lost Tribes.¹⁴⁴ Other pro-secessionists in the South, namely, W. H. Seat in his book *The Confederate States of America in Prophecy* tried to solve this exegetical problem by identifying the South with the Southern Kingdom and God's remnant, but the secession comparison then fails.¹⁴⁵ Pro-secessionists in the Valley and other parts of the South thus turned to scriptures beyond 1 Kings 12:1-24.

Other Biblical Passages

Pro-secessionists of the Valley used other biblical passages to justify secession. Henry Teaford of Lexington annotated F. E. Pitts' *A Defence of Armageddon: or Our Great Country Foretold in the Holy Scriptures* around the time of the Civil War. In response to Pitts' exegesis of Daniel 2:31-45, Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream about a statue of different metals, Teaford writes, "Might not this image of the feet be our country represented under the symbol of iron and clay as it now exists North V South...might it not represent a fanatical & superstitious North in opposition to a more civilized and religious South all the signs of the times seem to strongly foreshadow it."¹⁴⁶ The feet being broken apart in Daniel 2:34-35 likely prompted Teaford's thought. Teaford has little disagreement with Pitts' arguments comparing the

¹⁴³ See 1 Kings 12:25-33

¹⁴⁴ See 2 Kings 17:1-23

¹⁴⁵ Seat, 84 & 92-93

¹⁴⁶ Teaford, marginal note 28-29

United States to Israel; however, Pitts is mistaken that nothing could divide the Union.¹⁴⁷

Teaford writes “the larger of the nationality is at present in 1862 the most despotic government on earth” and compares the “base yankees” to the army of Gog in Ezekiel 38-39.¹⁴⁸ Once again, the tropes of a holy South and wicked North appear in the biblical exegesis of pro-secessionists, allowing them to make comparisons to any scriptural passage concerned with battles between good and evil. Pro-secessionists also quoted Romans 8:31, “What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us?” to justify their position.¹⁴⁹ The editor of the *Lexington Gazette* declared, “We have an abiding confidence in the successful issue of the great revolutionary struggle now going at the South, because we firmly believe that our God is with us and we know our women are. When they are for us, who can be against us and be triumphant?”¹⁵⁰ This paraphrase of Romans 8:31 is striking because the writer places the females of the Valley alongside the divine and broadens the “who can be against us?” statement to exclude the possibility of Southern defeat. The pro-secessionists viewed their cause as righteous because the people of the Valley and the South were the true inheritors of the covenant God established with the American people.

Covenant was the biblical belief vital to the interpretations of the pro-secessionists. Before Lincoln’s April 15th call for troops, the pro-secessionists of the Valley believed Lincoln and the North would repair the covenant which held the states together by addressing the South’s concerns about the continuance of slavery; however, an act of coercion convinced the pro-secessionists the covenant was beyond repair. Virginia would enter into a covenant with the other Southern states and form a more, holy nation. Pro-secessionists interpreted 1 Kings 12:1-24

¹⁴⁷ Teaford, marginal note 111

¹⁴⁸ Teaford, marginal note 45 & 102

¹⁴⁹ Boyd, 16

¹⁵⁰ *Lexington Gazette*, June 6, 1861, “The Women of the South”

and Romans 8:31 to establish the righteous South as in conflict with the wicked North. God would honor the covenant and allow the South to triumph. Through the use of covenantal language, the pro-secessionists were able to shift the cause of secession from the preservation of slavery to purification and self-defense. The people of the Valley believed their side of the Civil War to be just, so when the South lost the war, they had to reinterpret the Confederacy's divine destiny. The people did not stop believing God ordained the creation of the Confederacy, and they explained the South's loss as the result of national sins. Southerners had not kept the Sabbath holy nor repented of their love of money; they did not view slavery as the sin for which they paid. Unlike the Northern Kingdom of Israel, the South did not become lost to history, nor did the North completely subjugate the South as many pro-secessionists feared. Resistance to the North continued as the Valley's memory of the Civil War came to be viewed as apocalyptic.¹⁵¹ The people forgot their Union sentiments and the vision of a unified South replaced a nonconsensus of experiences, but the people of the Valley did not abandon their hermeneutics of secession.

¹⁵¹ See author's unpublished paper, "Apocalypse and Civil War in the Valley of Virginia"

Chapter 3: Anti-Secession, “Be subject to the governing authorities”

¹Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. ²Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.

-Romans 13:1-2

In contrast with other Valley of Virginia residents who ended their commitment to Unionism after Lincoln’s April 15th call for volunteers, a remnant of the Valley remained loyal to the Union. Their ranks consisted of members of the peace churches, community leaders and statesmen with a strong sense of God’s providence in history, and others with cultural and economic backgrounds which aligned them more closely with the North and western Virginia than the South and eastern Virginia. Anti-secessionists’ religious views were deeply intertwined with political questions about the nature of republican government and how Christians should respond to the authority of government as exemplified in their hermeneutical analysis of Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:11-17. They also believed the sacred covenant was unconditional. As in Chapter 2’s discussion of the pro-secession view, care must be taken not to confuse anti-secession with anti-slavery although beliefs about slavery did influence anti-secessionist positions, especially for the peace church communities. Anti-secessionists were a group with a shared conception of the Union as it existed under the United States government as sacred but differed in their views on the source of the Union’s sacrality and how to maintain its sacrality. While forgotten or suppressed during the period of Reconstruction and romanticized or appropriated in the modern Civil War imagination, the Valley’s anti-secession sentiments provide a striking nonconsensus reflective of the variety of experiences in the Valley. A portion of the Valley’s population believed the covenant of Union could not be broken.

Mennonite and Dunker Relationship to Government

In the Valley, the peace churches were concentrated in Augusta, Rockingham, and Shenandoah counties and mainly consisted of the German Mennonite and “Dunker”¹⁵² denominations although English Quakers were present in small numbers.¹⁵³ A commitment to nonresistance set the Mennonites and Dunkers apart from other denominations in the Valley and led members to refuse participation in war and even self-defense.¹⁵⁴ The Mennonites and Dunkers viewed themselves as peoples separate from the rest of the world, Christian and non-Christian, and emphasized fellowship and simple living in accordance with the teachings of Jesus Christ and the early Christian church as represented in the book of Acts.¹⁵⁵ A history of persecution led the members to support a republican form of government wherein they could enjoy free exercise of religion, and the peace churches reflected a commitment to non-coercion in their democratic organization and views on war, slavery, oath-taking, and baptism.¹⁵⁶ The Mennonites and Dunkers favored the New Testament over the Old Testament and opposed slavery as it violated Jesus’s commandment to “love thy neighbor;” however, unlike the Quakers, the denominations were non-activist.¹⁵⁷ James Lehman and Steven Nolt explain they “were not inclined to use the levers of government to reform society, even when they believed society was corrupted.”¹⁵⁸ Despite a theology of separation and dedication to non-coercion, the Mennonites and Dunkers’ history of persecution and emphasis on the teachings of the New

¹⁵² Note on Dunker terminology: the modern name is Church of the Brethren while contemporary names were “the Brethren,” “Dunkers,” “Tunkers,” and “German Baptists” due to the members’ manner of address and baptismal practices. Derisively or ignorantly, other Valley residents referred to them as the “Dunkards” (Bowman, 9-10). I will use the term Dunker because it best matches how the group was referred to around the time of the Civil War.

¹⁵³ Longenecker, 67-68

¹⁵⁴ Lehman and Nolt, *Mennonites, Amish, and the American Civil War*, 8 & 13; Bowman, *An Historical and Interpretative Study of the Church of the Brethren and War*, 32

¹⁵⁵ Lehman and Nolt, 13; Bowman, 21

¹⁵⁶ Lehman and Nolt, 20; Bowman, 15-16 & 24

¹⁵⁷ Lehman and Nolt, 19-20; Bowman, 17 & 93

¹⁵⁸ Lehman and Nolt, 31

Testament caused them to develop a respect for governmental authority which often clashed with their beliefs.

