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“‘With God For Us, We Must Be Successful’: Nationalism, Slavery, and Death in the Civil War Letters of Robert Franklin Bunting”

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“WITH GOD FOR US, WE MUST BE SUCCESSFUL:” NATIONALISM, SLAVERY, AND DEATH IN THE CIVIL WAR LETTERS OF ROBERT FRANKLIN BUNTING

By

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ABSTRACT

Robert Franklin Bunting (b. 1828, d. 1891) was a preeminent Presbyterian minister, church planter, and Confederate chaplain. Before serving as a chaplain, he planted multiple churches in Central Texas. As a chaplain, he wrote numerous letters to various Texas newspapers. This thesis utilizes Bunting's letters to understand how white southerners understood and interacted with the primary social issues in the Civil War. Specifically, it examines how Bunting understood nationalism, slavery, and death. His perception of these issues flowed from his religious worldview. As such, it highlights his religious interplay with these issues and contributes to furthering our understanding of religion's role in developing the cultural contours of the war.

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INTRODUCTION

Robert Franklin Bunting was a preeminent Presbyterian pastor, chaplain, church planter, and denominational leader. A Pennsylvanian native, Bunting received the Bachelor of Arts degree from Washington College and the Master of Arts and Bachelor of Divinity degrees from Princeton University and Princeton Theological Seminary, respectively. Following his studies, he requested ordination as an evangelist to Texas. As a Texas transplant, Bunting planted four churches in Central Texas. During the American Civil War, he was instrumental in the inception of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America in 1861. While initially against the secession of Texas from the Union, he entirely devoted himself to the Confederate cause during the war. Concerning his ideology, Thomas Cutrer wrote: "Although a Northerner by birth, heritage, and education, he fully embraced the Southern ethos regarding slavery, states' rights, and not only the legality but also the moral imperative of succession."[1] From 1861 to 1865, Robert Franklin Bunting was the chaplain to the 8th Texas Cavalry Regiment,

[1] Thomas Cutrer, "Introduction," in Robert Franklin Bunting, *Our Trust Is in the God of Battles: The Civil War Letters of Robert Franklin Bunting, Chaplain, Terry's Texas Rangers, C.S.A*, ed. Thomas W. Cutrer, Voices of the Civil War (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), xxiv.

more popularly known as Terry's Texas Rangers. As a chaplain, he preached, tended to the sick and wounded, and wrote letters.

Why Write a Thesis on Robert Franklin Bunting?

The Civil War letters that Bunting produced are the central focus of this thesis. He wrote Civil War letters for publication, appearing in numerous Texas newspapers. Concerning these letters, Cutrer stated that his purpose in writing his letters was "to influence congregations and civilians on the home front just as he had done when he lectured them from the pulpit before the Civil War." His letters, therefore, attempted to persuade his readers of his opinions concerning the Civil War. Bunting's letters addressed many public issues of the day, including politics, slavery, race, and religion.

The purpose of this thesis is twofold. First, it seeks to develop a microhistory of Bunting during the Civil War. Despite his historical significance, his contributions to 19th-century American religious history remain inadequately explored. His Civil War letters played a pivotal role in developing southern perspectives on the war. Bunting worked chiefly as a theologian, with this represented in his letters. As such, he viewed the war through a religious lens and often interpreted its events as having spiritual meaning. He used his letter-writing platform to shape his reader's view of the war, convincing them of its spiritual nature.

Few works exist that examine Bunting's life. Paula Mitchel Marks's popular-level work written in the 1980's, "The Ranger Reverend," was the only engagement with Bunting for many years.[2] While she did explore the religious dimensions of his letters, this was not her article's primary purpose. She used Bunting's war letters as her primary source to offer a birds-eye view of his experiences during the war. Her article remained the only significant interaction with Bunting until a collection of his Civil War letters were published in 2006. Thomas Cutrer compiled and edited the entirety of Bunting's Civil War letters. Cutrer's historical contributions are primarily in Civil War military history. He has significant experience compiling and editing Civil War letters, even collecting and publishing the letters of three of Bunting's fellow Texas Rangers.[3] Cutrer has published a number of primary sources relating to Bunting.[4] Despite these

[2] Paula Mitchel Marks, "The Ranger Reverend," *Civil War Times Illustrated* 24 (1985): 40–45.

[3] L. B. Giles, J. K. P. Blackburn, and E. S. Dodd, *Terry Texas Ranger Trilogy*, ed. Thomas W. Cutrer (Austin, TX: State House Press, 1996). While Cutrer has compiled numerous collections of Civil War letters, these are the only ones germane to this thesis.

[4] See Thomas W. Cutrer, "Bunting, Robert Franklin (1828-1891), Pioneer Presbyterian Minister and Confederate Chaplain," in *American National Biography Online* (Oxford University Press, 2008), https://doi.org/10.1093/anb/9780198606697.article.0802368; Robert Franklin Bunting, '"Emphatically a General of Cavalry': A Tribute to Maj. Gen. John Austin Wharton from Chaplain Robert Franklin Bunting, Terry's Texas Rangers," ed. Thomas W. Cutrer, *Military History of the West* 33 (2003): 13–32; Robert Franklin Bunting, '"To Lay Anew the Foundations of a Mighty Church': Robert Franklin Bunting Reports the First and Second General Assemblies of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States," ed. Thomas W. Cutrer, *The Journal of Southern Religion* 6 (2004), http://jsr.fsu.edu/2003/Cutrer.htm.

publications, no historian has analyzed Bunting's letters in-depth. Cutrer's thirty-page introduction to Bunting's letters is the only considerable interpretation of his letters. This thesis fills the historiographical gap by providing an in-depth analysis of Bunting's public Civil War letters to better understand this pivotal nineteenth-century religious figure.

The second goal of this thesis is to use his letters to explore the religious underpinnings of the American Civil War. An understanding of the spiritual dimensions of the Civil War is critical. Many soldiers and civilians in the war interpreted the events with religious eyes. Concerning historian's interpretation of the war, Benjamin L. Miller maintains, "The Civil War cannot be fully explained without understanding religion's role in the conflict."[5] Despite religion's importance in the war, relatively few works have explored its spiritual dimensions, with most of these being large-scale explorations. Harry Stout's magisterial *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War* is one such work.[6] Utilizing sermons, letters, and other primary sources, he sought to explore the moral dimensions of both Confederate and Union conceptions of the war. He weaves Bunting's letters and wartime sermons throughout his overarching narrative on the moral dimensions of the war. *God's Almost Chosen Peoples* by George Rable is similar in

[5] Benjamin L. Miller, *In God's Presence: Chaplains, Missionaries, and Religious Space during the American Civil War*, Modern War Studies (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2019), inside cover.

[6] Harry S. Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2007).

structure to Stout's book on the religious history of the American Civil War.[7] Like Stout, he utilized Bunting's war writings to explore the religious dimensions of the war. Other works are more eclectic. *Religion and the American Civil War*, edited by Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson, explores various religious issues of the war.[8] Mark Noll's *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* comprises essays all written by Noll that investigate the theological dimensions and ramifications of the war.[9]

Chaplaincy during the Civil War is another relevant angle that provides a personal interaction with how ministers reconciled the war with their faith. *Faith in the Fight: Civil War Chaplains* by John Brinsfield serves as a comprehensive resource for Civil War chaplains that lists all known denominational chaplains who served on both sides of the war.[10] *In God's Presence: Chaplains, Missionaries, and Religious Space during the American Civil War* "analyzes the religious experiences of soldiers and clergy during the American Civil War."[11] Similarly, Warren B. Armstrong's *For Courageous Fighting and*

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[7] George C. Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War*, The Littlefield History of the Civil War Era (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

[8] Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson, eds., *Religion and the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[9] Mark A. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, The Steven and Janice Brose Lectures in the Civil War Era (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

[10] John Wesley Brinsfield et al., *Faith in the Fight: Civil War Chaplains*, 1st ed (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2003).

[11] Benjamin L. Miller, 3.

Confident Dying: Union Chaplains in the Civil War explores the Civil War's religious dimensions from the perspective of Union chaplains.[12]

Some historians have examined the religious dimensions of the war through the lens of a single chaplain. A. James Fuller's *Chaplain to the Confederacy: Basil Manly and Baptist Life in the Old South* is one such work.[13] Utilizing primary sources related to Basil Manly, he uses them to explore Baptists in the antebellum South. Following this methodology, this thesis utilizes the Civil War letters of Robert Franklin Bunting to foster a greater understanding of the religious and cultural contours of the American Civil War. This thesis will not, however, restrict itself to speaking to Bunting's denominational contributions. While there is merit in framing a religious historical investigation through the lens of one's denomination, Bunting's influence extended beyond the confines of the Presbyterian church.[14] Widely published throughout Texas, his letters impacted those outside his denominational tradition.

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[12] Warren B. Armstrong, For Courageous Fighting and Confident Dying: Union Chaplains in the Civil War, Modern War Studies (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998).

[13] A. James Fuller, *Chaplain to the Confederacy: Basil Manly and Baptist Life in the Old South*, Southern Biography Series (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000).

[14] Concerning the importance of studying denominational religious history, historian April E. Holm maintains that, while "church and denominational history … has fallen out of favor, and seems old-fashioned," it is these same denominations and churches that played a significant role in the lives of nineteenth-century Americans. April Holm, *A Kingdom Divided: Evangelicals, Loyalty, and Sectionalism in the Civil War Era*, Conflicting Worlds (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2017), 4.

Method of Study

This thesis explores the Civil War letters of Robert Franklin Bunting to expand the historiography on the religious and cultural contours of the American Civil War. Furthermore, it will seek to be conversant with the relevant historiography in the field. This thesis does not attempt to arrange a chronological narrative of Bunting's activities throughout the war; Paula Mitchel Marks and Thomas Cutrer have accomplished that. This work will use Bunting's letters to expand our understanding of how religious southerners understood and interpreted vital problems and events of the war. That said, a concise chronology of events is presented to provide an adequate context for the topics covered.

Bunting came to Houston, Texas in December of 1852. Manifest Destiny undergirded his actions, with him unwilling to take any pastorate that exuded comfort or security.[15] He instead decided "to plunge into the unknown wilderness and endure the hardships and perils incident to conquering a frontier."[16] His determination to subdue the West led to numerous hardships, namely, a lack of Presbyterian churches to serve. He met and married his first wife, Nina Ella Doxey on October 18, 1853. This union was

[15] Cutrer, "Introduction," xviii.

