

CO-WORKERS IN THE FIELD OF SOULS: THE CIVIL WAR PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN
UNION CHAPLAINS AND THE U.S. CHRISTIAN COMMISSION, 1861-1865

by

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B.S., Shepherd University, 1982
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AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

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The thesis of this work is that Union chaplains and the United States Christian Commission developed a close and effective wartime partnership that significantly facilitated their ability to promote Protestant evangelical Christianity among Union soldiers during the Civil War. This wartime association substantially aided their efforts to advance their theological and moral views among the troops. Union chaplains and Commission representatives gained considerable influence over the army's spiritual and moral environment during the war and were primarily responsible for initiating the widespread revivals that occurred within the Union Army.

Although they began the conflict as two distinct organizations, Union chaplains and the Christian Commission collaborated with increasing frequency as the war progressed. Their affiliation brought a number of advantages to each organization and significantly increased their ability to promote their evangelical beliefs with the soldiers. This dissertation contributes to studies on religion and the Civil War by analyzing the religious leadership provided by Union chaplains and

the Christian Commission and explains how they shaped the Union Army's religious environment during the war.

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Dedication

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

On January 2, 1864, Rev. Amos Stevens Billingsley, chaplain of the 101st Pennsylvania, wrote to the leaders of the United States Christian Commission to inform them of the positive developments that he observed in his work with Union soldiers at the Fortress Monroe military hospital in Hampton, Virginia.¹ He was especially excited about the growing number of soldiers attending worship services and their enthusiastic response to his preaching. He stated “that between 500 to 700 are coming and many leave because there is no room.” He continued, “They seem hungry for the Gospel. I have never seen such an encouraging field in fourteen years of preaching.”² The fervent response these Union soldiers gave to Billingsley’s appeals was not a unique circumstance, however. Religious revivals occurred throughout Union military camps over much of the American Civil War (1861-1865). Beginning in the fall of 1862, they continued relatively unabated for the remainder of the conflict. Current estimates of the number of Union soldiers who converted to Christ range from around 100,000 to as high as 200,000. No other conflict in American history has matched the sheer size and scope of the revival movement that occurred among both the Union and Confederate armies during the Civil War.³

¹ The United States Christian Commission was a wartime auxiliary group created by the Y.M.C.A. in 1861.

² Amos Stevens Billingsley to United States Christian Commission, January 2, 1864, Record Group 94 National Archives, Washington, D.C. Billingsley was a Presbyterian minister who served as a military chaplain with the 101st Pennsylvania regiment and as a hospital chaplain during the war.

³ Historians identify a comparable number of Confederate soldiers having conversion experiences during the war. Gardiner Shattuck, *A Shield and a Hiding Place: The Religious Life of Civil War Armies* (Macon, GA: University of Mercer Press, 1987), 92-93; and James Moorhead, *American Apocalypse* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1978), 69-70. Based upon his studies of the many ways religion influenced the Union and Confederate soldiers during the war, eminent Civil War historian James McPherson contends that they were the most devout armies in

The Union Army did not always give significant emphasis to religion. During the first year of the war, enlisted men, officers, and civilian observers frequently commented on the lack of religion and morality they observed among the troops. Chaplains also expressed considerable concern regarding the widespread apathy and disinterest displayed by the rank and file toward worship services or Bible studies. Furthermore, traditional moral boundaries often weakened or collapsed after these young men left their communities for the first time and acclimated themselves to army life. Many of these new recruits adopted habits and practices that were regularly condemned by northern churches. Religious leaders were deeply troubled at how readily soldiers embraced what were considered the unholy trinity of camp life: gambling, drunkenness, and profanity. The destructive moral influence and perceived lack of piety in the Union military camp became a matter of serious concern in the North.

A notable shift in the religious practices within the Union Army developed in the summer of 1862. Religious leaders observed that soldiers began to demonstrate much greater interest in spiritual matters. Visiting clergy, for example, became aware of a sudden increase in the demand for religious literature around this time. Regimental chaplains also noted a significant change in the camp environment. Soldiers had become much more open to discussing matters of faith and frequently approached chaplains to confer about questions or topics that pertained to their religious beliefs. The ardor that developed among the Union Army continued to intensify and materialized into a series of religious revivals by the fall of that same year. As previously mentioned, these revivals became quite prevalent and eventually emerged in nearly all of the

American history. See James McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 63; and Steven Woodworth, *While God Was Marching On: The Religious World of the Civil War Soldiers* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2001), 252-53.

northern armies, regardless of geographical location.⁴ Furthermore, the size and scope of the revival meetings continued to expand as the war progressed. Along with the scores of Union soldiers who converted to Christ during these revivals, a considerable number rededicated themselves to following the teachings of Jesus as well.⁵

Although the revivals provided the most visible expression of Christianity's prominent role among the troops, many other activities promoting Christian practices also gained considerable support during the war. Moral reform societies were among the most notable approaches that soldiers used to encourage an ethical environment in their camps. A substantial number of regiments formed these groups as a way to support biblical principles and combat what they considered immoral behaviors, such as drunkenness and gambling. The membership rolls of groups that encouraged upright conduct among the soldiers grew steadily over the course of the war.

Union soldiers also substantially increased their participation in activities traditionally associated with the Christian churches as the war progressed. Worship services and prayer meetings often became so crowded that buildings housing these activities were filled beyond capacity. Bible studies served as another example of activities promoting Christian principles that grew appreciably over time. Led by both clergy and laity alike, these meetings became prevalent within the camps both in number and in participants.

Religious literature served as another barometer of the spiritual enthusiasm that developed among the Union soldiers. The demand for such literature sharply escalated in the fall of 1862 and continued to expand for the remainder of the war. The requests for spiritually themed

⁴ Woodworth, 214.

⁵ The term backslider was commonly used during the Civil War era to describe someone who had previously made a profession of Christian faith but had become relatively lax or complacent in living out Christian principles.

materials became so great that those involved with their distribution continually struggled to find an adequate supply to meet the demand.

Union soldiers maintained a high level of religious commitment even after the war ended. Many northern religious leaders had feared that their soldiers would follow the same pattern as the Revolutionary War veterans and return to society with diminished piety and dissolute moral character.⁶ These fears, however, proved to be quite unfounded. Rather than coming back home spiritually disheartened, these soldiers helped initiate a time of religious renewal in northern churches. A dramatic upsurge in church attendance as well as a renewed emphasis upon domestic and foreign missionary work developed shortly after they returned in 1865. Pastors also found that church members began to demonstrate a greater commitment in their own religious practices after observing the example of these Union soldiers. A writer in the *Methodist Quarterly Review* addressed these positive developments and expressed the wish that the church growth might serve as the “first fruits of the discipline” of the Civil War.⁷

A significant transformation in the religious beliefs and practices of the Northern Army clearly occurred during the war. The army that was once characterized as giving little emphasis to religious matters changed into a military that became noted for its spiritual zeal and support of Protestant evangelical values. Two groups in particular played a pivotal, yet often unheralded, role in the substantial growth of religious fervor among Northern soldiers during the Civil War: Union military chaplains and the United States Christian Commission.

Union chaplains and the Christian Commission served as the Union Army’s spiritual leaders during the war. The two religious groups formed a close and effective wartime partnership that

⁶ Shattuck, 13.

⁷ Ibid., 14; and L. P. Brocket, “Philanthropy in War Time,” *Methodist Quarterly Review* 47 (1865): 81.

significantly facilitated their ability to promote Protestant evangelical Christianity among Union soldiers. It is the thesis of this study that Union chaplains and the United States Christian Commission were integral to the revival movement and religious fervor that developed among the Union Army during the Civil War. They maintained considerable authority over the army's religious affairs and significantly influenced the military's spiritual and moral environment.

Military chaplains and Commission delegates played a prominent role in the Union Army's religious revivals. They were at the forefront in helping to initiate the revivals in the Union camps, and they were also highly influential in promoting their spread among the army. Union military personnel were highly cognizant of the vital role that religious leaders played in this spiritual movement. Soldiers often commented that the regiments that were without a chaplain or the support of a Commission delegate experienced these times of spiritual excitement to a much lesser degree.⁸

These two religious groups also figured largely in the widespread growth of Protestant evangelical values in Union military camps. Chaplains and delegates frequently collaborated to promote Protestant principles with the soldiers. They commonly emphasized evangelical themes in worship services, hymns, preaching, Bible studies, and visitations. The religious literature they freely distributed served as another means to promote these perspectives since these writings regularly encouraged evangelical principles. Chaplains and Commission delegates were also frequently involved in relationships that mentored soldiers to become influential spiritual leaders among their brothers in arms.

⁸ Lemuel Moss, *Annals of the United States Christian Commission* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1868), 449.

Although they began the conflict as two distinct organizations, Union chaplains and the Christian Commission participated in cooperative efforts with increasing frequency as the war progressed. Their interactions during the first year of the war were relatively limited while both organizations struggled to ascertain their wartime role and identity. They began to work together with greater frequency in the conflict's second year for a number of reasons: (1) they shared comparable objectives in their work with the soldiers; (2) their relationship provided a number of benefits for both organizations; and (3) they achieved greater results when they worked together rather than independently.

The commonality in theological beliefs between Union chaplains and the Christian Commission played a pivotal role in facilitating their collaborative efforts during the war. The members of both groups generally held to Protestant evangelical beliefs. Evangelical Christians are the theological heirs of the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. The leaders of this movement, such as Martin Luther and John Calvin, declared that they were restoring the Church's teachings in areas such as the sufficiency of Scripture, justification by faith alone and the priesthood of believers. Any attempt to define evangelical Christianity precisely is likely to be challenged because of the varying historical emphases of the evangelical faith. This may explain in part why so many scholars use this term without identifying the particular beliefs of these theological heirs of the Reformation. However, this reticence has likely contributed to a diminished understanding of the distinguishing characteristics of evangelicalism among scholars lacking a familiarity with religious history. In his study of evangelicals during the nineteenth century, historian David Bebbington identifies certain tenets that comprise what he calls "the enduring priorities of the evangelical movement" of that period. These foundational views include: (1) crucicentrism, the atoning work of Christ on the cross; (2) biblicism, the belief that

the Bible is the authoritative guide in spiritual matters and activism; (3) conversionism, the need for personal faith through conversion; and (4) activism, the importance of being active in the work of God.⁹ Union chaplains and the Christian Commission frequently stressed evangelical Christian views with the soldiers. The two organizations recognized that they shared similar priorities in their wartime efforts and they worked together with growing regularity to promote these religious principles with the troops.

The two organizations also espoused a number of comparable aims in their work with the Union Army. While both groups placed an emphasis upon promoting revival, they also shared a common goal of fashioning righteous soldiers. From their perspective, the righteous soldier met the following criteria: he had undergone a Christian conversion experience; he had adopted a moral code based on the Bible; and he was committed to promoting this religious perspective in both the military camp and the home front. The members of these two organizations frequently worked together to cultivate these Christian warriors.

The partnership between Union chaplains and the Christian Commission also served as a mutually beneficial association. Their affiliation brought a number of advantages to each organization and significantly contributed to their standing and influence with the soldiers. Military chaplains provided Commission workers, who were identified as delegates, with greater access to the soldiers. Additionally, the chaplains' experience and interaction with the soldiers offered valuable insight to these religious leaders, who were often unfamiliar with army life. Thus, delegates learned how to relate to the soldiers and their circumstances far more effectively.

⁹ David Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism: The Age of Spurgeon and Moody* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 21-39. Religious historian George Marsden includes two other key tenets that characterized evangelical beliefs of that period: (1) The importance of evangelism and missions; and (2) the importance of a spiritually transformed life. See George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 4-5.

Conversely, Commission members had access to valuable resources that chaplains recognized could facilitate their own work with the soldiers. For example, chaplains greatly benefited from the Commission's donation of supplies to build chapels for the Union Army.

The two organizations also discovered that they enhanced the effectiveness of their wartime ministries by working in close association. The increase in manpower was one obvious benefit that came from their collaboration. In previous conflicts, there had usually been an insufficient number of chaplains provided to adequately minister to the soldiers' religious needs. Consequently, they were often overwhelmed by their responsibilities and unable to fulfill many of them. Furthermore, the vast demands associated with the position often placed them under severe time constraints and limited the chaplains' opportunities for personal interaction with the soldiers. However, the Commission delegates provided these religious officials with a valuable associate who could assume some of the chaplains' many tasks and provide personal ministry to the soldiers. The two groups also increased their efficiency by working together. Because of their similarity in objectives they were often involved in comparable endeavors. Their collaboration helped them to eliminate the repetition of planning and organizing these parallel activities, which then allowed them to give greater attention to ongoing efforts or to developing new ministries with the soldiers. Union chaplains and the Commission also benefited greatly from mutual strategizing. Their interactions helped them to coordinate their efforts so that they could direct personnel and target their limited resources in areas that were likely to yield the greatest results.

The Civil War provided Union chaplains and Commission members with a unique opportunity to promote their religious beliefs with the soldiers. Union chaplains had a great deal of personal liberty to advance their own ministerial agenda in the camp since the military had

created almost no guidelines for the position as of 1861.¹⁰ Consequently, they were able to give considerable emphasis to promoting evangelical views among the troops, regardless of the wide variety of ecclesiastical backgrounds found within the Union Army. This freedom also allowed them to promote programs and activities intended to help create the righteous soldier. With the war being fought on American soil, Union chaplains also had the rare opportunity of developing a relationship with a non-military group who could provide on-site support. The Christian Commission supplied chaplains a valuable ally to help them attain their objectives.

The Commission also operated with a great deal of freedom to carry out its ministry over much of the war since neither Congress nor the War Department had created any specific guidelines prescribing a voluntary organization's involvement within military camps. Indeed, the unique circumstances surrounding the Civil War offered Union chaplains and the Christian Commission a significant opportunity to shape the army's religious environment unlike any other American conflict either before or since.

Historians have given the subject of religion during the Civil War greater scholarly attention over the last few decades. Although this field of study was relatively neglected for most of the twentieth century, in recent years a number of scholars have addressed the significant role that religion had in American society during the Civil War era, which was evident on both the battlefield and the home front. Their research provides valuable information and insight regarding the various ways that religion influenced the military on both sides of this national conflict.¹¹ Moreover, recent studies emphasize the importance that Northern soldiers gave to

¹⁰ *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, D.C., 1880-1901), Series III, Vol I: 154, 157. Hereafter referred to as *Official Records*.

¹¹ James McPherson provides a particularly notable example of this development. In the afterword of *Religion and the American Civil War*, he states that scholars in the past often overlooked the important role that religion held during the Civil War. Yet, in his highly regarded work on the war, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, he provides almost no

matters of faith and effectively challenge the conventional position that the Confederate Army was significantly more pious than the Union Army.¹²

However, there is a need for an in-depth examination of the influential wartime relationship between Union chaplains and the Christian Commission. While recent Civil War studies address the common soldiers' beliefs and practices, the religious leadership provided to the army remains relatively unexplored. I believe scholars have not adequately analyzed how chaplains and the Christian Commission fostered the soldiers' spiritual fervor. This study will also explore how these two groups shaped the Union Army's religious environment. Particular attention will be given to the integral role they had in the widespread growth of religious revivals in the Union Army. I believe that a crucial facet of religion in the Civil War remains insufficiently analyzed. I will argue that Union chaplains and the Christian Commission were the driving force behind

reference to religion's influence among the armies. However, he addresses this oversight in the work *For Cause and Comrade: Why Men Fought in the Civil War*, where he analyzes how religion influenced the soldier's participation and perspective of war. Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson, eds. *Religion and the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 409; James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Shattuck, *Shield and Hiding Place*; Woodworth, 220, 230; Moorhead, 69-70; and C. C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schisms and the Coming of the American Civil War* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985).

¹² These scholars have found a considerable number of personal accounts left by Northern soldiers that provide vivid testimony of their devout faith in their writings. Apologists for the Confederacy frequently emphasized the Confederate Army's piety. They often referred to the large number of those converted during the war as an example of this army's Christian nature. Bell Irvin Wiley's study of the common soldier of the Civil War also played a considerable role in promoting the position of the Southern army's superior piety. He declared that while large scale revivals occurred in Confederate military camps, there were no large scale revivals in the Union camps. However, recent studies challenge the accuracy of Wiley's assessment based upon questions over his research methodology. Joseph Glatthaar observed that Wiley drew his conclusions regarding the Union soldiers' religious habits almost solely from the Army of the Potomac during the early stages of the war, which was prior to the numerous revivals that occurred among northern soldiers from 1863-1865. Thus, Wiley based his conclusions about Union soldiers during a time that religion was at one of its weakest points with the army. Gregory Urwin raises another concern regarding Wiley's research. Urwin notes that the 180,000 black troops who fought in the Federal army were basically ignored in the depiction of the Union soldier. Consequently, Wiley glosses over this group of soldiers that gave significant emphasis to religious matters. Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Johnny Reb* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1943), 180-83; *The Life of Billy Yank* (Indianapolis, IN.: Bobbs-Merrill, 1951), 358-9; Joseph Glatthaar, *The March to the Sea and Beyond: Sherman's Troops in the Savannah and Carolina Campaigns* (New York: University of New York Press, 1985), xi, 15-38, 93-7; and Gregory Urwin, "The Lord Has not Forsaken Me and I Won't Forsake Him: Religion in Frederick Steele's Union Army," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, 52 no. 3 (1993): 318-40.

the Union Army's widespread revival movement. I will also demonstrate that the collaboration between the chaplains and the Commission greatly enhanced their ability to promote Protestant evangelicalism among the troops. This study will address how the wartime association of the Union chaplains and the Christian Commission enabled them to advance Protestant evangelicalism during the four-year conflict.¹³

The personal correspondence between Union chaplains and the Christian Commission plays an especially prominent role in this study. The letters among the members of these two groups offer a valuable glimpse into the close relationship that developed between them during the war. The correspondence also demonstrates how they collaborated to achieve their shared religious goals. The journals and diaries of chaplains and Commission workers also supply valuable information regarding their perspectives on their efforts to promote Protestant evangelicalism with the soldiers. The letters and personal writings of Union soldiers are other helpful resources and provide insight to how the chaplains and Commission workers influenced the beliefs and practices of the Northern army. The field reports written by Commission delegates to their headquarters also offer useful data regarding their ministerial work in the military camps. Additionally, newspaper articles and religious journals from the Civil War era serve as pertinent sources of information regarding the events and activities of that period.

The growing scholarly interest in religion during the Civil War has prompted a number of studies on the military chaplains' wartime work. While most of the historiographical literature has focused upon Confederate chaplains, there have been a number of works that address the

¹³ It will be noted that this study does not include the work of Union naval chaplains and the Christian Commission. This exclusion is based on the considerable differences that the maritime environment introduced into the relationship between the members of these two organizations. While the Commission members labored to address the spiritual and physical needs of the Union sailors, they lacked the same opportunities to interact with naval chaplains.

wartime efforts of their Northern counterparts. Historian and former army chaplain Herman Norton provides an historical overview of the military chaplaincy from the time of the U.S. Constitution's ratification up to the conclusion of the Civil War in *Struggling for Recognition: The United States Army Chaplaincy, 1791-1865*.¹⁴ In the second volume of this three-volume history of the military chaplaincy, Norton chronicles the vast changes that developed in the military office during this seventy-four year period.

Norton focuses upon the instability of the position over much of this tumultuous era and the many obstacles that the chaplaincy faced. He identifies the oft-repeating cycle of military expansion and contraction as a primary cause for the frequently precarious state. The chaplaincy experienced constant changes to both the number of those appointed to the position and the location of their service during the first half of the nineteenth century because of the government's frequent revisions in military policy. Consequently, there was little opportunity to develop much stability or many traditions with the office. However, Norton identifies the government's failure to define their military role as the primary contributor to the chaplaincy's struggles throughout this period. The need for a policy delineating their status and position was especially keen in the Civil War during which the absence of official guidelines often hampered their ability to function effectively. Yet, even in the midst of the various difficulties, Norton frequently emphasizes how chaplains adapted to the difficulties and faithfully carried out their work. He also identifies a significant transition developing in the chaplains' perception of their office during the Civil War. Prior to this conflict, he believes that most who held the position viewed themselves primarily as clergy who were there to minister to the soldiers. As the war

¹⁴ Herman A. Norton, *Struggling for Recognition: The United States Army Chaplaincy, 1791-1865* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1977). Norton served as an army chaplain during World War Two.

progressed, however, chaplains began to give greater prominence to their military role as the government enacted standards for the position. Norton's treatment of the chaplaincy during the Civil War suffers from a lack of balance, however. The study focuses almost solely on the chaplains' secular labors and provides insufficient attention to their efforts to address the spiritual needs of the soldiers. Furthermore, Norton virtually ignores the interaction that chaplains frequently had with the Christian Commission during the war.

Warren B. Armstrong serves as an apologist for the Union chaplain in *For Courageous Fighting and Confident Dying: Union Chaplains in the Civil War*.¹⁵ His purpose for writing this work was to refute the charge that most of the chaplains who served during the war were either incompetent or ineffective in their attempts to meet the needs of the soldiers.¹⁶ To support his contention, Armstrong focuses upon the wide range of labors performed by chaplains over the course of the war to illustrate the significance of their efforts. He emphasizes that it was this willingness and ability to perform such a diverse assortment of tasks for the soldiers' benefit that made them such a valuable asset to the Union cause. Unfortunately, the lack of analysis provided in this work serves as one of its biggest weaknesses. For instance, although there were significant theological differences among the various chaplains, the impact that these contrasting views had on their wartime labors is minimized. A related concern is that the study does not supply the same level of insight to the chaplains' spiritual endeavors as it did to the secular labors. Consequently, Armstrong's treatment of the Union chaplain suffers from the same problem as Norton's: it provides an incomplete portrayal of the chaplaincy's wartime labors.

¹⁵ Warren B. Armstrong, *For Courageous Fighting and Confident Dying: Union Chaplains in the Civil War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998).

¹⁶ Rollin W. Quimby, "The Chaplain's Predicament," *Civil War History* 8 no. 1 (1962): 25-37.

John W. Brinsfield, William C. Davis, Benedict Maryniak and James I. Robertson, Jr. highlight the work of Civil War chaplains in their book *Faith in the Fight: Civil War Chaplains*.¹⁷ The book is divided into three sections. The first includes two essays that individually address the Union and Confederate chaplaincies. The second section draws from the wartime letters and memoirs of the chaplains describing their experiences. Finally, the last section provides a listing of the Union and Confederate chaplains who served during the war. In all, the authors supply background information on the 3,694 men who were commissioned as chaplains during the war.

The roster they provide is the most extensive account of Civil War chaplains on record and makes a valuable contribution to this subject matter. Maryniak, a Civil War researcher, supplies the essay on the chaplains from the North. Regrettably, his presentation offers little toward advancing the study of chaplains. His depiction of the Union chaplains' wartime service generally reiterates the information presented by Norton and Armstrong. Maryniak's harsh treatment of evangelical Christians serves as a major problem in this study. He consistently belittles both the motivations and actions of those he identifies as evangelicals. An example of this extremely critical characterization occurred in his initial description of General O. O. Howard, a Union officer who was well known for his religious devotion and strong support of religious revivals. Maryniak describes the military leader as "all but hopeless as a general" and "one part flesh and three-parts holy fool."¹⁸ The YMCA and Christian Commission fare little better. Both of these groups come across as extremely manipulative and intolerant in their religious beliefs and practices. His references to these groups focus almost exclusively on

¹⁷ John W. Brinsfield, William C. Davis, Benedict Maryniak, and James I. Robertson, Jr., *Faith in the Fight: Civil War Chaplains* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2003).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

incidents that he believed illustrated their attempt to use political leverage to gain dominance over religious affairs in the Union Army, while he omits any reference to the appreciation soldiers frequently extended to these groups.

Brinsfield and Maryniak continue their focus on the chaplaincy in *The Spirit Divided: Memoirs of Civil War Chaplains: The Union*.¹⁹ However, this work is directed solely toward the Union officials and serves as a companion to *The Spirit Divided: Memoirs of Civil War Chaplains: The Confederacy*.²⁰ The authors' stated purpose is to go beyond simply examining the varied labors that the chaplain performed during the Civil War. They seek to identify the feelings and motivations of these religious leaders. To accomplish this task, the authors used the personal correspondence, journals and memoirs of Union chaplains as their source material. They divide the work into various sections that focus on particular themes relating to Union chaplains' experiences in the war, such as their ministry in the military camps, military campaigns, military hospitals or even prison camps. In each chapter, the editors included selections from the writings of various chaplains that pertain to the section's theme.

Brinsfield and Maryniak provide a more balanced perspective toward the various religious beliefs than that found in *Faith in the Fight*. Evangelical chaplains, for example, are incorporated in a number of selections, but without the disparaging characterizations that were so frequently made in their previously mentioned study. However, the manner of their presentation limits the benefit of this study on Union chaplains. Brinsfield and Maryniak offer little basis to qualify or quantify the various views included in their work. Thus, the reader has no way of

¹⁹ John W. Brinsfield and Benedict R. Maryniak, *The Spirit Divided: Memoirs of Civil War Chaplains: The Union* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007).

²⁰ John W. Brinsfield, *The Spirit Divided: Memoirs of Civil War Chaplains: The Confederacy* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007).

identifying whether a particular perspective was widely held among chaplains or simply an isolated example. Their depiction of the chaplains' motivation for serving in the army is also problematic. When the editors describe the reasons why chaplains volunteered, they fail to mention the desire to promote conversions among the soldiers. By ignoring the emphasis given to saving souls, the authors minimize the primary reason many clergy gave for becoming chaplains during the Civil War.²¹

An unpublished dissertation by historian William Dickens addresses the vast changes that occurred in the office of the chaplaincy in the Civil War. His aim in "Answering the Call: The Story of the U.S. Military Chaplaincy from the Revolution through the Civil War" is to demonstrate that the conflict served as the pivotal event in the development of the modern military chaplaincy.²² He focuses upon the significant organizational differences between the prewar and postwar military chaplaincy to support his contention. He concentrates in particular on the changes that occurred in their military role, status, and credentials and analyzes how they were clarified during the war. Dickens credits chaplains with playing a prominent part in promoting standards for the office. Manuals written by Federal clergy in the early stages of the war provided guidelines for the chaplaincy that were regularly used as the model for the position. Consequently, he asserts, while the government finally developed formal regulations and standards for this military office, chaplains helped determine the practices and traditions that became the basis for the modern military chaplaincy.

²¹ Ibid., 1-2; William Y. Brown, *The Army Chaplain* (Philadelphia: William S. Martien, 1863), 126-7; and John Ripley Adams, *Memorial and Letters of Rev. John R. Adams* (Cambridge, MA: privately printed, 1890), 15-16.

²² William Dickens, "Answering the Call: The Story of the U.S. Military Chaplaincy from the Revolution through the Civil War" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1998).

Although there are no published monographs on the Christian Commission, there are a number of unpublished dissertations that focus upon the wartime organization. Historian James O. Henry offered the first study of the group in 1959.²³ His purpose in writing “The History of the United States Christian Commission” was to address the historiographical gap he perceived regarding the Christian Commission’s work during the Civil War after he discovered that this organization’s wartime contributions were largely overlooked. Henry desired to supply a narrative account of the group’s spiritual and physical contributions to the Union Army during the Civil War. As such, he supplies a historical overview of the organization by tracing its development from its YMCA heritage to its dissolution shortly after the Civil War.

Historian Theresa McDevitt provides much greater emphasis on the social and cultural factors that shaped the efforts of the Christian Commission than that found in other studies on the benevolent organization. In her study “Fighting for the Soul of America: The United States Christian Commission,” McDevitt provides a descriptive account of the strong connection between antebellum reform groups and the Christian Commission.²⁴ Her goal is “to trace the history of this organization from its antebellum roots in Christian reform associations through its development and work in the Civil War period.”²⁵ A secondary goal is to highlight the many contributions made by the female members of the Christian Commission during the war, which she believes have been overlooked in previous treatments on the organization.

²³ James O. Henry, “The History of the United States Christian Commission” (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 1959).

²⁴ Theresa McDevitt, “Fighting for the Soul of America: History of the United States Christian Commission” (Ph.D. diss., Kent State University, 1997).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

McDevitt provides an informative study on the growth of the Commission's organizational structure. She offers insightful analysis to the causes of the group's early struggles, as well as to the increased sophistication they eventually developed in their procedures. The impact of the Commission's work on the Union Army does not receive this same level of scholarly attention, unfortunately. Little insight is offered regarding the Commission's influence upon the soldiers or the organization's role in promoting the religious revivals.

The next study on the Christian Commission concentrated primarily on the wartime labors of this organization. In David Raney's "In the Lord's Army: The United States Christian Commission in the Civil War," the historian seeks to explain why the soldiers, press and public held this evangelical organization in such high regard.²⁶ He intends for his study to complement Henry's earlier work. Raney believes that Henry provided a sound presentation of its institutional history, yet it failed to depict adequately the basis for its considerable popularity or the primary motivation for its efforts, which was evangelism.²⁷ Raney stresses the importance of the Commission's emphasis upon personal ministry as a primary cause for its close relationship with the troops. He identifies their frequent interaction with the soldiers as one of the main reasons that they were held in higher regard by the troops than an organization like the United States Sanitary Commission, which did not encourage personal contact with the soldiers.²⁸ Furthermore, he believes the Christian Commission's ability to develop and carry out new programs to meet the soldiers' needs also factored largely in their positive public standing.

²⁶ David Raney, "In the Lord's Army: The United States Christian Commission in the Civil War" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 2001).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁸ The United States Sanitary Commission was a benevolent wartime organization founded in June, 1861. The Christian Commission's relationship with this group will be addressed in chapter four.

This study also places considerable emphasis upon the Commission's efforts to convert the soldiers to Christ. He stresses the preeminent role that the organization gave to evangelism, which he identifies as being the driving force of its work. Although the delegates addressed physical needs in a number of their activities, he emphasizes that they performed these labors with the soldiers' conversion in mind. However, in his depiction of the military's favorable image of the benevolent organization, most of the eyewitness accounts are drawn from Commission personnel. Raney would have been better served if he had used the soldiers' own testimony to illustrate their regard for the organization.

The Christian Commission's wartime relationship with Union chaplains has not received sufficient scholarly attention. Previous studies have depicted the Commission's ministry in relative isolation from the chaplaincy. There is little indication of the frequent collaboration that occurred between the two groups and the considerable impact their combined efforts had on the military's religious environment. The Commission's role in the Union Army's revival movement also needs further analysis. While previous works address the group's evangelistic emphasis, they do not adequately address the connection between the Commission's activities and the numerous revivals that developed within the Union Army. Consequently, the group's impact on the soldiers' religious environment has not been adequately recognized.

There are also a number of works that concentrate upon religion and the Union Army. Religious historian Gardiner Shattuck made an important contribution to this field in his work *A Shield and Hiding Place: The Religious Life of the Civil War Armies*. Based upon his Harvard University dissertation, Shattuck's work analyzes how the North's and South's divergent views on faith and society significantly impacted the outcome of the war. Although both sides gave considerable importance to their Christian faith, he contends that northern churches facilitated

the Union war effort, while southern churches actually hindered the Confederate cause. Shattuck challenged the traditional concept that religious revivals occurred almost exclusively among the Confederates. He finds considerable evidence that revivals frequently occurred in the Union military camps and that the number of soldiers converted was relatively comparable between the two armies. He also maintains that the North's traditional emphasis upon promoting social and moral reform within the Christian message significantly aided the Union war cause. Many of those who were converted believed that they were fighting for a higher cause. Consequently, the revivals in the northern camps boosted morale and helped sustain the troops through the many difficult periods of this lengthy conflict.

Shattuck's depiction of how religion undermined the Confederacy is less persuasive, however. In contrast to the North, he maintains that the South adopted a more individualistic approach to religion. Although the Confederate Army also experienced widespread revivals, he believes that these revivals may have actually undermined their war effort. He argues that not only did Southern Christianity lack this emphasis upon social reform, but it also became plagued by guilt regarding the morality of slavery.²⁹ A significant flaw in this perspective is that a number of recent studies persuasively challenge the position that the South became weighed down by feelings of guilt over its "peculiar institution." Whereas some in the Confederacy expressed concern about how the slaves were treated, there is little evidence indicating that large numbers of southerners felt guilt over the institution of slavery.³⁰

²⁹ Shattuck, 9-11.

³⁰ Gaines M. Foster, "Guilt Over Slavery: A Historiographical Analysis," *Journal of Southern History* LVI, no. 4 (1990): 691-95.

A symposium held at the Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in 1994 served as the seminal event in the recent burst of studies in the field of religion and the American Civil War. One of the primary objectives of the conference was to recognize the importance of religion during the Civil War, which the symposium's organizers believed was often overlooked in contemporary studies of the conflict. They invited a number of scholars to present papers that addressed religious themes during the war. Eventually sixteen of the essays were revised and published in *Religion and the American Civil War*. The editors provide the framework for this collection of essays in their introduction where they state, "In fundamental respects, religion stood on the center of the American Civil War experience. This perspective serves as the theme for the book."³¹ Noted historians Mark Noll, Eugene Genovese, Drew Gilpin Faust, Reid Mitchell and Samuel Hill are among the contributors to this work that addresses how religion influenced various segments of northern and southern society during the era. The essays cover such themes as the Bible and slavery, the northern clergy's role in the political conflict, the impact of religious literature upon Confederate soldiers, Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address and even a piece that compares the American Civil War with the English Civil War of the 1640s and the Spanish Civil War of the 1930s. This collection of essays makes a valuable contribution to the study of religion and the Civil War in both its presentation and in its role in promoting further research in the field.

Robert Miller, a church historian and Roman Catholic priest, also sought to remedy the lack of scholarly attention given to the subject of religion and the Civil War with his work *Both*

³¹ Miller, Stout, and Wilson, 4.

*Prayed to the Same God: Religion and Faith in the American Civil War.*³² His objective was to highlight the importance that both sides gave to their faith by providing an overview of the significant religious themes that pertained to the war. The work, however, is primarily a synthesis of previous studies on this subject matter. While it serves as an introduction to the subject there is not much analysis offered in the work.

Historian Steven Woodworth focuses upon the religious beliefs and practices of the Union and Confederate soldiers in his work *While God is Marching On: The Religious World of Civil War Soldiers*. His objective is to show the importance that soldiers from both sides gave to their Christian faith, which he believes historians have all too often marginalized in their studies on the conflict. He refers to the dearth of attention given to religion in the popular Ken Burns documentary on the war as an example of this occurrence. Woodworth draws upon the extensive research he performed with the personal writings of the soldiers to illustrate the centrality of religion in their lives and how it impacted them in the military camp and battlefield. He maintains that while the two sides may have fought over contrasting views of the good society, they also shared a number of commonalities in their religious beliefs and worship practices that stem from their common Protestant evangelical heritage.³³

Woodworth openly identifies himself as an evangelical Christian in this work, which served as both a strength and a weakness in presentation. He demonstrates considerable insight into Protestant evangelicalism in his depiction of their doctrines and practices, which is exemplified in his accurate description of the theological terms associated with these beliefs. However, his

³² Robert J. Miller, *Both Prayed to the Same God: Religion and Faith in the American Civil War* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007).

³³ Woodworth, 20.

sympathy toward evangelicalism also shapes his characterization of other religious beliefs. For example, he often includes his perspective regarding the theological accuracy of comments made by soldiers that concern religious themes.³⁴ Nevertheless, this book provides an insightful presentation of the importance that Union and Confederate soldiers gave to their faith during the war.

The manner in which soldiers reconciled their religious beliefs with their participation in the war serves as the basis for historian David Rolfs' work *No Peace for the Wicked*.³⁵ He holds that Northern soldiers who gave evidence of being a Christian generally had little trouble embracing their involvement in the war. Most perceived the conflict as a type of holy war and viewed their participation as a way of honoring God or combating evil. Rolfs argues that a considerable number of these soldiers also sacralized the nation and its system of government. Consequently, they believed that their efforts to save the Union would also serve a divine purpose. He singles out northern religious leaders as playing a major role in promoting these perspectives. Clergy effectively advanced these views through their messages that frequently demonized southern society and sanctified their own political culture. Union soldiers, for the most part, adopted these views and entered the war with an assurance of the rightness of their cause. He also asserts that the confidence they held in the sacred nature of this cause helped them to adapt readily to the shifting fortunes of the war. Thus, they could attribute a victory as a sign of God's favor while a defeat was viewed as a test of faithfulness from God or as a temporary setback that resulted from a lack of obedience.

³⁴ Ibid., 106.

³⁵ David Rolfs, *No Peace for the Wicked: How Northern Christians Justified Their Participation in the Civil War* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006).

However, Rolfs' failure to identify and define the theological beliefs more precisely significantly undermines his presentation. He rarely distinguished between the differing religious views among the soldiers and tended to consolidate all Protestants together. This is displayed, for example, in his frequently assuming that Reformed theological views are synonymous with evangelical beliefs.³⁶ Not only does this ignore the significant number of soldiers who did not hold to these views, but it also fails to recognize the substantial contrasts these positions present towards God's sovereignty and human free will.

The religious customs and themes emphasized by evangelical Christians during the Civil War play an integral role in this study. Many of the practices that military chaplains and Christian Commission representatives used to promote their views with the soldiers emerged in the decades just prior to the conflict. In order to gain a better understanding of their objectives and methods, it will be beneficial to provide a brief overview of Protestant evangelicalism in nineteenth-century America, and that will be covered in the next chapter.

³⁶ Ibid., 71, 186-87.

Chapter Two

PROTESTANT EVANGELICALISM IN ANTEBELLUM AMERICA

When the Civil War began, northern church members expressed deep concern for the spiritual and physical welfare of its soldiers. Not only were Union soldiers facing the peril of combat; many were also leaving home for the first time. Fears arose that the morals of these impressionable young men would likely deteriorate while living amidst the unsaved. It was widely assumed that the ungodly would promote activities such as gambling, drunkenness and profanity in the camps, all of which were immoral behaviors strongly condemned within northern religious circles. Furthermore, these young men would have to face these temptations without the support of their local community or church to sustain them. While most in the North confidently presumed that the conflict would be of a limited duration, there was still considerable concern regarding how the war would impact the religious beliefs and morals of the soldiers.