The Mennonite and Dunker denominations held with the opinion of Swedish pietist Christopher Hochmann “that civil government was divinely sanctioned by God and that Christians should submit to civil authority when the actions of the government did not disobey God’s word and the individual’s conscience.”¹⁵⁹ The members respected and followed the government’s laws, citing Romans 13:1 and 1 Peter 2:13-14; however, they reserved an exception for civil disobedience.¹⁶⁰ Dunker Elder James Quinter explained that

The principle of civil government is ordained of God, but that not all civil laws are thus ordained...Ambitious and wicked men have abused their authority, and made laws and regulations subversive of human rights, and destructive of human happiness. And obeying such laws, in many cases, would have been obeying Satan rather than God; where this would be the case, it is our duty to disobey such laws.¹⁶¹

The peace churches’ disobedience was not always overt as reflected in how their neighbors viewed them. The *Rockingham Register* maintained the opinion that the Mennonites and Dunkers were extremely respectful of governmental law as “They carefully and promptly pay their taxes to support the government which protects the slave holders as well as themselves.”¹⁶² The peace church members likely engaged in disobedience only when it directly impacted their way of life, separated as it was from the ways of the world, and the tension between governmental authority and individual conscience became evident in how the denominations responded to the secession crisis.

During the secession period, the Mennonites and Dunkers exercised their rarely used civil rights to prevent disunion. They normally viewed voting as acquiescence to the institution of

¹⁵⁹ Bowman, 35

¹⁶⁰ Bowman, 99

¹⁶¹ Bowman, 100

¹⁶² Lehman and Nolt, 42, from article in February 15, 1861 *Rockingham Register*

slavery and the waging of foreign wars; however, they voted against secession as “unholy rebellion.”¹⁶³ Pro-secessionist neighbors forced some peace church members to refrain from voting or to change their votes.¹⁶⁴ The war rosters also contain records of the involuntary participation of young Mennonite and Dunker men who were conscripted into the Confederate army and then deserted, fleeing to the mountains or Northern states to avoid punishment as fines for conscientious objectors increased in value and disagreement between state and Confederate federal law made earlier payments void.¹⁶⁵ Peace church members’ opposition to secession was mainly due to strong anti-war beliefs and a view of the Union as the legitimate form of government although members did welcome the opportunity for the end of slavery.¹⁶⁶ Peace church members did not have a radical program of civil disobedience, and they paid taxes and fees to the state and federal Confederate government which caused Northern commissioners to deny their claims during Reconstruction.¹⁶⁷ The members also had no qualms hiring substitutes or selling agricultural produce to Confederate quartermasters. Lehman and Nolt argue the “sense that the Confederacy had always lacked legitimacy did not allow them to see their actions as radical protests, but as signs of orderly submission to the properly constituted (Union) government.”¹⁶⁸ While the Mennonites and Dunkers resisted participation in war, they did not actively oppose the Confederate government through civil or covert means. Rufus Bowman observes “They wanted peace and waited for the will of God, as they thought, to work things out.”¹⁶⁹ The Mennonites and Dunkers opposed war and slavery, but their theology of separation

¹⁶³ Bowman, 97-98; Lehman and Nolt, 46; reports of coercion appear in the records of the Southern Claims Commission in Virginia.

¹⁶⁴ Lehman and Nolt, 46

¹⁶⁵ Lehman and Nolt, 57 & 61-69

¹⁶⁶ See Kline, diary entries for July 4, 1847 & January 1, 1861

¹⁶⁷ Lehman and Nolt, 61; Bowman, 111-112

¹⁶⁸ Lehman and Nolt, 228

¹⁶⁹ Bowman, 84

discouraged them from interfering with the powers of the world. Bowman argues “War was wrong for them because Christ taught against it. But they had not clearly interpreted the rightness or wrongness of the government to wage war.”¹⁷⁰ Disobedience occurred at the individual level, and the groups lacked the centralized organization needed to have a significant cultural or political impact in the Valley. As long as the government did not interfere with their lifestyle, the Mennonites and Dunkers were content to live alongside other settlers. They had little desire to change a world in which they did not participate.

Hermeneutics of John Kline

John Kline was a prominent Dunker elder from Rockingham County who traveled extensively throughout the Valley of Virginia and the Ohio River Valley as a missionary and preacher. He strongly opposed slavery and pleaded with the Valley’s delegates to the secession convention and state lawmakers to avoid war and keep the state in the Union. During the war, Kline served as the moderator for the Dunkers’ Annual Meetings and labored to keep the denomination together as the war prevented communication between Southern and Northern churches, crossing battle lines frequently despite the danger. He also aided members with securing exemptions from service which resulted in Confederate army officials jailing him for suspected Union sympathies in April 1862. A small group of young, pro-Confederate men murdered the sixty-six-year-old Kline on his way home from the blacksmith’s shop on June 15, 1864, and the peace church community soon revered him as a martyr.¹⁷¹ In diary entries from before the war, Kline discusses his views on slavery and patriotism. Reflecting upon celebrations for George Washington’s birthday, he writes: “My highest conception of patriotism is found in

¹⁷⁰ Bowman, 97

¹⁷¹ *Life and Labors of Elder John Kline, the Martyr Missionary Collated from His Diary by Benjamin Funk*

the man who loves the Lord his God with all his heart and his neighbor as himself. Out of these affections spring the subordinate love for one's country; love truly virtuous for one's companion and children, relatives and friends; and in its most comprehensive sense takes in the whole family."¹⁷² Slavery is immoral because it violates Jesus' commandment to love God and neighbor, and no one can call his or herself a patriot if he or she does not first recognize enslaved persons as neighbors and hold towards them the love of an equal. Kline confesses he "do[es] believe that the time is not far distant when the sun will rise and set upon our land cleansed of this foul stain, though it may be cleansed with blood. I would rejoice to think that my eyes might see that bright morning; but I can have no hope of that" because "the church and the world have shaken hands in a mutual agreement to live together in peace."¹⁷³ Like Kline, many peace church members desired to see the end of slavery, "But it is the aim of the Brethren here not to offend popular feeling, so long as that feeling does not attempt any interference with what they regard and hold sacred as their line of Christian duty."¹⁷⁴ A theology of separation and desire to live peacefully among white neighbors prevented the Mennonites and Dunkers from seeing their beliefs come to fruition, especially if war would be the only way to defeat the institution of slavery. On January 1, 1861, Kline writes with clear foresight for impending disaster:

Secession means war; and war means tears and ashes and blood. It means bonds and imprisonments, and perhaps death to many in our beloved Brotherhood, who, I have the confidence to believe, will die, rather than disobey God by taking up arms...It may be that the sin of holding three millions of human beings under the galling yoke of involuntary servitude has, like the bondage of Israel in Egypt, sent a cry to heaven for vengeance; a cry that has now reached the ear of God.

He does not shy away from the transformative power of war, but he does not wish his fellow conscientious objectors to be involved. Kline's writings demonstrate how peace church members

¹⁷² Kline, diary entry for February 22, 1849

¹⁷³ Kline, diary entries for July 4, 1847 & November 26, 1854

¹⁷⁴ Kline, diary entry for September 11, 1856

in the Valley held deep convictions about how Christians should live in the world while respecting governmental powers with which they disagreed, leaving vengeance in God's hands.

Kline best presents his hermeneutics in a letter to Governor Letcher and his jail sermon.

Writing to Governor Letcher, Kline explains that

We teach and are taught obedience to the "powers that be;" believing as we do that "the powers that be are ordained of God," and under his divine sanction so far as such powers keep within God's bounds. By *God's bounds* we understand such laws and their administrations and enforcements as do not conflict with, oppose, or violate any precept or command contained in the Divine Word which he has given for the moral and spiritual government of his people. By *government*, to which we as a body acknowledge and teach our obligations of duty and obedience, we understand rightful human authority. And by this, again, we understand, as the Apostle Paul puts it, "the power that protects and blesses the good, and punishes the evildoer." The general Government of the United States of America, constituted upon an inseparable union of the several States, has proved itself to be of incalculable worth to its citizens and the world, and therefore we, as a church and people, are heart and soul opposed to any move which looks toward its dismemberment.¹⁷⁵

This letter illustrates how members of the peace churches held in common with other settlers of the Valley God's mastery of earthly history; however, the Mennonites and Dunkers viewed the writings of the New Testament as superior to the Old. They were less likely to quote scripture from the Old Testament and agree with the tradition of covenant unless the concepts could support those found in the New Testament. The Mennonites and Dunkers also shared with other Christians the belief that God established the United States, but, unlike the pro-secessionists, this belief led the peace church members to view secession as an act of man's disobedience to God and not God's establishment of a new, more obedient and holier government. The government of the United States was God's government regardless of its shortcomings. The covenant was unconditional. While in jail under suspicion of holding Union sentiments, Kline preached to his fellow prisoners, mostly other Mennonite and Dunker men. He taught that

¹⁷⁵ Kline, diary entry for January 30, 1861. Kline also wrote to John T. Harris, his congressman, on February 1, 1861.

