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**THE PROPELLENT ROLE OF CHRISTIANITY IN AMERICAN
ABOLITIONIST MOVEMENT**

by

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ABSTRACT

Christianity has played an indispensable role in both American religious history and secular history. The U.S could be defined as a country based on the spirit of “Protestantism”. Both political faiths and social affairs in American society were greatly influenced by Christian Protestantism in the nation’s shaping period. Undoubtedly, American abolitionist campaign is by no means cutting off connection with Christian influence. The modern American abolitionist movement emerged in the early 1830s as a byproduct of the upsurge of religious revivalism popularly known as the Second Great Awakening. Revivalistic tenets led abolitionists to regard slavery as the product of personal sin and to demand emancipation as the price of repentance. Furthermore, it is not difficult to find that there exist voluminous scriptures in *Bible* claiming that Slavery is an unforgivable sin and should be forbidden. And anti-slavery always has occupied an important position in Christian doctrines. By presenting the backgrounds and deeds of some outstanding white and black abolitionists, the author has demonstrated how Christianity served as a positive momentum to give impetus to the abolitionist movement and to drive this movement forward until final emancipation. This thesis is intended to explore the relationship between Christianity and American abolitionist movement, and how Christianity has been as a positive momentum to propel this notable historical event objectively from the existing data.

Key Words: Christianity; religious awakening; American abolitionist movement

摘要

从美国建国开始，基督教就扮演着重要的角色，美国社会的方方面面都被基督教新教打上了深深的烙印。宗教的影响体现在社会生活的各个方面，作为在美国历史中占有重要一页的废奴运动自然也会受到基督教的影响。现代美国废奴运动开始于十九世纪三十年代，此时美国社会正在经历一次重要的宗教奋兴运动，即第二次大觉醒运动。宗教复兴的信条为废奴主义者带来了信念与动力。他们以《圣经》中宣扬人人平等以及关于奴隶制罪恶的记载和描述作为思想基础和精神支柱，坚持不懈地与非人的奴隶制做斗争直至最后取得胜利。这其中包括了白人与黑人神职人员与普通平信徒。本文从考察基督教教义与废奴运动宗旨之间的关系入手，详细地解释了基督教教义中宣扬众生平等、奴隶制罪恶等信条是如何与废奴运动者的初衷所吻合进而给予他们持续的动力进行斗争；进而理清基督教与废奴运动存在着怎样的因果关系，从而明确基督教对废奴运动的推动作用。

关键词：基督教；宗教复兴；美国废奴运动

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Description

As a multi-cultural and multi-ethical nation, the United States has always been proud of its unique freedom and democracy, which is also the dream of the founding fathers'. Christianity as one of the main religious beliefs among the world, has existed for centuries in the U.S. since the first puritans set out their ambitious plan on the new land; it is a window through which the American national spirit and historical development could be manifested. In his masterpiece *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville has noted in the first half volume: "No any other country can match America in terms of the magnificent influence of Christianity on people's soul" (1:59). Deeply surprised and touched by the connection between the peculiarity of American Christianity and the national creed of freedom, he even says:

The Americans combine the notions of Christianity and of liberty so intimately in their minds, which it is impossible to make them conceive the one without the other; and with them this conviction does not spring from that barren traditional faith which seems to vegetate in the soul rather than to live. (1:337)

Thus a persuasive conclusion could be drawn: without Christianity, there would have been no present America and Americans. Christianity has always been playing a significant role throughout the development of America.

The American abolitionist crusade is one of the most important reform movements in the United States history. It brought thousands of reformers together in a more than three decade long battle to end the deeply entrenched institution. It is religious and secular, moral and political, philosophical and self-interested, Northern and Southern. America is a country of Promised Land and the founding fathers alleged that "everyone was created equal". However, the reality just stands at the

opposition state of the ideal. An English traveler Edward Abdy agreed: “the American people were equal to other nations in their love of justice, religion, and kindness, yet they condemned one-fifth of their people to contempt and debasement only because of their skin color, though the United States was the world’s leading egalitarian republic” (Goodman 235). Americans began debating over the slavery issue in the late seventeenth century, when the Quakers, who had opposed slavery in Great Britain, developed arguments against the expansion of chattel slavery in North America. However, their voices were muted compared to the overwhelming economic development of the plantation system in the Southern colonies. Early opponents were primarily religious figures, like the founder of Methodism, John Wesley, who wrote a treatise attacking the institution in the mid-eighteenth century. The Quaker meetings opposed slavery simultaneously, and one man named John Woolman, eloquently told of his anguish of conscience he suffered when required by his employer to write an indenture of sale for the purchase of a slave. Moreover, slavery was challenged by natural rights theorists of the Enlightenment, and it is one of the ironies of American history that the most eloquent articulation of those principles was composed by Thomas Jefferson, the drafter of the *Declaration of Independence*, while also the master of Virginia plantation and the owner of slaves.

The important link between Christian Protestantism and abolitionism was popularized most forcefully in Gilbert Barnes’s *The Antislavery Impulse, 1830-1844*. Barnes argued that evangelical religion in western New York was the initial impulse behind the emergence of abolitionism. By charting the spread of antislavery sentiment in the Midwest, Barnes noted the importance of religion in bringing about the abolitionist movement: “a religious impulse which began in the West of 1830, was translated for a time into antislavery organization, and then broadened into a sectional crusade against the South” (McKivigan, *Abolitionism*, 6). Moreover, it could be seen that the consequent coming of the vigorous abolitionist movement was full of Christian religious creedal passion which served as the theoretical base and spiritual backbone prodding these abolition fighters to complete their holy mission.

Therefore, it is evident that the American Christian Protestant was so deeply embedded in the abolitionist movement that it is impossible to analyze one without another. In view of the intimacy of the two aspects, this thesis aims to answer the questions that why Christianity was involved in the American abolitionist movement and how it exerted its influence upon this movement by expounding the details of those Bible doctrines which comply with the abolition spirit; the relationship between Christianity and abolitionism crusade and how Christianity acted as a catalyzer to push this campaign. Based on lots of second hand materials, the research adopts a method of history documents analysis combined with systematic comparison and induction.

1.2 Significance of the Research

Although in the United States and in other foreign countries there are huge volumes on abolitionist movement, most of them focused on this issue from political and economic perspectives. Slavery as the cause of Civil War is normally a widespread statement. Through deeper exploration, it would be found that religion, especially Christian Protestantism, had exerted much more influence than we used to expect. Therefore, greater attention should be paid to the relationship between Christianity and abolitionist movement. The most essential problem in researching American abolitionist movement is to make clear how Christianity get involved and influence the crusade and what is the cause and effect between these two ends. Grasping the overall situation between religion and abolitionist movement is helpful for us to reach a thorough understanding of Christian doctrines and tradition. Furthermore, it could be learned more about the regular pattern of how religion influence the development of American society in an all-round way in terms of politics, economics, and culture. In addition, researching the relationship between Christianity and abolitionist movement bears much realistic meanings. Since the end of the cold war, conflicts out of religion were sprung up continuously. Many countries, such as America, took advantage of religious issues to achieve its own

foreign policy target. Therefore, it is necessary for individuals to learn more about its religious background so as to deal with relative problems. Recently, American Protestant right-wing forces have dominated in the political field, wielding its traditional “Stick and Carrot” foreign policy to promote the universal value and democracy and to strengthen its hegemony. In light of that statement, comprehension on this issue would be good for our administration to formulate policies toward the United States. Besides, Christian involvement in the abolitionist movement emerged as a spontaneous folk force, their advocacy of freedom, equality, and fraternity idea was exerting irreplaceable influence on Americans in the process of arousing public awareness and enhancing national consciousness. With regard to China, taking American case as an example is also useful, especially in strengthening the national sense of cohesion and patriotic enthusiasm.

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

The purpose of this thesis aims to explore the relationship between Christianity and abolitionist movement and to demonstrate how Christianity served as a positive momentum in the campaign. Based on voluminous historical literary documents, This paper has analyzed the abolition issue with many second-hand materials both in China and in foreign countries. And a qualitative analysis had been conducted throughout the whole thesis. This thesis consists of eight parts. Chapter I serves as an introduction part to present the theme and concern of this paper, describes the process, method and significance of conducting this research, and outlines the organizational arrangement of the thesis in terms of time consequence. Chapter II mainly focuses on the previous research in western countries and China respectively, and points out the research gap in this field.

In the third chapter, the author intends to display an panorama of the participation of Christianity in early American social affairs in two ways: politically and culturally. From that, the United States, a country built upon Christian Protestantism would be confirmed. It is convinced that the coming of abolitionist

movement is the embodiment of Christian faith in secular affairs.

The fourth chapter focuses on the debate on slavery in North and South and the convert of churches' attitude toward slavery. A conclusion could be drawn that these Christian denominations, owing to the influence of their own traditions and economic interests, they hold different views on whether the slavery system should be abolished.

The central part of of this thesis are the fifth and sixth chapters, which include the religious doctrines of Christianity upon abolitionism motif and how Christianity has been a propeller in the abolitionist movement specifically. The author tries to find out the bondings of the two in terms of traditional Christian doctrines, ideas, and religious activities, which are also the ideological basis and spiritual backbone both for the white and black abolitionists. Chapter seven reveals the historical confinements and limitations of the Christian influence on the abolition campagin. Although Christianity served as an indispensable force in the movement, some limitations should not be ignored. Based on above analysis, an American paradox is presented, which has been perplexing Americans for centuries, namely, a fissure between their ideals and the reality; all the massive social activities are intended to make up this fissure.

Chapter eight is the concluding part, in which main findings and basic argument of the thesis are listed and its significance and limitations are presented at last.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Previous Studies in Foreign Countries

In foreign countries, especially in the United States, research on the relationship between religion and abolitionism originated from the very beginning of the republic. Alvin J. Schmidt, a professor of sociology at Illinois College, is the author of *How Christianity Changed the World*. In this book, slavery abolition was raised as a Christian achievement in a whole chapter. He traced back to early Christian anti-slavery tradition, and then analyzed its influence in many aspects: Christian preachers' impact on abolition, Christian laypeople in abolitionism, Christianity sustained the slaves, American civil rights and the Christian connection. According to Schmidt, both the abolition of slavery and rejection of racial segregation have their roots in the earliest teachings of Christianity. The great historian Will Durant has shown, Christianity was not a segregated religion: "it offered itself without restriction to all individuals, classes, and nations; it was not limited to one people, like Judaism, nor to the freemen of one state, like the official cults of Greece and Rome" (Schmidt 289). Because of the highly summarized conclusions, this book bears high value of reference in the Christianity and abolitionism study. Gary H. Nash, a doctor from Princeton University, has appreciated the effect and influence of African Americans and Native Americans in constructing the American history in his book *The American People, Creating a nation and a society*. In the first half volume, the author has accumulated numerous and accurate historical evidences to describe how the blacks were slaved, how they pursued the freedom, and took part in the abolitionist movement and converted to Christianity. It included many details about blacks and abolitionist movement. This is likely to have been the most comprehensive description in studies of American history so far.

Some American scholars have compiled a series of collections on abolitionism which mentioned the relation between abolitionism and religion. In the symposium *Abolitionism and American Religion* and *Religion and the Antebellum Debate over Slavery*, John R. McKivigan, the author here addresses the general problem of religion's role in the slavery controversy, presents key published articles on the history of the American abolitionist movement's attempt to convert the nation's religious institutions into allies in the battle for emancipation. McKivigan quotes Lincoln's words so as to highlight the religious and moral issue: "Both read the same *Bible*, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces, the prayers of both could not be answered; that of neither has been answered fully" (McKivigan, *Abolitionism*, 6). The Civil War president recognized a crucial fact that historians have long since sought to explain—"that the antebellum sectional controversy over slavery developed within a society profoundly pervaded by evangelical Protestantism" (McKivigan, *Religion*, 6). Through his research on Antebellum American historians, an even more obvious evidence of the participation of Christianity in abolitionist movement has been presented by McKivigan. He argues that historians searched for links between the Second Great Awakening and the pattern of social change before the Civil War. Whitney Cross, the writer of *The Burned-Over District* (1950), shows how the interaction between evangelical religion and economic change initiated a series of reform movements designed to perfect the U.S society for the coming millennium. He also mentions that at the beginning of the 1960s, historians have helped to clarify the often complex and subtle intellectual affinities between evangelical religion and abolitionism. Armed with their belief that revelation was superior to reason and that all human beings were capable of salvation, evangelical abolitionists saw slavery as a sin that required immediate abolition. "From the outset, they thus insured that the antebellum controversy over slavery would be debated in religious and moral terms" (McKivigan, *Abolitionism*, 6).