The emphasis church leaders gave to religious issues during the Civil War reflected the importance American society attributed to matters of faith throughout the nineteenth century. A resurgence in Christianity occurred at the beginning of that century with the coming of the Second Great Awakening. A series of well-attended revival meetings initiated this era of heightened religious enthusiasm and moral reform. The Church in America went through a number of notable changes during this period as well. A shift in denominational affiliations and the significant role of the camp meeting were two of the most notable developments that occurred with the church during the Second Great Awakening.¹

¹ It is much easier to identify when the Second Great Awakening started than to determine when it concluded because of the series of revivals that continued up to the Civil War. Mark Noll, *A History of Christianity in the*

This Awakening reversed a decline that the church had experienced for the previous quarter of a century. During the twenty-five-year interval between the American Revolution and the Second Great Awakening, the churches encountered a number of difficulties that undermined their influence within American society. Regarding this difficult period, historian Sydney Ahlstrom states, “The churches reached a lower ebb of vitality during the two decades after the end of hostilities than at any other time in the country’s religious history.”² America’s political instability provided one reason for this decline. Much of the country seemed to be focused primarily on politics in the wake of the war and the adoption of the new constitution. Moreover, religious devotion among the members also appeared to be on the wane. Pastors frequently mentioned in their correspondence their concern regarding the widespread religious apathy and moral decline they observed among their congregations in the years just prior to the close of the eighteenth century.³ Furthermore, state governments were in the process of disestablishing their official churches. By 1790, only three of the thirteen original colonies maintained formal ties between the church and state.⁴ This new development caused many pastors to fear that their increased dependence upon private sources would prove overwhelming to their congregations, especially in light of their perception of the widespread spiritual apathy besetting the church.

The spread of Deism provided another source of concern for Christians. A number of influential American leaders, such as Thomas Jefferson, Ethan Allen and Thomas Paine, had

United States and Canada (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 166; and Barry Hankins, *American Evangelicals: A Contemporary History of a Mainstream Religious Movement* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 12-15.

² Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 365.

³ John Boles, *The Great Revival: Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1996), 13-19.

⁴ Disestablishment occurred in Connecticut in 1818, in New Hampshire in 1819, and in Massachusetts in 1833.

adopted this theological perspective that was influenced by Enlightenment rationalism. They advocated a naturalistic religion that elevated humanity's capabilities and diminished God's role and activity in human affairs. Deists rejected a number of traditional Christian beliefs that they did not consider rationally sound, such as miracles or the depravity of humanity. Moreover, they also challenged the view that the Bible was the revealed Word of God. Allen, for example, promoted the position that the Bible was filled with superstitions, contradictions and errors in a book that he wrote in 1784.⁵ Religious leaders feared that the public's high esteem for these Revolutionary War heroes might facilitate the acceptance of these views that challenged orthodox Christianity. In the minds of many clergymen, Deism had, indeed, become a considerable threat to the churches in America. Thus, as the eighteenth century came to a close, clergy were deeply concerned about the state of affairs in American society where the church struggled with apathy, financial uncertainty and philosophical opposition. In light of these dire circumstances, many in the religious community prayed for some kind of divine intervention that would renew the faith of the people and reinvigorate the churches. Indeed, an event was about to break upon the national scene that would radically impact American Christianity: The Second Great Awakening.

A diverse series of religious revivals occurred during the Second Great Awakening.⁶

Although the religious meetings in the western frontier often gained the largest audiences and

⁵ Ethan Allen, *Reason the only oracle of man; or, A compendious system of natural religion* (Bennington, VT: Haswell & Russell, 1784).

⁶ *Dictionary of Christianity in America* s.v. "The Second Great Awakening." Historian William G. McLoughlin distinguishes a religious revival from a "great awakening" by the scope of the event. "Revivalism is the Protestant ritual in which charismatic evangelists convey 'the Word' of God to large masses of people who, under this influence, experience what Protestants call conversion, salvation, regeneration or spiritual birth. Awakenings--the most vital and yet mysterious of all folk arts--are periods of cultural revitalization that begin in a general crisis of beliefs and values and extend over a period of a generation or so, during which time a profound reorientation in beliefs and values takes place. Revivals alter the lives of individuals; awakenings alter the world view of a whole

produced some of the most memorable events associated with the Awakening, the first signs of the movement actually appeared in the northeast. Near the close of the eighteenth century, religious leaders fervently hoped that revival would occur in their churches. One of the leaders in this effort was the new president of Yale University, Timothy Dwight, whose grandfather Jonathan Edwards had played such a significant role in the First Great Awakening of the 1730s and 1740s. Under Dwight's leadership, a revival developed at the end of the eighteenth century among many of the Yale students that led to about a third of them being converted to Christ.⁷

The Awakening in New England exhibited some significant differences from the movement in the West or the South. One of the most notable dissimilarities among the regions regarded the oratorical style of the preachers. Clergy in the Northeast were generally better educated and more refined in their preaching style than the revivalists in the South or the frontier. Religious leaders in New England desired to avoid the excessive emotionalism that they believed characterized the early nineteenth century frontier revivals. Although these northeastern clerics supported conversionism, they sought to project a more dignified approach in their sermon delivery.

While evangelicals in the North and South shared a number of theological similarities, northern Christians were much more active in their efforts to transform society. Historian John Boles identifies the emphasis that southern churches placed upon the individual as a major distinction from the North. He maintains that the evangelicals in the South did not give the same emphasis to social and moral reform because they did not share the North's communal

people or culture.” See William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings and Reform: An Essay on Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), xiii.

⁷ Although the United States had experienced a number of revivals prior to this event, the term was not commonly used until 1800. Barry Hankins, *The Second Great Awakening and the Transcendentalists* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 4-5; and Noll, 168-9.

emphasis.⁸ Northern evangelicals were frequently involved in benevolent groups created to promote spiritual renewal, moral reform and education.⁹ By contrast, southern clergy focused upon the individual and stressed personal holiness rather than community reform. These divergent interpretations of the church's role in society became a source of controversy, which was exacerbated by the declarations from both sides that their views exhibited greater fidelity to the Bible's teachings.¹⁰

The leading revivalist of the Second Great Awakening was Charles Grandison Finney. He gave up a promising legal career and went to seminary after having a conversion experience in 1821. He was later ordained by the Presbyterian Church in 1824. During the latter part of the 1820s and through the 1830s, Finney conducted a series of successful revivals in the North, the most famous occurring in the Burned-Over District of New York.¹¹ However, some of his preaching themes and methods were quite controversial. Finney preached a modified form of Calvinism that diverged from traditional Presbyterianism. He emphasized, for instance, that all could be saved, rather than just those that God had predestined. Furthermore, he stressed a balance between God's reign over the universe with humanity's rational ability to seek

⁸ Boles, 129-30.

⁹ Noll identifies the large number of voluntary societies and their institutional longevity as one of the primary reasons why the Second Great Awakening had a significantly greater impact than the First Great Awakening. Noll, *History of Christianity*, 169. Congregational minister Lyman Beecher was an especially prominent and influential advocate for these organizations that sought to tackle social problems. Beecher, for example, helped found the American Temperance Society in 1826. *Dictionary of Christianity in America* s.v. "Lyman Beecher."

¹⁰ Ahlstrom, 422-28; Boles, 128-30; Donald G. Matthews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 77; and David B. Chesebrough, *God Ordained this War: Sermons on the Sectional Crisis, 1830-1865* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 6, 56-57.

¹¹ The Burned-Over District refers to an area in New York that experienced a number of well-publicized revivals and was also the birthplace for such diverse movements as Mormonism and the Oneida Community. See Whitney Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of the Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (New York: Octagon Books, 1981).

forgiveness and salvation.¹² Finney also gave considerable emphasis to issues of moral reform in his preaching. Thus, it was quite common for him to comment upon issues such as the evils of slavery or drunkenness. Yet, it was not just Finney's homiletical skills that helped him gain such prominence. He also significantly shaped the direction of modern revivalism with his methodology, all of which became common practices among revivalists after Finney.¹³

The revival movement in the West began just prior to the start of the nineteenth century. James McGready is often identified as the pivotal figure in the promotion of these influential religious gatherings. During the 1790s, McGready, a Presbyterian pastor serving in Kentucky, organized a series of outdoor communion services for the purpose of promoting revival. These meetings created a great deal of religious fervor, which prompted even greater numbers to attend such services. McGready invited churches from the surrounding area to participate in these assemblies, which he believed were blessed by God. This emphasis upon interdenominational cooperation would set a pattern for future camp meetings, the term most commonly used for the wilderness gatherings. In 1800, Barton Stone, a Presbyterian pastor, came to observe one of these religious assemblies. He came away from it deeply impressed and with a desire to organize a camp meeting near the church he served at Cane Ridge, Kentucky. This well-publicized camp meeting held in 1801 lasted for seven days and attracted an audience estimated

¹² The term "God's sovereignty" was frequently used in that era to characterize His dominion over human affairs.

¹³ Some of Finney's new methods included his use of advance publicity, protracted meetings, and the anxious seat. The anxious seat was used at revival meetings for those with a troubled conscience who desired to be saved. Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney and the Spirit of American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 149; and Charles G. Finney, *Lectures on Revival of Religion* (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1835), 12. McLoughlin believes that Finney introduced a whole new era in American Christianity through his innovative techniques to promote conversions and should rightfully be identified as the primary architect of modern revivalism. See William G. McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham* (New York: Ronald Press Co., 1959), 11-15.

as high as 25,000 people.¹⁴ However, it was not simply the sheer size of Cane Ridge that made it the most renowned camp meeting of the Second Great Awakening. It is also remembered for the intense physical and emotional reactions exhibited by the audience at these services. As word spread about the events at Cane Ridge, religious leaders throughout the West organized their own camp meetings in the hopes of triggering a revival in their own communities. After Cane Ridge, the camp meeting became a recognized practice in America's ecclesiastical landscape.¹⁵

The camp meeting played an integral role in promoting revivalism across the nation since it served as an ideal forum to bring Christianity to the wilderness. These gatherings often met a significant social and spiritual need for the settlers, many of whom lived in regions that had no churches yet. The emphasis upon interdenominational cooperation provided another reason for the enormous impact and popularity of these religious meetings. Presbyterian, Baptist and Methodist preachers often shared the pulpit during the early stages of the Second Great Awakening and preached to audiences comprised of people from varying religious traditions. Due to their overriding concern with saving souls, speakers often refrained from addressing doctrinal differences that might prove divisive and lessen the number of those who might attend and be saved. The wide range of emotions frequently displayed at these gatherings provided another feature that attracted people to the camp meetings. People often traveled considerable distances to be a part of these gatherings where members of the audience often responded to the preaching and singing with intense physical gestures. Knowing that they were working with an audience that would likely come to the meetings with heightened emotions and a sense of expectancy, experienced preachers often had little difficulty intensifying the enthusiasm of the

¹⁴ Boles, 63-69.

¹⁵ Ahlstrom, 432-35.

crowd even further. However, not all who attended these meetings were motivated by religious concerns. Some people attended these revivals simply out of curiosity. Stories about the unique events associated with the camp meetings rapidly circulated around the nation. Hoping to witness some of these unusual activities, a number of those who came did so either to observe the proceedings or to be entertained by the actions of those around them.¹⁶

A considerable change had occurred in the perception of the camp meeting within a decade after Cane Ridge. By 1810, the Methodists were clearly the strongest advocates of the gatherings. They continued to use these outdoor worship services as a way to promote conversions and moral renewal along the frontier. The camp meeting became a common tradition among their churches and some even established permanent sites for these assemblies. Methodist leaders also began to provide greater organization to the gatherings by orchestrating the various details surrounding these events.¹⁷

Baptists and Presbyterians, however, gradually distanced themselves from the camp meeting. Historian John Boles identifies the criticism over perceived excesses associated with these assemblies as a major reason why their support for the movement diminished.¹⁸ Religious leaders from these groups expressed concern over some of the practices and customs associated with these gatherings. Presbyterian leaders had become uncomfortable with the emotionalism and excesses often exhibited during the events. Although clergy from this denomination held a pivotal role in initiating the camp meetings, their ecclesiastical leaders preferred religious

¹⁶ Boles, 57-59, 67; Paul K. Conkin, *Cane Ridge: America's Pentecost* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 116; and Charles A. Johnson, *The Frontier Camp Meeting* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1955), 60-61.

¹⁷ Johnson, 82.

¹⁸ Boles, 90, 94.

services that were much more orderly than what was generally practiced at these proceedings. Their officials also voiced their apprehension regarding the lack of formal training possessed by many of those conducting the outdoor services, which Presbyterian leaders believed opened the door to heretical teachings.¹⁹ While many Baptists shared a similar apprehension regarding some of the perceived excesses associated with the camp meeting, they still espoused the concept of promoting gatherings that focused on saving souls. Thus, they began to hold revival meetings at their churches where the emotionalism could be kept in check.²⁰ In light of the many concerns that had developed over the camp meeting, Presbyterian and Baptist involvement in these assemblies diminished to the point that these religious gatherings had become almost solely a Methodist practice by 1825.²¹

New perspectives in Christian thought and practice gained substantial popularity during the Second Great Awakening. Arminian theology prompted a significant shift in biblical interpretation and served as one of the most important religious developments in the first half of the nineteenth century. Named after the Dutch religious leader Jacobus Arminius who advanced these views, this theological outlook served as a major catalyst to the vast changes that occurred in the nation's religious affairs. Arminius challenged a number of interpretations maintained by Calvinists, such as the emphasis upon predestination and unconditional election. While Calvinism had been the most influential Christian perspective in America through the eighteenth century, Arminian doctrines gained considerable support during the nineteenth century.²² This

¹⁹ Conkin, 137-38.

²⁰ Johnson, 79-80.

²¹ Ibid., 80-82; and Boles, 100.

²² Ahlstrom, 326-27.

theological system's emphasis upon free will and human responsibility often struck a chord among listeners previously accustomed to the Calvinistic emphasis upon God's complete sovereignty. Audiences eagerly responded to a message that addressed humanity's moral plight before God with the assurance of immediate forgiveness and eternal life to those who declared their allegiance to Christ. Furthermore, Arminianism also enjoyed the advantage of appearing far more democratic regarding salvation than its theological counterpart, which declared that humanity's eternal destination was based solely upon God's determination. The freedom of choice found within Arminianism resonated with an American populace who increasingly embraced democratic ideals.²³

The Methodists figured largely in the rapid growth of Arminian theology in American society. John Wesley, founder of Methodism, was a particularly influential advocate of this theological perspective. He rejected a number of Calvinist views, such as limited atonement and predestination.²⁴ He believed that the Reformed biblical interpretation incorrectly limited the grace of God and consequently promoted immorality by emphasizing humanity's helplessness in the face of temptation. Wesley also maintained that God offered forgiveness to all people and he adamantly rejected the view that God predestined some to eternal condemnation, which he believed diminished God's mercy.²⁵ Benefitting from the ardent support of this influential

²³ *Dictionary of Christianity in America* s.v. "Arminianism"; Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 3, 170-74; and Noll, *History of Christianity*, 153.

²⁴ The theory of atonement emphasized that Christ's death paid the penalty for sin to which humans were liable. Limited atonement refers to the belief that the benefits of Christ's sacrifice are limited to the salvation of the elect. *Dictionary of Christianity in America* s.v. "Atonement."

²⁵ Wesley believed that holiness was attainable with the help of the Holy Spirit. This emphasis upon Christian perfection became a central tenet in Methodist doctrines. See Henry Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 74, 388.

leader, Arminian views disseminated rapidly throughout the nation and gained a significant influence in American Christianity.

A substantial shift among the nation's denominational bodies provided another notable societal transition that occurred during the Second Great Awakening. On the one hand, the Methodists and Baptists made considerable gains in adherents and became the two largest Protestant groups in the nation, while on the other hand, established churches such as the Episcopal Church and the Congregational churches saw the percentage of Americans affiliated with their denominations substantially diminish. Vast differences in organizational structure provide one explanation for this marked shift of fortunes among these religious bodies. Both the Methodists and Baptists functioned under systems that provided much greater flexibility than those found among the other major denominations. This arrangement helped them adapt to the vast changes occurring in American society during the nineteenth century far more effectively than other Protestant groups. Methodists and Baptists required significantly less educational training than their counterparts in the Congregational, Presbyterian and Episcopal churches. These less intensive requirements made it much easier to send preachers out into the frontier and to begin churches where none had previously existed. The established churches, however, required significant amounts of formal training before their candidate would be allowed to serve as a representative of their denomination. Consequently, they lacked the flexibility to respond to new opportunities in a manner comparable to either the Methodists or Baptists.²⁶

The prominence Baptists gave to the autonomy of the local church provided another advantage in adapting to the nation's expanding frontier. This stress upon the congregational

²⁶ Ahlstrom, 437-44; Ernest T. Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South* Vol. 2 (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1963), 66; and Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in the Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 104.

rule of each church body meant that they were not constrained by denominational regulations in the formation of a new church. Thus, a farmer or blacksmith sensing a call from God could organize a Baptist church and even become ordained by that church without having to leave his farm or trade to receive formal training.

The Methodists' use of the circuit rider served as one of the most prominent examples of their ability to adapt effectively to the changes occurring in American society in that period. Under the capable leadership of Bishop Francis Asbury, this denomination gave considerable emphasis to recruiting and sending out these itinerate preachers. This helped the Methodists gain a crucial foothold along the frontier through their tireless efforts to found new churches and nurture those already established in relatively undeveloped locales. This practice also helped them gain an active and influential presence in a community long before other denominations launched their own places of worship.²⁷

The Presbyterian Church faced a unique struggle regarding their response to the revival movement. The denomination's educational requirements handicapped their ability to move into the frontier. Presbyterian polity required a substantial amount of formal training before someone could be licensed. Thus, they were not able to send out representatives anywhere comparable in number to the Methodists or Baptists. Ahlstrom believes the denomination's theological structure impeded its acceptance among the new settlements. He declares, "The doctrinal system of the Westminster formularies was ill-adapted to the simplification of frontier preaching, it demanded a genuinely teaching church, a catechetical system."²⁸ While many Presbyterians shared a strong commitment to promoting spiritual revival in the land, their traditions and the

²⁷ Noll, *History of Christianity*, 171-74.

²⁸ Boles, 99; Ahlstrom, 444; Conkin, 114.

well developed system of church polity ultimately lacked the flexibility that was often needed to succeed in the frontier. Thus, this early participant in the revival movement never experienced the same kind of gains as those enjoyed by the Methodists and Baptists.

The nation's social and political milieu at the beginning of the nineteenth century also contributed to the dramatic shifts in American Christianity. During this era that gave such emphasis to republican equality, the Methodists and Baptists made significant gains because they were often viewed as linked with the common citizen rather than with the societal elites. Nathan Hatch believes that the democratic spirit these groups promoted figured prominently in their rapid growth: "They denied the age-old distinction that set clergy apart as a separate order of men, and they refused to defer to learned theologians and traditional orthodoxies. All were democratic or populist in the way they instinctively associated virtue with ordinary people rather than with the elites."²⁹ Conversely, many were turned off by the elitism that they perceived in the hierarchical structure of the Presbyterians and Episcopalians.

The priority that Methodists and Baptists gave to evangelism offered another reason for their amazing growth during the first half of the nineteenth century. Both of these groups stressed the need for an individual to experience a religious conversion to be forgiven by God and saved from hell. Churches from these traditions identified the Great Commission as one of their primary responsibilities given to them by Christ.³⁰ Preachers frequently exhorted their members to carry out this imperative by sharing the Gospel message with the unsaved. Not surprisingly, most of those who were converted generally affiliated with the same church attended by the person they identified as being responsible for their conversion. Episcopal churches in the North, however,

²⁹ Hatch, 38.

³⁰ The Great Commission refers to Matthew 28:18-20. In this Gospel's concluding chapter, Jesus instructs His followers just before He ascends into Heaven to go into the world and make disciples.

took a considerably different perspective towards evangelism. Denominational officials did little to encourage this practice among their members during this time of religious enthusiasm. Furthermore, some of the region's most influential leaders were strongly opposed to both conversionism and revival meetings.³¹ Consequently, the church experienced little of the growth in numbers like the Methodists, who had been a part of the Anglican communion in the previous century.

There was also much greater diversity of belief among the more traditional Protestant bodies regarding the importance or need of a conversion experience. While some members of these other denominations emphasized the need to be converted, there was also a substantial number who did not agree with the stress placed upon this type of spiritual experience. Many of those associated with the Episcopal and Lutheran churches, for instance, believed that the emphasis upon conversionism placed too much stress upon the human response and minimized the role of the institutional church in the salvific process.³² There was also considerable diversity of belief regarding the eternal state among Christian denominations. For example, Unitarianism had made significant inroads in New England during the nineteenth century. Members of this movement challenged traditional interpretations of Christian theology and debated issues such as the divine nature of Christ and the work of atonement. Moreover, Ahlstrom declares that a definite tendency toward the belief in universal salvation had developed among its members.³³

³¹ Episcopal historians David Hein and Gardiner Shattuck identify Samuel Provoost, the Bishop of New York, as a virtual Deist. Furthermore, Samuel Seabury, the Bishop of Connecticut, was adamantly opposed to evangelical teachings. See David Hein and Gardiner Shattuck, *The Episcopalians* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 59-60.

³² *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, s.v. "Conversion."

³³ Noll, *History of Christianity*, 233-34; and Ahlstrom, 400-2.

Roman Catholic leaders also rejected the emphasis upon conversionism because they believed it placed undue emphasis upon an individual's pledge of faith. Catholic doctrines identified the church as playing a pivotal role in the salvation process because it functioned as the chosen instrument God used to confer grace on a sinful world. Moreover, this grace was bestowed through the sacraments of the Catholic Church and only those who were part of the Church would receive these blessings.³⁴ Accordingly, American Catholics around the time of the Second Great Awakening generally rejected the Protestant emphasis upon justification by faith alone since they believed this position diminished the essential role that the Catholic Church and the sacraments played in their salvation. Protestants, for their part, believed that the soteriological position advanced by the Catholic Church distorted the biblical teachings on how to be saved. Consequently, many Protestants believed that Catholics needed personally to be converted to Christ if they were to become part of the Christian fold.³⁵

Evangelical Christians became prominent in American society during the Second Great Awakening. Initially spurred on by the preaching of religious leaders such as Lyman Beecher and Charles Finney, evangelicals energetically tackled the nation's social problems with the same kind of passion that they displayed in their efforts to convert others. Their widespread involvement in these reform movements gave them considerable influence in shaping the nation's culture.³⁶ They established groups with the purpose of promoting both the Christian

³⁴ The word sacrament originates from the Latin word *sacramentum*, which was a translation of the Greek word *mysterion*, meaning mystery. Roman Catholics recognize seven sacraments: baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist, penance, anointing of the sick (extreme unction), ordination and matrimony. *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, s.v. "Sacraments and Ordinances"; and Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981), 242-44.

³⁵ Soteriology refers to doctrines relating to salvation.

³⁶ Ahlstrom, 470; Martin Marty, *Pilgrims in Their Own Land: 500 Years of Religion in America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1984), 227. Religious historian William McLoughlin identifies evangelicalism as a dominant

message and a moral and upright life. Some of the organizations that emerged during this religious movement such as the American Bible Society and the American Home Mission Society would have a lasting impact on national culture through their promotion of revivalism and cultural morality. Religious groups also spread their views through their emphasis upon education. Believing that a literate society would encourage moral values, evangelicals went about establishing schools that could provide basic education and impart Christian principles. Consequently, their ethical values became increasingly embedded within American society through these institutions. Furthermore, their widespread labors helped to foster a moral perspective that was adopted by much of the country.³⁷

The influence Protestant evangelicals gained during the Second Great Awakening inspired many to believe that they could build a “Christian America.” While this longing for a Christian society was manifest from the country’s beginning, the sway evangelicals exerted over American culture during the nineteenth century made this ideal appear achievable. In his study of the unsuccessful attempts by Protestants to build a Protestant America, historian Robert Handy offers this characterization of their objective: “Evangelicals were convinced that the vision could be fulfilled with God’s help by voluntary means, by good people working together for true religion and enlightened civilization, opposing together alien influences that ran counter to their goals.”³⁸ However, the Christian America that many Protestants envisioned actually promoted a cultural and ethnic homogeneity that excluded a number of other groups that did not fit their

force in the nineteenth century because of its profound influence in shaping the nation’s culture. See William McLoughlin, *The American Evangelicals, 1800-1900: An Anthology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 1-2.

³⁷ Noll, *History of Christianity*, 228-30.

³⁸ Robert Handy, *A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 56.

conception of the ideal citizen. Roman Catholics, for example, were often perceived as outsiders and excluded from this social order because of their resistance to convert to Protestantism and their refusal to adopt the moral practices widely supported by evangelicals.³⁹

A surge of religious excitement swept over much of the nation on the eve of the Civil War. The Revival of 1857-1858, or the Businessmen's Revival⁴⁰ as it is sometimes called, energized evangelicals and influenced their approach to ministry during the Civil War. Interdenominational cooperation and an emphasis upon lay leadership were two of the dominant characteristics of this movement.⁴¹ The revival began in New York City and developed out of a noontime prayer meeting organized by Jeremiah Lanphier, who was working at the time as a missionary to the area. His objective was to hold a weekly gathering for businessmen to meet and pray, which he publicized by posting handbills in local warehouses and businesses. Six people from four different denominational backgrounds joined him at that first meeting on September 23, 1857, at the North Dutch Reformed Church where he served. Within three weeks the meeting had to be moved to a larger room because so many began attending the weekly gathering. They soon began to hold daily meetings because of the positive influence it was having upon those attending. Not surprisingly, other churches throughout the city began to hold noontime prayer meetings and within six months 10,000 businessmen were participating in these

³⁹ Ibid., 51-52.

⁴⁰ Businessmen comprised a significant number of the Noon prayer meeting participants. Katherine Long, *The Revival of 1857-58* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 14.

⁴¹ McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, 163-64. He also identifies the influence of the financial crisis of 1857 upon the movement as one of the reasons that it does not qualify as a religious awakening.

daily gatherings. Word began to spread around the country about these events in New York City and churches in other regions launched their own prayer meetings.⁴²

Leaders in this revival placed considerable emphasis upon maintaining Christian unity within the prayer meetings. In a manner reminiscent of the early camp meetings, doctrinal issues were vigorously avoided since they could prove divisive and discourage the participation in these meetings. Likewise, controversial social issues such as slavery were also discouraged from being mentioned for fear of the discord it could introduce into the gatherings.⁴³

The various activities associated with the revival also provided the opportunity for greater lay leadership. Although clergy were actively involved with this movement, local businessmen often took the lead in many of the activities connected with the prayer meetings. This provided them with exposure in organizing and leading Christian groups. Their participation also resulted in corporate principles being implemented within the religious activities. Meetings became much more organized and often followed a specific structure. Activity schedules were set ahead of time and punctuality was emphasized.⁴⁴

The secular press also played an important role in the revival by all the publicity they gave to the religious activities and events. When reports of the prayer meetings' popularity first began to spread through New York City, editors of the region's major papers recognized the possibility of

⁴² Ibid, 8, 13; and J. Edwin Orr, *The Fervent Prayer: The Worldwide Impact of the Great Awakening of 1858* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), 1-6

⁴³ Long, 110-11; Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), 192-96. A split occurred among Presbyterian churches in 1837. The conflict centered around doctrinal issues. Northern evangelicals also feared that addressing the slavery controversy would antagonize Southern Christians. Regional splits also occurred among the Methodists (1844) and the Baptists (1845), primarily over the issue of slavery. See Goen, 66-107.

⁴⁴ Long, 68-69, and 85-86.

capitalizing upon the excitement of the revival as a way to increase their readership.⁴⁵ By March of 1858, the New York papers were providing daily accounts about the city's religious revival to the rest of the nation. However, within a few months the tenor of the newspapers' depiction of the revival changed. The press began to treat it in a less deferential manner and more as if it were entertainment. Stories frequently focused on prominent citizens who attended the meetings. Moreover, the accounts regularly dramatized the actions of these celebrities.⁴⁶

The movement began to lose momentum during the summer of 1858. The weather likely played a significant role in its decline. Church activities traditionally diminished considerably during the hot weather months. Many of those living in these urban areas often traveled during this time of year to escape the scorching temperatures, while others simply limited their activities. Press coverage also diminished around that time. The revival had seemingly become old news and the editors of the rival papers turned their focus toward new avenues to attract readers. Although the level of participation in church activities and Bible studies picked up once again in September of 1858, clergy noted that the level of enthusiasm had notably waned from that exhibited during the previous spring. When the summer of 1859 arrived, religious leaders observed a dramatic decline once again.⁴⁷ The prayer meetings soon became a distant memory as the country became preoccupied with mounting sectional tensions. Nevertheless, the movement's emphasis upon evangelical unity and lay leadership provided a model for ministry that the founders of the Christian Commission would seek to emulate.

⁴⁵ The press was the first group to describe the event as a national revival. *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴⁶ Katherine Long related one incident when the *New York Tribune* supplied a week long account regarding the actions of a well known boxer, Orville "Awful" Gardner. The paper's daily report about his activities was heavily sensationalized and turned the pugilist into a "celebrity convert" to Christ. *Ibid.*, 35-45.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 65-66.

When the war arrived, northern evangelicals rallied together for a common cause: to bring the Gospel to the Union Army. Methodists and Baptists would be particularly active in this effort. Evangelicals would employ many of the practices that had been effectively used during the Second Great Awakening, such as the camp meeting, in their labors with the Union Army. At a time when the nation would be torn apart by sectional conflict, evangelicals would unite to build an army that would be characterized by personal piety and Christian virtue. For some Protestant clergy, volunteering for the military chaplaincy appeared to be one of the best ways they could promote these values with the soldiers.

Chapter Three

CREATING A MILITARY IDENTITY: THE UNION CHAPLAINCY, 1861-1865

On April 15, 1861, President Abraham Lincoln issued a call for 75,000 volunteers to respond to the Confederate Army's attack on Fort Sumter. Three weeks after this announcement, the War Department issued General Orders Fifteen and Sixteen (May 4, 1861), which authorized a chaplain for each regiment:

There will be allowed to each regiment one chaplain, who will be appointed by the regimental commanders on duty with the regiment at the time the appointment is to be made. The chaplain so appointed must be a regularly ordained minister of some Christian denomination, and will receive the pay and allowances of a captain of cavalry.¹

The Union government's efforts to secure chaplains for the soldiers continued a longstanding practice in American military history. From the early days of Colonial America, clergy have worked with the army to address the soldiers' spiritual and physical needs. The rationale for the chaplaincy's ongoing involvement in American army affairs has generally been rooted in two areas: the desire to secure God's blessing upon the military, and to attend to the soldiers' religious concerns. Lincoln recognized the significant connotation meaning attached to the military chaplaincy and authorized the War Department to supply chaplains for the newly formed army. He knew that northern citizens were deeply concerned about the spiritual welfare of its soldiers and would appreciate the government's efforts to provide clergy to minister to the troops. He also believed that these officials could make a valuable contribution to the Union cause through their efforts to sustain both the morale and the moral conduct of the troops during

¹ *Official Records*, series 3, 1:154, 157. Congress added its legislative endorsement to these regulations later that summer when it passed the Act of July 22 and the Act of August 3, which authorized the appointment of chaplains for the volunteer army and the regular army. *Ibid.*, 382, 398. Congress also passed legislation in May of 1862 that made the President responsible for the appointment of chaplains to the military hospitals. *Ibid.*, series 3, 2: 67.

the war.² However, unbeknownst to Lincoln and northern citizens, the disorganized state of the military chaplaincy made it ill-prepared to address the needs of the soldiers at the beginning of the conflict. Moreover, chaplains also discovered that traditions and practices commonly used by the clergy in previous conflicts were no longer appropriate to employ by the time of the Civil War. The chaplaincy experienced numerous struggles and had little influence on the military camp's environment at the beginning of the war because of the religious office's many problems. Union clergy recognized that substantial changes needed to be made to their position if they were going to be able to carry out an effective ministry to the troops. They also concluded that the religious office needed to develop a closer association with the military. This chapter will examine how the chaplains and Union officials strengthened the chaplaincy's ties to the military and how the clergy developed an effective ministry with Union soldiers during the Civil War.

A significant transformation occurred in the military chaplaincy during the Civil War. When the conflict first began, very few held this position and the responsibilities of this office were quite ambiguous. Yet, by the end of the hostilities the national government had significantly expanded the number of chaplains serving in the army and substantially clarified their military role and status.³ Furthermore, Union chaplains began to develop norms and a common code of conduct for the position after prominent clergy published manuals that provided helpful guidelines on how to carry out their wartime responsibilities.⁴ In the early stages of the conflict,

² Norton, 83.

³ The Union commissioned 2,398 chaplains over the course of the war. Brinsfield et al, 43.

⁴ Two of the most influential works were William Y. Brown's *The Army Chaplain* and Jonathan Pinkney Hammond's *The Army Chaplain's Manual* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1863). President Lincoln sent Brown a letter on November 7, 1861, that requested his service as a military hospital chaplain. He served as a chaplain at Douglas Hospital in Washington, D.C. for the remainder of the war. Hammond served as the chaplain of the 19th Pennsylvania Infantry and as a hospital chaplain in Annapolis, Maryland. Service Record, Files of the Adjutant General's Office, National Archives, Record Group 94.

however, military chaplains experienced a number of struggles because they operated with little direction regarding their wartime role since the government had not clearly delineated their official responsibilities. The vague nature of the position often made it difficult to minister to the troops and caused clergy considerable frustration. Chaplains had also contributed to the office's early wartime problems by the substantial emphasis they had placed upon preserving their autonomy prior to the Civil War. There was little interaction among them and they resisted any efforts to develop an association for the office. Yet, the lack of cooperation among Union clergy diminished their ability to promote changes during the early stages of the war because it had left them without a forum to share their particular concerns or a group or association that could represent their interests with government leaders.⁵

Union chaplains became keenly aware within a short period of time that the lack of structure and organization connected with their position significantly undermined their ability to minister to the troops. Many of those who volunteered to be chaplains were motivated primarily by the desire to promote Christianity among the troops. Yet, they discovered within the first few months of the war that army personnel looked quite unfavorably upon the chaotic state of the office and its loose affiliation with the military. They also recognized that the negative perception associated with the chaplaincy adversely impacted their relationships with the soldiers, which hindered their ministry to the army. Union clergy became convinced that they needed to develop closer ties with the army if they were going to be able to develop an effective wartime ministry with the troops. Consequently, they began to make a conscious effort to promote practices that would strengthen the chaplaincy's military identity.

⁵ Richard M. Budd, *Serving Two Masters: The Development of American Military Chaplaincy, 1860-1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 13-14.

The Union chaplains' attempt to define their wartime role and relationship with the army became one of the central themes of their Civil War experience. The endeavor to determine their military identity basically revolved around their efforts to clarify two principal issues. First, Union chaplains needed to define their official rank and status. They occupied an ambiguous position with the army at the beginning of the war. While informally recognized as officers by the military, they held no formal rank in an organization where the absence of official status could seriously limit their opportunities for ministry with the soldiers. Second, Union chaplains needed to determine their military role. Their formal responsibilities with the army were not clearly defined when the war first began. This resulted in a number of misunderstandings between military officers and chaplains regarding their function and the duties they were expected to perform. For Union chaplains, their ability to determine their wartime role and relationship with the military would be contingent upon clarifying these unsettled issues. Before examining how Union chaplains strengthened their military identity during the Civil War, a brief historical overview of the military chaplaincy will be provided to illustrate how the office developed such a tenuous relationship with the army.

The military chaplaincy draws upon a long historical precedent of religious officials participating in military affairs. The Old Testament provides numerous examples of this relationship between spiritual leaders and the army.⁶ Even after the monarchy was established, religious leaders still occupied a prominent place in military matters, which even the king was not to usurp.⁷ Furthermore, kings often consulted priests and prophets prior to battle for the

⁶ Exodus 17:9-12; Deuteronomy 20:1-4.

⁷ King Saul illustrated the importance of acknowledging this sacred task when he attempted to assume the priest's role prior to a battle with the Philistines. He was severely admonished by the prophet Samuel as a result of his action. 1 Samuel 13:13-14.

purpose of attaining divine blessing upon the battlefield or supernatural insight regarding the outcome of the battle.⁸

Yet, the people of Israel were certainly not the only people who sought divine favor in wartime. Throughout history, nations have sought supernatural intervention in their military engagements, which promoted the desire for priestly involvement during these times of conflict. While there has been a notable shift over time in the means used to gain divine aid, the desire for this heavenly assistance is still clearly seen in society today.⁹ The responsibility to fulfill that role in the modern military often rests upon the chaplaincy.

The origin of the term chaplain is popularly believed to have developed with the actions of Martin of Tours (316-397). According to this famous legend, a soldier named Martin encountered a shivering beggar on a cold winter evening. Martin proceeded to slice his military cloak into two sections and gave one to the cold beggar, while he used the portion he kept for himself as a cape (*capella*). That same night, Martin dreamed he saw Jesus wearing the cloak. This vision so affected Martin that he converted to Christianity and left the army. The cloak of Martin became a venerated relic during the Middle Ages and became one of the Frankish kings' most treasured possessions. Rulers frequently brought the *capella* into battle believing that it would bring divine favor to their cause. The priest who served as the custodian of this relic was called the *cappellanus*, which later became *chapellain* in Old French and *chaplain* in English. The priests who served the military were identified as *cappellani* and the place where the relic

⁸ 1 Kings 22:15; 2 Kings 19:3-4.