[16] Henry Bunting, *Biography of Robert Franklin Bunting, A.M., B.D., D.D., Pioneer Texas Presbyterian Clergyman and Confederate Chaplain* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Historical Society, n.d.), 5, 9; Thomas Cutrer, "Introduction," xviii.

short-lived, with his wife passing away from yellow fever only eight months later. He, too, became sick with the disease. This ultimately led him back to the comforts that he forsook for the wild frontier: San Antonio. He took a pastorate at the First Presbyterian Church of San Antonio on January 6, 1856. He ministered there for three years before taking a leave of absence in 1859 to fundraise for his church's new sanctuary.[17] His fundraising expertise evidenced the multitude of skills that Bunting possessed. While fundraising for his church in San Antonio, he met his second wife Chrissinda Sharpe Craig. They were married on January 26, 1860, only one year before the war.[18] Chrissinda's family were Unionists, with her father being a staunch abolitionist.[19]

Bunting did not initially plan to serve the Confederacy in the Civil War and was initially opposed to secession. While it is unclear when his convictions changed, it was likely due to a chance encounter with a Confederate regiment. In November 1861, he intended to travel to Ohio to see his wife who was visiting with her family, however Union soldiers in Kentucky prevented him from entering the state. While traveling through the state, he met with former church congregants serving the Confederacy and

[17] Cutrer, "Introduction," xx.

[18] Cutrer, "Introduction," xx.

[19] Cutrer, "Introduction," xxi.

decided to serve them as a chaplain. He considered his role as a sovereign appointment and carried out his duties accordingly.[20]

As a Terry's Texas Rangers member, Bunting experienced many notable Civil War battles. Victories, like those seen at the Second Battle of Murfreesboro, became "precious mementos" for the chaplain. [21] He loved to boast about his regiment's victories on the battlefield. Bunting bragged about his regiment's actions during the Battle of Chickamauga. While Terry's Texas Rangers is seen as one of the most effective Confederate regiments, they were not undefeated and participated in pivotal battles that resulted in Confederate defeat. He mourned the loss of Confederate men in the Battle of Shiloh, lamenting that the "terrible battle" ushered in a "new era" in the war. [22]

His chaplaincy did not prevent him from fulfilling his denominational responsibilities. He took two brief breaks from his duties as chaplain to attend the General Assembly meetings of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States in December of 1861 and May of 1862. Following these meetings, Bunting returned to his chaplain duties. July of 1863 was, for Bunting, a significant spiritual turning point in the war as a spiritual revival swept through numerous southern regiments. He stated, "For

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[20] Mitchel-Marks, 40.

[21] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, January 6, 1863, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles,* 107.

[22] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, April 28, 1862, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles,* 47.

some weeks past there has been considerable interest manifested in the army of Tennessee, both at Tullahoma and Shelbyville, which has resulted in the conversion of several hundred souls, whilst many more are inquiring the way of life."[23] His role as chaplain changed towards the end of the war. In December 1864, he became the hospital chaplain in Auburn, Alabama. This season of chaplaincy, though different than that on the battlefield, still consisted of meeting the spiritual needs of others and appeared to be a task he gladly accepted as he felt that "a Chaplain can do but little in the field during the cold months."[24] He remained at this hospital until the conclusion of the war.The thesis comprises three chapters.

Chapter One explores the concept of nationalism through the lens of Bunting's letters. Although not born in the South, Bunting strongly supported the Southern cause during the war in his writing. Underlying this belief was his inheritance of American exceptionalism. He, like other southerners, believed that the Confederacy imbibed the true American vision and had inherited God's divine protection. His southern nationalistic views lay the foundation for his views on slavery and death.

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[23] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, July 15, 1863, in Robert Franklin Bunting, *Our Trust Is in the God of Battles: The Civil War Letters of Robert Franklin Bunting, Chaplain, Terry's Texas Rangers, C.S.A*, ed. Thomas W. Cutrer, Voices of the Civil War (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), 162.

[24] Robert Franklin Butning to the *Houston Daily Telegraph*, February 24, 1865, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles*, 297.

Furthermore, this chapter explores Bunting's concept of Texas exceptionalism. Stories of the "Wild West" impacted him from his youth, ultimately leading him to move to the Lone Star State. His mythic understanding of the state led him to interpret Texas and its soldiers as the most skillful and brave. While he did see all southern states as under the special providence of God, Texas was exceptional.

Chapter Two utilizes Bunting's letters to foster a better understanding of his views of slavery. Bunting's letters portray the typical southern ethos concerning chattel slavery. His conception of the slavery was theological, interpreting slavery as the providential work of God. He believed that the enslaved were inferior to whites and saw slavery through a paternalistic lens.

Slavery expanded beyond the walls of the chattel institution and became an interpretive motif for the chaplain. By conceiving of the Confederacy as a divinely chosen nation, he interpreted the North and their cause for war as an attempt to enslave southerners. By adopting a biblical hermeneutic popularized by slave religion, he recapitulated Bible stories as a way to reinterpret battles and Confederate hardships as northern oppression. Additionally, he interpreted Confederate losses as forerunners to God's judgment. Since he viewed the Confederacy as a covenantal nation, he believed that southerners had an obligation to devote themselves to God fully. By taking Bible stories that highlight Israelite enslavement due to sin and applying them to the

Confederacy, he warned his readers that, if they did not repent of their sins, the North would enslave them.

Chapter Three examines Bunting's perspective on death. His letters frequently mentioned the deceased. The war had a profound impact on how people perceived and interpreted death. Many of those who died during the war did not have a dignified passing. His letters attempted to rectify this issue by providing these soldiers with a "good death." He accomplished this by fashioning Confederate soldiers into martyrs who sacrificed their lives for a sacred cause. His nationalistic beliefs explored in Chapter One formed the foundation for this martyrdom.

Towards the end of the war, Bunting pivoted from writing about the dead to directly caring for those potentially on death's doorstep as a hospital chaplain. This season of chaplaincy for Bunting was a time of fundraising and spiritual ministering. As a fundraiser, he sought to raise enough funds to prevent the deaths of his fellow Confederates by providing them with adequate facilities. As a minister, he labored to provide a safe and spiritual environment that assuaged the grim realities of the war.

CHAPTER ONE:

Nationalism in the Civil War Letters of Robert Franklin Bunting

Religion played a significant role in shaping the southern ethos before the Civil War. It served as an interpretive framework underpinning their patriotic fervor for the Confederate nation. Concerning the religious nature of the South, Drew Gilpin Faust argued that "southerners presented themselves as the most godly of Americans," using religion as a way to legitimize the Confederacy's cause for war.[25] With the rationale for war justified as a holy cause, the South became emboldened in their nationalistic zeal.

The Civil War letters of Robert Franklin Bunting highlight the intersection of piety and nationalism during the era.[26] His patriotic and religious beliefs merged, forging a profound spiritual connection with his homeland. One of his earliest letters in the war proudly boasts of his convictions for his country: "Doubtless there are many now in Dixie, looking upon or engaged in this struggle who are Southern from necessity, because

[25] Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South*, Paperback ed., The Walter Lynwood Fleming Lectures in Southern History (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 22.

[26] Nationalism is a nebulous term that is often defined [and redefined] in a number of ways. For the purpose of this thesis, nationalism is one's strong belief in and support of a particular nation. This thesis will specifically analyze nationalism as it relates to Civil War cultural history and American religious history.

born on her soil. But I can frankly say such is not my position. I am a Southerner from choice and principle. With me it is not a matter of convenience or profit, but of conviction and conscience."[27] He was a native Pennsylvanian but signaled to his readers that his letters represented the most authentic southern perspective on the war. He purposefully embraced the southern identity and did not simply inherit it by birth.

This chapter examines the cultural and religious aspects of southern nationalism in Bunting's letters, placing him within the historiographical discourse on nationalism during the war. As a self-proclaimed southerner by principle, his letters represent the southern perspective on nationalism. Blending piety and patriotism, he fashioned the Confederacy into a nation under the divine guardianship of God. He inherited prior conceptions of American exceptionalism present before the war, adapted it, and crafted a civil religion based on various wartime symbols and events. Furthermore, this chapter analyzes how Bunting's nationalistic fervor impacted his conception of Texas. While his exceptional perspective of the Confederacy extended to all southern states, he especially perceived Texas and its citizens as the most extraordinary. Due to his high view of Texas, he believed Texans as the most exemplary southern citizens and soldiers.

[27] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *San Antonio Herald*, November 30, 1861, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles,* 9.

The Chosen People of God: The Confederacy and its Exceptional Destiny

American exceptionalism emphasizes the distinctiveness of the United States and its people. According to John Wilsey, "The idea that Americans are a people specially chosen by God and given a destiny to fulfil by him has endured since the colonial days."[28] The "destiny" that Wilsey mentions embodies the belief that once founded, America's destiny was to be a Christian nation that represented Christianity. Puritan John Winthrop's treatise "A Model of Christian Charity" established this rhetoric.[29] This homily embodied the belief that the colonists were entering into a covenant with God regarding their work in colonizing America, with severe punishment promised if they deviated from this divine agreement:

> We are entered into covenant with Him for this work. We have taken out a commission… Now if the Lord shall please to hear us, and bring us in peace to the place we desire, then hath He ratified this covenant and sealed our commission, and will expect a strict performance of the articles contained in it; but if we shall neglect the observation of these articles which are the ends we have propounded, and, dissembling with our God, shall fall to embrace this present world and prosecute our carnal intentions, seeking great things for ourselves and our posterity, the Lord will surely break out in wrath against us, and be revenged of such a people, and make us know the price of the breach of such a covenant.[30]

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[28] John D. Wilsey, *American Exceptionalism and Civil Religion: Reassessing the History of an Idea* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2015), 16.

[29] Wilsey, 16.

[30] John Winthrop, *John Winthrop Dreams of a City on a Hill*, 1630, 3.

This concept of the colonists entering a covenant with God was an underlying belief for many Americans.[31] It led to many Americans conflating America with the biblical nation of Israel. The Puritan biblical interpretive method known as typology initiated this conflation. According to Wilsey, typology was an interpretive method demonstrating "the symbiotic relationship of the Old Testament and the New."[32] This biblical hermeneutic expanded beyond the realm of Scripture and became, for many, a worldview by which they interpreted their nation. Simply put, the colonists saw America as a type of new Israel. This biblical interpretation of America laid the foundation for American's exceptional view of themselves and their nation.

As the Civil War broke out, many southerners took the Puritan concept of American exceptionalism and applied it to the Confederacy. They did not consider themselves a new nation but successors of the American legacy.[33] "Secession," Drew Gilpin Faust posits, "represented continuity, not discontinuity; the Confederacy was the

[31] For a more thorough exploration of the colonial concept of God's covenant with America, see Wilsey 41-2.

[32] Wilsey, 42.

