A Rhetorical Analysis of Selected Pro-Slavery Sermons by Presbyterian Clergy in the Antebellum South.

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A rhetorical analysis of selected pro-slavery sermons by Presbyterian clergy in the antebellum South

Dill, Russell Pepper, Ph.D.

The Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical Col., 1994
A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS
OF SELECTED PRO-SLAVERY SERMONS
BY PRESBYTERIAN CLERGY IN
THE ANTEBELLUM SOUTH

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Speech Communication

by

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May 1994
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Though the work of my own hand, this is not the effort of merely a single person. Like the numerous tributaries of a river, many streams have flowed into my life to bring me to this place. I would like to thank the members of my committee, especially Harold Mixon for his invaluable guidance and assistance on this project.

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To my parents, Charles and Shirley, who faithfully raised the two God had entrusted to them. Your love has always been a security net beneath my every effort. Your faith, confidence, and encouragement have served as a compass giving direction in my life. I pray that I may love as you have loved, give as you have given, and live as you have lived. Thank you.
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And finally, to my wife, Debby, you are a precious jewel whose value is beyond compare. Your love for me and belief in me have given encouragement and a sense of completeness. When considering the life and love we share together, the days are too short and the years too few. Thank you, my "Gentle One."
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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the pro-slavery rhetoric of selected Presbyterian ministers in the antebellum South from 1843 to 1861. The first half of the Nineteenth Century was marked by significant social, political, and religious events to which Southern Evangelical Protestantism (i.e., Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians) was forced to respond.

Representative of Southern Evangelical Protestantism, Presbyterian clergy had a reputation for education, influence, and pulpit eloquence. As evidence of their puissance and persuasion, the sermons in this study were circulated in print, most of them at the request of the local communities and newspapers of the day.

A synthesis of two methodologies was used in this research. First, the rhetorical situation as proposed by Lloyd Bitzer provided a context within which the religious utterances took place. Examining the exigence, constraints, and audience(s) rendered greater insights and understanding of the rhetorical choices made by southern pro-slavery clerics. Due to the general cultural homogeneity of the antebellum South, the constituent element of "audience" was expanded into Bitzer's broader concept of "public." This afforded a description of the people of the Old South who comprised the audiences to whom the sermons were delivered.
Second, *stasis* theory allowed the research to focus upon the key issues which were of greatest concern to the pro-slavery clergy. Examining the *staseis* of the sermons proved to be useful in analyzing the defensive rhetoric of the pro-slavery position, identifying the points of contention between the North and the South in reference to slavery, and discovering the lines of counterargument used by the southern clerics in response to the perceived Abolitionist attacks.

To defend slavery was to defend the very essence of the southern way of life. Religion and its spokesmen held the responsibility of infusing the southern culture with the moral strength of divine support, thereby confirming southern values and solidifying the southern position.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In the first half of the nineteenth century, few subjects aroused so much emotion as the topic of slavery. It is difficult today to understand how one would defend a system so morally repugnant. However, to the antebellum southerner, slavery was not only defensible, it was necessary. The large plantations in the South were heavily labor-intensive, and could not operate profitably apart from slavery. Perhaps even more fearfully contemplated by the average southerner, as well as the large landowners, was the thought of the slave population suddenly turned into freedmen, equal before the law with their former masters and with the southern populace as a whole. Therefore, when sectional conflict, political frustrations, and the northern

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Abolitionist attacks upon the South's "peculiar institution" all challenged the continuation of slavery, the massive assault produced an exigence that could not go unanswered by the South. In reaction to the radical Abolitionists, the South defended its society and culture, and began to systematize its pro-slavery ideology. William S. Jenkins has expressed the South's response well:

[T]he Southern mind was absorbed in making a defense of slavery. The whole Southern civilization, which had many distinctive features as a way of life, was so completely identified with slavery as to make its very existence seem to depend upon the defense of that institution.2

Eric McKitrick has suggested that "nothing is more susceptible to oblivion than an argument, however ingenious, that has been discredited by events,"3 and no better example of that exists than the pro-slavery arguments of the antebellum South. Though the Civil War and emancipation rendered the issue of slavery moot, the pro-slavery position has remained nonetheless ingenious and intriguing. As a part of the unique milieu produced and nurtured by the antebellum South, slavery became the distinctive entity around which secular institutions and religion rallied. "Southern religion helped the South to delineate and justify its special features . . . . The secular environment, in turn,

shaped religious attitudes and doctrines, leading Southern clerics to emphasize conservative theology buttressed by Biblical literalism."

The pro-slavery arguments were not put to rest by the North's victory on the battle field. Many of the same arguments resurfaced in the decades after the Civil War, with the major difference being that the former defense of slavery was now transformed into a justification of segregation. So persistent were those segregationist arguments that they continued into the mid-1950s, when southern apologists resurrected the same ideas to resist integration. Thus the ideas have possessed a life of their own, independent of the cause for whose defense they were created. That very persistence suggests that they are an important part of the South's intellectual history, and deserve attention.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the rhetorical defense of slavery as presented in the sermons of selected pro-slavery Presbyterian ministers. Given the role of the clergy as a part of the establishment in the antebellum South, it comes as no surprise that they were active in

promoting the pro-slavery cause, and previous studies have examined the clergy's apologia in general terms. Furthermore, it is possible to anticipate the arguments that they might have used. However, there has been no systematic investigation of the clergy's defense of slavery from a rhetorical perspective, certainly not at the level of individual denominations. The present study examines the rhetorical strategies of one Protestant denomination, the southern Presbyterian church, in the defense of slavery. It seeks to answer the following questions: What arguments did the southern Presbyterian clergy offer their listeners? Did the nature of those arguments change as the South moved closer to the "irrepressible conflict?" If there was change, what was the nature of the change and does it tell us anything about the pro-slavery apologists as a group?

Expressed in terms of argumentation theory, the southern pro-slavery apologists as a whole were engaged in a debate with the Abolitionists over a proposition of policy that called for an end to slavery. In that debate, the Abolitionists were the advocates of change and the southerners the opponents of change. To answer the research questions posed above requires a methodology that will place the clergy in a historical context which allows the researcher to identify the parameters, created by both the advocates of change and by southern society, which shaped the pro-slavery arguments. To achieve that objective, this study
will use Lloyd Bitzer's "rhetorical situation" to reconstruct the exigences and constraints that produced the contest over slavery.

However, in examining the clerics' discourse, a principal objective is to identify and evaluate the primary lines of argument offered by the ministers, and Bitzer's rhetorical situation does not provide a method to achieve that goal. Therefore, stasis theory will be used to analyze the speech texts. The concept of stasis is particularly suited to the purposes of the present investigation, because the system was originally developed to permit speakers to determine the strongest possible points of attack against an opponent's case. As the fuller discussion of the methodology later in this chapter will demonstrate, stasis theory not only permits the critic to identify and categorize a speaker's lines of argument, but it also permits the investigator to rank the arguments in their order of strength, and thereby draw some conclusions about the effectiveness of an advocate's case. In other words, stasis theory allows the investigator to get within the mind of the apologists.

At least two reasons justify such a study. The first was the powerful role played by the clergy in shaping public thought. In The Oral Tradition in the South, Waldo Braden argued that one of the important factors in the development
of the South's oral tradition was religion.\textsuperscript{5} Alexis de Tocqueville observed that religion in America and its clergymen regulated the community by their power over manners and morals. Religion was the "foremost of the political institutions of the country."\textsuperscript{6} The clergy had a distinct place of honor in the southern society and a marked influence upon the southerner. They saw themselves as the trustees of the religious and moral purity of the southern people and believed it their duty to concern themselves with issues and problems relating to the southern social order. In a region where evangelical commitment was widespread and intense, the authority of the southern minister was virtually unrivaled.\textsuperscript{7} Drew Gilpin Faust suggests that "preachers possessed in their weekly sermons one of the most effective and influential means of reaching the southern population."\textsuperscript{8} From the first signs of Abolitionist encroachment, southern antebellum clergy served as a clarion of warning and defense against

\textsuperscript{5} Waldo W. Braden, \textit{Oral Tradition} 22-43.


northern intrusion and attack. By examining the pulpit orations of pro-slavery ministers, it should be possible to expand our understanding of the rhetorical techniques by which they presented their ideas.

Secondly, the study is justified by the absence of detailed studies of the rhetorical practices of the southern clergy as pro-slavery advocates. In *The History of Southern Oratory* Benjamin Riley asserted, "In no sphere of southern oratory has there been a more meritorious display of the art than in the pulpit." Yet, in spite of such commendations, though research exists on certain antebellum ministers, little has been done to evaluate the particular rhetorical characteristics of Old South preachers, specifically southern Presbyterians. Given the prominence and influence held by the clergy of the Old South, an analysis of pro-slavery sermons by Presbyterian preachers would provide the sort of detailed study that could eventually be synthesized into a definitive picture of the clergy's rhetoric in defense of slavery.

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Finally, this study should increase our understanding of the phrase "rhetoric of desperation"10, a phrase that was created by Ralph Eubanks to characterize southern public address during the half decade or so that preceded the Civil War. Most rhetorical studies of the period have focused on deliberative speaking in a secular context. By examining the rhetoric of the clergy, this investigation will expand our knowledge of the rhetoric of that turbulent period in American history.

Methodology and Procedure

Two methodological possibilities which might be considered as means of analysis for this type of investigation are movement studies and power theory. Studies of rhetorical movements, according to Leland Griffin, attempt to isolate, evaluate, and describe the pattern of public discussion and discourse peculiar to a historical movement. The investigation focuses upon "the rhetorical pattern inherent in the movement . . . ."11 Theories of power examine the rhetoric and rhetorical strategies employed by

10 Ralph T. Eubanks used this phrase to describe the rhetoric of the antebellum South in an essay published in Waldo Braden's Oratory in the Old South.

leaders and spokesmen of the establishment which enable them to maintain social control. However, because southern Presbyterian ministers did not consciously band together in any unified cooperative effort to present an organized pro-slavery position or front, a movement study did not seem to be appropriate, since the primary strand binding the clerical apologists together was a common stock of arguments. Similarly, the lack of unified structure and established organization in their defensive efforts appears to extend the parameters for which power theory is intended. Thus, these two methodologies were rejected.

As noted above, two methodologies are employed in this dissertation: (1) a reconstruction of the rhetorical situation as proposed by Lloyd Bitzer, and (2) an analysis of stasis (point of issue) within the selected sermons. The reconstruction of the rhetorical situation provides a general rhetorical/historical context within which the religious utterances took place and lays the groundwork for an examination of the specific sermon texts. The use of stasis enables the researcher to identify what the speakers considered to be the crucial points that must be settled in order to reach a decision about the matter under discussion. Such a determination is a necessary prologue to analyzing and

evaluating the arguments used to support a position. An analysis of the staseis (plural of stasis) used in the selected sermons enables the researcher to focus on the basic stock of ideas to which the Presbyterian pro-slavery clergy appealed. Furthermore, the fact that the staseis can be ranked in an order of strength allows the critic to make judgments about the clergy's rhetorical strategy over the period of time covered in this study.

In 1968, Lloyd Bitzer first proposed his situational paradigm in the article "The Rhetorical Situation," which appeared in Philosophy and Rhetoric. In this landmark article Bitzer offered three constituents of his situational model: exigence, audience, and constraints.

According to Bitzer, an exigence is a problem at hand that urgently requires attention and amelioration, "an imperfection marked by urgency." However, not all exigences are rhetorical. An exigence that cannot be modified by discourse, or can only be modified by means other than discourse, is not rhetorical. An exigence is rhetorical only when positive modification is possible and requires discourse to bring it about. The audience in a rhetorical situation is more than those having access to the message. The rhetorical audience "consists only of those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of

change." Those capable of being influenced have an interest in the exigence and its resolution. The constraints on a rhetorical situation consist of persons, events, objects, and relations that dictate and control decision and active response needed to alter the exigence. A rhetorical situation, then, is a complex of exigence, audience, and constraints coalescing to call for a fitting rhetorical response.¹⁴

As a rhetorical tool, stasis theory was developed most fully during the Hellenistic period of Greek rhetoric and by the Roman rhetoricians. The word stasis first appears in connection with the efforts of the seventh-century BC Greek communities to throw off the domination of the aristocrats and establish true democracies. That period of Greek history was characterized by a struggle between the aristocracy and an emerging middle class. The contest was labelled stasis, and the word appears to have meant something like "strife." Aristotle was the first to apply stasis theory to rhetoric. In his treatise, Rhetoric, he suggested four distinct avenues of reasoning that could lead the orator to the significant point at issue in a legal argument.¹⁵ During the Hellenistic period, no new main types of stasis were added to the four originally suggested by Aristotle. However, Hermagoras of

¹⁴ Bitzer 6-8.

Temnos and his successors further developed stasis theory by producing a myriad of sub-categories under the four primary staseis.\textsuperscript{16} Though the application and adaptation of stasis theory continued through the Hellenistic period, Cicero and Quintilian are credited with re-establishing stasis theory and making it a centerpiece of invention in Roman rhetoric. The most thorough exposition of stasis theory which has emerged from ancient times is On Stases by Hermogenes of Tarsus. According to Ray Nadeau, however, Hermogenes' treatise was merely a practical revision of Hermagoras' work.\textsuperscript{17}

Modern students of rhetoric have contributed two emphases to the use of stasis. The first is a recognition that stasis theory can be applied to the analysis of all varieties of discourse. Stasis theory was originally a technique developed to help litigants determine the key issues in a forensic speech, that is, a speech to be delivered in a court case, and most of the discussion of stasis by both Greek and Roman rhetoricians occurs in the context of courtroom speeches. However, both Cicero and Quintilian allude to a broader application of stasis that would include all forms of oratory. In De Inventione Cicero


\textsuperscript{17} Ray Nadeau, "Classical Systems of Stases in Greek: Hermagoras to Hermogenes," \textit{Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies} 2 (1959): 70-71.
asserts that "Every speech whether epideictic, deliberative or forensic must turn on one or more of the 'issues' described in the first book."" He further notes in the same passage that,

"At present I shall concern myself in explaining controversies with the class of speech delivered in courts of law and the rules applying to them; many of these rules can with no difficulty be transferred to other kinds of speeches, too, which involve a similar controversy."

Nowhere in the passage does Cicero use the term status, the Latin counterpart to the Greek stasis; indeed, the early part of the discussion seems, on first reading, to be talking about the common topics that Aristotle assigned to the three types of speeches. However, in the discussion that follows the quoted passage, Cicero uses the Latin names for the four standard staseis (for example, he begins by discussing the constitutio coniecturalis, the standard term that Latin rhetoricians used to refer to the stasis of fact). Therefore, it seems clear that he intends to suggest that the four staseis can be properly applied to all forms of oratory. Similarly, Quintilian clearly indicates the applicability of stasis to all forms of speeches. He notes,

Since every cause, then, has a certain essential basis on which it rests, before I proceed to set forth how each kind of cause should be handled, I think I should first examine a question that is common to all of them, namely, what is meant by


19 Cicero 177.
basis, whence it is derived and how many and of what nature such bases may be. Some, it is true, have thought that they were peculiar merely to forensic themes, but their ignorance will stand revealed when I have treated of all three kinds of oratory.”

The word here translated *basis* is the Latin word *status*, which, as Quintilian himself later notes in this same passage, is what the Greeks call *stasis*. The passage makes it quite clear that Quintilian intends for *stasis* to be a tool that can be applied to find the central issue(s) in all kinds of oratory.

Pursuing the suggestions of Cicero and Quintilian, present-day critics have argued for the applicability of the system in analyzing types of speaking other than those which occur in legal settings. Leo Hultzen has concluded that *stasis* can be applied to deliberative speaking, though not in terms of the four *staseis* of the Greek rhetoricians. Instead, he substitutes the four *staseis* of ill, reformability, remedy, and cost in the place of the classical *staseis*. 21

George Kennedy also concludes that *stasis* can be applied to deliberative speeches. Recognizing that classical stasis theory was created as a means of preparing for courtroom speeches, Kennedy concludes that "Ordinary deliberative and

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epideictic do not exhibit *stasis* in the strict sense, since they do not necessarily imply an opponent."^{22} However, he goes on to say that it would be appropriate to apply stasis theory to deliberative oratory if it is assumed that the speaker imagines himself debating with an unnamed opponent, and that the debate involves issues for which stasis theory is an appropriate form of analysis.\textsuperscript{23}

Lawrence J. Prelli argues for an even more comprehensive application of stasis theory. According to Prelli, stasis theory can be applied to any specie of rhetoric. He suggests that,

"Ameliorating a rhetorical exigence will entail taking a 'stand' or 'stands' toward the problem(s) the exigence presents. In this sense, all rhetorical situations will contain points of stasis -- issues -- that require resolving rhetoric."\textsuperscript{24}

The purpose of stasis theory is to enable one to "locate the key issues in a given case or set of circumstances."\textsuperscript{25} As applied to rhetoric, *stasis* is "a point in controversy which acts as a focus or center for opposing contentions."\textsuperscript{26}


\textsuperscript{23} Kennedy 311.

\textsuperscript{24} Prelli 46.


Prelli contends that "_stasis_ points need to be searched out systematically." Isolating the central points of contention enables identification of what arguments would be most appropriate to the specific issue(s). Furthermore, by discovering the _staseis_ the researcher is able to determine the significant issues of contention upon which the rhetor believed the audience's decision should hinge. Determining the _staseis_ indicates what the orator believed to be the most advantageous line of argument.  

The rationale provided by either Kennedy or Prelli justifies the application of stasis theory to the sermons analyzed in this study. Using Kennedy's position, one might conclude that when the ministers venture into the subject of slavery and its defense, their sermons become deliberative in nature because they were discussing policy. Furthermore, their sermons were clearly defensive responses to the rhetorical attacks made by Abolitionists. Thus, Kennedy's grounds for applying stasis theory to deliberative oratory become applicable to the passages within the sermons that defend slavery. Of course, Prelli's even broader view that makes _stasis_ a suitable tool for analyzing all species of discourse would further justify using the technique to examine these sermons.

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27 Prelli 46.

28 Prelli 46.
A second contribution of present-day scholarship is the suitability of the four *staseis* found in almost all discussions of the subject in antiquity. In book III of his *Institutio Oratoria*, Quintilian provides an extensive review of the number of *staseis* identified by classical writers. While noting that some rhetoricians developed rather large numbers of *staseis*, he concludes that a majority of authorities, along with himself, had followed the lead of Cicero in advocating the four *staseis* of fact, definition, quality, and objection. While Prelli introduces *staseis* that are particular to a subject field, he also retains the idea of "general *staseis*" in the sense that they can be applied to all subjects, regardless of the particular field of knowledge to which the subject belongs.

Therefore, the four standard classical *staseis* are used in analyzing the key arguments within the pro-slavery sermons chosen for this research. Those four *staseis* are: fact, definition, quality, and objection, which are consistent among all of the Greek and Roman rhetoricians who discuss stasis theory. Later theories of *stasis* became very elaborate and complex in their subdivision of *stasis*, but these four *staseis* remained the primary ones used throughout classical times and form the core of stasis theory. Nadeau notes that despite the Hellenistic and Roman revisions to the

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29 Quintilian III, sections v-vi, 397-463.

30 Prelli 50-58.
system of stasis, the four major staseis remain practical, useful, and current. Basically, they are the same four staseis used by Aristotle, Hermagoras, Cicero and Quintilian, and are still viable tools of analysis for contemporary scholars.\textsuperscript{31}

The particular texts examined in this study were selected for four reasons. First, of the major religious denominations in the South, southern Presbyterian ministers as a group provided the most complete sermon texts the researcher was able to locate. Second, because of the Presbyterian clerical reputation for education, culture, and influence in the South,\textsuperscript{32} and the emergence of the southern Presbyterian minister as a conspicuous pulpit orator in the nineteenth century,\textsuperscript{33} Presbyterian preachers served as articulate spokesmen for the South. Consequently, a number of their pro-slavery sermons were preserved in Presbyterian archives and anthologies. Third, restricting this study to the southern Presbyterian clergy and their pro-slavery sermons makes it possible to be more specific in the analysis of the rhetorical situation and of the sermons themselves. Finally, each of these sermons is significant to pro-slavery

\textsuperscript{31} Nadeau "Classical Systems of Stasis," 66-67, 70-71. See also Prelli 44-61, 144-84 and Kennedy 306-14.

\textsuperscript{32} Farmer 1-16. Crowther 10.

\textsuperscript{33} Riley 129.
ideology in that all are referred to and cited in modern secondary works on pro-slavery thought."

The eight ministers whose sermons are analyzed in this research are: James H. Thornwell, Benjamin M. Palmer, John T. Hendrick, Joseph R. Wilson, Ferdinand Jacobs, Frederick A. Ross, Samuel J. Cassells, and W. T. Hamilton. The pro-slavery positions and arguments of these men were well-known and broadly published in newspapers, pamphlets, and periodicals throughout the South from 1843 to 1861. The specific sermons examined in this dissertation include:

(1) "Servitude, and the Duty of Masters to Their Servants" by Rev. Samuel J. Cassells (1843);

(2) "The Duties of Masters and Slaves Respectively: or, Domestic Servitude as Sanctioned by the Bible" by Rev. W. T. Hamilton (1844);

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(3) "Union and Slavery" by Rev. John T. Hendrick (1850);

(4) "The Committing of Our Cause to God" by Rev. Ferdinand Jacobs (1850);

(5) "The Rights and Duties of Masters" by Rev. James H. Thornwell (1850);

(6) "Sermon Delivered Before the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, Buffalo, New York," by Rev. Frederick A. Ross (1853);

(7) "Sermon Delivered Before the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, New York, New York, by Rev. Frederick A. Ross (1856);

(8) "The South: Her Peril and Her Duty" by Rev. Benjamin M. Palmer (1860);

(9) "Our National Sins" by Rev. James H. Thornwell (1860); and

(10) "Mutual Relation of Masters and Slaves as Taught in the Bible" by Rev. Joseph R. Wilson (1861).

All of the above sermons were preached in the sanctuaries of Presbyterian churches and each of the preachers of these sermons pastored a Presbyterian church in the South. Four of the sermons were delivered during regular Sunday church services and two were given at Presbyterian conventions. The remaining four sermons were preached at special services: two on Thanksgiving Day and two on state declared "Fast Days." Rev. Frederick Ross delivered both of
his sermons to Presbyterian conventions; the one in Buffalo, New York, he delivered somewhat impromptu "in good-natured ridicule" of testimony and reports against slavery in the South.\footnote{Frederick A. Ross, "Sermon Delivered Before the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, Buffalo, New York," \textit{Slavery Ordained of God} (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1857) 12.} For his sermon "The Rights and Duties of Masters," Rev. James Thornwell was the guest speaker at the Second Presbyterian Church of Charleston, South Carolina, for the dedication of a new church building erected for the purpose of religious instruction of Negroes. The remaining seven sermons of this study were delivered to the congregations by their respective pastors.

Only Rev. Joseph Wilson specifically stated (in the preface of the sermon pamphlet) that his sermon "was not written with a view to wide circulation . . . ."\footnote{Joseph R. Wilson, "Mutual Relation of Masters and Slaves As Taught in the Bible" (Augusta, GA: Steam Press of Chronicle & Sentinel, 1861) 3.} The other seven pro-slavery clergy either directly stated or implied that their sermons were intended for a larger audience than the immediate congregation. Feeling a pressing civic responsibility and expressing an intention to reach the public at large, Rev. Benjamin Palmer declared, "Whoever may have influence to shape public opinion, at such a time must lend it, or prove faithless to a trust as solemn as any to be
accounted for at the bar of God."37 With the purpose of defending the spiritual and moral uprightness of himself, southern clerics, and the South in general, Rev. W. T. Hamilton aimed his remarks at "that great body of American citizens, who look upon slavery with disapprobation and abhorrence..."38

Finally, in reference to the publication and circulation of these sermons, only Rev. Ross took upon himself the responsibility to have his own sermons published. No indication was given in Rev. Hamilton's sermon as to who instigated the publication of his treatise. All of the remaining sermons were published at the request of the local church congregations, except for Rev. Palmer's sermon which was transcribed and printed in the New Orleans newspaper, The Sunday Delta, and later published in pamphlet form.