⁹ Chaplain historian Roy Honeywell notes that the reliance upon physical items such as relics, amulets and libations diminished over time and that religious leaders relied almost solely upon prayer as the means to gain divine favor. See Roy Honeywell, *Chaplains of the United States Army* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Chaplaincy, Department of the Army, 1958), 5. General George Patton's request to Chaplain James O'Neil to pray for better weather around the time of the Battle of the Bulge (December, 1944) offers one of the most famous examples in recent history of seeking divine aid in military situations.

was kept and where religious services were conducted was known as the *chapel*. Thus, a soldier turned priest provided the basis for the term chaplain.¹⁰

Christian church leaders have from time to time addressed the chaplain's role. The Council of Ratisbon in 742 AD provides one of the most famous statements regarding the prescribed duties for the holder of this office. The guidelines for the position are detailed in Canon 2:

We prohibit the servant of God in every way from bearing arms or fighting in the army or going against the enemy, except for those alone who because of the sacred office, namely, for celebrating mass and carrying relics of the saints, have been designated for this office; this is to say, the leader may have with him one or two bishops with their priest chaplains, and each captain may have one priest, in order to hear the confessions of the men and impose upon them the proper penance.¹¹

Although the Council's decree provided direction toward the chaplain's military responsibilities, its statement did not resolve one of the most controversial subjects surrounding the chaplaincy: the clergy's involvement in combat.

Despite the fact that there have been notable examples of clergy bearing arms throughout history, such as during the Crusades to the Holy Land (1095-1271), both Christian and secular leaders have generally discouraged clergy from participation in battle since the fourteenth century. There have, however, been numerous incidents of chaplains participating in military conflict since that time and the American Civil War was certainly no exception.¹²

No European nation had a greater influence upon America's military chaplaincy than England. The traditions that had developed in the English army served as the model that the

¹⁰ Ibid., 5; and Israel Drazin and Cecil B. Curry, *For God and Country: The History of the Constitutional Challenge to the Army Chaplaincy* (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, 1995), 4.

¹¹ Ibid., 6.

¹² Clarence L. Abercrombie, *The Military Chaplain* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1977), 33; and Parker C. Thompson, *The United States Chaplaincy: From its European Antecedents to 1791* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1978), xii. The controversy over chaplains bearing arms during the Civil War will be examined in greater detail later in this chapter.

colonists regularly followed for much of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Many of their customs and practices originated during the Tudor and Stuart dynasties. The government gave considerable prominence to the chaplaincy's role in the military during this time of heightened religious interest. For example, procedures were established to provide a chaplain for every regiment. This policy required every regimental commander "to have a well-governed and religious preacher in the regiment so that by his life and doctrines the soldiers may be drawn to goodness." The commanders were also expected to ensure that a formation at headquarters occurred every morning and evening "where divine duties are to be performed by the preacher." Moreover, policies were also established during this period that formalized the chaplain's military standing and pay.¹³

While the requirement for the provision of a chaplain was clearly stated, the duties of these religious officials were far more ambiguous. Their responsibilities were depicted in one brief phrase: "His duty is to have the care of souls and it is well if he meddle with no other business, but make that his only care." This short statement served as the chaplain's only guideline for most of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The American military followed a similar pattern and provide few guidelines regarding the chaplain's specified role.¹⁴

The aversion most colonists held toward Roman Catholicism limited the influence that French and Spanish clergy had upon the chaplaincy in Colonial America. The colonists held French chaplains in particularly low regard after the French and Indian War (1754-1763) since many believed that these clerics were responsible for inciting raids upon their settlements during the conflict.

¹³ Thompson, xii-xiii.

¹⁴ John G. Smyth, *In This Sign Conquer: The Story of the Army Chaplains* (London: A. R. Mowbray and Company, 1968), 14.

The chaplains' standing in the American military has widely fluctuated from the first colonial settlements through the Civil War. The New England colonies attributed great importance to the chaplain's involvement with the army. The first recorded example of a religious leader assuming this position in a military capacity occurred during the Pequot War of 1637. In the spring of 1637, members of the Pequot tribe attacked the settlements around Wethersfield, Connecticut. The colonists responded by sending out a military expedition to wage war against them. Believing that religious oversight was vital to the success of this military effort, they asked Samuel Stone, a thirty-five-year-old minister from Hartford, to act as the chaplain. By virtue of his position, Stone was expected to provide spiritual leadership for the troops and serve as an advisor to the commanding officer.¹⁵ New England colonies regularly followed this same pattern of providing clergy to serve as chaplains during times of warfare throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The southern colonies, however, rarely used chaplains in their military conflicts. The Anglican Church figured largely in this contrasting practice from the northern colonies. As the established church in the southern region it was expected that the chaplain would come from the Anglican tradition. However, Church of England policies required that a minister obtain a letter of license from the bishop in London before the colony's provincial governor could appoint him as a chaplain.¹⁶ Thus, the conflict was often concluded before this ecclesiastical requirement could be satisfied. Consequently, the South often did not share the North's affinity toward the chaplaincy during the Colonial era since they were accustomed to having militia units without a chaplain.

¹⁵ Honeywell, 11; and Thompson, 12-13.

¹⁶ Thompson, xvii-xviii.

A number of notable changes occurred to the military chaplaincy during the American Revolution (1775-1783). The number of those who served in this office during this conflict vastly exceeded anything previously witnessed in colonial history.¹⁷ A marked shift in the chaplain's relationship with the military also occurred during the war. The association became much more formalized after the Continental Congress gave official recognition to the chaplaincy on July 29, 1775. As a result, the loose connection that often characterized the ties between local clergy and militia units began to give way to a more defined affiliation.¹⁸

To demonstrate their commitment to military professionalism, government officials attempted during the war to determine the military rank, pay and duties of the chaplains. However, the lawmakers had mixed results in their efforts to resolve these issues. Congress passed a measure on July 29, 1775 that established the pay scale for the chaplain at twenty dollars a month, which was comparable to the pay of an infantry captain.¹⁹ Yet, neither Congress nor the military were able to settle the issue of the chaplains' rank or their prescribed military duties. Chaplains were treated throughout the war as if they were officers, yet they held no formal rank, which was simply a continuation of previous military practice.²⁰ Although Congress did not pass any policy that stipulated the chaplains' military role, they did pass a provision that listed some of the desired qualities that should be evident in a candidate for the chaplaincy. The measure specified that only clergy with experience and established public

¹⁷ Partial historical records make it extremely difficult to identify the precise number of those who served as chaplains, although there is adequate evidence to determine that at least 219 clergymen served as chaplains during the war. Congregationalists provided the largest number of chaplains to the army and Presbyterians supplied the second most clergy to the position. Honeywell, 30-31; and Thompson, xix.

¹⁸ Honeywell, 35-37.

¹⁹ Ibid., 37.

²⁰ Harvey Cox, *Military Chaplains: From Religious Military to a Military Religion* (New York: American Report Press, 1971), 18.

character for piety, virtue and learning should be nominated for this office. However, the government did not establish a formal standard by which a chaplain could be appointed a chaplain. Thus, each military unit continued to determine its own criteria for how it selected someone to the position, which often varied from region to region and unit to unit.²¹

While the military chaplains' duties may not have been formally prescribed, there were certain tasks chaplains commonly performed during the war. These included conducting worship services, organizing prayer meetings, visiting the sick and wounded, encouraging and counseling those struggling with difficulties, and finally, conducting funeral services. Military chaplains also placed great importance upon the messages they delivered to the troops. The two most common themes preached by chaplains pertained to saving souls and defending liberties.²² Many of these officials also gave considerable importance to promoting the morale of the troops and maintaining a high moral standard within the military camp.²³

The military chaplaincy experienced considerable instability from the end of the Revolutionary War to the beginning of the Civil War. The number of those serving in this position frequently fluctuated as a consequence of the many changes made to the military's structure during that period. Throughout most of this phase, the chaplains served at military posts along the frontier, where they continued to function without any clear guidelines regarding their formal duties.²⁴

²¹ Honeywell, 38.

²² *Ibid.*, 71.

²³ Thompson, 114-116.

²⁴ A fear of inciting controversies with denominational leaders over doctrinal issues likely contributed to the government's reticence to develop a formal policy outlining the military chaplains' duties. One of the few instances where Congress did pass legislation regarding a chaplain's duties occurred in 1818. This policy required the chaplain serving at West Point to teach history, geography and ethics. Norton, 24.

In both the War of 1812 and the Mexican-American War (1846-1848), the chaplaincy occupied a vastly diminished military presence in comparison to the Revolutionary War because of the political and religious controversies associated with these conflicts. In 1812, Congress responded to the growing tension with Great Britain by reorganizing the military. Each of the regiments was intended to include over 2,000 men, which included officers. However, they assigned only one chaplain for each of these large units.²⁵ Thus, these religious leaders encountered a herculean task during this conflict because of the changes made to the army. Furthermore, considerable opposition to the war developed in New England because of the economic difficulties that arose from the disruption in trade. Whereas this region had provided a sizable number of chaplains during the Revolutionary War, the region's widespread antagonism to this second war with Britain resulted in far fewer volunteering to serve in this same military capacity with the militia units as well.

Religious concerns figured more prominently in the military chaplaincy's diminished role in America's next major conflict: the War with Mexico (1846-1848). Yet, the controversies associated with this clash ultimately led to the appointment of the first Catholic chaplains to minister to United States soldiers. Religious tensions between Protestants and Catholics became a source of concern for President James K. Polk (1845-1849) during America's military conflict with its neighbor to the south after Mexican secular and religious presses circulated reports in 1846, which characterized the conflict as a religious battle against Catholicism.²⁶ Catholics in both countries were disturbed by the assertion of sectarian motivations. Furthermore, a large

²⁵ In June of 1812, there were eight chaplains to serve the regular army of 11,000. Unfortunately, most of the records that pertain to the military chaplaincy during this conflict were destroyed when the British Army burned down much of Washington, D.C. in 1814. Honeywell, 78.

²⁶ George Brown Tindall and David E. Shi, *America: A Narrative History*, 6th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), 559-560; and Norton, 64-65.

number of American soldiers fighting in Mexico were Catholics who had recently immigrated to the United States.²⁷ Although Polk consciously refrained from publicly identifying the conflict in religious terms, he was concerned about possible impact from the religious propaganda. He feared that it could increase the resolve of the Mexican army as well as diminish support for the war among American Catholics. In an attempt to quell any charges of sectarian connections with the war, Polk adopted the controversial policy of sending two priests (both were Jesuits from Maryland's Georgetown College) to minister to the soldiers in Mexico later that same year.²⁸ Although some Protestant leaders criticized Polk's actions regarding the use of these Catholic officials, he contended that the critics of his policy ignored the nation's commitment to religious liberty. The criticism toward using Catholic priests diminished substantially after the news came out that Father Anthony Rey (one of the two officials from Georgetown) had been killed by Mexican guerillas in January of 1847.²⁹ Thus, the Mexican War established an important precedent that eventually allowed forty-three priests to serve as chaplains to the Union Army during the Civil War.

The military chaplaincy entered one of its bleakest periods after the war with Mexico ended. The number of appointments to the chaplaincy once again diminished substantially after Congress initiated a cutback in the size of the peace-time military in 1849. The new policy

²⁷ Catholic leaders in the United States encouraged their communicants to volunteer for military service in the war as a way that new residents could demonstrate their loyalty to the nation and its political values. Tyler Johnson, *Devotion to the Adopted Country: U.S. Immigrant Volunteers in the Mexican War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2012), 12-14.

²⁸ Herman Norton, *Struggling for Recognition: The United States Army Chaplaincy, 1791-1865* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1977), 66-67. There is some controversy surrounding the identification of America's first Catholic chaplain. Although these two priests are identified by Norton as the military's first two Catholic chaplains, Polk did not identify either of these priests as chaplains since he did not believe he had the constitutional authority to designate chaplains. See James K. Polk, *Diary of James K. Polk*, ed. Milo M. Quaife, vol. II, (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1910), 147; and Honeywell, 45.

²⁹ Polk, *Diary*, III: 105.

reduced the army to 10,000, most of whom would serve at frontier posts. The guidelines also authorized only thirty chaplains to serve at these distant military locales.³⁰ The chaplaincy also received a bit of negative publicity during the 1850s because of particular appointments made to this post. Stories circulated around Washington that questioned the suitability of those holding the office since some of the chaplains at the frontier posts had few to no religious credentials. Furthermore, lawmakers received critical accounts about post chaplains that declared that a number of those appointed to the position devoted their time strictly to secular or civilian affairs and ignored any type of religious ministrations. In spite of these criticisms, little change came to the office as a result of these charges since the political sector's attention was far more engrossed in the growing sectional tensions.³¹ However, events on the not too distant horizon were going to bring about considerable changes in the military chaplain's role and responsibilities.

The office of the chaplaincy was certainly not prepared to respond to a conflict the size and magnitude of the Civil War. When the Union government first began to mobilize its army after the attack on Fort Sumter, federal law authorized only thirty chaplains, and twenty-six of these posts were filled by those who served at distant military stations. While the number of active chaplains was obviously insufficient and would need to be increased, the absence of a comprehensive policy for the position and its tenuous relationship with the military posed far more serious consequences at that time.³² Henry Clay Trumbull, chaplain of the Tenth Connecticut, offered this description of the chaplains' ill-defined standing at the beginning of the war:

³⁰ Norton, 76.

³¹ Honeywell, 84.

³² Although Union military policy directed that every regiment was to be provided a chaplain, a shortage of personnel serving in this position remained a problem throughout the war. Norton, 108.

There were post chaplains at various stations where military needs required the gathering of soldiers but a Regimental chaplain was so little called for that his position and duties were hardly known. The standard military dictionary of that time defined “a chaplain” as “a commissioned officer or clergyman who performs divine service.” According to army regulations a chaplain was entitled to the pay and rations of a captain of cavalry; but that provision did not indicate his rank, his sphere, or his duties. The only specific utterance on this point in the Articles of War was, that a chaplain could be courtmartialled “like any other officer,” in case of a misdemeanor.³³

Union clergy assumed a military position that was ambiguous in both its status and responsibilities. Furthermore, there was no system of oversight in place to guide them on how to minister within an army environment, nor were there any regulations to direct them in their wartime role outside of the vague reference to providing divine service for the soldiers.³⁴

A common awareness developed among Union chaplains during the first few months of the war that the office’s tenuous standing within the military was a primary cause for many of its struggles. They also observed that the muddled state of the office undermined their ability to promote Christianity with the troops. Union chaplains were often made aware that their superior officers looked upon the chaplaincy quite unfavorably during the first few months of the war. The office’s lack of structure, for example, significantly contrasted with the Union Army’s strong desire to instill a commitment to professionalism with its newly enlisted soldiers.³⁵ Union leaders often made the chaplains feel as if their presence with the army was not desired. James J. Marks, chaplain of the 63rd Pennsylvania, offered this perspective of how chaplains perceived they were viewed by officers during the initial stages of the war. “So far as the appointment of the chaplains is concerned it was evidently a concession made to the religious

³³ Henry Clay Trumbull, *War Memories of a Chaplain* (Philadelphia: J. D. Wattles, 1898), 1.

³⁴ Budd, *Serving Two Masters*, 47.

³⁵ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 349.

sentiment of the country—one of those formless, shapeless things thrown in to fill up a vacuum.” Marks also expressed his perception that many of the officers put up with the chaplain’s presence only because the clergy were seen as facilitating enlistments.³⁶ John Hight, chaplain of the 58th Indiana, believed that regimental commanders struggled with the chaplains’ military function and were often “at a loss to know what to do with them.”³⁷

The low regard held toward the chaplaincy deeply concerned the clergymen. They were aware of the influence that regimental commanders had over the chaplains’ ministry with the troops. Support from the superior officer could greatly enhance opportunities to interact with the soldiers. Thomas M. Stevenson, chaplain of the 78th O.V.V.I., observed that attendance significantly increased when the commander endorsed or actively participated in a worship service or prayer meeting.³⁸ Conversely, military leaders could also limit this contact and discourage participation in religious activities.³⁹ An unexpected development had indeed emerged for Union chaplains that threatened to diminish their ability to promote Christianity among the army: they were viewed as outsiders by the military establishment.

Union chaplains began to embrace a stronger military identity after they discovered that soldiers often held the chaplaincy in low regard. The clergy were made aware that army personnel viewed the chaplaincy’s organizational procedures and lack of structure as unprofessional for a modern force. Furthermore, they also recognized that the office’s traditional

³⁶ John J. Marks, *The Peninsular Campaign in Virginia or Incidents and Scenes on the Battlefield and in Richmond*, 5th ed. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1864), 49.

³⁷ John J. Hight, *History of the 58th Regiment of the Indiana Volunteer Infantry* (Princeton, IN: Press of the Clarion, 1895), 46.

³⁸ Thomas Stevenson, *History of the 78th O.V.V.I.* (Zanesville, OH: H. Dunne, 1865), 106-107. The abbreviation O.V.V.I. stands for Ohio Veteran Volunteer Infantry.

³⁹ Francis Springer, *The Preacher’s Tale: The Civil War Journal of Rev. Francis Springer, Chaplain U.S. Army of the Frontier*, ed. William Furry (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2001), 90-91.

detachment from military procedures contributed significantly to the distant relationship they presently held with the army.⁴⁰ Consequently, chaplains started to place much greater emphasis upon following military policies as a way to build closer ties with the army. William Brown, for example, strongly encouraged his associates to carry out their work in a professional manner. He wanted the chaplaincy to give greater prominence to accountability than it had in the past when it was often responsible to no one. He believed it would be extremely beneficial for chaplains to seek oversight from military superiors. He also encouraged accurate record keeping of their wartime labors as another way that holders of the office could demonstrate their professionalism.⁴¹ Clergy such as Brown hoped that by displaying a greater affinity with the military in their customs and practices they might enhance their ministry with the soldiers.

However, the chaplains' attempt to strengthen their military identity greatly depended upon their ability to clarify their role and relationship with the army. While the ministers may have desired to operate in a more military-like manner, there was little likelihood they could accomplish this goal until their official station with the army was more clearly defined. They needed appropriate guidelines to direct them in their mode of operations and conduct. Therefore, chaplains began working with Union lawmakers and military officials by the summer of 1861 to develop formal procedures for the office that would resolve much of the uncertainty that surrounded the position. Their efforts centered around two primary themes: clarifying the chaplains' ambiguous status and defining the chaplains' military responsibilities.

The military chaplains' specific standing within the Union Army's chain of command emerged as one of the significant problems that needed to be addressed. Prior to the Civil War,

⁴⁰ Budd, *Serving Two Masters*, 27-29; and Hammond, 31-32.

⁴¹ Brown, 55, 110.

clergy had informally been viewed as officers by both the government and the military. However, the position lacked formal recognition or defined status. The vague nature surrounding their rank would be especially troublesome in the military's hierarchical structure, which placed such emphasis upon recognizing the proper lines of authority. The confusion regarding the chaplains' specific position raised a number of questions such as whether they were to be saluted or what amount of authority these religious leaders had over enlisted men. There was also concern among chaplains that the lack of formal recognition from the military could undermine their ministry with the troops and lessen the respect from commanders and soldiers. Frederic Denison, Chaplain of the 1st Rhode Island Cavalry and 3rd Rhode Island Heavy Artillery, elaborated on the unease the clergy felt during the early stages of the war because the chaplain joined with "no appointment or recognized place ... on a march, in a bivouac, or in a line of battle; he was a supernumerary, a kind of fifth wheel to a coach, being in place nowhere and out of place everywhere."⁴² It was certainly understandable why Union chaplains desired to have their military status clarified. The Army's unique practice of providing informal recognition to the chaplains as officers was not conducive to the clergy's commitment to following prescribed military procedures. As long as the office of the chaplaincy lacked formal acknowledgement, they would have a difficult time shedding the image as outsiders among the army.

Union Army leaders were also cognizant of the confusion caused by the chaplains' vague military status. They desired to develop a formal answer to the question whether a chaplain was an officer, and if so, what was his rank? The wording in General Order No. 15, which authorized the position, did little to dispel the confusion over the matter. Not only did it not include

⁴² Frederic Denison, *A Chaplain's Experiences in the Union Army* (Providence, RI: Soldiers and Sailors Historical Society of Rhode Island, 1893), 17.

chaplains among the other officers but it also listed them alongside wagoners, musicians and sutlers. This initial declaration caused a number of regiments to question whether chaplains should be mustered in with the officers or the enlisted men.⁴³ Two months later, in an effort to clarify some of the confusion regarding the chaplains' status, Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas issued General Order No. 44, which stated that all chaplains would be "duly mustered into the service in the same manner as prescribed for commissioned officers."⁴⁴ Unfortunately, many viewed the statement "in the same manner as officers" as a way of saying that chaplains were not officers.⁴⁵ On April 9, 1864, Congress finally helped bring a little more clarity to the issue when it passed a law that created the rank of "chaplain without command." The measure also declared that the chaplain would be listed on the field and staff roles immediately after the surgeon.⁴⁶ Many initially took this statement to imply that the rank of chaplain was between a major and a captain since surgeons held the rank of major. The Adjutant General attempted to provide further clarification regarding the chaplain's status in a recommendation he passed on to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton at the end of October of that same year. He proposed a policy that set the chaplain's rank, pay, and allowance at the same level as a captain. Stanton eventually passed this plan to the president but the war ended before any action was taken by Congress.⁴⁷

Not all chaplains were so concerned about having their particular status determined. Some preferred to keep a little distance in their relationship with the military since they perceived such

⁴³ Budd, *Serving Two Masters*, 42.

⁴⁴ Lorenzo Thomas served as the Union Army's Adjutant General for the entire war.

⁴⁵ Rollin W. Quimby, "Congress and the Civil War Chaplaincy," *Civil War History* 10, no. 3 (1964): 253.

⁴⁶ Congressional Globe, 38 Cong., 1 Sess., 1163 (1864). Chaplain was used as a title rather than a rank prior to this legislative action.

⁴⁷ Honeywell, 109-110.

a wide divergence in the primary aims of the two organizations. Jonathan Pinkney Hammond maintained an attitude of indifference towards ascertaining the chaplain's rank. He stated in his influential work on the chaplain's wartime role that "Chaplains should have no rank whatsoever." Rather, he maintained that they should seek to earn the respect of others because of their role as "ambassadors of Jesus Christ" instead of placing such stress on external compliance with military practices. Consequently for Hammond, "The question of rank is therefore of little importance."⁴⁸ There were also chaplains who expressed reservations about the considerable importance some clergy placed upon being identified so closely with the military. They feared that the significant emphasis upon being more army-like could cause the office to lose the distinctiveness of its spiritual role. Ezra Sprague, Chaplain of the 119th Massachusetts, exemplified this view in a letter he sent to the Adjutant General. He wrote to challenge an assertion made by other chaplains that implied these religious leaders were unified in their desire to wear uniforms that more closely resembled the military's. He informed General Thomas that there were a significant number of chaplains who were strongly opposed to changing their appearance in this manner and preferred instead to wear garb that distinguished them as clergy.⁴⁹

The confusion over the chaplains' military status figured prominently in the controversies that developed over their financial compensation. Congress initially set the pay for both chaplains in the regular army and volunteers at \$1,700 a year, which was equivalent to that of a captain of the cavalry. The same rate of compensation was also eventually given to military hospital chaplains.⁵⁰ However, by the spring of 1862, Senate members began to express their

⁴⁸ Hammond, 23.

⁴⁹ Ezra Sprague to Lorenzo Thomas, October 28, 1864, Letters Received, Files of the Adjutant General's Office, National Archives, Record Group 94; and Alonzo H. Quint, *The Potomac and the Rapidan* (Boston: Crosby and Nichols, 1864), 69.

concern that the amount paid to chaplains was exorbitant and that it should be reduced. During this same period, a number of well publicized reports about incompetent or unqualified chaplains began to circulate around Washington. Some of those who desired to decrease the chaplains' salary argued that a substantial reduction in their pay could also resolve the army's difficulties with inadequate clergy. They proposed reducing the stipend to \$900 a year, which they maintained would help rid the army of the worthless chaplains since only the truly conscientious would continue to serve at such a small salary.⁵¹ Although this bill never made it to a vote, Congress did eventually reduce the chaplains' salary to a base pay of \$1,200 annually in the summer of 1862. The lawmakers included a provision that would provide for two rations a day, which were valued at around \$200. Nevertheless, this was still a substantial reduction in pay of almost 18 percent, which provoked considerable frustration among the chaplains.⁵² Furthermore, there was already a shortage of clergy serving in the Union Army and members of the office feared that the decreased salary could exacerbate the problem even further. The financial effects of this legislation became even keener for some chaplains because of a misunderstanding that developed over the legislation's wording. The law stated that chaplains were to be paid "one hundred dollars per month and two rations a day while on duty." However, some Union paymasters interpreted the phrase "while on duty" to imply that all compensation was to be withheld at any time the chaplain was not on duty. This meant that any time a chaplain was sick, wounded, serving away from camp, or even imprisoned, he would be denied any pay during this

⁵⁰ Honeywell, 111-113; Hammond, 16-19; and Armstrong, 8-11.

⁵¹ Norton, 88-89.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 88-90; *The Public Statutes at Large of the United States of America*, XII: 595; and *Official Records*, series 3, 1: 368.

period.⁵³ This extremely literal construal of this policy resulted in considerable hardship for a number of chaplains who saw their pay significantly reduced or withheld, which could occur even while they performed labors connected with their office, such as if they were picking up camp supplies at another location. Alonzo H. Quint, chaplain of the 2nd Massachusetts, expressed deep concern regarding the detrimental effect that the policy, as it was worded, could have upon the chaplains' work. He feared that it might ultimately discourage them from helping soldiers on the battlefield, since they ran the risk of losing their pay if they were wounded.⁵⁴ Military chaplains continued to see their salary withheld or reduced even after Congress publicly stated in April 1864 that the religious leaders were not to have their pay reduced in this manner.⁵⁵

The army also provided guidelines for the chaplains' uniforms amidst its efforts to clarify their military rank and status. General Order 102, which was issued on November 25, 1861, prescribed that the uniform of chaplains of the army would consist of "a plain black frock coat with standing collar, and one row of nine black buttons; plain black pantaloons; black felt hat, or army forage cap, without ornament. On occasions of ceremony, a plain chapeau de bras may be worn."⁵⁶ This policy was later amended by General Order 247 (August 25, 1864), which allowed for a few modifications in their uniform.⁵⁷ These policies were intended to make it easier to identify chaplains and remove any confusion regarding their military status. However,

⁵³ Union Paymaster General Timothy Andrews steadfastly maintained this view toward the chaplains' salary and promoted it among his subordinates. Brinsfield, et al., 10-11.

⁵⁴ Quint, 353.

⁵⁵ Denison, 41; and Honeywell, 113. The fourteen black clergymen who were appointed to serve as chaplains to black regiments experienced even greater financial consequences after Army paymasters improperly interpreted a policy that paid these ministers the same amount as the blacks that performed general labor. See Armstrong, 11.

⁵⁶ Honeywell. 110; and Armstrong, 11-12.

⁵⁷ Records of the Adjutant General's Office, National Archives, Record Group, 94. The army had initially created regulations for the chaplain's uniform in 1816 but these standards were frequently revised over the next forty-five years. Francis A. Lord, *Uniforms of the Civil War* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1970), 84.

some chaplains believed the emblems that identified the chaplains' status were often not easily distinguished. A group of chaplains even sent a petition to the Adjutant General in 1864 that requested that a special insignia be adopted for the office that would make their status more recognizable.⁵⁸

Union military chaplains displayed considerable variations in attire even after the new standards were passed in 1861. They generally enjoyed a great deal of freedom in what they wore since regimental leaders rarely enforced these guidelines for the ministers' uniforms very strictly. Many chaplains enjoyed the opportunity to provide their own personal touch to their attire. Chaplain Robert Browne of the 100th Pennsylvania provides a description of the modifications he made to his uniform:

My style of dress is slightly under consideration between myself, Col & staff. Chaplain Stewart wears black, cut in military style, and without the brass buttons. I think I will have a modest blue, with brass buttons & without the shoulder straps—also a fatigue suit of the same.⁵⁹

The differences in their uniforms did cause some confusion among the soldiers, who were not always able to recognize when they were in the presence of a chaplain. William Corby, chaplain of the 88th New York Infantry, was involved in a particularly notable example of mistaken identity during the war. While riding between two surgeons one night he was mistakenly addressed as a general by a young officer. The very next day a soldier rode up, tossed his reins to the chaplain and told him to hold his horse. In a light-hearted manner, the chaplain lamented

⁵⁸ N. B. Critchfield to Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas. Letters Received, Files of the Adjutant General's Office, National Archives, Record Group, 94; and Armstrong, 12.

⁵⁹ Robert A. Browne, Letter dated September 19, 1861, Civil War Miscellaneous Collection, United States Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, PA (referred to as USMHI hereafter).

to his companions: “Last night I was a general; now a private offers me a dime to hold his horse.”⁶⁰

While some clergy simply enjoyed the opportunity to express a little distinctive flair in their attire, many attached considerable significance to their garb. The importance placed upon their manner of dress extended well beyond simply clarifying military rank or personal taste. The unique symbolism that both clergy and the military connected with their uniforms significantly influenced what the chaplain wore.⁶¹ On the one hand, there were a number of religious leaders who desired to emphasize their military identity and dressed in a manner that clearly resembled soldiers in appearance. For example, Jerome Spillman, chaplain of the 5th Iowa Cavalry, mentioned his pleasure at how he looked with his “two fine holsters and colt revolvers which I shall use if necessary on the field. You ought to see me on my horse with my uniform on.”⁶² The same Robert Browne who mentioned the additions he made in his attire also wrote of a visit he received from R. W. Oliver, chaplain of the 31st Pennsylvania Volunteers, whom he described as “uniformed & equipped with sash, sword, & revolver.”⁶³ Yet, on the other hand, there were also many chaplains who very consciously wore attire that clearly distinguished them as clergy. Alonzo Quint believed that the chaplains who sought to appear more military-like in their uniform opened themselves up to the ridicule of the officers. Moreover, they also failed to recognize their proper role with the army. He stated, “The less a chaplain assumes to be a military man the better. His influence is that of a Christian minister.”⁶⁴ Union chaplains

⁶⁰ William J. Corby, *Memoirs of Chaplain Life* (Notre Dame, IN: Scholastic Press, 1894), 204-5.

⁶¹ Budd, *Serving Two Masters*, 45.

⁶² Jerome Spillman, Letter dated January 28, 1862, Civil War Illustrated Collection, USMHI.

⁶³ Robert A. Browne, Letter dated September 16, 1861, Civil War Miscellaneous Collection, USMHI.

continued to exhibit considerable diversity in their attire throughout the war since they were unable to reach a common understanding regarding the particulars of the uniform's appearance.

Chaplains did on occasion experience negative consequences because they did not follow the military's policy regarding their uniforms. Rev. Andrew Hartsock, for example, wrote about being arrested in 1863 by a Union Lieutenant as a rebel spy because he was not wearing a uniform.⁶⁵ Rev. Horatio S. Howell suffered particularly dire consequences for his decision to dress in a manner that resembled the soldiers. This chaplain for the 19th Pennsylvania was killed at Gettysburg during an attempt to explain to a Confederate soldier that he was a non-combatant after being asked to surrender.⁶⁶

Union officials also established stronger standards for the chaplaincy during the war. Ordination was initially the only prerequisite for the office. However, a movement to bolster the requirements for the office had developed by 1862 after numerous accounts about incompetent and unqualified military chaplains began to circulate in Washington, D.C. and northern churches. While some of the incidents pertained to moral indiscretions, the more common complaint was that the clergy either showed little concern for the soldiers or they were inept in their work.⁶⁷

One reason for the large amount of criticism directed toward the first wave of chaplains was the poor quality of ministers who initially held this military station. Many sought the office

⁶⁴ Quint, 69.

⁶⁵ Andrew Jackson Hartsock, *Soldier of the Cross: The Civil War Diary and Correspondence of Rev. Andrew Jackson Hartsock*, ed. James C. and Eleanor A. Duram (Manhattan: Kansas State University, 1979), 99. Hartsock served as the chaplain for the 110th and 133rd Pennsylvania Volunteers.

⁶⁶ Norton, 106.

⁶⁷ *Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 12, 1861; and Norton, 83-85, 117. One chaplain was caught selling goods that were sent by an organization with the expressed purpose that they be distributed to the soldiers free of charge. Another notable incident involved a chaplain who absconded to Europe after he was discovered to have collected money for a non-existent charity. Bell Irvin Wiley, "Holy Joes of the Sixties: A Study of Civil War Chaplains," *Huntington Library Quarterly* XVI (May, 1953): 291; and Armstrong, 56.

simply because they were not able to find or hold positions as pastors of churches, while more qualified pastors were often reluctant to trade their comfortable parish positions for the rigors of military life. Questionable appointments by regimental leaders also figured in the controversy over ineffectual chaplains. A significant number of the officers in charge simply ignored the requirement that the candidate for the position had to be ordained. Henry Clay Trumbull, for instance, observed several instances where regimental commanders selected personal acquaintances who were clearly unqualified for the position.⁶⁸

The physical demands associated with war also contributed to the all too common problem of ineffectual chaplains. Many of them simply lacked the stamina generally needed during military campaigns and eventually became overwhelmed by the many challenges that accompanied the war. It is worthwhile to note that while physical endurance certainly contributed to the military chaplains' ability to carry out their labor, Union lawmakers never established any age restrictions upon the office during the war. For example, Charles C. McCabe, chaplain of the 122nd Ohio, mentioned that one of his associates, who was with him in Libby Prison, was eighty years old. John Pierpont served briefly as the chaplain for the 22nd Massachusetts at the age of seventy-six.⁶⁹

Even the stipulation of ordination did little to insure the quality of the candidates for the chaplaincy since there was such a variance in the educational requirements among the

⁶⁸ Quimby, "The Chaplain's Predicament," 28; Norton, 85; and Trumbull, 2. General Orders Number 15 and 16 established the procedure for the appointment of chaplains. These policies authorized regimental commanders to appoint a chaplain on the vote of field officers and company commanders. However, some regimental commanders gave little consideration to the views of others when making their selection of a chaplain. See Richard M. Budd, "Ohio Army Chaplains and the Professionalization of Military Chaplaincy in the Civil War," *Ohio History* (Winter-Spring 1993): 6-10; and Elisha Hunt Rhodes, *All for the Union: The Civil War Diary and Letters of Elisha Hunt Rhodes*, ed. Robert Hunt Rhodes (New York: Orion Books, 1985), 125-126.

⁶⁹ Frank Martin Bristol, *The Life of Chaplain McCabe, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1908), 137; and Honeywell, 105. The youngest chaplain was likely in his late teens. Norton, 85.

denominations. Presbyterians and Episcopalians, for example, were far more rigorous in the level of formal training that was needed to be ordained than was set forth by Methodists or Baptists.

After months of debate, Congress finally passed legislation on July 17, 1862 that revised the standards for the chaplaincy:

No person shall be appointed a chaplain in the United States army who is not a regularly ordained minister of some religious denomination, and who does not present testimonials of his good standing as such minister with a recommendation for his appointment as an army Chaplain from some authorized ecclesiastical body, or not less than five accredited ministers belonging to said denomination.⁷⁰

Union lawmakers hoped to strengthen the quality of the chaplaincy by making it more difficult for inept ministers to gain the position. Moreover, the inclusion of ecclesiastical endorsement offered another safeguard against incompetent candidates. Yet, this was not the only notable change included in this policy. Congress also removed the previous requirement that the chaplain must be a member of a Christian denomination since it was viewed as discriminatory of Jews, many of whom were serving in the Union Army. This modification in the law allowed for the appointment of Jewish chaplains.⁷¹

The new guidelines also included a measure intended to increase the quality of the chaplaincy by removing ineffectual clergy. The policy stipulated that commanders whose unit contained a chaplain were required within thirty days of the act's publication "to inquire into the fitness, efficiency and qualifications of the chaplains of hospitals or regiments, and to muster out of service such chaplains as were not appointed in conformity with the requirements of this act,

⁷⁰ *Public Statutes*, XII: 403.

⁷¹ Jacob Frankel became the first recognized Jewish chaplain after he was appointed to serve at a military hospital in Philadelphia in the fall of 1862. Bertram Korn details the efforts made by American Jews to change the laws that prevented them from serving as military chaplains during the Civil War. See Bertram W. Korn, *American Jewry during the Civil War* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1951).

and who have not faithfully discharged the duties of the chaplains during the time they have been engaged as such.”⁷² On October 6, 1862, the War Department issued General Order 152 as a response to reports that some military commanders had not carried out the specified inquiry. The directive ordered military commanders to comply with the previous guideline immediately. The new regulations led to some beneficial changes for the office. They not only drummed out some of the more incompetent types, but also raised the standards for those who served in this military and religious capacity. While the regulations helped remove useless chaplains, there continued to be reports of chaplains who engaged in little to no work with their regiments throughout the war.⁷³

Much of the confusion that surrounded the chaplaincy’s military status had been resolved by the end of the Civil War. Formal guidelines were established that addressed issues such as the chaplains’ rank, manner of dress, and standards of eligibility. Furthermore, the new policies facilitated the chaplaincy’s goal to develop a closer affinity with the army in its practices. However, the office’s ambiguous military standing was not the only difficult issue that Union chaplains sought to resolve during the war. They also desired to address their ill-defined role with the army.

Clarifying the office’s formal responsibilities served as another significant way that Union clergy hoped to strengthen their military identity. There was considerable confusion surrounding the chaplains’ role with the army at the beginning of the war because Congress had established

⁷² Honeywell, 109.