There has been a tendency in historical studies of the abolitionist movement to focus on the contributions of whites, while regard blacks only as passive recipients rather than fighters in the emancipation process. In *Black Abolitionism—A Quest for Human Dignity*, Beverly E. Mitchell has distinguished the feature between black abolitionism and white abolitionism. White abolitionists wanted to see the end of slavery. However, despite their abolitionist activities, they were unable to accord blacks the same level of human dignity that they believed whites possessed. Hence, the defense, rescue, and restoration of human dignity of blacks would become the defining feature of the African American understanding of what abolitionism really meant(3). In this book, Mitchell enumerates several prominent black abolitionists for the purpose of demonstrating the influence of Christianity in their fight for freedom, such as David Walker, James Pennington, Henry Garnet, and Samuel Ward. He points out that their comprehension of Christian faith helped to provide a theological framework for understanding slavery as a sin. They affirmed that all human beings are created in the image of God that Christ died for the sins of all, and that all persons are subject to the law of love, namely, the requirement to love one's neighbor as oneself (91). Similarly, Mason Lowance in *Against Slavery—An Abolitionist reader* confirms the Christian value of the Negro. He expounded its capacity for salvation, and the urgency for slaveholders to redeem themselves by Christianizing their slaves. "The Glorious God will put an unspeakable glory upon me, if it may be so. The Consideration that would move you, to Teach your Negroes the Truths of the Glorious Gospel, as far as you can, and bring them, if it may be, to live according to those Truths, a Sober, and a Godly life "(5). Lowance here essentially argued that Christian slaves would make a better living for their having been introduced to the principles of the Christian faith.

As for obstacles in the process of emancipation, it was mentioned in Bryan Lebeau's book. In the *Religion in America to 1865*, a monograph which published in 2000, Lebeau tells the story of American religion to 1865 in a chronological way. In the chapter of "Civil war and the Churches", he introduces the severe conflict before

the civil war over the slavery issue which related to the interpretation of *Bible*. Lebeau indicates that Southern evangelicals used the Biblical story to defend slavery and regarded it as the cornerstone of their social order, which was included in the Old Testament story of Ham, Shem and Japeth. This is the theoretical basis for southerners. Church schism is also discussed in the later chapter.

2.2 Previous Studies in China

Since the reform and opening up of China, Chinese scholars have begun to show interest in studying American history from the religious angle. However, their relative researches fall far behind other countries. There is no acknowledged monograph in this field. Several comments may be found sporadically in some articles, in which the influence of Christianity is placed on the top priority, and the cause and effect of Christianity and abolitionist's movement is ignored. In *Analysis on Religious Situation in Antebellum America*, Liu Yuanzhao points out religion is another incitement to the Civil War which is easy to be neglected, and abolitionist movement and Civil War is inseparable. He explores the origin of anti-slavery tradition which is in line with Christian doctrines, the debates over slavery issue and influence of religious schism. In *the Historical Origin of American Black Theology*, an article published in Social Science Journal of Xiangtan University, the author Lei Yutian examines the real process of how Christianity influenced Negro community, namely, providing organizers and theorists for abolitionist movement and highlighting the propellent role of church in the anti-slavery crusade. Some scholars tend to focus on the moral side. Chen Qi in *the Reflection of American Historians upon Civil War* asserts that the religious moral motivation is the essence of abolitionists' viewpoint, indicating the relationship between religion and abolitionist movement carrying much weight in American historians' circle. As to the catalyzer role of Christianity in abolitionist movement, Xie Rongqian, a researcher from the national religious affairs bureau, published a paper named *Christian Tradition on American Politics, Social Cognition and its Influence*. In this thesis the writer

expounds the propellent effect of the four Great Awakenings to the U.S society in American history. He points out that the abolitionist movement emerged as a byproduct of the upsurge of religious revivalism known as the Second Great Awakening and this movement was the igniter of American Civil War. It has important reference value when it comes to Zheng Yiping's *Analysis of the Impact of Christianity on American Abolitionist and Civil Rights Movement*. It is one of the few articles which focuses on how Christianity propels the abolitionist movement from various angles. Most of the previous studies both at home and abroad highlight the influence of Christianity in abolitionist movement, while few of them approach the problem through the interests and demands of the participation of Christianity in the crusade. Apparently, the discussions in those papers are not profound and systematic. Thus, it might be wise for us to conclude that there is still a lot to be done in the research on religion and abolitionism. This thesis would make a comprehensive, well-rounded and objective analysis of the relationship between Christianity and abolitionist movement and how Christianity played as a propelling role in the movement.

In addition, the research gap should not be ignored. That is, despite Antebellum America, especially in the north region, the abolitionist movement was straggling fast unpredictably, while lots of conservative forces were defending the legality of slavery obstinately. Most of the south Episcopal churches and several north parishes firmly supported slavery institution even at the eve of Civil War for their self-interests. Because of the limited time and resource, some questions are not answered comprehensively enough; it leaves the author to further explore the religious role and the disparity between the North and South.

CHAPTER III

THE PARTICIPATION OF CHRISTIANITY IN EARLY AMERICAN SOCIAL AFFAIRS

The principal themes in Antebellum America are growth, diversity and adaptation, all of which contributed to the formation of a new nation from thirteen tiny separate colonies. Such were the themes of American religious history to early republic as well. The number and diversity of religious bodies increased to levels unprecedented in the older nations of the world, as did the percentage of Americans that chose to belong to those religious bodies. Regardless of their intent upon their arrival on the shores of North America, religious bodies had to play by a different set of rules and to modify their beliefs and behaviors as to be successful in winning over the hearts and minds of population. It is wisely to say that the American nation was built upon beliefs of religions, especially Christian Protestantism; Christianity had already penetrated all way through in American society.

3.1 The Participation of Religion in the Early Republic

In the year of 1620, a group of puritans who believed in their way of serving God, sailed from Britain by “May Flower”, through rigorous voyage finally landed on the new land of North America. Naturally, they are reputed as the “Founding Fathers”. These puritans came to this unexplored continent with the dream of establishing “City of God” so as to realize their religious pursuits and goals. Thus, America is not formed naturally from the very beginning; it is a religious country which was built by puritans who were seeking the avoidance of religious persecution and establishing an ideal spiritual world. After the travel and intense study of American society, Alexis de Tocqueville notes: “When I reflect upon the consequences of this primary circumstance, methinks I see the destiny of America embodied in the first Puritan who landed on those shores, just as the human race was

represented by the first man” (1:320). Therefore, when we look back upon the American history, it is obvious that the foundation of American colonies and nation originating from Christian Protestantism. In America, wrote the German theologian Philip Scahaff in 1853“every thing had a Protestant beginning” (Huntington 154). This Puritanism has always been influencing American politics, society and culture afterwards.

Their attention was to establish communities of pure Christians who collectively swore a covenant with God. Puritans believed that civil and religious transgressors should be harshly punished. They willingly gave up freedom that other English settlers sought. As an ideology of rebellion originated in England, Puritanism in North America became an ideology of control and of a powerful mission that is still part of American thinking. As Winthrop reminded the first settlers: “we shall be as a city upon a hill [and] the eyes of all people are upon us” (Howe 65). One of the main causes of American independent war is that most of the early immigrants were Christian Protestants while they were oppressed by English colonizers. Originally, these puritans were persecuted due to their opposition to the Church of England, namely the Anglican Church, after they fled to American continent; these religious separatists had always been standing at the opposite side of British state religion. The religion revivalism had made dissemination and intensification of Protestant doctrines and led the total break off with British Anglican Church. This movement also accelerated the emergence of immigrants’ egoism consciousness, aroused the common consensus on issues economically and politically, and intensified the belief of “The Chosen One” and “Manifest Destiny” among ordinary citizens. Based on those thoughts, American people gradually achieved the common view that every man and woman has the “unalienable rights” which propel them to protest the tyranny of British government. It also provided moral basis for them to fight against British colonizers. American historian William Macklin argued: “Evangelical movement had laid the foundation for revolution” (Zheng 79). Marsden also had similar statement: “The great revivalism in 18th

century bridged Puritanism and democratic revolution” (Zheng 81). Obviously, Christian Protestantism was the mainstream. It could be also easily found that the ponderous influence of Christianity on revolutionary leaders. During the independence war, George Washington ordered his fellow officers and soldiers to read out prayers to begin with a new day, and disposed priests accompanied with army from July 1776, which remained as a tradition till nowadays. Washington held the view that American independence is the benevolence of God. He addressed in the inaugural speech:

Every step by which they have advanced to the character of an independent nation seems to have been distinguished by some token of providential agency. That Almighty Being who rules over the universe; who presides in the councils of nations; and whose providential aid can supply every human defect; that his benediction may consecrate to the liberties and happiness of the People of United States. (Fountain 625)

Therefore, Christianity played a significant role in American exploration and revolution period. Meanwhile, it should not be ignored that its influence upon American politics and social moral ethics.

3.2 The Participation of Religion in the Political Field

In America, religion and politics have a close connection as a part of American political tradition. Church is the primary institution of American politics. If you do not understand the role of religion in American society, that means you do not know American politics. Tocqueville said: “Every religion is to be found in juxtaposition to a political opinion which is connected with it by affinity” (1:185). In America, God always stands with democracy. It was in the name of God that pilgrims signed the Mayflower Compact in 1620, the foundation of American autonomy and law; it was also in the name of God that Americans found there was “a civil, moral, and federal liberty” (1: 29). After the foundation of the republic, religions, especially

Christian Protestantism, had played a decisive role in the development of political parties in some sense. Politicians did carry out secular activities always in the name of God. Not only most of American presidents are Christians, but also many congressmen are God believers. George Washington was a parish representative in Virginia. John Adams alleged himself a fanatical believer of Christianity. The American continental congress held during 1774 to 1789, had greatly promoted religious activities because most of their members are pious Christian believers. At that time, the party which enters the election contest always boasts they are the spokesman of Christian truth, and the opposition parties are titled as “pagans”. The party which wins the campaign usually considers the election victory as the success of Christian salvation. “The election campaign is deemed to be a revitalized movement of Christian theology” (Dong 26). In American secular life, the influence of God is reflected obviously in every aspect. The absence of any particular established state or national religion opened the way for the direct incorporation of many of the ideas and symbols of generalized religion into American political behavior. Just as the national flag is a symbol found in almost all American churches, so is the God found in almost all American national rites and ceremonies. The declaration of the nation’s birth assures Americans that they are endowed by their creator with unalienable rights; Americans pledge their allegiance to one nation “under God”; they proclaim their trust in God on their currency; they are told by their Supreme Court justices that their institutions presuppose a Supreme Being; their public ceremonies invariably begin with an invocation by a clergyman from one religion and end with a benediction by a clergyman from another. Nowhere else in the world are church and state more firmly separated institutionally and religious and political ideas are closely interwoven in national beliefs. The United States is, indeed, as G.K Chesterton said, “a nation with the soul of a church” (Huntington 153). Fifty years later another European observer also affirmed, “You don’t have a country over there, you have a huge church” (Huntington 154).