[33] Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South*, Paperback ed., [5. Nachdr.], The Walter Lynwood Fleming Lectures in Southern History (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1998), 27.

consummation, not the dissolution, of the American dream."[34] Seeing themselves as successors of the original Puritanical American covenant led to many southerners religiously interpreting the Confederacy. Faust further maintains that "[t]his conception of covenant…signified that they [southerners] were *corporately* special in a way that rendered religion and nationalism inseparable. Such an ideology transformed God himself into a nationalist and made war for political independence into a crusade [emphasis original]."[35] "Southern clergy," Steven Woodworth argued, "repeatedly and vehemently equated the Confederate cause with that of God."[36] George Rable asserts that "[s]ermons, denominational magazines, and church publications exuded patriotism—magnifying successes, downplaying defeats, and holding out hope for ultimate victory."[37] Southerners saw the Civil War as a David versus Goliath story, with the Confederacy set to overcome a seemingly impossible adversary with God's help.

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[34] Drew Gilpin Faust, *Confederate Nationalism*, 27. See also Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 196. Snay maintains, "The idea that secession and the formation of a separate Southern nation represented a continuation of the struggle of 1776 was a central contention of Southern nationalists."

[35] Faust, *Confederate Nationalism*, 28.

[36] Steven E Woodworth, *While God Is Marching on: The Religious World of the Civil War Soldiers* (Lawrence, KN.: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 271.

[37] George C. Rable, *The Confederate Republic: A Revolution against Politics*, Civil War America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 75.

The official seal of the Confederacy exudes the deeply ingrained belief that southerners represented Christianity and the retrieval of the original American vision. [Figures 1.1 and 1.2]. Their seal featured President George Washington, asserting their claim as heirs to the American vision. Along with its presidential forefathers, the Confederacy maintained that they inherited America's divine protection, as evidenced by their motto at the bottom of the seal, which read *DEO VINDICE* [With God as our Defender].

Figure 1.1: The Seal of the Confederate States of America has President George Washington prominently positioned in the center. The Latin phrase *DEO VINDICE* [With God as our Defender] adorns the bottom of the seal.[38]

[38] Andrew B. Graham, Lithographer, and Joseph S. Wylon, *The Confederate States of America: 22 February- deo vindice / Andrew B. Graham Litho. Washington, D.C.* Washington,

Figure 1.2: This Confederate note features the Confederate seal on the left and General Stonewall Jackson on the right. Both symbols played a significant role in shaping Confederate identity.[39]

D.C.: Andrew B. Graham Litho. Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, Accessed November 15, 2023, <www.loc.gov/item/2014645208/>.

[39]" Five-Hundred Dollar Confederate Bill" (Confederate States Treasury Department, 1864).

Since southerners viewed themselves as the ones in covenant with God, they marked northerners as sinners who abandoned God. Conrad Cherry notes how, as a result of this northern disposition, southern "protestant ministers and editors depicted the southern struggle against Union forces as the attempt of a chosen people to preserve an American destiny abandoned by Yankee infidels."[40] As a result of these religious depictions of northerners, southerns launched a campaign to dehumanize their enemies. George Rable maintains that southern animosity towards northerners exploded during the war:

> Bluecoats polluted southern soil by their very presence, invading the privacy of southern homes, treating soldiers and civilian with equal contempt and cruelty. They were barbarous and destructive, Goths and Vandals, inhuman brutes reveling in murder and rape. They were abolition fanatics determined to strike at the very heart of the southern social order through emancipation and miscegenation. Along with their African American allied (or "deluded" slaves as Confederate might have said), the Yankees appeared hell-bent on exterminating southern white people. Therefore, hatred and revenge became the inevitable and appropriate Confederate response. [41]

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[40] Conrad Cherry, ed., *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny*, Rev. and updated ed (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 164.

[41] George Rable, *Damn Yankees! Demonization & Defiance in the Confederate South*, Walter Lynwood Fleming Lectures in Southern History, Louisiana State University (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015), 7.

These dehumanizing conceptions of northerners undergirded most southern perceptions of the Union. It is these notions that imbibe Bunting's letters.

Bunting's letters embodied several elements of American exceptionalism and nationalism, reinforcing the belief that the Confederacy was a Christian nation that inherited the puritanical American vision. Early in the war, he reminded his readers that they should "let the example of our fathers cheer us forward," citing their participation in the American Revolution and the War of 1812 as acts of heroism that southerners should emulate.[42] Akin to his fellow southerners, he believed that the Confederacy represented true American ideals. He viewed the South with the same Puritanical typology, conflating Israel with the Confederacy, stating that "No righteous cause, when supported in the fear of God by any people as numerous as the dwellers in the Confederate States, *can possibly be lost* unless *abandoned* [*emphasis* original].[43] This statement laid the foundation for Bunting's nationalistic worldview, showing that he believed that God guided and protected the Confederacy. Anyone daring to attack the Confederacy became perceived as wicked, leading to his vitriolic statements about the Union.

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[42] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, April 4, 1862, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles,* 43.

[43] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, April 4, 1862, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles,* 43-4.

Bunting's advocacy for the Confederate cause came by way of invoking the Christian religion of his fellow soldiers. While some of his fellow Rangers expressed boredom or indifference towards Christianity, he emphasized the spirituality of crucial figures in the war.[44] "General Lee is a Christian. Its representative man, Stonewall Jackson, is a Christian. Many of its officers and men are Christians. May this not account for its [the Confederacy's] unparalleled success?"[45] This statement exemplifies how his religious and nationalistic beliefs commingled into one entity. While, according to Harry Stout, Bunting attempted to separate his religious views from his patriotism, his letters make it difficult to differentiate between the two.[46] He intrinsically linked his belief in the victory of the Confederacy with the religion of its soldiers and citizens.

Conflating nationalism with religion enabled Bunting to equate service to the Confederacy with devotion to God. Writing to the *Tri-Weekly Telegraph* on April 22, 1863, he wrote about the fundraising efforts of those on the home front and saw them as an act of devotion: "In [sic] behalf of the Rangers I acknowledge with gratitude to our

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[44] For example, Ephraim Shelby Dodd, a Texas Ranger accused of being a spy by Union soldiers, wrote in his diary, "Parson Bunting preached for us to-day. Nothing occurred to change the monotony of camp. Sick, and time drags slowly with me. L. B. Giles, J. K. P. Blackburn, and E. S. Dodd, *Terry Texas Ranger Trilogy* (Austin, TX: State House Press, 1996), 195.

[45] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, December 8, 1862, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles,* 93.

[46] Harry S. Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2007), 214-5.

Heavenly Father Who has so richly blessed our State, this free will offering, which so spontaneously comes from the friends who first bid us go forth in this struggle, and who have never forgotten us in all the sufferings and perils of this campaign."[47] This statement's biblical allusions display his conflation of Confederate and religious devotion. Of note was his use of the phrase "free will offering." In biblical literature, a free-will offering was an act of highly devout believers, as God did not require this offering from His followers to remain in good standing. Utilizing biblical language, he conflated devotion to the Confederacy with devotion to God.

A key fundamental in Bunting's letters was that God ordained a glorious future for the Confederacy. His vision for the South was a future of prosperity in which the South became a beacon to every other country on earth, representing God, heroism, and gallantry:

> [O]ur glorious Confederacy will take her place in the great family of nations, and although the youngest born sister, yet by no means the least or most unworthy, for already by her heroic devotion to the cause which lies so near the heart of her people, by her sacrifice, her gallant deeds, her glorious achievements in arms, she has extorted the unwilling praises and admiration of the civilized world.[48]

[47] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, March 30, 1863, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles,*134.

[48] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, March 11, 1863, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles,*126.

His belief in the future glory of the Confederacy stemmed from his conflation of Israel with the Confederacy. Just like the biblical nation of Israel, Bunting believed that God chose the Confederacy as God's representatives. This formed his belief that God destined the Confederacy to win the war due to His selection and approval of the nation. "Have we not reason to believe," he reasoned, "that He [God] has taken a peculiar interest in this young nation and will carry her yet through to independence? God's providence, as manifested in our history, must have an impression upon every mind. I believe He is with us."[49]

A robust civil religion developed due to Bunting's conflation of religion and nationalistic fervor.[50] He attached spiritual symbolism to the Confederate flag, believing it represented God. Their flag, or the "stars and bars," became a "glorious" representation of a Christian nation.[51] Other symbols of southern civil religion included generals or other key Confederate figures. Men like Stonewall Jackson became hagiographical

[49] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles,*194.

[50] Civil religion, as defined by John Wilsey, "is a set of practices, symbols and beliefs distinct from traditional religion, yet providing a universal values paradigm around which citizenry can unite." John D. Wilsey, *American Exceptionalism and Civil Religion: Reassessing the History of an Idea* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2015), 20.

[51] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *San Antonio Herald*, December 7, 1861, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles,* 8.

representatives who proved the virtue and goodness of the Confederate cause.[52] Lastly, gravesites represented holy grounds where valiant soldiers became martyrs for their country. Writing about the Confederate soldiers buried at the O.S. Presbyterian Church in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, he eulogized them and presented their resting place as "hallowed:"

> [w]henever that hallowed spot is visited by the citizens of Murfreesboro, though they may be strangers, and they read those names, their hearts bounding with gratitude to God and their eyes flowing with tears, they will say "These are the gallant men who fell in rescuing our homes and our altars from the invader, and delivered our city from the oppressive rule of our cruel and heartless enemy. Come, let us wreath bright flowers, and hang festoons around their tomb."[53]

Soldiers' graves symbolized Confederate sacrifice and united the South.

The Exceptional Texas: Bunting and Texas Exceptionalism

Bunting wrote letters to inform Texans of the war's events, making them his primary audience. While not Texan by birth, he thoroughly identified with Texas and Texans in his writings. This identification with Texas led to his application of aspects of American Exceptionalism to the Lone Star State. While Bunting believed the

[52] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, December 8, 1862, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles,* 93; Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, July 15, 1863, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles,* 161-2.

[53] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, October 27, 1862, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles*, 80.

Confederacy inherited American Exceptionalism, he saw Texas as a uniquely blessed state in the Confederacy.

Bunting developed his fascination with Texas as a child. Stories of Sam Houston's heroism and the untamed Texas frontier filled the young boy's mind.[54] His fascination for the Lone Star State grew during his time at Princeton Theological Seminary. While studying there, he heard the impassioned pleas of fellow Presbyterian minister Daniel Baker to evangelize Texas [Figure 1.3].[55] After completing his seminary education, he promptly requested ordination as an "evangelist to Texas."[56] He served as a circuit preacher for nine years following his commission to the state. While ministering in the state, Bunting went from dreaming about Texas to becoming a devout Texan, even befriending his childhood hero, Sam Houston.[57]

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[54] Paula Mitchel Marks, "The Ranger Reverend," *Civil War Times Illustrated* 24 (1985): 40.

[55] Henry Bunting, *Biography of Robert Franklin Bunting, A.M., B.D., D.D., Pioneer Texas Presbyterian Clergyman and Confederate Chaplain* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Historical Society, n.d.)., 6-8.

[56] Henry Bunting, *Biography of Robert Franklin Bunting*, 6.