⁷³ Some commanders had been particularly lenient in their interpretation of whether a chaplain had faithfully fulfilled his duties. Honeywell, 152; Norton, 87-90; and M. Hamlin Cannon, “The United States Christian Commission,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 38 (June, 1951): 62.

no prescribed duties for the office.⁷⁴ Jonathan Pinkney Hammond referred to the lack of guidelines in his manual for military chaplains. He stated in the introduction that he wrote the work to instruct others on how to carry out commonly performed labors associated with the station because of the “absence of all army regulations defining the duties of chaplains.”⁷⁵ The paucity of direction offered to clergy severely handicapped their efforts and played a major part in the office’s numerous struggles during the early stages of the war. For Union chaplains, establishing their military role served as another important objective they desired to achieve.

The fear of promoting a church-state controversy factored largely in this dearth of regulations concerning the chaplaincy. Lawmakers had traditionally steered clear of religious or theological issues so that the government would not be viewed as having overstepped its boundaries and moved into the church’s realm.⁷⁶ Delineating the chaplains’ role certainly had the potential to spark a controversy among denominational groups since any attempt to define the office’s specific military responsibilities could easily touch upon sensitive theological themes. Consequently, Congress avoided the possibility of initiating a religious controversy by not addressing the chaplains’ prescribed role. While this cautionary approach allowed lawmakers to avoid potential conflict, it also left the Union clergy with no formal duties when the war began in 1861.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Quimby, “Congress and the Civil War Chaplaincy,” 247.

⁷⁵ Hammond, vii.

⁷⁶ Dickens, 64-70; and Kenneth D. Wald, *Religion and Politics in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1997), 86-92. Religious historian Edwin S. Gaustad asserts that the Supreme Court also exhibited a reticence to addressing matters of religious belief. He noted that “with a few exceptions, the U.S. Supreme Court remained quiet on matters of religion throughout the 19th century.” Edwin S. Gaustad, *Church and State in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 48.

⁷⁷ Rollin W. Quimby, “The Chaplains’ Predicament,” 26-27.

The emphasis that military chaplains placed upon preserving their autonomy also contributed to the uncertainty that surrounded their prescribed role. They had previously resisted attempts to develop an association for the office because they were apprehensive that members of other denominational traditions or even the government might use the organization as a way to gain control over the chaplaincy. There was considerable concern among clergy that if another group gained this type of authority, it could be used to impose specific doctrinal views upon the office. Consequently, they avoided collaborating with other chaplains on matters related to the position as a way they could preserve their religious independence. Furthermore, chaplains also saw little need to form an organization among themselves since there was such a small number who held the station.⁷⁸

Clergy who first assumed the office in May 1861 discovered they held a post that offered little guidance regarding how they were to fulfill their military role. The ambiguous nature of the position frequently left chaplains with great uncertainty about what was expected of them. William Brown commented on the challenging circumstances: “The chaplains’ duties, unlike every other officer in the army are not clearly defined, and hence, he is left much to the exercise of his own judgment as to what his duties are, and how they shall be performed.”⁷⁹ Frederic Denison believed the lack of direction significantly circumscribed the chaplains’ ability to carry out their work: “Some chaplains did all they could under the circumstances. All might have done more if the *Army Regulations* had been different—more full and definite as to place and

⁷⁸ Budd, *Serving Two Masters*, 14, 24-26, 36.

⁷⁹ Brown, 91-92.

duties.”⁸⁰ Union clergy were in the unenviable position of holding an office with an unclear role while dwelling amidst an environment that prized orderliness.

The lack of regulations factored largely in the criticism directed at the office during the initial stages of the war. Many of the disparaging accounts about lazy or neglectful chaplains were aimed at clergy who took advantage of the absence of specified duties to perform as little work as possible. Officers and enlisted men alike felt great disdain toward the ministers who ignored the needs of their regiment. General Robert McAllister mentioned in a number of letters he wrote to his family about his annoyance with his chaplain because the cleric spent all his time reading in his tent and rarely interacted with anyone. Daniel Hughes, of the 25th Indiana Volunteers, complained that his lazy chaplain seemed “to have forgotten us.”⁸¹ Soldiers often expressed their frustration about their regiment’s chaplain to clergy from other units. John Stuckenberg, chaplain of the 145th Pennsylvania, was approached a number of times by Union soldiers aggravated by the indolence exhibited by their own regiment’s minister. He recounted one incident when a Union officer declared, “Our chaplain is good for nothing, except to relieve the government of money. He is too lazy to do anything and he has preached only twice since he was with us. He never visits us, but is always on hand when pay day comes.”⁸² Union chaplains also voiced considerable disapproval toward clergy who failed to carry out their work with the army in a conscientious manner. William Lyle, Chaplain of the 11th Ohio Infantry, expressed

⁸⁰ Denison, 45.

⁸¹ Robert McAllister, *The Civil War Letters of General Robert McAllister*, ed. James I. Robertson, Jr. (New Brunswick, NJ: 1965), 217-218, 252; and Daniel Hughes, *The Civil War Diary of Daniel Hughes* (Amarillo, TX: Claud McDaniels, 1960), 45.

⁸² Norton, 104; Wiley, “Holy Joes,” 291-93; John H. W. Stuckenberg, *I’m Surrounded by Methodists: Diary of John H.W. Stuckenberg, Chaplain of the 145th Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry*, ed. David T. Hedrick and Gordon Barry Davis, Jr. (Gettysburg, PA: Thomas Publishers, 1995), 103.

great scorn in his journal for another chaplain who was quite lazy and would not even come to the aid of those who were wounded.⁸³ The frustration they felt was further exacerbated by the unfavorable publicity that slothful or inept chaplains brought upon the office. Union clergy were particularly concerned about the office's standing with both the military and the general public in the early stages of the war. The unflattering accounts about worthless ministers undermined the perception of the chaplaincy and made efforts to strengthen their military identity even more difficult. General Oliver Otis Howard's comments to Congress at the beginning of 1863 about the chaplaincy being "a failure" served as one of the most prominent instances of criticism directed toward the office. Howard had been converted at a revival meeting in 1857 and had begun studies for the ministry in the Episcopal Church, which he gave up after the war broke out. The general was widely known throughout the North as the "Christian Soldier" and frequently preached to the troops when no chaplain was available. Consequently, the Union military leader's well known standing as a devout Christian caused his comments to carry extra significance among his listeners.⁸⁴

The absence of formal guidelines also contributed to the perception of the chaplain as an outsider to military affairs. Clergy often responded to the dearth of specified duties by conducting their work in the same fashion that they had used with their parishes when they were still civilians. Many devised ministerial plans that were based upon a stable and recurring timetable. Their worship services, prayer meetings and visitation were carried out in a consistent

⁸³ William M. Lyle, *Light and Shadows of Army Life* (Cincinnati: R.W. Carroll and Co., 1865), 273-274.

⁸⁴ John Stuckenberg stated that having the chaplaincy critiqued by this Union officer who was so well known for his piety made it especially difficult for chaplains to hear. Stuckenberg, 110. Howard later clarified his comments about the chaplaincy in an address at the Christian Commission's Second Anniversary Meeting in 1864. The general maintained that he directed his comments to the inadequate number of chaplains to attend to numerous moral problems found among the soldiers, rather than a statement about the quality of the chaplains. See Major-General Howard's Address at the Second Anniversary of the United States Christian Commission (Philadelphia: Caxton Press of C. Sherman, Son and Co., 1864).

manner since the camps operated on a regular pattern when they were first established.⁸⁵ However, chaplains had considerable difficulty adjusting to the changes that developed after their regiments broke camp. They struggled with the unpredictable time schedule that often came about once their unit was on the move. Some resigned their commission after a relatively short period of service because they so strongly desired to regain the stability they previously had in their civilian life. Another problem was that many lacked the flexibility to adapt to the abrupt changes often necessitated by war. Sunday worship services, for example, were often cancelled because a unit had received new orders or were involved in some type of military drill. Lyman Daniel Ames, Chaplain of the 29th Ohio Volunteers, mentioned in his journal that he experienced considerable discomfort in “making a secular day of the Sabbath for the first time” in January of 1862.⁸⁶ John R. Adams, Chaplain of the 121st New York, referred to an instance when he had no sooner announced the sermon topic at a well-attended service when the sound of the “assembly call” was heard and soon followed by “pack up” and Adams found himself suddenly alone in the chapel.⁸⁷ While most chaplains were disappointed whenever this happened, it could become a source of significant frustration when a commanding officer scheduled activities that conflicted with or interrupted worship services on a regular basis.⁸⁸

Union chaplains also experienced difficulties because of their lack of familiarity with army procedures. While chaplains and soldiers were often taken aback by their first exposure to combat, some clergy continued to struggle under these difficult conditions.

⁸⁵ Quimby, “The Chaplains’ Predicament,” 30-31.

⁸⁶ Lyman Daniel Ames, *The Civil War Diaries of Lyman Daniel Ames*, ed. by Edwin Lyman Ames, Jr. CWTI Collection, USMHI.

⁸⁷ John Ripley Adams, *Memorial and Letters of Rev. John R. Adams* (Cambridge, MA.: privately printed, 1890), 199.

⁸⁸ George S. Bradley, *The Star Corps* (Milwaukee: Jermain & Brightman, 1865), 25-26; and Honeywell, 131.

Frederic Denison observed that chaplains with no military education often became separated from their regiments during campaigns and battles, which was when he believed they were often needed most.⁸⁹ Most of those who accepted this religious position had little contact with the army prior to the war and were often unaware of its many customs or standards of conduct. Some clergy became involved in controversies because they violated military protocol in some manner. Charles C. McCabe described one incident where he had a significant conflict with his commander after he failed to respond properly to his superior officer. The clash developed after the regiment's colonel observed that a number of soldiers were not at the parade grounds for the usual three o'clock dress parade. After the commander discovered that the missing men were at a "protracted revival meeting" held by McCabe, he relayed orders for the chaplain to dismiss the meeting. However, the minister did not comply with this command. He replied to the messenger "I could not dismiss the meeting; it was going on with such great power that I did not feel it would be right." The colonel then sent a guard and had the chaplain arrested and brought to headquarters, where he severely reprimanded McCabe for his actions. A few days later the chastised minister apologized to his commander and recorded in his journal that he would never undermine the military authority of his commander like that again.⁹⁰ As chaplains like McCabe became more acquainted with army customs and procedures, breaches in military protocol like this one occurred with much less frequency.

The absence of sanctioned duties also complicated the relationship Union clergy had with their superior officers. The vague nature of the position allowed for widely divergent views to develop regarding the chaplains' responsibilities. While parsons frequently identified the

⁸⁹ Denison, 22-23.

⁹⁰ Bristol, 77-78.

soldiers' spiritual welfare as their primary responsibility, regimental leaders sometimes took advantage of the absence of regulations and requested chaplains to perform work that had little to no connection with religious themes. Although some officers might have adopted this approach because they held a low view of religion, it often occurred because there was a shortage of staff personnel and chaplains could perform necessary regimental tasks. Military leaders recognized that clergy were generally among the most educated members of a unit, and consequently, were frequently asked to assist with administrative labors such as writing up the staff reports.⁹¹ A number of chaplains served as the aide-de-camp to their commanders. Rev. Harry J. Jones, for example, served as General James Garfield's chaplain and as his aide-de-camp. The future president frequently consulted with the minister regarding military matters.⁹² They were also frequently included in staff meetings and planning sessions before battle. Federal clergy were also utilized in intelligence gathering activities. Many served as scouts and there were even occasions where they acted as spies to gain information about the Confederate Army.⁹³

While clergy generally accepted these assigned duties with few qualms, it became a source of frustration when these tasks became the dominant feature of their wartime labor. Chaplains, for instance, were often designated as the regimental postmaster, a position which could require a great deal of time to carry out. Richard Eddy, Chaplain of the 60th New York Infantry, recorded that he once had to process and deliver 3,063 letters for his unit in one month.⁹⁴ James Marks resented being delegated to this position where he felt that he was treated as little more than a

⁹¹ Budd, *Serving Two Masters*, 48; and Rollin Quimby, "The Chaplains' Predicament," 27.

⁹² Russell H. Conwell, *The Life, Speeches, and Public Services of James A. Garfield* (Boston: B. B. Russell and Co., 1881), 375.

⁹³ Budd, *Serving Two Masters*, 53-54.

⁹⁴ Richard Eddy, *History of the Sixtieth Regiment, New York State Volunteers* (Philadelphia, 1864), 89.

“mailboy” by his superiors.⁹⁵ Regimental leaders often tried to use their chaplains to fill unexpected vacancies. Arthur Fuller’s commanding officer, for example, once tried to place him in charge of the officers’ mess after the position suddenly opened up.⁹⁶ Another concern chaplains held toward the secular assignment was that the task often entailed little contact with the enlisted men, which clergy viewed as an integral part of their ministerial work. One former chaplain wrote in an article published in 1863 that many of the clergy who left the army had done so because they were extremely frustrated over being assigned so many secular labors that they had no time to address the soldiers’ spiritual needs.⁹⁷

Union officials enacted a few guidelines for the military chaplaincy during the war. The first formal reference to the chaplains’ duties occurred in a Congressional act (July 22, 1861), which required the clergymen to provide a report to the regimental leader “at the end of each quarter, the moral and religious condition of the regiment, and such suggestions as may conduce to the social happiness and moral improvement of the troops.”⁹⁸ However, it would not be until April of 1864 that another formal statement would be issued that concerned the chaplains’ duties. General Order 158 reiterated the requirement that all chaplains were to provide monthly reports to the Adjutant-General of the Army. The act also required “That all chaplains in the military service of the United States shall hold appropriate religious services at the burial of soldiers who may die in the command to which they are assigned to duty, and it shall be their duty to hold

⁹⁵ Marks, 50.

⁹⁶ Richard Frederick Fuller, *Chaplain Fuller: Being a Life Sketch of a New England Clergyman and Army Chaplain* (Boston: Walker, Wise and Co., 1863), 195. Fuller was the Chaplain of the 16th Massachusetts Volunteers.

⁹⁷ “Religious Instruction in the Army,” *Princeton Review* 35 (July 1863): 388.

⁹⁸ *Official Records*, series 3, 1: 382.

public religious services at least once each Sabbath, when practicable.”⁹⁹ Yet, outside of providing burials for fallen soldiers and a weekly worship service on the Sabbath, military chaplains still had no prescribed duties by the war’s end.

Congress did, however, have more success in its efforts to address the issue of the chaplain’s role and status on the battlefield. The matter of clergy bearing arms served as one of the most controversial topics associated with the office’s wartime role. There was considerable division of opinion among Union officials regarding the propriety of chaplains participating in combat. Chaplains had been frequently involved in combat during the Revolutionary War and there were no military regulations that prohibited Union clergy from partaking in battle when the Civil War broke out. Indeed, there were a number of chaplains who participated in combat during the war, particularly in the earlier stages of the conflict. Frederic Denison, for example, had few qualms about participating in battle. He maintained that it was just as appropriate for the chaplain to participate in battle as any other officer wearing the uniform.¹⁰⁰ While not sharing quite the same bravado as Denison, other chaplains became involved in combat during the heat of the moment. On different occasions, Henry Clay Trumbull helped fortify his regiment’s lines after he observed they were close to breaking. Milton L. Haney, Chaplain of the 55th Illinois, received the Medal of Honor for gallantry because of his efforts in helping Union troops retake the Federal intrenchments near Atlanta in 1864.¹⁰¹ Yet, participation in combat also subjected them to the risks and hazards commonly associated with war. For example, John Springer, Chaplain of the 3rd Wisconsin, was killed while fighting at Resaca, Georgia in 1864. A unique

⁹⁹ *Official Records*, series 3, 4: 227-228.

¹⁰⁰ Denison, 10.

¹⁰¹ Trumbull, 9; Milton L. Haney, *The Story of My Life* (Normal, IL: Haney, 1904), 208-10; and Honeywell, 96.

circumstance befell Arthur Fuller, who was also killed in action in December of 1862. He resigned from his position as chaplain so that he could take a position as a hospital chaplain. He delayed his departure, however, so he could help the Union Army that was fighting in nearby Fredericksburg, where he was shot while trying to drive out Confederate sharpshooters.¹⁰² Among the sixty-six Union chaplains who died in service, about 20 percent died in combat.¹⁰³

The majority of Union clergy, however, did not support the notion of the chaplaincy participating in battle.¹⁰⁴ Most were opposed to this idea because they believed it contradicted their primary purpose, which was to tend to men's souls. Jonathan Hammond was among those who believed that clergy bearing arms was at odds with their spiritual role. He provided the basis for this position in his manual for chaplains:

The weapons of the chaplain's warfare are not carnal but spiritual; and he is not liable to be called upon to use a weapon, even in self-defense. His place, if in the battlefield, is with the wounded and dying; and though the swift messengers of death may whistle around him, even to endangering his life, he will heed them not, if faithful to his duty; but will be totally absorbed in the glorious occupation of whispering in the ears of the departed soul, the blessings of redemption, and telling of that precious blood which was shed to take away the sins of the world.¹⁰⁵

Hammond believed that chaplains who took up the sword failed to recognize the unique nature of their office. Their approach to combat was to differ from the soldiers because their primary objective was so dissimilar. While the military pursued material or worldly aims, chaplains ultimately labored in a spiritual realm.

¹⁰² His unique military status at the time of his death produced considerable controversy regarding the issue of whether his family was entitled to any benefits. Armstrong, 65-66.

¹⁰³ William F. Fox, *Regimental Losses in the American Civil War* (Albany, NY: Albany Publishing Co., 1889), 43-44.

¹⁰⁴ While studies on the military chaplaincy often refer to notable examples of clergy who made a significant contribution on the battlefield, these incidents were relatively uncommon during the Civil War. Norton, 105-6; Wiley, "Holy Joes," 299; and Honeywell, 90-91.

¹⁰⁵ Hammond, 26.

Northern churches normally discouraged clergy from bearing arms in combat. If these religious officials were to be found in the front lines, it was to be as a non-combatant.¹⁰⁶ Union military leaders generally shared similar sentiments about clergy bearing arms. Most believed that chaplains best fulfilled their role by serving as non-combatants and they usually discouraged the religious officer from accompanying the soldiers in the battlefield. Although they appreciated the chaplains' desire to minister to the soldiers in the heat of battle, army officers generally believed that it was more beneficial if clerics stayed out of harm's way. They preferred that the religious officers stay in the back of the lines where they could comfort the wounded or dying and help the army surgeons tend to the soldiers' physical needs.¹⁰⁷

While neither the Union nor the Confederate Army established a formal policy forbidding chaplains from partaking in battle, their participation was increasingly discouraged as the war progressed. The two sides established guidelines in 1862 that chaplains who were captured while acting in the line of duty would be viewed as non-combatants and released immediately.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, by the end of the war a general consensus had emerged among the military and general public that was opposed to chaplains partaking in combat. Indeed, this would be the last war in which American chaplains would participate in military combat except for a few isolated incidents.¹⁰⁹

Federal officials also addressed the issue of chaplains being held as prisoners of war. Neither the Union nor the Confederacy had a formal policy regarding the capture of these officials at the

¹⁰⁶ Stuckenberg, 11; Brown, 82-83; Denison, 9.

¹⁰⁷ Budd, *Serving Two Masters*, 55, 63.

¹⁰⁸ The Union issued General Orders 90 on July 26, 1862. *Official Records*, series 2, 7:108. On July 31, 1862, an order was also issued to Union prison commanders that ordered them to release any Confederate chaplains that were held at their facilities.

¹⁰⁹ Budd, *Serving Two Masters*, 56-57.

beginning of the conflict. As previously mentioned, the two sides designated chaplains as non-combatants in 1862, which was intended to encourage the immediate release of chaplains seized in the line of duty. However, the ambiguous military status of the office complicated efforts to implement this policy. In particular, the numerous incidents of clergy bearing arms in combat seemingly challenged the assertion that these religious officials were actually non-combatants in the minds of some, which resulted in some chaplains not being released.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, the two sides promoted the immediate exchange of chaplains as their formal policy throughout most of the war.¹¹¹

Although the military had established few formal regulations for the office, there were certain unstipulated tasks that a regiment expected their chaplain to carry out. Many of these responsibilities revolved around religious themes or activities. Providing a Sabbath worship service was one of the few formal obligations placed upon the office, yet it was also widely assumed that the cleric would also conduct a Sunday evening service and a weekly prayer meeting. They were also expected to perform baptisms when the occasion arose, although denominational traditions often dictated how the ceremony was carried out.¹¹² There was also a

¹¹⁰ There were numerous occasions on both sides when either military officials or prison commanders chose to ignore this regulation and held chaplains as prisoners of war. This generally occurred with chaplains who were viewed as being closely involved with military activity. However, there were also occasions when clergy who tended to the sick and wounded were captured and sent to a prison camp. The circumstances surrounding the imprisonment of Charles C. McCabe in 1863 were particularly controversial. McCabe and the regimental surgeon Dr. W. M. Houston were captured while tending the wounded after a battle at Winchester, Virginia. Confederate General John Gordon initially provided them with ambulances to take the wounded away from the battlefield. However, General Jubal Early countermanded the order and had McCabe sent to Libby Prison in Richmond. Early stated to McCabe that Northern preachers were responsible for the war and that it was appropriate that the chaplain should go “on to Richmond.” *Official Records* Ser. II, vol. IV, pp. 27-28, 795; Honeywell, 96; and Bristol, 80-81.

¹¹¹ There was a three month period between July and October of 1863 when the exchange was curtailed after Union officials refused to release two Confederate chaplains who were believed to have been involved in the escape of other prisoners. Budd, *Serving Two Masters*, 56-57; and Honeywell, 98.

¹¹² It was generally left to the chaplains’ discretion regarding how they carried out this religious ceremony. There was considerable variance in perspectives among the chaplains regarding the baptism of a soldier who

tacit understanding that the religious officers would conduct funeral services for a fallen warrior long before it became codified into their prescribed duties. Soldiers also presumed that the chaplain would interact regularly with the regiment. Visitation with individual members of the unit, particularly those in the hospital, represented another unofficial but extremely important function for the regiment's religious leader to fulfill. It was also commonly assumed that clergy would help with the wounded after a battle occurred. A chaplain who did not carry out these assumed tasks was likely to be looked upon very unfavorably by his regiment. Members of Michigan's 6th Cavalry, for example, viewed their aged chaplain Stephen Greely as well intentioned but useless. One member of the group declared, "Army life was too much for him to endure, and it was as much as he could do to look after his own physical well-being, and the spiritual well-being of his flock was sadly to be neglected."¹¹³ Even the cleric who possessed strong speaking skills was not exempt from regular involvement with the troops. Milton L. Haney's chaplain was forced to resign because he gave so little attention to interaction with the soldiers. Haney commented, "He was a good man and a strong preacher, but he depended upon the pulpit rather than his personal contact with his people."¹¹⁴ Furthermore, soldiers generally paid little attention or simply ignored the messages of the chaplain whom they perceived as negligent or lazy in his work.¹¹⁵ Union personnel wanted a religious officer who addressed the physical and spiritual welfare of the unit. Indeed, chaplains who failed to meet the soldiers'

belonged to a denomination that practiced a different mode of baptism. Lutheran Chaplain John Stuckenberg, for example, found performing a baptism by immersion for the very first time a very strange experience. Stuckenberg, 21; and Lyle, 105-6.

¹¹³ J. H. Kidd, *Personal Recollections of a Cavalryman* (Ionia, MI: Sentinel Printing Co, 1908), 56.

¹¹⁴ Haney was elected by the regiment to become the new chaplain. Haney, 141; and Wiley, "Holy Joes," 289-93.

¹¹⁵ Milton Bailey to Ann Sturtevant, Miscellaneous Collection, USMHI; and Quimby, "Chaplain's Predicament," 29.

basic expectations often paid a steep cost regarding their standing with the men. However, while some officeholders undermined their wartime ministry by their inaction, there were others who earned considerable respect with the troops by their diligent attempt to meet the regiment's various needs.

Union clergy devoted substantial effort to performing helpful labors for their units over the course of the conflict. Although most identified their efforts to minister to the soldier's soul as their paramount duty, they frequently carried out useful tasks as a way to support the troops. The wide scope of the conflict created a broad range of needs for the troops and chaplains recognized that they could effectively address many of these concerns. Consequently, they became heavily involved in endeavors to assist the soldiers and often demonstrated considerable versatility in the diverse ways they met these issues.

One of the temporal duties commonly performed by chaplains involved helping soldiers with their correspondence.¹¹⁶ They frequently wrote letters for those who were incapacitated or were unable to write for some reason. Hospital chaplains, in particular, spent a great deal of time in this activity. Reports they sent to the surgeon general indicate that they wrote about 500 letters a month.¹¹⁷ Their regular involvement with correspondence also included one of the most difficult tasks they had to perform: they often assumed the responsibility for writing the letters that informed families about the death of a soldier.

Chaplains also supported the regiments by helping with monetary matters. William Lyle, for example, acted as the financial and general business agent for his regiment and was often

¹¹⁶ In his study on the various labors Union chaplains performed during the Civil War, Warren Armstrong attached the term "temporal duties" to the voluntary actions clergy carried out to support the troops that were of a more secular nature. Armstrong, 17.

¹¹⁷ Norton, 120.

responsible for making its purchases.¹¹⁸ Clergy frequently served as custodians with their unit's money. The amount they carried could be quite substantial if the disbursement of funds had been delayed, which meant that regiments sometimes received their pay in one lump sum. Apprehensive about carrying such a large amount of money into battle or leaving it in camp, soldiers frequently entrusted the religious officer for safekeeping or to transport their funds back home. William Stevens, Chaplain of the 148th Pennsylvania, once carried \$65,000 back to Pennsylvania where he delivered it to the soldiers' families. In 1864, Lyman Ames even received a leave of absence from his commander while his regiment was in Atlanta so he could take the regiment's pay back to Ohio.¹¹⁹

Chaplains also promoted educational endeavors with their regiments. Classes were frequently offered during periods of inactivity in the camp and often exhibited considerable variety in their subject matter. John Marks, for instance, organized classes in Latin, German and arithmetic and also formed a debating society. Frank McCabe helped create the "University of Libby Prison" while he was held captive. The school offered classes in French, Spanish, Latin, Greek, Rhetoric, English Grammar, Mathematics, and Natural Philosophy. Moreover, each of the teachers at the prison camp possessed considerable expertise in his particular subject.¹²⁰ Chaplains also provided instruction in rudimentary areas of education. They often helped the illiterate learn how to read and write. This activity was especially common among regiments comprised of freedmen, who responded enthusiastically to the opportunity for an education.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Service Record, Files of the Adjutant General, National Archives, Record Group 94.

¹¹⁹ Service Record, Files of the Adjutant General, National Archives, Record Group 94; and Quimby, "The Chaplains' Predicament," 33.

¹²⁰ Marks, 53; and Bristol, 103.

¹²¹ Armstrong, 74-80.

While chaplains often carefully planned out activities to improve the soldiers' lot, they performed some of their most helpful and appreciated actions quite spontaneously. Union clergy made it their goal to be attentive to ways they could assist the troops and ready to respond to concerns that might suddenly emerge. It often meant they gave up their horse to an ailing soldier, helped dig a trench after a long march, or tried to find some boots for a soldier whose previous pair wore out. They also scrounged up scarce foods so that they might add a bit of variety to the normal rations. Milton Haney, for example, once went behind enemy lines to get food for his unit when his regiment had very little to eat.¹²² Clergy generally viewed the labors they voluntarily performed for the soldiers much more favorably than the labors they were assigned to fulfill. The temporal labors were usually more personal and interactive and were perceived as being more beneficial to their ministry with their men.

Chaplains realized that their ability to adapt to the various needs of the soldier made a significant contribution to the Federal army and they often advanced this capacity as a central feature of their military role as the war progressed. William Brown strongly encouraged his fellow officers to promote their usefulness in his manual for chaplains, since he believed that by following this approach they could finally resolve the ambiguous nature of their position. He asserted that since the military provided so little direction for the office, the chaplain "must create his own position in the regiment." He urged chaplains to be ready each day to perform acts of compassion on behalf of the soldiers and they would likely earn the respect and gratitude of both the officers and the men as a result.¹²³ William Eastman, Chaplain of the 72nd New York, shared similar sentiments to Brown's. In an address given in 1863 regarding the

¹²² Haney, 140.

¹²³ Brown, 44, 91-92.

chaplains' role, he maintained that the religious official needed to "do good whenever possible." Later in his discussion he declared that "while other officers might be good friends, this man was to make a business of kindness."¹²⁴ Jonathan Pinkney Hammond also promoted the idea that the chaplain "is to make himself useful in every capacity." He maintained that chaplains would have little opportunity to win the soldiers to Christ until they had first earned their confidence. He urged his fellow clergy to be "performing those little acts of kindness which are always grateful to the human heart."¹²⁵ Chaplains had finally found their military niche: meeting the soldiers' needs. Although federal officials were not able to codify this emphasis into specific duties, Union military personnel increasingly viewed the religious officers' assistance as a central feature of their role.¹²⁶

Union chaplains greatly enhanced their relationship with the troops because of the emphasis they gave to meeting their needs. Northern soldiers recognized the significant effort clergy made to support them and they often expressed their appreciation to the ministers for the many labors performed on the unit's behalf. James B. Rogers, chaplain of the 14th Wisconsin, believed that the troops became most aware of his contributions while he was away from them. He noted that the men frequently approached him after he returned to camp to express their appreciation for his work.¹²⁷ Soldiers were often willing to overlook a chaplain who lacked some of the talents traditionally associated with the ministry if he labored faithfully for his unit. Although he apparently lacked strong homiletical skills, Barton Roger, chaplain of the 5th Illinois Volunteers,

¹²⁴ William R. Eastman, *Personal Recollections of the War of the Rebellion*, ed. A. Noel Blakeman. (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1912), 343, 349.

¹²⁵ Hammond, 71, 85.

¹²⁶ Budd, *Serving Two Masters*, 47.

¹²⁷ James B. Rogers, *War Pictures: Experiences and Observations of a Chaplain in the U.S. Army in the War of Southern Rebellion* (Chicago: Church and Goodman, 1863), 79-80.

earned the admiration of his unit by his tireless efforts. Lucius W. Barber, a member of the unit, offered this description of his parson: “Our chaplain could not rest unless doing something for the good of the men. Although not a gifted man or eloquent speaker, yet, I will venture to say that there was not a harder working chaplain in the whole army or one that did more good.”¹²⁸ Clergy were able to gain the appreciation and loyalty of the men they served. When newspaper correspondent Benjamin Taylor asked a group of front line soldiers from Illinois how they liked their chaplain, they conveyed their esteem for the religious officer when they responded, “We’ll freeze to him every time.”¹²⁹ The reporter noted that he was not surprised at their reply after seeing the clergyman “dressing a wound, helping out a blundering boy, whose fingers were all thumbs with his letter to the girl he left behind, playing ball, running a race, as well as heard him making a prayer and preaching a sermon.”¹³⁰ The chaplain’s courage, or lack thereof, also played a significant role in a regiment’s perception of their religious officer. Soldiers regularly mocked the religious officials who exhorted them to be strong and courageous but then fled at the first sign of battle. However, they frequently expressed admiration for the clergyman who stayed at the front during a skirmish.¹³¹ Federal soldiers sometimes even demonstrated their gratitude to the chaplain through physical gestures. William Stevens’ unit, for example, gave

¹²⁸ Lucius W. Barber, *Army Memorials of Lucius W. Barber, Company “D,” 15th Illinois Volunteer Infantry* (Chicago: J. M. W. Jones Stationery and Printing Co., 1894), 103.

¹²⁹ Confederate soldiers used this same expression to communicate their devotion for their helpful chaplain. George C. Rable, *God’s Almost Chosen People* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 115.

¹³⁰ Benjamin F. Taylor, *Pictures of Life in Camp and Field* (Chicago: S.C. Griggs & Co., 1875), 125.

¹³¹ Some chaplains believed that their presence on the battlefield was an essential part of their ministry and made a habit of accompanying soldiers into conflict. Wiley, “Holy Joes,” 292, 300. John Chandler Gregg, *Life in the Army* (Philadelphia: Perkenpine and Higgins, 1866), 91-92; and William Wyatt, *The Life and Sermons of Rev. William Wyatt* (Albany, NY: Charles Van Benthuyzen and Sons, 1878), 226.

him a horse as a token of their appreciation after he returned from his financial errand to Pennsylvania.¹³²

The chaplains' goodwill and support significantly facilitated their efforts to strengthen their military identity with Union personnel. While inadequate clergy could always be found in the northern army, most became more effective in their work and better able to recognize the soldiers' needs as they gained experience with army life.¹³³ Officer and common soldier alike displayed an increased level of appreciation for both the parson's contribution to the unit's welfare and his value to the army as a whole as the war moved forward. A letter written by a Federal captain illustrated the dramatic shift in perspective that often developed towards the religious officer: "I am particularly proud & thankful for him as some officers (nonprofessors) used to think & even say that a chaplain was a sort of fifth wheel...and even voted against having one, but now all are ready to admit that we could not get along without our chaplain."¹³⁴ Mead Holmes expressed similar sentiments about the chaplaincy in a letter to his father. He mentioned how his appreciation for the religious leader's contributions had increased over time and he declared that "a good chaplain is a great acquisition to a regiment."¹³⁵ The members of the 5th Maine Infantry illustrate the high regard they maintained for their chaplain John Ripley Adams in a public tribute they offered after he died in 1866:

From his quiet and beautiful home in Gorham, he went forth to the war with the going out of the Fifth Maine, in which he was commissioned as chaplain. In nearly every march he participated with the regiment, and nearly every battlefield

¹³² Quimby, "Chaplains' Predicament," 33.

¹³³ Herman Norton observed that Union soldiers' correspondence depicted the chaplains in a much more favorable manner as the war progressed. See Norton, 100.

¹³⁴ Quoted in Wiley, "Holy Joes," 300-301.

¹³⁵ Mead Holmes, *A Soldier of the Cumberland, Memoir of Mead Holmes, Jr.* (Boston: American Tract Society, 1864), 141-42.

he rendered noble and efficient service in administering to the wants, bodily and spiritual of the soldiers. He loved the men; they loved him. In him they found a friend, earnest, true, sympathetic, unobtrusive; he had the esteem and respect of the highest in rank.¹³⁶

Chaplains like Adams became recognized as valuable members of their regiments because of the many contributions they made to the unit. Their helpful labors greatly facilitated their efforts to gain their unit's acceptance and also bolstered their relationships with the soldiers. Moreover, the hard earned respect clergy finally gained from the army brought them a long desired reward: Union soldiers became much more receptive to the chaplains' spiritual message.¹³⁷

Union clergy worked together during the Civil War with much greater regularity than they had in previous conflicts. The increased amount of interaction between chaplains served as another major development for the office. The significant struggles they faced at the beginning of the conflict likely encouraged them to reduce the emphasis they gave to maintaining their autonomy. They recognized that they needed to address the inadequate structure and lack of direction associated with the office and that they had a better chance of correcting these problems if they banded together. The ministers formed organizations to discuss matters of concern to the office, such as their pay, rank, personnel shortages, and formal responsibilities. The groups in the east were commonly identified as the Chaplains' Associations, while those in the west were generally known as the Council of Chaplains.¹³⁸ Clergy also hoped that the creation of these groups would foster more professionalism within their station, which could also facilitate their efforts to strengthen their military identity with the army. Although the chaplains demonstrated a greater willingness to work together to resolve these wartime issues, there was

¹³⁶ Adams, 241.

¹³⁷ The Union chaplains' efforts to promote spiritual themes with the army will be the focus of a later chapter.

¹³⁸ Stuckenberg, 110; and Norton, 106.

still considerable opposition among its members to creating some type of administrative position that would give one chaplain authority over its other members, however.¹³⁹

The chaplaincy's standing in the army was significantly more defined by the end of the Civil War than at the start. Union clergy worked throughout the conflict to bring about this change after they recognized how their loose association with the military significantly undermined their ability to carry out an effective ministry with the soldiers. Federal chaplains made considerable progress in their efforts to strengthen their military ties during the Civil War. Long overdue guidelines were finally in place that helped to clarify their formal status. Although the chaplains' formal responsibilities still remained relatively vague, Union clergy successfully established a new paradigm for the office by their emphasis upon meeting the soldiers' needs. By the war's end, the chaplaincy had formed a military identity. Their commitment to professionalism helped eliminate the perception of them as outsiders and removed a significant barrier to their ministry with the troops.

A new pattern of collegiality had also developed among Union clergy. The office's early struggles caused its members to work together to resolve their problems. The benefits they gained from their interaction lessened the emphasis they had previously placed on their autonomy. The positive results they experienced from these encounters likely increased their openness to collaborating with the Christian Commission.

The chaplains' efforts to strengthen their ties with the army also facilitated their ability to shape the camp's religious environment. Union clergy gained greater sway with the troops because of the emphasis the religious officers gave to meeting their regiment's needs. Soldiers

¹³⁹ Brown, 143 and Budd, *Serving Two Masters*, 34-35. The chaplains' collaborative efforts to promote Christianity among the troops will be covered in a later chapter.

also became more receptive to the chaplains' efforts to promote spiritual themes with the camp.¹⁴⁰

The chaplaincy's primary ally in ministry would come to the same realization about the importance of ministering to the soldiers' physical and spiritual needs. As chapter four reveals, however, the Christian Commission would encounter its own struggles before it began to carry out an effective ministry with Union soldiers.

¹⁴⁰ The increased interest in religious matters displayed by Union soldiers will be covered in greater detail in chapter five.