3.3 The Participation of Religion in the Social and Cultural Aspect

From the very beginning of the establishment of colonies, Americans were endowed with protestant moral ethics. After the founding of the republic, Christianity was also regarded as the foundation of the country and the basement of national ethics. The Protestant emphasis on morality and good works rather than on theology and doctrine made it easier for people to adhere to generalized religious code. American social customs and conventions are necessary the reflection of this main value. Washington in his farewell address presented to his countrymen,

Let us with caution indulge this supposition, that morality can be maintained without religion, whatever maybe conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that National morality can be prevail in the exclusion of religious principle. (Allen 801)

His conclusion was going to tell people that virtue or morality often originates from religion. Religion is the motive power of a government which enjoys a high reputation of “of the people; by the people; for the people.” John Adams followed Washington’s step by a further radical expression: “Unless the moral behaviors of American citizens are steered by Christian creed or the free institution would not be maintained” (Yu 15). Protestantism in America was a democratic and republican religion, and this contributed powerfully to the establishment of a republic and democracy in public affairs. Religious influences have played key roles in shaping the ideas and behaviors. As Tocqueville observed, “There is no country in the world, where the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than America” (1: 320). In the Antebellum American society, under the calling of Christian ethics and the Second Great Awakening, American people participated actively in the social reform movement with a sense of duty and moral motivation, hoping to rebuild American society and eliminate social evils. There were many social movements springing up in which Christian believers had pushed forward an immense influence, such as the Prohibition movement, women’s right, and social

labor organization.

CHAPTER IV

SLAVERY ISSUE IN THE ANTEBELLUM AMERICA

Although America is a Christian nation, a moral dilemma which had been haunting Americans for nearly a century, let them have to face it seriously. That is the notorious slavery system. It was the first barrier for US as the country to head towards an orthodox Christian nation. In views of Christian believers, this inhumane system was the last stain on the “City upon a hill”; it was a sinful institution which betrayed God’s will. Both the northern and southern Christians, either anti-slavery or proslavery, could cite numerous evidences to support the correctness of their assertions. Thus a fierce debate on whether the slavery should continue or be abolished seems to be the hottest topic in the Antebellum America. Here an objective observation is essential; namely, many churches’ attitude towards the slavery are very complicated. It could not simply rush to conclusion that one party is right and the other is not. And one party who is in support of anti-slavery at first could also change the attitude, vice versa. In general, on the eve of Civil War, through arduous lobbying by northern Christian abolitionists, most of northern Christian Protestant denominations finally agreed to sign the *Proclamation of Emancipation*, whereas the southerners held firm to their obstinacy.

4.1 Debate on slavery issue

American slavery was introduced into the colonies in 1621, when the Jamestown was settled, then in its infancy. The America gradually began the importation of African slaves to sustain the labor force needed to operate the small farms and plantations necessary to survival in the agricultural economy. The African slaves became property by law, which eased the conscience of those slave owners concerned about human rights. Although applied differently, Christianity became an integral part of the debate over the institution of slavery. While both slave-owners

and abolitionists justified their ethical standpoints through the Christian framework. In each of these cases, the group in question utilized the Christian worldview to justify its beliefs. Thus, religion became an important part of the rhetoric of the parties in the battle over the practice of slavery.

The context of this debate in America was complex. Not only did ordinary citizens disagree with the practice of slavery, but also governmental leadership for the most part was ambivalent. Most American presidents were fairly consistent in their objection to the slave practice. In a letter to Robert Morris, President Washington stated that “there is not a man living who wishes more sincerely than I do, to see a plan adopted for the abolition of it” (Lang 181). John Adams explained that “I have, through my whole life, held the practice of slavery in such abhorrence, that I have never owned a Negro or any other slave...” (Lang 181). When Abraham Lincoln was still serving in the Illinois General Assembly in 1837, he wrote an official pretest in the assembly which included the statement: “...the institution of slavery is founded on both injustice and bad policy...” (Lang 181). If American leaders were against the practice of slavery, how did the practice persist for nearly a hundred years after the founding of the republic? Some would simply say that the financial gains outweighed the ethical considerations. However, it also seems that since both sides of this argument had religious justification, it took longer to resolve.

Slave owners also justified their practice through Christian rhetoric. They saw slavery as sanctioned by scriptures and as a way of structuring a viable Christian order. The biblical justification for enslaving other human beings came from *Leviticus 25:44-46*. This scripture states that male and female slaves are to come from Israel’s neighboring nations, but not from Israel itself. In addition, slaves could become inherited property and one could make another person a slave for life, as long as that person was not Israelites. Slave owners thought they inherited the promises which were made by God to the Israelites, so they believed this scripture was applicable to their situation. Because the *Bible* was considered to be the word of God, this scripture was used to justify subjecting a group of humans to lifelong

slavery.

Abolitionists also used Christian rhetoric. However, they utilized scriptures and theological ideology to justify the necessity of freeing the slaves. For them, all humans were equal in the eyes of God. While early attempts at abolition utilized scriptures as a means of persuading the government, businesses, and the general public that the institution of slavery was sinful for its embarking on the liberation of its people. Early abolitionist movements did not emphasize on an immediate end to slavery. Attempts starting in 1831, they gradually abandoned the gradual approach and began to call for an immediate end to all forms of slavery in the new nation. For instance, in the American Anti-Slavery Society Constitution, members stated that the institution of slavery was “a heinous crime in the sight of God, and that the duty, safety, and best interests of all concerned, require its immediate abandonment, without expatriation” (Lang 186). While their strategies may have differed, all abolitionist movements believed that it was morally wrong to hold another human being in the bonds of slavery. Most of the abolitionist movement appealed to the higher authority of the Christian scriptures and tradition to support their assertions.

4.2 The Complex Situation of Church

Churches' attitude towards slavery during that time was complicated. On one hand, most of the northern regions were occupied by denominations of Christian Protestantism churches like Quakers; Methodists; Presbyterians and Baptists, which were mostly in support of abolition. On the other hand, most of the southern areas were dominated by Anglican churches which were mostly conservative and pro-slavery. In the early efforts toward the abolition of slavery, the Quakers, Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists led the way. There were many anti-slavery societies in the early 1800's, although their voices were muted compared to the calls for economic development of the plantation system in the southern colonies. Despite of these anti-slavery movements, northern churches also shared a proslavery heritage. In the aftermath of the revolution age, the wide acceptance of

Enlightenment concepts regarding natural rights and human liberty led several denominations to incorporate condemnations of slaveholding in their disciplines. But this early burst of antislavery vigor in the churches barely lasted out the century, and few denominations actually enforced disciplinary actions against slave-owning members. Many church leaders rejected the abolitionists' contention that slaveholding was intrinsically sinful. One commonly expressed objection to the abolitionists' position held that slavery was a morally neutral institution that had to be judged according to each individual circumstance. Conservative church leaders acknowledged that slaveholding was often a source of sinful abuses, but they laid the blame to erring individuals, not to the system. Even moderate antislavery church leaders who dissented from the abolitionist described slaveholding as an unqualified sin. These antislavery church leaders contended that some slave owners could not be held morally accountable for their actions. One expression of this viewpoint acknowledged grounds on which slaveholders could escape from the guilt attached to their position. For example, if an individual became an owner of slaves involuntarily, perhaps through inheritance, and found himself legally prohibited from manumitting them, he was not to be judged as a sinner. Antislavery moderates sometimes claimed that a master who recognized the evil of slavery would be morally correct to delay freeing his slaves if circumstances made such an action detrimental to their welfare. Other objections to the abolitionists' religious principles and goals related to more worldly considerations. Many church leaders hesitated to endorse any position on slavery in case of driving away southern members. Such caution is attributable both to feelings of denominational pride and to fear that decisive public quarrels would jeopardize confidence in the church's moral leadership. Both popular revivalists and local ministers complained that preaching against slavery would impede their missionary and other pure religious work.

Analysis of the northern churches' response to this debate over slavery reveals that a number of socialcultural and institutional factors interacted with theological issues to erect complex barriers against the success of abolitionist efforts.

Meanwhile, in the southern areas, although antislavery sentiment lingered in states like Georgia, Missouri, and Louisiana, religion still played an instrumental role in the defense of slavery and in the growth of sectionalism in the Antebellum South. Most of southern clergymen endowed slavery with biblical sanction, legitimized the southern social order, and exacerbated the growing estrangement between North and South. The anti-slavery behaviors conducted by northern abolitionists forced southern clergymen to defend the morality of slavery. Based on the assumption that *Bible* was God's word, proslavery ministers constructed an elaborate justification of slavery. Besides, they also sought to further sanctify slavery by wording on social order maintenance. For example, they created a slaveholding ethic to guide the conduct of masters towards their slaves. They reminded southern slaveholders that they were morally responsible for the physical and spiritual welfare of their bondmen. To sum up, through the biblical justification of human bondage and the slaveholding ethics, southern clergymen had provided a firm moral foundation for the South's peculiar institution.

4.3 The Convert of Church

Although some northern denominations still hesitate in adopting abolitionist principles and practices, there was evidence that abolitionist pressure increased antislavery sentiment in the northern churches during the 1840s and 1850s. Initially, only the traditional antislavery denominations, including the Quakers and Baptists and a few "comeouter" sects founded by abolitionists condemned all slaveholders as sinners and refused to share religious fellowship with them before the beginning of the Civil War. The secession of southern members from New School Presbyterian and Methodist Episcopal churches in the immediate prewar years effectively ended the fellowship of slaveholders, but these major churches still refrained from making any formal endorsement of abolitionism. Although many Unitarians, Baptists, and Congregationalists strengthened their testimony against the evils of slavery, none of these denominations came up to abolitionist standards by severing all ties with

slaveholders. The centrists remained in their long-standing position that slavery was a morally neutral and exclusive secular question. Despite of considerable antislavery progress in many denominations, several northern churches still held a reserved attitude about abolitionism in 1860.

However, the coming of Civil War broke down much of the northern churches' resistance to taking aggressive antislavery actions. With more than three decades of abolitionist lobbying, several denominations gradually accepted the principles of the inherent sinfulness of slave owning and the equality of all races. The distinct difference of economic structure between North and South and the secession of southern states also accelerated the northerners to realize the fact that the slavery system would not persist in the northern industrious society. While antislavery moderates gained control of many denominations, initiative for the strongest actions came from other sources. For example, amount of northern church groups ceased fellowship with slaveholders not only by erecting strong antislavery disciplines but through the secession of southern proslavery militants. Meanwhile, the secession of the southern states led many denominations to acknowledge the moral corruption inherent in a slaveholding society. War time anti-southern sentiment even led the Methodist Episcopal Church to adopt a discipline barring slave owners from membership. Yet we have to mention that the northern churches' delay in endorsing emancipation until the start of the Civil War revealed more the acceptance of wartime anti-southern passion than of moral arguments for immediate abolition. After initial hesitation, most denominations responded to abolitionist entreaties to endorse emancipation. Northern churches began to lobby the president and congress during the war to put an end to slavery. Before the war's end, many northern church leaders also enlisted in abolitionist efforts to reinforce emancipation with freemen's aid and anti-racial discrimination programs.

Based on above exposition, a conclusion might be drawn without difficulty that it is an arduous and tough question to explicitly give an account of the situation of the church's status in American antebellum society. There is no any denomination

that could provide people a distinct and logical beginning in terms of its own doctrine and standpoint. All the Christian Protestant branches had been through a stage which the slavery debate was the most headache problem. Both the proslavery side and anti-slavery side quoted scriptures from *Bible* as justifications for their movements. The hot debate on slavery issue also led to the schism of church in denominations such as Presbyterians and Methodists.

History has proven that the Northern Christian anti-slavery denominations finally conquered the South on the slavery issue, which means the Northern Christian churches and their believers served as an indispensable role on the road to victory. Therefore, how the Christian beliefs and churches influence these Christian abolitionists and propel them to persist until the end is what we are concerning. Given that reason, this thesis on the next chapter explores more the aspects of how Christianity and churches played an active role in this anti-slavery campaign while not ignoring the negative side, and strives to objectively draw a conclusion of the influence of religion in abolitionist movement.

Most of American abolitionists are black and white people from north. As active socialists in the American antebellum society, they crusaded over the slavery issue not by accident, but by their Christian faith. A majority of abolitionists had Christian background and had been converted to Christianity.

CHAPTER V

RELIGIOUS DOCTRINES OF CHRISTIANITY UPON ABOLITIONISM MOTIF

In *Bible*, many chapters aim at instilling doctrines related to equality and kindness among people. These doctrines imperceptibly influence Christian Americans, whose dream is to establish a country cherishing liberty and equality. For this reason, when society began to deviate from its presupposed track, abolitionists, “labeled as corrector of the social evils”, started to wield Bible and other Christian anti-slavery traditions as weapon to attack the inhuman institution.