Contributory Studies

1. Religion and Slavery in the South

Several works have examined the pro-slavery ideology of the antebellum era from the historical-critical perspective.


38 W. T. Hamilton, "Duties of Masters and Slavers Respectively: or Domestic Servitude as Sanctioned By the Bible" (Mobile, AL: F. H. Brooks, 1845) 4.
In 1860, E. N. Elliott compiled the classic pro-slavery work entitled *Cotton Is King, and Pro-Slavery Arguments*. In this extensive volume Elliott justified slavery from the standpoints of history, agriculture, economics, morality, social implications, Biblical justifications, and national and international law. Two other significant studies dealing with pro-slavery thought are William S. Jenkins' *Pro-Slavery Thought in the Old South* and Eric L. McKitrick's *Slavery Defended: The Views of the Old South*. These two treatises stand as classics in analyzing the pro-slavery position advocated in the antebellum South.

Works that explore the intertwining of slavery and religion are *Religion in the Old South* by Donald Mathews, David T. Bailey's *Shadow on the Church: Southwestern Evangelical Religion and the Issue of Slavery, 1783-1860*, and *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 1800-1860* by Anne Loveland. These studies examine the religious atmosphere of the antebellum South and how southern religion incorporated the institution of slavery. An unpublished dissertation by Edward R. Crowther, entitled "Southern Protestants, Slavery and Secession: A Study in Religious Ideology, 1830-1861," investigates the influence of southern Protestantism upon the development of a "regional mind" and the interaction between this budding southern sectionalism and institutional religion.
Specifically addressing southern Presbyterians, Earnest Thompson's *Presbyterians in the South* traces their introduction, development, and influence upon the frontier and southern culture. *The Testimony and Practice of the Presbyterian Church in Reference to American Slavery* by Rev. John Robinson serves as a primary source revealing the position of the General Assembly toward slavery in the early nineteenth century. As a Presbyterian, Robinson provided an insider's perspective on the South's peculiar institution and the impact produced on the denomination by the controversy over slavery.

Three published articles analyze the pro-slavery stance taken by three of the ministers examined in this study. In "The Pro-Slavery Argument Reconsidered: James Henley Thornwell, Millennial Abolitionist," Charles C. Bishop examines the arguments posited by Thornwell in defending the morality of the institution of slavery." Wayne C. Eubanks offers an Aristotelian analysis of a pro-slavery sermon in "Benjamin Morgan Palmer's Thanksgiving Sermon, 1860." Tommy Rogers investigates the Presbyterian defense of slavery and the conflict it produced between the Old School and New

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School Presbyterians in "Dr. Frederick A. Ross and the Presbyterian Defense of Slavery." These studies provide insight into the reasoning of southern pro-slavery Presbyterian clergy and the influences exerted upon these men.

2. The Rhetorical Situation

Lloyd Bitzer wrote a second monograph concerning the rhetorical situation entitled "Functional Communication: A Situational Perspective." In this essay Bitzer further refined his theory of the rhetorical situation as being related to the concept of rhetoric as a goal-oriented act and concerned with the relationship between environment and humankind. Critics of the rhetorical situation, like K. E. Wilkerson, have faulted Bitzer for limiting the scope of rhetorical discourse. In the article "Rhetoric and Its Situations," Scott Consigny labeled Bitzer's situational model as too deterministic, even fatalistic. Richard E. Vatz feared that a situational view of rhetoric would cause

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the discipline of rhetorical criticism to become subordinate
to other disciplines and subjects."

Surprisingly, beyond the passing reference to Bitzer's
type which is commonly seen, there have only been two
dissertations and one thesis written that actually apply
and/or use the rhetorical situation. John H. Patton's
doctoral dissertation "The Contemporary American Pulpit as
Rhetorical Situation" [Indiana University, 1974] did not
actually use Bitzer's model as a critical tool, but attempted
to further refine and clarify the model itself. In a masters
thesis Joseph 0. Tabarlet applied the rhetorical situation as
a methodology in analyzing selected speeches of former
Mississippi governor, Ross Barnett." Also, DeWitt Jones
used the rhetorical situation as a critical tool of analysis
in his recent doctoral dissertation "Wade Hampton and the
Rhetoric of Race: A Study in the Speaking of Wade Hampton on
the Race Issue in South Carolina, 1865-1878.""

" Richard E. Vatz, "The Myth of the Rhetorical

" Joseph 0. Tabarlet, "Ross Barnett and Desegregation
in Mississippi: A Situational Analysis of Selected Speeches,"

" DeWitt Grant Jones, "Wade Hampton and the Rhetoric of
Race: A Study in the Speaking of Wade Hampton on the Race
Issue in South Carolina, 1865-1878," diss., Louisiana State
3. Stasis Theory

Several published articles address the concept of stasis theory. The first appeared in *Speech Monographs* in 1950 in an essay by Otto Dieter. This detailed article examines the origin, meaning, and application of stasis theory in classical rhetoric. Ray Nadeau has published four articles exploring stasis theory. Nadeau's first and second articles on stasis theory investigate and interpret Hermogenes' classical work, *On Stases.* His 1959 article, entitled "Some Aristotelian and Stoic Influences on the Theory of Stases," compares the four Aristotelian predicables of genus, definition, property, and coincidence with the four Stoic categories of body, kind, state, and relation." Nadeau's fourth article offers a translation of *On Stases* and an in depth investigation of Hermogenes' contributions to stasis theory in that treatise. Wayne Thompson's study "Stasis in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*" supplements the investigations of Dieter and Nadeau by characterizing stasis as it appears in the *Rhetoric* and by comparing Aristotle's treatment of stasis


"Nadeau "Hermogenes' *On Stases," 361-78.

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with that of Hermagoras and those who followed him." In his book *A Rhetoric of Science: Inventing Scientific Discourse*, Lawrence Prelli conducted an extensive investigation of stasis theory and made specific application of the theory to scientific discourse. Underscoring the importance of stasis theory, Prelli argued that,

> Until the points of *stasis* are discovered and evaluated for their logical importance and priority in the rhetorical situation, [the critic] . . . cannot know which facts and opinions . . . [the rhetor believed to be] of greatest value in meeting the case of an opponent and in swaying a judging listener's decision."

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**Organization of the Study**

Using the constituents of the rhetorical situation as a gridwork for analysis, the following three chapters will focus on each of the three elements respectively: exigence, constraints, and audience. Chapter two investigates the dominant exigence existing in the antebellum South -- the perceived threat to the southern way of life. Slavery, the southern Presbyterian Church, and social reform are discussed as key components which helped create that exigence. Chapter three examines the significant religious and sociopolitical

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52 Prelli 49.
constraints, as well as some relevant "imported" constraints influencing the rhetorical choices of the pro-slavery Presbyterian ministers in the antebellum South. Chapter four extends the understanding of audience to encompass a broader concept of the "public." In addition, the "public" of the antebellum South is examined in terms of a "closed society." The fifth chapter focuses on the content of the sermons by analyzing the ideas and identifying the major points of contention. The final chapter offers not only some insights and implications in reference to the southern pro-slavery Presbyterian clergy and their sermons, but also some suggested consequences of the study.
CHAPTER 2

THE EXIGENCE: THE PERCEIVED THREAT TO THE SOUTHERN WAY OF LIFE

Introduction

The indispensable portion of the rhetorical situation is the exigence, without which there would be nothing to invite change in the audience. Bitzer defines an exigence as "an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be" — the problem at hand. Bitzer's notion of exigence is rooted in John Dewey's notion of value assessment. An appraisal of value "takes place only when there is something the matter; when there is some trouble to be done away with, some need, lack, or privation to be made good, some conflict of tendencies to be resolved by means of changing existing conditions."

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Though Dewey's concept of valuation suggests innumerable exigences, Bitzer's focus is clearly on "rhetorical" exigences. The distinctive feature of a rhetorical exigence lies in the available means of modification and/or resolution of the "problem." Within any given situation there are numerous exigences, some that can not be modified at all, some that can only be modified by means other than discourse, and some that can only be modified by discourse. When positive modification is possible only by the injection of messages that invoke the audience to alter the exigence through some mediating attitude or action, then the exigence is rhetorical. There may be multiple rhetorical exigences operative at the same time within the same situation, and there may even be tandem exigences.\(^3\) Bitzer suggests, however, that there "is at least one controlling exigence which functions as the organizing principle: it specifies the audience to be addressed and the change to be effected."\(^4\)

A rhetorical exigence consists of two parts: a factual condition and its relation to some interest. A factual condition is "any set of things, events, relations, ideas, meanings -- anything physical or mental -- whose existence is (or is thought to be) independent of one's personal

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\(^3\) Lloyd Bitzer, personal interview, 20 March 1990.

\(^4\) Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation" 6-7.
subjectivity." When a factual condition is joined with an interest -- a need, desire, appreciation, or aspiration -- it accounts for the purpose of the discourse. The perception of the exigence suggests a motive for the introduction of messages within the situation.6

Critics of Bitzer's situational model have labeled the notion of exigence as being too deterministic, suggesting that Bitzer fails to recognize the rhetor's power of choice. Scott Consigny attacks the rhetorical situation as being falsely determinate and predetermining. He understands the rhetorical situation as a phenomenon that can be empirically determined and that also dictates the response of the rhetor.7 Consigny's charge of determinism stems from Bitzer's explanation of the exigence. Bitzer states,

The exigence and the complex of persons, objects, events and relations which generate rhetorical discourse are located in reality, are objective and publicly observable historic facts in the world we experience, are therefore available for scrutiny by an observer or critic who attends to them. To say the situation is objective, publicly observable, and historic means that it is real or genuine -- that our critical examination will certify its existence.8

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8 Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation" 11.
This same issue is addressed by K. E. Wilkerson, who takes Bitzer to task for having an overly historical view of rhetoric: "[T]he circumstances which give rise to discourse are more important candidates for description and analysis than discourse itself. . . . [T]he circumstances which interest Bitzer are precisely of the sort studied by historians. . . ." Wilkerson is concerned that Bitzer's theory transforms the rhetorical critic into a historian with a specialization, examining historical events with an eye toward the rhetoric each event calls forth.

Richard E. Vatz offers the most critical attack on Bitzer's situational model in "The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation." Vatz denounces the rhetorical situation for being far too narrow and charges Bitzer with taking the position that meaning merely resides in events. Vatz believes Bitzer has totally ignored the creative role and responsibility of the rhetor, both in the areas of situational perception and production of discourse. For Vatz, "[n]o situation can have a nature independent of the perception of the interpreter or independent of the rhetoric with which he chooses to characterize it."

Rather than viewing rhetoric as situational or an exigence as inviting


11 Vatz 154.
utterance," Vatz sees situations as rhetorical and
utterance as inviting exigence. According to Vatz,
"rhetoric is a cause not an effect of meaning. It is
antecedent, not subsequent, to a situation's impact."

John H. Patton attempts to clarify these
misunderstandings and to extend the concept of the rhetorical
situation in his article "Causation and Creativity in
Rhetorical Situations: Distinctions and Implications." The
three key problems addressed by Patton focus upon the
concept of the rhetorical exigence. First, there is the
tendency to misinterpret the idea of rhetorical exigence as
a purely objective and independent phenomenon. The intention
of the situational theory is toward "grounding rhetoric in
historically observable sets of circumstances which are
distinct and particular," what Consigny calls
"particularities." The fact is, discourse can not be said
to have rhetorical significance or meaning without the
presence of historically observable events; however,
rhetorical exigence can not be separated from other key

12 Bitzer, "Rhetorical Situation" 3, 5.
13 Vatz 159.
14 Vatz 160.
15 John H. Patton, "Causation and Creativity in
Rhetorical Situations: Distinctions and Implications," The
16 Patton 39.
17 Consigny 177.
elements of the situational theory, i.e. constraints, audience, and most importantly perception.

The second problem addressed by Patton is the "distinction between the meanings of fatalism and determinism . . . in attributing causal force" to the notion of rhetorical exigence. Bitzer's concept of exigence has been misinterpreted as fatalistically accounting for the emergence of rhetorical response. Most assuredly, discourse does have causes, but that does not necessarily mean it is unavoidable. Though the rhetorical exigence is an essential element in labeling any discourse as rhetorical, it does not hold causal power in predetermining the emergence or content of the discourse. Patton states,

. . . the concept of rhetorical exigence does not provide a causal account of why discourse comes into being. Rather, the distinguishing feature is that if and when rhetorical discourse develops, it can be said to do so in relation to some set of events or experiences capable of positive modification through the assistance of discourse.19

The third problematic issue Patton examines is the role and significance of the rhetor's perception. The choices made by the orator concerning a rhetorical response are a result of the combined influence of exigence and constraints, and those choices ultimately comprise the controlling exigence. "Thus, it seems clear that the choices rhetors

18 Patton 38.
19 Patton 44-45.
make significantly influence both the form and content of their discourse.”

The historical events of any situation must be examined to establish the reasons why rhetors define controlling exigences and formulate responsive discourse. But the rhetorical significance of those observable events results from the way in which those events are perceived. A rhetor’s response to any situation, then, is in part a product of his perceptual process.

Bitzer allowed for the rhetor's perceptual process as he developed the concept of exigence. As defined by Bitzer himself,

The exigence may or may not be perceived clearly by the rhetor or other persons in the situation; it may be strong or weak depending upon the clarity of their perception and the degree of their interest in it. . . . When it is perceived and when it is strong and important, then it constrains the thought and action of the perceiver who may respond rhetorically if he is in a position to do so.

In his second work on the rhetorical situation, Bitzer dissected the rhetorical exigence into two parts: a factual condition and a related interest. He accounted for the factor of perception by analyzing the various possibilities of agreement and disagreement between the rhetor and audience.

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20 Patton 41.

21 Patton 47.

22 Bitzer, "Rhetorical Situation" 7; "Functional Communication" 29-34.

23 Bitzer, "Rhetorical Situation" 7.
concerning the elements of "factual condition" and "interest." The mutual experience of a rhetorical exigence, and the communication of that exigence, is possible to the degree that the factual conditions and the interests are similarly perceived and shared.\textsuperscript{24}

The perceptual processes of both the rhetor and the audience are essential to defining the controlling exigence of a rhetorical situation. It should be noted, however, that the perceptual process by itself can not fully explain the occurrence of rhetorical discourse. As audiences and rhetors encounter rhetorical situations, their perceptions involve a blending of subjective internal value systems and reasoning processes with observable external events and experiences. Thus, the resulting discourse is based on something more than the mind of the perceiver alone. While the rhetor can not respond without perceiving an exigence, the discourse produced is an encounter with the external conditions which form part of the observable world. This concept of exigence underscores the importance of recognizing historical realities as a fundamental grounding for discourse.\textsuperscript{25}

In examining selected sermons from the antebellum South, it is essential to identify and examine the historical realities that spawned the discourse. The southern region during the first half of the nineteenth century was a virtual

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Bitzer, "Functional Communication" 29-30.
  \item \textsuperscript{25} Patton 49-51.
\end{itemize}
oratorical hot-bed, especially during the last two decades preceding the Civil War. Through most of American history, two opposing sets of values have "faced-off" at the Mason-Dixon line. One side has favored cosmopolitanism, industrialism, rationalism, and egalitarianism, while the other side cherished stability, traditionalism, localism, faith, and honor. James Oscar Farmer concludes that by 1840, "these opposing value systems were taking on a sectional quality, and politically they expressed themselves most articulately in the debate over slavery." In the remainder of the chapter, I wish to explore the rhetorical exigence by examining the historical context of the antebellum South that influenced the production of discourse.

As stated earlier, Bitzer suggests there may be several exigences operative at the same time in the same situation. This is certainly the case in the antebellum South during the years of 1840 to 1861. Analyzing the various issues, attitudes, and ideologies occurring during this time period offers a myriad of complexities and complications. For example, the South had long felt the strain between States' rights and Federalism. As advocates of States' rights, southerners found themselves in a constant struggle for political power against the swelling tide of Federalism. They experienced clash with the northern and western regions

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over tariffs and the control of agricultural markets. As the South's sectional identity solidified, it battled over the institution of slavery and resisted change in general.

Contributing to part of the complexity of the issues is what Bitzer calls "tandem exigences." As an orator addresses a rhetorical exigence, he attempts to resolve or bring about a "remedy" to the problem at hand. The injection of discourse serves as a successful remedy for the exigence to the extent that it functions as a fitting response to the situation. The message may "fit" the situation in either of two ways. It may function as a corrective to the exigence, or it may "fit" simply because the exigence allows it to be well-received. Thus, the discourse may correct the exigence and bring about resolution, or it may merely be well-received and modify the pre-existing exigence into a new exigence. The new modified exigence has a close connection to the previous exigence and is thus referred to as a "tandem exigence".

However, there was one exigence which functioned as an organizing principle for all the other exigences occurring in the South during the antebellum years. That exigence was the perceived threat to the southern way of life. The South, and

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28 Bitzer, "Functional Communication" 23. Bitzer explains that in addition to the exigence "something else is recognized as a means of remedy or modification," and that the two constituents of exigence and remedy are essential and real in a genuine pragmatic situation.
more specifically southern Presbyterians, felt "smothered by the complexity of the issues, the emotionalism, and the gradual drift toward repression." Because of political and economic maneuvering on the national level and a presumptuous sense of piety expressed by northerners, Presbyterians in the South developed a posture that was defensive. Ultimately, however, the issue that became the catalyst for disagreement and division was the institution of slavery.

Slavery: A Tolerated Evil

Almost from the beginning of settlement in the southern colonies, slavery was introduced and accepted into the southern culture and society. Initially, indentured servants, Englishmen who sold their labor for a specified period of time, provided the labor force necessary to establish large agricultural holdings. Primarily young unmarried males, indentured servants sold their labor in the


hope that they too could become landowners in time. But as more and more indentured servants completed their time of service, social and political tensions arose over their inability to acquire suitable settled land. As a result, landowners increasingly turned to black slaves and racial slavery.

Disagreement exists over the exact date for the beginning of racial slavery. But by the end of the seventeenth century, bound laborers came to be regarded as indispensable agents for achieving wealth and status. Beginning early in the region's history, the institution of Negro slavery became a vital part of the South. That section of the United States below the Mason-Dixon line has long been known as the home of racial slavery, and the white southerner could not envision a concept of personal liberty that did not include the enslavement of the black race. To the southerner, if the institution of slavery was threatened, then his own personal liberty was being threatened. The Constitutional guarantee of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" meant that the individual could live his own life in the way he thought best. In the South, that involved agriculture and slavery.  

Agriculture provided the main impetus to the economic and cultural growth of the South, and agricultural advancement required land. The necessary land for agricultural pursuits was easily accessible and available. Following Andrew Jackson's defeat of the Creeks and Cherokees in the Southwest, floods of settlers moved west to take up rich lands for planting profitable crops. Land was plentiful in the South and offered a great deal more than economic advancement. William Cooper, Jr., observes,

> In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries landownership provided the necessary key to respected social position and to participation in political life. . . . As a result, widespread ownership of land became an essential requirement for both social mobility and broad political activity.32

As farms and great plantations began to appear on fertile river lands, white settlers pushed westward from the older tidewater section and with them carried slavery as a part of their economic and cultural heritage. Most southerners on the frontier saw slavery as a necessary component for a prosperous future. While landownership assured political and social status, owning black slaves in addition to land distinguished the economically privileged.

The plantation served as the cornerstone of southern agriculture and dominated the economy of the antebellum South. The plantation system was the method of meeting the

world's demand for certain staple crops. In reference to the plantation system of the South, Ulrich Phillips stated,

That system, providing efficient control and direction for labor imported in bondage, met the obvious needs of the case, waxed strong, and shaped not alone the industrial regime to fit its requirements, but also the social and commercial system and the political policy of a vast section; and it incidentally trained a savage race to a certain degree of fitness for life in the Anglo-Saxon community.\(^3\)

Phillips also described the antebellum plantation as a unit in agricultural industry where the work force was usually of substantial size and the labor was divided among groups working routinely under supervision. The laborers were primarily slaves and in each case the principal objective was the production of a staple crop for sale.\(^4\)

Of all southerners gainfully employed, Charles Sydnor reports that "90 per cent were engaged in agriculture as compared to 77 per cent in the rest of the nation,"\(^5\) making farming the primary occupation of the majority in the South. But the distinctive character of southern agriculture lay in the plantation system and in the plantation's production of money crops. The crops of tobacco and rice dominated the tidewater section throughout the eighteenth century and sugar


\(^4\) Phillips 6.

was discovered to be well-suited and profitable in the Louisiana territory. But the staple crop that would reign over southern agriculture and the plantation system from the end of the 1700's throughout the 1800's was cotton.

Machinery developments in England during the late eighteenth century that could produce cotton cloth inexpensively created a heavy demand for cotton. Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin enabled cotton fibers to be more easily separated from the seeds which permitted greater production of cotton for national and international markets. Along with the mechanical improvements, there were improved efforts to control insect infestation and plant diseases, more extensive use of the plow, and perhaps most importantly, the introduction of better varieties of the cotton plant. During the years of 1819 through 1821, the average per year cotton crop was 353,000 bales. Furthermore, cotton production in the South nearly doubled with each subsequent decade until the Civil War. By the 1830's, the abundance of land available and enterprising men bent on bettering themselves on the rising cotton market, caused the center of cotton culture to shift west of the mountains and take with it the center of southern wealth. "To the plantation-dominated commonwealths of Virginia, the


37 Sydnor 13.
Carolinas, and Georgia had been annexed Alabama, Florida, Mississippi, Tennessee, Texas, and Arkansas"\(^3^8\) -- the "Cotton Kingdom" of the antebellum South.

The western migration and the expansion of the plantation system was also accompanied by slaves and slavery. The introduction of cotton to the plantation system was well suited to the large scale production by Negro slave labor. In fact, in the minds of southern entrepreneurs the slave was essential to large planting endeavors. There was the task of clearing away wooded lands and the daily routine of plantation life required constant labor. The large landowner believed that slaves were necessary for the cultivation of fields and performing required tasks about the plantation. The successful cotton grower discovered that the most beneficial investment of the profits from his money crop was in more land and more labor. Thus, the plantation system and slavery "continued to expand and the lower South was committed to cotton and to slave labor. . . ."\(^3^9\)

The demand for slave labor increased with the opening of new cotton lands. Not only did many migrating planters take their slaves with them, but an elaborate slave traffic emerged between the eastern seaboard and the new southwest.


Simkins and Roland report that 180,000 slaves were transported in this traffic during the years of 1840 through 1850, and some 230,000 slaves in the decade prior to the Civil War. As the cotton kingdom expanded, the number and value of slaves continued to grow. Healthy males between the ages of eighteen and thirty brought $1,000 in 1820, and by 1860 the price had reached $1,800. On the average women brought approximately three-fourths the price of males.\textsuperscript{40} The census of 1820 showed that slaves comprised roughly one-third of the South's population, as opposed to a black population of only 2 per cent in the North. The black population in the antebellum South continued to grow at exponential rates. Numerically, the census of 1820 revealed the slave population to be 1,643,000, and by 1860 that number increased to 4,201,000. In fact, by 1860, slaves outnumbered the whites in the geographical crescent extending through the heart of the deep South and spanning from southeast Virginia into southeast Texas.\textsuperscript{41}

The majority of great planters in the South owned 100 or more slaves each. Almost 10,000 middle-class planters owned between 50 to 100 slaves each, and approximately 90,000 small planters owned between 10 and 50 slaves each.\textsuperscript{42} The Encyclopedia of Southern History reports that most slaves

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\textsuperscript{40} Simkins 119-120.
\textsuperscript{41} Simkins 120 and Sydnor 3.
\textsuperscript{42} Simkins 121.
\end{flushright}
lived and worked on farm units where the slaves in residence averaged twenty per farm.43 The prevalence of slavery throughout the South induced an acceptance of the slave as an intimate part of southern society. White children were often raised by black mammies and played side-by-side with black children. Black and white faces were constantly thrust together in daily chores and routines. Though black slaves were never considered "equals," the two races attended church together, celebrated together, and lived together.