Chapter Four

THE UNITED STATES CHRISTIAN COMMISSION (1861-1865)

The *Zouave Gazette*, a regimental newspaper, reported on the work of YMCA representative Dwight L. Moody after he ministered to Union soldiers at Camp Douglas in October, 1861. It described the many labors he performed to illustrate why he was so highly regarded by the troops:

D. L. Moody, the active missionary of the Young Men's Christian Association of Chicago, having been invited by the chaplain of the 19th to visit our regiment ... since which time he has labored unceasingly both day and night in distributing books, papers, tracts, hymn books &c. Many of the boys have signed a temperance pledge and commenced to lead a different life. The secret of Moody, both here among soldiers and at home is that he makes a personal application of the gospel truths to those whom he meets, and living a life devoted to his master, his advice and example convinces and converts. The boys of the 19th will long remember Mr. Moody's visit. All regret that his duties in Chicago prevent his remaining permanently among us.¹

Moody's work at this military camp located just outside of Chicago exemplified the ideals of the United States Christian Commission during the Civil War.² At Camp Douglas and throughout the conflict, he emphasized conversionism in his preaching and his teaching. He was also regularly involved in efforts to address the soldiers' physical needs, which earned him considerable respect from both the troops and the general public. Moreover, his labors also brought favorable attention upon the Commission, since the press frequently reported on his ministrations with the troops as one of their representatives.³ A source no less than George

¹ *Zouave Gazette*, October 30, 1861, p. 1.

² The Christian Commission was not officially created until November of 1861.

³ *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 18, 1862, p. 2; *Chicago Times*, January 13, 1864, p. 4, and July 31, 1865, p. 4. Moody's (1837-1899) involvement with the Christian Commission during the Civil War played an integral role in his later success as a revivalist. The organization helped him gain valuable preaching experience, which allowed him to hone his nascent homiletical skills. He also developed influential contacts within the organization. A number of the Commission's leaders played prominent roles in his famous urban revivals later that century. Some

Stuart, Chairman of the Christian Commission, stated that Moody “was one of our most efficient workers.”⁴

The United States Christian Commission was created in 1861 by northern chapters of the Young Men’s Christian Association. The organization’s leaders formed the group because of concerns they had about the detrimental influence that the military environment could have on the religion and morals of Union soldiers. The goal of the Commission was to encourage Christianity among the troops. The organization stressed this aim in the introduction of its *First Annual Report*: “The object of the Commission was to promote the spiritual and temporal welfare of the officers and men of the United States army and navy, in co-operation with chaplains and others.”⁵ It initially directed most of its energies toward assisting military chaplains and distributing Bibles and religious literature. However, the Commission broadened its activities during the second year of the war and became heavily involved in efforts to address the soldiers’ physical needs as well. By the end of the conflict, the Commission was considerably larger than the YMCA and had become one of the largest benevolent organizations in America.⁶

of these individuals included John Wanamaker, William Dodge and John Farwell. While few knew of Moody at the outbreak of hostilities, his valued efforts during the war helped him become a respected religious leader among both the Chicago community and the city press by the conflict’s end. See Scott Pickard, “D. L. Moody and the United States Christian Commission, 1861-1865,” (Master’s thesis, Kansas State University, 2002).

⁴ George Stuart, *The Life of George H. Stuart*, ed. Robert Ellis Thompson (Philadelphia: J. M. Stoddart, 1890), 272.

⁵ The United States Christian Commission, *First Annual Report* (Philadelphia: United States Christian Commission, 1863), 5.

⁶ Shattuck, *Shield and Hiding Place*, 24-26; and C. Howard Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America* (New York: Association Press, 1951), 84-90. The YMCA diverted so much of its resources, including human, to the Commission that it almost collapsed in numerous cities by the end of the war. Hopkins states that only a fourth of the Associations were still operating by 1865. See Hopkins, 98.

The YMCA was started in London by twenty-two-year-old George Williams in 1844 after being influenced by evangelist Charles Finney's writings.⁷ Williams' intention was to create a group that could minister to young men working in the city. He envisioned an organization that could provide Christian fellowship and a positive alternative for the young men who faced such a myriad of temptations in the urban locale. Williams recruited other like-minded young men to support his efforts and on June 6, 1844, the London Association was formed. The society's main objective was to promote conversions to Christianity. Furthermore, the group also aimed to encourage Christian brotherhood, acts of service, and intellectual stimulation. The London group sponsored prayer meetings, Bible studies, and lectures on religious and moral themes to advance its agenda. They also provided a reading room, which they filled with Christian literature as a way to promote intellectual growth among its members. The movement spread rapidly and there were branches in sixteen other cities in England, Scotland and Ireland by 1851. In that same year, the Association also gained greater international recognition among Christian churches because of its involvement in evangelistic activities at the World's Fair in London.⁸

The YMCA crossed the Atlantic and established the first North American chapters in Boston and Montreal in 1851. New branches quickly followed in other cities such as New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago, all of which had experienced rapid urban growth and offered a wide variety of temptations to the young men dwelling there. These initial branches sought to follow the example of the London Association and adopted the founding organization's objectives as

⁷ Williams was born in Somerset, England in 1821.

⁸ Hopkins, 4-6, 17; Lawrence L. Doggett, *History of the Young Men's Christian Association* (New York: Association Press, 1922), 30-34.

the model for their chapters. By 1854, the organization had opened a total of forty-nine branches in the United States.⁹

The North American branches also followed the London Association's policy that reserved full membership only to individuals affiliated with evangelical churches. Some local branches offered associate memberships to those who demonstrated good character but were not connected with an evangelical church. However, only full members were allowed to hold an office or vote on organizational matters.¹⁰ Each of the local branches was autonomous and independent from the other chapters. However, William Chauncey Langdon, who worked in the U.S. Patent Office in Washington, D.C., became concerned about the lack of interaction between the various groups. He spearheaded a movement to create a national association where the various chapters could meet to encourage one another and promote their common interests. His efforts culminated in the organization's first national convention, which was held in Buffalo, New York, in June 1854. The delegates agreed to establish a voluntary confederation at this initial meeting. A central committee of eleven members was also created to oversee organizational matters. The primary function of the board was to coordinate and publicize Association information and help in the formation of new branches. However, the delegates also desired to protect the independence of the individual branches, which they accomplished by passing a resolution that stipulated that the new committee held no authority over the local chapters.¹¹

⁹ Hopkins, 22-23.

¹⁰ Richard Morse, *History of the North American Young Men's Association* (New York: Association Press, 1913), 14-17; Hopkins, 48-49.

Although each of the YMCA branches was autonomous, they shared common practices. The Association, like so many other benevolent societies, relied upon its members to volunteer their time to carry out the organization's work. The leadership was also comprised of lay volunteers, most of whom were successful young businessmen.¹² Women were also allowed to play a limited role in YMCA activities. A number of branches created a "ladies auxiliary" group to serve as the conduit for their involvement. Their participation usually revolved around the decoration of Association facilities, helping with social events, teaching Sunday School, and fund raising. While the Association certainly benefited from their labors, they were not granted membership in the organization.¹³

The YMCA also sought to eschew controversial issues that could cause conflict within the membership. The organization stressed the importance of inter-denominational collaboration in its efforts to promote Christian influences in society. In order to maintain evangelical unity, sectarian differences were regularly overlooked or avoided. Associations discouraged the discussion of doctrinal dissimilarities among its members since they were considered inappropriate topics to be addressed at its meetings.¹⁴ In a similar manner, the organization also tried to steer clear of contentious political issues such as the debate over slavery. Association leaders squelched discussion of this particular subject because they feared that the controversy could lead to a regional clash within the organization. They hoped to avoid the same result that

¹¹ The convention delegates also illustrated the importance that the Association placed upon inter-denominational cooperation when they passed a resolution that required that the central committee had to be represented by five different religious denominations. Hopkins, 58-63.

¹² Morse, 14-17; and McDevitt 42-43.

¹³ Hopkins, 39; and McDevitt, 51-52.

¹⁴ Hopkins, 47-48.

had occurred with the American Tract Society, which divided in 1858 because of the ardent differences of opinion on slavery.¹⁵

The YMCA went through a significant transition during the Revival of 1857-1858. The organization's membership and its ministries expanded during this religious movement.¹⁶ The Association played a leading role in organizing the prayer meetings, which were such an integral feature of the revival. The New York YMCA helped initiate the noon prayer meeting movement by creating a number of these gatherings in the summer of 1857. The meetings experienced tremendous growth in attendance, especially after the press began to report about the events. Other branches around the country experienced similar results after they began their own prayer meetings. Northern cities, with their more developed commercial structures, generally drew the largest crowds to their meetings.¹⁷ In addition, many of those who participated in the noon-time gatherings joined the YMCA during this period of religious excitement. The Association's participation in this religious movement was not limited to the prayer gatherings. It also worked with Protestant churches to organize evangelistic services. The assemblies were often held in large portable tents and drew considerable crowds, particularly during peak periods of the revival.¹⁸

¹⁵ Long, 65; and Hopkins, 85-87. The Association finally split between northern and southern regions in May of 1861 after the Associations in Richmond and New Orleans asked northern branches to accept the secession of the southern states as a permanent political solution.

¹⁶ Katherine Long identifies the Revival of 1857-1858 as the event that truly established the YMCA in America. It was during this period that the Association first came to national prominence and that the organization developed the mission that it would follow for the coming decades. See Long, 61.

¹⁷ The Philadelphia YMCA's prayer meeting went from 300 people to 4,000 between March 8 and March 19 after the city papers began to publish front page stories about the revival in 1858. The Cleveland Association had 2,000 people attending their daily meetings at its peak. Ibid., 36-37; and Hopkins, 83.

¹⁸ Long, 27. George Stuart mentioned that a portable tent that could accommodate 1,200 people was used for revival services in Philadelphia. However, it was not always sufficient to hold the large crowds gathered there. Stuart, 107.

The YMCA broadened its mission during the revival. Many of those who became new members through the prayer meetings wanted to see the organization expand its focus beyond young males in the city. They wanted the Association to promote revival in both rural and urban locales. Furthermore, they also hoped to see more emphasis given to social concerns, which had been exacerbated by the nation's severe economic problems during the late 1850s. Local associations became actively involved in providing humanitarian aid to groups in need. Branches, for example, distributed clothing, coal, and food to the northern cities hardest hit by the nation's fiscal difficulties during the winter months.¹⁹

The organization received a number of benefits from its involvement in the revival. It experienced a helpful surge in its membership during this period. The organization had been in a state of decline prior to the summer of 1857. It had lost members and closed branches in each of the three preceding years. However, the YMCA's national convention in 1859 illustrated the dramatic change in the organization's state of affairs. The Association had more branches attend this gathering in Troy, New York than had been at the previous four conventions. Furthermore, more than half the branches at the assembly had been started within the previous year. By 1860, there were over 200 YMCAs and its membership had swelled to over 25,000.²⁰ The Association also developed stronger ties among its branches during this period. Prior to the summer of 1857, there was little contact between the groups because a provincial attitude generally prevailed within the organization. The emphasis given to their autonomy began to change during this time of religious enthusiasm after regional chapters collaborated to organize and promote activities

¹⁹ Hopkins, 26-29.

²⁰ This represented a 400% increase in Association chapters since 1856. Associations that organized prayer meetings often experienced some of the greatest membership gains. Hopkins, 23; and Moss, *Annals*, 64-67.

connected with the revival. The success they enjoyed at these events encouraged a greater openness to cooperative ventures in the future.

The YMCA also enhanced its standing within the evangelical community during this time of spiritual fervor. Most Christians had little awareness of the nascent group prior to the revival. Yet, the organization gained considerable publicity and prestige among Protestants because of its close association with the noon prayer meetings. It also established significant relationships with evangelical churches after they worked together in various events. Many of these churches would later provide valuable support to the Christian Commission during the Civil War because of its connection to the YMCA.²¹ There was still another benefit that the YMCA gained from its involvement in the Revival of 1857-1858: it helped to prepare the members for its future work in the Commission.

The YMCA began its ministry to Union soldiers shortly after Lincoln issued a call for 75,000 militiamen to help put down the insurrection in April of 1861. Members from various branches began to visit and minister to local troops as soon as the soldiers began to arrive at the Union military bases. Association leaders were deeply concerned about the impact that military life could have on the spiritual welfare of the soldiers, especially since many were affiliated with the organization. A number of regional branches formed Army Committees to address the religious needs of the soldiers and support the work of the chaplains. Members from the various Associations traveled to Union camps during the first few months of the war. They brought Bibles, religious tracts, and hymnals to distribute among the troops. They also visited the sick and wounded and offered counsel and encouragement to the disheartened. Many of the

²¹ The YMCA also developed important contacts with evangelical pastors through these religious events as well. Some of them would later serve as delegates during the Civil War. Long, 87-89.

representatives held prayer meetings, and if there was no chaplain present they held worship services.²²

YMCA leaders became deeply concerned about the state of the military chaplaincy during the first few months of the war. They observed that a considerable number of regiments were without a religious officer and they feared that with so few clergy serving in this position there would be little to check immoral influences from spreading among the troops. Association officials were also deeply troubled by the many accounts of incompetent chaplains among those who did hold the position. They believed that these military officers played a vital role in promoting Christianity among the troops and needed to conduct themselves in an exemplary manner. While YMCA leaders were worried about the shortage of chaplains in the Union army, they believed it was essential that the religious leaders carry out their duties faithfully. Consequently, Association officials in July 1861 petitioned Secretary of War Simon Cameron to remove the ineffectual chaplains and establish stronger standards for future applicants.²³

Vincent Colyer, a member of the New York City YMCA, played an influential role in the eventual creation of the Christian Commission. He went to Washington, D.C. to minister to the troops shortly after the Battle of Bull Run (July 21, 1861). He became troubled about the religious state of the Union Army during his time there. He perceived that military life had an extremely detrimental impact upon the soldiers' moral behavior and was concerned about the insufficient number of chaplains serving in the Union Army. Colyer also developed mixed feelings about the YMCA's approach to its wartime labors with the army. He had found that the

²² Moss, 68-83.

²³ Quimby, "Congress and the Chaplaincy," 251. In August of 1862, the Commission offered to provide chaplains for the army at no expense to the government. Secretary of War Edwin Stanton turned down the proposal, however. Moss, 138-39.

soldiers were very appreciative of his efforts to minister to them. He recorded in his journal that he “received a warm welcome” from them and that they gladly accepted the religious literature that he handed out. However, he also believed that the localized scheme of ministry used by the Association was disjointed and inefficient in a conflict of such magnitude.²⁴ He was convinced that the organization needed to create a central office that could coordinate its wartime efforts if it was to address the soldiers’ needs sufficiently. In a letter circulated to the various Associations in October of 1861, Colyer urged the YMCA to call a national convention so that it could create “a Christian Commission.” He focused upon the inefficiency of the Association’s current system in his message to the organization: “The work is so extensive and needs such large resources, that single associations can do but little; and for them to act independently of each other, is to increase vastly the expenses, while the labor accomplished will be less; and while some sections will receive too much attention, others will be comparatively neglected.”²⁵ Colyer also mentioned in his letter that he had written to a number of chaplains regarding the advisability of forming such a group and that over sixty of these officials responded to express strong support for the initiative.²⁶

While the various YMCA branches shared Colyer’s concerns, many were hesitant to support the movement for a convention. James Grant, Secretary to the National Committee of the YMCA, observed that there was considerable apprehension over the magnitude of such an undertaking. Many feared that to sustain a national organization that ministered to thousands of

²⁴ Moss, 92-94. Collyer provided the Commission access to his journal and wartime correspondence when the organization comprised its account of its history and labors.

²⁵ New York Branch, U.S. Christian Commission, *Memorial Record of the New York Branch of the Christian Commission* (New York: J. A. Gary and Green, 1866), 10-11.

²⁶ Moss, 96-97.

troops was beyond the organization's scope and that it would fail.²⁷ However, the reluctance to form a society of this nature lessened after it became apparent that there would not be a quick resolution to the war. Organization members became increasingly apprehensive about the long term spiritual impact of the war after they realized that the conflict could be of a prolonged nature. Reports about pervasive immoral behavior in the camps had intensified their fears about the effect army life could have on the men.²⁸ Supporters for a national convention urged the Association to create a wartime agency that addressed the body and soul, because "there had been no united effort to look after the spiritual interests of the soldiers ... and their temporal welfare."²⁹ A consensus eventually developed among the Associations that their sporadic approach to their wartime ministry was not adequate. The National Committee finally met in October 1861, and agreed to call for a convention to address the issue of the Association's wartime ministry.

On November 14-15, 1861, thirty-six representatives from the various regional branches of the YMCA gathered in New York City. Out of this meeting emerged a resolution to form the organization that became known as the United States Christian Commission.³⁰ The Convention established a General Committee of twelve that would serve without salary.³¹ The members of this supervisory board hailed from seven different cities and represented six different

²⁷ James Grant, *The Flag and the Cross: A History of the U.S. Christian Commission*. Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

²⁸ Springer, 91, Robert McAllister, *The Civil War Letters of General Robert McAllister*, ed. by James I. Robertson, Jr. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1965), 103-4; and Moss 286.

²⁹ Stuart, 128-29.

³⁰ Moss, 106-07.

³¹ Although there is no specific reference made to the rationale for the number of members in Commission records, the biblical symbolism attached to the number twelve likely weighed heavily in their decision.

denominations.³² The board was comprised primarily of successful businessmen, most of whom had previously been heavily involved in moral reform societies. Three clergymen were also part of the body.³³ George Stuart, Chairman of the YMCA National Committee, was selected to be the Chairman of the new group. Stuart, a member of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, was a successful merchant from Philadelphia who had played a prominent role in the founding of the city's YMCA and had actively supported philanthropic efforts for a number of years.³⁴ The Convention also established an Executive Committee of five members, which would oversee the organization's daily matters and report directly to the General Committee.³⁵

The wartime auxiliary maintained close ties with the YMCA throughout the war. Even though the Commission was officially considered a separate entity from its sponsoring organization, local Association branches continued to direct most of their efforts to support the Commission's work with the soldiers. Furthermore, most of the members of this "sturdy child of the YMCA" were drawn primarily from Association auxiliaries. In fact, the various Associations devoted so much of their energy to the Commission that only twenty-five percent of the branches were still in existence by the end of the war. Many of the YMCAs had simply transitioned into regional offices for the wartime group.³⁶

³² The respective cities were Boston, Buffalo, Chicago, Cincinnati, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C.

³³ Moss, 104, 113; and McDevitt, 110. Thirteen different denominations were represented on the board by the end of the war. William H. Armstrong, *A Friend to God's Poor: Edward Parmalee Smith* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993), 47.

³⁴ Stuart identified the Revival of 1857-1858 as a pivotal period in his life. It was during this time that he began to take a more public role in religious activities. He also gained confidence in his speaking abilities and by the end of the revival had earned the reputation as an eloquent orator. Stuart, 23; and Long, 81-82.

³⁵ Moss, 108.

³⁶ Hopkins, 90-98.

Most of the Commission's leaders were heavily involved with the Revival of 1857-1858, and the influence of this religious movement was apparent in the Commission's aims. The wartime organization stressed a number of the same objectives that were promoted during the prayer meeting revival: a priority on conversion, layperson evangelism, promotion of Christian unity, and avoidance of divisive doctrinal issues.³⁷

The Commission's objectives were listed in a circular that was sent to the local Association branches around the country. The newly-formed group declared in the document that the organization's principal aim was to promote "the spiritual good of the soldier in the army, and incidentally their intellectual improvement and social and physical comfort."³⁸ Support for the chaplain's work served as another of its foundational principles. This assistance included the distribution of Bibles and religious literature, as well as helping the chaplain, or in lieu of a chaplain, the offering of religious services and prayer meetings for the troops.³⁹

The Commission initially adopted a decentralized approach in the administration of its affairs. The field of operations was divided into geographical sections. It established District Committees to oversee the various regions. Each District Committee had three members (appointed by the Commission) and was responsible to "superintend all the operations and promote all the interests contemplated by this Commission." The boards were also expected to keep the channels of communication open with the chaplains in their jurisdiction.⁴⁰

³⁷ Stuart, 21-23. For a more in-depth examination of the relationship between the Revival of 1857-58 and the Christian Commission see Long, 87-91.

³⁸ Moss, 106-7. Promoting the soldiers' moral welfare was implied in this declaration.

³⁹ United States Christian Commission, *Second Annual Report* (Philadelphia: United States Christian Commission, 1864), 19-21.

⁴⁰ Moss, 113.

The Commission devised a system that would send volunteers, who were called delegates,⁴¹ to minister to soldiers in military camps and hospitals. The organization exhibited a definite preference for clergy to serve in this role. The rationale for this stance was described in the New York Branch's *Memorial Record*: "While persons from all professions and callings offered their services and rendered most essential aid by far the largest number were clergymen. The committee soon discovered that, as a rule, clergymen were more acceptable to the men and consequently more efficient than others."⁴² Although laypeople did serve as delegates, the vast majority were clergy. The first group of commissioned delegates was sent out on May 14, 1862, and consisted of ten clergymen and four laypeople.

After the delegate was commissioned they were equipped by the organization with a railroad pass, a memorandum book to keep notes and records, instructions on their duties, a haversack containing soap, a towel, crackers and dried beef (for their own use and the wounded), a blanket and strap for sleeping, and a small Bible to be used with the dying and for funerals. If the delegate was going to a battlefield they were also supplied with a bucket and cup so they could provide water for the wounded. Lastly, they were also given matches, candles and a lantern for working at night. The delegate was also supplied with a metal badge with the organization's name engraved on it so they could be identified as one of its representatives.⁴³

The Commission initially located its headquarters in New York City since the branches in this region had been the most actively involved in ministering to the troops. However, the organization had to move its operational center four times during the period of November of

⁴¹ The term delegate likely developed because the organization's representatives were sent as a delegation from the Christian Commission. *Ibid.*, 122.

⁴² United States Christian Commission, *Memorial Record*, 33.

⁴³ United States Christian Commission, *First Annual Report*, 12; and Moss, 547.

1861 to January of 1863.⁴⁴ The Commission eventually transferred its headquarters to Philadelphia at the beginning of 1863 after George Stuart offered to provide a warehouse to the organization free of charge. The center of operations suddenly went from a cramped little room with few provisions to multiple offices with ample supplies. The organization's chairman also provided clerks to take care of general office details. The Philadelphia building remained the group's headquarters for the remainder of the war and greatly enhanced the Commission's administrative capabilities.⁴⁵

One of the first official actions taken by the Commission involved its efforts to gain formal sanction from the government. Organization leaders met with President Lincoln, Secretary of War Simon Cameron, and General George McClellan in December of 1861 in Washington, D.C. to explain the objectives of the newly formed group. Each of the Union officials responded favorably to the aims and provided a written endorsement for the organization.⁴⁶ Commission leaders viewed the government's support as an important asset to the organization and promoted cordial relations with the Lincoln Administration throughout the war.⁴⁷

The Commission encountered a number of difficulties during its first year of operations. Lemuel Moss, Home Secretary of the Christian Commission, declared that the organization

⁴⁴ The financially strapped group had little capital to work with and relied upon donated space for its office. Moss, 119-21.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 127-29.

⁴⁶ Commission records indicate that Lincoln made financial contributions to the organization on more than one occasion. *Ibid.*, 299.

⁴⁷ Moss, 108-9, 527-28. Although Lincoln was a strong supporter of the Commission's work throughout the war, some of his biographers believe that this support was based on his belief that the Commission would boost troop morale rather than any affinity with evangelical Christian beliefs. Wayne C. Temple, *Abraham Lincoln: From Skeptic to Prophet* (Mahomet, IL: Mayhaven Publishing, 1995), 171-72; and Allen Guelzo, *Abraham Lincoln: Redeemer President* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 322-23. Ironically, the Union general who was credited with playing the largest role in promoting the work of the Commission was Ulysses S. Grant, a man not widely known for his religious piety. Grant's greatest contribution to the Commission was that he provided greater access to the military camps. Moss, 148-49; and Stuart, 133.

“accomplished very little” in its endeavors during the first eight or nine months of its existence.⁴⁸

The lack of financial support was one of the most serious problems that confronted the Commission in the early stages of the war. Fiscal records reveal that the organization had received assets of just over \$17,000 by August 1862. The general public’s lack of familiarity with the organization significantly contributed to its financial plight. Few were aware of the group’s existence and Moss noted that even evangelical churches were initially reluctant to open their doors to the representatives of the recently created auxiliary of the YMCA.⁴⁹ The organization’s leaders were also inexperienced at fund raising for a national ministry and had limited success in their early efforts to procure funds or goods for the group. Consequently, the organization had very little capital or resources to work with during its first year of existence.

The military’s lack of familiarity with the Commission also contributed to the organization’s early struggles. Army officers often limited the access of delegates because they were unacquainted with the organization. Although the Commission had the endorsements of Washington’s top officials, this backing meant little to military officers who were extremely reticent about allowing civilians from a relatively unknown group to wander around their bases. Yet, this was not the only sector of the army that initially viewed the group’s presence in the camp in a less than favorable manner. Delegates found their access to the hospitals could be limited as well. George Stuart wrote, “The surgeons, in the beginning, were hardly favorable to the presence among their patients of men who had neither professional training nor experience.”⁵⁰ Consequently, the members of the newly created organization observed that its

⁴⁸ Moss, 116.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 117, 122.

⁵⁰ Stuart, 125.

opportunities to interact with the soldiers were sometimes significantly restricted during the first year of the war.

Organizational weaknesses also plagued the Commission during its early existence. The group's operational structure was poorly defined, which substantially limited its ability to function effectively. The YMCA representatives who created the group gave considerable attention to the Commission's objectives but provided insufficient direction as to how it was to carry out its business. Thus, simple procedures regularly became bogged down by questions pertaining to unclear roles and responsibilities. Moss believed the founders were intentionally vague in devising its structure because of the uncertainty they held toward creating a national wartime organization. He declared "that at the outset no one well understood the precise work to be done, or the methods by which it could be accomplished."⁵¹

The Commission also experienced frequent problems because it did not establish an adequate system of supervision with its members in the field. Moss noted that the delegates operated without any administrative oversight and were "left entirely to their own discretion in choosing the place and character of their own labors."⁵² They determined the length of their service, the location of their work, and the amount of supplies they needed. Consequently, the organization had little control over its resources or its representatives.

The lack of oversight with its delegates led to its most notable period of discord with military chaplains. Some friction developed between them after the Commission began to send representatives into the field during the summer of 1862. At that point, Union chaplains were struggling to establish their own military identity and were deeply concerned about the general

⁵¹ Moss, 115.

⁵² Ibid., 361.

perception of the office. Moreover, the numerous criticisms made about incompetent chaplains were not that far removed, which likely heightened their sensitivity toward any perceived slight. In the midst of these circumstances, Union chaplains became quite frustrated by the delegates' conduct in the military camps. One of the primary concerns involved the perceived lack of regard they felt they received from the lay ministers. Although the Commission's guidelines instructed its representatives to keep chaplains well informed of their activities, they frequently failed to consult with them about their labors, which left the religious officers unaware of the delegates' dealings in the base. Furthermore, Union chaplains were also disturbed that some Commission representatives made little effort to collaborate and often gave scant attention to the chaplains' counsel or instructions. Alexander Morrison Stewart, Chaplain of the 13th and 102nd Pennsylvania Volunteers, for example, became deeply aggravated in the latter part of 1862 by what he perceived as the delegates' lack of cooperation with the chaplains. He was also concerned that Commission delegates might have been involved in some publicly disparaging accounts about the chaplaincy that had appeared in newspapers.⁵³

Chaplains also worried that the delegates' lack of military decorum could negatively impact their own ministry with the soldiers. Some Commission representatives carried on as if they believed that camp regulations did not apply to them and that they were entitled to free access within the bases. Union clergy feared that the civilians' actions might undermine their own efforts to demonstrate their military professionalism since the army knew of their close association with the Commission. Alonzo Quint was among the chaplains who were concerned that the delegates could undercut efforts to increase the office's standing with

⁵³ A. M. Stewart made a reference to the Commission in his log a few months after this incident that indicates the rift in the relationship was clearly resolved, however. He wrote, "Not a day passes without my having occasion to bless God for the existence of the United States Christian Commission." Alexander Morrison Stewart, *Camp, March, and Battlefield* (Philadelphia: J. B. Rodgers, 1865), 198-99, 348-49; and Henry, 194-95.

the troops. While he appreciated the organization's efforts to provide literature and minister to the soldiers, he felt that Commission workers often overstepped their boundaries because they lacked experience with military protocol. He believed that the short term nature of the delegate's service limited their ability to become familiar with army regulations. He declared, "for a few weeks do not suffice to teach a 'delegate' his business."⁵⁴ The lack of training and supervision provided to the early delegates not only undermined their ministry; it also frustrated their religious ally as well.

The Commission began to function much more effectively during its second year of existence after it successfully addressed some of its major problems. The organization made notable improvements in fund raising, which greatly expanded its access to resources and supplies for the soldiers. New measures were also implemented that significantly increased its organizational efficiency and administrative oversight. The new policies also increased the group's operating capabilities, which allowed the Commission to expand the scope of its work with the army.

The Commission's financial situation had improved significantly by the beginning of 1863. Organization members became much more effective at generating revenue and procuring supplies as the war progressed. Their leaders developed valuable contacts with other groups and businesses that regularly donated goods to the group at little to no cost.⁵⁵ Railroad lines, for example, carried delegates at no charge and transported the organization's goods at no cost or at a greatly reduced price. Telegraph lines were placed at the group's disposal free of charge as

⁵⁴ Quint, 363-64.

⁵⁵ George Stuart became quite proficient at fund raising. His ability to solicit contributions was one of his most important contributions to the Commission. McDevitt, 163.

long as the post bore the signature of George Stuart.⁵⁶ The Commission also recognized the importance of positive publicity in fund raising and became adept at promoting its work. The organization kept both the religious and secular press well informed about its activities with the Union army, which often resulted in favorable exposure for the group.⁵⁷ Delegates also raised awareness about the Commission's work by speaking at churches and public assemblies regarding their time of service with the soldiers. Audiences were often moved by these firsthand accounts and responded quite generously to the appeals made to support the group's wartime work.⁵⁸ The Ladies' Christian Commission also played a role in the organization's improved financial situation. Women began to form auxiliary groups in 1863 in order to lend their support to the wartime ministry for soldiers. The Ladies' Christian Commission sponsored a host of activities to raise funds and supplies for the organization's work. The Ladies' auxiliary group in Buffalo, for example, was responsible for more than half of the region's receipts in 1863.⁵⁹ The Commission's fiscal records indicate that the organization received almost one million dollars in donations during its second year of operations, which was over fifty times greater than what it received in the previous year.⁶⁰

The Commission also instituted more efficient organizational procedures during its second year of existence. It created a number of new administrative roles that helped the wartime agency supervise its operations more carefully. The most notable of these new managerial posts

⁵⁶ Moss, 126-27; and Stuart, 135.

⁵⁷ United States Christian Commission, *Second Annual Report*, 241; *Chicago Times*, October 10, 1862; and *Boston Daily Journal*, February 16, 1863.

⁵⁸ Moss, 133; *Chicago Tribune*, April 18, 1862; and *Boston Daily Journal*, February 16, 1863.

⁵⁹ U.S. Christian Commission, *Second Annual Report*, 272; and Moss 324.

⁶⁰ U.S. Christian Commission, *Second Annual Report*, 275.

was the General Field Agent. John Cole, an engineer from Massachusetts, envisioned the idea for this position after working as a delegate with the Army of the Potomac during the summer of 1862. He urged Commission leaders to develop a more defined organizational structure and provided a model of how this could be accomplished. A central part of his plan involved the use of paid employees to offer greater managerial supervision with its representatives. The General Field Agent's primary role would be to systemize the Commission's ministries and coordinate all of the delegates' work within a particular geographical area. They would also serve as the region's liaison with the military. The Executive Committee eventually voted to create this position in October 1862 and appointed Cole as its first General Field Agent in March 1863.⁶¹ The Commission increased the number of field agents during the following year to facilitate its supervision of its labors.⁶² The organization gained further oversight with its personnel in the field after it created the station agent position in 1863. Each of the Commission's field of operations contained supply bases that were staffed by these salaried employees. The station agent reported to the regional field agent and their primary role was to supervise the delegates' labors and manage the station's supplies.⁶³

The Commission eventually expanded the size of the General Committee in 1864 because of the growth in its wartime activities. The board could no longer adequately oversee the organization's extensive labors. Consequently, the membership was increased from twelve to forty-eight members to improve its administrative supervision.⁶⁴ The organization found it

⁶¹ Cole was assigned to work with the Army of the Potomac. Later that same month Edward P. Smith was selected to serve with the Army of the Cumberland. Moss, 145-47.

⁶² Ibid., 436-37; and U.S. Christian Commission, *Second Annual Report*, 29-30.

⁶³ Moss, 145-46.

necessary to take a similar approach with its Executive Committee at the beginning of 1865. During its Third Annual Meeting, the General Commission increased the size of this body from five to fourteen to facilitate the management of its expanding ministries.⁶⁵

The organization also implemented procedures to provide greater oversight with its delegates. For instance, new standards of eligibility for the position were enacted. Candidates were now required to receive a recommendation from a clergyman known to the Commission before their application could be accepted.⁶⁶ It also established guidelines for the delegate's tour of duty. A battlefield delegate was to serve for two weeks, while the envoy serving in a military camp or hospital was to serve for six weeks.⁶⁷ The fixed schedule removed much of the uncertainty that surrounded the delegates' stay with the army. Furthermore, the defined time frame also made it easier for chaplains to plan activities with the Commission since it provided the religious officer with the field representative's particular term of service. Delegates were also required to meet with the regional field agent before they could begin their work with the soldiers.

The Commission's field agents and station agents maintained close contact with chaplains and regimental commanders so that they would be aware of any difficulties that developed among the personnel under their charge. Delegates were strongly encouraged to be diligent about following military protocol and were also expected to be conscientious about consulting with appropriate military officials and chaplains regarding their activities within the camps and

⁶⁴ Ibid., 166-68. The number was later increased to fifty in 1865, which allowed them to place two government officials on the board, one of them being Speaker of the House, Schuyler Colfax, Jr.

⁶⁵ United States Christian Commission, Minutes of the General Commission, Third Annual Meeting, January 28, 1865. National Archives, Records Group 94, Entry 753.

⁶⁶ Moss, 171; and Henry, 380.

⁶⁷ Moss, 145; and Stuart, 134-35.

hospitals.⁶⁸ Union clergy greatly appreciated the changes that they observed in the activities of the delegates after the new policies were put into effect. They found their representatives were more accommodating and easier to work with than they had been. Chaplains also believed that the increased emphasis upon following military procedures enhanced the Commission's ministry with the army.⁶⁹

The Commission was able to enlarge the scope of its activities with the Union Army because of the positive changes that the new policies brought about. The substantial growth in its resources allowed the organization to identify new ways to minister to the soldiers. While the distribution of religious literature and conducting prayer meetings remained a significant priority, Commission delegates also became involved in areas such as food distribution, hospital work and developing camp libraries.

The Commission's leaders did not view this new policy as reducing its spiritual emphasis. They depicted it as recognizing the wide level of unmet temporal needs confronting the Union soldiers. This perspective is clearly presented in their *First Annual Report*:

The Christian Commission regards our brave defenders *as men, having both bodies and souls* [emphasis theirs], and aims to minister to their wants, both temporal and spiritual. Bodily relief to suffering men is important and imperative; without it, religious admonitions are in vain and a mockery. Therefore, the Commission receives and distributes clothing and comforts, and sends relief to the sick, wounded, and destitute, by every one of its delegates.⁷⁰

The leadership endorsed the concept that ministering to physical needs could facilitate the acceptance of their evangelistic message. George Stuart referred to a conversation he had in which the other person "wished the Christian Commission to confine its work entirely to spiritual

⁶⁸ Moss, 543-47.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 124-25.

⁷⁰ United States Christian Commission, *First Annual Report*, 118-9.

matters, leaving the temporal welfare of the soldiers to the Sanitary Commission.” Stuart replied, “there is a good deal of religion in a warm shirt and a good beef-steak.”⁷¹ With this changing orientation, the delegates increasingly sought to identify how they could minister to the soldiers’ physical needs as well as their spiritual and moral concerns. The Commission’s *Second Annual Report* (1864) revealed how these principles were to be applied by the delegate:

... and always adding such personal service to the value of the gift as may be needed. Is the gift a shirt, drawers and socks for the soldier wounded or sick? Wash him first, and then put them on! Is it a bed? Make it up in order and tenderly place him on it! Is it only a blanket? Wrap him in it! Is it some delicacy for the sick, or coffee or soup for the worn or wounded, or a meal for the hungry wayfarer? Prepare it nicely and serve it!⁷²

The organization gained substantial recognition and admiration from the military, civilians, and press because of its willingness to minister in such a variety of ways to men facing great deprivation and danger. It is reasonable to assert that the Commission’s decision to expand its wartime role probably had a greater impact upon northern society’s perception of the benevolent group than any other policy it enacted.

The Commission’s emphasis upon identifying new ways to meet the needs of the army was a primary reason why Union soldiers held an increasingly favorable image of the organization. The benevolent group initiated a number of programs during the conflict that greatly benefited the soldiers or addressed their concerns. The Diet Kitchen, for example, made a substantial contribution to the physical welfare of the troops and was one of the organization’s most successful labors. The Diet Kitchen was a hospital food plan that prepared meals based upon the patient’s individual needs. Annie Wittenmyer, a representative of the Iowa Christian Commission, devised this policy in the latter part of 1863 after she visited a military hospital and

⁷¹ Stuart, 129; and United States Christian Commission, *First Annual Report*, 19.

⁷² United States Christian Commission, *Second Annual Report*, 17-18.

discovered that it served all of its patients the same fare.⁷³ She recognized the importance that the diet had in the healing process and was deeply concerned about how a military hospital's uniform meal plan might undermine the recovery of ailing soldiers. Wittenmyer gained the Commission's backing and in January 1864 put into operation a program at a Nashville hospital that allowed the surgeons to provide a list of the patients' specific dietary needs. The food was then prepared in accord with the physician's instructions by volunteers in a facility separate from the main kitchen. Wittenmyer's program improved recovery rates among the soldiers almost immediately and became a standard practice in Union military hospitals by the end of the year.⁷⁴

The Army Loan Library was another successful policy initiated by the Christian Commission. It was started by Chaplain Joseph Thomas in 1862 as a result of his efforts to provide more reading material for his regiment. He was concerned about the lack of literature available for the soldiers and he sought a wide assortment of quality reading materials, both religious and secular, at the least possible cost for his unit. The program met with the approval of his superiors and by 1863 General George Thomas (no relation) requested that he develop a library system for the entire Army of the Cumberland. Recognizing the immensity of this task, Thomas turned to the Christian Commission for its assistance and by 1864, the Commission assumed the role of organizing the distribution of literature for the Army of the Cumberland. While favoring religious books and pamphlets, but not exclusively so, the Commission was careful to avoid literature with a denominational slant that might engender controversy. By the end of the war the Commission had opened over four hundred loan libraries, with an average of

⁷³ The bread and bacon that were served for breakfast by the hospital that day were coated in grease. McDevitt, 315.