[57] Thomas Cutrer, Introduction, in Robert Franklin Bunting, *Our Trust Is in the God of Battles: The Civil War Letters of Robert Franklin Bunting, Chaplain, Terry's Texas Rangers, C.S.A*, ed. Thomas W. Cutrer, Voices of the Civil War (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), xviii.

Figure 1.3: Presbyterian minister Daniel Baker profoundly impacted the direction Bunting took his life. Steering him towards Texas, Baker helped lay the foundation for Bunting's exceptional view of Texas. Bunting later served Daniel Baker College as a board member.[58]

[58] "Daniel Baker," *Log College Press*, n.d., accessed November 16, 2023, https://www.logcollegepress.com/daniel-baker-17911857.

Figure 1.4: Robert Franklin Bunting poses for a picture while adorning his 8th Texas Cavalry Regiment Uniform.[59]

[59] *Rev. Robert Franklin Bunting*, ca. 1861-1891, Photograph, 10-0203, Presbyterian Historical Society.

Bunting's high view of Texas led him to fashion his and other Texas regiments as incredibly skilled and effective. Drawing from the exceptional Texas mythos, he considered Texas soldiers elite and larger than life. Whenever a Ranger succeeded on the battlefield, he quickly boasted of their superiority compared to Union soldiers and other Confederate units. Paula Mitchel Marks noted that "his pen glowed when writing about the Texas Rangers."[60] Writing about a skirmish in Tennessee, he maintained, "Whenever Texians are found, they win a name on the battle-field [hyphen original] … They first broke the stillness of the morning with a genuine yell as they rushed upon the foe, and onward they dashed until the victory was complete."[61] Not only did he believe Texans were the most skilled soldiers in battle, but they were also the most resourceful. Speaking on the imprisonment and subsequent escape of Texas soldier William Ward, he boasted "that Yankees cannot hold a Texian prisoner—they always escape by some means."[62]

Bunting considered Tennessee a friend of Texas and often wrote about the positive relationship between these two states. In particular, the women of Tennessee received a special blessing for their service to Texas. After they provided his regiment with clothing, he wrote a glowing letter praising them:

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[60] Marks, 43.

[61] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, February 13, 1863, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles,* 119.

[62] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, November 10, 1862, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles,* 81.

> Texians owe a debt of gratitude to the patriotic, noble, and beautiful daughters of Tennessee which can never be paid. To our gallant boys they have proven angels of mercy in the chamber of sickness and in camp, in enjoyments of the domestic circle and in providing many necessaries and comforts…Ever will we, in gratitude to God for such friends at such a time, invoke Heaven's richest blessings upon them and theirs.[63]

Tennesseans drew the admiration of Bunting with their presentation of a new battle flag for the Rangers [Figure 1.5]. The flag had a prominent cross in the middle and the Latin phrase *Ducit amor patriæ* [led by the love of country] at the bottom. The camaraderie shown by Tennessee towards Texans during the war left a lasting impression on the chaplain. After the war ended, he returned to Tennessee to pastor several Presbyterian churches.

[63] Robert Franklin Bunting, untitled letter, December 9, 1862, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles,* 104. Bunting's letters exemplify one of the many ways in which households participated in war efforts. In this instance, women actively participated in the war through donations, illustrating how the Civil War demanded participation from all within the household. For a more thorough overview of the shifting gender norms in the war see Leeann Whites, "Written on the Heart: Soldiers' Letters, the Household Supply Line, and the Relational War" in Lisa Tendrich Frank and LeeAnn Whites, eds., *Household War: How Americans Lived and Fought the Civil War* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2020), 118-33.

Figure 1.5: This cabinet card showcases the third battle flag of Terry's Texas Rangers.[64]

[64] "Flag of Terry's Texas Rangers," (Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection, n.d.).

Conclusion

Bunting's Civil War letters portrayed the Confederacy as a Christian nation, reflecting the Southern perception of their country as unique and chosen by God, rooted in the early Puritanical American vision. He believed that fighting for the Confederacy equated to fighting for God. Southern citizens united through a robust civil religion, using flags and graves as national symbols. While he saw the Confederacy as unique, he believed Texas was exceptional. Drawing from childhood stories, his letters portrayed Texas as the unique state he envisioned.

Bunting's nationalistic beliefs formed the basis of his views on slavery and death. He viewed the enslaved individuals as critical pillars that supported the nation's economic stability. Furthermore, his covenantal refashioning of the Confederacy led to his perception of the Confederacy as an enslaved nation under the cruel bondage of the North. Additionally, his perception of the Confederacy as a Christian nation led him to fashion his fellow departed comrades as martyrs.

The nationalism that Bunting exuded in his letters helped craft identities for southerners and Texans post-war. The Confederate flag was a symbol that served to unite the South during the war. Post-war, the emblem persisted as a powerful representation of

regional identity and fostered a sense of unity among white Southerners.[65] Bunting's high view and deification of the flag undoubtedly paved the way for the continued symbolic power of the flag. Texans maintained their sense of pride in their state even after the war. By depicting Texans as the most exceptional southern soldiers, they perpetuated the idea of Texas exceptionalism long after the war.

[65] For a more thorough exploration of the meaning of the Confederate flag see John M. Coski, *The Confederate Battle Flag: America's Most Embattled Emblem* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2006).

CHAPTER TWO:

Slavery in the Civil War Letters of Robert Franklin Bunting

Throughout his ninety-five extant Civil War letters, Confederate chaplain Robert Franklin Bunting wrote extensively on the issue of slavery. As an ardent Christian and southerner by "choice and principal," his letters arguably encapsulate one of the clearest examples of the religious southern mindset on slavery.[66] Making note of religious interplay, this chapter explores slavery as conceived through Bunting's Civil War letters. He utilized his letter-writing platform to convince readers of the moral goodness of slavery and the necessity of secession to protect it, with many letters counteracting northern ideas of emancipation seeping into the South. Coinciding with his views on the institution of slavery was his adoption of the slave motif to describe both the Confederacy and the events of the war. He labored to convince white readers that they were the actual slaves of the war. Finally, interpreting Confederate wartime losses as divine punishment, he urged readers to repent of their sins and place their trust in God alone. These losses, he maintained, were precursors to God's ultimate judgment: enslavement by the Union.

[66] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *San Antonio Herald*, December 7, 1861, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles,* 9.

Slavery: A Providential Institution

Bunting's theology and southern worldview undergirded his understanding of chattel slavery. As a Princeton-trained Presbyterian, his doctrinal background had roots in Calvinistic theology.[67] His theological education, which embraced a robust reliance upon the doctrine of providence, was vital to his understanding of slavery.[68] Writing on the issue, he maintained that, at its root, "slavery is a providential institution, that … rests upon Christian ground."[69] Believing in the divine providence of chattel slavery, Bunting crafted it into a doctrinal system of subjugation. Rejecting slavery, therefore, was synonymous with rejecting the Christian religion. One's perspective on slavery became a litmus test that southern ministers utilized to determine orthodox biblical doctrine.[70] Mark

[67] "Calvinistic theology" or "Calvinism" is a theological system of thought most often associated with the French Protestant reformer John Calvin. While far from monolithic, Calvinistic theology has roots in a robust view of God's sovereignty in Christian salvation. For most adherents of Calvinistic doctrine, however, the sovereignty of God extends well beyond the realm of soteriology [the theological study of salvation in the Christian religion] and has a more overarching influence in the world at large.

[68] Providence, as defined by Steven Woodworth, means that God "is presently, positively active in it [the world], producing the good and permitting the evil, all for the accomplishment of His own purposes and the ultimate good of His people," Steven E Woodworth, *While God Is Marching on: The Religious World of the Civil War Soldiers* (Lawrence, KN.: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 39.

[69] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, April 7, 1865, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles,* 309.

[70] Perhaps the most infamous example of a southern theologian who conflated racism and theology is Robert Lewis Dabney. Like Bunting, he intertwined a vigorous view of providence with race-based slavery, utilizing this "doctrine" as a test of fellowship and orthodoxy. Arguing for the inferiority of the Black race due to providence, Dabney maintained that the enslaved

Noll noted that, for religious southerners, the choice was "either orthodoxy and slavery, or heresy and antislavery."[71] Bunting wrote at length on the superiority of the white race while decrying the "doctrines of negro equality" in his letter to the *Houston Daily Telegraph* in December 1864. Referring to ministers adopting and teaching abolitionist ideals as "tories," he informally excommunicated them from the church, calling them "unchurched" and "disloyal [to God]."[72]

The concept of providence was not foreign to his readers and was a prominent interpretive presupposition that bolstered both southern and northern conceptions of slavery. While white southerners defended the institution on Christian grounds, abolitionists used the doctrine of providence as a weapon against slavery. They believed that God was working providentially to end slavery.[73] They rejected the idea of slavery as

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person's state of servitude was a providential blessing from God and that proximity to the "superior" white race helped in their sanctification. *A Defence of Virginia, [and Through Her, of the South] in Recent and Pending Contests Against the Sectional Party* (New York, NY: E.J. Hale & Son, 1867), 282; see also Robert Lewis Dabney *Ecclesiastical Relation of Negroes.* Here, he argued that the destruction of the church was inevitable if it adopted the "doctrine" of racial equality. Robert Lewis Dabney, *Ecclesiastical Relation of Negroes* (Richmond, VA: Boys and Girls Monthly, 1868), 205.

[71] Mark Noll, "The Bible and Slavery," in *Religion and the American Civil War*, edited by Randall M. Miller, Harry Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson (New York: Oxford Press, 1998), 44.

[72] Robert Franklin Bunting to the Houston Daily Telegraph, December 30, 1864, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles,* 281.

[73] Noll, 75.

a God-sanctioned institution and recognized it as inherently evil. Writing on the providence of God in the abolishment of slavery, Presbyterian theologian Charles Hodge maintained that slavery was a system "fraught with evil" and that the South, through perpetuating and defending slavery, had invoked the providential "displeasure of God," resulting in their defeat in the war.[74] While northerners and southerners arrived at differing conclusions concerning the issue of slavery, both sides believed that providence was on their side.

As a providential institution, Bunting believed that slavery was adaptable to fit any situation deemed appropriate by white society. Aware of the Confederacy's imminent defeat, he believed arming enslaved individuals would save the nation.[75] While Bunting was not alone in his desire to arm the enslaved, other southerners voiced their displeasure at such a proposition.[76] Bunting wrote to the *Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph* in April

[74] Charles Hodge, "President Lincoln," Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review 37 (July 1865), 439-40.

[75] See Robert Franklin Bunting to the Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph, April 7, 1865, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles,* 308, where he compares the current state of the Confederacy to that of the Irish Rebellion of 1798.

[76] The Confederate use of enslaved people in warfare was a highly controversial and divisive issue in the war. Writing on this, James McPherson points out that, to many southerners, the use of enslaved people in the war was "at best ludicrous and at worst treasonable." James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*, The Oxford History of the United States, v. 6 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 831.