While slavery paid good dividends to the plantation owner, it also brought general agricultural prosperity to the South as a whole. However, the benefits to the average non-slaveholding southerner lay primarily in the ego satisfaction of white supremacy, the personal security provided by slavery as a system for controlling the black race, and the social confidence maintained by the fact that blacks were the "mudsill" of southern society. In the pre-emancipation world of the antebellum South, no other socioeconomic concern affected the lives of all people, white and black, so significantly as did slavery. Because the South's peculiar institution had spread throughout southern social and economic life so thoroughly, the question of slavery's

survival emerged in the mid-nineteenth century as the nation's greatest moral, social, and political issue."

As a key factor influencing the exigence confronting antebellum southerners, slavery lay at the core of the South's social and economic existence. As far as southerners were concerned, abolishing slavery would capsize the southern social order and leave the southern economy impotent. By the first half of the nineteenth century, slavery had become such an integral part of the South that it shaped the South's sectional identity and supported the southern way of life. Southerners perceived any challenge or attack against the South's peculiar institution as a threat to their very way of life.

The Southern Presbyterian Church

Throughout American history religion has functioned as a means of social control, establishing and maintaining acceptable standards for the community. Such was definitely the case in the antebellum South. Religion served as a principal force directing and molding the southern mind. Edward Crowther explains that,

[b]y its very nature, religion is myth-making, an attempt to explain the inexplicable. Even when it confronts the material world, it metes out

"Roller 1110, 1112."
justification or damnation not always according to reason but often because of the need to preserve its hold on the mind of man and to maintain profitable traditions."

For the antebellum South this was particularly the case since religion provided an acceptable weltanschauung. The influence and power of established religion in the South helped intensify the exigence of perceived threat to the southern way of life and promoted resistance against the perceived threat.

The influence of religion in the South grew dramatically during the Jacksonian era and the religious ideology of the South served as a powerful weapon for pro-slavery and southern rights spokesmen. The fact that the devout God-fearing southerner also quite often owned slaves made him a powerful ally to southern political leaders. Religion permitted moral considerations to be introduced into the political arena, allowing the godly southerner to cooperate with the southern politician to vindicate States' rights and slavery by upholding a literal interpretation of the Bible and the Constitution."

The masses below the Mason-Dixon line were sincerely religious; and with the exception of Catholicism in the French parishes of Louisiana, Protestantism dominated


"Crowther 5-7.
ecclesiastically and doctrinally. Southern Protestantism played an important part in the social and cultural development of the regional mind. Protestantism as it existed in the antebellum South supported the plantation system, upheld the southern concept of patriarchy, defended States' rights, and endowed paternalism to masters of slaves." It provided a solid foundation of common beliefs and practices, and fostered "sharing of common convictions about purpose and destiny, and participating in the common task of creating a Christian republic." In the South the church has long been the hub of social interest and activity, and the clarion of public opinion. The three leading Protestant denominations in the South were Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian. Though fewer in number than the Baptists and Methodists, the Presbyterian Church in the South exerted a far greater influence upon its region than its numerical strength might suggest. Earnest Trice Thompson attributes this to the fact that so many southern leaders emerged from the Presbyterian Church ranks which stressed theological orderliness and education."
By investigating the southern Presbyterian Church, a clearer understanding can be gained about "the ideals which animated and actuated the toiling millions and the thoughts concerning the universe and man which informed their minds."\(^5\) Crowther suggests that people of the antebellum South did not associate with spokesmen they did not trust, nor support opinions in which they did not believe. "If congregations and denominations advocated slavery . . . , the majority of members composing both must have at least passively accepted the peculiar institution . . . ."\(^5\)

The clergy served as spokesmen for congregations and denominations. In *A History of Preaching: Volume III*, Ralph Turnbull observed that the southern pulpit formed the mind from which southern statesmen and society acted.\(^5\) They "possessed in their weekly sermons one of the most effective and influential means of reaching the southern population."\(^5\) Clergymen were significant individuals in the social structure of the South. For society in the antebellum South, Larry Tise notes, "[t]he clergy constituted the

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\(^5\) Crowther 9-10.


the largest, the most highly educated, the most influential, and the most pervasive and cohesive group of men . . . ." 54 Ministers were the principal overseers of morals and manners and some of the most revered citizens in every community. Their authority in the southern community was virtually unrivaled. They led their community morally, socially, educationally, and though they generally did not occupy elective offices, they functioned as strong political voices. 55 Southern clerics believed it their duty to concern themselves with issues and problems facing the southern social order 56 and served as "custodians of the community values." 57

Although slavery existed in all thirteen colonies following the Revolutionary War and respectable people, including the clergy, owned slaves, there was an overall opposition to the peculiar institution. Denominationally, the Presbyterian church took the first institutional anti-slavery stance, albeit a hesitating and cautious one. In


55 Timothy L. Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth Century America (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957) 36; and Tise 63.


1774 the most influential synod of the Presbyterian church, the Synod of New York and Philadelphia, attempted to address the subject of slavery. A committee was appointed to draft an official statement, but such differences arose concerning the issue that the matter was postponed until the next meeting. The issue was repeatedly addressed in subsequent synods, but not until 1787 did the Presbyterian church take an official stand. The following proposal was presented before the General Synod:

It is . . . the duty of those who maintain the rights of humanity and who acknowledge and teach the obligations of Christianity, to use such means as are in their power to extend the blessings of equal freedom to every part of the human race. From a full conviction of these truths, . . . the Synod of New York and Philadelphia recommend, in warmest terms, to every member of this body, and to all the Churches and families under their care, to do everything in their power consistent with the rights of civil society, to promote the abolition of slavery, and the institution of negroes, whether bond or free."

However, the General Synod responded timidly and conservatively to this proposal. Though it approved of the overall principle of universal liberty, the synod recognized the potential danger to the rest of the community if too hasty an abolition were adopted. The synod recommended that slave owners educate their slaves in a sufficient manner to

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59 Records of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America Embracing the Minutes of the General Presbytery and General Synod 1706-1788, 539.
prepare them for freedom and adequately acquaint them with the practices of industry. Lastly, the synod advocated "the most prudent measures, consistent with the interest and state of civil society in the countries where they live, to procure eventually the final abolition of slavery in America."  

This particular stand remained in effect until 1818 when the Presbyterian church took its most progressive stance against slavery. In principle the church declared emphatically that;  

We consider the voluntary enslaving of one portion of the human race by another, as a gross violation of the most precious and sacred rights of human nature; as utterly inconsistent with the law of God, which requires us to love our neighbors as ourselves, and as totally irreconcilable with the principles and spirit of the gospel of Christ which enjoin that all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.  

Though in principle the Presbyterian church encouraged Christians to make every attempt to correct the errors of former times, the church also reminded its members not to act so hastily as to jeopardize the safety and happiness of the master or the slave. The church sympathized with those who were burdened with the evils of slavery and with the slave whose "ignorance and vicious habits rendered their immediate emancipation dangerous, and it urged efforts towards

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60 Records of the Presbyterian Church . . . Minutes . . . 1706-1788, 540.

61 Minutes of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America from Its Organization A. D. 1789 to 1820 Inclusive (Philadelphia, 1847) 688.
abolition as speedily as compatible with public welfare.\textsuperscript{62} The Presbyterian church further argued that since the injury of slavery had already been imposed upon the Negro, it could not encourage additional injury by emancipating them so fast that they might decimate themselves or others.

Ultimately, however, an attitude of compromise prevailed when cotton became a dominant economic concern. The Presbyterian Church in the South was caught in a dilemma. On the one hand, Presbyterians as a whole initially made declarations of anti-slavery principles which encouraged the abolition of slavery. On the other hand, the concern of southern Presbyterians for the safety and well-being of both the slave and the slave-owner produced disagreement as to the method and timing of abolition, and provided a justification for the continuance of the South's peculiar institution. A conflict existed between the church's theological principles which it had to uphold, and the cultural pragmatics of the society in which the church existed. Thus, the influence of the southern Presbyterian Church and the dilemma it faced in reference to slavery affected the exigence of perceived threat to the southern way of life confronting antebellum southerners.

\textsuperscript{62} Kull 103.
Social Reform in the South

Another contributing factor to the exigence occurring in the antebellum South was the popular notion of reform spreading through the states during the first half of the nineteenth century. The roots of this reform movement lay at the heart of the Second Great Awakening. At first, the impetus of the Second Awakening focused primarily upon the conversion of the unregenerate by means of effective evangelism. John L. Thomas observed that "[t]he initial thrust of religious reform was moral rather than social, preventative rather than curative. . . ." But as the flames of the Awakening began to die down, the concentration of efforts shifted to personal and social perfectionism. (A more thorough discussion of the theological and religious foundations of "perfectionism" is discussed as a "constraint" in Chapter 3.) As individuals experienced the joy of their new conversion, they felt compelled to assist others in experiencing that same joy. They wanted to propagate their experience of light, liberation, joy, and peace to others still in darkness. As evidence of a legitimate experience, converted individuals exhibited an unselfish and altruistic

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lifestyle. Regeneration changed a person from selfishness to benevolence; from absorption with one's own interests to choosing the happiness of others and the glory of God's kingdom. "This meant the regenerate man was committed to sacrificing his own pleasure in order to advance God's kingdom on earth." 

As new converts joined the churches and already established church members revitalized their sense of commitment, they participated in voluntary reform associations. They worked for temperance and Sabbath observance, and against dueling. Some of the more prominent benevolent associations were the Home and Foreign Mission Society, the American Bible Society, the American Education Society, the American Tract Society, and the American Temperance Society. These benevolent societies were basically conservative in nature and sought socially to control the common man's depraved and undisciplined nature.

By 1830, secular perfectionism dominated American social thought. The philosophy of the enlightened rationalists accentuated mankind's innate goodness, reasonableness, and freedom of choice. The fairly recent success of achieving independence and defeating the greatest empire of the world

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66 McLoughlin 112-113.
added further credence to that philosophy. Apparently, God had not only blessed the American colonies' efforts for freedom, He also seemed to be pleased with their cause -- "freedom" itself. The acceptance of secular perfectionism and its emphasis upon freedom of choice and the unbound will established the foundation from which social reform could be achieved. Seeing social evils as merely individual acts of selfishness meant that Americans could perfect society anytime they chose to do so. When a sufficient number of individual Americans had "seen the light," they would automatically squelch the nation's evils and bring about deep and lasting national reform. Nowhere can the essence of this secular perfectionism be so clearly seen as in Andrew Jackson's First Inaugural speech in 1828, where he said:

I believe . . . man can be elevated; . . . and as he does he becomes more God-like in his character and capable of governing himself. Let us go on elevating our people, perfecting our institutions, until democracy shall reach a point of perfection that we can acclaim with truth that the voice of the people is the voice of God."

As the spirit of reform continued to grow, it became more radically inclined. Southerners, however, focused more upon the moral reform of the individual. They primarily concerned themselves with the reformation of character rather than the reformation of southern society, "though they

67 McLoughlin 99-100.

68 Andrew Jackson, First Inaugural (1828); as it occurs in William McLoughlin, Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1978) 139.
believed that individual reformation would lead to the betterment of society. . . .”69 Donald Mathews attributes this difference of focus to the South's entanglement with slavery. Because of their inclination to individualize the fight with sin and evil, southerners were "forced by slavery to settle for a personal struggle to gain possible victories" instead of fully developing "a social ethic which could affect institutions and power relationships."70 In the North, the ultimate test of social reform coalesced around the issue of slavery.71 The attempts of northern Abolitionists to eradicate slavery and its stain upon American ideals drew distinct lines of division that separated regions, religion, family, and friends. The strong anti-slavery sentiment of the North came from philosophy, politics, and radical Abolitionists. The philosophical group condemned slavery as a moral evil. The political school of thought sought to limit slavery and use the issue of slavery as a catalyst for political advantage. The third group, the radical Abolitionists, wanted to see slavery abolished

69 Loveland 161.
70 Donald Mathews, Religion in the Old South (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1977) 65, 77-78.
71 McLoughlin 113, 130.
immediately, without concern for the social upheaval that might occur in the South."

With slavery being at the very core of southern antebellum culture and society, southerners would not permit its removal nor any attack upon the institution as a social pariah. Instead, southerners viewed slavery as one of the pillars of a more genteel and ideal social order. Southern efforts to reform slavery focussed not upon the institution's place in society, but upon the abuses found within slavery. Thus, the impact of southern social reform upon the exigence confronting the antebellum South served to strengthen the South's peculiar institution and defend the southern way of life.

Conclusion

The rhetorical exigence, or "problem at hand," in the antebellum South was complex and complicated. As Bitzer suggests, within any given rhetorical situation there may be multiple rhetorical exigences, and even tandem exigences. This was certainly the case in the South during the first half of the nineteenth century. Bitzer also believes that one exigence will function as an organizing principle, and

thus will be the controlling exigence. The controlling exigence in the antebellum South during the last two decades before the Civil War was the South's fear that the "southern way of life" was in jeopardy.

A rhetorical exigence consists of two parts, a factual condition and an interest. Keeping in mind Bitzer's definition of a factual condition, ["any set of things, events, relations, ideas, meanings -- anything physical or mental -- whose existence is (or is thought to be) independent of one's personal subjectivity"], three distinct elements comprised the factual condition of the controlling exigence mentioned above. Those three elements were: slavery, based upon and supporting an agrarian culture and economy; the clergy of the Presbyterian Church in the South -- educated, orthodox, and articulate; and the southern social reform movement, which sought to elevate and refine southern society. The second component of a rhetorical exigence, an interest, Bitzer defines as "a need, desire, appreciation, or aspiration." The interest, or "need," in the antebellum South prior to the Civil War was to defend its culture and its very way of life. The South felt a pressing need to preserve and justify the southern economy, southern society, and southern piety.

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73 Bitzer interview.
74 Bitzer, "Functional Communication" 28.
75 Bitzer, "Functional Communication" 28.
Though spokesmen for the South attempted to correct the exigence of the perceived threat to the southern way of life, history shows they were ineffective. However, their message of defense and justification was well-received by southerners. The South had no greater spokesmen for its cause than its clergy, especially the more educated and articulate Presbyterians. People below the Mason-Dixon line were sincerely devout and predominantly Protestant. Since religion has always helped establish and maintain acceptable standards for the community and provide a means of social control, it seemed only natural that southern preachers would speak out and attempt to address the exigence faced by the South. With the rising tide of northern reform wanting to remove the stain of slavery and considering the South to be morally base, southern Presbyterian ministers were compelled to defend and even justify slavery from a religious standpoint. Those Presbyterian apologists turned to the Bible to justify the South's peculiar institution and defend the piety of the southern way of life. Though their rhetoric did not resolve the exigence faced by the South, their message was applauded by southerners and their arguments became the core of the pro-slavery position.
CHAPTER 3

THE CONSTRAINTS

Introduction

The second element of the rhetorical situation is the concept of constraints. Bitzer defines constraints as a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations that have the power to dictate and control decisions and active responses needed to alter the exigence. Constraints "influence the rhetor and can be brought to bear upon the audience;" they compel thought and grab attention. Constraints find their source in "beliefs, attitudes, documents, facts, traditions, images, interests, motives,"


2 Lloyd Bitzer, personal interview, 20 March 1990.

3 Bitzer, "Rhetorical Situation" 8.

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emotions, arguments, public knowledge," and even exigencies themselves can and do serve as constraints within the rhetorical situation.  

Bitzer views constraints as opportunities and limitations within the situation. They consist of (1) everything available to the orator that might induce change and (2) the receptiveness and demands existing in the situation at any given moment.  

When the rhetor enters the rhetorical situation, his discourse must control and direct the constraints within the given situation, as well as provide additional constraints. "The rhetor's central task is to discover and make use of proper constraints in his message in order that his response, in conjunction with other constraints operative in the situation, will influence the audience." John H. Patton observes that constraints help explain the factors an orator takes into consideration when deliberating about the form and content of the rhetorical

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4 Lloyd Bitzer, "Rhetoric and Public Knowledge," Rhetoric, Philosophy, and Literature: An Exploration, ed. Don M. Burks (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue U P, 1978). Bitzer regards public knowledge as "that set of truths and values which would characterize a competent public" (p. 83). There will be further discussion and development of a "public" and public knowledge in Chapter 4 which addresses "the audience."

5 Bitzer, interview.


response in relation to the orator's perception of actual events and experiences.®

In "The Rhetorical Situation," Bitzer divided constraints into two classes. His classifications coincide with Aristotle's concept of inartistic and artistic proofs. The first classification, inartistic constraints, inherently exists and operates within a given situation prior to the orator's entrance into or recognition of the situation. All other constraints, artistic constraints, are those introduced and controlled by the orator and/or his method.® Thus, a speaker's credibility, invention, delivery, even the orator's interpretive reactions to the situation which are designed to modify the situation, can be classified as artistic constraints.

Like Bitzer, Patton also subdivides constraints into two categories; objective elements and subjective elements. Documents, facts, and traditions are examples of constraints that would be classified as objective elements. Examples of subjective elements are beliefs, attitudes, and images. Patton believes the subjective constraints exert the greater influence in the rhetorical situation.¹⁰ For instance, the factuality of a historical event will be less constraining

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® Bitzer, "Rhetorical Situation" 8.

¹⁰ Patton 45.
than what is believed about the significance of the event. In determining and defining constraints, it is not only a matter of responding to external conditions, but also "a matter of internal cognitive and value systems" of the orator. When classified in this manner, "constraints reveal a basically pragmatic orientation and exist as answers to the question why, revealing the bases on which both rhetorical audiences and rhetors act."

A given situation inherently contains certain types of problems arising from the communicative activity which influence and/or "impede the ongoing act and which can be partially or wholly removed by the appropriate use of certain . . . [rhetorical] devices." Within the given situation the rhetor must be able to identify and formulate the problems, and present them in such a fashion as to facilitate their resolution by the audience involved in the rhetorical situation. The orator discerns and presents the problems (constraints) of the situation through the channel of his individual "perception." The situational theory, Patton argues, assumes that the perception of variables within the situation not only precedes any

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11 Patton 52.
12 Patton 45.
rhetorical discourse, but is also a necessary condition for the production of any rhetorical discourse."

Wilkerson observes that "it is the speaker's perception of his social context and his perception (anticipation) of the development of his communicative act" which aids in determining his message response. Modification of the message is brought about by means of responding to external data and feedback, and continual anticipation of expected feedback. The rhetor cannot respond without perceiving some constraint(s), and the subsequent response encounters events and experiences which form part of the reality comprising the rhetorical situation at hand. Thus, the perceptual orientation of the speaker functions as a constraint within the rhetorical situation. His perception(s) and intentions will influence how he interprets the situation and how he responds to the constraints within the situation. The introduction of responses by the orator into the situation constantly influences, alters, and/or realigns the dynamic between exigence, constraints, and audience. The orator's "fitting responses," then, are not only called forth by the demands of the situation, but also reveal his interpretive reaction designed to modify the situation. The rhetor's perception and personal intentions, as well as his "fitting

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15 Patton 46, 47.
16 Wilkerson 92.
17 Patton 49.
responses," play a significant part as constraints in the development and resolution of a rhetorical situation.

While the exigence (the problem at hand that demands attention and calls for resolution) remains the driving force of a rhetorical situation, some, if not all, of the constraints are always changing.¹⁸ This state of change and flux becomes a contributing factor for elements of a rhetorical situation going unperceived or misperceived. One of the strengths of the situational approach, according to Patton, is that it recognizes the potential of misperceiving situational constraints and "provides a perspective for distinguishing among degrees of accuracy or inaccuracy and clarity or unclarity in perceiving."¹⁹ In addition, Patton observes that the critic's account of observable data (constraints) within a given situation may differ from the orator's perceptions. In such events the critic's account may become truly explanatory by calling attention to key features of the situation which the rhetor either failed to perceive or misperceived to some degree.²⁰

In the remainder of this chapter, specific historical elements occurring during the antebellum period will be discussed as constraints upon the mind of the southern Presbyterian and upon the southern way of life. These

¹⁸ Consigny 179.
¹⁹ Patton 48.
²⁰ Patton 50.
constraints will be examined under two classifications: religious constraints and sociopolitical constraints. It should be noted, however, that it is not the intent of the researcher to produce a history of the antebellum South. Rather, the purpose of examining and highlighting certain historical data is to try to determine the significant constraints influencing the southern Presbyterian minister and his audience during the antebellum period. The rhetorical significance of the events rested in the symbolic meaning with which they were invested. They were not just materially determined conditions, but symbolic invention that determined the way in which the material conditions were perceived. Thus, the constraints were rhetorically constructed. Their compelling influence originated not in the fact of their occurrence, but in the meaning of their occurrence.

Religious Constraints

The key religious event which occurred during the early nineteenth century was the Second Great Awakening. It was instrumental in establishing the definitions of what the nation understood as its identity, i.e. what it meant to be "American" and what was to be the nation's manifest destiny. In *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform*, William McLoughlin
argues that where "the First Awakening led to the creation of the American republic; . . . [the] Second Awakening led to the solidification of the Union and the rise of Jacksonian participatory democracy.\textsuperscript{21} Following the Revolution and the consolidation of the thirteen colonies into a republic founded upon a written constitution, America emerged with an optimistic worldview. But compromises that had been necessary to ratify the Constitution were starting to show signs of strain. By 1800, new fears and doubts began to develop and surface. The infant nation, struggling for a sense of direction and trying to establish its own institutions, had lost its revolutionary drive and commitment. Individuals began to feel alienated and distant from the government, and began to lose their sense of identity. Though general agreement existed as to the nation's achievements and potential, considerable disagreement arose as to the course of direction, governmental leadership, and national development. Geographically, sectional differences increased; politically, expansionists clashed with those still looking toward Europe; and religiously, denominational beliefs and practices of the nation continued to fracture.\textsuperscript{22}


During the Second Awakening societal focus shifted to the individual. The individual was responsible for self-improvement, and in turn, improving his society. Out of this ideology emerged a new faith in the common man which was fundamental to Jacksonian democracy. The Second Great Awakening fostered a new understanding that Americans were a special people, "chosen by God to perfect the world."\textsuperscript{23} Philosophical and theological conflicts had arisen between the worldviews of the Calvinists and the new Enlightenment rationalists. The Calvinists stressed the depravity of mankind and predestination, while the rationalists accentuated man's innate goodness, reasonableness, and free will. The heritage of piety gave traditional strength to the Calvinists, but the recent experience and success of fighting for independence lent credence to the rationalists.

This philosophical controversy found its way into the theological realm. Calvinism taught that the fate of individuals and nations rested in the mysterious and unpredictable will of God. But to many, this concept of predestination seemed too fatalistic. The rationalists believed that God (whatever and wherever He might be) governed by reason and with benevolence, and that His aim was to further the happiness and well-being of mankind. If man's reason could be viewed as God-given then the education of

\textsuperscript{23} McLoughlin, \textit{Revivals} 105.
that reason would allow mankind to understand God's ways and act in harmony with them."

The greatest impact of the theological controversy centered upon the doctrine of predestination and the responsibility of man, free will. The point of friction concerned the agency of man in bringing about the regeneration of the soul. In practical terms the conflict pertained to the impact and influence the preacher might have in bringing about the immediacy of conversion. Philosophically, however, if immediate conversion was possible by an act of the human will in response to grace extended to man by God, then man played a significant role in the regeneration process and God's sovereignty seemed much less arbitrary. This gave greater power to man's will and made him more accountable for his choices and capabilities. If man played an active role in his salvation, then it only stood to reason that he could also play an active role in the salvation of his society. If human nature could be renovated and reformed, then so could the nature of society.

What emerged was a hybrid theology which incorporated aspects of both Calvinism and Arminianism -- having Calvinistic roots, but bearing Arminian fruit. Arminianism, simply put, holds to the absolute free will of mankind. The

\[\text{\textsuperscript{24}}\text{ McLoughlin, Revivals 100.}\]

major point of division between Calvinism and Arminianism is the degree of human freedom. The difference between the two theological positions can best be understood as viewing the same scenario from two different reference points. The reference point for Arminianism is man, and the reference point for Calvinism is God. While the Calvinist influence saw God as the Provider and Initiator, the Arminian influence saw man as the agent implementing and administering the plan of God. As man worked in harmony with God's will, then both the individual and society became pliable, reformable, and perfectible. The force of this assumption matured in the wake of the Second Great Awakening and gave rise to the notion of perfectionism and millennial optimism.