⁷⁴ Moss, 663-671; and Annie Wittenmyer to George Stuart, United States Christian Commission Records, National Archives, Record Group 94, Entry 753. The Diet Kitchen was one of the primary venues where women served in the Christian Commission.

about 125 volumes in the typical library. For soldiers starving for reading materials, the lending library was a welcome addition to military life.⁷⁵

The organization also addressed two common sources of apprehensions that Union personnel held towards dying in battle: their burial and their identification. Commission representatives recognized that the manner of burial was extremely important to the soldiers and the organization went to great lengths to provide funeral services for those who had perished. Union troops appreciated the Commission's efforts for their fallen comrades and were also comforted knowing that the organization would care for them in the same way if they were to die. Soldiers frequently expressed their gratitude to delegates for providing these religious services, rather than "being buried like dogs."⁷⁶

The Commission also helped alleviate a common fear among soldiers if they were to die in a manner that prevented recognition of their body. The organization devised a means to identify the soldiers who were either stripped of personal articles, or so badly mutilated that it made personal detection impossible. Delegates distributed small parchments of paper among the troops that were called identifiers. The slips provided personal information on one side and a Bible verse on the other side. The data also helped medical personnel ascertain the names of soldiers who had been severely wounded. George Stuart noted that "for these identifiers there

⁷⁵ Annals, 714-17; and the United States Christian Commission, *Third Annual Report* (Philadelphia: United States Christian Commission, 1865), 347-49. The demands of this work became so great that Thomas eventually became the General Library Agent for the Christian Commission. Ralph C. Gordon, "Nashville and the U.S. Christian Commission," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* LV (Summer 96): 109; and M. Hamlin Cannon, The United States Christian Commission, *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 38 (June, 1951): 71-72.

⁷⁶ J. B. Rogers, *Christ in the Army* (Philadelphia: J. B. Rogers, 1865), 50. Henry Clay Trumbull observed that the soldiers often put themselves at considerable risk from enemy fire in their efforts to provide a Christian burial for their comrades. Trumbull, 224.

was great demand” and that Union soldiers deeply appreciated that their fate would no longer remain unknown among family and friends back home.⁷⁷

Although the Christian Commission generally fostered positive relations with others, this was not always the case. A notable exception was evident in its tenuous relationship with another benevolent organization, the United States Sanitary Commission.⁷⁸ Although the two groups maintained a fragile alliance during the war, the rapport between their leaders was often acrimonious.⁷⁹ Both sought to promote the welfare of the Union Army, yet they approached this objective with vastly different ideologies and methodologies. The contrasts in their approaches factored largely in the tension that developed between the two groups. The Christian Commission identified saving the soldier’s soul as its primary objective. However, the Sanitary Commission’s principal aim was to keep the soldiers physically healthy through the utilization of the most advanced scientific and medical means. The Sanitary Commission placed considerable emphasis upon its professionalism. In regards to carrying out its objective, historian George Frederickson states, “Its goal was cool, impersonal efficiency.” Their leaders regarded the Christian Commission’s organizational structure as inadequate and their methods of distribution as wasteful.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Stuart, 163-64. The identifier slips were also the forerunner of the modern military identification tag.

⁷⁸ The United States Sanitary Commission was founded in June, 1861. At the time of the war it was the largest philanthropic organization in American history. Henry Bellows, a Unitarian minister, served as the President of the Sanitary Commission.

⁷⁹ Sanitary Commission Treasurer George Templeton Strong had a particularly strong aversion to the Commission. He once described George Stuart as an “evangelical mountebank.” After a meeting between the two organizations, he wrote that there was “an undercurrent of cant, unreality, or something else to their talk that offends me.” George Templeton Strong, *The Diary of George Templeton Strong*, ed. Allan Nevins and Milton Halsey (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 3:310-11, 589.

⁸⁰ For a good summary of the contrasting philosophical and theological differences between these two organizations, see George Fredrickson, *The Inner Civil War* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 90-113.

The two groups also frequently vied for popular support. Leaders of the Sanitary Commission became frustrated by the differences in the public's perception of the two groups. While northern society viewed both organizations favorably, the Christian Commission was generally accorded greater respect by the people, the press, and the government.⁸¹ One reason why it had the superior public standing was because of its direct involvement with the soldier, which led to beneficial publicity detailing incidents of heroism and compassion. The Sanitary Commission's method of distributing medical supplies did not involve direct contact with the soldiers and, consequently, was viewed as much more impersonal in its operations.⁸² Nevertheless, the two organizations learned to coexist and even worked together in a number of ventures to help Union troops.⁸³

Shortly after the war's end, the Christian Commission's Executive Board concluded that its work was complete and voted to disband on January 1, 1866.⁸⁴ The various regional branches gathered after the war to commemorate their work and its results. The organization raised over \$2,500,000 in cash, and another \$3,000,000 worth of stores and supplies. Over the course of the war this organization had commissioned almost five thousand delegates to serve and minister to

⁸¹ *Congregationalist*, March 18, 1864, and May 6, 1864. The Sanitary Commission's policy of paying its agents also caused it to be viewed as less admirable than the Christian Commission, whose delegates volunteered their service free of charge. Frederickson, 106-7. William Maxwell maintains that there was a lack of support for the Sanitary Commission from the Lincoln Administration from its very initiation. One source of contention pertained to distribution of supplies. Sanitary Commission leaders desired to direct this process. However, Union officials feared that organization workers would simply get in the way of the military. See Maxwell, *Lincoln's Fifth Wheel: The Political History of the United States Sanitary Commission* (New York: Longmans and Green, 1956), 7-8. In contrast, the Christian Commission received warm endorsements from the Lincoln Administration and maintained amicable relations throughout the war. Stuart, 132-33; Moss 216. Stuart and Grant developed a close friendship during the war. Grant even offered Stuart a cabinet post during his administration (1869-1877), which Stuart declined because of health concerns. Grant's last public appearance was with Stuart at a Commission memorial. William S. McFeely, *Grant: A Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1982), 294, 495-96; and Stewart, 233.

⁸² Frederickson, 106-7.

⁸³ *Baltimore Sun*, July 20, 1863; *Daily National Intelligencer*, June 18, 1864; and Moss, 150, 165;

⁸⁴ Moss, 228.

the Union troops. However, it was the organization's partnership with Union chaplains that would serve as its most influential wartime work, as illustrated in the following chapter.

Chapter Five

A MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL PARTNERSHIP

On March 20, 1864, Reverend Benjamin Waddle, a delegate for the United States Christian Commission, officiated as the worship leader at an evening service for members of the Union army stationed at Warrenton Junction, Virginia. Chaplain Joseph Mateer of the 155th Pennsylvania regiment had asked the Presbyterian pastor to serve in this capacity after the chaplain discovered he would be unable to carry out this responsibility. One week later Mateer, also a Presbyterian, returned the favor and filled in for Waddle at a service sponsored by the Christian Commission. During his six-week tour of duty, the delegate developed a warm relationship with the chaplains at the military base. Waddle mentioned in his weekly report that Mateer and another chaplain “really helped him” in his work. In the following week’s account, he referred to the close association he shared with the chaplains. He also expressed pleasure at the many “who came forward” and were converted during his time of service at Warrenton Junction and the “strong interest in the prayer meetings.” He was also grateful to see so many publicly rededicate their lives to following Christ’s teachings. When the time came for his departure, the chaplains held a farewell party for him that was attended by many of the soldiers. In the account of his efforts at the Virginia camp, Waddle mentions that he was deeply touched by the chaplains’ expression of “appreciation for his many valuable labors and their regret that they could not continue working together.” While he was sorry to see his time with these officers come to an end, he also felt great pleasure upon observing “the notable influence that their work had on the religious and moral life of the camp.”¹

¹ United States Christian Commission Records, Record Group 94, Entry 753, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

The rapport Waddle shared with these chaplains was not a unique occurrence. The two groups frequently interacted during the war because they pursued similar objectives and it benefited them to collaborate. They each viewed the other as an ally in the attempt to encourage Protestant evangelicalism with the soldiers. Moreover, they often coordinated their labors because they recognized that the other group possessed assets that would facilitate their ability to promote these views with the troops. On the one hand, chaplains had valuable ties with the army and personal relationships with the soldiers. On the other hand, the Commission had access to resources that helped their ministry to the troops. By working together, the two groups became more effective. This chapter will examine how chaplains and the Commission promoted Protestant evangelicalism among the soldiers and why their cooperative efforts greatly increased their ability to shape the army's religious environment.

The Christian Commission and Union chaplains were committed to promoting evangelical Christianity with the troops. This shared objective figured prominently in their wartime association and labors. The Commission was quite intentional about establishing a strong connection with Union chaplains. From its very inception, organization leaders identified the chaplaincy as playing an essential role in preserving morality within the army and they desired to support the military office in this cause. Lemuel Moss, for instance, believed that the strong endorsement Union clergy gave to Vincent Colyer's proposal greatly increased the Association's willingness to establish the auxiliary organization.² The benevolent group viewed chaplains as natural colleagues in their efforts to promote revival among the ranks and they anticipated that they could work together to encourage this objective. However, Commission personnel were also concerned about the state of the office during the early stages of the war. There was an

² Moss, 96-97.

insufficient number of chaplains to supply one with every regiment. Organization leaders hoped their delegates could address this problem by carrying out some of the functions normally handled by the religious officers, such as conducting worship services and prayer meetings, and visiting with the soldiers.³ They were also disturbed by the military office's lack of structure. YMCA members who visited the army camps viewed the confusion that surrounded the chaplaincy's role as a serious impediment to an effective ministry. Episcopal Bishop Charles McIlvaine, a member of the organization's General Commission, commented upon the chaplaincy's early struggles: "The chaplains stood in great need of sympathy and support in the early period of the war, for everything was in a chaotic state, and their condition was peculiarly unpleasant."⁴ For the Commission, the chaplaincy represented an important ally in the campaign to promote Christianity with the soldiers, but was also perceived as a partner that would be greatly aided by the benevolent organization's assistance.

Union chaplains, for their part, responded favorably to the YMCA's offers of support. Many of the chaplains who replied to Colyer's inquiries included expressions of appreciation for the help they had already received from the organization.⁵ Mason Gallagher, who served as the secretary of the Chaplains' Association during the latter part of 1861, sent the YMCA a formal note of appreciation on the group's behalf. He stated that the chaplaincy owed a great obligation to the YMCA for all the help and support it had provided to them.⁶ The Association's resources

³ Ibid., 76-83; and Stuart, 128.

⁴ Moss, 88.

⁵ Ibid., 97-98.

⁶ Ibid.

and support considerably aided the beleaguered chaplains and facilitated their receptiveness to working with the organization's newly created wartime auxiliary.

While the Commission generally maintained a good working relationship with Federal clergy, they usually developed their closest relationships with the officials who shared their Protestant evangelical beliefs.⁷ Most of the Union chaplains also adhered to these theological views. Over two-thirds of the clergy who served in the position belonged to denominations that advocated evangelical principles.⁸ Furthermore, there were chaplains from the other denominations who also held these perspectives.⁹ The delegates worked more frequently with these religious officers than others because their similarity in beliefs promoted comparable objectives. They were committed to converting the unsaved to Christ and encouraging moral principles based upon the Bible. They wanted to fashion righteous soldiers in the Union Army.

⁷ A resolution passed by thirty-six chaplains in the spring of 1864 illustrated the cordial rapport they shared with non-evangelical chaplains. Some of the clergy who signed the document were not evangelicals. They drafted the declaration to express their appreciation for the Commission's efforts and to encourage the public to support the organization. United States Christian Commission Records, Record Group 94, Entry 753, National Archives.

⁸ Denominational Affiliation of Union Chaplains:

Methodist 38%
 Presbyterian 17%
 Baptist 12%
 Episcopal 10%
 Congregational 9%
 Unitarian/Universalist 4%
 Roman Catholic 3%
 Lutheran 2%
 Others 1%.

Brinsfield, et al., *Faith in the Fight*, 45.

⁹ John Stuckenberg and Stephen Higgenson Tyng exemplified this commitment to evangelical principles. Stuckenberg was a Lutheran pastor who sought to convert his unsaved listeners and desired soldiers to become evangelical Christians. Tyng was an Episcopal clergyman who served as chaplain of the 12th New York Volunteers. He worked closely with the Christian Commission during the war. Stuckenberg, 16; and Moss, 86.

One of the primary ways army chaplains and Commission delegates shaped the Union military's religious environment occurred through their public discourse. Members from both groups emphasized Protestant evangelical themes in their sermons, teachings, and discussions. The Commission stressed this point in its description of the delegates' objectives in their field work, which was directed to the "work of winning souls to Christ by preaching, prayer meetings, personal conversations, facilitated and enforced by their other labors."¹⁰ The recurring opportunity to address these topics with the soldiers provided them with an influential means to promote these views with the Union Army.

Chaplains had considerable liberty in determining the subject matter they addressed with soldiers. Although the lack of formal policy directed to the office was often a source of frustration regarding their military role, it also provided them a great deal of freedom in their preaching. Military leaders rarely raised any objections with clergy regarding theological matters discussed in a sermon. While officers sometimes encouraged their chaplains to address areas that could boost the troops' morale, they treated doctrinal matters as something outside their sphere of influence.¹¹ Military officials who did not agree with their chaplains' theology generally avoided the unit's worship services. But there were also commanders who took a passive aggressive approach to a difference of opinion and made a habit of scheduling activities that interfered or conflicted with religious services.¹² When Union officials did comment about a sermon's theological themes with their chaplain, it was usually to affirm what had been said.

¹⁰ United States Christian Commission, *Third Annual Report* (Philadelphia: United States Christian Commission, 1865), 27.

¹¹ McAllister, 414-15; and Stuckenberg, 83.

¹² Rogers, *War Pictures*, 83.

O. O. Howard, for example, often discussed the content of a sermon with chaplains and visiting clergy at the conclusion of a service.¹³

Chaplains and Commission delegates gave evangelism the highest priority in their preaching throughout the conflict.¹⁴ They frequently emphasized that converting the unsaved was their most important wartime labor. Jonathan Pinkney Hammond, in his influential manual for chaplains, identified leading soldiers to Christ as the chaplain's primary goal: "But when we reflect that the main object of all his efforts is to win souls to Christ, or in other words, to persuade men, it is plain that his first endeavor must be to win the confidence of those with whom he labors."¹⁵ William Brown also assigned preeminence to evangelism in his guidelines for the office. He stated, "The public preaching of the gospel, is the highest duty and privilege of the Christian minister."¹⁶ Clergy often identified preaching to the unsaved as their primary motivation for taking the position. John Ripley Adams, for example, decided to become a chaplain because he believed that the position provided "a great field of opportunity" to preach the gospel to the soldiers.¹⁷

¹³ Stuckenberg, 102; Moss, 480-82; William S. McFeely, *Yankee Stepfather: General O.O. Howard and the Freedmen* (New York: Norton, 1970), 26; and Adams, 92.

¹⁴ Evangelism is the spread of the gospel, or good news, by means of proclamation or announcement. *Dictionary of Christianity in America* s.v. "Evangelism."

¹⁵ Hammond, 70.

¹⁶ Brown, 30-31.

¹⁷ Lyle, 252-54; Hartsock, 14; and Adams, 22. In a study on the subject matter regimental chaplains emphasized most commonly in their sermons, Rollin Quimby, a professor of speech and drama at the University of California at Santa Barbara, identified patriotic ideals as being the most prevalent theme in their messages. He maintained that chaplains frequently juxtaposed the principle of serving God and country in their messages as a way they could boost morale and maintain discipline. Quimby held that Union clergy prominently stressed to their listeners that they served God by being a good soldier and fighting faithfully for their nation. See Rollin Quimby, "Recurrent Themes and Purposes in the Sermons of the Union Army Chaplain," *Speech Monographs* 31 (1964): 425-36. However, Warren Armstrong points out that Quimby made his assertions based upon the views of a relatively small number of chaplains. Armstrong, 137n46. It is also notable that Quimby rarely cites chaplains who were Protestant evangelicals to support his position, even though they comprised the majority of the officeholders.

The importance that the Commission placed upon evangelism was articulated in the organization's official account of its wartime activities:

The work of the Commission was exclusively, in spirit and aim, a religious work. It is by this avowal, made at the outset and always adhered to, that they wish to be estimated and judged. What was done for the bodily and intellectual welfare of the soldiers was the offspring of religious motives. Patriotism and philanthropy are prominent among Christian virtues, although feebler and less pure forms of them may exist apart from Christianity. But above this, the Commission felt that the soldiers were sinful, accountable, and immortal men. They felt that only the blood of Christ can save the soul, and that for the soldiers, as for all others, repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ are essential to salvation.¹⁸

Converting soldiers to Christ was its preeminent objective. While the organization sponsored a number of activities that helped the soldier and supported the Union cause, these labors were always subordinate in importance to the salvation of the soldiers.¹⁹

The perilous nature of war influenced the stress that chaplains and delegates gave to evangelism in their preaching and teaching. Members from both groups mentioned how the thought of so many soldiers perishing unsaved on the battlefield heightened the urgency they placed on converting them to Christ. Their concern for the soldiers' spiritual state was especially strong before battles. John Stuckenberg referred to the emotional burden he felt at the Battle of Fredericksburg (December 13, 1862). He struggled to maintain his composure when members of his regiment bade him farewell, since he knew it "would be the last goodbye that some of them uttered" and not all "were prepared to meet their God." Stuckenberg stressed "pointing people to Christ, if not yet his" as a chaplain so that they would be prepared if it was indeed the hour they would come before God.²⁰ William Lyle maintained that the subject of death needed to be

¹⁸ Moss, 567-68.

¹⁹ United States Christian Commission, *Second Annual Report*, 177-79.

²⁰ Stuckenberg, 41, 115.

addressed before a conflict. He offered a rationale for why the issue should be mentioned before battle:

No man can be as brave without the consciousness of God's favor as he would be with it. Who can afford to be so brave as he who hath placed his all in the hands of God, and feels prepared either to live or to die ... and the bravest unconverted man that ever lived could have been braver even still if he had possessed the blessed consciousness that, whether he lived or died, he was the Lord's.²¹

Lyle believed that converted soldiers had the advantage of entering the battlefield knowing they were at peace with God. Furthermore, it also made them more effective fighters because they could carry out their duties without the same fear of death.

The thought of soldiers dying unsaved also weighed heavily on Commission personnel. Although delegates were generally located a safe distance from the battlefield, K. A. Burnell related an incident during the campaign at Vicksburg, Mississippi (1863) when he put himself at considerable risk because of his concern for the soldiers' eternal welfare. He observed that the unit he had been ministering to was likely to be called into action at any moment. He felt compelled to join them so that he could "point them to the Captain of their salvation." Although it placed him in the line of enemy fire, he stood before the prone regiment and spoke to them for the next fifteen minutes about Christ.²²

Chaplains and delegates regularly dealt with subjects that pertained to conversion. Sin, forgiveness, repentance, salvation, the cross, death, and eternal life were commonly addressed topics in the messages. Jonathan Pinkney Hammond encouraged chaplains to stress these themes in his guidelines for preaching:

²¹ Lyle, 178-79.

²² United States Christian Commission, *Second Annual Report*, 152-53.

He proclaims the good-will of God to His people. He declares the inestimable benefits resulting from the death and sacrifice of Christ. He denounces God's anger against, and yet, at the same time, calls the sinner to repentance. He displays the infinite riches of the Saviour's love and compassion for His creatures; and offers, in the Saviour's name, pardon and peace in the world, and a glorious prospect of eternal happiness in the world to come, to all who will confess and forsake their sins, and seek a refuge, in faith, beneath the shadow of the blood-stained cross.²³

Hammond supplied a logical progression to his messages. Each theme built upon previous sections to represent a pathway to salvation. While the content in his discourses varied, his emphasis on conversion remained a constant in his sermons.²⁴

There was considerable variety in the manner that chaplains and delegates delivered evangelistic messages. Denominational and theological traditions, regional customs, and differences in temperament all factored in the diverse oratorical styles employed by the religious leaders. While evangelical clergy shared the common objective of promoting conversions to Christ, they often maintained significant differences in the manner they attempted to accomplish this goal. Some ministers commented on the varying approaches used by other religious leaders. John Stuckenberg for example, referred to the lack of refinement he perceived in the preaching of his Methodist colleagues: "I am surrounded by Methodist Chaplains who are very clever, but lack cultivation." While he frequently labored alongside clergy from this denomination he mentioned that preferred to work with fellow Lutherans.²⁵ Delegate Eri Baker Hulbert expressed his desire for a more reserved decorum during his meetings. The Baptist minister began working in Virginia with the Army of the James in February 1865 while they were in the midst of a revival. He was pleased with the "deep religious solemnity" he observed among the soldiers at

²³ Hammond, 110.

²⁴ Ibid., 111-12.

²⁵ Stuckenberg, 56.

the meetings. However, he also felt that the strong emotions expressed by some at the religious gatherings to be a distraction and wrote that “our devotions are spoiled by the noise and confusion which these deluded brethren create.” He added, “they seem to think that they cannot worship God without a vast amount of noise and the Amens and groans and sighs which we hear on every side are enough to take every particle of genuine fervor out of a true and sane believer in X.”²⁶

While the term evangelistic sermon often conjures up the image of a minister preaching with great emotional fervor, clergy frequently adopted a subdued approach when they presented the Gospel message to the Union soldiers. Clergy and laity often characterized the meetings as solemn or somber.²⁷ While some messages were often designed to pull at the hearts of the soldiers, yet, there were religious leaders who believed it was important to engage the mind of the listeners. When Milton Haney preached to the unconverted, he “aimed to show that a rational faith could be exercised in Christ Jesus as Saviour and in the Bible as the inspired word of God.”²⁸ Religious leaders also hoped to revive those who had previously been converted but had lost their spiritual resolve. Benjamin Crever, a chaplain at a military hospital in Frederick, Maryland, made it “his goal to restore those who have experienced spiritual declension.”²⁹

The eternal state was another commonly addressed issue. Religious leaders frequently brought up the subject of heaven and hell with the troops. They gave more attention to the

²⁶ Eli Baker Hulbert, “The Civil War Diary of a Christian Minister,” *Journal of the West* 3 (April, 1964): 230-31.

²⁷ Billingsley, 257-59; and Moss 469.

²⁸ Haney, 189.

²⁹ Benjamin Crever to George Stuart, United States Christian Commission Records, Record Group 94, Entry 753, National Archives; and United States Christian Commission, *Second Annual Report*, 167.

former than the latter.³⁰ Preachers often emphasized the peace of mind that the saved could have about their eternity. The Commission stressed this theme in an incident that involved D. L.

Moody shortly after the Battle of Shiloh in Tennessee (April 6-7, 1862):

Mr. Moody was roused out of bed to speak with a critically injured soldier. There was a man on one of the boatloads of wounded from the field, who was very low and in a kind of stupor. He was entirely unknown. A little stimulant was poured down his throat, and Mr. Moody called him by different names, but could get no response. At last, at the name 'William,' the man unclosed his eyes and looked up. Some more stimulant was given, when he revived. He was asked if he was a Christian. Though replying in the negative, he yet manifested great anxiety upon the subject: 'But I am so great a sinner that I can't be a Christian.' Mr. Moody told him he would read what Christ said about that. So, turning to St. John's third chapter, he read ... 'For God so loved the world that He gave His Only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' 'Stop,' said the dying man; 'read that over again will you?' It was read again. 'Is that there?' 'Yes' said Moody; 'that's there just as I read it to you.' 'And did Christ say that?' asked the man. 'Yes', replied Moody. The man began repeating the words, settling back on the pillow as he did so, with a strange, solemn look of peace on his face. He took no further notice of what was going on about him, but continued murmuring the blessed words until Mr. Moody left him. The next morning when the soldier's place was visited, it was found empty. Mr. Moody asked if anyone knew about him during the night. A nurse, who had spent the hours with him before he died, replied, that he was heard repeating Mr. Moody's words of assurance over and over again.³¹

The episode with Moody touched on two themes evangelicals stressed with army members.

First, the soldier who placed his faith in Christ could face death without fear. Second, salvation was always available to any who trusted in Christ. Although religious leaders exhorted their listeners about the perils of not making a commitment, they also emphasized that even someone who believed he was a great sinner could still be forgiven during the last moment of his life.³²

³⁰ There was a considerable increase on books about heaven after the war. Prior to the war, about one book a year was published in the United States. Almost one hundred works on the subject were published within ten years after the war. See Phillip Shaw Paludan, "Religion and the American Civil War," in *Religion and the American Civil War*, ed. Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 31.

³¹ Edward P. Smith, *Incidents of the Christian Commission* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1869), 71-72.

³² Trumbull, 127.

Preachers also dealt with the topic of hell. Messages that focused on the subject often included a vivid portrayal of the bleak and hopeless emotional state of the unsaved when they faced death. William Lyle's depiction of his encounter with a dying officer provided a notable example of this desolate image:

And is this all the comfort that infidelity can give in the face of suffering and death. Cold, cheerless, and dark as the grave is the skeptic's pathway! He begins by refusing to think of God and eternity. God is not in all his thoughts. He continues in the dark and cheerless pathway of unbelief, saying to the God of light and life, "Depart from me, O God, for I desire not the knowledge of Thy ways!" And when he stands shivering on the brink of eternity, the poor hopeless, homeless unbeliever exclaims, "I DON'T WANT TO THINK!" And does not this exclamation from this dying soldier contain the very essence, the very life, of all ungodliness.³³

The chaplain's grim description of the officer's final moments offered a stark contrast to the uplifting depiction often provided of the Christian's peaceful manner at death.³⁴

Sermons and teachings on the subject of hell commonly referred to it as a literal place of eternal suffering for the condemned. Daniel Crotty of the 3rd Michigan Volunteer Infantry alluded to this characterization during his description of the Battle of the Wilderness (May 5-7, 1864). He writes, "About this time both armies, nearly two hundred thousand strong, kept up a rattle of musketry like the boiling cauldron of hell, as it is represented to us by our good Chaplains."³⁵

Union troops became well acquainted with the death of a regiment member and the manner of passing often made a deep impression on those who remained. Soldiers regularly provided detailed accounts in their correspondence of how their ailing comrades responded to their

³³ Lyle, 55-56.

³⁴ James Russell Miller, "Two Civil War Notebooks of James Russell Miller," *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society* XXXVIII, no. 3 (1959): 158.

³⁵ Daniel Crotty, *Four Years Campaigning in the Army of the Potomac* (Grand Rapids, MI: Dygert Brothers and Co., 1874), 128.

impending death. The frequent references they made to a person's final moments reflected the importance that soldiers often placed on dying well. Historian Drew Gilpin Faust observed that the notion of the "good death" was widely shared by Americans around the time of the Civil War. Citizens of both North and South attributed significant spiritual implications to *hors mori*, the hour of death. She declares that it was commonly perceived in that era that the manner in which one faced death provided a reflection of a person's spiritual state: "How one died thus epitomized a life already led and predicted the quality of life everlasting."³⁶ Jefferson Moses of the 93rd Illinois illustrated the emphasis on dying well in a letter he wrote to his parents after he had seen one of his close companions die. He commented on the calm demeanor displayed by his friend Henry Carl, who was mortally wounded at Allatoona, Georgia in October of 1864. He was especially moved by the soldier's last moments: "There was a chaplain who came to see him and he thought a good deal of him and I rather think he died happy."³⁷

The importance attached to the "good death" had significant implications for a soldier's family as well. Soldiers who were aware of their impending deaths often made a point of communicating to other parties about the soundness of their faith or referred to their reliance on Christ's sacrifice on the cross as a way they could assure their loved ones of their eternal destination. Notifications sent by the Union Army to inform a family about the passing of one of its members also illustrated the importance attributed to dying well. Chaplains and military

³⁶ Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 8-9.

³⁷ Jefferson Moses Diary, October 24, 1864 (October 5, 2008), <http://www.ioweb.com/civilwar/> (accessed February 2, 2012).

officers frequently included in their messages that the fallen soldier had a good death as a way that they could bring some comfort to the grieving family.³⁸

The military hospital served as another environment where chaplains and delegates placed considerable stress on evangelism. Most of their efforts occurred through personal visitation during the first half of the war. Opportunities to offer worship services were often limited for need of separate facilities at that point. However, the hospital setting was found to be very conducive for sharing the gospel with the soldiers. This locale was described as “one of the richest fields for spiritual husbandry” in a Commission publication.³⁹ Patients frequently reflected upon spiritual matters while recuperating from their battle wounds or illnesses. William Brown noted that the soldiers he visited often conversed with him on the question of death and eternity.⁴⁰ Their contemplation on the subject matter was understandable since they had seen their comrades around them perish during battle and were well aware that they nearly met a similar fate. Moreover, most knew their recovery was not assured. It was common knowledge that more soldiers perished from their wounds in the hospital than died on the battlefield.⁴¹ Chaplains and delegates also observed that soldiers were more prone to convert to Christ when their thoughts dwelled upon their own eternal state.⁴²

Particular urgency was directed toward soldiers who were in critical condition. Religious leaders made great efforts to ascertain if a patient in this circumstance was a Christian. A. S.

³⁸ Quint, 21-22; Smith, 82-85.

³⁹ United States Christian Commission, *Third Annual Report*, 53.

⁴⁰ Brown, 34-36.

⁴¹ Illness was also a significant threat. Soldiers were twice as likely to die from disease as they were to be killed in combat. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 486-87; Fisk, 49-51; and Hammond, 132-33.

⁴² Rogers, *War Pictures*, 80-81; and Bristol, 117.

Billingsley believed that identifying the soldier's spiritual state was one of the hospital chaplain's most important duties.⁴³ There was no higher priority than to share the gospel with those whose lives were near an end and who offered no evidence that they were saved.⁴⁴ In their accounts of the war, chaplains and delegates frequently referred to occasions when a soldier placed his faith in Christ on his deathbed in their accounts of the war. Delegate A. B. Dascomb had one such encounter while he was serving at a military hospital in Nashville, which was later included in a collection of the Commission's most notable labors:

I spoke to him earnestly and repeatedly, but received no satisfactory response. I was puzzled, for it was impossible to determine whether he was physically insensible, or indifferent to what I was saying. I urged him to pray, still no answer came. Bending down to him, I repeated my request, giving him these words of petition: "God, be merciful to me a sinner, Saviour, pity; Jesus, save me." There was no reply and sorrowfully I turned to the next cot, tenanted by a bright and glowing Christian, in whose words of faith and hope, the speechless sufferer near me was forgotten. A low murmur of words from his cot recalled him to mind. In a clear but very faint, struggling voice, the words I had said to him were repeated: "God be merciful to me a sinner; Saviour, pity; Jesus, save me."⁴⁵

Dascomb's role in the soldier's deathbed conversion provided one of the most compelling motives for serving as a delegate. Many of those who volunteered likely envisioned they would at some point be in a similar situation when they would lead a soldier to eternal salvation just before he perished.

Chaplains and delegates gave the same kind of importance to sharing the gospel with soldiers who were gravely injured on the battlefield as with those in the hospital. Milton Haney referred to a memorable experience he had with a mortally wounded soldier during the Battle of Atlanta (1864). A musket ball had passed through the man's body near the stomach. The chaplain tried

⁴³ Billingsley, 115-16.

⁴⁴ Brown, 29.

⁴⁵ Smith, 101.

to comfort the soldier who was aware that his life was about to end. Haney recounted the man's final moments:

“Chaplain, I suppose I have but a few minutes to live, and I feel that I am unprepared for eternity. I hope you might tell me words whereby I could be saved.” It seems now to me that in all this ministry I never was so empowered from God to bring a soul so quickly and so thoroughly to Christ as in this case. I had a clear inner sense that he saw and would with his whole heart take hold of Christ as his present, Almighty Savior.

Haney proceeded to sing the gospel hymn “Boundless Mercy,” which he often used in revival meetings.⁴⁶ While he was in the midst of the last verse, the young man opened his eyes and said, “Chaplain, I have found Him.” The soldier's conversion served as one of the Union cleric's most memorable incidents from the war.⁴⁷

William Brown identified prayer as another way to promote the gospel with hospitalized soldiers. He commented upon the influence it had on the wounded warriors: “Here many a stout heart has bowed to the Redeemer's scepter, and many a careless eye has moistened with tears of penitence, as his mind has wandered back to the years of childhood and youth, and recalled the prayers of sainted parents around the family altar.”⁴⁸

Although most chaplains viewed evangelism as their most important responsibility, a number of these military officials did not seek to convert soldiers to Christ. There was a wide variety of religious traditions represented among Union clergy and some maintained beliefs that differed from evangelical Christians in this matter. Charles H. Humphries, Chaplain of the 22nd Massachusetts, for example, was a Unitarian minister who did not pursue the same goals as the “evangelical sectarians.” He explained in a letter he wrote to a friend in 1864 that his aspiration

⁴⁶ The hymn “Boundless Mercy,” was written by Oliver Holden and Thomas Hastings.

⁴⁷ Haney, 208-9.

⁴⁸ Brown, 37-38.

was to encourage love, charity, and kindness among his listeners. Humphries declared, “My aim in preaching is to elevate rather than convert. I appeal to what is good and true in my auditors.”⁴⁹

There were also differences of perspective in the identification of who needed to be converted. For instance, opinions diverged among Protestant chaplains regarding the spiritual state of Catholics. Some believed they were not saved and needed to be converted, while other chaplains believed this was unnecessary. Amos Billingsley and Arthur Fuller exemplified these contrasting perspectives towards the followers of this religious tradition. Billingsley was quite frank about his efforts to convert Catholic members of his unit to Christ. He did not believe they were saved and he thought the army provided a good opportunity to reach out and talk with them about “the Saviour and the way of salvation.” He recounted one incident at a military hospital when a young Catholic soldier, who was badly wounded, expressed concern about his eternal state. Billingsley told the young man that he needed to “resolve and come to God.” He also encouraged him to “believe and be saved.” He eventually concluded his appeal with the words, “come unto Christ and he will give you rest.” The chaplain finished his depiction of the incident with a brief final statement regarding the injured soldier: “He was much engaged in prayer, and, though brought up a Catholic, he now seemed to be a converted boy.”⁵⁰ Fuller, on the other hand, did not try to convert Catholics because he believed it was more appropriate for chaplains to emphasize the commonalities among the unit’s various Christian traditions. In a letter to the American Bible Society thanking them for supplying him with reading materials, he referred to

⁴⁹ Charles H. Humphries, *Field, Camp, Hospital, and Prison in the Civil War, 1863-1865* (Boston: George H. Ellis Co., 1918), 16-18.

⁵⁰ Billingsley, 242-43, 268.

the emphasis he gave to religious unity with his regiment, which had a large number of Roman Catholic members: “Our Catholic soldiers receive and read the Bible most cheerfully, as a general rule. I do not seek to proselyte them, thinking it would be wrong in the position that I occupy.”⁵¹ Joseph Hopkins Twichell, Chaplain of the 71st New York, was a Congregational minister, who served a unit that was primarily Catholic. He mentions in a letter he wrote to his brother in June of 1861 that he hopes to save these soldiers. He was concerned, however, that this would not occur if he promoted Protestant views too heavily: “It is not best that I should approach them as a Protestant clergyman. I shall try to make the term chaplain synonymous with friend, and while I wrestle in prayer for their salvation now, my aim must be, first, in a legitimate way to secure their confidence and respect toward me as a man.”⁵² There were also examples of Catholic chaplains encouraging Protestants to join the Catholic Church. Father William Corby, Chaplain of the 88th New York, mentioned a number of occasions when he had baptized Protestants.⁵³ However, this was a relatively unusual incident since priests comprised such a small number of the chaplaincy. It was more common for Protestant clergymen to proselytize Catholic soldiers.⁵⁴

The prayer meeting served as another milieu that chaplains and delegates used for evangelism with the soldiers. While some of the gatherings were publicized well ahead of time, they were often held with little advance notice. The activity often followed a customary format.

⁵¹ Fuller, 191-92.

⁵² Twichell developed a good friendship with Joseph B. O’Hagan, Chaplain of the 73rd New York, who was a Jesuit priest. Twichell frequently called on his Catholic colleague to perform the sacraments with the 71st. Joseph Hopkins Twichell, *The Civil War Letters of Joseph Hopkins Twichell*, ed. Peter Messent and Steve Courtney (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 34-35.

⁵³ William Corby, *Memoirs of a Chaplain’s Life* (Notre Dame, IN: Scholastic Press, 1894), 112, 123-26.

⁵⁴ Among the 2,154 regimental chaplains, Catholic priests held somewhere between 2-3% of the posts. Brinsfield et al., *Faith in the Fight*, 45; and Benjamin J. Blied, *Catholics and the Civil War* (Milwaukee: privately published, 1945), 108.