Righteousness is obedience to law. This is its most general meaning. This is its human sense. In its divine sense it is obedience to the laws of God. Wherein the laws of men depart from the laws of God obedience to their laws is disobedience to God's laws. Here arises a conflict in which each individual may decide for himself which he will do, the will of men or the will of God.¹⁷⁶

Again, Kline emphasized obedience to God's authority over man's authority. The emphasis on individual choice is a Protestant doctrine they shared with other Christians in the Valley, but the Mennonites and Dunkers used it to justify noncoercion. The principle of noncoercion supported their opposition to slavery while also preventing the members from engaging in meaningful activism outside their churches. Noncoercion was also the argument of pro-secessionists who interpreted Lincoln's call for troops as an overreach of power and violation of the covenant between the states, which may explain why some members of the peace church community diverged from the Unionism of their brethren. The Mennonites and Dunkers' anti-secessionist hermeneutics were strong enough to cause many members to remain loyal to the Union, but the hermeneutics did not inspire actions beyond mild civil disobedience.

Hermeneutics of Romans 13:1-7

Hermeneutical analysis requires a closer examination of the scriptures Mennonites and Dunkers used to justify their anti-secessionist stance, Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:11-17. In

Romans 13:1-7, Paul writes

¹Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. ²Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. ³For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; ⁴for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. ⁵Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. ⁶For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's

¹⁷⁶ Kline, diary entry for April 6, 1862

servants, busy with this very thing. ⁷Pay to all what is due to them—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due.

Paul's claim that all earthly authority derives from the authority of God is not radical at first glance because 19th century American Christianity encouraged this view and the pro-secessionists also accepted it; however, the broad nature of the statement and its historical context reveal a radical theological position. Christians during Paul's time were under the authority of the Roman Empire whose laws often conflicted with Christian beliefs, resulting in fines, imprisonment, and other persecution. How can Paul argue authority rewards good deeds and punishes evil ones if he himself has been the victim of unjust imprisonment several times throughout his ministry? Is he claiming God approves of evil laws? In contrast to Romans 12:1-2 & 9-21 and his other writings, Paul does not outrightly reject the evil ways of the world. The placement of Romans 13:1-7 between passages which greatly contrast with its message (Romans 13:8-14 also supports living in opposition to the world) suggests Paul may be attempting to protect fellow Christians from punishment and death. He encourages Christians to accept authority beyond its legal and financial aspects by relating conscience, respect, and honor to these civil duties in verses 5-7 to further protect believers. Paul's apocalyptic expectation may also influence this position of radical obedience to governmental authority.¹⁷⁷ He believes, as evidenced in Romans 13:11-12, that Christ is returning soon. If the Second Coming is imminent, then existing authorities can be tolerated as Christ will overthrow them and Christians will no longer be subject to God's servants but God directly.

Removed from the original context of the passage, the Mennonites and Dunkers interpreted it differently. They accepted earthly authority as an extension of God's authority but

¹⁷⁷ Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 331-343

rejected Paul's radical claim that the government's laws and actions were therefore just or to be tolerated until Christ's return. The writings of Hochmann, Quinter, and Kline recognize that God's "servants" can abuse their authority and enact evil laws of which God would not approve, especially laws regarding war and slavery. Furthermore, the Mennonites and Dunkers did not view themselves as disobeying the established authorities. The United States, the legitimate government over the peace church members and not the Confederate government, possessed the authority which "blesses the good, and punishes the evildoer."¹⁷⁸ The Mennonites and Dunkers' difficulty with Romans 13:1-7 then becomes one about how Christians should act when non-divinely appointed authorities are unjust and in conflict with God's law. Romans 13:1-7 does not anticipate their circumstances nor provide an exception for civil disobedience.

Hermeneutics of 1 Peter 2:11-17

While Romans 13:1-7 radically suggests authority always acts rightly because God establishes it, 1 Peter 2:11-17 provides an alternative view of authority. Peter writes

¹¹Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul. ¹²Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge. ¹³For the Lord's sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, ¹⁴or of governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. ¹⁵For it is God's will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish. ¹⁶As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil. ¹⁷Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

Earthly authority derives from humans and not God, and Christians must learn how to live as servants of God under an empire which views believers as lawless. The government retains the authority to praise and punish, but Peter's theological claim is more limited and conventional

¹⁷⁸ Kline, diary entry for January 30, 1861; see also entry for January 1, 1861

than Paul's because God's authority is distinct from that of humans. By making this distinction, Peter resolves the conflict between living as a Christian and maintaining good relations with other subjects of the Roman Empire. Christians cannot do evil but also cannot let their freedom from sin and the ways of the world disrupt the harmony of the community by planning to overthrow the empire. Unlike in Romans 13:1-7, civil disobedience is possible, but freedom should be exercised responsibly. The Mennonites and Dunkers supplemented Romans 13:1-7 with 1 Peter 2:11-17 to create a more agreeable position for their relationship to governmental authority, Union or Confederate. They could view themselves as separate from the world while still respecting the authority of a government whose laws conflicted with their positions on war and slavery to maintain peace in the Valley. Kline writes in his diary about how the Dunkers do not wish to agitate their neighbors over their anti-slavery position but does not encourage other church members to compromise their deeply held beliefs.¹⁷⁹ The Mennonites and Dunkers could oppose human laws while respecting the government's authority, which allowed them to pay taxes and sell produce to the Confederate government while also opposing the war and slavery.

Nonconsensus

Surprisingly (or unsurprisingly), nonconsensus existed among the Valley's Mennonite and Dunker populations. Near Waynesboro, an Augusta County Mennonite community under the leadership of bishop Jacob Hildebrand had members who voted for secession and joined the Confederate army voluntarily or complied with conscription.¹⁸⁰ Jacob R. Hildebrand, a cousin of the bishop, "did not subscribe to the tenets regarding the refusal to bear arms and non-participation in government affairs...His journal for 1860 refers to his attendance at meetings

¹⁷⁹ Kline, diary entry for September 11, 1856

¹⁸⁰ Lehman and Nolt, 3 & 59 & 190-193

and conventions for two Democratic presidential candidates.”¹⁸¹ His personal journal also records the entry of many community members into the army, including the service of his three sons, one of whom died during the war. While Hildebrand’s journal does not cover the secession period, it contains entries tolerable of or favorable to the Confederate cause. On March 19, 1862 and September 25, 1863, Hildebrand describes and interprets dreams of his wife and himself that prominently feature the southern and northern directions.¹⁸² His wife’s dream is particularly striking because a barn which represents the Confederacy burns until only the beams remain, perhaps representing a cleansing of the Confederate government and people’s sins for the restoration of God’s favor. Despite their respect for the Confederate government, Hildebrand and older members applied for exemptions and disliked the impressment of agricultural produce beyond the state-implemented tithes and taxes they paid.¹⁸³ Hildebrand called one such incidence “Rather a farce.”¹⁸⁴

Younger Mennonites in other areas of the Valley also broke with denominational ranks to devote themselves to the Confederate cause. Gabriel Shank was from a prominent Mennonite family, but when he enlisted for the army after Ft. Sumter, the members refused his baptism into the fellowship; instead, he joined a Presbyterian church, was captured in battle, and died in prison.¹⁸⁵ Other, unbaptized youths went into the army and then converted into the peace churches after experiencing the horrors of war.¹⁸⁶ The positions of the Hildebrand community and younger Mennonites suggest they supported the Confederacy for defense of their homes or transferred their respect of governmental authority from the Union to the new Confederacy; no

¹⁸¹ Hildebrand, *A Mennonite Journal, 1862-1865: a Father’s Account of the Civil War in the Shenandoah Valley*, xii

¹⁸² Hildebrand, 5-6 & 20

¹⁸³ Hildebrand, 19 & 14-15, & 35

¹⁸⁴ Hildebrand, 19

¹⁸⁵ Longenecker, 176

¹⁸⁶ Longenecker, 175; Kline, editorial anecdote for July 24, 1859 entry

evidence indicates they fought to defend the institution of slavery. As with the pro-secessionists, these peace church members may have viewed Lincoln's call for volunteers as a constitutional threat to the protections of religion or an act of coercion breaking the covenant. Hildebrand's entries in April 1862 provide explanation and clarification for why his community and other peace church individuals may have supported the South. On a fast day, the Hildebrand community prayed for "aid from the Allmighty [sic] in our struggle [sic] for Liberty & Independence [sic], Lord Regard the Government under which we live."¹⁸⁷ He also wrote of his son going "with the army to drive out Abe Lincolns [sic] Hireling tools who are Invadeing [sic] our soil & desecrating our homes."¹⁸⁸ This group perceived the Northern army as a more immediate threat to their beliefs about the purpose of government and way of life than the Confederacy's upending of the principle of nonresistance. Mennonites and Dunkers in the North could more easily devote themselves to non-resistance and support of the Union when battles were far away from their homes, but the proximity of war caused the actions and experiences of members in the Valley to be vastly different.