The doctrine of perfection initially concentrated on the individual believer's potential to put away sin in his or her life. It was believed and advocated that the Christian could restrain the evil impulses in his life and fulfill his obligations through obedience to God's law. This directly influenced the convert's social involvement, since it stood to reason that reformed individuals could bring about the same results in society. All sin was believed to exist in selfishness, while all holiness and virtue were thought to reside in benevolence. Benevolence was seen as "good will"

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and desiring the happiness of others. Since God's own happiness was believed to consist in His benevolence, then the individual's "do-goodism, by advancing the happiness of the universe in general, advanced the will of God." This served as a primary motivation for engaging in the manifold reform movements of the day.

Another factor influencing the concept of perfection was the doctrine of millennialism, specifically postmillennialism. The optimistic outlook of postmillennialism held that the spread of Christianity by means of evangelism would move the world toward a state of perfection and that gradual improvement would convert this world into God's world. The millennium, a thousand-year period of universal peace and prosperity, would usher in the return of Christ and the final establishment of God's kingdom on earth. Jack Maddex, Jr., states, "The deepest faith they could invest in their social system was to believe that God was shaping it into the form of the future millennial society." Postmillennialism uniquely "blended providence with progress." Armed with the incentive of ushering in the kingdom of God here on earth and the belief that man was

\[28\] McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism* 103.


\[30\] Maddex, "Proslavery Millennialism" 48.
a moral free agent, many Americans set about the task of changing and reforming the individual and society.

The emergence of philosophical, theological, and social change proved too great a strain on the Presbyterian denomination, producing disruption and division among its members. The denomination began to divide into two schools of thought, the New School and the Old School. The New School had a strong New England and Congregational background, and in the wake of the Second Great Awakening pursued a softer Calvinism. The Old School, on the other hand, held fast to the "good old doctrines" of strict Calvinism. Members of the New School aggressively promoted new strategies in evangelism and revivalism, reinterpreted the standards of the Westminster Confession, and began practicing new forms of inter-denominational cooperation. The Old School's unwillingness to accept any alterations in its Calvinist doctrines also predisposed it to not tamper with existing social order. In fact, where the New School was comprised of strong Abolitionist forces, the Old School was dominated by the southern pro-slavery position.

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32 C. C. Goen, Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schisms and the Coming of the American Civil War (Atlanta: Mercer U P, 1985) 68.

33 Kull 106, 107, 109.
Both sides jockeyed for power at the annual General Assemblies. Finally, in 1836, New School leaders established Union Theological Seminary as a progressive seminary in an effort to counter the influence of Princeton, the Old School bastion. Thoroughly aroused by such an action, Old School leaders decided the only way to preserve the Presbyterian tradition and heritage was to excise those of the New School from the church. The final split of the Presbyterian Church into Old and New Schools in 1837 was chiefly concerned with doctrinal matters and missionary methods, although the abolitionism of the New School men without a doubt hastened the breach. However, C. C. Goen argues that "the slavery dispute was the fundamental issue in the ecclesiastical rupture." Following the 1837 split, all of the expelled New School synods denounced slavery as a sin against God and man. In fact, so strong was the anti-slavery sentiment in the New School that by 1846 the General Assembly of the New School made the following declaration:

[T]he system of slavery, as it exists in the United States, . . . is intrinsically an unrighteous and oppressive system, and is opposed to the prescriptions of the law of God, to the

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34 Goen 68.
35 Kull 106, 107; also Goen 66-68.
36 Goen 11.
37 Kull 110, 111.
spirit and precepts of the gospel, and to the best interests of humanity."

The orthodoxy of the Old School Presbyterians and the theological conservatism of the Old South formed a natural alliance. Presbyterians in the antebellum South predominantly belonged to the Old School church and "contributed to Southern intellectual life out of proportion to their numbers in the region." Those of the Old School who more actively opposed anti-slavery and abolition sentiment tended to have a more conservative theological viewpoint and to uphold a more stringent orthodox Calvinism. Larry Tise observed in his research, "The Interregional Appeal of Proslavery Thought: An Ideological Profile of the Antebellum American Clergy," that the religious persuasion of the families in which pro-slavery ministers grew up was primarily Presbyterian. Tise also noted that those pro-slavery clerics with strong Calvinist theological leanings outweighed all others. The Calvinistic underpinnings of Old School Presbyterianism


39 Maddex, "Proslavery Millennialism" 47; also see Walter Brownlow Posey, The Presbyterian Church in the Old Southwest, 1778-1838 (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1952) 126 and Kull 106.


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espoused a worldview dominated by predestination," and their convictions of predestination persuaded them to leave the southern social order intact. They argued that Jesus would not overthrow an established social order, but would choose to work within the confines of that social order. In fact, James H. Thornwell, noted Southern Presbyterian minister and theologian, argued that,

... [W]e are far from admitting ... that the proper end of the church is the direct promotion of universal good. It has no commission to construct society afresh, to adjust its elements in different proportions, [or] to rearrange the distribution of its political constituencies."

The Old School Presbytery of South Carolina expressed a similar position in October of 1836:

[T]he church has no right to prescribe rules and dictate principles which can bind or affect the conscience in reference to slavery; and any such attempt would constitute ecclesiastical tyranny; ... and whosoever has a conscience too tender to recognize this relation as lawful ... has submitted his neck to the yoke of man, sacrificed his Christian liberty of conscience, and leaves the infallible word of God for the fancies and doctrines of men."

From this theological position of predestination, the ministers concluded that some had been placed in authority over others by the providential hand of God. Those in

"Crowther 31.


"Minutes of the Harmony Presbytery in Zebulon Crocker, The Catastrophe of the Presbyterian Church in 1837 (New Haven: n.p., 1837) 64.
authority had a responsibility to teach their subordinates to
do good and to punish them when they did wrong. Though it
was believed the subordinate's position could change, it
could only happen according to divine timing, "and could not
be hurried along by the machinations of man.""5

Many southern Presbyterian clergy argued that
ecclesiastical harmony could only be achieved and maintained
by limiting the "church's responsibility to the moral
relationship between master and slave and to deny it the
right to question the existence of a civil institution, such
as slavery.""6 The primary responsibility for defending the
morality of the institution of slavery fell to the southern
minister. He emerged as the element of southern society most
concerned with the non-economic apology for slavery."

At the turn of the nineteenth century, most southern
clergymen, including Presbyterians, would have labeled
slavery as an evil to be tolerated."" In fact, many
southern Calvinists echoed northern churchmen's hope and
assumption that slavery would be a temporary institution,
believing as mankind progressed toward the millennium,

" Crowther 115.

" Charles C. Bishop, "The Pro-Slavery Argument
Reconsidered: James Henley Thornwell, Millennial

" Bishop 18.

" Crowther 67.
institutions that were harmful would fall to the wayside." Eventually, however, the southern clerical position "began to shift toward a more affirmative conception of slavery in general, and in favor of the variety practiced in the American South in particular." One of the earliest pro-slavery advocates to articulate his position publicly was Reverend James Smylie of the Presbytery of Mississippi. Reverend Smylie first put forth his views in a sermon which he later published in pamphlet form. In this pamphlet, A Review of the Letter from the Presbytery of Chillicothe, to the Presbytery of Mississippi, on the Subject of Slavery, Smylie stated,

I have, years ago, entered seriously on the investigation of the question, is slavery in itself sinful -- and, on examination of the scriptures, and facts as brought to light by history . . . have arrived at the conviction, that slavery, itself, is not sinful.

Several factors contributed to this shift of opinion among southern Presbyterian clergy. First, the cornerstone of the southern region and its society was an agrarian economy. Slavery became very profitable in conjunction with growing staple crops, especially cotton. Jack Maddex argues that any remaining vestiges of anti-slavery opinion among

49 Maddex, "Proslavery Millennialism" 49.
50 Crowther 67.
51 James Smylie, A Review of a Letter from the Presbytery of Chillicothe, to the Presbytery of Mississippi, on the Subject of Slavery (Woodville, MS: Wm. A. Norris & Co., 1836) 15-16.
southern clergy, particularly Presbyterians, went by the wayside with the onslaught of the cotton boom. Second, the increase of Abolitionist attacks challenged and threatened the South's sense of honor and morality, driving many southerners to hold on to slavery out of a sense of pride. As a result, southern Presbyterian ministers were inspired to find scriptural justifications to defend and confirm the South's honor, morality, and peculiar institution. Crowther argues that the rise of abolitionism served as the catalyst in this shift of southern ministerial opinion on slavery, from viewing slavery as a "tolerated evil" to considering it a "positive good". Third, the South suffered from certain phobias concerning its culture and social structure. Every white person in the South knew his position in society. They belonged to the "white aristocracy," while all slaves made up the "mudsill" of southern society. No matter what financial standing a white person had in the antebellum South, there was always "white equality" because the slaves were at the bottom of the southern social stratification. Southerners feared slave uprisings and rebellions would incite the slave population to


53 Crowther 129; see also Walter Brownlow Posey, The Presbyterian Church in the Old Southwest, 1778-1838 (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1952) 81-82.

54 Crowther 68.
revolt against the southern social order, though very few uprisings actually occurred. In general, southern Presbyterians feared any change in their social structure that might alter the South's white equality and racial unity. Finally, the shift in opinion from viewing slavery as a "tolerated evil" to that of a "positive good" was solidified by the scriptural literalism espoused by Old School Calvinism in the South. Southern Presbyterian ministers argued that the Scriptures acknowledged the existence of slavery as a legitimate system without evaluating it as bad or temporary. The Bible, they believed, was purposefully silent as to slavery being a sin or an evil to be extinguished."

Arguments along these lines served to turn the southern clerical position on slavery. By 1850, some Presbyterian ministers in the South were going so far as to claim a divine guarantee of slavery's continuance throughout all of history. John T. Hendrick, pastor of the Presbyterian church of Clarksville, Tennessee, held that the Ten Commandments assumed the perpetuation of slavery "in all time to come." Some southern Presbyterian clergy preached that God had chosen them and the South to defend the pro-slavery truth

\[55\] Maddex, "Proslavery Millennialism" 49.

against the nation's liberal errors." In a Thanksgiving Day sermon, Benjamin M. Palmer declared that the providential trust of the southern people "is to conserve and to perpetuate the institution of domestic slavery as now existing."

Northern Abolitionists grew increasingly less tolerant of the South and its peculiar institution which they considered sinful. Many northern Presbyterians began to demand more stringent denominational legislation on slaveholding. Still, the views held by southern Presbyterian church leaders of slavery's justness and its continuation proved to be "sufficient to rally their hearers against any anti-slavery efforts." In general pro-slavery Presbyterian clerics defended the southern social system against all outside attackers and "encouraged godly Southerners to resist those liberal, Northern manifestations." Pro-slavery apologists of the southern


59 Maddex, Proslavery Millennialism 54-55.

60 Crowther 11-12.
Presbyterian ranks discovered that defending slavery was "in effect defending southern society itself."  

Sociopolitical Constraints

A number of national events occurred which influenced southern attitudes, created a sense of sectional identity, and produced a feeling of nationalism in the South. Prior to the transportation revolution of the early nineteenth century the river system which connected the West and South made the South a principal component in transportation to the East and Europe. The construction of railroads and canals through the Great Lakes region diverted transportation West to East, bypassing the South. Generally, the South was left out of most national internal improvements like transportation, and the banks favored industry rather than agriculture. As western and eastern ties developed and expanded, it caused the South to become increasingly isolated. This produced an unusual dichotomy. While the South was agriculturally independent, it was at the same time industrially dependent

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on the North. The South began to look for ways to offset the strengthening bonds between the West and the East.\textsuperscript{62}

The Missouri Compromise of 1820 solidified the sectional identity of the South. It reopened the controversy of whether the Federal government had the right to legislate the legality or illegality of slavery in a given state. The Compromise provided for the creation of the state of Maine from part of the state of Massachusetts. In addition, a line was drawn at the 36-degree-30-minute parallel which refused admission of any slave states into the Union north of that line. To offset the added legislative power produced by creating a new northern state, the Missouri Compromise allowed the state of Missouri to remain a slave state above the 36-degree-30-minute parallel demarcation line. The Missouri Compromise established the precedent that the Federal government could in fact legislate concerning slavery.\textsuperscript{63}

The Tariff of 1828 became an issue of real political division between the South and the Northeast. Tariffs in general tended to hurt the South because other countries who paid the tariffs on their exports retaliated by placing a tariff on United States exports. The South exported much of its staple crops, especially cotton, to Europe.

\textsuperscript{62} Sellers 107-118.

\textsuperscript{63} William J. Cooper, Jr., \textit{Liberty and Slavery: Southern Politics to 1860} (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983) 139-42.
resulted in the South carrying the brunt of Europe's economic retaliation by paying more for the goods protected by the tariffs which were primarily industrial products from the Northeast. Revered spokesman for the South, John C. Calhoun of South Carolina, wanted adjustments made on the Tariff of 1828 that would be more favorable for South Carolina and the South. When those desired changes were not forthcoming, Calhoun resorted to the political doctrine of nullification and led South Carolina to declare the Tariff of 1828 unconstitutional, and null and void. Though the other southern states thought South Carolina had gone too far in nullifying the Tariff, it proved to be a significant political battle pitting the southern view of States' rights against the northern view of the Union. Refusing to be manipulated by South Carolina or Calhoun, President Jackson combined tariff conciliations with military coercion to bring about a compromise along with South Carolina's rescission of its nullification stance. As the South experienced a decline in political clout and influence over national affairs, feelings of betrayal, distrust, fear, and

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defensiveness possessed southerners and produced a spirit of separatism and sectionalism."

In the aftermath of the Mexican War which ended in the summer of 1848, the United States took possession of what is now California and the bulk of the modern Southwest. The gold rush of 1848 made it necessary for California to establish a government, and for the United States government to act immediately. President Zachary Taylor, wanting to avoid the conflict of the territorial phase altogether, pushed to have California admitted into the Union without delay and subsequent early admission of the remaining Mexican Cession as New Mexico. The South was concerned about the admission of new "free" states into the Union because of the shifting balance of power in the national government toward northern interests. As conflict and controversy escalated, Henry Clay of Kentucky stepped forward to rally the forces of moderation and compromise and proposed the Compromise of 1850. Clay presented a series of proposals which were designed to diffuse the sectional tension.

There were five provisions to the Compromise of 1850. First, California was to be admitted as a free state. Second, the remainder of the Mexican Cession was to be organized into two territories, Utah and New Mexico, with no

reference to slavery made. This left the issue to be decided by the inhabitants of the territories, and allowed both the North and the South to believe there was the possibility of influencing the new territories to their respective sides on the issue of slavery. Third, the boundaries of New Mexico were to be adjusted eastward, incorporating part of Texas. In return for the lost land, Texas' public debt was to be assumed by the United States government. Fourth, the slave trade (not slavery) was to be abolished in the District of Columbia. Finally, fugitive slave laws were made more stringent and were placed under federal jurisdiction.

Unfortunately, the Compromise of 1850, though passed by means of political maneuvering, did not help mend the rift between the North and South. In fact, the provision establishing stricter fugitive slave laws which were to be enforced by the federal government outraged and antagonized most northerners. It caused many in the North who were undecided or apathetic about the slavery issue to take an anti-slavery position. The overall effect of the Compromise of 1850 served to polarize the North and the South and created more sectional distance between the two. Ultimately, it galvanized many northerners to express more hostility toward the South's "peculiar institution."  

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In an attempt to secure and organize territories of the West so that a railroad could be built connecting Chicago and San Francisco, Stephen Douglas of Illinois proposed the Kansas-Nebraska Bill. The senate opposed Douglas' initial proposal, so he had to make some concessions to enable the bill to pass. The first concession allowed popular sovereignty rather than the government to decide the issue of slavery in the two new territories of Kansas and Nebraska. The second concession repealed the Missouri Compromise in the two new areas which at least allowed the possibility of slavery to exist in both Kansas and Nebraska. The bill passed in 1854, but the results proved to be less than favorable. The Kansas-Nebraska Act raised unreasonable expectations in the South about the existence of slavery in the two new territories. It also further antagonized northerners by taking territories that had been settled as "free" territories under the auspices of the Missouri Compromise, and submitted them to the possibility of becoming slave territories. The Kansas-Nebraska Act fostered bloodshed in Kansas, increased suspicion and distrust on the part of southerners, and undermined the power and influence of the existing Democratic party. It intensified sectional differences and identities, and broadened the breach between the North and the South.6

Another key national event which impacted southern attitudes was the Dred Scott decision of 1857. Dred Scott, a slave, belonged to an army surgeon of Missouri named John Emerson. In 1843, Emerson died, leaving his estate and slaves to his wife. Scott brought suit against Mrs. Emerson for his freedom on the grounds that residing in the state of Illinois and the territory of Wisconsin while serving the Emershons made him free. Since the Missouri Compromise forbade slavery in any part of the Louisiana Purchase north of the 36-degree-30-minute parallel, Scott believed he should be free because he moved and resided with the Emerson's north of that parallel. Scott lost the initial trial, but appealed and a verdict was given in his favor. Mrs. Emerson appealed to the Missouri Supreme Court which in turn reversed the lower court's decision, refusing to grant Scott his freedom.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Emerson remarried and moved with her new husband to Massachusetts. She left Dred Scott in Missouri with her brother, John Sanford. This made it possible for Scott to file another suit for his freedom, this time against Sanford. The suit was filed in the St. Louis Federal Circuit Court. Again, the court ruled against Scott, but this time he was able to appeal to the United States Supreme Court. The U.S. Supreme Court decided that since Dred Scott was a slave, he was not a United States citizen, and therefore did not have the right to bring legal action against John Sanford. In announcing the Supreme Court's decision, Chief
Justice Roger Taney also gave a dictum stating that emancipated slaves and their descendants could not become citizens. In addition, Taney argued that Congress had no authority to decide for a territory on the issue of slavery and pronounced the Missouri Compromise unconstitutional based upon the "due process" clause of the Fifth Amendment. The North never accepted or abided by the Dred Scott decision. But the decision did fuel the fire of southern vehemence by giving judicial support to the South's "peculiar institution."

While political and judicial events sent ripples throughout the nation, the social reform that altered the face of society in the North had a much more subtle effect on society in the South. Reform in the South remained on a personal moral level, seeking to elevate people spiritually rather than moving to a social level. Though southerners did involve themselves with reform on behalf of prisoners, the insane, and more humane treatment for the deaf, dumb, and blind, "... they did not go so far as to call for a restructuring of the social order ..." McLoughlin suggests that demography and environment were significant factors which help explain the differences in the reform movement in the North and South following the Second Great

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The strong industrialization of the North, endless schisms, and theological debates created major social shifts and changes. Though similar things occurred in the South, reform was far less reaching than in the North, and it did not affect the firmly established agrarian-based society that existed in the South as much as it affected the northern society.

Religion in the South has long been used to support society and buttress the southern moral tradition. James Farmer argues that when theology clashed with the dominant ideology of the culture, theology changed. In the aftermath of the Second Awakening, southern Presbyterians came to consider social reform as the personal moral reform that strengthened the existing southern society and brought order to the local community, i.e. "restraining violence, strengthening self-discipline, and encouraging familial and neighborly responsibilities for good behavior." Though Presbyterian churches in the South wanted to impact and affect southern society, they were not concerned with reordering society. Southern Presbyterians supported benevolent reform on an individual and personal level, but if reform meant rearranging the social order, it was misguided.

"McLoughlin, Revivals 133.


McLoughlin, Revivals 133.
and "un-Christian." The average God-fearing Presbyterian was more concerned with evangelism and personal improvement, both for the individual's own good and "for the good that they in turn might do for the cause of religion." For the South, the Second Awakening served to confirm the prevalent lifestyle and culture, and to increase religious homogeneity. With a growing sense of sectional unity and God's approbation, southerners did not believe extensive reform was necessary in the South. According to Edward Crowther, "... benevolent activities of the church did not and were never supposed to affect the social and economic foundations in the South." Due to the South's understanding and strong conviction of the separation of church and state, anything beyond personal behavior dealt with politics, and politics was not the concern of the church. Mixing social reform with spiritual matters went too much against the grain of the traditional southern way of life. It threatened communities rather than strengthened them. It promised disorder and upheaval when the function of religion was to promote peace and unity. In Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform, William McLoughlin observes,
In a land with little real poverty, no urban slums or factory towns, minimal cultural conflict with Roman Catholic immigrants, with the Indians removed to the West and the blacks considered childlike beneficiaries of civilization, the white southerner felt that his region of the nation was already closer to millennial perfection than any other part of the country.76

Since the reform impulse in the South was committed to maintaining social order, reform interests and activities focused on elements within society which appeared to threaten social stability. Southern social reform involved individual moral stewardship, and "what better exemplified this humanitarian guardianship over others than the paternalism of slavery?"77 Abolitionists of the North, however, saw slavery, not as humanitarian care, but as a blemish on the face of American ideals, a scar which needed to be eliminated. Since the institution of slavery was not seen by southern Presbyterians as an evil, it was not something they felt needed to be eradicated. Presbyterian ministers in the South accused northern reformers of depending on individual conscience alone to determine God's will, rather than looking to the Bible for definitions of right and wrong.78 Southern Presbyterian clergy believed the individual conscience alone without Biblical support was not sufficient, even dangerous,

76 McLoughlin, Revivals 136-37.
78 Faust 11.
in its pursuit of reform. When addressing economic and political questions, it is possible for those of opposing views to find a way to compromise. But in the spirit of American antebellum religion, God would not condone compromise between moral right and moral wrong, nor could those who professed to be true followers. "[O]nce abolitionists had catalogued slavery as sinful and Southern defenders had catalogued it as a thing that was right in the sight of God, compromise was impossible."'

Strategy and Ideology: Imported Constraints Revealed in the Sermons

As discussed earlier, Bitzer classifies constraints into two categories: (1) those inherently present within a given situation prior to the rhetor's entrance into or recognition of the situation, and (2) those introduced and controlled by the rhetor and/or his method. 80 Joseph Tabarlet labeled these two categories of constraints as "inherent" and "imported."81 Constraints given by the situation are "inherent" and constraints brought to the situation by the

79 Sydnor 299.

80 Bitzer "Rhetorical Situation," 8.

orator are "imported." Examples of imported constraints would be the orator's credibility, invention, delivery, and interpretive reactions to the situation. The constraints examined up to this point were inherent in that they existed within the situation apart from the rhetor. The inherent religious constraints were of primary significance in their bearing upon the nature of rhetorical choices made by the Presbyterian preachers in the antebellum South. Affecting both the ministers and their congregations, the inherent religious constraints identified were: the doctrine of predestination adhered to by southern Presbyterians, perfectionism and its impact on social reform, the division of the Presbyterian denomination into Old School (holding to traditional Calvinist doctrines and resistant to change) and New School (advocating a softer Calvinism and doctrinal change), and the belief in the Holy Scriptures as the absolute truth.

Of interest in the remainder of this chapter are the imported constraints that each preacher brought to their respective situations. Analysis of these selected pro-slavery sermons by southern Presbyterian ministers revealed the rhetorical strategies they employed and the ideological themes to which they appealed in developing and supporting their ideas. Three particular strategies emerged from the investigation of the sermons. These strategies were suggested by Andrew King in his work *Power & Communication*.
They are: manipulating the context by expansion, manipulating the context by contraction, and tribal piety.