1865 to encourage the South to arm enslaved people for battle. He argued that they were now under a "new providence:"

> One fact is past argument: The negro will be the future soldier of the war. If not on our side, then against us. The refusal to use slavery in this way will be tantamount to its abolition … hence, to secure this continuance [of slavery], we should promptly organize a suitable number of our slaves to fight side by side with us in this struggle. If these views are just and true, our slaves now stand in a new providential light. They are more important to us than ever before. They are more essential to us than ever before. They are more than ever providentially ordained for our auxiliaries and helpers. If we … examine this great subject in the light which the Providence of the Present, not the Providence of the Past, sheds light upon it, we can hardly fail of the conclusion that duty to ourselves, to the negro, to the civilization of the continent, demands of us the immediate arming of our slaves.[77]

Although Bunting's statement helped assuage some southern concerns about arming enslaved individuals, others feared that doing so would ultimately lead to their emancipation.[78] Bunting, anticipating this argument, reasoned that arming the enslaved was necessary to preserve slavery, "We must employ slavery if we expect to perpetuate slavery. Employ it, we mean, as a military force."[79] Writing on this new providence for

[77] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, April 7, 1865, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles*, 309-10.

[78] McPherson, 834.

[79] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, April 7, 1865, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles*, 309.

the enslaved likely came as a response to the Union's use of escaped slaves in warfare.[80] In his view, it was better for the Confederacy to use the enslaved as tools to maintain slavery rather than abolish it. Commenting on both Confederate and Union use of the enslaved in battle, he argued that "[t]he only way to silence him [the Union] is to fight him with his pet hobby, the negro."[81] If enslaved individuals fought in the war, it would be better for them to fight for the South rather than against it. Therefore, Bunting created a "new providence" for the enslaved.

Providence reinforced Bunting's idea of paternalism concerning slavery.[82] He portrayed the institution as a "mutually beneficial" relationship between the enslaved and the enslaver, referring to it as a "holy trust."[83] Paternalism and religion reinforced each

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[80] The Union recruited these escaped slaves, commonly referred to as "contrabands," starting in 1863. Enslaved people saw their service to the Union as a pathway towards freedom. For a more in-depth look at the use of "contrabands" in the war, see Chandra Manning,"Contraband Camps and the African American Refugee Experience during the Civil War," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History*, by Chandra Manning (Oxford University Press, 2017), https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.013.203; Amy Murrell Taylor, *Embattled Freedom: Journeys through the Civil War's Slave Refugee Camps*, Civil War America (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 39-40.

[81] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, April 7, 1865, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles*, 308.

[82] Paternalism, as defined by Elizabeth Fox-Genovese is a societal system that "invokes a specific metaphor of legitimate domination: the protective domination of the father over his family." Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South*, Gender & American Culture (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 64.

[83] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Houston Daily Telegraph*, April 13, 1864, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles*, 249; Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, April 7, 1865, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles*, 309.

other for Bunting, resulting in a system of divine subjugation where "the master [of the enslaved] was God's surrogate on earth."[84] Coinciding with Bunting's providential and paternalistic view of slavery was his covenantal refashioning of the Confederacy. Conflating his nationalistic view of the Confederacy with the biblical nation of Israel resulted in his appropriation of the same rules that regulated Israel. One covenantal stipulation that Bunting applied to the Confederacy was the contingency of blessings. He believed that slavery was a conditional blessing, subject to revocation if the Confederacy strayed from God. Writing about the Vicksburg Campaign, he remarked that, just as God had taken victory away from the South in battle, God could likewise revoke their "holy trust" of slavery.[85] Although he believed in God-given white supremacy over the Black race, this authority was subject to revocation.

Deliverance from the Hands of the Enemy: Confederate Enslavement and the War

While chattel slavery was a primary subject of his letters, slavery transcended the confines of the institution and became an interpretive lens for Bunting's interpretation of the war. Recapitulating the events of the war with biblical language, he fashioned the

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[84] Drew Gilpin Faust, "The Proslavery Argument in History," in *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830-1860*, Library of Southern Civilization (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 13.

[85] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, July 15, 1863, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles*, 164.

Confederacy as a typological Israel in danger of enslavement by the Union. He believed that the Confederacy was a nation set apart by God, and thus he fashioned anyone daring to threaten the well-being of the Confederacy as the epitome of evil. This conflict was more than a war over slavery and states' rights; this conflict was a war between the righteous and the wicked. "These are spiritual conquests," he maintained, "—the triumph of truth, virtue, and holiness— the disenthrallment of the soul from the power of sin and the slavery of Satan. God is recognizing that branch of our army in its sufferings and noble efforts for our young nation."[86]

Perhaps the most ironic aspect of Bunting's interpretation of the war was his adoption of a biblical interpretive method most associated with American slave religion. Like Bunting, the enslaved related their people and experiences to the biblical nation of Israel. Taking biblical narratives like the Exodus story, they appropriated the slave motif in two primary ways. Firstly, they believed that, just as Israel found freedom from their slavery in Egypt, they would find liberation from their bondage. Living with the anticipation of eventual release provided religious enslaved people with the strength to continue in their work. Secondly, the enslaved became emboldened in their conviction that their current state of servitude was inherently evil. Weaponizing New Testament

[86] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, December 8, 1862, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles*, 93.

texts, pro-slavery advocates subjugated the enslaved with seemingly holy arguments.[87] The enslaved, however, were not keen on adopting their master's biblical hermeneutics, choosing instead to appropriate the Israel Exodus story to explain and give purpose to their servitude. This religious interpretation of their servitude convinced them that their bondage was unjust and that God was on their side, increasing animosities between the master and the enslaved.[88]

Adapting the hermeneutic of the enslaved for his use, Bunting recapitulated the war's key events in a manner that fashioned the Confederacy into an enslaved nation fighting for liberation. The Confederacy, he argued, was under the "bondage of the Northmen."[89] The war, therefore, became a plight for Confederate freedom. Letters became riveting stories of how the Confederacy, blessed by God, overcame their enemies. Taking a quote from *The Fall of Robespierre*, he made it clear that he viewed this as a war for freedom:

For easier it would be

[87] An essential text utilized by enslavers and pro-slavery preachers was Ephesians 6:1, which states, "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ (NIV)." Utilizing this and other biblical texts, pro-slave preachers developed a theology of subjugation. For a more thorough exploration of pro-slave theology, see Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South, Updated ed* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 242-3; 294-5.

[88] Raboteau, 303-9.

[89] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, July 8, 1863, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles*, 160.

> To hurl the rooted mountain from its base
> Than to force the yoke of slavery upon men
> Determined to be free[90]

Encouragement to his readers to continue their war efforts often came alongside some of the grimmer situations the Confederacy faced. While seemingly ill-suited, his reassurance stemmed from his conflation of the Confederacy with Israel. He primarily accomplished this by appropriating Old Testament narratives and themes to the Confederacy and the events of the war. Writing about Lincoln's "Emancipation Proclamation," he urged his readers to interpret the declaration as a sign of eventual southern victory:

> These signs, which bid hope to spring up in our hearts—which seem prophetic of the nearing and glorious future, when our young nation shall enter the Canaan of her rest and prosperity—should not cause us to relax one effort or cease executing one well matured plan for carrying on this war; but, on the other hand, inspire our hearts with fresh hope…[91]

Much like Israel in the Exodus story, he believed that catastrophic events preceded victory.[92]

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[90] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, September 25, 1863, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles*, 186.

[91] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, March 11, 1863, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles*, 125-6. The "Canaan rest" he references alludes to the Old Testament story of the Israelites's 40-year journey in the wilderness. After they struggled for freedom from Egypt, the Israelites struggled to find the promised land (Canaan) due to their disobedience to God. Their wilderness wandering represented their spiritual wandering from God. Despite their disobedience, the Israelites pressed forward due to God's promise that they would inevitably reach Canaan.

[92] For example, in the biblical Exodus story, Israel, enslaved by the Egyptians, ultimately found liberation after the divine plagues were unleashed upon their captors.

Coinciding with his conflation of Israel with the Confederacy was his courageous refashioning of the nation. His courageous depiction served to both legitimize the southern cause and bolster his argument for the South's oppression by the North. He accomplished this by aligning the Confederacy with other nations he deemed courageous.[93] He caricatured these nations in a way that presented their victories as overcoming seemingly impossible odds.[94] Likewise, the Confederacy became his modern-time underdog nation fighting for its freedom. Though the South lacked the resources of the North, they did possess an attribute that propelled them over their enemies. "Southern valor," Bunting maintained, "proved more than a match for the Abolition horde who would subjugate us. Our impetuous Rangers rushed in upon them like a tornado."[95] While the South could not match the resources of their enemy, Bunting worked to convince his readers they possessed God-given valor in spades.

Juxtaposing his courageous refashioning of the southern cause was his demonic reinterpretation of the Union. Rather than brave, they were the "cowardly" and "fiendish"

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[93] For instance, he argued that following the war, the Confederacy would take its "place and name among the nations of the earth." Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, July 8, 1863, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles*, 160, 160-1.

[94] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, September 25, 1863, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles*, 184-6.

[95] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *San Antonio Herald*, January 4, 1862, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles*, 12.

foes of the Confederacy.[96] He reasoned that the "Goths and Vandals, fierce and remorseless as they were, really exhibited more kindness and nobleness of nature than the enemy who now oppresses us and seeks our humiliation and ruin."[97] These moral volleys from Bunting preceded his fierce campaign to dehumanize his foes. He frequently painted his foes with demonic biblical language. Speaking on the South's desolation, Bunting decried the actions of the Union, claiming that the "minions of Lincoln possessed the land."[98] Heading the supposed satanic legion was none other than Abraham Lincoln, whom Bunting fashioned into a satanic figurehead. The satanic transformation of Lincoln primarily came from vividly describing his war actions. He criticized the president's actions using religious language, calling them "diabolical." He attacked Lincoln, claiming abolitionists were "paying homage at the shrine of King Abraham."[99] Bunting labored to present the Union and President Lincoln as representatives of godlessness and wickedness. By dehumanizing the Union and valorizing the Confederacy

[96] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *San Antonio Herald*, January 4, 1862, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles*, 11-2; Robert Franklin Bunting to the Telegraph Editor, April 2, 1863, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles*, 149.

[97] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *San Antonio Herald*, December 27, 1862, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles,* 97.

[98] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, September 25, 1863, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles*, 184.

[99] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Houston Daily Telegraph*, February 24, 1864, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles,* 219.

as a nation chosen by God, Bunting set the stage to reframe the war as a fight for southern freedom.