The Hildebrand community and young Mennonites and Dunkers justified their pro-secessionist stances by interpreting the familiar passages of their denominations in a different way than other peace church members. They accepted the radical totality of Paul's statement about obedience to authority and used it to legitimize the Confederate government. Living in the Valley of Virginia, they were citizens of a confederacy established by God and desired to obey its laws. They did not view their support of the Confederacy, even participation in fighting, as violations of church positions. While 1 Peter 2:11-17 does not attribute governmental authority to God nor encourage obedience to evil laws, the passage can also be used to argue against civil

¹⁸⁷ Hildebrand, 11

¹⁸⁸ Hildebrand, 11

disobedience. The pro-secessionist Mennonites and Dunkers could have interpreted Peter's teaching to "not use your freedom as a pretext for evil" as a reason why they did not oppose conscription.¹⁸⁹ They may have also wanted to prevent threats from extremely pro-Confederate neighbors. Additionally, the Mennonite and Dunker belief in noncoercion and democratic structure of the denominations may have prevented anti-secession churches in the Valley from shunning their pro-secession brethren. Ambiguities in texts like Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:11-17 illustrate how biblical scripture is rich in interpretations even for people with similar backgrounds. If everyone interpreted the Bible the same way, the Civil War would not have occurred.

For the Mennonites and Dunkers, anti-secessionist views were strongly linked to the experiences of the peace church community. Past persecution caused the denominations to develop a theology of separation which caused members to develop an unusual relationship to the authority of government. Mennonites and Dunkers respected legitimate governments as instituted by God but allowed civil disobedience if the laws of man opposed the laws of God. Other anti-secessionists whose views did not align with any one community or movement also justified their position using religion. President of Washington College George Junkin gave up family, community, and career for his anti-secessionist stance.

Hermeneutics of George Junkin

George Junkin was a learned Presbyterian minister from Pennsylvania who had previously served as president of Lafayette College in Pennsylvania and Miami University in Ohio before becoming president of Washington College in 1848. The residents of Lexington held

¹⁸⁹ 1 Peter 2:16

Junkin in high esteem for his efficient management of the college and prolific writings on education, religion, and politics. Junkin's family quickly became integrated into the community. His daughter Elinor became Thomas J. Jackson's first wife in 1853, his daughter Julia married Professor J. M. Fishburn in 1856, and his eldest daughter Margaret, the "Poetess of the South," married John T. L. Preston of the Virginia Military Institute in 1857. Two of Junkin's sons, E. D. Junkin and William F. Junkin, and a nephew, George G. Junkin, also established ties to the Valley.¹⁹⁰ A staunch Presbyterian of the Old School, Junkin firmly believed God controlled the destiny of the United States and anticipated the nation playing a central role in realizing Christ's millennial reign.¹⁹¹ Junkin's stance on divine destiny also contributed to his pro-slavery views, and he gave an eight hour sermon in Cincinnati in 1843 on the dangers of abolitionism to the integrity of the Union.¹⁹² Junkin continued to advocate for unity throughout the sectional crisis, especially as the students under his care became more overt in their support of secession.¹⁹³ When Virginia seceded from the Union, Junkin resigned his presidency and returned to Pennsylvania where he wrote and spoke on Unionism and ministered to Confederate prisoners.¹⁹⁴ Upon Junkin's death in 1868, his family buried him alongside his wife and other deceased relatives in Lexington. A firm believer in the divine sanctity of the Union, Junkin relinquished family, community, and career for his anti-secessionist views.

Junkin conceived of the Union as a sacred nation built upon the promises of a covenant, the Constitution of the United States.¹⁹⁵ In a letter to the governor-elect of Pennsylvania, Andrew

¹⁹⁰ D. X. Junkin, *The Reverend George Junkin...A Historical Biography*, 149 & 406-407 & 490-509

¹⁹¹ Ames, 53; *Lexington Gazette*, January 3, 1861, "A Voice from a Pennsylvanian in the Heart of Virginia"

¹⁹² D. X. Junkin, 430-453; Chesebrough, 19

¹⁹³ Hays, 23-24; D. X. Junkin, 509-526

¹⁹⁴ Hays, 26; McFarland, diary entry for April 18, 1861; D. X. Junkin, 527-567

¹⁹⁵ Junkin's earliest memories of religion also concern God's covenant (see D. X. Junkin, 29-30).

G. Curtin, which appeared in the *North American & United States Gazette* and widely circulated through the mid-Atlantic region, Junkin argues for the divine creation of the Union. He writes,

In fact, I am in the habit of presenting [the Union] to young men as a super-human production; not, indeed, as an inspired work; but God, by His wonderful providential movements, guided, directed, hedged in and shut up our fathers to the necessity of doing just what they did, whilst, in fact they were largely ignorant of the vastness, and comprehensiveness, and pliability, and yet durability of the structure they were erecting. And there it stands, in its sublime grandeur, the Temple of Liberty, in which the nations may bow and worship that God whose truth hath made them free.¹⁹⁶

God, working through the Founding Fathers, ordained the Union as the stronghold of an ideal Christianity which will spread across the world and usher in the millennial age. Junkin elaborates,

God has not created this nation in vain. It is not of His plan of government to dash down a nation in the morning of its days, and the dawn of its capacity for usefulness. I have always viewed this republic as the model government for the world; the home of the fugitive church. Here she rests in peace, and hence she is to herald over all the earth the glad tidings [sic, tidings? timings?]¹⁹⁷—the doctrines which alone can constitute a basis for human freedom.¹⁹⁷

Junkin claims any attempt to destroy the Union is wicked because it will prevent the Union from achieving its destiny. He asks “Now, who will immortalize himself, who will damn himself to eternal infamy, by casting the first bread [brand] for its consumption?”¹⁹⁸ While Junkin addresses this question to Southern secessionists, he also criticizes Northerners who do not enforce the Fugitive Slave Law because by doing so they have disobeyed the covenant of Union. When the states entered the Union, they made a covenant to be a single, sovereign entity, and refusal to respect national laws weakens this covenant.¹⁹⁹ The Southern states, especially Virginia, have a real complaint against the Northern states, but Junkin believes the covenant is

¹⁹⁶ *Lexington Gazette*, January 3, 1861, “A Voice from a Pennsylvanian in the Heart of Virginia”

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ *Lexington Gazette*, February 21, 1861, “No Sovereign State”

unconditional and cannot be broken. Junkin writes, “Because the Union was formed by compact, it is said the parties to that compact may, when they feel themselves aggrieved, depart from it; but it is precisely because it is a compact, that they cannot.”²⁰⁰ Northerners must correct their actions, and Southerners must work with their brethren to reaffirm the covenant. The proper response to sectional conflict is not secession because rejection of the covenantal Union is disobedience to God. In a letter to Francis McFarland, a trustee of Washington College and friend, Junkin asserts, “God made this government & he will not let any man destroy it.”²⁰¹ The Union is a covenant not only between the states but between God and the American people, and no human can break what God has established.

Along with many people of the Valley, pro-secessionist or anti-secessionist, Junkin believed in the holiness of the Union. He also accepted the institution of slavery as divinely sanctioned; however, unlike the pro-secessionists, he did not view Northern disapproval of slavery or Lincoln’s call for volunteers as actions which could break the covenant between the states, nor could the secession of the Southern states. Junkin’s writings suggest his conception of covenant was different from that of his peers. For Junkin, no human action could undo what God had established; humans could disobey the stipulations of the covenant, but nothing could break the covenant. Junkin’s view of covenant strongly adheres to the covenant of Deuteronomy 29-30.