5.1 Christian Beliefs—Promotion of Human’s Liberty and Equality

Most of Americans believe in Christianity. In the *Declaration of Independence*, the founding fathers had set the tone, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men and women are created equal, that they are endowed by their creators with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness” (Stron 68). Human rights mainly consist of the right for liberty and for equality. These two are continuously emphasized by Christian doctrines and its believers. The way that Christians worship God is to propagate God’s benevolence and mercy among every individual. What Christianity promoting is that everyone should respect and be kind to each other by following God’s will. In front of God’s providence, everyone is totally equal in terms of value of life and human dignity. The emphasis on human’s basic rights in the eyes of God represents that Christianity cherishes the fundamental rights of a human being; namely, in the eyes of God, every man is created uniquely and precious. The emphasis upon individual liberty and rights laid the foundation for abolitionists’ tone and motif on the slavery issue. Obviously, proslavery was inconsistent with the basic principles of Christian doctrines.

The idea of equality has its Christian parentage; it originates from two doctrines. First, everyone is the child of God. *Bible's* doctrines tell us that: God's providence creates human beings, and we are all bathed under the light of God. Therefore, everyone is born equal. Secondly, God create human, and the ancestors of human were eating the same spiritual food and drinking the same spiritual water. Therefore, everyone enjoys equality indiscriminately and no one should be enslaved. The *New Testament Gospel of Matthew* says people are sisters and brothers. In the *Epistle to the Romans*, Paul highlighted: "We are the sons chosen by God and are descendants like Jesus, go suffer with him as well as enjoy the pride" (Lu 8). Another story also demonstrates this point. St. Paul told Philemon that he would no longer treat Onesimus, who was once a slave, as a bondservant rather than as a brother. Onesimus had run away and was being returned to Philemon, his owner. Paul in effect told Philemon that as a Christian he would no longer to practice slavery. Similarly, he told the Galatian Christians that from the Christian perspective there was "neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free...for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Schmidt 273). He also said to Philemon that "No longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother" (Schmidt 272). Given the culturally ingrained practice of slavery that had existed for centuries in the ancient world, Paul's words were revolutionary. The Philemon and Galatians passages laid the foundation for the abolition of slavery. In addition, the Original Sin of Christianity alleged that from human's ancestor Adam and Eve, humans had borne up the guilt of betraying God's will. The whole secular people had committed crime and disgraced God's glory. Therefore, they have to suffer and be punished even to death. The sense of guilt is at the core position in Christian doctrines, especially in the *New Testament* and *Epistle to the Romans*; Paul had made an explicit expound on human's guilt and redemptions over the Original Sin issue. A person who committed crime in the face of God, regardless of his social status, has to believe in Jesus in order to acquire the salvation in worldly life and then has the chance to enter into heaven after death. Thus, the theory of Original Sin also grounded foundation of equality notion. This

led those people who are defected, sinful and degenerated to have the same chance to obtain the salvation in the name of God. It is a kind of equality in terms of spirituality gifts in front of God. So it aroused people the awareness of natural equality and natural rights on account of inherent natural instincts and spirituality. The amount of doctrines and information contained in *Bible* had made Christianity possess anti-slavery orientation from the very beginning. Initially, the Christian churches had just permitted slaves equally attending parish rituals, such as the Baptism and Holy Communion. Later, with the penetration of equality notion among people, American abolitionist movement began to emerge and boom unprecedentedly. It could be concluded that lots of American institutions and social reform movements were influenced by Christian equality notion which stressed on the rule of law, independence, justice and equality.

Once upon a time, Christianity had realized the importance of human's liberty and rights. Many of scriptures cited about freedom like *Exodus*, *Leviticus*, *Deuteronomy*, *Gospel of John*. Individual freedom and rights are the most prevalent where Christianity had the greatest impact. All freedom-loving people would do well to recall the words of Malcolm Muggeridge, once a non-Christian but later a strong defender of Christianity. He said, "We must not forget that our human rights are derived from the Christian faith. In Christian terms single human being, whoever he or she may be, sick or well, clever or foolish, beautiful or ugly, every human being is loved by his Creator" (Schmidt 259). As for the relation between Christian liberal human rights and American society, like cited earlier, Tocqueville sighed with deep feeling, "Americans combine the notions of Christianity and of liberty so intimately in their minds, that it is impossible to make them conceive the one without the other" (Tocqueville 1: 337). What drove so many Americans pursuing the equal human rights is just the Christian liberty belief which is deeply rooted in their souls. Therefore, Americans had to face slavery, the institution which deviated Christian freedom spirit. The abolitionist movement and Civil War are the answers to the question.

5.2 Christian Anti-Slavery Tradition

In many cases, Christians freed slaves. During the second and third centuries, according to Robin Lane Fox, the early Christians “were most numerous in the setting of urban households where freeing of slaves was most frequent” (Mathisen 221). He further states that “the freeing of slaves was performed in church in the presence of the bishop” (Mathisen 221). How many slaves were freed during the early years of Christianity could never be known, but there were many is illustrated by W.E.H. Lecky, who says,

St. Melania was said to have emancipated 8000 slaves; St. Ovidius, a rich martyr of Gaul, 5000; Chromatius, a Roman prefect under Diocletian, 1400; Hermes, a prefect under Trojan, 1200. [And] many of the Christian clergy at Hippo under the rule of St. Augustine, as well as great numbers of private individuals, freed their slaves as an act of piety. (Schmidt 274)

It is also known that Constantine in A.D 315, only two years after he issued the Edict of Milan, imposed the death penalty on those who stole children to bring them up as slaves. Moreover, a Byzantine emperor abolished all laws that prevented freeing slaves. Early in the fourth century Lactantius (the Christian Cicero) in his *Divine Institutes* said that in God’s eyes there were no slaves. St. Augustine saw slavery as the product of sin and as contrary to God’s divine plan. St. Chrysostom, in the fourth century, preached that when Christ came he annulled slavery. He proclaimed that “in Christ Jesus there is no slave...Therefore it is not necessary to have a slave...Buy them, and after you have taught them some skill by which they can maintain themselves, set them free” (Schmidt 275). These words and actions as well as others had salutary effects. The honor, acceptance, and freedom that Christianity extended to slaves resulted in multitudes of them embracing the new faith, according to Lecky. Some even became priests of the church. In the early third century Callistus, a onetime slave, became not only a priest but also a bishop. Some

slaves were even honored as martyrs. For instance, in the early half of the sixth century Emperor Justinian built and dedicated the grandest example of Byzantine architecture in Ravenna, Italy, the Church of San Vitale, in memory of a martyred slave in the fourth century.

Voluminous Christian Protestant branches in America held the anti-slavery tradition; the Methodist was one of them. The founder of Methodism, John Wesley, once attacked the inhuman slavery institution vigorously. His reputation as an anti-slavery man rests primarily upon three statements: first, his lengthy essay “*Thoughts upon Slavery*” written in 1773, demonstrates at some length that the enslavement of a man is cruel and unjust and an affront to humanity. The spirit of the essay could be summed up as: “Whether you are a Christian or not, show yourself a man! Be not more savage than a lion or bear...Liberty is the right of every human creature, as soon as he breathes the vital air; and no human law can deprive him of that right which he derives from the law of nature” (McKivigan, *Abolitionism*, 28). Second, a notation in his *Journal* to the effect that he had read a book by an honest Quaker, on that including the execrable sum of the vice slave trade. And finally, the latter part of his life, in which he left this injunction with the British anti-slavery leader William Wilberforce, “O, be not weary of well doing! Go on, in the name of God, and in the power of his might, till even American slavery shall vanish away before it” (McKivigan, *Abolitionism*, 27). These sources invariably demonstrate that Wesley was an anti-slavery pioneer and the Methodist branch has an anti-slavery tradition.

With the passion of the leader, many other members gradually realized the importance of anti-slavery issue. Methodists of the North, or at least Methodist preachers, maintained that their church had always been anti-slavery, a view stated by a famous reviewer Peter Cartwright in plain word: “Now, sir, I will say that in all my long years of relation to, and acquaintance with Methodism and Methodists preachers, I never heard one that did not oppose slavery from stem to stern” (McKivigan, *Abolitionism*, 19). The founding conference of Methodism, the

clergymen had severely castigated the institution of slavery statement that it was contrary to the golden law of God. Slavery had nullified all the laws and the prophets, and the inalienable rights of mankind, as well as every principle of the revolution. At the meeting of the second general conference of the Methodist Church in 1796, the preachers even drew up a series of regime concerning to anti-slavery. For instance, no slaveholder in the future should occupy an official station in the Church until he promises for the emancipation, and no slaveholder receive membership until he spoke to “freely and faithfully” on the subject of slavery. As the upcoming of abolitionism was sweeping American society, the abolitionists in North Methodist Church exerted much more reactions. They established Methodist anti-slavery societies both in the New England and in New Hampshire Annual Conferences in 1835. They were indeed abolitionist societies, for they branded slavery as a sin in all circumstances and demanded the immediate and absolute emancipation of all slaves. It could be seen that the Methodist was the most typical example among those Christian denominations which held the anti-slavery tradition.

5.3 Inheritance to British Evangelical Abolitionism

The United Kingdom is the home country of the United States; being as the colonies of British determines America is not a nation established by nature, but rather a flock of British puritans who intended to evade religious persecution and to create a religion free country. Most of these puritans were Calvinists. It made Americans form the puritan ideology. Just like Max Weber observed: The Protestant ethics and value supported as the motive power of the creation of the country, which were the dominate force in the political and social life, and led to the fact that every once in a while there would take place social movements which obsessed in religious ideal and revivals (Weber 231). This tradition rose from British evangelical abolitionism from puritan revolution which had exerted great influence on American abolitionists.

It is important to note that although by the fourteenth century slavery had

essentially come to an end in Europe, including England, it was revived by the British in the seventeenth century, especially in England's colonies, such as North America. Slaves were transported to the British West Indies as well as to the American colonies and Canada. The revival of slavery was lamentable because this time it was implemented by counties whose proponents of slavery commonly identified themselves as Christians. However, some serious-minded Christians saw slavery as a gross violation from basic Christian beliefs and values, and before too long some courageous abolitionists was William Wilberforce, a member of England's House of Commons. He delivered many powerful speeches during his twenty years in Parliament against British sending slaves to the West Indies. In 1823, two years before he had to relinquish his seat in the House of Commons because of ill health, he presented a petition to the House of Commons to abolish slavery as a resolution declaring slavery repugnant to Christianity and the Constitution. It is difficult to find a better example than William Wilberforce to show the powerful effect the teachings and spirit of Christ have had in fighting the social sin of slavery.

Like the British anti-slavery leader William Wilberforce, many American abolitionists were dedicating themselves into this great campaign by following their steps, and learning experience from them. American female evangelical writer Moor was encouraged by William Wilberforce, published huge amounts of evangelical abolitionism pamphlets, and mobilized other female Christians to come into the crusade. The famous abolitionist leader, William Lloyd Garrison, was no exception influenced by their British counterpart. Once he wrote to his fellow Samuel May:

Our British worriers are fighting bravely against the sin and cruelty. I just received the pamphlets and leaflets they mailed to me, they British abolitionism fighters do not waste bullets—every single essays we could have found seriousness in it. I feel ashamed of my past apathy and sorry of meager thoughts and language. (Harrold 35)

Similarly, the "Immediate Emancipation" abolition slogan put forward by American abolitionists at the burgeoning stage in the campaign was also influenced

by British's counterpart. A pamphlet written by Elizabeth Harrick, a British Quaker, *No Gradualism, and Immediatism*, not only exerted a huge impact on England, but also performed as a hint for Garrison to propose the Immediate Emancipation on slavery issue in America.

5.4 Influence of the Great Awakening

In American history, four Great Awakening movements once came into being at every decade's intervals. And every Great Awakening was an illumination for society to reform and improve itself. It was sort of a creedal passion propelling Americans to ameliorate social evils to realize their promised ideal and regenerate the sense of "Manifest Destiny" in the light of Protestant responsibility.