Manipulating the context by expansion involves broadening the perimeters of an argument or issue in order to make it look bigger than it really is. Rev. Cassells employed this tactic when he asserted "that it was far better for Christian nations to hold them [Negroes] in slavery, than for them to be enslaved by other nations more cruel and oppressive."82 His intent was to take attention away from the institution of slavery as it existed in the South and broaden the focus to include atrocities committed against slaves around the world. Rev. Hamilton attempted to expand the institution of slavery into a tool in the hands of God, not just a self-serving and oppressive man-made system. "[T]he existence of slavery in [southern] society . . . may, in the view of Infinite Wisdom, be indispensable to the attainment of the greatest possible good."83 For southern Presbyterians the "greatest possible good" meant the development of character, the increase of righteousness, and the experience of salvation. Hamilton also used the tactic of expansion to indicate the extent of damage emancipating the slaves would produce in the South. "[T]he sudden introduction of any great change in society must be

82 Cassells 3.
83 Hamilton 16.
hazardous, and may be widely destructive." Rev. Thornwell manipulated the context by expanding his understanding of the moral character of slavery from the specific details surrounding slavery to the nature of slavery and its respective relationships. Thornwell stated that the moral character of the institution of slavery "cannot turn upon the incidental circumstances of the system, upon the defective arrangements of the details . . . ; it must turn upon the nature of the relation itself . . . ." Manipulating the context by means of contraction consists of reducing the significance or importance of an argument or issue in order to make it appear smaller than it really is. This tactic focuses upon the effects of a problem rather than the causes -- upon the problems within the system instead of problems with the system. Illustrating this strategy, Rev. Wilson stated:

[W]e do find, as a matter of historical fact, that among all people, during all the periods of time, there have been those . . . whom the very law of necessity itself has made servants to the other . . . . The simple question is, what must be the nature of this service? The answer is, that its nature depends upon circumstances."

A little later in his sermon, Rev. Wilson argued that the only way slavery could be wrong was if the relationship between masters and servants was abused. But, he continued,

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84 Hamilton 16.
85 Thornwell Rights and Duties, 415-16.
86 Wilson 8,9.
that in no way implied that the institution of slavery itself was wrong. Rev. Hamilton also used the strategy of contraction in a similar way when he stated, "the abuse of a thing is no part of the thing itself." Hamilton concentrated his arguments upon the abuses within the system of slavery rather than on the institution of slavery itself being abusive. "[T]he institution already exists among us, and, however it may have been originated, the only question for us to ponder is, How [sic], under these circumstances, shall we act?"

In discussing the Constitutional guarantee that all men are created free, equal, and endowed with the inalienable right of freedom, Rev. Jacobs manipulated the context through contraction by shifting attention away from the statement of principle to circumstances as they actually existed. Using examples of countries and people outside the boundaries of the United States, Jacobs contended that all men were not free and equal, nor was liberty an inalienable right. Liberty "in every state of society, and under every form of government on earth . . . is in various modes, and in various degrees constantly alienated." Rev. Ross in his sermon preached in Buffalo, New York, focused his argument upon the

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87 Wilson 12.
88 Hamilton 15.
89 Hamilton 15.
90 Jacobs 7,8.
positive effects slavery had on the Negro slave. By using the tactic of contraction, Ross argued that the status and condition of the slave in the South had been elevated in comparison to his black brethren in Africa. By confining his argument to a comparison of the circumstances surrounding the slave and the "pagan savage" in Africa, Ross concluded that slavery was the better condition under which to live.91

A third argumentative strategy employed by these pro-slavery Presbyterian clergy was that of "tribal piety." This strategy, according to King, revolves around a collective adherence to a "moral alliance"92 -- a higher value or calling that serves as a common bond. Throughout the pro-slavery sermons investigated in this study, repeated references were made to the South's responsibility to guard slavery as a God-given sacred trust. These Presbyterian ministers articulated the South's obligation to protect slavery in terms of accountability, spiritual integrity, and honor. The use of "tribal piety" provided a unifying rationale around which southerners could rally and feel the assurance of God's directing hand. The South, declared Rev. Ross, had "the highest and the noblest responsibility ever given by Him [God] to individual private men on all the face of the earth."93 As far as Ross was concerned, God had

91 Ross "Buffalo," 29.
92 King 35.
93 Ross "New York," 67-68.
entrusted the South to train the slaves, to civilize them, and give them the gospel of Christ. Other southern Presbyterian ministers said similar things:

[O]urs is the sober and onward work of protecting, defending, and promoting the tremendous moral trust which God in his providence has placed in our hands."

[Let us take care of the trust committed to us, let us act wisely and faithfully towards them, and not ruin our country and both races by the folly of the abolitionists and disunionists."

[The South has a divine obligation] to conserve and to perpetuate the institution of domestic slavery as now existing. . . . [W]e will stand by our trust: and God be with the right!"

Ideological themes to which the pro-slavery clergy appealed also served as imported constraints to their respective rhetorical situations. Several repeated themes emerged from an analysis of the sermons. The strongest and most recurrent theme was the use of Biblical examples of slavery and the appeal to Scriptural literalism. Rev. Jacobs probably most clearly expressed the southern Presbyterian belief in the literal interpretation of Scripture when he commented, "If the scriptures do not justify slavery, I know not what they do justify." Rev. Cassells made extensive use of this theme by drawing upon Biblical examples from the

94 Cassells 15.
95 Hendrick 24.
96 Palmer 7, 8.
97 Jacobs 20.
Patriarchs, the Decalogue, Levitical Law, Old Testament Law, and Christ and the Apostles. Cassells reminded his listeners that Jacob bound himself to Laban for fourteen years in order to secure Rachel as his wife, thereby enslaving his service to Laban.\textsuperscript{98} Rev. Hamilton argued,

\begin{quote}
[W]ere Abraham now living among us, with all his slaves around him, sealed though they were in God's own covenant by divine command, he would, by modern abolitionists, be excluded from the church, as a cruel, selfish, hard-hearted man, a bloody-handed man-stealer.\textsuperscript{99}
\end{quote}

Hamilton later concluded, "What God sanctions cannot be in itself, and essentially, evil."\textsuperscript{100}

Repeated references were made to the Ten Commandments. Twice slavery is recognized in the Decalogue. First, the Fourth Commandment forbade any work from being done on the Sabbath, including male and female servants. The second reference, the Tenth Commandment, prohibited coveting anyone's male or female servants. "Here the man servant and the maid servant are considered as the property of the master, and under his authority, by the sanction of God himself."\textsuperscript{101} Similarly, the clergy made numerous citations of Levitical Law and Old Testament Law in general. Levitical

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\textsuperscript{98} Cassells 6; see also Hamilton 9,10; Hendrick 14-16; Jacobs 12.
\textsuperscript{99} Hamilton 9,10.
\textsuperscript{100} Hamilton 11.
\textsuperscript{101} Cassells 10-11; see also Wilson, 14-15; Jacobs, 16; and Hendrick, 18.
\end{flushright}
Law, according to Rev. Cassells, made provisions for buying, holding, and regulating slavery. The Hebrew people were permitted to buy slaves from heathen nations and strangers, and could pass those slaves on to their children as an inheritance (Lev. 25: 44-46).102

Southern Presbyterian ministers believed the New Testament served to strengthen their pro-slavery argument. They contended that what the Old Testament commanded and the New Testament permitted could not be wrong for the South. Rev. Jacobs insisted that commands were given throughout the New Testament to regulate and control the institution of slavery.103 Christ nor the Apostles "at any time interfered with the existing relations of master and servant, but in all cases, taught the relative duties of both master and servant . . . ."104 Rev. Cassells claimed, "Christ and his Apostles acted upon the ground that slavery was lawful."105 When Christ healed the Centurion's servant, He did not rebuke the Centurion. The Apostles insisted upon the appropriate duties and attitudes of both masters and slaves.

The New Testament, then, left the subject of slavery just where it found it. The only influence it exerted upon it was that of imparting

102 Cassells 9,11; see also Wilson 15-16; Hamilton 9-10; Ross "New York," 61-63.
103 Jacobs 17-19.
104 Hendrick 20; see also Thornwell Rights and Duties, 406-07.
105 Cassells 11.
to it its own spirit and character. It taught masters justice, and kindness towards their servants; and it taught servants obedience and fidelity towards their masters.106

As one would expect, the preachers in this study used numerous Biblical examples in their sermons. But their belief in the literal interpretation of the Scriptures enabled them to isolate the Biblical examples and apply them directly to their immediate situation. Thus, by appealing to the ideological theme of Scriptural literalism they were able to evoke in their audience a sense of divine mandate for the existence and continuance of slavery. They believed the institution of slavery was "directly sanctioned by both the utterance and silence of scripture."107 The Bible could not ignore an offense against God, yet no where in its pages was slavery denounced. "Instead," they contended, "we find a distinct law of permission, and an unequivocal note of favor, extended to it. The Bible would control and sanctify, but not destroy it."108

Another ideological theme serving as an imported constraint was the pro-slavery clergy's appeal to the providence of God. This stems from the inherent religious constraint discussed earlier of the southern Presbyterian's strict interpretation of the doctrine of predestination.

106 Cassells 12; see also Hamilton 12; Wilson 16-19.

107 Wilson 10; see also Thornwell National Sins, 539.

108 Wilson 12-13; see also Ross "Buffalo," 29; Ross "New York," 41-42.
Each of the sermons in this study either directly or indirectly referred to God's providential hand guiding in the founding and developing of the American nation, and even more specifically, the South. Furthermore, southern Presbyterian clerics insisted that providence had coupled the Negroes' lot to that of slavery with the obligation to serve a master and had given the South the institution of slavery as a good and merciful system of labor.\footnote{Thornwell National Sins, 532, 541; Thornwell Rights and Duties, 414; Cassells 15.} Rev. Wilson argued that slavery had long been "sustained and promoted by a long course of favorable providences."\footnote{Wilson 10.} Rev. Thornwell asserted that the providence of God had marked out the precise services expected of the slave, the lawful obligations required of the master, and that God had allotted to each their respective portion.\footnote{Thornwell Rights and Duties, 414.}

Not only did these ministers hold to the providence of God in the establishment of the relationship between master and slave, they also believed that God intended a greater good for the Negro race, the American people, and the world at large. In terms of providential good for all humanity, Cassells stated, "It may be, that God designs to accomplish some great and good part in the evangelization of the world by the christian slaves of America . . . [;] doubtlessly vast
good is designed to be accomplished by it." 112  Rev. Hendrick advocated that the American people were the beneficiaries of God providentially establishing the institution of slavery and allowing the conflict between the northern and southern sections to arise. He claimed:

The special providence of God may be seen in the existence in our midst of that one institution that has caused all the agitation [at] the present time. I mean the existence of slavery. No truth is clearer to my mind than that the hand of God is in all this matter, and that great and glorious results will follow from the existence of slavery in the United States. 113

Appealing to the providence of God provided the pro-slavery Presbyterian preachers a means of establishing and reinforcing a sense of divine purpose for the South. With southern Presbyterians already adhering to a theologically conservative position on the doctrine of predestination, the appeal to providence served to fortify community beliefs and legitimize the South's peculiar institution. If God had providentially ordained slavery and its existence in the South, then the South had been given a divine mission and direction in defending the institution itself and the southern social order.

Still another ideological theme to which the southern Presbyterian clergy appealed was the "blessings of God." As identified by the pro-slavery preachers, these blessings of

112 Cassells 14.
113 Hendrick 11.
God, like the "providence of God" theme, encompassed the slaves, the masters, and the civilized world. Concerning God's blessings upon the slaves, Rev. Wilson contended that the institution of slavery was "one of the colored man's foremost sources of blessing" and was responsible for "saving a lower race from the destruction of heathenism."\textsuperscript{114} Slavery also served, they argued, as a blessing of God in terms of its impact upon the Kingdom of God.

The number of professing Christians among the negroes of the South is greater than all the converts in all the heathen lands in all the missionary stations on the globe combined. Thus more souls will be saved by the existence of slavery than has yet been saved by missions.\textsuperscript{115}

Ultimately, each of the southern Presbyterian pro-slavery ministers saw slavery as beneficial to all the civilized world and identified it as "a prime conservator of the civilization of the world."\textsuperscript{116} Rev. Palmer believed the blessing of God upon slavery was evident because the fruit of the land produced through the toil of slave labor fed the machinery of the world. With such a grave responsibility resting upon the South and its peculiar institution, Palmer exclaimed, "Do we not owe it to civilized man to stand in the breach and stay the uplifted arm?"\textsuperscript{117} As far as these

\textsuperscript{114} Wilson 10, 21.
\textsuperscript{115} Hendrick 11.
\textsuperscript{116} Wilson 10.
\textsuperscript{117} Palmer 10,11.
southern Presbyterian preachers were concerned, their belief in slavery and its consequences as "blessings" from God simply provided them a means of demonstrating God's approval and endorsement for the institution. Consequently, they argued, God was pleased with the South for its defense of the "blessed" institution and He would defend those who defended His cause -- slavery.

A final ideological theme to which pro-slavery Presbyterians regularly appealed was the notion of the South's responsibility to demonstrate to the slave a "paternal care." They insisted that owners of slaves were bound to guard, protect, and care for their servants as if they were children of the family.\footnote{Palmer 9-10; see also Jacobs 21; Wilson 18, 20.} Rev. Wilson stated, "The servant is, like the child, to know that the authority under which he has been placed is from above, and that the master rules him as the agent of heaven."\footnote{Wilson 18.} The Presbyterian clergy of the South expected their slave-owning parishioners to prepare their servants for heaven in the same way they attended to the religious instruction of their own children. They must "administer a firm, consistent, orderly,
paternal government," mingling mercy with justice.\textsuperscript{120} According to Rev. Jacobs, the "Christian master should feel an interest for them [the slaves] . . . [as] he feels for his children."\textsuperscript{121}

Appealing to the theme of paternal care enabled southern Presbyterian preachers to call upon the South to protect their slaves and slavery as they would protect their own family. By using this theme the clergy were able to cast the institution of slavery in a humane light. Instead of presenting slavery as just a system of labor, paternalism viewed slaves as an extension of the family. As a part of the family, then, the South had to protect, defend, and care for its slaves and slavery. The ministers communicated to their congregations the South's religious responsibility and accountability to care for their slaves and defend the institution of slavery.

\textsuperscript{120} Wilson 20; see also Thornwell Rights and Duties (this sermon was preached at the dedication of a new church building erected for the religious instruction of Colored People); Minutes, First Presbyterian Church, Clarksville, TN, June 1, 1860. The report of a committee in the church addressed the religious instruction of Colored People.

\textsuperscript{121} Jacobs 21.
Conclusion

The constraints, or influences upon rhetoric, in the antebellum South were numerous and diverse. Those elements functioning as constraints, both inherent and imported, influenced the masses as well as the individual in virtually every aspect of life. The constraints were cultural, political, societal, judicial, philosophical, theological, ecclesiastical, industrial, commercial, moral, and racial. They seized the attention of the antebellum South and compelled the thoughts of the southern mind. These myriad forces that shaped the South as a whole affected southern Presbyterians in the same way. The early nineteenth century reverberated with change, and for Presbyterians in the South so much change was unsettling at best.

The transportation and industrial revolutions radically altered commercial endeavors, and the Second Great Awakening forever transformed the impact of religion in America. The philosophy of the enlightened rationalists clashed with the theological presuppositions of the Calvinists, while the emphasis upon the freewill of man took precedence in both religion and society. Ecclesiastical divisions occurred in the major evangelical denominations of the nation, the most consequential being that of the Presbyterians. The Presbyterian denomination separated into Old School and New School factions with Presbyterians in the South belonging
predominantly to the Old School and adhering to a worldview dominated by predestination. On the sociopolitical front, southerners were inundated by the Missouri Compromise, the Tariff of 1828 and nullification, the Compromise of 1850, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the Dred Scott decision, and social reform. Religiously motivated, reform in the South did not undermine or challenge the southern society as was the experience in the North. Instead, southern social reform served to strengthen the existing social order and foster a greater sense of unity among southerners.

By examining the imported constraints, those brought to the situation by the rhetor, investigation of the selected sermons revealed how southern pro-slavery Presbyterian preachers developed and supported their ideas. The clergy employed three particular argumentative strategies within these sermons. First, they manipulated the context by means of expansion, broadening the parameters of the argument or issue. Second, they manipulated the context through contraction, reducing the significance of an argument or issue, usually by focusing on the effects rather than the causes. Third, they employed the strategy of tribal piety. The clergy offered a "higher calling" that served as a common bond for antebellum southerners. By using the strategy of tribal piety, the ministers provided a unifying rationale that assured southerners of God's directing hand.
Analysis of the sermons also revealed four primary ideological themes to which the southern Presbyterian preachers appealed. They appealed to the belief in a literal interpretation of Scripture and made extensive use of Biblical examples. The appeal to Scriptural literalism evoked a divine mandate for the continuance of slavery in the South. A second ideological theme identified was the providence of God. Appealing to the providence of God provided southerners with a sense of divine purpose for slavery's existence and the South's defense of it. The blessings of God provided another ideological theme. Identifying God's blessings upon slavery and the South implied a divine approval and endorsement of the institution of slavery and the South's involvement with it. Finally, the clergy appealed to the notion of paternal care. Appealing to the paternal responsibilities of slave-owners and southerners as a whole suggested familial obligation and divine accountability to care for the slave and protect the South's peculiar institution.

All of these changes and challenges played a significant part in affecting the mind of the southern antebellum Presbyterian. Charles Sydnor attributes considerable significance to the dissonance produced in the southern mind because of this change taking place so fast in the North, and relatively slowly in the South. "The booming cities, the factories, the multiplying railroads, the expanding
population, and the changing attitudes and viewpoints above Mason and Dixon's line account for tension between North and South\textsuperscript{122} to a greater extent than just the changes taking place in the South. Presbyterians in the South at times must have felt as though they were trying to board a moving train from a standing position. The South as an agrarian culture and economy supported by slave labor was considered by many in the North "as an obstacle to American social and economic progress and as a moral pariah."\textsuperscript{123} All of these factors functioned as constraints upon the people of the antebellum South, and "any suggestion that accepted practice and institutions be fundamentally changed" met with effective resistance.\textsuperscript{124}

\textsuperscript{122} Sydnor 332.

\textsuperscript{123} Sydnor 332.

CHAPTER 4

THE AUDIENCE

Introduction

The third constituent of the rhetorical situation is the concept of audience, those who can be constrained into action or decision.1 Technically, Bitzer defines an audience as "those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change."2 He further states that rhetoric always requires an audience, even if a person is simply engaging himself or an ideal mind as the audience, because "... rhetorical discourse produces change by influencing the decision and action of persons who function as mediators of change."3 Those persons who function as the audience in a rhetorical situation may also

2 Bitzer, "Rhetorical Situation" 8.
3 Bitzer, "Rhetorical Situation" 7-8.
serve as an audience for other simultaneous rhetorical situations. Thus, varying rhetorical situations may compete for the attention of those comprising an audience. In addition, the rhetorical audience may be incoherent in its composition and purpose, and incognizant of its existence, responsibilities, and powers.

To more fully understand the rhetorical situation, it is necessary to examine who comprises the audience, the audience's interaction with the exigence(s) and constraints, and the audience's ability to act as a mediator of change within the rhetorical situation. Human societies and individuals are not docile and static. People are constantly engrossed in planning, laboring, making, responding, adjusting, and overcoming. They not only interact with and are constrained by their physical and social surroundings, but also actively engage a plethora of mental environments including "the whole field of ideas, images, meanings, symbols, laws, rules, conventions, attitudes, feelings, interests, and aspirations that constitute the mental world" — all of which impacts the individual's perceptions, decisions, and actions.

4 Bitzer, "Rhetorical Situation" 12.

The audience's perception of the exigence is proportionate to their personal involvement with the situation. People usually have a strong affiliation with an exigence in which they are personally involved. As Bitzer observes, "[T]hey feel somehow responsible for it or understand that the exigence or its modification will bring about good or evil for them, their families, or friends." It is this potential for modification that is most significant about the concept of audience in the rhetorical situation. If members of an audience believe their response has the capability of modifying the exigence, then they are more likely to respond. Bitzer concludes that as this "modification capability increases, readiness to respond increases." 

Two factors influencing an audience's capability to modify the exigence are the level of difficulty involved and the degree of risk involved. Generally speaking, the greater the level of difficulty, the less likely an audience will positively modify the exigence. The more complex and intricate the exigence(s) and constraints are, the more difficult it becomes for an audience to modify the exigence/situation. Similarly, the readiness of an audience to respond to the exigence diminishes as the degree of risk involved increases. Where an audience stands to lose much by

6 Bitzer, "Functional Communication," 32.

7 Bitzer, "Functional Communication" 33.
responding to the exigence, it is less likely to attempt modifying the exigence. For those in the antebellum South, the exigence(s) and constraints were extremely complicated and arduous, making positive modification of the exigence doubtful and remote. Interestingly, however, the South perceived the greater potential of loss to be in not responding to the exigence. In the southern mind, not responding to the exigence would have meant acquiescing to the demands of the North and forfeiting the southern way of life and all for which the South stood. Ultimately, the South considered the collapse of the southern way of life a greater loss and threat than the dissolution of the Union.

**The Public**

Knowledge about the specific audiences that heard each of these sermons is not available. Therefore, rather than examining the immediate audience of each sermon, I intend to analyze the South as a whole, as an extended audience or what Bitzer refers to as the "public." In 1978, Bitzer published an essay entitled "Rhetoric and Public Knowledge" in which he articulated his understanding of the public. Bitzer

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8 Bitzer, "Functional Communication" 33.

defines a public as "... a community of persons who share conceptions, principles, interests, and values, and who are significantly interdependent[,]" needing "reassurance that their thoughts and actions are authorized."10 The "public" refers to the collective human experience of a community which serves as the authoritative ground for decisions and actions, "the source or carrier of truths and values thought to be indispensable."11

Historically, publics have formed within geographical confines, as in the antebellum South, and have been sustained by cultural contexts and communication which perpetuated their traditions.12 Bitzer suggests that these "publics" are called into being by consequences; consequences being the "effects" of an act or action which affect persons beyond those immediately involved in the act or action. Those "affected by such consequences comprise a public."13 The consequences, however, are those which can be described as serious, extensive, and enduring. Since a "public" depends upon consequences and contextual circumstances, publics exist as real and not abstract. Publics are "concrete entities comprised of people experiencing [their surroundings];" and their composition and nature will alter according to the

10 Bitzer, "Rhetoric and Public" 68.
11 Bitzer, "Rhetoric and Public" 69.
12 Bitzer, "Rhetoric and Public" 71.
13 Bitzer, "Rhetoric and Public" 77.
circumstances of their situation."14 Thus, "[t]he public is called into existence in response to exigencies produced by public transactions. . . ."15

Rhetoric, according to Bitzer, creates and articulates the truths and values held by the public. It serves as an instrument to test those truths and values, and gives voice to the interests and principles inherent in the public. In essence, rhetoric sustains and maintains public knowledge in the life of the community.16 The existence of the public requires community, and the community necessitates communication.17 Public knowledge is the knowledge necessary for public life and is actually possessed to a certain degree by all who live in the community. Bitzer, however, is not equating public knowledge with private information made available to the public, nor does he mean mere public opinion. Public knowledge "may be regarded as a fund of truths, principles, and values which could only characterize a public."18 This public knowledge gives the community competency to affirm truth and value, and to

14 Bitzer, "Rhetoric and Public" 78-79.
15 Bitzer, "Rhetoric and Public" 80.
16 Bitzer defines a community as "a group of persons developed through local face-to-face interactions, united in sentiment and interest, and caring for the well-being of one another" ("Rhetoric and Public" 79).
17 Bitzer, "Rhetoric and Public" 80.
18 Bitzer, "Rhetoric and Public" 68.
empower decision and action; it characterizes a competent public.\textsuperscript{19}

The theoretical connection between Bitzer's concepts of "audience" and "public" comes in his statement that "audiences serve, or stand in for, publics."\textsuperscript{20} Bitzer suggests that audiences can function as representatives of a larger entity, i.e., the public. He makes a distinction between the ideas of audience and public in the following manner:

A rhetorical audience consists of persons who have the capacity to mediate change so as to modify positively the exigencies in rhetorical situations. The public must be conceived to be a different thing . . . which in principle has the power to authorize change.\textsuperscript{21}

To "authorize change" essentially means the power to approve, warrant, and license, since the public is the entity which stands to gain or lose as a result of decisions and actions.\textsuperscript{22} In addition, the stability of the public exceeds that of a given audience due to mutually held public knowledge, similar community experience, and mutually encountered consequences.