The scripture maintains the covenant between God and Israel is eternal,

²⁹The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the revealed things belong to us and to our children forever, to observe all the words of this law.

¹When all these things have happened to you, the blessing and the curses that I have set before you, if you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God has driven you, ²and return to the Lord your God, and you and your children obey him with all your heart and with all your soul, just as I am commanding you today, ³then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you, gathering you again

²⁰⁰ *Lexington Gazette*, January 3, 1861, “No. 35—The Virginia School”

²⁰¹ Francis McFarland Papers, letter from Junkin to McFarland, January 19, 1861

from all the peoples among whom the Lord your God has scattered you. ⁴Even if you are exiled to the ends of the world, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there he will bring you back. ⁵The Lord your God will bring you into the land that your ancestors possessed, and you will possess it; he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your ancestors.²⁰²

Even if Israelites sin, they can repent and return to the covenant and enjoy the blessings of obedience. The covenant is for all the people of Israel, not only a remnant, which causes Deuteronomy 29-30 to differ from 1 Kings 12:1-24. God made the covenant with all the tribes of Israel, and Junkin believes the American covenant cannot be fulfilled if the North and South separate like the Ten Northern Tribes separated from Judah and Benjamin. Junkin views Virginia and the rest of the South as disobeying the covenant, so the states must be brought back into the unbreakable Union. The nonconsensus in anti-secessionist interpretations of scripture demonstrates how the people of the Valley employed a variety of hermeneutics to preserve the Union.

²⁰² Deuteronomy 29:29-30:5

Conclusion

Forgotten or shallowly explored in popular Civil War histories, religion significantly influenced Virginia's actions during the secession crisis. The people of the Valley of Virginia argued for and against secession by interpreting biblical passages, and their hermeneutics of secession were more complex and varied than in other localities because of the region's unique histories, cultures, economics, politics, and religions. Only lived religious experience as captured in primary archival sources can provide an accurate representation of how people made one of the most consequential decisions in American history. Most people in the antebellum Valley believed slavery to be a divinely ordained institution or tolerated the practice, but the presence of anti-slavery denominations created a convergence of Northern and Southern views. Contrastingly, all the people of the Valley strongly believed in America's divine destiny, and the Bible was the lens through which they understood contemporary and historical events. The Union between the states was a covenant that protected the civil and religious freedoms of the people and allowed them to prosper. Before Lincoln's April 15th call for troops, Unionists in the Valley opposed secession, but they perceived this act of coercion as threatening slavery and breaking the divine covenant. The pro-secessionists then interpreted their own circumstances using 1 Kings 12:1-24 to justify secession as biblical, and the covenant transferred from the Union to the Confederacy. Anti-secessionists in the Valley did not believe the covenant could be broken. The Mennonites and Dunkers interpreted Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:11-17 to justify their continued support of the Union and promote civil disobedience against the Confederacy while other anti-secessionists like George Junkin maintained Virginia could not exit the covenant if the Union was to fulfill her part in establishing God's kingdom on earth. Within the pro- and anti-secessionists factions, nonconsensus existed.

Over time, the apocalyptic horrors of war and the bitterness of Reconstruction buried the Valley's nonconsensus and created memories of a Valley united in defense of home and the South. Scholars seeking to uncover the Valley's true Civil War experience underestimate how religion permeated the secession crisis and contributed to the lasting impact of the war on the Valley's people. The variety of hermeneutics the people employed before the war suggests the post-war formation of memory was also religiously charged. More scholarship on members of the lower class and other demographics in the Valley is needed to provide a comprehensive view of Valley history and memory. This thesis is merely the starting point for thinking about Valley hermeneutics. Prevailing attitudes in the contemporary Valley are the result of deeply held religious beliefs and centuries-old methods of interpreting the Bible, and understanding how the people's hermeneutics functioned during moments of crisis can lead to productive conversations about how residents approach the Valley's unique history. The Valley is more than a monument to the Confederacy and Lost Cause. The Valley is a testament to how religious traditions can flourish together.

Acknowledgements

Many people deserve my thanks for supporting me throughout this project. The idea for this thesis began my first undergraduate year with a paper on divisionary prophecy and the Confederacy in Professor Kerry Sonia's War and the Bible class. Time spent in the University's Special Collections & Archives as a student worker increased my interest in the religious causes of the Civil War and revealed a gap of knowledge in Valley history. Special Collections has been invaluable not only to this thesis but my overall college experience. Tom Camden, Seth McCormick-Goodhart, Byron Faidley, and Lisa McCown have accepted me as one of their own. I would like to thank my advisor Professor Emily Filler for her guidance and encouragement throughout this process. She has been incredibly understanding and patient with me as I have struggled with multiple health issues over the past year. I would also like to thank Professor Alex Brown and the W&L Religion Department for providing an engaging intellectual environment in which to refine my critical thinking. My family, friends, and God have provided immeasurable support. Thank you to everyone. Words cannot adequately express all you have done.

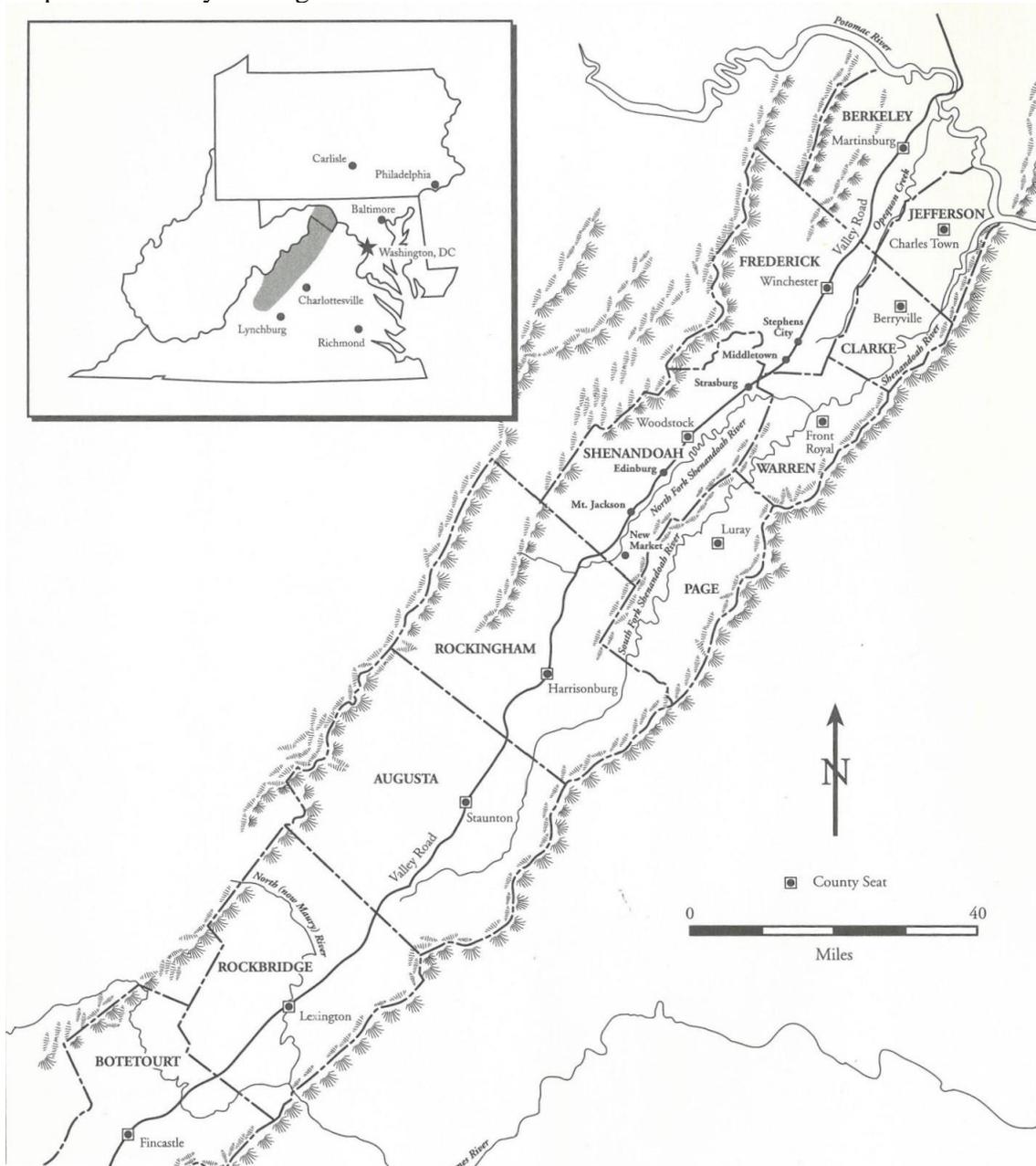
Appendix A: Maps

Map of Virginia.

