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CORMANY, CLAYTON DOUGLAS

OHIO'S ABOLITIONIST CAMPAIGN: A STUDY IN THE RHETORIC OF CONVERSION

The Ohio State University

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OHIO'S ABOLITIONIST CAMPAIGN: A STUDY IN
THE RHETORIC OF CONVERSION

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

Clayton Douglas Corman, B.A., M.A.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University
1981

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CHAPTER I

PLAN AND PURPOSE

Not many social movements in American history can challenge the abolitionist crusade in terms of entertainment, excitement, and violence. As Ernest Bormann notes, "few reforms have been supported by so many inspired, dedicated, involved, and admirable people and few by as many crackpots, radicals, neurotics, and fanatics."¹ The antislavery movement was at its peak between 1830 and 1850.² During this period, agents for the American Antislavery Society traveled across the nation preaching on the immorality of human bondage to anyone who would listen. Other activists formed political parties in order to elect antislavery men to positions of power. At the same time, abolitionist pamphleteers sent thousands of tracts to each part of the country while clergymen, legislators, and journalists took every opportunity to express themselves on this controversial issue.

Not surprisingly, scholars of rhetoric have found the abolitionist movement to be fertile ground for research. Since 1925, graduate students have written at least thirty-four theses and dissertations which deal with rhetoric in the antislavery crusade. Many of these works focus on the

¹
²
oratory of individual abolitionist leaders. The speaking of Wendell Phillips, for example, is the subject of no less than seven theses and dissertations written between 1925 and 1940. Each study examines a different aspect of Phillips' rhetoric. Joseph Snyder (M.A. thesis, Northwestern University, 1930), for example, focuses on his use of epithets while Mildred Pomeroy (M.A. thesis, Northwestern University, 1925) examines the imagery he employed. Still another study by R. H. Barnard (M.A. thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1929) deals with Phillips' ability to control hostile audiences.

At least two post graduate works in rhetoric and public address have been completed respectively on Thaddeus Stevens, Joshua Giddings, and Frederick Douglass. Other "speaker-centered" theses and dissertations have scrutinized the speaking of George Julian, Angelina Grimké, Henry Ward Beecher, William Lloyd Garrison, and Theodore Weld.

Considering Garrison's impact on the abolitionist movement and the high profile he maintained, it is surprising that up to 1974, only one post graduate composition specifically addressed itself to his rhetoric ("A Study of the Emotional Proof of William Lloyd Garrison," Joyce Carper, M.A. thesis, Florida State University, 1961). It is less surprising, however, that Theodore Weld--an equally prominent figure--has been generally overlooked. Weld was a self-effacing individual who did not publicize
his involvement in abolitionist undertakings. According to Bormann, he would not even sign his name to some of the tracts which he wrote.\(^3\)

A major graduate work on Weld by Paul A. Carmack, University of Syracuse, did come out in 1948. Entitled "Theodore Dwight Weld, Reformer," the dissertation covered Weld's speaking career from his days as an agent for manual labor in colleges to his morale-building campaign during the Civil War. Carmack gives close attention to the Lane Debates and Weld's subsequent crusade through Ohio on behalf of abolition. He concludes that Weld's evangelistic style of oratory and his strategy of branding slavery as a sin had a profound impact on antislavery activities throughout the nation.\(^4\) A second work on Weld, Bruce A. Phillips, M.A. thesis, Ohio State University, 1976, "Freedom's Trumpet Blast is Heard Again: Theodore Weld's Return to the Platform in 1862," dealt exclusively with Weld's oratory on behalf of the North during the Civil War.

While some graduate students have studied the rhetoric of individual antislavery speakers, others have turned their attention to abolitionist rhetoric that occurred in debates between pro and antislavery advocates. Included among these works are "The Compromise of 1850: A Burkeian Analysis," Jack David Arnold, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, 1959; "The Debate in Congress on the Kansas-Nebraska Bill: A Study in Persuasion," Donald O. Olson,


The last work is notable because it is one of the very few regional or statewide studies that has been done on abolitionist rhetoric. Several theses have examined "public speaking" in different states (especially Missouri) during the pre-Civil War period, but these apparently did not deal exclusively with antislavery rhetoric. By the same token, graduate students in rhetoric have not given much
attention to the different subgroups which collectively composed the abolitionist movement. Yet as Ernest Bormann has pointed out in his book *Forerunners of Black Power*, these subgroups took different approaches to the slavery question and as a result produced different types of rhetoric.