Turning Again to God: The Covenantal Confederacy and Slavery as Divine Punishment

The final thread of slavery within Bunting's letters was his use of slavery as a form of divine punishment for the Confederate nation. It was not enough for southerners to merely hold the correct view of slavery, "God also demanded loyalty, devotion, and humility."[100] He conflated stories of Confederate defeat with those of disobedience and enslavement in the Old Testament to create a narrative that informed readers of the war's events and also warned them that their sinful proclivities could result in God allowing the Union to win the war. Losing the war, he reasoned, was tantamount to southern enslavement.[101] His interpretation of the war in this manner stemmed from his conflation of Israel's governing principles and regulations, particularly the appropriation of how God punished the Israelites for their sinful actions. Just as God had allowed the enslavement of the Israelites, the Confederacy was subject to this same punishment if

[100] E. Carter Turner, "Causes Lost and Found: Southern Election in the Life of Robert Lewis Dabney" (Ph.D. Diss., The University of Denver, 2007), 16.

[101] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, April 7, 1865, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles,* 304.

their piety to God waned. Ultimately, if the South lost the war, self-inflicted "enslavement" followed.

One such sin that Bunting warned his readers about was the sin of idolatry. For Bunting, idolatry meant someone trusting something other than God. If the Confederacy was guilty of idolatry, then God's punishment was inevitable. Bunting often interpreted wartime losses as discipline meant to restore national religious devotion. He had a penchant for displaying this rhetoric when a high-ranking general or figurehead died in the war. Writing on the death of Colonel Thomas S. Lubbock, he expressed that God may have carried out his death to quell their idolatry. "It may be, indeed, that we loved our gallant leaders too well," Bunting penned, "that we trusted their judgment and their bravery too much, and now God has come and taken our idols from us so that we may not rely too much upon the arm of the flesh, but trust more in Him. May we heed His voice and improve His providence."[102] While he did applaud the general's valiant and skillful nature, he quickly noted that God was thinning out their ranks due to their idolatrous love for their generals. He maintained that this punishment was only a foretaste of what would come if the South did not heed his call.[103]

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[102] Robert Franklin Bunting to the Tri-Weekly Telegraph, January 29, 1862, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles*, 17.

[103] Robert Franklin Bunting to the Tri-Weekly Telegraph, January 29, 1862, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles*, 17.

Confederate loss in battle became an opportunity to speak on the chastisement of God. If they were on the losing end of a clash, he reasoned that their defeat came as a result of their pride in past victories: "Doubtless we made our hold upon the Mississippi an idol, and in our imagined strength and security forgot that our strength and wisdom cometh alone from God. Hence the necessity that we be humbled."[104] As the war continued and the Confederacy suffered more losses, Bunting interpreted these losses as God's displeasure and warned that they were in danger of turning the nation into "Babylon."

> What was the result [of their victory in the First Battle of Bull Run]? Ah! The victorious Southrons began to boast, saying, 'Is not this great Babylon that we have build [sic]?' 'Is not this the work of our hands?' 'We are invincible as soldiers; one of us can put a thousand of the enemy to flight, and two can put ten thousand.' God was offended with our folly; our boasting was wicked, and we received our due reward. Forts Donelson, Henry, and Beauregard fell into the hands of the enemy; city after city, island after island, fort after fort were lost; Maryland and Kentucky, Tennessee and Missouri were wrested from us.[105]

[104] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, August 31, 1863, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles*, 179.

[105] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, September 30, 1863, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles*, 192.

By comparing their supposed pride in their victories to the biblical city of Babylon, he declared the Confederacy the enemy of God.[106] This conflation alluded to his understanding that God inevitably conquers and enslaves his enemies.

Conclusion

The Civil War letters of Robert Franklin Bunting provide a window into the southern mindset of slavery as both an institution and an interpretive concept. He used his writings to advocate for slavery, justifying it on the grounds of Christianity. Utilizing Israelite enslavement narratives, he fashioned a picture of the Confederacy that argued that they were the actual slaves of the war. He used lost battles to speak about the perceived sinfulness of the South. He warned Confederates that these sins would lead to enslavement by the Union. Slavery transcended the chattel institution and became a critical interpretive motif he utilized to shape southern perceptions of the war.

Bunting's writings on slavery had numerous ramifications concerning perceptions of slavery and southern identity post-war. Framing slavery as a Christian institution gave way to future Christian defenses of slavery. Some fringe groups within evangelicalism still hold to Bunting's original ideas and justifications for the institution.[107] Additionally,

[106] Babylon is often associated with everything that goes against God in biblical literature. In the New Testament's book of Revelation, the downfall of Babylon at the hands of God is chronicled. Essentially, Bunting contended that the Confederacy's hubris will ultimately result in its ruin.

[107] Steven Wilkins and Douglas Wilson's *Southern Slavery, as It Was* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1996) epitomizes the contemporary Christian defense of slavery. In their work,

his letters reflected many tenets of what became Lost Cause ideology. His courageous portrayal of the South, the satanic refashioning of the North, and the use of northern enslavement rhetoric undoubtedly paved the way for the development of this ideology. Depicting the Northern states as oppressive and satanic fueled bitterness among southerners after the war; they saw themselves as oppressed and enslaved.[108] After the war, many southerners viewed the North as a symbol of tyranny and wickedness, with his letters contributing to this sentiment.[109]

Wilkins and Wilson present a similar paternalistic defense of slavery Bunting presented in his letters. Giving an anemoiac depiction of the antebellum South, they maintained that slavery was a good and cooperative relationship between the races.

[108] Once again, Robert Lewis Dabney exemplifies this disposition. Historians have noted that he came to despise northerners post-war. Charles Reagan Wilson, "Robert Lewis Dabney: Religion and the Southern Holocaust," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 89, no. 1 (January 1981): 82.

[109] See George Rable, *Damn Yankees! Demonization & Defiance in the Confederate South*, Walter Lynwood Fleming Lectures in Southern History, Louisiana State University (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015).

CHAPTER THREE:

Death in the Civil War Letters of Robert Franklin Bunting

The American Civil War holds the record for being the deadliest conflict in American history, with an estimated 600,000 casualties. Wives lost their husbands, mothers lost their sons, and soldiers lost their comrades. The impact of death was evident in the letters written by Robert Franklin Bunting during the Civil War, as it was a constant theme woven throughout his correspondences. This chapter explores death from the perspective of a Confederate chaplain. As a participant in a war that complicated the antebellum ritual of death, he sought to mitigate the issues that the war presented. He labored to keep his fellow Texans abreast of their loved one's state of being. If a Texan passed away, he portrayed them as heroic, virtuous, and masculine. These letters reveal the intertwining of nationalistic loyalties and Christianity. Bunting's patriotism often clouded his theological commitments, leading to hagiographical eulogies of fallen comrades. Also present throughout his letters was the desire to prevent his comrades from dying. Towards the end of the war, alongside the other topics of his letters, he focused his efforts on fundraising to establish a Confederate hospital to help ensure the survival of his wounded comrades. He used these hospitals as an opportunity to care for his fellow Confederates both physically and spiritually, serving as a chaplain to those within the hospital.

"Freely Laid Upon the Altar of Their Country:" Death and the Civil War

An understanding of the concept of the Good Death is crucial to understanding dying in the Civil War. The Good Death was primarily about *ars moriendi* [the art of dying]. In other words, the dying and the family of the dying were highly concerned with *how* they passed away. The idea gained prominence in nineteenth-century America through Jeremy Taylor's *The Rule and Exercise of Holy Dying*.[110] The "Good Death" concept was mainly used in religious settings. Protestants and Catholics had their understanding of what it meant to die well. One crucial aspect was knowing one's eternal fate. Since the process of transitioning from life to death was irreversible, religious leaders took the dying process seriously. They had one final opportunity to persuade someone to believe the gospel. Therefore, a person's final words carried great weight since they indicated their eternal destiny. Family and loved ones surrounded the dying to comfort the dying and attain assurance of their future eternal state [Figure 3.1].

The Civil War made death impersonal and distant, taking it from the intimacy of one's family to the battlefield [Figure 3.2]. Instead of dying surrounded by loved ones, many passed away alone and without dignity. Moreover, dying individuals' parting words often remain unheard, causing their loved ones to question their eternal fate.

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[110] Jeremy Taylor, *John Wesley's Extract of The Rule and Exercises of Holy Living and Holy Dying* (Franklin, Tennessee: Seedbed Publishing, 2018); Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 6.

Concerning death in the Civil War, Faust insisted, "The sudden and all but unnoticed end of the soldier slain in the disorder of battle, the unattended deaths of unidentified diseased and wounded men" defied the antebellum concept of the Good Death.[111] Chaos and separation replaced the dignity that once accompanied death.

[111] Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 9.

Figure 3.1: This painting depicts President George Washington surrounded by his family as he prepares for death, showcasing the elements of the Good Death.[112]

[112] Junius Brutus Stearns, Life of George Washington: The Christian Death, 1853, Painting, 1853.

Figure 3.2: These Confederate Civil War soldiers likely died alone, contrasting the serene depictions of the Good Death.[113]

[113] Timothy H. O'Sullivan, *Confederate Dead*, 1863, Photograph, 1863.

The Civil War complicated the Antebellum death ritual, leading to creative solutions. Faust posits, "Soldiers, chaplains, military nurses, and doctors conspired to provide the dying man and his family with as many of the elements of the conventional Good Death as possible."[114] Some soldiers who were on the brink of death wrote letters to their families to inform them about their impending fate.[115] To replicate the nearness of kin, many dying soldiers retrieved photographs of their family to replicate dying in their presence.[116] Death in the war served to bring about an ecumenical unity among soldiers. Amidst the battlefield, it was difficult to determine one's religious affiliation as soldiers perished. George Rable recounts the instance of a Catholic priest giving last rites and baptism to a mortally wounded Protestant on the battlefield.[117] Bunting mitigated the complications the war brought to the Good Death by writing extensively about departed Texas Rangers. Writing about Bunting's emphasis on his fallen comrades, Thomas Cutrer maintained that "Bunting was especially at pains to send home the names of Rangers

[114] Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 11.

[115] For examples of letters written by dying soldiers, see Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 16-8.

[116] Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 11.

[117] George C. Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War*, The Littlefield History of the Civil War Era (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 169-170.

killed, wounded, or ill throughout the war."[118] He attempted to replicate the Good Death through his words, constructing them as the heroes he envisioned them to be. Writing two years after his death of his friend Col. W.P. Rogers, he mourned the loss while simultaneously fashioning Roger's wartime actions and death heroically:

> [Here] rests the dust of the noble, heroic Texian, just where he fell two years ago, in front of the embrasure, from which the mighty cannon belched forth its hissing shot. But a few feet more and he would stand upon these walls and wave his sword in victory…
>
> The unusual heroism displayed in that charge challenged the admiration of the foe. He was honored with a grave upon the soil which was moistened with his blood. Over that manly heart, which shall beat no more on earth, the hand of affliction has planted a lovely rose bush which will bloom in the opening spring, fit emblem of that bright resurrection morn when the cold winter of the grave shall be over and the glorified body shall come forth into new life.[119]

Bunting made it his mission to reunite dying soldiers with their families through his letters.