The First Great Awakening emerged in the year of 1720 to 1760. It is a religious revival movement aiming to cope with the lack of beliefs in the public. This campaign was first launched in New Jersey in 1720s, and soon was spread to Pennsylvania and Connecticut valley. Jonathan Edwards, one of the most famous social activists during that time was known by publics widespread. He believed that revivals were God's miracles. In the 1740s, British evangelical preacher George Whitefield begun to sermon in the North American colonies itinerantly, pushing the campaign to its climax. The First Great Awakening movement intertwined social changes with religious revivalism was intended to let the massive citizens focus on the social injustice in order to establish a harmonious society. This movement also made the notion of liberty and equality so firmly embedded among ordinary Americans.

The First Great Awakening bequeathed to the American people the belief that they were engaged in a righteous effort to ensure the triumph of good over evil and thus to realize God's will on earth. Before shortly long, there came the Second Great Awakening during 1790s to 1830s to which abolitionist movement was of importance. It was not only to seek religious revivals, but to bond religion with other social improvement activities. During this period, the church forces were growing

simultaneously and had a huge influence upon people's thought. From 1800 to 1830, Methodist membership increased sevenfold, Baptist membership tripled, and Congregationalist doubled. In 1830, approximately one out of every seven or eight Americans was an official member of a denomination, and two or three out of that number attended church with some regularity. For this reason, it might be confirmed that the Second Great Awakening had restored the church attendance on secular affairs and made more Americans to embrace Christian faith, which paved the way for abolitionist crusade. The "Perfectionism" and "Millennialism" theory acquired vital position which connected intimately with abolitionists' motif. The Perfectionism theory consists of many theological thoughts concerning self-discipline and improvement. The thought could be traced back to John Wesley's theological ideology. The evangelical concept of benevolence in humanity taught that man was not powerless to prevent evil, which means he had the ability to recognize and renounce sin. Unless he acknowledged its existence and attempted to eliminate it, he would remain guilty in the eyes of God. So he had to save himself through arduous work in order to shower the God's benevolence. That way of saying also served as a modification to Calvinism, which professed the salvation of a person was more dependent on God's choice, namely manifest destiny. For abolitionists, benevolence meant more than mere sympathy for the slaves. Action was the infallible test of true benevolence and charity. Fortright action opposing sin and evil was the only prudent course for the true Christian believer. Eventually, they turned to antislavery as a field for benevolent action.

The theory of "Millennialism" was another theological thought rising up during the Second Great Awakening. It emphasized the second coming of Jesus Christ when all secular evils would be destroyed and God would turn this world into paradise, into a Christian commonwealth. Men have to prepare the spiritual and ethic improvement both mentally and physically so as to welcome the establishment of millennium kingdom. The only approach is to convert to Christianity and propagate Christian beliefs. For abolitionists, abolition was presented as a kind of "calling"

which proved one's benevolence affections and which asked one to work both for the glory of God and the welfare of mankind. The cause of abolitionist crusade was described as the pursuit of a Christian end by Christian means. In sum, in abolitionists' eyes, "the Great Awakening raised the hope of ordinary people, and they shifted to the more optimistic millennial view, and predicted its abolition as the final step toward the millennium" (McKivigan, *Abolitionism*, 10).

Both the "Perfectionism" and "Millennialism" theory had advocated human's ability of self-improvement and self-redemption as a kind of positive energy. If a man converted to Christian, he would practice the pious belief through conducts. The social- improving activities like abolitionist movement was nothing else than the craving passion of embracing God's glory through the modification of social evils. It is obvious that the two theories appearing in the Second Great Awakening laid the important foundation for involvement of Christianity in later abolitionist movement.

CHAPTER VI

CHRISTIANITY AS A PROPELLER

Since the United States declared its independence from Great Britain in 1776, the antislavery effort faced especially determined opposition. Years of conflict between antislavery forces mainly in the North and proslavery forces centered in the South, preceded the emancipation of all American slaves. The unwillingness of African Americans to remain in bondage, profound economic and ideological change associated with the industrial revolution, and major evangelical revivals shaped a powerful antislavery impulse. But strong economic, cultural, and racial interests made American slavery a resilient phenomenon. Even after the formal abolition of slavery in 1865, these interests prevented African Americans from enjoying the same legal rights and economic opportunities as white Americans did.

Nevertheless, abolitionist movement is one of the great reform movements in American history. It rivals the struggles for Prohibition, women's rights, and labor organization. Like other reformers, abolitionists were controversial during their time and have remained so ever since. They were self-righteous, suspicious of compromise, often harsh in their language, and their opposition to slavery led them to demand fundamental changes in America's racial, economic, social, and political structure. So, what is the primary motive for the abolition fighters to stick to their ambitious cause? Obviously, their Christian background and conversion to Christianity could not be ignored. As mentioned before, Christianity possessed the thought of slavery abolition in the first place. The vice slavery institution was abolished first in countries where Christianity had a major presence. Historical data shows that slavery was first abolished in the Western world as a result of Christianity's influence. The Christian abolitionists not only had the mind of Christ and powerful references of the New Testament on their side, but they also had noteworthy antislavery precedents in Christian history, as cited earlier.

The influence of Christianity upon American slavery abolition issue embodied

also in way that although many American defenders of slavery called themselves Christians, and every state also had its clergy who argued that slavery was compatible with biblical Christianity. “But the abolitionist movement had a considerably higher percentage of Christian clergy than did the pro-slavery defenders. Two-third of the abolitionists in the mid-1830s were Christian clergymen. This made for a phalanx of vociferously active clergy abolitionists” (Schmidt 279). The clergymen here mostly referred to the Northern white abolitionists while a lot of black abolitionists and non-clergy abolitionists also made a great contribution to the movement. Owing to the endeavors they had made cooperatively, the antislavery sentiment had been inspired in the North, and made the southern white reaction to abolitionism more desperate than it would have been otherwise.

6.1 Positive Momentum of White Abolitionists

As a positive momentum in the abolition movement, there were huge amounts of white abolitionists, mostly from North, spurred by their Christian beliefs to fight against slavery system. It was of great importance to realize that the Christian background of these white abolitionists had offered them the ideological basis and spiritual backbone.

6.1.1 White Christian Clergy’s Impact on Abolition

Many northern Christian clergies and non-clergies were moved by the good doctrines in Christianity and exerted tremendous impact on abolitionist movement and other people’s thoughts.

Elijah Lovejoy, who was accosted and killed by rioting pro-slavery radicals in his printing office in Alton, Illinois, in November 1837, is often cited as the abolitionists’ first martyr. He was a Presbyterian clergyman who had attended Princeton Theological Seminary. His strong stand against slavery, prompted by his Christian convictions, cost him his life. Two years before he was murdered, he wrote in the newspaper that he published, “I shall come out, openly, fearlessly, and as I hope, in such a manner as becomes a servant of Jesus Christ, when defending His

cause ” (Mactavish 156).

A close friend and supporter of Lovejoy was Edward Beecher, who resided sixty miles north of Alton in Jacksonville, Illinois, where he served as president of Illinois College. Beecher, who visited Lovejoy shortly before his brutal death, was also a strong promoter of the abolitionist cause, largely through the auspices of the college. Black students, for instance, were welcomed as students, which was a rare phenomenon in those days. The college, a Christian institution, was labeled by the Illinois State Register of Springfield, Illinois, as a “freedom-shrieking tool of abolitionism” (Schmidt 279). Like his friend Lovejoy, Beecher was a Presbyterian clergyman. And he was the brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

Another strong clergy connection that provided considerable stimulus to the abolitionist movement was Lane Theological Seminary in Cincinnati, Ohio. The seminary was founded in the early 1830s by New York evangelicals as an outpost of revivalism in the Midwest to train clergy who would urge Christians to live holier and more sanctified lives. Lyman Beecher, a Congregationalist and one of New England’s well-known evangelical preacher, became the school’s first president. He was also the father of Henry Ward Beecher, Edward Beecher, and Harriet Beecher Stowe. Along with its evangelistic emphasis, Lane Seminary also had ties to Ohio and New York antislavery societies. Arthur and Lewis Tappan, two strong abolitionists and wealthy businessmen from Boston, provided financial aid for the school. Lewis Tappan, a former Unitarian, turned to Presbyterian because the Unitarian denomination did not give equal evidence with the Orthodox of their spirituality and liberal giving and because they were deficient in a devotional frame of mind. The Tappan brothers funded the seminary, and they also sought to make it an abolitionist school by bringing Theodore Weld from the Oneida Institute in the New York to the seminary. Weld was a zealous abolitionist, an evangelical preacher, and a convert of revivalist Charles Finney. Together with others, Weld soon made the seminary “a citadel of Yankee abolitionism”.

Weld had little patience. Soon he, along with some faculty members and most of the students, adopted immediatism, which means that slavery had to end immediately. The seminary's trustees became alarmed and asked the faculty and students to disband their anti-slavery society. Lyman Beecher was unable to effect a compromise. So Weld and forty students severed their seminary ties, and before long they relocated at the new and fledgling Oberlin College. The rebellion entered even Beecher's family, as daughter Catherine sided with her father, and daughter Harriet agreed with the seceders. According to one historian, "The Lane debate reverberated throughout the nation" (Barnes 69). Almost simultaneously with the founding of Lane Seminary, another zealous abolitionist, the Reverend John Jay Shipperd, began the Oberlin Institute in Elyria, Ohio, in less than a year's time; however, this venture encountered severe financial problems. Shipperd contacted the Reverend Asa Mahan, a trustee of Lane Seminary and a firm abolitionist. Seeking to revitalize the Oberlin Institute, Mahan contacted the Tappan brothers for funding. They complied, providing that the new school would have an anti-slavery orientation which later became the well-known Oberlin College.

At Oberlin College, Charles Finney, a former Freemason and a charismatic preacher of revivalism, joined the faculty in 1836 to teach theology and later became the college's president. In the 1820s he used his charisma to convert large audiences to evangelicalism in his revival meetings in the eastern part of the country (Barnes 8-9). In the Midwest he also used his charisma to convert people to abolitionism. One of Finney's eastern converts, both with regard to Christianity and to antislavery, was Theodore Weld, who soon joined the Oberlin faculty. Later in 1839, he wrote a best-selling book on antislavery, *Slavery As It Is*. This book was one of the resources that Harriet Beecher Stowe used in writing *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Oberlin College assumed a number of roles in promoting abolitionism. It opened its classrooms to blacks, hired abolitionist instructors, and sheltered black fugitives.

Christ's teachings definitely have to be credited with having moved Christian clergy like Lovejoy, the Beechers, Mahan, Shipperd, Finney, Weld and others too

numerous to mention. That is also how Lyman Beecher saw it. One researcher cites him as saying that abolitionism was the offspring of the Great Revival that proceeded in the eastern states (Michaels 163).

Abolitionist clergy in the South encountered more difficulties than their northern soul mates. Antislavery-minded ministers commonly were muzzled verbally, many lost their positions, and some were even imprisoned. David Chesebrough in his *Clergy Dissent in the Old South, 1830-1865* described the difficulties that antislavery clergy experienced in the South. J.D. Paxton, was forced to leave his parish in Cumberland, Virginia, for having authored a small book, *Letters on Slavery*, in which “he called slavery a moral evil and declared that Christians were morally obligated to work for its destruction ”(Chesebrough 42). John Hersey, a Methodist pastor in Virginia, wrote a book titled *Appeal to Christians on the Subject of Slavery*. After the book’s third edition appeared in 1843, matters became very intense for him. Soon copies of his book were burned in Richmond, and he was finally compelled to migrate to the North. Another clergyman, John Fee, founded Berea College in Berea, Kentucky. Modeled after Oberlin College in Ohio, it was the only racially integrated school in the south, a phenomenon that did not sit well with the pro-slavery proponents. Over several months, Fee was attacked by a mob, thrown into the Ohio River, and eventually forced to flee to Cincinnati (Chesebrough 46).