Bitzer builds his concept of "public" from John Dewey's notion of "public" as set forth in his work \textit{The Public and

\begin{itemize}
\item Bitzer, "Rhetoric and Public" 83.
\item Bitzer, "Rhetoric and Public" 73.
\item Bitzer, "Rhetoric and Public" 73.
\item Lloyd Bitzer, personal interview, 20 March 1990.
\end{itemize}
Its Problems: An Essay in Political Inquiry. Dewey believed a public emerged "only in periods of marked societal transitions when crucial alternative issues stand out, such as that between throwing one's lot in with the conservation of established institutions [and traditions] or with forwarding new tendencies." Bitzer takes Dewey's idea of public and adapts it to a situational application by extending the parameters of Dewey's definition along with Bitzer's understanding of the audience. Dewey's definition of the public uniquely fits the antebellum South. It was definitely a period of "marked societal transitions" when "crucial alternative issues" stood out. Though divergences existed within the antebellum southern society, the distinct cultural unity of the South and experiential commonality of southerners remained its principal characteristic of identity. The distinctive unity of the antebellum South allows the particular audiences of the sermons included in this research to be examined collectively as the public. The antebellum South, as a "public," held to a public knowledge which enabled it to affirm social values and truths and empower community decision and action.


The identifiability of a public depends upon the extent to which it articulates significant portions of its knowledge and is mutually experienced. "The public that would maintain its identity will learn, rehearse, and celebrate what it knows; it will not only experience its personal facts, but also will display and sometimes dramatize them." 25 A significant characteristic of the southern antebellum "public" was the closed nature of southern society, or what Waldo Braden referred to as "oneness." 26

The Nature of a Closed Society

In 1964, James W. Silver addressed the concept of a "closed society" in his article entitled "Mississippi: The Closed Society." 27 Silver's understanding of the closed society emerged from his experience as a professor at the University of Mississippi during the violent situation surrounding the admission of James Meredith in 1962, the university's first black student. A closed society "may apply to a region, a state, an ethnic group, a neighborhood, ...


a cult, a team, a religious order, a gang, a church congregation, a lodge, a fraternity, or even a family." 28 In a closed society there is a constant stream of propaganda, what Silver refers to as the "true faith." Loyalty to it is demanded and nonconformists are not tolerated. Characteristic of the closed society is "the refusal of its citizens to believe that there is any view other than the orthodox." 29 When people establish strong emotional, philosophical, and ethical connections and act together without questioning, Braden believed they approached "oneness." Braden elaborated this concept of "oneness" which characterized a closed society by describing the people involved:

They accept common articles of faith. They respond to common symbols and ritual. They control the means of communication and limit access to outside information. They regiment and discipline the membership. They silence, ostracize, or drive out opposition . . . . [They] move forward together, reinforcing each other, and intensifying emotional involvement. 30

Such an analysis accurately describes the closed southern antebellum society. Although divergences existed across the South, the most notable element remained its unanimity. All of the southern antebellum states were predominantly agricultural and felt the force of slavery as

29 Silver 33.
a system of labor and social control. In fact, the biracial nature of the population provided the dynamics underlying the preponderance of action and decision in the South. Southerners wanted to be told and to believe that they were good Christians, law abiding citizens, and faithful adherents to the southern way of life. Thus, strong resistance existed to outside influences such as newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets, all of which were considered subversive. Southerners failed to see much evidence of the Christian virtues of truth, humility, and love behind the barrage of northern advice, warning, and denunciation, even though the North claimed religious motivation for its actions. The "holier-than-thou" attitude which suggested that northern consciences were more enlightened than those of the South left a much graver impression on the southerner.

I have already considered the specific theological and ecclesiastical events as discussed in Chapter Three under "religious constraints." It is my intent at this point to emphasize the elements that united the antebellum South as an audience/public. It would be impossible to examine the


34 Sydnor 241.
southern antebellum society without addressing religion's impact. The objective of discussing religion in this chapter is to indicate how it unified the South by confirming southern values and how it helped establish the antebellum South as a "public."

Southerners were incensed that the North would assume a posture of religious superiority. Religion saturated southern antebellum society and orthodox Christian theology was woven into the very fabric of the South's value system. Lester Scherer notes that in the antebellum South "church and society were inseparably mixed." In the aftermath of the Second Great Awakening, religion had a permeating effect on southern society. In contrast to the religious fluidity of the North and West, Samuel Hill, Jr., argues, southern religion provides a picture of homogeneity and solidarity. Since southern religion and society were so intertwined, much of southerners' social contact was conducted in and with the local church. Values espoused by the southern church became infused into the southern social fabric through the establishment of accepted social mores and


ideals. In fact, northern concern about the decline and deficiency of moral power in the evangelical pulpit of the day (1848) prompted the *Southern Presbyterian Review* to defend the South and southern religion in an 1848 issue.

We shall content ourselves with answering, that we fear they are too true of the pulpit in many parts of our country, but less so, we believe, in our own Southern Church than anywhere else. We do not mean to boast; but we thank God, here, both church and pulpit have been far less corrupted and disturbed by external influences and inward dissensions than in other localities; and we believe have been preserved in greater simplicity, purity, and power.3

In the antebellum South "[r]eligion became identified with an essential public reaffirmation of social solidarity. Going to church became not merely a religious act, but a civic responsibility." The special social unity of the antebellum South, according to Emory Thomas, was held together by the glue of religion:

> Perhaps Southern churches are the best place to look for the origins of cultural nationalism in the Old South. There the Southern mind, conditioned by reverence for the concrete and characterized by assertive individualism, blended with a unique religious tradition to mold intellectual and cultural life."

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38 Hill *Southern Churches*, 171-72.


Widely shared theological convictions across the South helped shape its homogeneity and maintain its identity as a "public." Beliefs such as the sinful nature of human beings (the total depravity of man), the necessity of a personal conversion experience, and the promise of attaining perfection in the life to come served as "public knowledge" and helped promote a religious orthodoxy which fashioned a powerful social unit.

In understanding the religious fiber of the South, one must not overlook the force of Evangelical Protestantism in its shaping and preservation. Evangelical Protestantism was the type of Christianity and religion with the greatest following and influence in the South. The Encyclopedia of Religion in the South refers to it as "a religious mood, belief, and movement within the Protestant tradition . . . . In the 19th century, it became one of the determinants of Southern culture and . . . a major factor in defining the region's uniqueness." Joel Carpenter explains that Evangelical Protestantism during the early 1800's emphasized "voluntary religious affiliation, interdenominational cooperation, aggressive evangelization, instantaneous conversions, zealous abstemious life-styles, and revivalistic

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47 Thomas 21.

millennial expectations." Donald Mathews observes that those holding to Evangelical Protestantism in the antebellum South espoused six essential beliefs: (1) the Bible is the absolute authoritative guide to faith and morals; (2) justification by faith; (3) sanctification, a way of life which consciously struggles to subdue the self in an effort to serve God; (4) a commitment to evangelize, i.e. to share one's faith with others; (5) belief in eternal life-after-death and God's establishment of the millennium; and (6) emphasis upon the individual's personal experience of the truth of the Christian message. The beliefs associated with Evangelical Protestantism permeated the antebellum South and became a part of the "public knowledge" held by the "public" in the South. The three denominations most closely associated with Evangelical Protestantism and espousing the core of beliefs identified with Evangelical Protestantism (discussed above) were Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians.

Prior to the late colonial period, southerners could best be described as irreligious and at best apathetic toward church related matters. But the religious tenor and shape of the South radically changed around the middle of the


eighteenth century with the arrival of Presbyterian, Baptist, and Methodist revivalists. Revivals and revivalism took the South by storm, causing the South to become increasingly religious. The membership of the Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian denominations in the South multiplied as the majority of southerners identified themselves with the region's religious establishment, the "Big Three." Southerners were nurtured in a religious tradition that was "fundamentalist in basic doctrine, evangelical (revivalistic) in homiletics, puritanical in ethics, congregational in church governance, and Calvinist, Wesleyan, or Arminian in theology." Based on the figures of the Census of 1850, James Farmer estimates there was one minister for every 594 free people in the South, further indicating the strong religious tone and nature of the antebellum South.

As the three major southern Protestant denominations grew, more churches emerged. As more churches emerged, they became more orderly and exerted more control and influence. A rising demand for better educated ministers prompted most denominations to establish colleges and seminaries. Well known for their theologically trained clergy, the

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"7 Wilhoit 256.

"8 Farmer 12."
Presbyterians led the educational way in church-related colleges and seminaries in the South. Prior to 1830, the three church colleges in the South were Presbyterian. Between the years of 1830 and 1844, the Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists established a total of thirteen colleges in the South, and eight more colleges were started by 1861. In addition to the colleges, between 1821 and 1831, the Presbyterians established three seminaries: Southwestern Theological Seminary in Tennessee, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, and Southern Theological Seminary in South Carolina.

The religious worldview espoused by Evangelical Protestantism held such a firm grip on the southern mind by the 1830's, "that it lay ready to hand as a source of meaning for interpreting and directing what was happening all around;" what Bitzer refers to as "public knowledge." According to Robert Bellah, every society feels compelled to measure itself by some higher domain and justify itself on more than its actions and achievements alone. It looks for verification and vindication "through its commitment to

49 Farmer 12.
50 Sydnor 295.
unrealized goals or values. For the South, those goals and values were to be found in the Holy Scriptures and could only be realized with the help of religion.

A religious ideology geared to addressing its social and cultural context is certain to mirror that surrounding context in some ways. As regards the South, the religious ideology [Evangelical Protestantism] was attuned to its social and cultural context, a fact seen no more clearly than in its bolstering and legitimating slavery. Its posture was to fixate and defend. It fixated and defended the prevailing religious outlook and expected its culture to do the same.

In general, religion in the antebellum South concerned itself with private order to assure and ensure the existing public order. According to Evangelical Protestantism, converting individuals was the mission of churches and the only means of "accomplishing God's will for society, which was thought to consist of two kinds of virtue: personal holiness and the acceptance of one's lot in life." Personal holiness allowed for the establishment of a moral and upright society, while accepting one's lot in life assigned accountability to the individual for responsibly taking his or her place in a divinely ordained order.

Historians have customarily grouped Southern Evangelicals together because of their numerous theological

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53 Hill The South and the North, 76.

54 Hill The South and the North, 74-75.
commonalities. Their differences were more a matter of variation than of substance. The distinctions of southern Presbyterians were primarily their stricter interpretation of the doctrine of predestination and a greater formality in their public worship services. Though the other two major denominations of the South held to predestination in varying degrees, the Presbyterians held to it more dogmatically. Due to their more rigid interpretation of predestination, southern Presbyterians placed more significance upon accepting one's lot in life.

Religion in the antebellum South played a major factor in unifying, equalizing, and empowering southern whites into a solid social unit, what Bitzer refers to as a "public." According to Samuel Hill, Jr., the southern church exerted a "powerful influence in uniting the South, calling it to a moral course of action, and legitimating its values. . . . [I]t was a public and a publicly significant institution in the antebellum South."\(^5\)

Again it should be noted that many sociopolitical factors, like specific theological and ecclesiastical events, were discussed as constraints in Chapter Three. The political elements addressed here are designed to highlight the consolidating force southern politics played in the antebellum South. The objective of discussing southern politics in this chapter is to examine how it unified the

\(^5\) Hill The South and the North, 75.
South by solidifying the southern position before the Civil War.

In reference to politics and a solid South, Samuel Hill, Jr., observes that "political unity, which bordered on uniformity, flavored the southern personality." The polarized and isolated by sociopolitical constraints (as discussed in Chapter Three), antebellum southerners concerned themselves with politics "as a statement of power relationships, and [it] was the vehicle through which they expressed their ideology and attempted to transform it into action." The most important and pervasive influence affecting southern politics was the development of an economy founded upon plantation agriculture and slave labor. "[T]he rapid westward expansion of cotton and caste laid the foundation for southern unity."

With the economic growth and expansion, the agrarian democracy of the southern cotton kingdom flourished. Popular political participation increased during the early 1800's, and "during the middle years of the 19th century was the

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56 Hill Southern Churches, 11.
57 Thomas 28.
highest it has ever been in southern history." Bartley argues that one of the primary reasons for this display of vigorous democracy in the antebellum South stemmed from the general agreement of white southerners on substantive issues. White southerners agreed on issues like the promotion of agriculture, the advancement of slavery, and defending the South from the meddling efforts of anti-slavery advocates. Commenting on southern unity, John C. Calhoun stated in 1838,

The Southern States are an aggregate, in fact, of communities, not of individuals. . . . These small communities aggregated make the state in all, whose action, labor, and capital is equally represented and perfectly harmonized. Hence the harmony, the union, the stability of that section which is rarely disturbed [the South], except through the action of this government."

Calhoun's analysis of society and social interaction in the antebellum South supports Bitzer's understanding of a "public" and gives evidence suggesting the existence of "public knowledge."

Individual state governments were of primary import to the antebellum southerner. State governments of the antebellum South chiefly concerned themselves with protecting


60 Bartley 1151.

people, property, and an orderly system within which individual conflicts could be resolved in proper fashion. Little attention was given to improving the intellectual and economic lot of the citizens. Ultimately, the individual citizen's success or failure rested upon his own shoulders. "[T]he state practically never initiated, planned, or supervised schools, roads, religious institutions, charity, or other such services for the people, though it permitted and in a measure encouraged private individuals to undertake these tasks." Basically, southern state governments held to a policy of non-interference which encouraged a spirit of independence.

The biggest political issue uniting southerners centered upon slavery. It emerged as the decisive element on every issue southerners addressed. "For many southerners slavery . . . provided the foundation for their civilization; it became 'the very foundation of liberty.'" The Missouri controversy proved to be a landmark in the development of political ideology for pre-Civil War southerners. The debate over the Missouri controversy channeled all the issues and events concerning sectional political differences into one stream -- the slavery question. According to James Hodges, the issues involved the following:

62 Sydnor 77.

63 Cooper, Jr. The South, 60; see chapter 3, "The Flowering of Southern Sectional Politics," pp. 43-97.
the division of power between North and South, slavery, the pattern of the growing national economy, and, more significantly, the meaning of American democracy and its values. . . . The debate impelled southerners to define their political views in relationship to the North and to articulate their separate political culture. In its defense of slavery the South slid into a political orthodoxy and social conservatism."

The southerner's economic interests, traditions, and very way of life made it virtually impossible for him to consider the institution of slavery in a detached, objective fashion. In addition, the South had for some years felt betrayed by the North and what little faith existed in northern disinterestedness and fair dealing had faded long ago. While the North requested, even demanded, the South to perform a costly and revolutionary act in freeing the slaves, southerners tasted the bitter mixture of northern self-interests and self-serving efforts involving protective tariffs, federally funded northern roads and canals, and the divisive words and votes of northern congressmen."

Conclusion

The audience, the third element involved in the rhetorical situation, is comprised of those who are


"Sydnor 241."
influenced by the constraints within the rhetorical situation and who can serve as mediators of change to alter the exigence. The homogeneity and unity of those in the antebellum South makes it possible, even necessary, to consider antebellum southerners as an extended audience, or what Bitzer refers to as a "public." Their shared interests, values, principles, conceptions, and interdependence made them a public. They were affected by their physical and social surroundings; submerged in an environment of agrarian-based slave economy, white controlled social structure, and a feeling of political and economic betrayal by the North. The collective human experience of antebellum southerners not only influenced them, but also served as the authoritative ground for their perceptions, decisions, and actions. The distinctive cultural unity of the South and experiential commonality of southerners allows them to be considered collectively, as an extended audience or public.

The people of the antebellum South were deeply immersed in the religious, social, and political milieu of the day and felt a grave responsibility to protect what they believed to be an ideal society in the South. The difficulty and complexity of the exigence(s) encountered by southerners in the first half of the nineteenth century virtually doomed

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66 Bitzer, "Rhetorical Situation" 8.
them in terms of effectively modifying or resolving the exigence(s). However, their fear of forfeiting the southern way of life and abdicating what the South represented prompted southerners to respond to the exigence(s) confronting them. As James Farmer observes, though southerners were defensive and faced an uphill battle, they increasingly presented their case with confidence as they approached the impending secession.68

In describing the South James W. Silver characterized the culture as a "closed society."69 Though his analysis focused on the South during the 1950's and 1960's, the characterization also fits the southern antebellum society. Several notable elements of unanimity existed in the South before the Civil War. Southerners held staunchly to religious and social orthodoxy. They espoused it as the "true faith," rejected anything other than the orthodox viewpoint, demanded loyalty to it, and refused to tolerate any deviation from it. Economically, southerners depended on agriculture. Socially, whites enjoyed an equality and control that rested on a black "mudsill."

In terms of religion, Evangelical Protestantism with an undercurrent of predestination held a firm grip on the southern mind and produced a framework for establishing, interpreting, and confirming southern values. Politically,

68 Farmer, Metaphysical Confederacy 5.
69 Silver, "The Closed Society" 3-34.
the issue of slavery solidified the southern position and served as the decisive factor on every issue southerners faced. Slavery was a part of the very fiber of southern culture and provided the dynamics for most of the action and decision in the antebellum South. The institution of slavery functioned as a powerful force upon which the southern economy and society rested; southern politics protected, and southern religion defended the institution. Combined with the political posture of the South and the religious beliefs of the people, the structure of southern society virtually assured that rhetorical choices within the situation would be very narrowly constrained.
CHAPTER 5

THE PRO-SLAVERY SERMONS

Introduction

While America during the Nineteenth century experienced what James Farmer refers to as a "crisis of values," the South in general expressed reaction and paranoia. Southerners were notably defensive, but during the years leading to secession they increasingly presented their case with confidence.¹ Their growing confidence must be attributed largely to the rhetorical efforts of leading religious spokesmen. These southern clerical stalwarts introduced sophisticated theories to defend their racial position.² The clergy, predominantly of the more educated ranks, directed their efforts toward apologetics and polemics


on behalf of the southern region. They busied themselves with chores of "defending, shoring up, [and] bolstering — the very essence of reactionary [defensive] behavior."³

In "The Rhetorical Situation," Bitzer states that a form of discourse can be established and can develop a power of its own, and thus, "the tradition itself tends to function as a constraint upon any new response in the form."⁴ This can be clearly seen in the sermonic discourse employed by southern antebellum clergy. Southerners revered the pulpit, for what was said from the pulpit had a divine sanction. The form of discourse known as the sermon wielded great power in southern society. Thus, when sermons in defense of the South's peculiar institution were delivered, they served as a powerful means of vindicating and fortifying the South's position and the southern way of life.

Shelby Foote observed that ministers in the antebellum South functioned as spokesmen for the "grassroots" or common folk. In fact, had they not agreed with and expressed the opinion of slavery held by the vast majority of southerners, they would not have remained in the South very long.⁵ The one who represents, or speaks for the public, according to Bitzer, knows what the public knows and speaks what the

³ Hill The South and North, 80-81.
⁵ Shelby Foote, telephone interview, 19 May 1991.
public would speak: "[A] spokesman for the public possesses and employs as premises of discourse those truths, values, interests, and principles located in the public's tradition and experience -- wisdom authorized or warranted by the public and part of the public domain."6 In a community where there is uniformity of accepted truth and interest, there would also be uniformity of expression among the spokesmen. Spokespersons echo the public's terms and maxims, sustain the public's traditions, and carry out the public's rituals. In fact, "discourse created by a public speaker and judged by a public audience will be accredited to the extent that it completely engages or articulates the knowledge and interests of the public."7 The spokesman is able to define the tone of the culture and "represents the public both to itself and to others . . . because he is immersed himself in the tradition and experience of his public."8

The Concept of Stasis

The remainder of this chapter will focus on the analysis of stasis within the selected sermons. Since the southern

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7 Bitzer, "Public Knowledge" 76.

8 Bitzer, "Public Knowledge," 74.
Presbyterian clerics' pro-slavery position took the form of a deliberative debate, albeit at long-distance, with the Abolitionist forces, an examination of the sermons' invention from the perspective of *staseis* is especially appropriate, since it allows the researcher to focus on the ministers' specific arguments as a response to the argumentative positions taken by Abolitionist critics. Lawrence J. Prelli reinforces that rationale. He notes that "Ameliorating a rhetorical exigence will entail taking a 'stand' or 'stands' toward the problem(s) the exigence presents. In this sense, all rhetorical situations will contain points of *stasis* -- issues -- that require resolving rhetoric." An analysis of *stasis* allows the critic to ask and answer the question of what the orator believed to be the central issue in the subject being discussed and provides for locating the *rhetorical* task that the orator tried to accomplish. Thus, Prelli argues that "*stasis* points need to be searched out systematically."

In *The Communication Handbook: A Dictionary*, Joseph DeVito defines *stasis* as "that point on which an argument turns; the major issue around which an argument revolves;"

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9 *Staseis* is the plural of *stasis*.


11 Prelli 44.

12 Prelli 46.

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generally, a static state, a state of inactivity."\textsuperscript{13} The term \textit{stasis} comes from the root \textit{STA}, the basic meaning of which is "to stand;" all its cognate forms have this idea implicit within their meaning. In their definitive dictionary of classical Greek, Liddell and Scott interpret \textit{stasis} as meaning a "placing; setting; a weighing; the posture of standing; the place in which one stands; a faction or discord; and quarrelsome."\textsuperscript{14} The concept \textit{stasis} surfaced early in Greek culture and thought. One of the first instances occurs in a Greek lyric poem from the sixth or seventh century B.C. In that poem, \textit{stasis} refers to the point of origin and changing point of the wind. Later Greek writers spoke of "the stasis of the water, the stasis of the air, the stasis of the bowel, and the stasis of politics."\textsuperscript{15}

As already discussed in chapter one, the term was used to describe the civil class conflicts that eventually produced democratic government in the Greek polis. Plato explained \textit{stasis} as the opposite of "to go," "walk," or "move." Centuries later, Ptolemy, the Greek astronomer and


mathematician of the second century A. D., used *stasis* in referring to the four phases of the moon.\(^\text{16}\)

These usages suggest how the meaning of *stasis* has evolved. Initially it referred to the physical act of standing or placement. But as the word developed and broadened, it embraced the cognitive facets of "standing," i.e., mentally or rhetorically taking a stand or position.

Insofar as present evidence indicates, the application of *stasis* as a rhetorical concept began with Aristotle. In his work entitled *Physics*, Aristotle used the term *stasis* in the development and description of his theory of motion. In this context, he referred to *stasis* as a disruption, or a severing of motion in which the continuity of movement is broken. It is not the absolute termination of motion, though a previous movement is terminated by it. Rather, it is the pivotal point between a previous motion and a counter motion. The *stasis* is the moment in which a movement reverses, the point of change. It functions as the turning point. Thus *stasis* is "a transitory state, a temporary standing in conflict, undecided and wavering, between contrary impulses . . . [,] the movement contrary to the movement after which it has occurred."\(^\text{17}\)

Aristotle's scientific studies in the area of motion and *stasis* provided the basis for the rhetorical concept of

\(^{16}\) Dieter 345-48.

\(^{17}\) Dieter 349-50.
stasis. As used in rhetoric, the term relates to a set of contradictory statements. As one statement moves in a particular direction and another statement moves in the opposite direction, a stasis lies between the statements. In fact, if there is no stasis, there is no argument. The function of stasis, then, "is that of enabling one to locate the key issues in a given case or set of circumstances." The concept of rhetorical stasis appears in Aristotle's Rhetoric. In that work, he suggested several levels of reasoning that could be the significant point at issue in an argument. He classified these levels of reasoning under four different headings:

(1) If you maintain that the act was not committed, your main task in court is to prove this. (2) If you maintain that the act did no harm, prove this. If you maintain that (3) the act was less than is alleged, or (4) justified, prove these facts, just as you would prove the act not to have been committed if you were maintaining that.