Many letters mourned the loss of his comrades who died alone without the comfort of a proper death. Writing to the *Houston Telegraph*, he informed his readers of the grim fate of Billy Nicholson: "Poor Billy Nicholson was shot through the body, and

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[118] Thomas Cutrer, "Editorial Practice," in Robert Franklin Bunting, *Our Trust Is in the God of Battles: The Civil War Letters of Robert Franklin Bunting, Chaplain, Terry's Texas Rangers, C.S.A*, ed. Thomas W. Cutrer, Voices of the Civil War (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), xxxii.

[119] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Houston Daily Telegraph*, February 24, 1865, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles*, 298-9.

getting off by himself in the woods, he bled to death, all alone. Next day his dead body was found. Poor fellow! No one was there to comfort him or hear his last words."[120]

While Bunting's theology on paper represented the Westminster Standards, his political views clouded his theological commitments in practice when speaking on the death of his fellow Confederates, evidencing a conflict between his theology and patriotism.[121] When writing about the deaths of Benjamin Terry and Thomas Lubbock, he used religious language to describe both their deaths and legacies: "Terry and Lubbock! These are names that will hereafter be *sacred* to every citizen of the Lone Star State! Their lives have been freely *laid upon the altar* of their country [*emphasis* added]."[122] While not explicitly stated, he implies that these men died martyrs' deaths through his use of biblical language. The conflation of religious and patriotic loyalties led to the development of what Steven Woodworth calls "patriotic heresy." This heresy was the equivocation of dying for the Confederacy with salvation. Equivocating martyrdom with salvation was common in the South and represented a post-war theological shift for many

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[120] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Houston Daily Telegraph*, February 15, 1865, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles*, 301.

[121] By "Westminster Standards," I am referring to the three primary documents that govern the theology and polity of Presbyterian churches. These documents include the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Westminster Larger Catechism, and the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Historically, the Presbyterian Church has deferred to these documents on matters of doctrine and practice.

[122] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, January 29, 1862, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles*, 18.

Protestants.[123] Concerning this shift, Kurt Berends states, "No longer was Jesus' death the only efficacious death. Many southerners became convinced that death on behalf of the Confederacy was also salvific. In other words, both deaths offered a path to heaven."[124] By choosing to die for the Confederacy, soldiers could die a martyr's death, with Bunting's letters playing a pivotal role in their martyrdom.

While many of his depictions of his fallen comrades conflate his religion and nationalistic viewpoints, other examples evidence a sharp division between his national loyalties and religious commitments. Writing on the death of Captain W.Y. Houston, he made sure to differentiate his service to his country and God:

> "But he has passed away. His life has been sacrificed for his country — a cause which enlisted all his energies and the noblest feelings of his soul. He died facing the foe and at the head of his men, leading them in a desperate charge. He was one of my warmest and best friends, and I mourn his loss as though a brother had departed. I remember well his position and attention during my last sermon preached to the regiment before my sickness. The Lord grant that the truth *may have had its effect and prepared him for the departure* [e*mphasis* added]."[125]

[123] Woodworth, 142.

[124] Kurt Berends, "Confederate Sacrifice and the 'Redemption' of the South," in Beth Barton Schweiger and Donald G. Mathews, eds., *Religion in the American South: Protestants and Others in History and Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 99.

[125] Robert Franklin Bunting Letter to the Editor, September 26, 1862, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles*, 73.

While praising the captain, this eulogy delineated Christianity from his military service. This eulogy, when compared to his other eulogies showcase that constructed his fallen comrades into martyrs, begs this question: Did Bunting believe that Confederate death accomplished salvation in the Civil War? His letters do not provide an answer to this question; however, they do showcase the ambivalence many religious southerners evidenced when Confederates died in battle. Bunting was an astute Presbyterian theologian trained at Princeton Theological Seminary. He was also a critical denominational figure for the Presbyterian church during the war. Put simply, he was not ignorant of the Bible and Christian salvation. The crux of this antinomy finds its answer in the Confederacy's covenantal personification explored earlier in this thesis. Bunting and other white southerners conflated Israel with the Confederacy, constructing their version of a biblical nation governed by God. While Bunting knew the difference between the biblical Israel and the Confederacy, he allowed the two concepts to converge into one entity. Conflating Israel with the Confederacy ultimately led to his and other southerners' construction of Confederate martyrs.

The conflation of southern nationalism and theology led to a paradigm shift in American soteriology. With death replacing faith for the Confederacy, God's role in salvation became minimized while humanity's agency became the central agent in salvation. Concerning this shift, Berends states, "Their [Confederates] message was twofold: Confederate soldiers could choose salvation, and death in the ranks offered

redemption to both the soldier and the country."[126] While Bunting's letters never explicitly stated that dying for the Confederacy offered an alternate route to salvation, his use of biblical and theological language when describing the deaths of his fellow compatriots certainly contributed to this commonly held misconception. Confederate gravesites became "hallowed."[127] Soldiers were "sacrifices."[128] His letters memorialized his comrades, allowing them to live eternally through his letters.

Bunting's hagiographical depictions of comrades contributed to the Antebellum perception of deceased Confederate soldiers. His published memorials idolized the dead and featured prominently throughout his letters. His idolization of Confederate General Stonewall Jackson is evident in his appraisal of his death. Jackson, a prominent figure in the Confederate Army and regarded as a hero by many southerners, was also seen by Bunting as the epitome of a perfect man. Bunting's announcement of Jackson's death reflected this admiration:

> [O]ur hearts have been made sad by the confirmation of the news that Stonewall Jackson is dead. Well might we join in the universal sorrow; for a nation is bereft. Whilst we mourn for the death of the Christian hero, the chivalric patriot-warrior, all the world will estimate his loss at its true standard. It is, in many respects, irreparable. But, our trust being in God, it is well; and, in his own language, we

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[126] Berends, 106.

[127] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, October 27, 1862, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles*, 80.

[128] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, January 29, 1862, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles*, 18.; Robert Franklin Bunting Letter to the Editor, September 26, 1862, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles*, 73.

know that for him, "it will be infinite gain to be translated to Heaven and be with Jesus.

He was the Lannes of Lee's army, the most dashing, popular, successful, and able leader of troops on the continent, equaled in this war only by Albert Sidney Johnston, a man of stern fealty, of free born valor, of mighty energy, of Christian patriotism and deep piety—an officer who combined the elements of superstitious awe and the blind credence of his men—a soldier literally of the Cross, pure as day, just as the dews of Heaven, but weird and wrinkled through and through by the grim features of the god of war…But now he has passed away…We still have noble Christian officers to lead our troops to victory. God can remove his chief of workmen and still carry on the cause of Liberty.[129]

This eulogy represented how Southerners viewed Jackson as a patriotic and devout Christian. Bunting's letters helped cultivate this hagiographical view of Jackson through the memorialization of his death. These southern perceptions of Confederate generals and figureheads fostered the development of Confederate icons that eventually represented Confederate civil religion.

Treatment for the Sick and Wounded: Bunting and Confederate Hospitals

Bunting spent his final season of wartime ministry caring for Confederate hospital patients, with many of his fellow chaplains serving in similar roles.[130] Caring for the sick and wounded during the war was a chief concern for Bunting throughout the war. Most

[129] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, July 15, 1863, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles*, 161-2.

[130] Miller, 111.

Confederate hospitals, however, could not adequately care for their patients. While there were many reasons for this, Wall, Rogers, and Kutney-Lee cite a shortage of supplies as a primary factor for poorly developed Confederate hospitals.[131] These inadequate facilities led Bunting to pivot his duties as a chaplain towards the sick and wounded. His goal as a hospital chaplain was twofold. First, he desired to preserve the lives of his fellow Confederates. His primary contribution towards this goal was his intense fundraising efforts, which were present in his later war letters. Second, he desired to minister to those within the hospital as he had done on the battlefield.

Bunting's early letters lamented the lack of an adequate hospital for his fellow Texans. Writing to the *Tri-Weekly Telegraph* on December 8, 1862, he informed his readers that their loved ones could die if their soldiers did not have an adequate facility: "We have now enough of Texas troops for a large hospital," he bemoaned, "We will need it. Without such an institution, we must sacrifice many of our brave boys, for these promiscuous hospitals are little more than vast slaughter pens."[132] Confederate care, however, did not improve. The lack of care, alongside his intense desire to meet the

[131] Barbra Mann Wall, Kathleen Rogers, and Ann Kutney-Lee, "The North vs. the South: Conditions at Civil War Hospitals," *The Southern Quarterly* 53, no. 3 (2016): 45.

[132] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, December 8, 1862, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles*, 92-3.

spiritual desires of the sick and wounded, led to his assignment as the Confederate hospital chaplain at Auburn, Alabama, in December 1864.[133]

Fundraising became a primary focus of Bunting's letters while serving as a hospital chaplain. Beginning in early January 1864, he wrote numerous letters imploring southern citizens to support Confederate hospitals. His appeals were to all southerners, since death had impacted them throughout the war:

> [T]o accomplish this [the establishment of a Confederate hospital] at the present prices, it will be necessary for our friends at home to aid us. Therefore, my appeal is to fathers, mothers, wives, children, sisters, and friends who have their representations among us. Those who are dear to you are far from your homes and beyond the reach of your power to personally aid."[134]

His letters continued requesting aid from willing Texans, maintaining that "[i]t may be the rich soldier or the poor one—it matters not—I have found both without a cent, who needs present relief. Shall it be denied?"[135] His requests for aid often came alongside scathing criticism of the Texas Legislature. Placing the blame of dying soldiers on their shoulders, he stressed that the state of Texas had "money appropriated for this purpose

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[133] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Houston Telegraph*, February 23, 1865, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles*, 297.

[134] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Daily Telegraph*, February 24, 1864, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles*, 236-7.

[135] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Houston Daily Telegraph*, July 29, 1864, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles*, 263.

[money for to care for the sick and wounded]," and its officials have neglected their own.[136] Due to their neglect, Bunting turned to everyday citizens to fund and support Confederate soldiers.

Bunting spent his time caring for the sick and wounded when he was not busy with fundraising. His main goal as a chaplain was to provide a space to alleviate the burdens of those within the hospital and ease the suffering's war burdens. He accomplished this by attending to the spiritual needs of his patients. Writing to the *Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph* in February 1865, he mentioned the "time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord" at his hospital.[137]

Bunting used holidays as an opportunity to serve his patients and make the season memorable and comfortable. To him, holidays were when the "unborn realities" of the future disappeared for a time.[138] Bunting detailed the feasting and Christmas décor that adorned the hospital. These festivities, Bunting held, helped to "cast aside…whatever sad burdens the heart may have" during the war.[139]

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[136] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, December 8, 1862, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles,* 93.