The impact of Christ’s teachings that so moved hundreds of abolitionist clergy did not, of course, remain with them alone. Through their teaching and preaching, they converted many lay people to the abolitionist cause. The fact that there were also clergy, both in the North and especially in the South, who defended slavery does not nullify the agreement that the Christian antislavery spirit achieved its eventual goal, namely the freedom for the enslaved. Numerous faithful clergy, motivated by the spirit of Jesus Christ, achieve attain that goal.

6.1.2 Nonclergy Role in Abolitionist Campaign

Although clergy, most of whom belonged to the evangelical stripe, made up

two-thirds of the abolitionist movement, it is important to remember that many Christian lay people also played vitally important roles in abolishing American slavery. The Tappan brothers and Harriet Beecher Stowe are excellent examples of lay people who took active roles, some as supporters of the abolitionist clergy and some independent from them.

One of the prominent and influential laymen in the abolitionist movement was William Lloyd Garrison, a Baptist and a Journalist from Massachusetts. His associate, Benjamin Lundy, a Quaker, called him “ultra-orthodox” in his religious beliefs. He founded his own periodical, *The Liberator*, which for years published strong and frequently strident articles promoting abolition. As a Journalist, he often quoted the passage from Christ’s parable: “a house divided against itself cannot stand” (Lowance 53). So strong were his antislavery beliefs that he sometimes chastised Christian denominations for doing too little to end slavery. Often clergy were the indignation. Thus he once wrote, “The cause [abolition] must be kept in the hands of laymen, or it will not be maintained” (Barnes 98). He said this at a typical meeting of the New England Anti-Slavery Society, which he had founded in 1833, two-thirds of its delegates were clergy. Garrison once burned a copy of the Fugitive Act of 1850 as well as a copy of the U.S. Constitution. Hence, many saw him as radical and impatient even though he always advocated Christian nonresistance. Whatever the accusations, his contributions to abolitionism were immense. They were summarized well in President Lincoln’s words: “The logic and moral power of Garrison and the antislavery people of the country and the army have done it all” (Mayer 568). It should be remembered that Garrison’s Christian beliefs and convictions played a major role in all of his contributions to the abolitionist crusade.

James G. Birney, a Southerner from Kentucky and Alabama and once a slaveholder, needs to be mentioned. Birney became an active abolitionist and, like virtually all of the antislavery promoters, he was motivated by Christian principles. Another was Joshua Giddings, a convert of Theodore Weld who later served as a United States Congressman. Referring to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, Giddings

said, “We cannot be Christians and obey it” (Schmidt 283). Still another abolitionist worthy of note was Julia Ward Howe. Although she was Unitarian, her early Christian influence is apparent in some of the lyrics in her “Battle Hymn of the Republic” (1862), an antislavery song that stirred the minds and emotions of countless Americans.

Harriet Beecher Stowe was possibly the most influential among the antebellum abolitionists. Most Americans have heard about *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) and how it depicts the misery of America’s enslavement of Negroes. Many even know that this book brought the tragedy of American slavery to the attention of the entire world. However, one rarely hears about the Christian motivation that moved Stowe to write her revealing antislavery novel. Harriet casts Uncle Tom in the role of the suffering servant as he suffers physically under the hands of his last slave master. Christlike, he refuses to take revenge despite powerful urgings from his fellow slaves; he clings to the promises of Christ up to his death, which was caused by the beatings his slave owner inflicted on him. As one analyst has well observed, “Uncle Tom [the book] takes a Christian approach that suffering is redemptive and that evil will be atoned for” (Donavan 12). The book abounds with biblical passages, and throughout its emotionally stirring pages the author reveals the deep spiritual tensions, induced by Christian values, that existed among the slave owners. In noting these tensions, Stowe seeks, of course, to show how slavery violated the teachings of Christ, which she personally had internalized from her Christian upbringing. On one occasion, a sea captain met her and said that he was pleased to shake the hand that wrote *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. She responded that she did not write the book. “God write it,” she said, “I merely did his dictation” (Fields 377). In writing *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Harriet Beecher Stowe, a Christian, contributed greatly to the shattering of American slavery. Her book took the sting of fanaticism out of abolitionism, and its popularity gave incalculable weight to the idea of emancipation as a moral and historical inevitability.

Some Prominent American Abolitionists

Abolitionists	Status	Contribution
Pastorius, Franz	German immigrant	Issued first formal antislavery proclamation in America, Germantown, Pennsylvania, 1688
Lovejoy, Elijah	Clergyman and publisher	Published articles opposing slavery
Beecher, Edward	Clergyman, president of Illinois College	Enrolled black students at the college
Tappan, Arthur	Wealthy businessman	Funded Lane Seminary, a strong antislavery school, Cincinnati, Ohio
Tappan, Lewis	Wealthy businessman	Helped his brother fund Lane Seminary
Finney, Charles	Revivalist preacher	Promoted abolitionist causes at Lane Seminary and Oberlin College
Weld, Theodore	Evangelistic preacher	Promoted abolitionism at Lane Seminary; published <i>Slavery As It Is</i> , best-seller
Stowe, Harriet Beecher	Author	Published <i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i> , a stirring antislavery novel
Shipperd, John Jay	Clergyman	Founded Oberlin Institute, Elyria, Ohio
Mahan, Asa	Clergyman	Helped found Oberlin College
Torrey, Charles	Clergyman	Father of the Underground Railroad
Paxton, J. D.	Clergyman, author	Published <i>Letters on Slavery</i>
Hersey, John	Clergyman, author	Published <i>Appeal to Christians on the Subject of Slavery</i>
Fee, John	Clergyman	Founded Berea College, a racially integrated school, in Berea, Kentucky
Garrison, William	Publisher	Published <i>The Liberator</i> , an abolitionist periodical; burned a copy of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850
Birney, James	Former slave owner	Promoted abolitionist causes
Giddings, Joshua	Convert of Theodore Weld	Condemned the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850
Howe, Julia Ward	Social activist	Wrote "Battle Hymn of the Republic," 1862
Lincoln, Abraham	President of the United States	Issued his Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 that freed all black slaves

Data source: Alvin J. Schmidt. *How Christianity Changed the World*. Zondervan

Publishing House, 2004.

All in all, no matter moral abolitionists or violent ones, southerners or northerners, clergymen or nonclergy role, they were all influenced by Christian doctrines and codes of conduct in the movement. They were moved by Christian ethics and poured into this righteous cause generation by generation.

6.2 White Christian Abolitionists' Backup for Slaves

The northern white abolitionists were the first people who attacked the slavery institution. They were pious, brave and self-sacrificing. The holy cause was promoted by means of Anti-Slavery Societies' establishment, abolition propaganda, blacks saving and education etc.

The Quakers were known as the first Christian denomination who took a stand against slavery. By 1760, they had already eliminated the slave-holding phenomenon within their own ranks. Moreover, the first American anti-slavery society—"Pennsylvanian Anti-Slavery Society" was established in 1775. Since then, influenced by surging revival movement of Second Great Awakening, a lot of prominent abolitionists emerged, such as Theodore Weld; the Tappan brothers and William Lloyd Garrison as cited previously. They co-founded the largest association "American Anti-Slavery Society" in which two-thirds was Christian revival clergymen. Those abolition societies influenced by the original one, made the evangelical abolition thoughts widely spread vice versa. At the beginning of its settlement in 1834, the AASS only had 60 branches, increased to 200 more in May 1835, 537 in May 1836, rocketed over 1000 in July 1837, 1350 in 1838, and achieved the climax 2000 in 1840 and numbers over 20 thousand (Wu 55). Among the leading members in AASS, every Christian Protestant denomination could be found there. Only Methodical and Presbyterian churches offered half of the whole 300 more officers from 1833 to 1840.

In the propaganda of abolitionism, white abolitionists often tend to conduct ways of addressing, preachment, petition, newspaper publication and pamphlets

dissemination in order to arouse the conscience of Americans, and make them realize the evil of slavery-holding, overcome the racism concept and then work jointly towards the same goal—abolition of slavery. Among these means of publicity, church preaching is definitely the most effective approach for abolitionists to uncover the sin. It enables those believers who are showering the Christian gospel to comprehend the inconsistency between slavery and Christian doctrines at the same time. Edward Stowe, Harriet Beecher Stowe's brother, once gave a speech on slavery in a church in Ohio. Another brother Henry conducted a special slave auction in a Brooklyn church to set them free which won an unexpected result in terms of abolitionism. Similarly, the Negro church also plays an important role in this campaign. In all of the pain and suffering that the American blacks endured during slavery, they were greatly aided by Christianity's presence in their lives through the vehicle of black churches. Most of the Negro churches were funded by northern abolitionists and were virtually the only place where slaves were allowed to congregate, to experience a spiritual union with other slaves, and to feel equal to the white man, especially in the eyes of God. In addition, black preachers could go to the white slave master and beg for trivial favors. Even Eugene Genovese, once a Marxist, credits Christianity as the institution that enabled the black slaves in America to survive the prolonged dehumanization process" (McPherson 320).

With the prosperity of newspapering, many white Christians adopted this convenient way to promote abolitionism. For example, Benjamin Lundy, a Quaker from Pennsylvania, sponsored the famous abolition newspaper *Universal Tendency for Liberation*, which was welcomed by abolitionists and slaves. Another well-known one was *Liberator*, founded by William Garrison in 1833; he had stayed on the position of editorial as long as 35 years. This newspaper was supported widely by mass blacks, by 1834; subscribers amounted to 2300 in which 1700 were blacks (Zhang 165). Besides, the Presbyterian clergyman Samuel Corny, editor-in-chief of *Free Press, Human Rights* and *Colored Americans*, Horace Greeley *New York Tribune*, Christian believer Joseph Medill *Chicago Tribune*, all

these newspapers were ferociously flogging the inhumane slavery-holding system. By the 1840s, there were over one hundred newspapers advocating the anti-slavery crusade. These newspapers were good at capturing various misdeeds of slavery to arouse the people's detest on slavery and pities on slaves. Once, a newspaper published a poster which depicted an imploring black slave and appended with caption that "Am I not a Man and a Brother?"(Howe 380). The caption had been performing as encouragement for antislavery supporters to make weekly donations to the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society.

The Underground Road may be the most famous, successful and realistic undertaking which the Christian white abolitionists had devoted to in the salvation of black slaves. The Underground Railroad was an informal network of secret routs and safe houses used by black slaves in order to escape to free states and Canada with the aid of abolitionists. They established a network stretching from Washington and Baltimore northward through Philadelphia, New York City, and Albany to Canada. Most of the organizers were northern Quakers and the working funds were raised by donation of Society of Friends. The aid took a variety of forms, including assisting individuals who had been kidnapped into slavery, supporting freedom suits initiated by slaves, and providing escaped slaves food and shelters. The Christian abolitionist clergyman Charles T. Torrey, father of the Underground road and Thomas Smallwood, co-organized the network in Washington in 1842. Aided by other nonclergy white and black men and women, Torrey and Smallwood helped about ten thousand slaves escape. Another remembered Underground Railroad agent was Harriet Tubman, a black Christian convert from Maryland. Tubman was not well known during 1850s except among a few abolitionists and people she helped. Although she was not a white man but she was touched by Torrey's deeds. Having herself escaped from slavery in Maryland in 1849, she returned as many as nineteen times to help others. Like Torrey and Smallwood before her, she relied on a network of black and white abolitionists for support. The Underground road salvation showed the loyalty and definite determination of these Christian believers about

abolition campaign. A young white abolitionist Thomas Wentworth Higginson said: “Year by year new track is being laid, and the cars are running back again—cars that take these heroic self-emancipated fugitives move heroically back from Canada into the midst of slavery again, that they may bring out their children and their friends with them” (Harrold 69).

6.3 Positive Momentum of Black Abolitionists

There has been a tendency in historical studies of the abolitionist movement to focus on the contributions of whites, as if the work of emancipation was something of which blacks were only passive recipients rather than something for which blacks also fought. Though the contribution of whites to abolitionism cannot be underestimated in terms of its impact on the eventual end to slavery, it is important to pay attention to the efforts of blacks and the relationship of their Christian conversion and the involvement of abolitionist movement.