Some type of signal, such as a bell or horn, was used to alert the camp that the meeting was about to begin. It often commenced with the singing of hymns. A discourse from the preacher on a specific section of the Bible or a particular verse often followed. The messages generally addressed themes such as sin and repentance, salvation, Jesus and the cross. Rev. William Barrow described the proceedings of one such gathering he observed while visiting the 22nd Massachusetts Regiment at Stoneman's Station, Virginia on April 3, 1863. It started with the singing of "Nearer, my God to Thee," and was followed by a prayer said by a minister. After a few more stanzas of a hymn were sung, the minister "read the account of the blind beggar Bartimeus and how Jesus healed him and how he followed the Master afterwards." The clergyman then spoke briefly about "how blind we are to our own good and God's glory, till we all call on Jesus." Then another hymn was sung, which was followed by prayer "for loved ones at home and the church." After they sang one verse of another hymn, the minister talked about following Christ in the army. He finished with an exhortation "to any who had not enlisted under the Captain of our salvation," which was followed by the singing of "O happy day that fixed my choice." The service concluded with the singing of the doxology and a closing prayer.⁵⁵ During the first three years of the war, the majority of conversions occurred at these meetings. Evangelism was not the sole focus of these gatherings, however. Union clergy and delegates were also concerned about the soldiers' moral behavior. They often addressed issues related to their conduct at prayer meetings and at other spiritually oriented events.

Chaplains and delegates devoted significant attention to promoting biblical principles of morality in the Union camps. They believed that their efforts to encourage virtuous conduct

⁵⁵ Smith, 44-47. Barrow's description was initially printed by the *Boston Recorder* and later reprinted in Smith's account of the Commission's wartime labors.

among the troops would benefit the Union war cause. Many espoused the view that a moral army was also likely to be a disciplined unit. Joseph Hopkins Twichell cited the promotion of this objective as one of the reasons why he decided to serve as a chaplain.⁵⁶ William T. Harned, Chaplain of the Indiana 24th Volunteers, praised the efforts of Colonel William Thomas Spicely to discourage immorality in the camp. The parson thought his commanding officer's efforts to promote good behavior greatly benefited the unit.⁵⁷ There were chaplains and delegates who also believed that the soldiers' behavior could sway God's involvement in the conflict. They feared that the Almighty would not aid an unrighteous army. Even worse, the Lord could bring hardships and defeat on the military because of its evil deeds. H. Clay Trumbull, for example, emphasized this view with the troops. He placed great importance on encouraging moral discipline in the army. He frequently warned the men under his charge that it was the soldier's duty to be afraid of defying God and the consequences it could bring.⁵⁸ Union soldiers were also concerned about the consequences that immoral behavior could have on their military efforts. For example, many struggled with the martial activity conducted out on the Sabbath and were strongly opposed to engaging the enemy on what was supposed to be a holy day. Cyrus Boyd of the 15th Iowa felt it was wrong to fight on the Sabbath and believed that God had punished the Confederate Army at the Battle of Shiloh for carrying out an attack on that day. In May of 1862

⁵⁶ Twichell, 18.

⁵⁷ William T. Harned to Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas, Letters Received, Files of the Adjutant General's Office, National Archives Office, Record Group 94.

⁵⁸ Trumbull, 97-98.

he wrote, “The terrible Sunday at Pittsburgh is pointed to and the reason given that the enemy was defeated because they commenced a fight on that day.”⁵⁹

There was another important facet to the stress chaplains and the Commission placed on the soldiers’ conduct. They promoted moral principles with the army because they believed there was a significant connection between faith and actions. Evangelicals emphasized that the converted were to illustrate a spiritually transformed life. If someone made a commitment to Jesus Christ, the pledge was to be demonstrated in his or her actions. They were expected to exercise repentance, a turning away from sin.⁶⁰ The Bible was the authoritative guide in matters of conduct, which was one reason why such importance was placed on reading it. Christians were to live according to the standards set forth in the Scriptures. Personal conduct had significant spiritual implications. It was viewed as a window to the soul. Consequently, evangelicals believed that engaging in immoral behavior reflected on the state of the relationship with Christ.

The soldiers’ impact on northern society after they returned from the war was also influenced by the emphasis on promoting moral principles with the troops. Chaplains and delegates were concerned that members of the Union Army would bring back bad habits they adopted during the conflict. However, the religious leaders also believed that Christian soldiers could have a positive influence on their brothers-in-arms in the camps and also in the churches after the war. The two groups hoped to develop righteous warriors that would influence others through their spiritual fervor and commitment to moral purity.

⁵⁹ Cyrus F. Boyd, *The Civil War Diary of Cyrus F. Boyd, Fifteenth Iowa Infantry, 1861-1863*, ed. by Mildred Thorne (Millwood, NY: Kraus, 1977), 47.

⁶⁰ Bebbington, 31-32.

A document read at the Massachusetts General Association of Congregational Churches illustrated the emphasis on forming Christian warriors in the Union Army. The text was prepared by the Commission's Edward P. Smith and Rev. Alfred Emerson of Fitchburg, Massachusetts.⁶¹ The purpose for the writing was to encourage support for the Commission's labors. A primary theme of the message pertained to the impact that returning soldiers would have upon Northern society:

The young men of our land are in arms. Many of them will return no more. Those who do come back are to tone and shape society, for at least two generations. For not a few of them would be men of mark at any time. And for the rest, with the three to five years of momentous living, few will return to be ordinary men. And then we must remember that in coming years, as never before, the prestige of the life in the field is to give influence among the American people. Thus the future as well as the present is in the hands of the army... The incentives to action are the strongest that can be presented, the salvation of multitudes who could never be reached before, of multitudes who can never be reached again, a wise care for the vast interests of the future depending on the spiritual condition of the returning troops. Shall they come back to be a blessing or a curse? As soldiers usually come, or as Cromwell's did, to be foremost in every good enterprise?⁶²

Smith and Emerson believed Union troops would have a lengthy and significant influence upon the nation. Chaplains and Commission representatives hoped to promote Christian warriors who would be advocates for biblical moral principles for future generations.

Developing righteous soldiers was one of John R. Adams' goals as a chaplain. He hoped they would emerge from the war as a positive example to others. In a letter written to his wife in March 1864, he stated that he wanted them "to be eminent for moral and religious influences, and to be welcomed home as good citizens, made wiser and better by the discipline of army life." He also believed that the regiment's newly constructed tent was helping him achieve this

⁶¹ The document was read at the Massachusetts General Association of Congregational Churches in June of 1864. Emerson was a member of the association.

⁶² Moss, 200-2.

objective. He mentioned how pleased he was at the changes he observed in the soldiers' moral behavior since they set up the structure for religious activities.⁶³

Evangelical groups and churches supported the efforts of chaplains and delegates to encourage righteous warriors. The *Evangelical Quarterly Review* praised the Commission's endeavors to promote this objective in an article written near the end of the war. The piece focused on the benevolent group's evangelistic work with the soldiers. It referred to the positive impact that the Commission's labors would have after the fighting was done:

When the war is over and our noble heroes shall be permitted to return, thousands who entered the army, careless and unconcerned with regard to their eternal interests, will come forth unharmed by the perils of the camp, identified with the people of God, sincere faithful loving Christians whose first permanent impressions can be traced to this fundamental principle of the Christian Commission.⁶⁴

Written at a time when the conflict was nearly over, evangelicals were excited about the prospect of incorporating Union soldiers in their cause to promote righteous behavior in the nation.

Chaplains and Commission representatives recognized that soldiers dwelled in an environment where vice was constantly before them. The religious leaders directed their efforts primarily toward sins commonly committed in the camps. Profanity, gambling, drunkenness, sexual immorality, and theft were quite prevalent amidst the army and perceived as serious impediments to the Christian life. While religious leaders observed some progress in their attempts to improve the moral state of the army, the condemned activities remained prevalent in the camps throughout the war.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, chaplains and delegates labored in a variety of ways to diminish the spread of these behaviors and promote biblical principles with the troops.

⁶³ Adams, 144.

⁶⁴ "The United States Christian Commission," *Evangelical Quarterly Review* XVI, 62 (April, 1865): 264.

⁶⁵ Stuckenberg, 56; and Trumbull, 103-4.

They stressed the importance of the soldiers' behavior in their sermons and teachings. Both messages and lessons often revolved around the benefits of upright behavior and the dangers of camp life.⁶⁶ Union clergy and Commission representatives frequently warned about participating in the oft-mentioned transgressions. It was during periods of inactivity that soldiers were most prone to engage in these behaviors.⁶⁷ James J. Marks wrote of a notable incident when he challenged his men not to succumb to temptation. The regiment was facing its first winter away from home at the beginning of 1862. The soldiers were bored and discouraged. The parson characterized the soldiers' mood as dark and gloomy. Sensing that his men were on the verge of acting in an unwholesome manner because of their environment, Marks emphasized the harmful consequences they would suffer from participating in immoral behaviors during the following worship service: "I exhorted them, for the sake of all whose interests they represented, not to fall into sin, but to shun those evil ways which set on the fire of hell the whole course of nature." He also described the impact the soldiers' transgressions would have on the home front: "I reminded them of the incurable anguish they would endure if they heard of their sins; that they had fallen before temptation, had gone to dens of shame, had indulged in drunkenness, had become profane: to themselves these sins would bring only evil now, and in the end remorse." He concluded his message by reminding his audience of the biblical injunction that a tree would be known by its fruit. Marks noted that the meeting initiated a period of considerable spiritual activity that resulted in "one of the most remarkable seasons of religious solemnity I have ever seen."⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Moss, 429.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 424.

⁶⁸ Marks, 57-58.

Chaplains and delegates also helped establish voluntary associations to promote moral behavior and accountability from its members. A number of churches were formed during the war. William Lyle helped to form the Union Church of the 11th Regiment of the Ohio Volunteer Infantry in March of 1862. He explained that it was created to provide mutual aid and encouragement in leading a religious life while in the army. The members were expected to promote morality and religion in the regiment.⁶⁹ Amos Billingsley wrote that the hospital church he helped to establish developed articles of faith for its members in the fall of 1864. Participation was open to Christians of all denominations. They declared in one of the tenets that the word of God was to be their guide and that they were to “trust in Christ alone for salvation.” Members were also expected to abstain from alcohol, profane language and other vices in the camp. In addition, they were to “earnestly strive to lead souls to Christ” and also “watch over their Christian brother.”⁷⁰ Christian groups were also organized to encourage the faithful. Commission representative T. R. Ewing mentioned that delegates helped form “bands of brotherhood” in Nashville to strengthen and encourage the soldiers who were confronted with ennui of camp life and the “the demoralizing influences” of the city.⁷¹ J. Chandler Gregg formed an association for his regiment in the fall of 1862. The group was open to all professors of religion and the chaplain declared that it was identified as a “Christian body.”⁷² Religious leaders were also involved in voluntary societies that focused on moral issues. For instance,

⁶⁹ Lyle, 32-36; Stuckenberg, 121; and Hartsock, 26.

⁷⁰ Billingsley, 259-60.

⁷¹ Moss, 513.

⁷² Gregg, 71.

many promoted temperance groups as a way to discourage drunkenness and to promote abstinence of alcohol.⁷³

Efforts were also made to provide recreational activities to fill up idle camp time and serve as a positive diversion to practices such as gambling and drinking. Soldiers regularly blamed the boredom of camp life as the reason why they engaged in these actions.⁷⁴ For example, chaplains and delegates promoted sports as a healthy alternative to immoral behaviors. Jonathan Pinkney Hammond thought gymnastic exercises and football were a good way to spend the idle time in camp.⁷⁵ Andrew Hartsock encouraged the soldiers to play baseball or pitch horse shoes since it kept them from cards and other vices.⁷⁶ Religious leaders also promoted moral themes in the religious literature they offered to the soldiers. The subject matter regularly pertained to right conduct. Moreover, the distribution of the reading material served as the primary source of interaction between chaplains and delegates during the first year of the war.⁷⁷ Their working relationship would expand significantly during the following year, however.

The chaplaincy and the Commission increased their interaction in the fall of 1862 after Union soldiers began to demonstrate greater interest in spiritual matters. A notable development in the war likely contributed to the increased attention the troops gave to this subject: a dramatic rise in battlefield casualties. The Battle of Shiloh initiated a new level of lethality in the conflict. It was the bloodiest clash that had ever been fought in the Western Hemisphere up to that point. The

⁷³ Adams, 143, United States Christian Commission, *Third Annual Report*, 124; and McAllister, 383.

⁷⁴ Moss, 286; Boyd 42; and Woodworth, 185.

⁷⁵ Hammond, 90.

⁷⁶ Hartsock, 90.

⁷⁷ The widespread distribution of religious literature will be addressed in greater detail later in the chapter.

Army of the Potomac experienced even greater casualties a few months later at the Battle of Antietam (September 17, 1862).⁷⁸ Union chaplains observed a change in the attitude of the troops after these encounters. Soldiers displayed a greater concern about religious issues and were much more open to discussing themes that pertained to Christianity. William Lyle observed a significant change in his unit immediately after the fierce clash at Antietam. They began to have two or three services a week, besides the one on the Sabbath, “and the attendance at every one was quite large.” He also referred to the influential example of a Christian soldier who explained how he had maintained his composure and acted with particular valor during a crucial moment in the skirmish: “I committed my all to Him, and asked that, whether I lived or died I might be His true follower. I felt an indescribable peace and satisfaction fill my heart. I enjoyed more happiness and a clearer conviction of my acceptance with God than I ever did before. My fear and trembling disappeared and I felt calm throughout the entire day.” Lyle detected that the young man’s words made a deep impression upon his listeners.⁷⁹

Commission representatives also witnessed signs of change in the spiritual climate. The troops exhibited a greater willingness to discuss religious matters and often conversed with the delegates about themes that had been raised in sermons and prayer meetings. Dr. I. L. Sloane shared Lyle’s view that soldiers’ “interest in religious things” grew significantly after Antietam.⁸⁰ While laboring at Fortress Monroe near the end of 1862, J. P. Janeway commented

⁷⁸ More than 1,700 were killed and 16,500 were wounded (2,000 mortally) at the skirmish in Tennessee. James McPherson identifies Shiloh as America’s immersion to total war. Over 4,100 were killed and another 18,000 were wounded (2,500 mortally) at the battle in Sharpsburg, Maryland. It remains the single bloodiest day in American military history. See James McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1992), 226-29, 286-87.

⁷⁹ The soldier had taken charge of his company at a point when there was no commissioned officer able to do so. He then rallied them together to make a successful charge against the enemy. Lyle, 176-179.

⁸⁰ United Christian Commission, *First Annual Report*, 29-30.

upon the fervor he saw demonstrated by the soldiers: “Many of these men have not been accustomed to pray, and some have never even known how; yet they desire anxiously to be taught.”⁸¹ James Barrett, a delegate from Maine, also became aware of a change in perspective. He shared his perceptions with Commission headquarters after he completed his second tour of service. He observed a correlation between the soldiers’ length of army service and their response to the gospel. Barrett noted that “mature soldiers” were often receptive to conversing about spiritual matters. However, he found the “new recruits most resistant” to his efforts to share the gospel with them.⁸²

Soldiers who had “seen the elephant” often became more attentive towards the themes of salvation and their status with God.⁸³ Chaplains and delegates often used words such as earnestness and solemn to describe the soldiers’ mood during religious meetings.⁸⁴ Soldiers dwelled on these issues in their writings as well. Henry W. Tisdale, a member of the 35th Regiment Massachusetts Volunteers, became increasingly reflective about his conduct after being wounded at the Battle of Antietam. In December of 1862 Tisdale wrote that “it is not by any words of my own that I can merit His grace still also must realize that while I love sin cannot hope for His mercy or grace.”⁸⁵ Union personnel also gave considerable thought to issues related

⁸¹ Ibid., 60-61.

⁸² United States Christian Commission Records, Record Group 94, Entry 753, National Archives. Barrett also observed that the quarters of the soldiers who had longer tenures of service were often filled with items and objects that were connected with their homes.

⁸³ McPherson, *For Cause and Comrade*, 33, 62-63. “Seeing the elephant” was a contemporary term used to describe a soldier’s initial experience to combat.

⁸⁴ Billingsley, 123; and Moss, 469.

⁸⁵ Henry W. Tisdale Diary, December 28, 1862, *Civil War Diary of Henry W. Tisdale*, <http://www.civilwardiary.net/diary1863b.htm> (accessed January 19, 2012).

to the afterlife. George S. Marks, of the 99th Illinois, for example, made a list of Bible verses that referred to heaven in his diary.⁸⁶

Reports of revivals going on in Union camps began to occur with greater regularity near the end of 1862. In a letter to the Presbyterian Synod of Philadelphia, George Stuart wrote that a revival had developed at Camp Douglas in Chicago in October 1862 and that Philadelphia regiments were involved in large prayer meetings. Milton Haney, who was stationed at the Douglas post, described it as a “blessed revival” and that “quite a number of them were converted at the time.”⁸⁷ Around that same time, a revival arose at Camp Parole in Annapolis, Maryland. Delegate John Jones reported that the daily prayer meetings were drawing over five hundred people.⁸⁸

A large increase in the demand for religious reading materials also occurred among the soldiers in the autumn of 1862. Delegates often found themselves surrounded by those requesting literature on their arrival at military camps. It became relatively common for Commission representatives to contact their headquarters requesting more supplies because their own stores were exhausted.⁸⁹ Witt Reid, a delegate from Vermont, referred to the strong desire exhibited by the soldiers in his concluding report. He stated that he distributed over 11,000 pieces of literature and Bibles during his six weeks of service.⁹⁰ Commission administrators struggled to meet the increased demand for literature. It became an ongoing challenge for them

⁸⁶ George S. Marks Papers, Civil War Miscellaneous Collection, USAMHI.

⁸⁷ George Stuart to Presbyterian Synod of Philadelphia, United States Christian Commission Records, Record Group 94, Entry 753, National Archives; and Haney, 137.

⁸⁸ United States Christian Commission, *First Annual Report*, 48.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 51-52.

⁹⁰ United States Christian Commission Records, Records Group 94, Entry 753, National Archives.

for the remainder of the war to procure enough supplies to satisfy the growing number of appeals for the reading materials.

Representatives from other religious groups also commented upon the change in the soldiers. An article from the *Journal of the American Temperance Union* described the increased level of spiritual interest that members of the organization saw displayed by the troops during a visit to the Army of the Potomac. They reported that an upsurge in temperance pledges had occurred. They also gave an account about the growth in attendance at the regiment's prayer meeting. The article also referred to the statements of Rev. John Alvord, Secretary of the Boston Tract Society, who informed the Temperance Union that a large increase in the demand for religious literature had developed among the soldiers.⁹¹

The heightened religious interest brought greater demands upon the labors of chaplains and the delegates. The two groups found it beneficial to cooperate in response to the increased opportunities for ministry. One area where this collaboration often occurred was at the military hospital. The amount of time chaplains spent at this facility had grown substantially because of the increase in casualties.⁹² Commission representatives helped the religious officers by assuming some of their visitation responsibilities with the soldiers. Some also assisted by performing burial services for Union soldiers.⁹³ Worship services and religious meetings served as another forum where the two groups interacted with greater regularity. They often planned out these events together and rotated leadership responsibilities among them. Their collaboration reduced the demands upon their schedules. Even more significantly, the efficiency of the

⁹¹ The *Journal of the American Temperance Union*, July, 1862.

⁹² A. S. Billingsley observed that he often visited over five hundred patients each day as a hospital chaplain. Billingsley, 269; and United States Christian Commission, *Second Annual Report*, 181.

⁹³ H. Q. Butterfield, *A Delegate's Story* (Philadelphia: United States Christian Commission, 1863), 8-9.

working arrangement allowed the two groups to organize more activities and programs for the soldiers' spiritual well-being.

The Commission benefited from the reports about the army's religious enthusiasm. Contributions to the group increased after delegates shared with churches and other assemblies the positive developments they observed among Union soldiers. The number of people volunteering to serve as delegates also grew as a result of the encouraging accounts. In 1863, it commissioned 1,207 ministers and laymen to serve in the field. This was almost a fourfold increase from the previous year, when it sent out 356 representatives.⁹⁴ The Commission could expand its ministries to the soldiers because of the increase in donations and workers. The preceding events became a pattern for the organization when it expanded its ministries. Union soldiers generally responded positively when new religious activities were offered to them. Reports about the army's enthusiastic participation would filter back to the churches. Groups and individuals would provide even more support for the wartime organization because of the encouraging news, which would allow the Commission to launch a new cycle of programs.⁹⁵

The positive results from their previous cooperative efforts prompted greater interaction between chaplains and the Commission. They coordinated their activities with growing regularity by 1863. Their collaboration played a significant role in the widespread religious fervor that occurred within the Union Army from 1863 to 1865. The change in their relationship was not the result of a formal policy, however. It developed gradually between the two groups in response to the beneficial effects it had on their ministry with the soldiers. Members from both

⁹⁴ United States Christian Commission, *First Annual Report*, 126; and United States Christian Commission, *Second Annual Report*, 12.

⁹⁵ United States Christian Commission, *Third Annual Report*, 14.

groups appreciated the help and support the other provided.⁹⁶ The Commission welcomed the increased involvement with the chaplaincy. The benevolent organization had stressed evangelical unity from its foundation and the office's military ties improved the Commission's connections with the army. Chaplains also recognized the advantages of greater cooperation. They simply lacked the personnel to respond adequately to the fervor that had developed among the soldiers. The Commission could facilitate this promising religious development with a labor force that continued to increase in size. Furthermore, the two had worked together effectively on a number of occasions, which likely lessened concerns the army officers had about teaming up with a civilian organization.

Both groups contributed strengths to the partnership that enhanced their spiritual leadership and increased their abilities to promote their religious values. The chaplains' institutional ties provided a vital component to the wartime partnership. Union clergy possessed experience with army procedures and had relationships with soldiers, both of which the civilian organization lacked. They could facilitate the Commission's ministry with the troops. The delegates were largely unfamiliar with the military system, which presented a potentially serious liability to their ability to carry out their work. The Commission's early struggles illustrate how its opportunities could have been curtailed. Access to facilities had been diminished and army personnel viewed their behavior unfavorably.⁹⁷ If the benevolent group had continued to face limitations like it had, it would have likely reduced its opportunity to care for the needs of the troops, which played such a large role in gaining the military's favor. Organization officials believed that the positive perception they achieved greatly aided their spiritual influence with the soldiers.

⁹⁶ United States Christian Commission, *First Annual Report*, 100-1.

⁹⁷ Moss, 147-48.

Chaplains facilitated the delegates' adjustment to the military camp. These army officers made a point of assisting them with their initial ministry efforts. The Federal clergy stationed in Murfreesboro, Tennessee were frequently recognized in Commission literature for their helpful approach with new delegates. They developed a system that integrated Commission representatives into a ministry with the soldiers at a comfortable pace. A number of delegates expressed their appreciation for the Murfreesboro chaplains in their reports to Commission headquarters.⁹⁸ The Union clergy were also recognized for the effectiveness of their work. Rev. T. J. Abbot, a delegate from Boston, for example, sent a message to Philadelphia in June of 1863, to describe the successful ministries being carried out and to inform them that he was "highly impressed with the faithful work of the chaplains" he had labored with.⁹⁹ The positive feelings they held towards the Union officers were reciprocated. A group of twenty-two chaplains passed a resolution at the Murfreesboro post to express their appreciation for the delegates' work and the literature they supplied.¹⁰⁰

Chaplains guided new delegates on how to carry out a ministry with soldiers. The instruction was often drawn from their own experiences. Consequently, they were able to counsel Commission representatives in areas such as the appropriate time length for preaching in different environments. For example, Jonathan Pinkney Hammond advised that it was counterproductive to prepare lengthy sermons. He believed they should not be over twenty minutes. He reasoned that many in the audience would not be accustomed to hearing sermons and might start to get restless. He believed this principle applied even more so to a message

⁹⁸ United States Christian Commission, *Second Annual Report*, 53; and Moss, 456.

⁹⁹ Rev. T. J. Abbot to United States Christian Commission, Record Group 94, Entry 753, National Archives.

¹⁰⁰ *Sunday School Times*, June 6, 1863.

delivered in a hospital since most patients were not able to sit for any great length of time. He advocated that it was better to leave some things unsaid than to say too much.¹⁰¹ Preachers also needed to account for weather conditions. John Steele, Chaplain of the 13th Iowa Volunteers, stated that sermons needed to be shorter in the winter because of the cold and there often was no place to sit.¹⁰² Religious leaders who ignored the chaplains' counsel undermined their efforts to influence the soldiers.

The greatest level of oversight seemed to occur at military hospitals. Their unique environment likely contributed to the increased emphasis upon structure. Delegates at these facilities often lacked the same amount of liberty in their labors as those who worked in the camps. They frequently refer to being assigned specific duties by hospital chaplains.¹⁰³ The arrangement helped the delegates' assimilation into the hospital environment. Furthermore, Commission guidelines instructed representatives to demonstrate a readiness to perform whatever tasks were needed. Hospital staffs appreciated the emphasis on helpfulness. Delegates developed a favorable reputation with the medical personnel.¹⁰⁴ A monthly report sent to Adjutant General Thomas by A. W. Henderson, Chaplain of the 13th Illinois Cavalry, referred to the positive perception the Commission earned with hospital personnel. He commented on the delegates' labors at a military hospital in Little Rock, Arkansas, and stated, "they have the

¹⁰¹ Hammond, 112-13; and Brown, 36.

¹⁰² John Steele Diary, Civil War Miscellaneous Collection, USAMHI.

¹⁰³ United States Christian Commission, *Second Annual Report*, 157-58; and United States Christian Commission, *Third Annual Report*, 53.

¹⁰⁴ Moss, 125.

significant approval” from the staff at the facility.¹⁰⁵ Division Medical Director J. H. Spurrien and Hospital Chaplain William P. Koutz wrote to the Commission in 1865 from Charlotte, North Carolina, to thank the organization for the many labors performed by the delegates and “for their kind and opportune aid to the sick and destitute soldiers.”¹⁰⁶

The delegates’ lack of experience did become an issue on occasion. One such instance occurred at an army hospital in Annapolis, Maryland. H. C. Henries, a chaplain at the hospital, wrote to Commission headquarters on April, 17, 1863, to request that the organization send representatives who were experienced preachers. Patients at the hospital had started demonstrating greater interest in spiritual matters but the facility had an insufficient number of chaplains staffing the position. Consequently, Henries depended upon the delegates’ assistance. However, the organization had sent students from Andover College in Maine, who apparently were not performing their duties adequately in the chaplain’s mind. Henries expressed appreciation for the “young” students but declared that the “opportunity is great and they do not know what to do.” Furthermore, he believed their time of service was too short for them to learn how to carry out an effective hospital ministry.¹⁰⁷

The administrative leadership supplied by the chaplaincy made a substantial contribution to the revival movement. They had become more organized and were better prepared to respond to the religious interest that developed among soldiers by the fall of 1862. Chaplains adopted a systematic approach to their collaborative efforts with the Commission and the strategy created

¹⁰⁵ A. W. Henderson to Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas, July 1, 1864. United States Christian Commission Records, Records Group 94, Entry 753, National Archives.

¹⁰⁶ United States Christian Commission, *Fourth Annual Report*, 185.

¹⁰⁷ H. C. Henries to United States Christian Commission, April 17, 1863. United States Christian Commission Records, Group 94, Entry 753, National Archives; and Smith, 54.

an effective working arrangement with the benevolent group. The structure it provided was especially important in light of the delegates' lack of familiarity with army affairs and their limited term of service. The Commission described how the chaplaincy employed this scheme in the military hospitals:

The chaplains are the heads of the religious department, and, from the reports we receive from them and the visits we make to their premises, we learn how beautifully and successfully this labor of faith and love is fulfilling its mission. Every hospital has its chaplain, and our delegates are in the habit of making daily visits to them and assisting them in the performance of their arduous and confining labors.¹⁰⁸

Union clergy implemented visitation plans that divided the labors based upon experience and the particular needs of the environment. Chaplains had a familiarity with the troops that the delegates generally lacked. They often possessed helpful knowledge about the soldiers' spiritual opinions. William Brown, for example, believed it was useful to keep detailed records of a hospital patient's religious state. He encouraged other chaplains to learn as much as they could about the soldiers' beliefs. If the person being interviewed was not saved, they should discover what was keeping them from following Christ.¹⁰⁹ Union clergy directed Commission workers to soldiers who exhibited greater receptivity to spiritual matters and they also provided the delegates helpful insight regarding the religious condition of patients they were scheduled to see. Lemuel Moss believed these visits often played an influential role in the large number of conversions to Christ: "The way had been prepared during the previous months, by timely and various ministrations to the bodily, intellectual, and religious needs of the man."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ United States Christian Commission, *Second Annual Report*, 158-59.

¹⁰⁹ Brown, 51-58.

¹¹⁰ Moss, 178-79.

The chaplaincy also provided leadership and guidance to the religious meetings. They were largely responsible for planning and staffing the activities. They also provided oversight to insure that things were carried out in an orderly manner. Commission official G. S. Griffith described this working arrangement in a letter to George Stuart. Delegates met regularly with chaplains “for prayer and consultation, and to prepare a plan for preaching points.” Griffith also referred to the work being carried out at a military hospital in Frederick, Maryland. He writes, “Rev. Mr. Crever, the Chaplain has charge. Everything seems to be managed well under his care. Several prayer meetings are held during the week, which are well attended.”¹¹¹ Chaplains became more efficient in organizing these gatherings as the war progressed. Their administrative skills helped them to broaden their ministries for the soldiers. Delegates and soldiers identified the expanded level of activities as a primary cause for the increased level of religious fervor displayed by the army in 1863. Commission delegate George Street commented on the growing level of spiritual interest he observed among the soldiers because of the prayer meetings held at Stoneman’s Station in April 1863. The Commission had obtained the use of some tents and held nightly gatherings for seven weeks. He noted that the tents were all filled to capacity and that another delegate had started a meeting in the open air because some soldiers were not able to enter the structures.¹¹² In May 1863 Lyman Ames remarked on the positive influence that the prayer meetings at Stoneman’s Station were having on his regiment. He observed that religious activity was growing in size and that the moral and spiritual condition among the men had

¹¹¹ G. S. Griffith to George Stuart, Record of the United States Christian Commission, Record Group 94, Entry 753, National Archives.

¹¹² Moss, 399-400.

improved. Ames desired to see a revival develop among his unit and the recent events caused him to write, "I have a good hope of success."¹¹³

This Chaplaincy's administrative skill also helped to compensate for the insufficient number of clergy holding the office. They supplied helpful oversight and direction to the various ministries they established even when they were prevented from taking an active role because of other demands on their schedules. The Union Army's religious meetings grew in both number and scale during the major revivals of 1864-1865. Lemuel Moss observed that one of the notable differences from the previous year regarded the increased size of their labors: "The work of this winter differed from that of the last in but few points, except that it was everywhere conducted on a larger scale."¹¹⁴ Moreover, the Commission also became more efficient in its procedures as the war progressed. By 1864, many of its delegates had already completed a previous term of service and were experienced in carrying out a wartime ministry and working with chaplains. The organization had become more familiar with military procedures and provided new delegates better preparation for their first term of service.¹¹⁵

There were occasions when tension developed between Union chaplains and Commission delegates and there was little interaction between them. Commission workers became frustrated with chaplains who were perceived as negligent in their duties. Delegate Stephen Mershon expressed disappointment that several chaplains "acted as if they had no responsibilities."¹¹⁶ A delegate's lack of familiarity or insensitivity to camp life also caused problems on occasion.

¹¹³ Ames, *Civil War Diaries*.

¹¹⁴ Moss, 437.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 372, 436.

¹¹⁶ Stephen Mershon to United States Christian Commission Records, Record Group 94, Entry 753, National Archives.

William Wyatt related an incident shortly after the Battle of Cold Harbor in Virginia, June 1864. The chaplain had gone to see Christian Commission representatives to pick up some goods for the sick and wounded. He arrived at their tent around 9:00 in the morning but found the representatives still asleep. He observed they were wrapped in blankets far superior to any others in the camp. After waking them, Wyatt was informed that the only goods they had to offer were lemons, although their quarters were filled with abundant provisions, which apparently were for their own personal comfort. The chaplain vowed afterwards that he would never ask for anything from the organization again.¹¹⁷ There were also occasions when Union clergy felt as if the Commission volunteer was taking all the credit for their joint labors. Delegates sometimes made few allusions to the efforts of the chaplains when they described their labors at public gatherings. The Commission's emphasis on favorable publicity may have contributed to this problem. The organization depended on donations for its financial support, and representatives may have overstated their role as a way to highlight the group's influential work with the soldiers. However, conflicts such as these were more the exception than the rule. Chaplains widely appreciated the Commission's help and relied heavily on the delegates' labors to address the spiritual needs of the Federal troops.

The Christian Commission's distribution of religious literature was one of the most prominent ways the group encouraged evangelical principles in the Union Army. The organization placed great importance on providing Christian reading materials to soldiers and identified this work as one of its primary ministries in its Plan of Operations (January 13,

¹¹⁷ Wyatt, 229-31.

1862).¹¹⁸ The literature they supplied came in a variety of formats that included tracts, Bibles and New Testaments, religious newspapers and periodicals, hymnbooks, and books.

A lack of funds and limited contacts initially constrained the group's ability to distribute material to the troops. The organization was able to do little more than pass along second hand reading literature that had been donated to them.¹¹⁹ The Commission's access to materials expanded after it strengthened its affiliation with the American Bible Society and the American Tract Society.¹²⁰ The YMCA had worked in conjunction with these religious literature publishers from the very beginning of the war.¹²¹ However, in the summer of 1862, they began to supply the Commission with a large number of tracts that were prepared for the army.¹²² The tract, which was a small booklet or even a single sheet, was often used to spread the gospel or encourage specific moral principles. The low cost and small size made it a popular and inexpensive way to advance Christian teachings.¹²³ Tracts distributed during the war concentrated on the themes of salvation and moral conduct with the soldiers. The literature contained anecdotes to support its premise. The stories often emphasized the peace and happiness that a Christian who lived a godly life would possess. Another recurring message pertained to the dangers of delaying conversion or engaging in immoral actions. Allusions to

¹¹⁸ Moss, 111.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 685.

¹²⁰ The American Bible Society (organized in 1816) and the American Tract Society (organized in 1825) were both created to encourage Christian knowledge and education through the distribution of Christian literature. The two organizations were both innovators in the mass distribution of religious literature. Ahlstrom, 424-25; Noll *History of Christianity*, 169; and *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, s.v. "American Tract Society."

¹²¹ Moss, 297.

¹²² Ibid., 688.

¹²³ Bebbington, 101.

family members were often included to heighten the emotional appeal. A story or illustration might offer a poignant description of the joy and serenity a soldier's faith in Christ brought to loved ones, or it might portray the anxiety that was experienced because a son, husband, or father was unsaved.

Great emphasis was also placed upon getting the Bible into the hands of the soldiers. Delegates regularly distributed Scripture to the troops. George Stuart expressed the importance the organization placed on the distribution of the Scriptures in a note he wrote to the American Bible Society to convey his appreciation for their help during the war: "May this seed so widely and happily scattered spring into abundant harvests, and may the American Bible Society go forth in the confidence, affection, and generous support of the people, to put a copy of God's Word in every home in the land, and send it in every tongue to every nation of the earth."¹²⁴ The American Bible Society greatly aided the Commission in this endeavor after it agreed to supply the wartime group with Bibles and Testaments in September of 1862. They donated almost 1,500,000 volumes of Scripture to the Commission over the course of the war.¹²⁵

A substantial number of pocket-sized hymnals were also given to the soldiers. The lyrics in the songs emphasized biblical themes and encouraged devotion to God.¹²⁶ They served as another way to share the gospel message. The music often had a powerful emotional appeal. Familiar hymns would trigger strong memories of family and home for many of the listeners. Alonzo Quint observed that the whole camp would sometimes become silent while the words

¹²⁴ Moss, 693.

¹²⁵ George Stuart to American Bible Society, October 20, 1862, United States Christian Commission Records, Records Group 94, Entry 753, National Archives; and Moss, 688-89. Moss noted that the Bible Society provided translations in German, French, Danish, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese in response to requests from soldiers to have it printed in their national tongue.

¹²⁶ Moss, 86.

were sung.¹²⁷ Gospel hymns often served as the medium that prompted soldiers to convert to Christ.¹²⁸

The Commission also distributed religious newspapers and periodicals. It had originally supplied a limited quantity of these papers, which were provided to soldiers with subscriptions. It did not emphasize this type of literature because there were concerns that denominational publications could promote doctrinal positions that could diminish evangelical unity. However, the organization increased its expenditures for these materials in 1863. The considerable interest Union troops exhibited toward religious literature provided one reason for the shift in position. Moss noted that Commission leaders began to favor religious periodicals over tracts because they believed they provided more substantive material.¹²⁹ However, they still maintained a preference for publications that avoided sectarian issues. The organization also attempted to respond to specific requests for literature. The appeals often pertained to denominational journals or writings in a different language. One such example is evidenced in a request made by a hospital chaplain for his patients at the White Hall Military Hospital in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. W. H. D. Hatton asked if the organization could send him twenty-five copies of the *Episcopal Recorder*, twenty-five copies of the *Lutheran*, twenty-five copies of the *German Reformed*, and twenty-five copies of *Botschaften German*.¹³⁰ Publishers often aided the

¹²⁷ Quint, 269-70.

¹²⁸ Moss, 366; and United States Christian Commission, *First Annual Report*, 30.

¹²⁹ Moss, 685-86.

¹³⁰ W. H. D. Hatton to George Stuart, United States Christian Commission Records, Records Group 94, Entry 753, National Archives.

Commission's efforts by providing their materials at cost and sometimes even donated their publication free of charge.¹³¹

Union soldiers maintained a keen desire for religious literature for the remainder of the war. Delegates frequently commented in their reports about the ardor of the troops' requests. Rev. J. M. Barnett served as a delegate shortly after the Battle of Fredericksburg in December 1863. He was frequently approached by chaplains and common soldiers requesting reading materials during his term. The comments of one religious officer regarding the significance of the religious literature made a deep impression on him: "If possible, send us something to read – the men are hungry for it. We have no tent to hold a service in; and while we have nothing to give the men to read, our hands are tied, and usefulness hindered."¹³² Alexander McLeod mentioned in his service report the strong reaction he received after he distributed these materials to the troops near the end of 1864. He discovered that they had not received Commission literature for a prolonged period and they had implored the delegate to help prevent this occurrence in the future.¹³³ William Brown noted that the demand for religious reading material was always greater than the supply at his hospital and that the men "begged for religious books and tracts like starving men beg for bread."¹³⁴

¹³¹ Moss, 686.