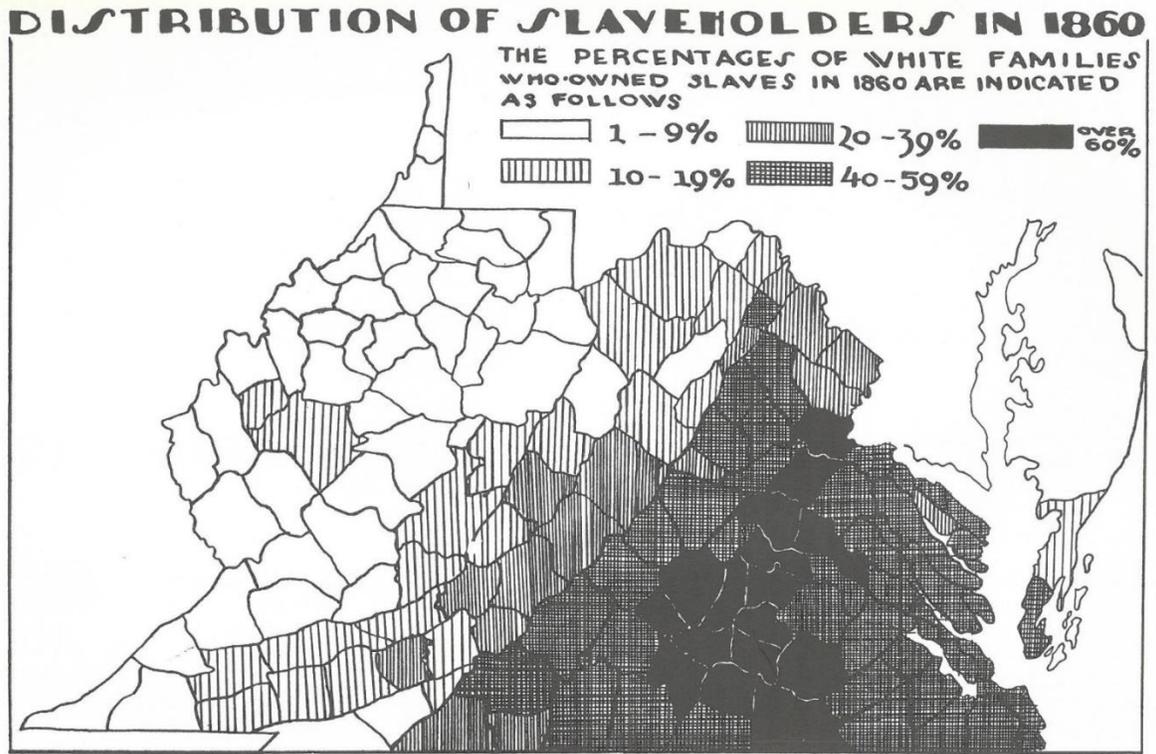


Shanks, frontispiece.

Map of the Valley of Virginia.



Koons, frontispiece.

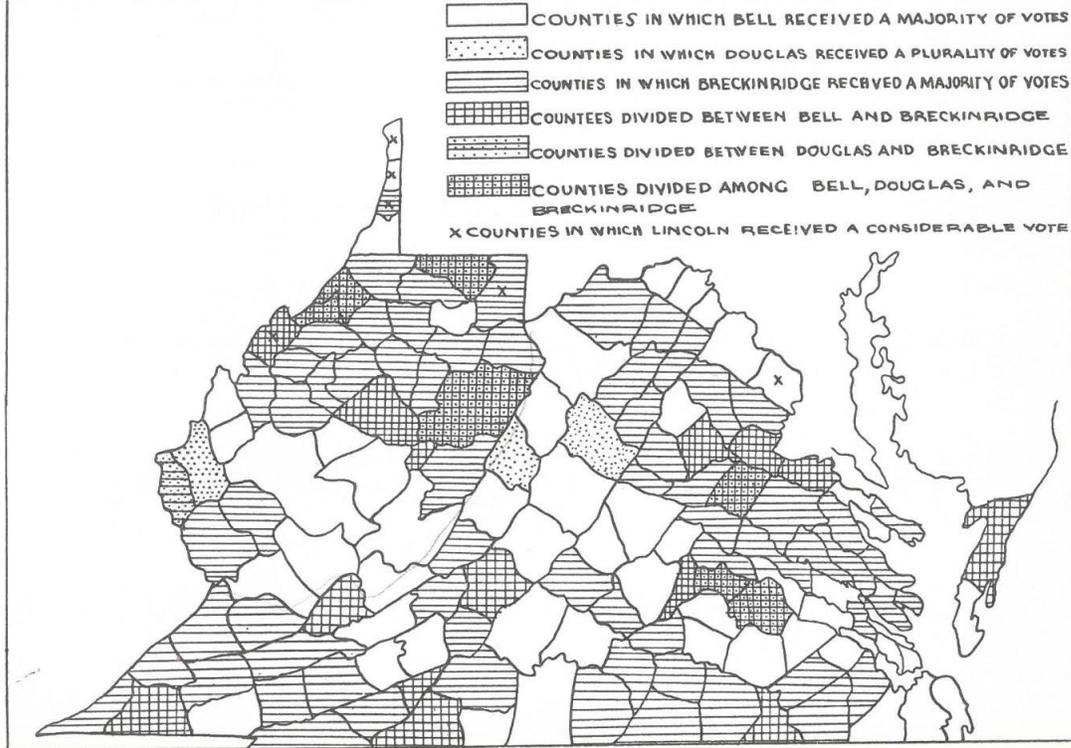


MAP II

Shanks, 10.

1860 Presidential Election Results.

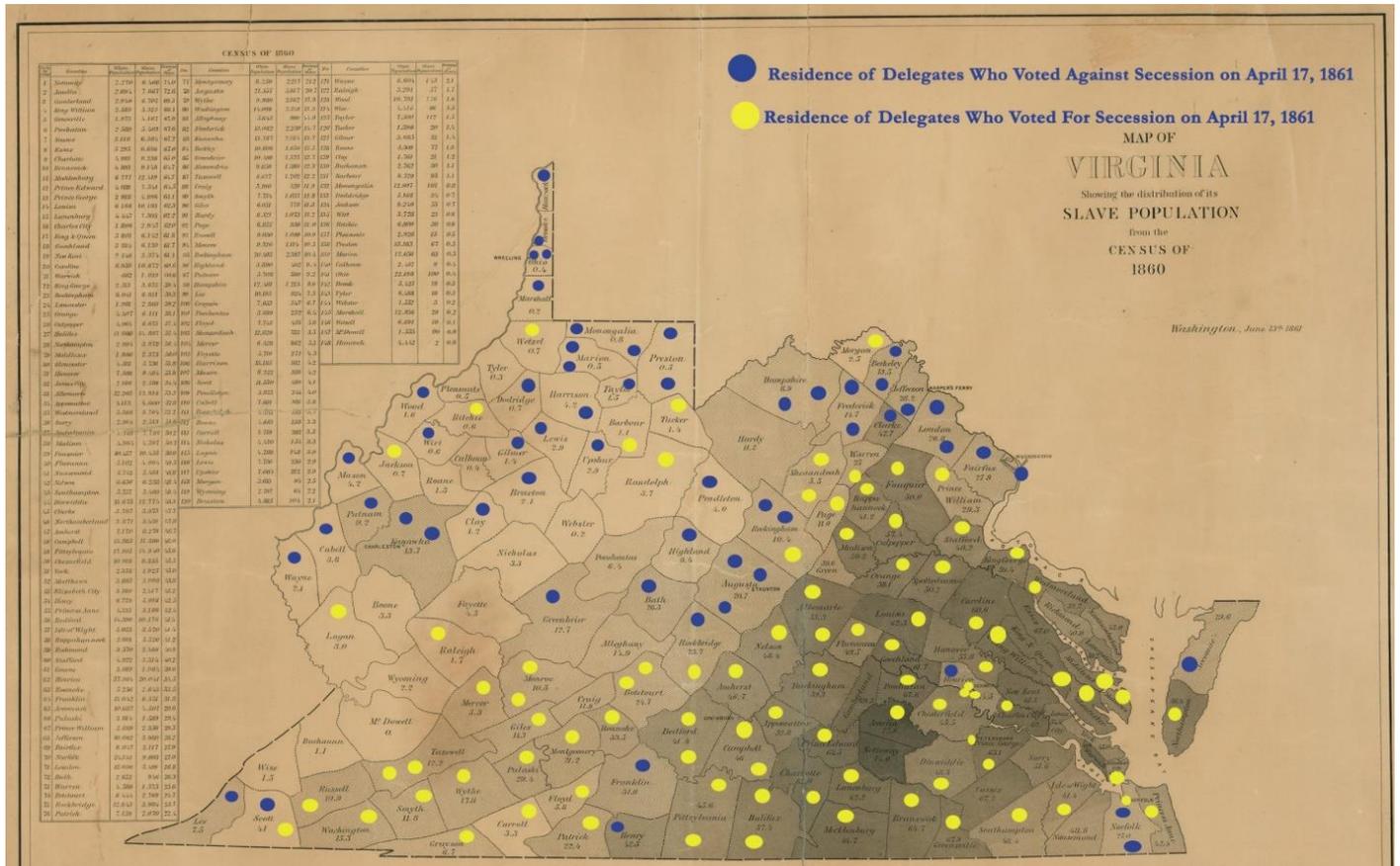
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OF 1860