[137] Robert Franklin Bunting to the Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph, April 7, 1865, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles,* 311.

[138] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Houston Daily Telegraph*, February 15, 1865, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles*, 301.

[139] Robert Franklin Bunting to the *Houston Daily Telegraph*, February 15, 1865, in Bunting, *Our Trust is in the God of Battles*, 301.

Conclusion

The Civil War letters of Robert Franklin Bunting showcase how he confronted the complications to death and dying brought by the war. Through his letter-writing, he closed the gap between families and the departed. He provided loved ones with the last words of their soldiers, if available, and lamented the loss of those whose words went unheard. He offered a substitute for the Good Death by honoring the dead with hagiographical eulogies that fashioned them into martyrs. His letters demonstrate the unique ways southerners confronted the wartime complications of death. Southerners attempted to mitigate these complications through various creative means, with Bunting's letters representing one of the innovative ways southerners confronted death in the war. As a hospital chaplain, he used his letters to raise funds to help prevent the death of his comrades and provide them with adequate care. While not fundraising, he supplied his patients with a space that eased their wartime and spiritual burdens.

His description of men like Stonewall Jackson led to the larger-than-life post-war personas that characterized these men. Hagiographical biographies on the lives of Generals Lee and Jackson abound. Bunting's appraisal of fallen Confederate soldiers mirrors other Confederate hagiographical writings and undoubtedly played a pivotal role in their development. These deified portraits of Confederates factored into the development of Lost Cause ideology. Following the war into the twentieth century, biographical works written by Christians possessed these same hagiographical

tendencies.[140] Furthermore, the war birthed a scenario where the delineations between Christian salvation and military sacrifice converged. The theological precision valued by Colonial American Puritans gave way to a murky conception of salvation that placed national martyrdom and belief in the Christian gospel on equal footing.[141] The modern American conservative evangelical church evidences the ripple effects of these beliefs, with many churches and denominations proudly boasting of their nationalistic loyalties.

[140] Henry Alexander White's *Southern Presbyterian Leaders* is a prime example of post-war hagiographical writing. This work, written by a Presbyterian for other Presbyterians, compiles biographical sketches of important Southern Presbyterian figures from the Colonial Period to the early twentieth-century. One will have trouble finding White criticizing his subjects. Much like Bunting, White presented idealized caricatures of his subjects. Henry Alexander White, *Southern Presbyterian Leaders* (New York, NY: The Neale Publishing Company, 1911).

[141] While the American Puritanical conflation of Colonial America with Israel paved the way for the southern Confederate nationalism, the Puritans' commitment to biblical salvation cannot be understated. For example, in Jonathan Edwards' sermon "The Manner Which the Salvation of the Soul is Sought," he emphasized repentance of sins and belief in Jesus Christ as the way of salvation, not national martyrdom. Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons, on the Following Subjects: The Manner in Which Salvation is to be Sought. The Unreasonableness of Indetermination in Religion. Unbelievers Contemn the Glory of Christ* (S.l.: Gale Ecco, Print Editions, 2018).

CONCLUSION

Following the war, Robert Franklin Bunting reunited with his wife in Ohio. While traveling there, he accepted a pastorate at the First Presbyterian Church in Nashville, Tennessee. His prior Confederate allegiance stirred controversy when he arrived at the church. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church had assigned a Union loyalist to the pastorate, though the church chose Bunting to fill the position. Bunting had previously preached there during the war in 1862, and the church had taken a liking to the minister. The unionist pastor-elect vehemently demanded that the pastorate be given to him while Bunting refused to advocate for the position, leaving the choice up to the church. The congregation decided to reject the General Assembly's minister and chose Bunting to fill the position. This decision angered the appointed pastor, who went to local authorities to report the church. His actions were in vain, and Bunting was instated as pastor. The General Assembly appeared keen on installing a Unionist pastor for this former Confederate congregation. Whether the church chose Bunting for his previous experience or his Southern sympathies, or both, their selection of Bunting displays a

divide between the church leadership's view for the denomination's future and the local congregation's. He remained in this position for three years.[142]

Proceeding his ministry in Nashville, Bunting served in various pastoral and administrative roles. He returned to Texas in 1868 to pastor the Presbyterian church of Galveston. He ministered there for eleven years. While pastoring in Galveston, he also served as the founding editor of a denominational periodical, the *Texas Presbyterian*, from 1876-1880. He briefly served as the pastor of the Presbyterian church at Rome, Georgia, laboring there for only one year before taking a break from pastoral ministry to become the fiscal agent for the Southwestern Presbyterian University in Memphis, Tennessee. He served in this position for five years before returning to pastoral ministry in 1889, serving a Presbyterian church in Gallatin, Tennessee until his death in 1891 at the age of sixty-three.[143]

The legacy of Bunting's letters live on and help explain how southerners allowed both their theological and national convictions to coalesce into an interpretive lens for understanding the events of the war. This convergence of ideologies formed a comprehensive worldview that impacted how southerners saw themselves, the war, and the North. As witnessed through Bunting's letters, the ramifications of this worldview

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[142] Thomas Cutrer, "Conclusion," in Robert Franklin Bunting, *Our Trust Is in the God of Battles: The Civil War Letters of Robert Franklin Bunting, Chaplain, Terry's Texas Rangers, C.S.A*, ed. Thomas W. Cutrer, Voices of the Civil War (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), 315.

[143] Cutrer, "Conclusion," 315-316.

were immense. Nationalistic conflation muddied theological precision. He removed biblical stories from their contexts and contorted them to fit into southern war narratives. Southerners used these narratives to propound their pre-existing nationalistic ideologies. His Christian nationalistic worldview paved the way for his views on slavery and death.

Bunting intertwined his religious beliefs with arguments for slavery. Seen as a divine institution, the enslaved became the providential property of whites. His providential view of slavery laid the groundwork for future religious defenses of the institution. White individuals believed themselves superior to Black people, leading to a paternalistic view of slavery. Moreover, he merged slavery as an interpretive motif with Bible stories to both defend their nation and attack northerners. Lastly, he interpreted every lost battle as divine displeasure due to his covenantal interpretation of the Confederacy. He believed that God's displeasure was caused by the unrepentant sin of southerners, which ultimately led to the South's defeat in the war.

Death and religion converged in a new way during the war. His letters sought to mitigate the difficulty of providing the Good Death to the dying. He portrayed fallen Confederates as martyrs, tying salvation to dying for one's country, regardless of their religion. "Combat [in the Civil War]," Charles Reagan Wilson maintained, "had spiritual significance." [144] Bunting showcased this sentiment, with his letters portraying the Civil

[144] Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood*, 44.

War as a holy struggle. Dying for the Confederate cause offered an alternative route to Christian salvation. Confederate leaders were eulogized as heroic, masculine, and pious. These depictions paved the way for future hagiographical depictions of Confederate soldiers.

Bunting encapsulated the entirety of his letters with this statement: "With God for us, we must be successful."[145] He saw the Confederacy as heirs of puritanical America. Understanding this worldview is vital to comprehending how he and other southerners saw themselves during the war. He believed that the South defended their heritage from godless invaders. This heritage, he felt, was divine in origin. From this worldview flowed his perspectives on slavery and death. Since God chose the Confederacy, he likewise sanctioned their use of the enslaved to prosper their nation. Furthermore, since God supported the Confederacy, dying for this nation became intermingled with this religiously charged worldview. As such, he perceived his dead Confederate comrades as martyrs who gave their lives to God's chosen nation. Bunting's letters offer a window into the nineteenth-century white Christian mindset on the cultural issues surrounding the Civil War, demonstrating the coexistence of political and religious beliefs that are contradictory in theory. From that point forward, American Christianity became politicized.

[145] Bunting, 101.

The Civil War showcased this uneasy relationship, and white religious southerners further complicated it.

While Bunting has passed away, the words and ideas present throughout his letters live on. And, while the Confederacy also died, many of its ideas permeate American culture to this day. The cohesion of Christianity and American nationalism has persisted well into the modern era. Evangelical Christianity has overwhelmingly adopted the practice of blending patriotism with piety. Most evangelical sanctuaries prominently display American flags. Patriotic services are the norm, with "TAPS" regularly played on patriotic holidays to honor fallen American soldiers. While never explicitly pardoned of their sins, the message is clear: "God validates your sacrifice." As Bunting's cohesive patriotic and religious views illustrate, separating modern evangelicalism and politics is nearly impossible. The massive support for Donald Trump from the evangelical community evidences the church's political cooperation.[146] For many in the church, a vote for Trump was a vote for godly principles. Forsaking Trump, therefore, equated to forsaking God.

Bunting's perspective on the chattel institution illuminates modern American racial tensions. While the end of the war spelled the end of slavery, it did not change the

[146] Justin Nortey, "Most White Americans Who Regularly Attend Worship Services Voted for Trump in 2020," *Pew Research Center*, accessed February 18, 2024, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/08/30/most-white-americans-who-regularly-attend-worship-services-voted-for-trump-in-2020/.

racially charged conceptions of Black people held by whites, which persisted long after the close of the war. Luke Harlow argues: "The slavery question might have been resolved legally and by military force, but not ideologically or, above all, socially."[147] Slavery gave way to other forms of unfreedom for people of color. Oppressive white dominance reigned through Black Codes and Jim Crow laws. Following desegregation, racially charged ideas remained and divided the nation. Race and religion still share an uneasy alliance.[148] Until the same racist ideology present throughout Bunting's letters disappears, racial oppression and tension remain.

The ghosts of Bunting's hagiographical depictions of Confederate figures continue to haunt America. Numerous Confederate monuments sully the American landscape. These monuments honor and perpetuate the ideals and beliefs of the Confederacy, namely, white supremacy and racism. While many of these monuments have been removed, others remain. Defenders of the remaining monuments utilize Lost

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[147] Luke E. Harlow, "Slavery, Race, and Political Ideology in the White Christian South Before and After the Civil War," in Mark A. Noll and Luke E. Harlow, eds., *Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the Present*, 2nd ed. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 205.

[148] Racism in the church is a highly divisive issue among churchgoers, with some recognizing it and others denying it outright. One helpful work that sheds light on this issue is historian Jemar Tisby's book *The Color of Compromise*. In this work, Tisby outlines the American church's relationship with racism and suggests ways to dismantle white supremacist ideals still present within the church. Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Reflective, 2019).

Cause rhetoric to argue for their remainder. This rhetoric, reflected in Bunting's letters, "ignored slavery and … recast southern rebellion and defeat as patriotic valor."[149] The perpetuation of Confederate monuments is a result of hagiographical depictions of southerners much like the ones which flowed from Bunting's pen.

[149] William Lees, "The Problem with 'Confederate' Monuments on Our Heritage Landscape," *Social Science Quarterly* 102, no. 3 (May 2021): 1002–15, https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12962, 1002.

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