¹³² United States Christian Commission, *First Annual Report*, 59-60.

¹³³ Alexander McLeod to Christian Commission, United States Christian Commission Records, Records Group 94, Entry 753, National Archives.

¹³⁴ Brown, 129. Scholars have also raised the issue of how much the ennui of camp life impacted the desire for the reading material. Historian George Rable remarks that he finds few references to the distribution of religious literature in the letters and diaries of the soldiers and questions the impact that it actually had on the army. George C. Rable, *God's Almost Chosen People* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 134.

Chaplains identified a number of benefits gained by providing religious literature to the army. Alonzo Quint believed it was especially important to have the materials during the winter months when there was not much activity in the camps. He also encouraged civilians to send Bibles to soldiers whenever possible. He observed that the soldiers' copies were often well worn and that the men were conscientious about reading it.¹³⁵ Union clergy also commented about the positive impact that the Christian literature had on the camp's religious environment.¹³⁶ Andrew Hartsock described some of the ways he used the material:

I generally find the sick reading their Testaments if they are able. I read, sing and pray with them and then speak to them from the scriptures read. I then distribute tracts and small books. Those are always received with great joy. As a general thing I have papers and tracts for the entire regiment on sabbath. These I always distribute after preaching. If the day is stormy and we can have no service in the open air I go from tent to tent in the entire Reg and give reading matter to them.¹³⁷

While Hartsock, like many other chaplains, used the literature as a complement to his teachings, he also relied on the materials when religious meetings could not be held. The infrequency of religious services increased the importance Union clergy attributed to the reading materials.

The literature also served as an effective way to introduce Christian principles to members of the army. Religious leaders had little opportunity to interact with soldiers who did not attend services or meetings. However, they would read the tracts and papers that were distributed. Few refused the religious literature or Bibles distributed in the camps.¹³⁸ The reading materials were

¹³⁵ Quint, 268-69.

¹³⁶ Marks, 53-54. No subject was mentioned more frequently in the correspondence between chaplains and the Christian Commission than issues related to religious reading materials.

¹³⁷ Hartsock, 49.

¹³⁸ Moss declared that most of those who turned down the offers were Roman Catholics. Moss, 284. The Commission also distributed almost 10,000 copies of the Douay Bible, which was the standard version used by English speaking Roman Catholics. The organization did not appropriate any money for the purchases, however. Ibid., 698.

often the primary or only way that chaplains and delegates could expose the soldiers to biblical teachings.

Chaplains were not the only members of the army to request the literature. There were also occasions when other Union officials asked for the religious reading materials. Isaac Israel Hayes, Surgeon in Charge at the Satterlee Hospital in Philadelphia, expressed his appreciation for the material sent to his facility and asked that they continue this helpful labor.¹³⁹ Common soldiers also made appeals for literature. D. S. Smith believed the Commission's literature had a positive impact on the soldiers. In a letter he wrote to the organization from a Nashville Hospital in September 1863, he expressed his gratitude for the delegates' distribution of materials to the patients: "They are doing a great amount of good in distributing books, tracts, and papers."¹⁴⁰ A unique request came from a soldier who had recently immigrated to America from Germany. Frederickson Loklembach sent five dollars to the Commission so that they could supply literature to other soldiers from his homeland. He declared in a note he wrote to the organization on December 10, 1863, that he had converted to Christ because of the organization's efforts and he enclosed the cash in hopes they could send religious materials to other Germans in his unit.¹⁴¹ The Commission provided a summary of its distribution of literature over the four year period: 1,370,953 Hymns and Psalm Books; 767,861 Magazines and Pamphlets; 18,126,602 Weekly and Monthly Papers; and 39,104,243 Tracts.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Isaac Israel Hayes to United States Christian Commission, United States Christian Commission Records, Records Group 94, Entry 753, National Archives.

¹⁴⁰ United States Christian Commission, *Second Annual Report*, 118.

¹⁴¹ Frederickson Loklembach to United States Christian Commission, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Loklembach was not aware that the Commission maintained a policy of not charging soldiers for any of the materials it provided to them.

¹⁴² Moss, 687.

The Commission's human workforce was another important asset the organization brought to its partnership with the chaplains. The delegates were heavily involved in the religious meetings and their numerous labors contributed to the religious enthusiasm that developed among Union soldiers. Furthermore, Union clergy needed the Commission's help to carry out many of the activities that they planned. The numerous demands on the religious officers' schedule often limited their availability to develop and oversee new programs to foster spiritual growth.¹⁴³ The chaplains at a hospital in Louisville could only provide one service a week because the hospital was understaffed and their responsibilities were so extensive. Delegates sent to the hospital in May 1863 worked out a ministry plan with one of the chaplains and began to conduct daily meetings that were very well attended.¹⁴⁴

Commission representatives aided Federal clergy by assuming some of these tasks. For example, delegates frequently helped out by writing the letters for hospital patients, which freed the chaplains to direct their efforts to other ministries. William S. Post, chaplain of the 81st Illinois, wrote to Commission headquarters at the end of 1863 to express his appreciation for the labors performed by the delegates. A revival had developed among the soldiers in Vicksburg and he declared that he "would not have been able to carry out his ministries without the Christian Commission."¹⁴⁵

Commission representatives also made a significant contribution through their visitation with the soldiers in the hospitals and the military camps. They often had greater flexibility in their schedules than the chaplains. Delegates were available to spend long periods of time with one

¹⁴³ United States Christian Commission, *First Annual Report*, 100.

¹⁴⁴ United States Christian Commission, *Second Annual Report*, 200-1.

¹⁴⁵ Reverend William S. Post to United States Christian Commission, United States Christian Commission Records, Record Group 94, Entry 753, National Archives.

individual, which the religious officers could not do if they were to perform all of their other labors. Chaplains frequently referred to the importance that the extended visit had in a soldier's conversion.¹⁴⁶

The delegates brought skills and connections that contributed to their effective labors with the soldiers. Although the Commission's representatives had little familiarity with the military, most were members of the clergy and had experience ministering to congregations. Union military personnel attributed spiritual leadership to the delegates. Soldiers regularly identified them as chaplains.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, the organization attempted to match delegates with troops from their own communities. The regional ties provided an important bond that often facilitated greater openness from the soldiers.¹⁴⁸

B. H. Howard, a surgeon in the Army of the Potomac, observed the labors performed by the delegates and wrote a letter to the organization's headquarters in the fall of 1864 to comment on their ministries to the soldiers. He believed that there was the potential for a large-scale revival within the Union Army. Moreover, he declared that it would not occur without the active participation of the Commission. He maintained there were not enough chaplains to carry out the activities needed to sustain a revival. From his perspective, the Commission played an essential role in the matter: "If the Christian Commission fails to do the work it contemplates it will be left undone."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ United States Christian Commission, *Second Annual Report*, 201.

¹⁴⁷ David Weston, *Among the Wounded: Experiences of a Delegate* (Philadelphia: J. B. Rogers, 1864), 9-10; and Stuckenberg, 66.

¹⁴⁸ Moss, 564-65.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 208-11.

The Commission also made a special effort to minister to units that lacked a chaplain. Delegates often placed a priority on providing religious literature for these units. They also conducted worship services and organized prayer meetings whenever possible. There were numerous occasions when they helped organize regimental churches or a Christian association. Soldiers with units that did not have a chaplain had greater opportunities to participate in religious activities during the latter half of the war. Religious meetings had become pervasive in the Union Army and often required little effort to find a meeting or service to attend. Henry W. Tisdale frequently participated in spiritual activities led by clergy from other units because his own chaplain rarely held religious services. Tisdale particularly enjoyed attending services led by Frank K. Stratton, who was the chaplain of the 11th New Hampshire Volunteers, and expressed regret when Stratton had to resign his position because of health problems.¹⁵⁰ Commission representatives also served as an alternative when a chaplain was not present. Jefferson Moss wrote in December of 1863 that he went to hear a sermon by a delegate because his regiment was without a religious officer at that time.¹⁵¹

The organization sometimes brought to attention exemplary service performed by its representatives. One such delegate was Rev. O. P. Pitcher. He served the Commission continuously for three years and directed his efforts primarily at groups that were not provided chaplains, such as teamsters, quartermasters, guards, and prisoners. He provided a summary of his three years of service for the Commission: Scriptures distributed ... 28,177; Religious papers ... 155,898; Books and pamphlets ... 11,855; Pages of Tracts ... 1,773,261; Religious services

¹⁵⁰ Tisdale Diary, February 15, 1863, May 17, 1863.

¹⁵¹ Moses Diary, December 20, 1863.

held ... 1,498; Converts and inquiries ... 587; Visits, exclusive of meetings ... 1,181; Miles traveled in the work ... 5,240.¹⁵²

The Commission became actively involved in ministries to African-American troops near the end of the war. Delegates frequently worked with chaplains to teach the soldiers how to read. Commission workers established a number of schools at “Birney” Station to accomplish this objective in 1865. Religious meetings were also held at this location and were described as “very interesting; some of them remarkable for their power and deep feeling manifested by the colored brethren.”¹⁵³

In its last year of operation the group sent out 2,217 representatives, who served for a total of 78,869 days.¹⁵⁴ The recorded labor of the 5,000 delegates included over 58,000 sermons and 77,000 prayer meetings.¹⁵⁵ These numbers were substantially higher than the previous year’s totals and a significant portion of those labors were connected with the organization’s tent ministries.

The Commission’s provision of materials to build structures for religious activities was an integral factor in the large scale revivals that occurred among the Union Army in 1864-1865. For the first two years of the war, the military lacked adequate facilities for spiritual growth. This deficiency was a major impediment to promoting Christianity among the army. Outdoor

¹⁵² Moss, 300.

¹⁵³ Birney Station was located just south of Richmond and was named after General David Birney. United States Christian Commission, *Fourth Annual Report*, 104, 119.

¹⁵⁴ United States Christian Commission, *Third Annual Report*, 14.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 563.

services were the norm, and as such, were subject to the weather.¹⁵⁶ Meetings were often cancelled or negatively affected by inclement conditions, which was a source of frustration for the troops. Wilbur Fisk, for example, was a devout Christian soldier from Vermont. He gained great enjoyment from attending worship services and other religious activities. Yet, he was also deeply disappointed whenever a religious assembly had to be cancelled. He identified the frequency of this occurrence as one of the biggest drawbacks of military life.¹⁵⁷

Union clergy and Commission delegates were particularly outspoken about the need for separate religious facilities for the military hospitals. They were often limited in their ministry to the soldiers because there was not adequate space to conduct religious activities within the existing medical structures. Furthermore, the medical officers generally would not allow services to be held because it could disturb some of the patients.¹⁵⁸ Chaplains and delegates lamented that a notable opportunity was being missed because they lacked a separate building or edifice that could be used for meetings. They believed that a religious facility would result in a large number of conversions among the patients.

The Commission identified the distribution of tents for religious activities as one of its primary objectives when it began its operations in 1861. Its leaders believed these structures facilitated the revival from a few years before and assumed that they could also be used

¹⁵⁶ Dennison, 47; and Woodworth, 183-84. Union soldiers varied in their perspectives toward indoor and outdoor worship. Gen. Robert McAllister mentioned in a letter to his family that his soldiers definitely preferred to have worship services in a building. McAllister, 563-64. However, there were chaplains and soldiers who enjoyed outdoor services. Although it took him a little bit of time to get used to it, Alonzo Quint, for example, began to prefer preaching in the open air rather than being confined in a traditional indoor structure. Quint, 75.

¹⁵⁷ Wilbur Fisk, *Hard Marching Every Day: The Civil War letters of Private Wilbur Fisk, 1861-1865*, ed. by Emil and Ruth Rosenblatt (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 127.

¹⁵⁸ Billingsley, 94-95.

beneficially with the soldiers.¹⁵⁹ However, the organization made little headway in securing tents for the Union army during the first two years of the war since it lacked the financial wherewithal to purchase these goods. Most of its efforts to promote the distribution of tents occurred through appeals to the government to purchase the items. On November 15, 1861, the Commission sent a formal request to Secretary of War Cameron to provide tents for the armies because the lack of adequate accommodations deprived the soldiers of “moral and religious influences so indispensable to elevation of character and efficiency in the public service.” The organization received word the following month that although their request was declined, the Secretary of War had issued an order that the War Department would cover “the costs for the transportation of Chapel tents wherever army tents are carried.”¹⁶⁰ Nevertheless, it was left up to churches and private groups to provide some type of edifice for religious gatherings.

The Commission began to make legitimate progress in providing tents for the Union army in the fall of 1863. Members of the benevolent group had been encouraged by the increase in conversions among the soldiers. Yet, they were also frustrated by the lack of facilities to promote spiritual growth. In November of 1863, the Commission devised a plan to remedy the problem. It would furnish a canvas roof (which was commonly called a fly) to each brigade as a covering for a chapel. Soldiers would be responsible to set up the structures that secured and stabilized the canvas. The organization proposed this idea to chaplains from the Army of the Potomac at a meeting held at Brandy Station, Virginia, on December 26, 1863. Federal clergy responded very favorably to the plan and three days later the Commission’s Executive

¹⁵⁹ Moss, 105.

¹⁶⁰ Securing transportation for the tents was another factor that limited their use during the first few years of the war. *Ibid.*, 412.

Committee voted to furnish six chapel tents and forty canvas roofs for chapels to the army.¹⁶¹

Although the organization's financial resources were much improved, the purchase still represented a significant outlay on its part.¹⁶²

Union clergy reported that the new structures produced beneficial results in the camp's religious life almost immediately. H. A. Reid, Chaplain of the 5th Regiment Wisconsin Volunteers, wrote to George Stuart on February 22, 1864, to thank him for the "fly" and stove the organization furnished for their religious services. He also reported the significant growth in activities that had taken place in the short time since they built the structure:

There is a good and encouraging degree of religious interest in the regiment. We hold divine service at 10 ½ o'clock A.M., Sabbath day; Bible class at 2 P.M., and prayer-meeting at 6 P.M.; social religious meeting Tuesday evening; and prayer-meeting Thursday evening. All these meetings are all well attended, and heartily engaged in by the men.¹⁶³

Chaplains in other regiments shared similar accounts to Reid's regarding the vast increase of religious activities that occurred after they received the materials to build the structure.¹⁶⁴ The organization received numerous requests for tents from clergy in other regiments as word spread about their positive impact.

Soldiers also appreciated that the chapels supplied them with a place specifically designated for religious activities. The buildings offered a feeling of privacy and made it easier to concentrate during religious services since they shielded them from much of the commotion that

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 177-78. As of November of 1863, the Commission had only four chapel tents in the Army of the Potomac.

¹⁶² Each chapel tent cost about \$525 and each chapel fly cost about \$200. Ibid., 180. George Stuart believed the weather that December also helped to sway their decision. Some regions experienced unusually harsh conditions, which had significantly hampered the organization's efforts with the Union army. A number of delegates reported to Stuart that they had a difficult time holding religious meetings because of the severe weather. Stuart, 190.

¹⁶³ Moss, 178-79; and United States Christian Commission, *Third Annual Report*, 67.

¹⁶⁴ United States Christian Commission, *Second Annual Report*, 249, 264; and Adams, 143-45.

occurred in a military camp. Previously, soldiers were constantly distracted by the activities going on around them. Union personnel were also grateful that they now had a chapel where they could pray by themselves or with others, rather than traveling to a more isolated area that could place them in closer proximity to the enemy.¹⁶⁵

The Commission made a substantial financial commitment for the distribution of these religious structures during 1864. The decision to expand the efforts was made because of the positive impact they had on the religious environment of the army. Moss indicated that Commission leaders believed the distribution of tents had become one of the group's most important labors.¹⁶⁶ The organization received significant financial help to pursue this objective. Individuals, groups, and churches purchased tents and flies that were donated to the Commission as memorials to those they desired to honor.¹⁶⁷ There were also occasions when the Commission provided lumber for the construction of these buildings, which sometimes were less expensive than supplying a tent.

The chapels exhibited a great deal of variety in size and design. Although the Commission gave little thought beyond the functionality of the structures when they first donated the materials in 1863, Union soldiers often enjoyed supplying a creative touch to their religious meeting place. Elisha Hunt Rhodes was quite pleased with the chapel that the 2nd Rhode Island Regiment built in January of 1864:

¹⁶⁵ There were numerous occasions when soldiers were fired upon while they participated in a prayer meeting or worship service. United States Christian Commission, *Second Annual Report*, 264; and Woodworth, 241-42.

¹⁶⁶ Moss, 180; and Henry, 213-14. The emphasis the Commission gave to providing structures is illustrated in their financial summary for 1864. They helped erect 205 chapels and chapel tents, which had a value of \$114, 359. United States Christian Commission, *Third Annual Report*, 13-14.

¹⁶⁷ Raney, 53-54.

The building is made of logs hewn smooth on one side and built up cob fashion. The roof is covered by a large canvas, presented by the Christian Commission. Inside we have a fireplace and tin reflectors for candles on the walls. A chandelier made from old tin cans, or tin taken from cans is in the center. The pulpit or desk is covered with red flannel, and the ground or floor is carpeted with pine boughs.¹⁶⁸

They named the building Hope Chapel and five different chaplains (including their own) attended the dedication that was celebrated that same month.¹⁶⁹ Other regiments took an approach similar to the Rhode Island unit's and supplied embellishments to their own structures. Some of the structures at permanent stations and bases were considerably larger and capable of holding well over a thousand people.¹⁷⁰

Lemuel Moss provided a description of the tents at the Commission's station bases. They were made of white canvas "with an arched awning over its broad door, and the white chapel-flag floating above it, was the crowning feature of the station. The buildings also contained "closely-arranged seats," however, Moss noted that the number of soldiers who attended the religious meetings regularly exceeded the seats available and that every foot of standing-room was often occupied.¹⁷¹ Some of the chapels also included a stove or fireplace, which could be used in the colder weather.¹⁷²

Chaplains and Commission representatives observed a notable change in the army's religious environment after a chapel was constructed. Regiments that had gone weeks or months without holding any meetings because of inclement weather were now sponsoring daily activities to

¹⁶⁸ Rhodes, 139-40.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Moss, 181-82; and 404.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 413-14. The large hospital tents were set up to seat 600 people. United States Christian Commission, *Fourth Annual Report*, 102.

¹⁷² Adams, 141.

promote the spiritual welfare of the soldiers.¹⁷³ Religious leaders reported that conversions had increased dramatically as a result of the tents. Delegate Thomas Pearne declared in a letter that he wrote to the Commission in the spring of 1865 that “the chapel tents are the crowning feature of the Christian Commission.” He added that he had observed almost one hundred conversions in two separate regiments in the previous five weeks.¹⁷⁴ Commission head George Stuart concurred with Pearne’s perspective of the tents’ impact on the army. He wrote, “These chapel-tents were until the close of the war among the most beneficent features of our work.”¹⁷⁵

Military units that had little contact with chaplains or the Commission reveal the importance these two organizations had on the spiritual life of the army. Union officials did not establish regulations to provide a chaplain for artillery brigades. Delegates who worked with these units often noted in their reports and correspondence that religious interest had not manifested itself in these groups as it had with so much of the Union Army. Rev. Thomas A. Leete worked with the artillery brigade from the 2nd Corps in the winter of 1864-1865. He discovered they had no religious services and that some soldiers had not heard a sermon in three years. He found that among the six batteries that comprised the brigade, there were no prayer meetings and only ten out of five hundred men expressed to him they were trying to lead a Christian life. Leete set up a tent for religious services and by the end of his seven weeks of service the brigade was holding nightly meetings that were filled beyond capacity.¹⁷⁶ Rev. A. Fuller from Hallowell, Maine had a similar experience with the battery brigade of the 1st Corps, when he was stationed near

¹⁷³ Ibid., 175.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 181.

¹⁷⁵ Stuart, 160-61.

¹⁷⁶ Moss, 422-26.

Culpeper, Virginia. Although there were no public activities of a religious nature and little evidence of spiritual interest among the soldiers, Fuller made a point of visiting with the soldiers and began holding daily meetings. The men responded to his overtures and he reported that a revival had broken out in the battery by the time his term had ended.¹⁷⁷

Union chaplains were not the only military personnel to play a role in the revivals that developed among the army. Common soldiers and officers also made important contributions to the religious environment. They often supplied spiritual leadership to their units. There were many clergymen in the Union Army who never served as chaplains but were influential advocates for Christianity. There were also laymen who were talented preachers and teachers. They sometimes provided sermons and Bible lessons when there were no clergy available. Chaplains and delegates also appreciated having able speakers they could call on and asked them to fill the pulpit on occasions.¹⁷⁸ Commission representatives, for example, asked O. O. Howard to preach when they were holding meetings in Cleveland, Tennessee, in 1864.¹⁷⁹ Soldiers also helped assist with religious activities. Union Clergy relied on their aid when Commission members were not present or during busy periods.

The death of a soldier who provided spiritual leadership to a unit could have a detrimental effect on its ardor. Robert McAllister, for example, referred to the adverse impact that Captain Samuel Sleeper's death at the Battle of Spotsylvania in Virginia (May 1864) had on the religious life of the soldiers. The officer was prominently involved in a revival occurring around the time of the skirmish. McAllister noted that the spiritual enthusiasm waned significantly after they lost

¹⁷⁷ United States Christian Commission, *Third Annual Report*, 55.

¹⁷⁸ Woodworth, 255

¹⁷⁹ Moss, 492.

the influential lay leader.¹⁸⁰ William Lyle described a similar state of affairs after the death of Thomas Shain. The slain soldier was a pastor at the time he entered the army and had provided religious leadership to his regiment.¹⁸¹

There were also occasions when chaplains and Commission personnel were not integral to the religious fervor that developed. There were incidents when a significant number of soldiers converted to Christ without the involvement of either organization.¹⁸² However, this type of event was less likely to occur after chaplains and the Commission began to collaborate more frequently by the beginning of 1863. The laity generally refrained from assuming religious responsibilities like preaching when clergy were in the vicinity during that period. They were more likely to take a supporting role in services and meetings and to perform any duties asked of them by the chaplain or delegate.

Members of the chaplaincy and the Christian Commission continued to collaborate in ministry endeavors even after the war had ended and they were no longer affiliated with either the military or the Commission. A notable example pertained to their joint efforts to help the freedmen adjust to their new life. The two groups had often worked together to minister to escaped slaves and colored regiments during the conflict and some members from each of the religious organizations elected to remain in the South to continue its ministry to those who recently been freed from their bondage.¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ McAllister, 459.

¹⁸¹ Lyle, 242-43.

¹⁸² Urwin, 335.

¹⁸³ Moss, 437, 452; Reverend William S. Post to United States Christian Commission, United States Christian Commission Records, Record Group 94, Entry 753, National Archives. Eric Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990), 65.

While speaking at the Christian Commission's Second Anniversary Meeting in Philadelphia, on January 28, 1864, O. O. Howard referred to the collaboration between the chaplaincy and the Commission:

Instead of there being a rivalry between the Christian Commission and the chaplaincy, those who are really the servants of the Lord work together as brothers should, arm in arm, hand in hand, heart in heart. They work together, they pray together, they preach together, they labor together in every way for the good of the soldier and for the cause of their common master.¹⁸⁴

The general's comments highlighted one of the reasons why the chaplaincy and the Commission developed their close relationship. They were united by a common aim, which was to minister to the soldier and to serve God. The chaplains and the Commission began the conflict as associates who were unfamiliar with how to carry out a wartime ministry. However, over the course of the war the two organizations became familiar with how to coordinate their labors so that they could accomplish this goal. By the war's end, they had developed a partnership that allowed them to shape the direction of the Union Army's religious environment.

¹⁸⁴ Oliver Otis Howard, *Major-General Howard's Address at the Second Anniversary of the U.S. Christian Commission* (Philadelphia, Caxton Press of C. Sherman, Son and Co., 1864), 14.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

On November 23, 1864, the *Chicago Tribune* printed a circular written by the Christian Commission. The document described some of the ministries that the religious organization provided to the troops and included an emotional appeal to Christian ministers and members of Christian churches to support the Commission's labors with the soldiers:

It is high time for you to wake up to an earnestness like theirs, who are giving their blood, their lives for you. Soon they may be in the deadly strife, and smitten down on the battlefield. O! let not your tears for them be embittered by the regret, that you neglected an earnest effort for their salvation. Next month may be too late. God is honoring our army by the presence of his Spirit as never was an army honored before. Let not customary trivial contributions throw their slight upon such a Pentecost. The universal revival of our army would be the universal revival of all the churches, and villages, and cities of our land, to which our converted soldiers would carry the whole fire.¹

The request made by the Christian Commission embodied the ethos that characterized American evangelicals during the mid-nineteenth century. They had a shared vision for constructing a Protestant Christian civilization and they held it was their responsibility to advance this objective. Evangelicals believed that the Civil War would have a lasting influence on the nation's morality. They were concerned about the adverse effect that military life would have on the troops and the subsequent harm that returning veterans could have on northern society. However, evangelicals also held that the Union military camps provided a unique opportunity to convert many to Christ and that the newly converted would be an influential example of upright behavior to their comrades-in-arms and to northern communities after the war. Consequently, Protestant evangelicals were actively involved in wartime ministries such as the military

¹ *Chicago Tribune*, November 23, 1864.

chaplaincy and the United States Christian Commission as a way they could promote Christian values and limit the spread of immorality among the soldiers.

Union clergy and the United States Christian Commission exerted considerable influence over the Union military's religious environment during the Civil War. This study has shown how they effectively advanced evangelical Christianity with the army. Chaplains and Commission representatives had a great deal of liberty to promote Protestant evangelical beliefs with the troops since Union regimental commanders generally treated the ministers' subject material as a matter that was outside of the military's sphere of influence. The religious leaders regularly stressed these theological views in their preaching, teaching, and interaction with the soldiers.

Chaplains and delegates gave particular emphasis to evangelizing the unsaved. Most of the religious leaders identified converting the soldiers to Christ as their most important objective. Moreover, their observations of the carnage on the battlefield often caused them to give greater weight to evangelism. Clergy regularly focused on themes associated with this spiritual goal in their ministries. Humanity's sinfulness, Christ's atonement, forgiveness, commitment to Jesus Christ, and eternal life were commonly addressed in sermons, prayer meetings, Bible studies, religious literature, and hymns. No subject received greater stress than pointing the soldiers to the savior and the way of salvation.

A major reason why the chaplains' influence on the military's spiritual life has not received sufficient historical recognition has occurred because scholars have generally overlooked the importance Union clergy gave to evangelism. Previous studies on the chaplains' wartime efforts focused primarily on the ways the religious leaders aided the army's morale through their

preaching or their helpful actions.² Union ministers certainly addressed other subjects such as patriotism in their sermons. However, Protestant evangelical chaplains, who occupied the majority of these positions, gave preeminence to evangelism in their preaching. No other theme was treated with the same magnitude as they attributed to sharing the Gospel with the unsaved. Likewise, Union clergy did not ascribe the same level of importance to their temporal activities that they provided to their efforts to convert the soldiers. While they sometimes gave substantial time to tasks that strengthened their ties to the military and supported the troops, chaplains viewed their labors to reach the spiritually lost as their greatest priority.

Chaplains and delegates also gave considerable emphasis to promoting moral purity in their ministries. Evangelical religious leaders stressed to the troops that conversion to Christ was a life-transforming experience and that the saved were expected to illustrate this change in their nature by their deeds. They also regularly conveyed the principle to the soldiers that moral behavior had significant implications since it served as a reflection of a person's spiritual well-being.

The ministers used many of the same forums to promote their moral perspectives that they used to try and convert the soldiers to Christ. The connection between faith and conduct served as a common theme in religious services, prayer meetings, and reading materials. Evangelical leaders waged an ongoing war against common camp vices. Behaviors such as drunkenness, gambling, profanity, and sexual immorality were regularly depicted as the antithesis of the spiritually transformed life. Sermons and religious literature frequently included illustrations of

² Examples of studies that follow this pattern include Herman A. Norton, *Struggling for Recognition: The United States Army Chaplaincy, 1791-1865* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1977); and Warren B. Armstrong, *For Courageous Fighting and Confident Dying: Union Chaplains in the Civil War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998).

hardships brought about by these identified behaviors to discourage soldiers from participating in these activities.

It is difficult to qualify the overall impact that chaplains and delegates had on the Union Army's moral environment. The religious leaders appeared to have had mixed success in their efforts to promote their moral principles with the troops. They persuaded scores of soldiers to abandon behavioral practices that the ministers identified as sinful. They were also closely involved with the formation of moral societies and Christian associations that became so prevalent in the Union camps during the revivals. However, the behaviors that the clergy regularly condemned remained prevalent in the military camps throughout the war. One chaplain provided an apt summary of the evangelicals' efforts to promote their principles among the soldiers. He observed that few left the war with their morals unchanged. Their time in the Union Army either made their behavior much worse or it made them better husbands, fathers, and citizens when they returned home.³

Chaplains and the Christian Commission were closely involved with the revival movement in the Union Army that developed in the fall of 1862 and continued until the end of the war. The religious leaders played an integral role in these revivals and this study has shown that they were chiefly responsible for the spiritual fervor that occurred among the soldiers. Although each group initially struggled to carry out an effective ministry, their influence on the Union Army's religious environment increased significantly after the two religious groups began to coordinate their efforts.

The army's religious zeal was at its lowest level during the first year of the war when the chaplaincy and the Commission were each struggling to define its wartime role and identity.

³ Bradley, 286.

Both religious groups were also hindered in their ministry to the army by their informal structure and their lack of familiarity with military policy, which army officials viewed as unprofessional and inefficient. Consequently, neither religious group appeared to have much spiritual influence with troops and had little to show for from the first year of the conflict.

Chaplains and the Commission each made progress toward improving its image with army personnel by the fall of 1862. Federal lawmakers helped Union clergy enhance their military standing after the policymakers initiated efforts near the end of 1861 that clarified some of the confusion surrounding the chaplaincy's military status and role. Union clergy also strengthened their ties with the troops by their commitment to following army regulations. The chaplaincy had generally not stressed military procedures among its members in previous conflicts. However, Union soldiers appreciated the importance that the religious officers gave to military protocol during the sectional conflict. Lastly, the emphasis chaplains gave to performing helpful tasks for their units also facilitated their efforts to develop closer relationships with the soldiers.

The Commission enhanced its standing with the military after it increased its organizational efficiency and expanded its labors to the soldiers in 1862. Reports of unpleasant incidents with the army diminished after the religious group initiated closer supervision of its delegates. The Commission's financial outlook had also improved after its leadership became more familiar and adept at fund-raising. The boost in its fiscal standing allowed the group to expand its ministries to the military, the most notable being the increased emphasis on meeting the troops' physical needs. Soldiers appreciated the Commission's attempt to address their concerns and they began to display a greater openness to the delegates' spiritual overtures as a result.

Chaplains and delegates helped initiate the first wave of revivals in the closing months of 1862. Each organization expanded its level of activity because of the spiritual interest displayed

by the soldiers after the battles became much more lethal earlier that year. Chaplains and the Commission used religious literature and religious meetings to promote evangelical themes with the troops. The ministers increased both the quantity of materials they distributed to the army and the frequency of the gatherings during that fall. Their efforts helped produce a notable surge in conversions among the soldiers by the end of that same year.

The level of cooperation between Union clergy and Commission representatives also increased in the fall 1862. Members from each group often assisted the other during this time of religious enthusiasm because of the growing demands on their schedules. They became aware that they could work more efficiently when they cooperated together since it allowed them to avoid the overlap in their labors that often occurred when each organization acted on its own. The interaction between the chaplaincy and the Commission further increased in 1863 and played a key role in the widespread growth of the revival movement during that year. The clergy were able to expand the number of meetings and religious services offered to soldiers since they could draw on the Commission's growing supply of delegates to provide leadership and support at these activities. Their collaboration also provided them a labor force that was large enough that they could provide special attention during their visits at hospitals or in the camps to individuals that displayed a greater level of spiritual receptiveness. Soldiers that were called on in this manner frequently made a public profession of faith within a short period after the visit.

The Commission's provision of physical materials that were used as religious centers factored significantly in the intensification of the Union Army's spiritual fervor in 1864-1865, when the revival movement reached its peak. The buildings allowed regiments to expand the amount of their religious activities considerably. A dramatic surge in conversions frequently occurred after units were provided these structures. Union personnel credited the tents as a vital

contributor to the spiritual enthusiasm that developed during this period. The religious centers also made a valuable contribution to the ministry efforts at military hospitals. The edifices provided chaplains and delegates with a facility to conduct religious services and meetings with soldiers. Furthermore, many of the Union Army's largest revivals occurred at these medical stations after the tents were erected during the last year of the war.

The collaboration between chaplains and the Commission also provides illumination regarding how the revival movement developed within the Union Army. Previous studies on the army's revivals have generally concentrated on the religious meetings and the spiritual enthusiasm displayed by the troops during this period, but have not provided the same level of attention to the precipitating factors that led to this outbreak of fervor. The spiritual leadership that Union clergy and delegates provided at services, meetings, and activities was a vital component of the religious movement. Officers and the enlisted often helped at these gatherings but they generally assumed a secondary role. They regularly deferred to chaplains or delegates in regards to preaching or teaching responsibilities. The lack of spiritual fervor exhibited by units that were not in regular contact with a chaplain or a delegate in relation to military groups that were in association with a minister further illustrates the integral role that the religious leaders held in the army's revivals. Commission representatives often found that regiments without a chaplain were far less likely to have a revival than those that did have one serving in the position.

Union clergy and the Christian Commission benefited by interacting together and this study has demonstrated the vital role their collaboration played in their ability to shape the Union military's religious environment. Chaplains and the Commission each brought certain strengths or assets to the partnership that either increased their ministry capabilities or addressed

deficiencies exhibited by the other group. Chaplains and delegates relied heavily on each other and eventually became mutually dependent in their ministries for the Union Army.

Union clergy provided valuable oversight to the ministry partnership. The chaplaincy regularly assumed an administrative role in its labors with the Commission because of its familiarity with military procedures. Chaplains developed considerable skill in organizing joint activities with the Commission. These Union officials became quite proficient at devising flexible ministry schemes that adapted to the differing skill levels of the delegates. The arrangement provided helpful training for Commission workers with little experience to integrate gradually into an ongoing ministry with the soldiers. Yet, the system also allowed veteran delegates greater autonomy with their ministry responsibilities. Chaplains also helped Commission members gain more awareness on how to carry out an effective ministry within an army environment. Federal clergy provided guidance and direction for its wartime partner, which facilitated the delegates' adaptation to the unique conditions of a military ministry. The chaplains' oversight often helped Commission representatives avoid committing the type of mistakes that undermined the benevolent group's efforts during the early stages of the war. Chaplains also assumed responsibility for planning and staffing a wide assortment of ministries. Their organizational proficiency was particularly important because of the insufficient number of clergy serving in the position. The shortage of chaplains may also serve as one reason why they have not been adequately recognized for their impact on the Union Army's religious environment.

The Commission's resources, both human and material, were the vital components that it provided to the ministry partnership. The chaplaincy relied heavily on the benevolent organization's personnel and supplies. The delegates' labors served as the complement to their

religious officer's oversight. If the chaplaincy was the head, than the Commission would be the legs. Union clergy lacked the time and manpower to carry out the extensive ministries that were such an important part of the spiritual enthusiasm that developed within the Union Army. The two groups could expand their activities because the Commission could supply the workers to provide leadership and assistance at the religious meetings.

The Commission also had access to physical supplies that were integral to the revivals. The Commission's ability to procure large amounts of religious literature made a notable contribution to the Union Army's religious life. Union chaplains believed that the literature was vital to the camp's spiritual life and relied heavily on the Commission to provide them these materials. The Commission's furnishing of tents and building materials figured prominently in the large-scale revivals that developed in 1864 and certainly qualifies as another valuable asset that it supplied to its labors with chaplains. Efforts to minister to the soldiers during the first half of the war had been hampered by the erratic pattern of religious activities. The structures supplied by the Commission allowed religious leaders to address the soldiers' spiritual interest much more effectively. Indeed, Union chaplains and the Christian Commission enjoyed a mutually beneficial partnership.

Although the Protestant evangelicals' hopes of establishing a Christian America did not come to fruition after the Civil War, they were largely successful in accomplishing their spiritual objectives with Union soldiers. Chaplains and the Commission were primarily responsible for shaping what scholars identify as one of the most devoutly Christian armies in history. They fostered a widespread revival movement among the army that historians estimate produced somewhere between 100,000-200,000 conversions. Furthermore, there were countless others who had converted to Christ prior to the war and were spiritually restored because of the labors

of the chaplains and delegates. The religious leaders also had a significant impact on the moral environment of the military camp. They persuaded scores of soldiers to abandon behavioral practices that were identified as sinful and to adopt moral principles promoted by the clergy.

Union surgeon B. H. Howard referred to the influence that chaplains and delegates had on the army's spiritual life in a letter he sent to the Commission in the fall 1864 from City Point, Virginia. He wrote the message because of the spiritual interest he saw displayed by the soldiers at the base's religious meetings and he hoped the Commission would send more delegates to minister to the troops. He believed that there was potential for a great revival if the chaplains and delegates labored together: "The Holy Spirit seems to be working, in anticipation of the co-operation of God's servants." He added, "During the ensuing winter the field will be fully available; it seems ripe for the harvest, and waiting only for the church to thrust in the sickle." Howard used imagery from the Gospels to characterize the spiritual environment at City Point. He likened the soldiers to a field that had produced an abundant crop and was ready to be harvested by the faithful, which he believed were the clergy. To evangelicals like Howard, the military chaplains and the Christian Commission were indeed co-workers in the field of souls.⁴

⁴ Moss, 213.

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