MAP IV

Shanks, 116.

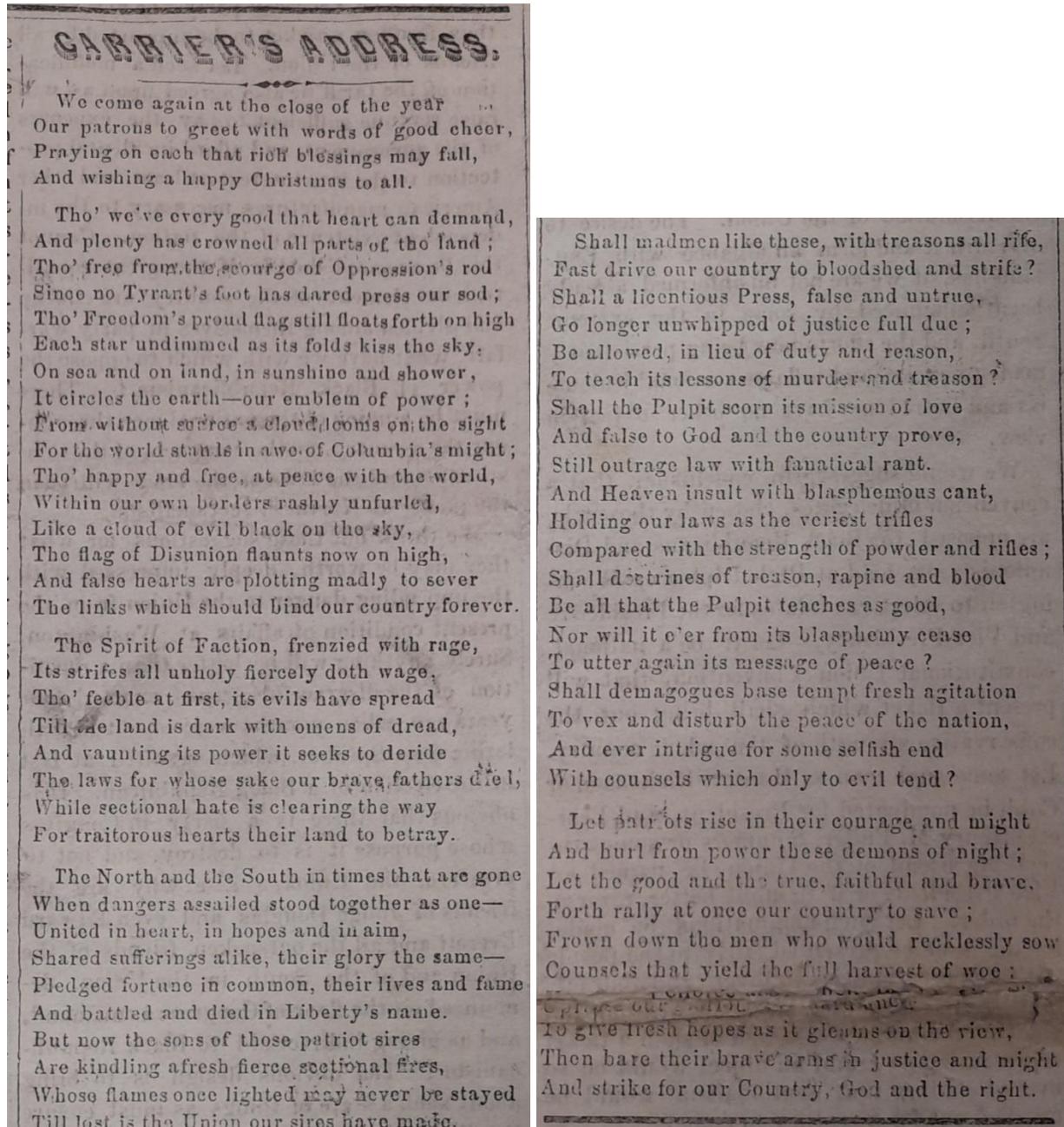
Map overlaying votes for and against secession with the distribution of enslaved persons in Virginia in 1860. As defined in this thesis, the Valley had five delegates vote for secession and eight delegates vote against secession.



Obtained from the Encyclopedia Virginia April 27th, 2022. [Delegates Who Voted for and Against Secession on April 17, 1861 – Encyclopedia Virginia](#)

Appendix B: Selected Primary Sources

Lexington Gazette Carrier's Address, January 5, 1860



Crumbled line as I interpret reads: "Upraise our ground [sanguine?] anew"

Selections from A. H. H. Boyd, "Thanksgiving Sermon," November 29, 1860

"There is something peculiarly appropriate in a great State doing homage to Him who guides and controls nations as well as individuals—from whom indeed flow all the blessings that distinguish a great people. The recognition of His power to bless, or to curse associated bodies of men, is a tribute due to His name, to His relations to the creatures of His power, and to the permanent interests of humanity. It tends to promote union and harmony in the body politic, and to the cultivation of such dispositions among individuals as enter essentially into the well-being of distinctive communities." (3)

"I wish to embrace this opportunity to present for your reflections another subject, important in view of the existing condition of the country, and one which demands the serious attention of all who love the land of their birth, and the institutions that have contributed to the dignity and glory of the nation." (4)

"we are reminded of the fact, apt to be forgotten amid the daily concerns of life, that we owe to God the blessings of the government under which we live, and the territory we occupy. He gave to those who established this form of government the wisdom necessary to devise such a system... (4)

"God has given us a heritage which others may envy, but which can never be torn from us, so long as we are true to ourselves, and to the principles that have hitherto governed us..." (5)

"Governments must stimulate the energies of the subjects by the protection of their rights, by ensuring their individual security, and by affording every facility, for a regular and profitable commerce." (6)

"There is no need for revolutions, in order to be able to publish to the world our sentiments on any subject, unless indeed they are of an incendiary character, and are in conflict with the recognized constitutional rights of States and individuals." (7)

"Here we know of no union of church and state...Our government—though pervaded by the spirit of christianity, and this because the people are brought to a greater or less extent under the power of the Gospel—is still exercised with impartiality towards all sects...I know of no greater curse that could befall the church of God than for it to be united with the state." (7)

"What a mighty power is this [Union, family relationships], not only to bind us together in indissoluble bonds, but to make us feel that, having common interests, we should live for each other's good, for our mutual elevation, and to disseminate throughout the world the principles bequeathed to us by our fathers!" (8)