Thus, there are four possible points of dispute, or stasis. Stasis could be at the point of "fact," the point of "injury," the point of "importance," or the point of "justice." The more concrete titles which were later given to these four staseis are: fact, definition, quality (or, 18 Dieter 353-54.


justification), and objection. The stasis of fact is employed when an individual is accused of doing wrong and s/he denies the "fact" that s/he did it.\textsuperscript{21} The stasis of definition involves disputing the label of an act because of what the label implies.\textsuperscript{22} For example, if an individual is accused of stealing an object, the person may argue that his/her act by "definition" was not stealing, but borrowing. If the accused cannot deny the act, nor that the act by definition was wrong, the stasis of quality (justification) is used by demonstrating extenuating circumstances. To illustrate, if a person is late to a meeting, s/he cannot deny the fact of the tardiness, nor can s/he define the tardiness as anything other than being late; however, the person may "justify" his/her lateness due to extenuating circumstance like traffic, car trouble, or a personal emergency. Finally, the stasis of objection is exercised when the accused believes that his/her opponent is out of place, or has no right to bring accusation.\textsuperscript{23} In a court of law, the stasis of objection is used to point out an error in procedure, or to free the defendant on a technicality, e.g., failing to read the accused his/her rights, or not having a proper search warrant before seizing incriminating evidence


\textsuperscript{22} Aristotle 79.

\textsuperscript{23} Kennedy 306.
from a place of residence or business. A *stasis*, therefore, could occur "at any point in the proceedings at which the contesting parties met 'head-on' by taking opposing positions on a question at hand."\(^{24}\)

Stasis theory reached its fullest development at the hand of Hermagoras of Temnos. By that time, a hierarchy of importance emerged in the selection of *stasis*, with each defense being stronger than the one which followed.\(^{25}\) In fact, Kennedy observed that the process of determining the *stasis* in a given situation "could be viewed as one of elimination of each *stasis* successively."\(^{26}\) Thus, one would first attempt to use the *stasis* of fact. If that was not possible, then one would employ the *stasis* of definition, next the *stasis* of quality, and finally the *stasis* of objection. Kennedy suggests that by putting the *stasis* of objection last in order, "Hermagoras seems to have regarded it as a last resort and a kind of petty legalism."\(^{27}\)

So viewed, *stasis* not only provides a means of classifying an argument, but also aids the critic in at least two ways. In the first place, *stasis* marks what the speaker considered to be the best arguments that could be used at a given point in the controversy. As Prelli observes,

\(^{24}\) Nadeau 376.
\(^{25}\) Kennedy 306.
\(^{26}\) Kennedy 308.
\(^{27}\) Kennedy 308.
isolating the central points of contention enables identification of what arguments would be most appropriate to a specific issue. Furthermore, by discovering the staseis the researcher is able to determine what the rhetor believed to be the most significant points/issues on which the audience's decision should hinge. Analyzing the staseis suggests what should be the most advantageous line of argument and directs the attention toward "what could be said to constrain an audience's judgements about controversial subjects."

However, the concept of stasis is useful to the critic in at least one other way. It has been seen that, beginning in Hellenistic times, rhetoricians ranked these four staseis in an order of strength, with fact the strongest position and objection the weakest. By viewing these ministers' use of stasis longitudinally, it should be possible to determine from the patterns of usage the relative strength of the clergy's arguments from the beginnings of the period under study right up to the eve of the Civil War.

Analysis of Stasis in Pro-slavery Sermons

Ten sermons are examined as to the staseis employed by the minister who preached the sermon. The rhetorical

28 Prelli 46.
artifacts studied are religious orations which were preserved in pamphlets and/or books. The opinions expressed in these sermons were so popular at the time they were delivered that the sermons appeared in printed form for mass circulation, most of them at the request of the local southern population and/or the local newspapers.

Though the ten different pro-slavery sermons were examined individually, the information produced by the investigation is not presented on a sermon by sermon basis. Instead, the major points of dispute within each sermon are discussed categorically under the four major classical staseis, i.e. fact, definition, quality, and objection. It should be noted that throughout the remainder of this chapter the researcher will make extensive use of block quotations in order to more fully represent the counterarguments and ideologies expressed in these pro-slavery sermons. Though these preachers and their sermons may be considered verbose by contemporary standards, one should remember that this was the style of expression common in the antebellum South, both oral and written.

1. Stasis of Fact

One of the most common attacks fielded in these sermons was the charge that "slavery is a sin," and the stasis most commonly used in answering this attack was fact. In *Servitude, and the Duty of Masters to their Servants*, Rev.
Samuel J. Cassells questioned how slavery could be considered a sin at that time, when seventy-five years earlier "not only slavery, but the African slave trade was advocated upon grounds of humanity!" In effect, slavery had been considered an act of humanity toward the Africans and their abject condition. Those who had previously encouraged slavery, according to Cassells, "now denounce slavery as sin, and the slave-holder as unworthy the sacraments and institutions of Christianity!" Furthering his denial of slavery as a sin, Cassells stated it must remain sanctioned since the Decalogue recognized and addressed the issue of slavery. Furthermore, to hold that slavery was a sin would be to "affirm that the Moral Law sanctions iniquity!"

Continuing the same line of reasoning, Cassells argued that

The New Testament, then, left the subject of slavery just where it found it. The only influence it exerted upon it was that of imparting to it its own spirit and character. It taught masters justice, and kindness towards their servants; and it taught servants obedience and fidelity towards their masters.

In similar fashion, Rev. W. T. Hamilton applied the stasis of fact by denying that slavery was a sin. "I take the ground distinctly and emphatically, that domestic

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30 Cassells 4.

31 Cassells 11.

32 Cassells 12.
servitude as found among us at the South (however undesirable it may be in some respects) is not, in itself, sinful." Hamilton concluded that if there was sin associated with slavery, it was not in the nature of the relation itself, but in the inappropriate care and neglect of duties. Based upon the sermon's scriptural text, which encourages justness in the relationship under the watchful eye of heaven, Hamilton rationalized as follows:

[If a master treat his slaves as herein required, he discharges his whole duty as a master; he may continue a master, continue to hold slaves so treated, and yet be a good man, and a worthy member of the church of Christ: which could not be, were slave-holding sinful in the sight of God.]

Furthermore, after considering significant Old Testament characters like Abraham, Joseph, and Moses, and God's dealings with them in reference to slavery, Hamilton reasoned that "What God sanctions cannot be in itself, and essentially, evil." Thus, Hamilton concluded that the Bible and God undeniably recognized and regulated the institution of slavery.

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33 W. T. Hamilton, The Duties of Masters and Slaves Respectively: or, Domestic Servitude as Sanctioned by the Bible (Mobile, AL: F. H. Brooks, 1845) 6.

34 Hamilton 7.

35 Hamilton 11.
Frederick A. Ross, in his sermon to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Buffalo, New York, argued along the same lines: "the relation of master and slave is not sin per se . . . [since] God nowhere says it is sin." Interpreting the Scriptures according to the letter of the law, Ross asserted that since there was no scriptural injunction forbidding slavery, there could be no sin in the relation between master and slave.

In *Duties of Masters to Their Slaves* Rev. Cassells addressed another line of Abolitionist attack which denied the relationship of master and slave as valid or to be officially recognized. Once again employing the *stasis* of fact, Cassells contended that slavery did in fact exist in the social status quo with presumption in its favor.

The relation between master and servant among us is a reality . . . . The relation exists, and whether men will hear it or no, still the word of God will proclaim it, "Masters give unto your servants that which is just and equal, knowing that ye also have a master in Heaven." [*Colossians 4:1*]

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36 Though Rev. Ross ministered in the South, both of the General Assemblies of the Presbyterian Church which he addressed were annual national conventions meeting in northern cities, i.e. Buffalo, NY, and New York, NY.


38 Cassells 3.

39 Cassells 10.
In *Union and Slavery* Rev. John T. Hendrick spoke to the question of whether slavery should be an issue upon which to base fellowship and communion. Hendrick argued that slavery was not by nature sinful. Rather, slavery resulted from sin, a consequence of God's judgement passed upon man's sin. In particular Hendrick referred to the sin of Ham, Noah's youngest son, as the reason for slavery's existence. Because slavery "resulted from man's own sin, depravity, and folly," rather than caused it, God did not deem it an issue upon which to base fellowship. Hendrick cited Biblical examples of Job and Abraham who owned slaves and yet God fellowshipped with them and blessed them. Jewish law given by God and even history itself showed the prevalence of slaves and slavery. Neither Christ nor the Apostles "interfered with the existing relations of master and servant, but in all cases, taught the relative duties of both master and servant. . . . "

Therefore, slavery should not be an issue upon which to base fellowship and communion because "slavery was fully recognized and tolerated in the three great periods of the Church, in the patriarchal, the Jewish, and the Christian dispensations. . . . "

Defending against this same line of attack in *The Committing of Our Cause to God*, Rev. Ferdinand Jacobs also

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41 Hendrick 22-23.
used the *stasis* of fact by denying any design on God's part to exclude slave-holders from fellowship or ministry:

The sum of the argument is this. Slavery has existed in the Church from the earliest ages; has been recognized under every dispensation, as one of the permanent relations of life; has been treated as properly a subject of rule; the holders of slaves are recognized as the servants of God, are spoken of in the highest terms of approbation, and are admitted to intimate communion with God.42

Rev. Joseph R. Wilson answered the Abolitionist attack that slavery and Christianity were incompatible due to God's disapproval of the institution. In *Mutual Relation of Masters and Slaves as Taught in the Bible*, Wilson denied the accusation by means of the *stasis* of fact. Wilson examined the specific words used in the Bible that addressed the slave/master relationship. He presented an etymological study of the two significant Greek words occurring in the scriptures which described slave and master relations, *doulos* and *despotas*. Of the word *doulos*, which is translated "slave," Wilson stated,

> It refers us to a man who is in the relation of permanent and legal bondage to another: this other having in him and his labor the strictest rights of property. The word is never employed to indicate the condition of a mere hireling. It points out a dependent who is solely under the authority of a master."43


The word *despotas*, the scriptural opposite of "slave" according to Wilson, is rendered as "lord," "possessor," "owner," or "master" throughout the scriptures. Thus, the Bible, commonly accepted by Presbyterians as God's standard for truth and humanity's guide to Christianity, clearly acknowledged the existence of slaves and masters and connected the two in relationship with each other in the kingdom of God.

Now, we have already seen that the Holy Spirit employs words which He has intended to be understood as distinctly enunciating the existence of domestic servitude -- that He has sent to all the world a volume of truth, which is indisputably addressed to men who hold slaves and to the slaves who possess masters -- and that, from the connections in which these highly suggestive words occur, He has included slavery as an organizing element in that family order which lies at the very foundation of Church and State."14

Further developing this line of thought, Wilson affirmed that slavery was sanctioned by divine authority and "by both the utterance and silence of Scripture."15

One of the primary contributing factors that enabled southern Presbyterians like Rev. Wilson to hold such a dogmatic position was their belief in Biblical literalism. Consonant with that belief, God could not disregard prevailing error, crime, or sin, and any grave offence against God would be clearly denounced in the Scriptures; however, slavery was no where denounced in the Bible.

" Wilson 7.

" Wilson 10.
Throughout the scriptures, Wilson argued, "slavery is never once condemned, never once even discountenanced. On the contrary, provision is made for its perpetuation . . . ." Thus, slavery not only was compatible with Christianity, it was also approved by God. To support his claim, Wilson cited the Ten Commandments, Levitical law, and the Apostle Paul, and concluded:

"Let neither master nor servant dispute the righteousness, doubt the wisdom, or fear the reproach of the relation which they sustain towards each other. It is not sinful. It is not inexpedient. It is not degradatory [sic]."

2. Stasis of Definition

As discussed earlier, the stasis of definition is used when the conflict or "contrary impulse" is over the identifying label of an act because of what the label implies. Of the sermons in this study, the boldest and broadest application of this stasis occurred in The Rights and Duties of Masters by James H. Thornwell." As one of the three major focuses in this sermon, Thornwell attempted to re-define the true pressing issue confronting both the

"6 Wilson 11.
"7 Wilson 14.
North and the South. In offering another definition, Thornwell shifted the locus of the central issue in the conflict away from slavery per se to broader issues of human social interaction of all kinds. Since Thornwell could not deny the existence of slavery, he simply changed the definition of the issue which he believed to be at the heart of the conflict. Strategically he broadened the scope of the issue to make slavery appear minuscule by comparison. By re-defining the issue, Thornwell removed its pungency and depicted slavery as a consequence rather than a cause.49

His response was:

It is not the narrow question of abolition or of slavery --- not simply whether we will emancipate our negroes or not; the real question is the relations of man to society --- of States to the individual, and of the individual to States; a question as broad as the interests of the human race ... In one word, the world is the battle ground --- Christianity and Atheism the combatants; and the progress of humanity the stake.50

The question most commonly answered by means of the stasis of definition dealt with the nature of slavery. Thornwell presented the Abolitionists' description and opinion of slavery as follows:

It is common to describe slavery as the property of man in man --- as the destruction of all personal human rights, the absorption of the humanity of one individual into the will and the power of another. "The very idea of a slave," says

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50 Thornwell Duties, 405-06.
Dr. Channing [an Abolitionist], "is that he belongs to another, that he is bound to live and labour [sic] for another, to be another's instrument, and to make another's will his habitual law, however adverse to his own . . . ." It violate's [sic?] all human rights, not incidentally, but necessarily, systematically, from its very nature.

Employing the *stasis* of definition, however, Thornwell defined slavery differently. "What is it that makes a man a slave? We answer the obligation to labour [sic] for another . . . independently of the provisions of a contract. The right which the master has is a right, not to a man, but to his labour [sic]. . . ." In Thornwell's *Our National Sins*, a sermon delivered on a state-called day of fasting in South Carolina, he argued that a person's labor could be owned as capital, but the person could not be owned as a thing. Thornwell explained, "Slavery is nothing but an organization of labour [sic], and an organization by virtue of which labour [sic] and capital are made to coincide."

Similarly, Rev. Samuel J. Cassells used the *stasis* of definition to defend the southern position on slavery against northern attack. Countering Abolitionist arguments, Cassells denied that slavery was a "traffic in human blood; as

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51 Thornwell *Duties*, 408-09.

52 Thornwell *Duties*, 414.

property in human flesh, &c. These ideas, however, are all imaginative; when we remember that slavery refers to service not to flesh -- to labor, not to human nature." According to Cassells' definition, slavery referred to the right of one man to the service of another. Therefore, it was not so much the man himself who was enslaved, as it was his labor. Cassells defended his definition of slavery so adamantly that he considered any understanding of slavery which extended beyond the boundaries of labor alone to be pernicious and erroneous. Life belonged only to God and could never be under the power of mere mortals. Slavery did not include rights to the slave's life, possessions, or conscience -- only his service. Though the master kept in his possession the person of the slave, it was only as the best means of securing the slave's service."

Rev. Hamilton exercised the stasis of definition when he addressed an attack proclaiming slavery inconsistent with the law of love. Hamilton denied the attack by stating, "the abuse of a thing is no part of the thing itself," that is, just because some may act unlovingly does not mean that slavery is an unloving institution. The law of love, according to Hamilton's definition, required people "not to abolish the existing ranks and distinctions of condition in

" Cassells 6.
" Cassells 5-6.
" Hamilton 15.
society, but to treat each person in a manner suited to
[their] relative positions. . . .\textsuperscript{57} Thus, love's aim was
not to remove the inequalities of society, but to treat
others with the kindness due their position in society.

Rev. Ferdinand Jacobs defended the South's peculiar
institution by fielding an Abolitionist attack which claimed
God disapproved of slavery because it was evil. In answering
this accusation, Jacobs acknowledged that the institution of
slavery was an evil, but only in the sense that it was a
consequence of the curse of sin and therefore a natural evil:

\begin{quote}
Slavery, . . . as we have constantly admitted, may
be a natural evil, as poverty is an evil . . . .
[However,] there is not one word in the New
Testament -- nor in the Old, -- tending to sunder
this relation, as a moral evil, but many words
(tending to regulate, to cement, to perpetuate
it.\textsuperscript{58}
\end{quote}

According to Rev. Jacobs, evil could be classified as either
natural or moral. Natural evil was something with which
humanity must live as a consequence of sin's entrance into
the world, e.g. sickness, death, poverty, floods,
earthquakes, and slavery. Moral evil consisted of actions
and attitudes associated with natural evil. Jacobs' distinction between the two classes of evil rested upon the
issue of choice. Natural evil was a providential repercussion from Adam's original sin and could not be
prevented or altered by mere mortals. Moral evil, on the

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\textsuperscript{57} Hamilton 15. \\
\textsuperscript{58} Jacobs 17.
\end{flushright}
other hand, represented choices of disobedience to God, providence, and divine law.

Jacobs furthered his distinction between natural and moral evil by examining the tenth Commandment which states, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, . . . thy neighbor's wife, nor his man-servant, nor his maid-servant" (KJV). Jacobs asserted, "In this commandment the right of property in the slave, is not only recognized, but is specifically defended, on the immediate authority of God . . . ." In defending slavery, Jacobs argued that God not only gave His stamp of approval upon the institution, but also indicated that slavery was not a moral evil. Slavery, therefore, stood merely as a dispensational component in God's providential plan and God-fearing people should respect it. This required Christians, according to Jacobs, to faithfully discharge all their responsibilities in all of life's relations in which providence had placed them.

Closely akin to the Abolitionists' claim that slavery was an evil was the attack that slavery was a transgression or sin. As discussed earlier, this line of argument was one of the most common and several different staseis were used in countering it. In his sermon in Buffalo, New York, Rev. Frederick A. Ross replied to the accusation by simply denying the fact of such a claim (see above). However, in a sermon

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59 Jacobs 16.
preached in New York, New York, in 1856,60 Ross employed the stasis of definition. Ross argued that sin existed on two planes, transgression of the law and exertion of the self-will. Since no divine law existed prohibiting the existence of slavery or the relation between master and slave, there could be no sin on this plane. Exerting one's self-will meant not submitting to the providential will of God. Thus, slavery could only be sin if the slave or the master rebelled against the providential lot in which God had placed either of them, exerting the self-will above God's will.61

In this same sermon Rev. Ross also answered an attack which asserted that no man had the right to rule over another. Using the stasis of definition, Ross went back to the Book of Genesis to establish what he believed to be the origin of human government where God said to the woman, "Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Gen. 3, KJV). He described this passage in the following way:

There, in that law, is the beginning of government ordained of God. There is the beginning of the rule of the superior over the inferior, bound to obey. . . . Adam, in his right, from God, to rule over his wife and children, had all the authority afterwards expanded in the patriarch and king. This simple, beautiful fact, . . . solves the


problem, whence and how has man right to rule over man.62

Ross equated the relation between master and slave with that of the husband/wife relationship and the parent/child relationship. The essence of Ross' argument rested upon distinctions within the concept of "rule" and its definition. For him, "rule" did not mean to dominate, but to have authority over another. Thus, there was no problem in governments or individuals exercising authority over others.

The stasis of definition was once again employed by Rev. Ross to counter the attack that slavery was a self-serving oppressive system. Ross argued that slavery was in reality not self-serving, but a trust given by God to care for the infidel.

Southern masters . . . hold from God, individually and collectively, the highest and the noblest responsibility ever given by Him to individual private men on all the face of the earth. For God has entrusted to them to train millions of the most degraded in form and intellect, . . . to train them, and to give them civilization, and the light and the life of the gospel of Jesus Christ.63

3. Stasis of Quality

When an individual cannot deny the fact of an event or accusation, nor that the act or accusation has been given an proper identifying label, the next course of action would be


to argue that the act or accusation was less harmful than alleged by demonstrating extenuating circumstances. This is done by implementing the stasis of quality. Rev. Samuel Cassells used this particular stasis in answering the same attack fielded by Rev. Ross above, that is, that the South maintained slavery out of self-serving interests. Where Ross redefined it in terms of a God-given trust, Cassells countered the attack by referring to the burden and responsibilities produced by the system of slavery. Cassells held that such a great burden and responsibility far outweighed any possibility and potential for self-serving interests.

No, it is not a selfish and sordid interest that we are serving. Ours is the great task of bearing immense responsibilities, of carrying the burdens of others, and of providing for the moral and social wants of an exotic race . . . .""A common Abolitionist line of attack was that no good can come from slavery. Though the circumstances surrounding slavery were not without flaws and problems, argued Rev. John T. Hendrick, God brought "good out of evil -- turning the cause into a blessing -- and causing the wrath of man to praise him [God]."" The "good" noted by Hendrick referred to the evangelism produced by the existence of the South's peculiar institution. In fact, Hendrick stated, "No truth is clearer to my mind than that the hand of God is in all this

""Cassells 15.

""Hendrick 12.
matter, and that great and glorious results will follow from the existence of slavery in the United States." He contended that more souls had been saved by the existence of slavery than through any other mission effort to that point. One in every six slaves had professed Christianity. "How amazing and how gracious the overruling providence of God, in making use of the slave trade, as a means, indirectly, of saving more souls than all the combined missionary operations of all Christendom, within the last three hundred years . . . ."

Rev. Ferdinand Jacobs also employed the stasis of quality to refute the charge that slavery violated the essential elements of human existence. At first reading, Jacobs appeared to be using the stasis of fact because he simply stated "all men are not created equal" and "liberty is not an inalienable right." However, Jacobs' development of the argument pivoted upon the stasis of quality. Jacobs was not so much denouncing liberty and equality as he was asserting those concepts as ideal states and denying the reality of those ideal states at that point in time. Jacobs took issue with the qualifier "all" which indicated the force of the assertion "all men are created free and equal."

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66 Hendrick 11.
67 Hendrick 12.
68 Jacobs 7.
69 Jacobs 7.
Ideally, Jacobs argued, all men were created free and equal according to God's design. But the entrance and effect of sin made that pragmatically impossible. He pointed out other countries and governments, finances, living locations and conditions; and then stated unequivocally, "INEQUALITY is now the law of our being." Though the circumstances surrounding mankind's life in this world may not be ideal, they did not violate the essential elements of human existence.

Rev. Samuel Cassells addressed a similar line of attack when he asked the question, "Are there any righteous grounds upon which a man may be under obligation to serve another for life? or, in other words, can slavery have a foundation in natural justice?" Cassells' use of the stasis of quality offered several sets of circumstances and conditions that he believed permitted the existence of such an institution. First, a man may invest his service just like capital, as with Jacob who bound himself to Laban for fourteen years to acquire the hand of Rachel in marriage. This he labeled "natural capital." Second, a man may obligate his service when he "hires himself to another for a given period." Third, debts make a man a slave to his creditors. The debtor could then either work to pay off the debt or be sold according to Hebrew Law. Fourth, a criminal

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70 Jacobs 8.

71 Cassells 6.
could be punished by the state in terms of slavery for life. Fifth, throughout history captives of war, if not killed, were enslaved. Finally, a child by birth took the social condition of the parents and therefore could be born into slavery according to Exodus 21:4 and 7.  

Three of these conditions or causes of enslavement, Cassells said, were involved in the institution of American slavery. In warring among themselves, native Africans enslaved each other. Those who enslaved their captives sold their "natural capital," or labor, to others. Eventually, those enslaved and brought to America helped perpetuate the institution by bearing children into the condition of slavery. Though the circumstances of enslavement may have been an injustice in man's eyes, Cassells believed that the "natural justice" of God's plan may have been evangelizing the uttermost parts of the earth. Thus, the righteousness produced by evangelizing slaves provided for Cassells sufficient grounds to justify the obligation of one man to serve another man for life.

It may be, that God designs to accomplish some great and good part in the evangelization of the world by the Christian slaves of America. . . . Their bondage is a mere circumstance. It may, or may not fall off; but doubtlessly vast good is designed to be accomplished by it.  

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72 Cassells 6-9.  
73 Cassells 9.  
74 Cassells 14.
In his sermon to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in New York, New York, Rev. Frederick Ross answered an attack which argued that slavery had only produced national trouble and agitation. Ross agreed that strife and conflict had resulted over the institution of slavery, but he counterargued that the trouble and agitation was sent by God for the good of both sections -- to bring the northern and the southern mind into harmony and to bless both the white and the black man. "I see him [God] more honored in the South to-day [sic] than he was twenty-five years ago; and that higher regard is due, mainly, to the agitation of the slavery question." According to Ross, the agitation forced southern divines to search the scriptures in order to validate their peculiar institution and try to prove the very truth and justice of its existence.