Since the first slaves were shipped to North American continent, Negroes proved to be the victims of the enslavement ferocity. This kind of relentless slavery institution was absolutely at odds with the charity of Christ which was advocated by Christian scriptures. When white Christian abolitionists began to fight evils in the light of conscience and morale, the black abolitionists also resorted to the revelation of Christianity so as to wield the spiritual forces to resist the inhumane system.

No matter how cruel the bondage was, how depressing the reality was, most slaves were still seeking the meaning and value of their lives. And in the process of the whole journey, religion, especially Christianity, took up a very important position. The blacks found the spiritual comfort and salvation from Christian doctrines while suffered everyday’s arduousness. In the blacks’ eyes, Christianity dose not just belongs to whites, and *Bible* is not just written for whites as well. What God cares about is the salvation of the whole mankind. For the oppressed, Jesus Christ had always been trying to save them, so even facing the worst situation; blacks were always optimistic and confident. They put religion at the center of lives.

The flame of resistance was ignited irrepressibly because the passions craving for freedom.

When it was becoming increasingly an indispensable part in slaves' lives, Christianity, originally used by slave-owners as a tool to obtain labor, obedience, and loyalty of slaves, had gradually become the means for slaves to seek their own freedom and liberation. At the beginning, the black Christians were confined in Negro churches and had been rejected by most of whites' churches. After the Independence War, more and more Negroes joined the Methodists and Baptists situated in New York and Philadelphia. They were attracted by the intense theological atmosphere; ardent worship and firm anti-slavery stance. By the year of 1790, twenty percent of Methodists' members were Negroes (Howe 396).

The foundation of black church was attributed to an African American Methodist clergyman Richard Allen, who initiated the "Free African Society" in 1787 aiming for abolition of slavery. In 1815, he established the "African Methodist Episcopal" (AME), the most important church in African American area. All of its members were Negroes and Allen was entitled as bishop. By the year of 1846, the denomination, which only had 8 preachers and 5 churches initially, had already owned 176 preachers, 296 churches and 17325 followers. And AME cooperated with Underground Road association, pushing the abolition crusade forwards with concrete actions. For example, they provided food and shelters for the fugitive slaves and gave them the education opportunity and helped their relatives escape. Other similar black churches developed significantly simultaneously, such as "African Methodist Episcopal Zion" and Baptists community. African American Preachers had gradually become the leading force in abolitionist movement. The independence of black church institution marked the maturation of American Negroes in the process of freedom-seeking. They were at the front line of the black liberation movement. African Americans were no longer in the negative positions led by white counterparts; on the contrary, they had begun to fight actively individually and collectively by churches.

6.3.1 The Opposition of Black Christians toward Slavery

To scour slavery stain is not only dependent on whites' conscience, but by thousands of blacks rising up to revolt. When black slaves got the hint of revelation of freedom and liberty written in *Bible*, they gradually accepted Christianity and regarded it as spiritual backbone and wielded it as a weapon to fight. There are many black Christian religious leaders and nonclergy believers we need to remember.

The vanguard was David Walker, a free man from North Carolina. His convictions about the true nature of slavery were developed through his exposure to the institution as a youth, despite the fact that he himself held the status of free born. His encounter with slavery, as he saw the mistreatment of fellow blacks, fed a hatred toward it that fueled his passion to fight for the abolition of slavery. The crown jewel of Walker's abolitionist activity is his self-published treatise *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*. Among slave holders it was viewed as subversive and an incitement to revolution (Mitchell 58). Walker declared freedom as God-given and the fight for freedom a "heavenly cause" that should be defended. He pointed out that the American nation had invoked Christian principles as a foundation way of life; slavery is a gross violation of Christ's "double commandment" to love God and neighbor (Mitchell 60). The nature of Walker's critique of slavery was reinforced by his own Christian faith, which provided a theological foundation for his opposition to slavery. He affirmed that the cries of the enslaved have been heard by the "God of justice" and that at some point in time blacks will be redeemed from their condition. He claimed the God of the oppressed is a God of justice (Mitchell 61). Theologically, slavery is problematic because it is a system in which human beings surrender themselves to human masters, but in truth, God is the only master of mankind (Mitchell 61).

Another theological reason Walker opposed slavery was that human beings belong to the Holy Spirit. He thinks it unseemly that a vessel of the Spirit of God should be enslaved. And this sacredness of humanity was clearly denied by the institution of slavery, and that denial was manifest in the degradation of blacks under

this oppressive system. In a word, Walker highlighted the theological error of slavery, condemning it as idolatrous, in conflict with the God of justice and a denial of the handiwork of the God who has implanted the divine image in all persons.

Another outstanding black Christian abolitionist is James W.C. Pennington. He was born a slave on the east shore of Maryland around the year of 1807. His parents were owned by different masters. When he was four years old, he, his mother, and an older brother were sold to the son of his master. Together with his mother and brother, he was separated from his father, and it is at this initial separation that he first became aware of the difficulties that slavery created for his family.

Although the family was subsequently reunited, Pennington became increasingly aware of the dehumanizing character of the master-slave relationship. After overhearing his father being militated and savagely beaten by his master, he determined that he would not submit his mind and spirit to the servility demanded of slaves. At last, he escaped to free states and performed his own duty as an abolition fighter. Pennington eventually arrived in New York in the late 1820s; he was deeply perplexed by the condition of degraded slaves. This discomfort became more intense when he received religious instruction in the Christian faith. Pennington perceived a critical link between personal salvation and emancipation. His conversion to Christianity led him to seek the help of God on behalf of the enslaved. In his autobiographical narrative, he writes:

[After conversion, slavery] seemed now ...to be more hideous than ever. I saw it now as an evil under the moral government of God—as a sin not only against man, but also against God. The great and engrossing thought with me was, how shall I now employ my time and my talents so as to tell most effectual upon this system of wrong?
(Beverly 66)

Thus it could be seen his critique of slavery was thoroughly grounded on his Christian faith, so he came to believe that he could be of greater use in the abolitionist effort by assisting the slaves. He became involved with antislavery

societies that were just founded at that time, where he sought to educate Christians in general, and ministers in particular, to the sinful dimension of slavery. For Pennington, the best way to counteract the effects of this dehumanization of slave was through conversion to the Christian faith and access to educational opportunities.

Henry Highland Garnet, a Presbyterian minister from New York, like Walker, contended that those who submit voluntarily to slavery place themselves in a position of disobedience to God. Garnet was a devout Christian; his bitter experiences of discrimination and sturdy Christian belief gave him the courage to fight against those who upheld slavery in a “Christian” nation that boasted of itself as the “land of liberty.”

Like Garnet, Samuel Ringgold Ward, an escaped slave from south, after his conversion to Christianity, became a traveling agent of the American Anti-Slavery Society, as well as the New York Anti-Slavery Society. Similarly, Ward’s Christian faith served as the foundation for his antislavery activity. He contended that the American proslavery church had a false Christ, and that such a false religion, he thinks, is an abomination and cannot be viewed as Christian. The system violates the Ten Commandments and denies the biblical law of love (love of God and love of neighbor) (Mitchell 78).

6.3.2 The Functions of Black Churches

In the words of Charles W. Joyner, Christianity gave African Americans “a source of strength and endurance that enabled them to triumph over the collective tragedy of enslavement” (Fountain 45). Differed from orthodox whites’ Christianity, having melted with their own religion, the blacks developed the Afro-Christianity accordingly. Black churches were wildly implemented by it and exerted great impact on blacks.

The function of black churches was reflected in various ways for Negro slaves. First, the church provided slave families consistent locations for social activities like wedding, birthday, funeral and commemoration. Besides, slaves could often receive

financial assistance. Initiatively, many churches organized mutual beneficial associations to help their members survive because of financial crisis which brought by the ailment and death of family members. The black churches even led Negroes to have their own religious graveyard distinguished from whites. Several aids supported by black churches left these enslaved African Americans opportunities to have their own social space and safety insurance, which is conducive to slaves forming the consciousness of safeguarding the rights and interests themselves. Therefore, the black churches had given numerous blacks opportunities to seek independence and liberty, enjoy autonomy and brew a more strong resentment toward slavery through their ways.

Second, participation in antislavery activities did create black clerical elites. They tended to belong to traditionally white churches. They interacted with white abolitionists and were generally freer and better situated to be visibly active. Based on puritan doctrines, the Negro slaves must also read *Bible*. Thus, black Christian churches began actively to bring up well-qualified abolition leaders. Because of prejudice, blacks were seldom allowed to enter in intellectual and business circles. In their little chances, the only legitimate occasion for blacks to participate in social activities is to regularly attend black churches, and becoming the preacher is seemingly the sole opportunity for them to be a leader. With regard to the black churches, Franklin Frazer, a black socialist, remarked that “black congregations provided full opportunity for the development of leadership and character” (Schmidt 283). At that time, most of slaveholders and clergymen in the South were trying to justify the plausible argument in support of slavery, which incited many resistance and repudiation coming from black Christian preachers from the North. For example, Henry .H. Garnet, who was cited earlier, was an abolition fighter and was good at using the power of speech. At a congregation occasion in 1843, he made an impressive oration to call upon his fellow African Americans to rise up. He admonished the slaves that the willing servitude was a kind of crime, and slaves should not just wait for the salvation from God, but to strive for the freedom. From

his perspective, shattering the dehumanizing slavery institution is God's plan; all Christians are in duty bound to participate in it and perform their own duty. Because of the continuous emergence of abolition theorists like Garnet, the Negroes had got the chance to set up the view on God, the outlook on Christianity and the world which were different from slaveholders' propaganda. They confirmed the truth that God's coming is for the oppressed stratum ones who are seeking the unalienable rights for freedom, liberty and happiness.

Third, the black Christian churches had played a role as an asylum of soul and backbone for spirit. With respect to the realm of spirit, the black Christian church was irreplaceable, because it offered the enslaved blacks significance, cognation and hope under the most sever circumstance and moral dignity beyond their white masters (George 102). The spiritual supports consist of asylum of soul, sentiment relief, spiritual comfort and group sense of belonging. The primary function of black Christian church is summarized by Frazer: "it is a Sanctuary existing in the horrid whites' world" (Li 25). Through the congregational church liturgy, slaves could share the negative feelings during enslavement, strengthen a kind of cohesive force to survive, and conquer their fear and loneliness. The "Spirituals" could be the best way for slaves to express emotions which most of their contents are from *Bible*. At blacks' religious congregation, they often chant Spirituals quoted with the story of Exodus, and the African Americans are metaphorically referred to Israelites. The Jordan River is not only the symbol of paradise, but also the boundary of North and South enslavement and freedom quarantine and emancipation. A notable black theologian James Dunne once claimed: "the Spirituals represent determinations of slaves to survive in a society which put them in prison; they are the demonstration of slaves' dignity" (Lei 23).

The last but not the least was that the black Christian churches gave these illiterate slaves an opportunity to receive education. Of all the obstacles hampering the slaves' access to Christianity, none was greater than the prohibition against teaching bondsmen to read. Clearly, understanding the central tenets of a religion is

a vital part of being a believer. Since Christianity's central tenets appear in the *Bible* as written words, literacy greatly facilitates Christian religious instruction. Persons who are interested in Christianity can examine the faith on their own rather than having to trust the words of someone perhaps unknown to them. Literacy and access to religious literature would allow an individual to pursue religious studies with the absence of clergy, and it also helps the slaves find the hypocritical actions of many southern Christian slave owners who enslaved them through false rhetoric. These two factors together created such negative feelings about southern Christianity which was aiming to maintain its social structure and interests. And it is not hard to imagine that a majority of slaves might have rejected the faith offered to them.