"We have the Bible to which we owe the civil privileges that distinguish this nation. Its effects [sic] upon human society is oftentimes invisible, but most powerful. It restrains human passion; it promotes unity among all classes. Whenever its principles are adopted as rules of action, its all-pervading and transforming influence will be perceptible. Nothing like it in its power over the human conscience has ever been known..." (8)

“True wisdom dictates, that when what we value is imperiled, we do not close our eyes to the danger, but that we contemplate it calmly, and endeavor to apply the remedy. Blind indeed must be that mind which does not see that the inestimable legacy left to us by the patriots of the revolution is in danger...it becomes the pulpit to lift the voice of warning, lest, through the wickedness of men, His goodness should be turned to wrath, and the brightest hopes of the nation should be blasted, and a world’s salvation, humanly speaking, should be brought into jeopardy.” (9)

“It [infidelity] wears the garb of charity and philanthropy, and seeks the diffusion of its essential principles by a combination with other and more popular sentiments pertaining to the industrial pursuits of life, and prides itself upon having discovered modes of living that will conduce most to the temporal welfare of the human family.” (12)

“Reason and philosophy are substituted for revelation and common sense. God, if recognized at all in their schemes of improvement, is not viewed as supreme authority...The divinity of the Sacred Scriptures may be admitted, but their most vital and distinguishing doctrines are discarded, and opinions are inculcated as consistent with the teachings of the Bible which at once render perfectly nugatory its most essential truths. Hence in many instances the restraints of the divine government are thrown off. Moral character is represented as constituting no part of the basis upon which man’s eternal destiny is decided. All are to be rewarded alike. The laws of God and of man may be violated with impunity...” (12)

“Their [the Founding Fathers] object was to bind together in indissoluble bonds the entire country. They knew that every part was dependent upon the other, and that the strength of each was derived from the Union of all.” (13)

“In the North, under the influence of a wretched fanaticism, men are found who glory in the idea, that this Union may soon be dissolved. They would rather that *every* strand should be broken, and the country be deluged in blood—brother warring against brother—than that domestic servitude should continue to exist in the South. They have violated the known obligations of the constitution, disregarded its plainest provisions by opposing a law, enacted to carry out the spirit and letter of the constitution, and without which constitutional provision, it is well understood that his Union of States could never have formed...” (13)

Slavery “clearly recognized in the Word of God to be an *innocent* relation, as the marriage, or parental, or any other relation in life. To carry out their idea of the sinfulness of the Southern institution, they have made ecclesiastical judicatories, as well as the halls of Congress, the theatre for exhibiting their opposition to what they consider the great sin of the South. They have divided Churches, destroyed the peace and unity oftentimes of families, converted the pulpit into an engine of destruction, instead of making it the great instrument for promoting truth and harmony in the community...” (13)

“This exhibition of malignity and fanaticism has excited a corresponding degree and feeling and dissatisfaction with the Union on the part of many in the South...When one portion of the country deliberately tramples [sic] upon the constitution by which all profess to be bound, it is natural that the other section should feel that all obligation on its part to maintain the Union, has

ceased;—in other words, that the compact once broken by either party cannot be binding upon the other.” (14)

“To all human appearance nothing but a divine interposition will avail to our deliverance from the appalling calamities that threaten us.” (14)

“My brethren, I speak upon this subject not as a politician. Far from it. These are times when it is perfectly legitimate for the pulpit to notice the difficulties that environ the nation, and to bring the principles of Christianity to bear with a view to a proper adjustment of existing difference which endanger the peace and well-being of the country.” (14)

“Infatuated indeed must be that man who, *for trivial causes*, under the promptings of revenge, or of passion of any kind, would desire to see this Union of States dissolved, cemented as it was, by the blood of our revolutionary ancestors, and productive, as it has been, of richer blessings than any other government upon the face of the earth. I have no sympathy, my brethren, with the sentiments of any class of men, if such there be, who...destroy this noblest specimen of human authority the world has ever seen.” (15)

“violation of the original compact between the States, and without any constitutional remedy...that the sundering of the ties that unite us as one people would be justified by the law of Christianity, and might indeed be necessary to the advancement of truth and righteousness in the land.” (15)

“And if that [peaceful separation] fails...I would unhesitatingly say to the South, and every Southern man who has a particle of self-respect remaining, would *then* say to the South, TO YOUR TENTS, O ISRAEL. IN THE NAME OF THE GOD OF JUSTICE AND OF RIGHT, SET UP YOUR BANNERS. IF GOD BE FOR US, WHO CAN BE AGAINST US.” (16)

“Act not upon the idea sometimes suggested, that the Almighty will not permit this nation to be rent asunder, because of its influence upon His kingdom in the world. Remember that He has not unfrequently, in His Providence, brought judgments upon nations which seemed to be necessary to the advancement of His cause upon the earth. Our hope, my brethren, is in God. Invoke His mercy. Pray that He would so guide and control the destiny of this great community, that we may continue a truly united people, recognizing each other’s rights, and ever aiming to honor God, and to promote the highest interest of the family of man.” (18)

“The permanence of this Union, and the highest glory of the nation do not depend upon our navy and army. Our dependence is not upon any speculative theories of government. It is not upon the wisdom and power of particular individuals. It is not upon the physical resources of the country. These things are subordinate to another and far more vital element in every well-ordered society. It is rather the prevalence of a right religious sentiment and sensibility which constitutes the foundation on which we can rest our hopes of the continuance of this republic, and of the welfare of the people. Christianity, where it exists in its purest form, will be a defence [sic] and protection to any community.” (19)

“Christianity requires obedience to the constituted legal authority, so long as it does not infringe upon the laws of God...” (19)

Appendix C: Scripture

¹Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had come to Shechem to make him king. ²When Jeroboam son of Nebat heard of it (for he was still in Egypt, where he had fled from King Solomon), then Jeroboam returned from Egypt. ³And they sent and called him; and Jeroboam and all the assembly of Israel came and said to Rehoboam, ⁴“Your father made our yoke heavy. Now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke that he placed on us, and we will serve you.” ⁵He said to them, “Go away for three days, then come again to me.” So the people went away.

⁶Then King Rehoboam took counsel with the older men who had attended his father Solomon while he was still alive, saying, “How do you advise me to answer this people?” ⁷They answered him, “If you will be a servant to this people today and serve them, and speak good words to them when you answer them, then they will be your servants forever.” ⁸But he disregarded the advice that the older men gave him, and consulted with the young men who had grown up with him and now attended him. ⁹He said to them, “What do you advise that we answer this people who have said to me, ‘Lighten the yoke that your father put on us?’” ¹⁰The young men who had grown up with him said to him, “Thus you should say to this people who spoke to you, ‘Your father made our yoke heavy, but you must lighten it for us’; thus you should say to them, ‘My little finger is thicker than my father’s lions. ¹¹Now, whereas my father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.’”

¹²So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king had said, “Come to me again the third day.” ¹³The king answered the people harshly. He disregarded the advice that the older men had given him ¹⁴and spoke to them according to the advice of the young men, “My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.” ¹⁵So the king did not listen to the people, because it was a turn of affairs brought about by the Lord that he might fulfill his word, which the Lord had spoken by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam son of Nebat.

¹⁶When all Israel saw that the king would not listen to them, the people answered the king,

“What share do we have in David?
We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse.
To your tents, O Israel!
Look now to your own house, O David.”

So Israel went away to their tents. ¹⁷But Rehoboam reigned over the Israelites who were living in the towns of Judah. ¹⁸When King Rehoboam sent Adoram, who was taskmaster over the forced labor, all Israel stoned him to death. King Rehoboam then hurriedly mounted his chariot to flee to Jerusalem. ¹⁹So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.

²⁰When all Israel heard that Jeroboam had returned, they sent and called him to the assembly and made him king over all Israel. There was no one who followed the house of David, except the tribe of Judah alone.

²¹When Rehoboam came to Jerusalem, he assembled all the house of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin, one hundred eighty thousand chosen troops to fight against the house of Israel, to restore the kingdom to Rehoboam son of Solomon. ²²But the word of God came to Shemaiah the man of God: ²³Say to King Rehoboam of Judah, son of Solomon, and to all the house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the rest of the people, ²⁴“Thus says the Lord, You shall not go up or fight against your kindred the people of Israel. Let everyone go home, for this thing is from me.” So they heeded the word of the Lord and went home again, according to the word of the Lord.

1 Kings 12:1-24

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