In an attempt to diminish the strength of the recurring Abolitionist attack upon the evil of slavery and its sinfulness, Ross pointed to the circumstances of the North's involvement in slavery and attempted a comparison between the slave and his African counterpart. Where Rev. Samuel Jacobs chose to use the *stasis* of definition and divide evil into "natural evil" and "moral evil," Ross used the *stasis* of quality in an effort to show the extenuating circumstances surrounding slavery. If northerners truly believed that slavery was evil, Ross wondered why they had no problem

buying southern products made available by means of southern slavery. Ross declared:

You know you are purchasing cotton, rice, sugar, sprinkled with blood, literally, you say, from the lash of the driver! Why do you buy? What's the difference between my filching this blood-stained cotton from the outraged negro, and your standing by, taking it from me? You . . . daily stain your hands in this horrid traffic. You hate the traitor, but you love the treason.76

Later in this same sermon, Ross furthered his counterargument against slavery being evil by drawing the following comparison:

[T]he southern slave, though degraded compared with his master, is elevated and ennobled compared with his brethren in Africa. Let the Northern man learn these things, and be wise to cultivate the spirit that will harmonize with his brethren of the South, who are lovers of liberty as truly as himself.77

Interestingly, Ross did not deny either that slavery was evil or the definition of evil, but rather by means of the stasis of quality contested the argument along two lines. First, if slavery was evil, both the North and the South were guilty by association. Secondly, by comparing the southern slave with the black man in Africa, slavery could be shown to not be evil if the slave was in better circumstances and in a better condition than his pagan barbarian kinsmen. Thus, circumstantially, southern slavery could not be evil.

76 Ross "Buffalo," 17.
77 Ross "Buffalo," 29.
Also confronting the issue of slavery's morality was Rev. James H. Thornwell. Using the *stasis* of quality, Thornwell dealt with the providential circumstances of universal evil. His evaluation was that ultimately everyone is a pawn in the providential hands of God. There was very little one could do with the circumstances in which he found himself. Therefore, morality could never be evaluated by the circumstances, but always and inevitably on a personal, individual basis in relation to God. True morality, then, was based on the individual's responses to the providential circumstances in which God had placed him.

Slavery is a part of the curse which sin has introduced into the world, and stands in the same general relations to Christianity as poverty, sickness, disease or death. In other words, it is a relation which can only be conceived as taking place among fallen beings -- tainted with a curse. . . . The real question is, whether it is incompatible with the spiritual prosperity of individuals, or of the general progress and education of society.  

Thus, rather than judging the morality of slavery by the conditions and institutions of fallen man or by social opinion, Thornwell advocated that slavery's morality be evaluated on the basis of "how" the individual slave and slave-owner related to God within the framework of slavery itself. If the quality of that relationship was good, it mitigated any bad results from slavery.

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78 Thornwell "Duties," 420, 422.
Another attack against which Thornwell applied the *stasis* of quality was one that probably raised the hackles of every God-fearing southerner -- that northerners were somehow more holy than southerners. Thornwell retorted, "they may say to us, *Stand by*, we are holier than you; but the day of reckoning must come." He reasoned that holiness was determined by, and varied primarily according to, the standards by which it was measured. Further, he argued that under the northern system of employment all would be well as long as capital sought labor. But, when labor started asking for capital, i.e. men seeking work, Thornwell believed hostility would erupt over the conflicting interests.

We desire to see no such state of things among ourselves, and we accept as a good and merciful constitution the organization of labour [sic] which Providence has given us in slavery. Like every human arrangement, it is liable to abuse; but in its idea, and in its ultimate influence upon the social system, it is wise and beneficent."

Basically, Thornwell advanced the argument that the circumstances involved in maintaining a socially and economically stable institution (as slavery did in the South) was a more holy cause and effort than what was espoused and advocated in the North.

Getting more at the heart of Abolitionist intent, Rev. Ross responded to the attack that slaves should be

"Thornwell "National Sins," 541.

"Thornwell "National Sins," 541.
emancipated and slavery abolished. Both Rev. Ross and Rev. Palmer addressed this attack. Ross, using the *stasis* of quality, contended that the descendants of the New England "kidnappers," i.e. slave traders, should assist southern slaveholders by monetarily matching their investment and manpower loss. Ross stated,

"You, gentlemen, made the best of the bargain. And you have kept every dollar of your money from the charity of emancipating the slave. You have left us, unaided, to give millions. Will you now come to our help? Will you give dollar for dollar to equalize our loss?"  

According to Ross, if the North wanted the slaves emancipated, they should be willing to help defray the cost of the southern economic loss, especially since the North had benefitted so handsomely from the South's peculiar institution. Thus, Ross believed the circumstances surrounding the North's involvement in introducing slavery into the United States made them equally financially liable and accountable for the demise of the institution.

Also answering this same line of northern attack, Rev. Benjamin Palmer asked, "With this institution assigned to our keeping, what reply shall we make to those who say that its days are numbered?"  

As the sermon title, *The South: Her Peril and Her Duty* (New Orleans: The True Witness and Sentinel, 1860) 8. It should be noted that this sermon was also titled "Thanksgiving Sermon" and "Slavery: A Divine Trust" in subsequent printings. However, they are all three the same sermon.
Peril and Her Duty, might suggest, Palmer strove to establish in the first part of the sermon what he believed to be the South’s providential trust, "to conserve and to perpetuate the institution of domestic slavery as now existing [1860]." Interestingly, Palmer built his entire sermon upon the stasis of quality and developed his counterarguments progressively from several different angles. Palmer's first argument stemmed from the "principle of self-preservation."

Need I pause to show how this system of servitude underlies and supports our material interests? ... how this system is interwoven with our entire social fabric? ... how it has fashioned our modes of life, and determined all our habits of thought and feeling, and molded the very type of our civilization? How, then, can the hand of violence be laid upon it without involving our existence?"

Palmer clearly articulated what was at the very heart of the slavery controversy for the South -- the South's way of life. No matter how southerners defended slavery, the South had a vested interest in protecting and preserving its way of life, and slavery was at its very core.

Continuing to utilize the stasis of quality, Palmer's second line of argument denied slavery should be abolished because southerners were duty bound "as the constituted guardians of the slaves themselves." Palmer believed the worst calamity that could befall southern slaves was the loss

83 Palmer 7.
84 Palmer 8.
85 Palmer 9.
of protection provided them under the southern patriarchal system. Under this system the slave was held in similar relation as a child to a parent." Thus, abolishing slavery, according to Palmer, would be like sending out a child all alone and unprotected.

Still using the stasis of quality, Palmer built his third argument upon the South's duty to the civilized world. He noted that "all branches of industry fall back upon the soil." The northern agricultural dependence on the South and the southern industrial dependence on the North created a "partnership, as no people ever thrived before since the first shining of the sun." Furthermore, many major European countries depended upon the agricultural products of the South, causing Palmer to assert, "Strike now a blow to this system of labor, and the world itself totters at the stroke."

A final argument advanced by Palmer, again making use of the stasis of quality, was the South's responsibility to "defend the cause of God and religion. . . . To the South the highest position is assigned, of defending, before all nations, the cause of all religion and of all truth."

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86 Palmer 9-10.
87 Palmer 10.
88 Palmer 10.
89 Palmer 11.
90 Palmer 11-12.
From Palmer's perspective, to create any major alteration from the predestined design of the accepted status quo meant challenging the providence of God. Therefore, the South in essence had a spiritual mandate not only to accept the providential lot which they had been given, but to defend it as they would defend truth or God Himself. According to Palmer's admonition, neither the North nor the South should attempt to control the providence of God, but rather the providence of God should control man.91

Rev. Benjamin Palmer capsulized his four-faceted argument in terms of "duty." He held that slavery must not be abolished because of the circumstances of duty which rested with the South. Explaining his line of reasoning, Palmer made the following claim:

[It] touches the four cardinal points of duty to ourselves, to our slaves, to the world, and to almighty God. It establishes the nature and solemnity of our present trust to preserve and transmit our existing system of domestic servitude, . . . wherever Providence and nature may carry it. This trust we will discharge in the face of the worst possible peril.92

Throughout Palmer's sermon, the theme of providential duty and trust charged his arguments with not only God's approval of slavery, but also obedience to God's will and His desire to preserve slavery.

91 Palmer 12.
4. **Stasis** of Objection

When the accused believes that his opponent is out of place argumentatively, or has no right to bring accusation at all, the *stasis* of objection is used. A modern example of this *stasis* in action occurs in the courtroom when one lawyer objects to the other lawyer's legal procedure or line of questioning. This *stasis*, however, is the weakest point of contention at which to take on an issue, primarily because it addresses process and procedure rather than content and issues. Understandably, then, the *stasis* of objection was the least exercised *stasis* in these selected sermons because it offered the weakest stance of opposition. In fact, only two of the clergy employed the *stasis* of objection, Rev. W. T. Hamilton and Rev. Frederick A. Ross.

Rev. Hamilton observed that there were a number of Abolitionists who held that if the Mosaic Law justified slavery, it would also have to justify polygamy. Hamilton responded by arguing that "the cases are not parallel." In addition to Mosaic Law, regulations guiding the institution of slavery were given to the Apostles in the New Testament, thereby renewing God's sanction upon slavery under the New Covenant. Furthermore, under the New Covenant God withdrew His sanction of polygamy "and declared it to be adultery for a man to have more than one wife at a time."  

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93 Hamilton 11.
94 Hamilton 12.
Hamilton based his argument condemning polygamy upon Matthew 19, which states, "whosoever putteth away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, and marrieth another, committeth adultery" (KJV). Thus, Hamilton employed the *stasis* of objection by declaring the analogy between the justification of slavery and the justification of polygamy to be invalid and not comparable. Since slavery and polygamy could not be truly paralleled in the New Testament, Hamilton argued that Abolitionists had no right or grounds to draw inferences based upon the comparison. Basically, Hamilton declared the Abolitionists "out of order." He also used the *stasis* of objection in answering the Abolitionists' efforts which encouraged slaves to run away to the North. Hamilton argued that the same providence of God which had placed Africans in the trust and care of slave-owners (southerners), also established the government and law of the land. Since the laws of Congress and the decisions of the Supreme Court of the United States supported the fugitive slave laws, Hamilton claimed that Abolitionists had no right to go against God's established government or encourage others to disobey the law.\(^5\)

In Buffalo, New York, at the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, men of the North with Abolitionist leanings wanted a committee to investigate particular issues and questions pertaining to slavery as it existed in the

\(^5\) Hamilton 24-25.
southern Presbyterian churches. Specifically, they wanted to know (1) the number of slaveholding members of the churches and the number of slaves they owned; (2) of the total number of these slaves, how many were still enslaved due to the laws of the states, obligations of guardianship, and demands of humanity; and finally, (3) how the southern churches regarded the sacredness of marriage vows among the slaves, and to what extent and manner were religious provisions made for the spiritual well-being of the slaves. In response to this request that the southern churches should submit to an investigation and inquiry by such a committee, Ross said:

Sir, it is just simply a fixed fact: the South will not submit to these questions. No, not for an instant. We will not permit you to approach us at all. . . . As gentlemen you may ask us these questions, -- we will answer you. But, ecclesiastically, you cannot speak in this matter. You have no power to move as you propose."

Conclusion

Antebellum southerners held a deep reverence for the church and the pulpit. The preacher who occupied the pulpit served as a representative of God and the words spoken from the pulpit had a divine sanctioning. Ministers and their sermons wielded a great deal of influence in southern society. Thus, the clergy came to function as spokesmen for

the people of the antebellum South -- the public. As spokesmen for the public, the clergy reflected and reinforced the South's values and sociopolitical position, and presented uncommon unity in their defense, arguments, and expressions.

Ten pro-slavery sermons from eight different southern Presbyterian ministers were analyzed in this chapter according to the staseis employed within the sermons. By applying stasis theory the researcher was able to examine the rhetorical invention within the pro-slavery sermons and investigate the pro-slavery position espoused by southern Presbyterian clergy in the form of deliberative debate. Findings and conclusions from the analysis of these sermons are discussed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Consequences of the Study

An examination of the staseis used in these sermons permits the identification of the key issues of contention between northern Abolitionists and southern Presbyterian clergy. Though argued upon different grounds and employing a variety of evidence and reasoning, three categorical issues of conflict emerged: the morality of slavery, the nature of slavery, and the superiority / inferiority of each section's spiritual condition. Each of the four major classical staseis was used at some point within the ten sermons that were studied. The most commonly used stasis was that of quality, followed by fact, definition, and objection. Though no single sermon contained all four staseis, Rev. Frederick Ross, over the space of two sermons, was the only preacher to employ all four staseis.
Analysis of the ten pro-slavery sermons revealed twenty-seven separate uses of *stasis*. Of those uses, the *stasis* of quality was employed thirty-seven percent (37%) of the time, the *stasis* of fact thirty percent (30%), the *stasis* of definition twenty-two percent (22%), and the *stasis* of objection eleven percent (11%).

The use of the four *staseis* in each of the three decades with which this study was concerned provides a new perspective on the strategy of the pro-slavery argument as developed by the southern Presbyterian clergy. Of the two sermons in this study which were preached in the 1840's, the *stasis* of fact was used forty-five percent (45%) of the time. The sermons from the 1850's and the two years of the 1860's immediately preceding the Civil War revealed a sharp decline in the use of the *stasis* of fact to twenty-one percent (21%) and twenty-five percent (25%), respectively. Similarly, the *stasis* of objection was employed twenty-two percent (22%) of the time in the pro-slavery sermons from the 1840's, but eventually was not used at all in the three sermons preached in 1860 and 1861. The decline in the use of the *staseis* of fact and objection during the twenty years preceding the war suggests that the southern Presbyterian clergy found them to be less effective in defending the pro-slavery position.

In contrast, the two *staseis* of definition and quality increased in their usage between 1843 and 1861. The *stasis* of definition was employed eleven percent (11%) of the time.
in the two pro-slavery sermons from the 1840's. In the sermons from the 1850's and 1860's, the use of the stasis of definition had increased to twenty-nine percent (29%) and twenty-five percent (25%), respectively. The stasis of quality was used twenty-two percent (22%) of the time in the sermons from the 1840's, but increased to forty-three percent (43%) during the 1850's and fifty percent (50%) in 1860 and 1861. The increase in the use of the staseis of definition and quality suggests that the pro-slavery Presbyterian ministers believed them to be the most effective in maintaining their defensive position. As the impending national breech moved ever closer, it became more difficult and less tenable to deny the facts surrounding slavery or to protest the North's interference in the Southern way of life. More and more defensive energies focused upon the shades of definitional distinction and the circumstances involved in the South's peculiar institution. By the eve of the Civil War, southern pro-slavery Presbyterian preachers apparently believed their strongest defense was to be found in the stasis of quality by arguing the extenuating circumstances surrounding slavery in the South.

The southern Presbyterian clergy's choice and implementation of stasis suggests several conclusions about their defense of the South's peculiar institution. First, recognizing that their strongest defense lay in denying the facts associated with slavery, they attempted to use the
stasis of fact wherever possible. However, since much of what was contested about slavery was observable, it made denying the data extremely difficult. The lines of defense in which the pro-slavery preachers used the stasis of fact were on a spiritual/moral level. They denied the fact that slavery was sin or evil, or that it was inconsistent with the law of love, the basis of church fellowship and communion, and incompatible with Christianity.

Second, according to classical stasis theory, if the fact of an act or event cannot be denied, then the identifying label of the act or event should be disputed because of what the label implies. The largest application of the stasis of definition was to the nature of slavery as it existed in the South. The clergymen argued that the controversy over slavery would be greatly reduced if the North had a clearer understanding and more accurate definition of slavery. Therefore, in their sermons, they attempted to shift the Abolitionist focus on slavery from "owning human beings as property" to "owning the labor of men and women." The remainder of the efforts at redefinition once again took the high moral ground in attempting to correct or clarify the northern understanding of sin and evil.

Third, the stasis of quality by its very nature offers the most versatility and the widest range of applications. The stasis of quality attempts to demonstrate extenuating
circumstances, and the ministers used it as a defense against a variety of attacks. Southern Presbyterian clerics provided justification of slavery, the humanitarian benefits of slavery, the justness of slavery, and the divine intent of slavery. All of this was based on providential circumstances beyond the South's control. The ministers apparently sought to convince northerners of the extenuating circumstances within which the South was forced to operate and recognize their efforts as just, moral, and righteous.

Finally, the least used stasis in the sermons was that of objection. However, if the staseis are ranked in a hierarchy of strength, the stasis of objection is the least effective, in part because it implicitly concedes the three staseis that stand above it. It does not call into question the content of the arguments, but the manner in which the arguments are developed and presented. When the southern Presbyterian clergy objected to the interference of northern Abolitionists in the South's way of doing things, they were no longer defending the legitimacy of slavery. Though pro-slavery Presbyterian preachers cried "foul," that argument was of little consequence to norther Abolitionists who were concerned with the immorality of slavery and its impact on the national character as a whole. Precisely because of that characterization of slavery, the Abolitionists would probably have asserted a moral right to "interfere" in the continuation of the South's "peculiar institution."
Leland Griffin observed that eventually invention runs dry and rhetoricians defending a cause, having exhausted their lines of argument, begin to repeat their stock arguments and appeals.¹ The application of stasis theory to the sermons included in the present study suggests that Griffin's claim concerning the exhaustion of argument applies to that discourse. Presbyterian clergy in the antebellum South ultimately exhausted their available means of pro-slavery defense, began to repeat their most effective stock arguments and appeals, and eventually adopted the strongest and most effective strategy of contention available to them -- the stasis of quality.

The question might be asked, "Did these ministers alter their rhetorical strategies when they addressed audiences outside of the South?" Unfortunately, there is little evidence on which to make a judgment. Of the ten sermons examined in this dissertation, only two were preached to audiences known to be comprised of both pro-slavery advocates and Abolitionist sympathizers. Both of these sermons were delivered by Rev. Frederick Ross at General Assemblies of the Presbyterian Church. The first sermon was preached in somewhat impromptu fashion in Buffalo, New York, as an apparently light-hearted reply to testimony and reports

against slavery in the South. Ross' objective in this sermon was to show that slavery was of God and good for the slave, the master, and America until providence unfolded another and better destiny. The second sermon was delivered in New York City, as an expansion of the same themes discussed in the sermon delivered in Buffalo. Ross had been challenged to argue the question of slavery from the Bible, and in so doing he attempted to offer a typical southern defense of the institution.

Ross did not attempt in any appreciable way to alter or adapt his arguments and appeals to these audiences which contained Abolitionist sympathizers. His arguments and strategies are remarkably consistent with other pro-slavery Presbyterian clerical apologists when they spoke in the South. Strategically, Ross manipulated the context of the slavery argument through the use of expansion and encouraged a moral alliance of southerners. Ideologically, he appealed to Scriptural literalism, the providence and blessings of God, and the paternal care and responsibility of southerners. From the available staseis, he chose fact, definition, quality, and objection. Ross' use of the stasis of objection is notable because he pointedly informed those of his audience with Abolitionist leanings that they had no business

meddling in the affairs of God-fearing southerners. Essentially, Ross used the same arguments and said approximately the same thing to his audiences containing northern Presbyterians that other Presbyterian clergy did to their audiences comprised of southerners. Though admittedly anecdotal, this very limited evidence suggests that southern Presbyterian preachers defending slavery did not alter their arguments and strategies when addressing audiences outside the South.

Ralph Eubanks describes the oratory of the Old South as a "rhetoric of desperation," and the present examination of the staseis employed in these sermons adds a new dimension to that characterization. For the antebellum South as a whole, the label is accurate and appropriate in identifying the rhetorical tone of the section as one of dwindling hope—isolated and alienated. Oratory was the only weapon left to the South short of the battlefield. However, the Presbyterian clerical rhetoric of the same time was not "desperate" in the same sense. It was desperate in that oratory was the only option left to them before war. It was defensive, at times aggressive, and had little, if any effect in changing the opinions of those in the North. The investigation of stasis in their sermons prior to the Civil War suggests that the clergy had to turn increasingly to

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weaker *staseis* to support their position. While they initially employed the *stasis* of fact in the 1840's and early 1850's, they eventually rested their pro-slavery arguments on the *stasis* of quality (circumstances), a weaker point of opposition according to classical *stasis* theory. However, the content of the oratory of southern Presbyterian clergy revealed real confidence and assurance, not only of the "rightness" of their position, but also of their ultimate vindication. They expressed certainty, based on a literal interpretation of the Bible, of God's support and vindication of their stance on the issue and institution of slavery. With the backing of God, the guidance of Holy Writ, and the mandate of providence, southern Presbyterian clergy confidently asserted that the South was right, that slavery was just, and that their position would ultimately be victorious. They seemed to have interpreted their responsibility to be proclaiming the "truth" as they believed God had shown it to them in the hope that the North would ignore the troublesome banter of Abolitionists and eventually see the righteousness of their point of view and their peculiar institution.

Southern antebellum Presbyterian ministers defended the South and its peculiar institution in an attempt to convince northerners and confirm to southerners the justness of the

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South's culture, values, and way of life. Ultimately, the clergy's rhetorical efforts failed to stop the impending national fracture and war. But, through their rhetoric they sought to ground the southern mind and position upon a divine foundation which provided the strength and fervor to defend slavery and the South as a "just cause" of God. Confident that the South had been entrusted with a divine mission, southern Presbyterian preachers proclaimed the justness of slavery and were certain that history and eternity would vindicate them and the South. Perhaps the eloquent James H. Thornwell summarized the clerical position best when he declared:

Let right and duty be our watchword, liberty, regulated by law, our goal; and, leaning upon the arm of everlasting strength, we shall achieve a name, whether we succeed or fail, that posterity will not willingly let die.5

Implications for Rhetoric

I

The usefulness of stasis theory suggests that the methodology would be of value in examining other discourse that is deliberative in nature. One specific application of

stasis theory might be the analysis of other pro-slavery speeches in the political and sociological arena. This would allow the comparison of rhetorical strategies and lines of argument across types of discourse which could eventually be synthesized into a larger picture of the pro-slavery position as possibly a counter-movement. Furthermore, the use of stasis theory would aid in investigating the defensive rhetoric of other situations and speakers in controversies over segregation, such as the resistance of the southern Evangelical "white pulpit" to the Civil Rights movement of the 1950's and 1960's, and the response of the South African "white pulpit" during apartheid rule to national and international pressures for integration. An application of the four general classical staseis to the analysis of the invention employed in the rhetoric of such movements would provide a consistent vocabulary that would allow comparisons of the rhetoric of these movements across studies.

II

Were the southern Presbyterian clergy controlled by their culture or did they attempt to exert control upon their culture? The issue does not seem to be one of which direction the influence flowed, but rather of adaptation to the changing dynamics of the rhetorical situation as it existed in the antebellum South. As this study has tried to show, southern Presbyterian ministers were shaped by their
culture. However, at the same time, as spokesmen for their society, they attempted to shape and create constraints that would influence their audience(s) and the southern "public." Of primary significance was their ability to convert into rhetorical terms the social and political arguments in defense of slavery fashioned out of the religious ideological themes of "scriptural literalism," "providence of God," "blessings of God," and "paternal care." By answering the attacks on slavery in religious terms, they were able to evoke a sense of divine mandate, divine purpose, divine approval, and divine responsibility for the southern institution of slavery.

III

As stated in chapter one, many of the same arguments used in defense of slavery during the antebellum years resurfaced following the Civil War to justify segregation and during the 1950's to resist integration. The recurrence of the arguments suggests they possess a life of their own, independent of the cause in whose defense they were used. One explanation for their resurrection in defense of segregation might be that, at their roots, the arguments are concerned at least as much with race as with the specific institution of slavery. It is the issue of race that connects both slavery and integration. Another possible reason for the persistence of these ideas might be the major
emphasis upon and use of the *stasis* of quality in defending slavery prior to the Civil War. Use of the *stasis* of quality focused the arguments upon the circumstances surrounding the institution of slavery, rather than on the institution of slavery itself. Thus, the arguments resurfaced and became viable again whenever there were similar circumstances surrounding the issue of race. Though neither the justification of segregation following the Civil War, nor the resistance to integration during the 1950's led to another war, in both cases ideas and arguments arose that were similar to the earlier defense of slavery. The pro-slavery Presbyterian clergy of the antebellum South helped establish an enduring way of defending the southern viewpoint on the issue of race.

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Approved:

[Signatures]

Major Professor and Chairman

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

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Date of Examination: March 23, 1994

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