CHAPTER VII

HISTORICAL CONFINEMENTS IN THE ABOLITIONIST MOVEMENT

Obviously, Christianity had acted an irreplaceable role in American abolitionist movement in a fair way. As advocates, organizers, and leaders, the clergyman and nonclergy roles, no matter what their skin colors were, they had made great contribution to the final collapse of slavery institution. It could not be difficult to find that the Christian moral power had become a kind of irresistible force pushing history development and promoting social progress. Despite of this, it could be further deduced that the whole Americans' spiritual paradox and religion attrition were getting worse than before. Namely, when the land of liberty was challenged by the evil slavery institution, most Christians found it inappropriate for a Christian country to boast proudly for freedom. Meanwhile, a lot of Christians, mainly from South, firmly supported this inhumane system and exacerbated the relationship deterioration between North and South. At last, it could only be solved by bloody civil war, which turned out to be a scar in American history. The positive value of how Christianity propels American history lies in researching this American paradox and its limitations as well. This is also a prelude for the coming of Americanized double standards in their social behaviors and international affairs.

7.1 Ambiguous Interpretations of Biblical Scriptures

When the northern abolitionists were fighting against slavery under the Christian doctrines and ethics, this peculiar inhumane system were upheld by many ardent adherents in south who claimed themselves Christians, because the slavery system served as the pillar of American south economy which was crucial for its economy and society. In defending what they referred to as the cornerstone of their social order, Southerners presented a world-view that including social legitimization and

their self-conscious definition of themselves. They found it necessary to challenge the abolitionist's premise that slavery was a sin before God (Lebeau 167). They quibbled that God is in the permission of slavery. On one hand, they abolished any statements and publications in support of abolitionists. On the other hand, they had cudged their brains to find evidence to defend the justification, legitimacy and rationality from *Bible*. They asserted that scripture sanctioned slavery in passage like *Genesis* and *Leviticus* in *Old Testament*, and *Corinthians* in *New Testament*.

The southerners pointed to the Old Testament of Ham. In summary form, they explained that Noah had three sons, Ham, Shem and Japeth, from whom the earth was populated. One day when Noah laid in a drunken stupor, Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his nakedness. He told Shem and Japeth, who covered their father without looking at him. Upon walking, Noah realized what had happened and cursed Ham. "Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall be unto his brethren" (Lebeau 168). Noah blessed Shem, adding that Canaan would be his servant, and prophesied that God would enlarge Japeth, who would dwell in the tents of Shem and be served by Canaan as well. Southerners understood Ham to be black, Japeth white, and Shem Indian—all prototypes of the races of America, thus offering one resolution to a tension in white Southern Christian thought: how blacks could be fellow-human beings and yet deserve to be slaves.

Turning to the New Testament, southern evangelicals pointed out that Christ and his apostles, though living where it existed and was recognized by Roman law, did not denounce slavery. Indeed they received into the church slaves and slaveholders alike and called upon slaves to be obedient to their masters, and masters to act with humanity toward their slaves. Why should things be any different in the Christian South? As Mark Noll has pointed out, the South was largely successful in its explainable defense of slavery through direct appeal to Scripture, forcing northern clergy to find other grounds for their claim of slavery's sinfulness (Lebeau 122). Combined with American south economic feature, the southerners was consistent with Scripture as the revealed word of God; it was also really a

positive good for south society.

It could be concluded without effort that any religion would have served for a particular interest group under a limited historical circumstance. However, what merits our primary concern is to seek out which force had occupied the dominated position and represented the historical universal value. That the inhumane slavery institution was abolished instead of continuing indicates the historical value of Christianity and its steering on the right historical direction. Also there are many defects and confinements, but it could not be denied that Christianity had served as a positive momentum in the American abolitionist movement all along.

7.2 Schism of Church

None of the several American churches of the antebellum period could avoid the impact of the slavery debate. By 1840s, the various denominations of Christianity began to step on divergent tracks upon slavery issue with abolition becoming the mainstream of social problem. Schism of church seemed to be unavoidable. The schism referred to the northern ministers who asked for abolishing slavery while southern evangelicals conducted as proslavery. By 1827, even the ardent abolitionists Quakers who were the first to oppose slavery in large numbers, were divided. Notable leaders like Benjamin Lundy, James and Lucretia Mott and others actively were engaged in abolition, but theirs were individual efforts, and many of their co-religionist refused to join them.

Similarly, the Presbyterian Church did explicitly divide on the issue of slavery. The Old-School—New School division of 1837 can be regarded as the first great ecclesiastical North-South separation. As early as in 1830, Old School Southern Presbyterians began to incubate a growing antislavery spirit in the New School. That spirit, though not explicitly articulated, underscored the accusations of heresy and complicity exchanged at the Presbyterian Assembly of 1837, and caused the two groups' separation. After that, within the New School more and more members made their anti-slavery sentiments known. Finally in 1850, New School General Assembly

repudiated the view that slavery was a divinely sanctioned institution.

The schism of Methodists and Baptists could also be traced back to the slavery issue. Also the Methodists always have the anti-slavery tradition, but by 1843, there were 1200 South Methodist ministers and preachers owning about 1500 slaves, and 25000 members with about 208000 slaves (Lebeau 173). Obviously, the church between North and South would not maintain its unity unless the slavery issue was settled. In May 1845, the Methodist Episcopal Church of the south, declared secession of the union, Northern and Southern Methodists had gone their own way. As for Baptists, in the Anti-Slavery Convention in Alabama in 1844, because the Foreign Missions Board of Baptists failed to repudiate its neutrality on slavery; the internal Baptists had begun to fissure. Delegates from nine states met on May 1845 in Georgia, and gave birth to the Southern Baptist Convention, and it issued a formal statement on proslavery.

7.3 The Marginal Position of Slavery Issue

When 1619, the first Negro slaves were shipped to the new land to the day when President Lincoln signed the *Declaration of Emancipation* at the end of Civil War; the slavery institution lasts over 250 years. However, slavery had never been placed to the core issue among these Christian Protestant denominations, nor been the main topic of previous religious movement.

During the early colonial period, all these religious sects faced severe circumstance and survival pressure. So how to survive and enlarge their group was the top priority. The institution of society often is the hottest discussion in assembly convention instead of slavery issue. The slavery issue was only concerned by minority Quakers.

At the beginning of the 18th century, under the influence of Enlightenment movement and scientific development, the American society became increasingly secular and material. All these melted factors made the religious enthusiasm wane in colonies. To rekindle the religious fervor among citizens, those evangelical revival

preachers set off the First Great Awakening movement. The main purpose was to disseminate gospel and persuade ordinary people to convert to Christianity. At the early stage of 19th century, with the booming of westward movement, the eastern massive Christian denominations waved the flag to move to the Wild West in order to carry out their Christian responsibility. Under this situation, the Second Great Awakening came into being as a prevalent social activity in order to rebuild the religious and politic destiny of the new nation. More generally, the Second Great Awakening has been interpreted as a result of the intensification of social strains and dislocations caused by economic development and geographic expansion (Huntington 162).

Therefore, whether at the early religious development stage, in the antebellum period, or when the two significant awakening movements took place, the anti-slavery issue is never put into the central position of whole society. It is a marginal issue as a byproduct of the Second Great Awakening movement. Generally speaking, the cause of Christians who determined to devote to abolitionist movement is the reflection and release of religious enthusiasm upon the dark side of American society triggered by Great Awakening movement. Moreover, most of the Christian Protestant denominations which hold a reserved, acquiescent attitude on slavery issue also weaken the effect of abolitionist movement. For their own sake, many clergymen even have slaves. Consequently, the non-central position of the slavery issue in religious priority and the reserved attitude of churches have not made the abolitionist movement achieve its supposed result.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

8.1 Research Conclusion and Significance

The focus of this thesis studies the role of Christianity in the process of American abolitionist movement and how this religion has acted as a propelling role to push and promote this crusade to final success. Firstly, the author portrays the Christian penetration in the Antebellum American society from the social and political aspects, aiming to expound America as a religious country from the very beginning. Christianity, as one of the most influential religious beliefs in the world, has existed in the United States since the first settlers from Europe came to the new land. It is a window through which American national spirit and historical development can be manifested. Therefore, the study of the influence of Christianity in the Antebellum American society would definitely help us better comprehend of its participation in the abolitionist movement. Secondly, the author points out that the American slavery issue is a complicated one which involves many economic, social and religious factors between the North and South. And this has implied that the participation of Christianity in the abolitionist movement has gone through many obstacles and changes.

Then the thesis probes into Christian doctrines which served as the theological base and spiritual backbone for those abolitionists. It is evident that from the start of the Christian history, liberty and equality have been the eternal theme, which indicates that no one should be enslaved; numerous Christians are also practicing this tradition in succession. With regard to modern American abolitionist movement, it is by the same token that inherited to the British evangelical abolitionism and combined with its own unique social awakening movement. Thus it can be seen the Christian anti-slavery doctrines and traditions are of great importance and necessity for those abolitionists.

By classifying those abolitionists into white and black, clergymen and

ordinary laymen, it could be easily concluded that no matter what their skin colors or social status are, the Christian belief is the pushing power for them to adhere to the abolitionist movement. For white abolitionists, many clergymen like Elijah Lovejoy, Edward Beecher, Theodore Weld and Charles Finney were all propelled by their Christian backgrounds and Christian beliefs without exception. And for the same reason, motivated by those Christian clergymen, a large number of laymen plunged into abolitionist movement and never looked back such as the famous abolitionist fighters William Lloyd Garrison and Harriet Beecher Stowe. The most significant contributions of those laymen in the abolitionist movement are that they had aroused the abolition enthusiasm of ordinary citizens. It turns out that the abolitionist movement is no longer carried on by the minority who has the relatively high social status, but also includes the public participation which laid a solid foundation for the final emancipation of slaves. Through the description of the words and deeds of black Christian abolitionist and the function of black Christian churches in the process of abolitionist movement, the author strives to illustrate that the blacks, the vulnerable groups in the traditional sense, also played an indispensable role in history. It could be concluded that the Negro preachers and Christian believers are very important because they are more familiar with black culture and communities. Therefore, they deeply know which part of the *Bible* scriptures coincide with the demand for blacks to encourage them to sustain over those enslaved days and to fight against slave-owners. Moreover, the black Christian churches played as an auxiliary role in offering those enslaved Negroes locations for social activities, nurturing leaders for black communities, performing as a spiritual asylum and giving them the opportunity to be educated.

In sum, although America is always alleged by herself to be the most egalitarian country in the world, through a detailed observation of its history, it could be found that there exists a huge gap between its national idealism and the reality of its institution and politics. It is a kind of disharmony in American society which is harassing it for generations and resulted in the Civil War and other

social-improving movements in modern times. Christianity, since its birth day, has settled down the moral high ground within its scriptures. It has pointed out what is good and what is evil. The motivation of Christians' participation in American abolitionist movement is just to eliminate these social evils and to refresh American creed in order to make up the rift; the participation of Christianity in abolitionist movement could be seemed as accidental as well as inevitable. And history proves that Christianity, indeed, has played a propellent role in abolitionist movement in many ways.

8.2 Research Limitations and Recommendations

Before ending this thesis, it is necessary to point out the research limitations. This thesis did a tentative research on the relation between the Christianity and the American abolitionist movement through the qualitative analysis of second-hand literary documents. It may be helpful for readers to get a comprehensive understanding of the role and influence of Christianity in the abolitionist movement from this thesis, but such a study is rather superficial and could not reach the point of satisfaction for the following reasons:

First, the analysis is far from being perfect due to the limited data and materials. As previously stated, research on the relations between religions and abolitionist movement is relatively limited, and the foreign scholars always expatiate this issue by whites and blacks as a whole. Therefore, sometimes it is difficult to distinguish the status of the abolitionists where they exactly come from. For example, whether they are northern whites or blacks, or southern whites or blacks, sometimes it is hard to distinguish. Moreover, the resources about the attitudes conversion of churches are not enough in these articles, so sometimes it has made some obstacles in researching.

Second, the analysis might be subjective in some points and the author's personal understanding is also inadequate, thus making the study incomplete to some extent.

Third, although the author has strived to narrow down the research scope, but the complexity of slavery issue in antebellum America and its relation with religion are still giving him huge difficulty to elaborate this problem in a very clear way. The thesis still runs the risk of being unilateral and too general.

These deficiencies need further studies to rectify, and abundant research must be conducted to explore the role of religion in the developing process in human history. Thus, it would be of great illuminations for modern people to reflect the past and to think about future.

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