Bormann himself identifies five subgroups within the abolitionist movement: evangelicals, agitators, black abolitionists, female abolitionists, and establishment spokesmen. Some scholars have criticized these categories for not being mutually exclusive. After all, someone like Sojourner Truth could fit easily into at least two of them.

But in the opening chapter of *Forerunners*, Bormann makes it clear that the speakers for the antislavery cause divided into just two major rhetorical camps: the agitators and the evangelicals. Both groups, he declares, were heavily influenced by the Puritan preaching heritage and spoke "in language reminiscent of the sermons of the Puritan divines of the eighteenth century." The essential difference between the camps, Bormann continues, was in the strategies they employed. The strategy of the agitator was "to sting, goad, and disturb the audience," while the aim of the antislavery evangelist was "to convert the listener to the gospel of immediate abolition and to recruit people for active work in the antislavery cause."

Further on, Bormann reveals that the rhetorical differences between agitators and evangelicals paralleled some
equally important differences in ideology. The agitators, he notes, believed that their cause stood "above and outside the mainstream of the culture." They rejected the Constitution, condemned the church as an instrument of the slave power, and viewed American society as being inherently corrupt and racist. The evangelicals, however, had an entirely different outlook. As Bormann explains,

They (evangelicals) supported the original compact between the states, argued that the founders felt that slavery was waning and would shortly die, suggested that America was the great experiment in human freedom and the hope of all freedom-loving people around the globe, and that slavery must be purged to make the experiment work. . . . The problem lay not with the basic dream and structure of American society but with the legal system and social mores.

This positive, more traditional outlook on American society prompted the evangelicals to generate a genre of rhetoric that was far more successful than the discourse produced by the agitators. Although the agitators won more publicity, Bormann declares, it was the evangelicals who converted enough people to sustain the petition drive and build the framework for the Liberty, Free Soil, and Republican parties.

Bormann's observations on the evangelical abolitionists are, in effect, the genesis for this dissertation. For while his assessment of their role in the antislavery crusade may be correct as far as it goes, it is incomplete. The unanswered question which stands out is how did the
evangelicals manage to be successful? How were they able to avoid the stigma which surrounded the agitators and bring people into their fold?

The answer seems to be contained in the phrase "the rhetoric of conversion." This, after all, was the distinguishing trait of the evangelicals; the characteristic which set them apart from the agitators. Thus, to understand the success of the evangelicals, one must gain some degree of insight into the meaning of this term.

To grapple with the phenomenon of conversion is to open a Pandora's Box. It has been studied intensely over the centuries by a wide array of scholars. Plato, one of the earliest writers to study the matter, asserted that "the conversion of the soul is the turning round the eye from darkness to light."10 Centuries later, Edwin Starbuck sought to gain an insight to religious conversion by conducting intensive interviews with 192 converts to Christianity. He ultimately concluded that conversion involved the "giving up of the personal will" and was "characterized by more or less sudden changes of character from evil to goodness ... and from indifference to spiritual insight and activity."11 William James, Starbuck's contemporary, provided a similar but somewhat more sophisticated explanation in his book The Varieties of Religious Experience:

To be converted, to be regenerated, to receive grace, to gain an assurance are so many phrases which denote the process, gradual or sudden, by
which a self, hitherto divided, and consciously wrong, inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right, superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities.12

Whereas Starbuck and James discussed conversion within a religious framework, other scholars have studied the phenomenon from different perspectives. Looking at conversion from a sociological viewpoint, Glock and Stark affirm that it "is the process by which a person comes to adopt an all-pervading world view or change from one perspective to another. It denotes a major discontinuity in behavior—a rapid and drastic shift in orientation or valuation of reality."13 For Kurt and Gladys Lang, "conversion is more than opinion change, it is a complete turnabout in central values that is fairly permanent." Such thinking, they note, can easily be transferred into the political realm, "for the political evangelist also calls for repentance and a change in life styles—a reorientation epitomizing a transformation of one's value system."14 Herve Carrier, who provides a psychosociological perspective of modern religions in his book The Sociology of Religious Belonging, defines conversion as a "total adhesion, sudden and often accompanied by crisis, to values shared by a community; the experience will tend toward the reunification of the personality and toward its social integration."15

Although the preceding statements reflect numerous differences in opinion, some common threads of meaning can
nonetheless be extracted from them. First, it appears from what has been said that conversion is a dynamic phenomenon. The person who is converted undergoes some kind of internal change which affects the way that person perceives and interprets reality. Second, the convert regards the change as being for the good. He feels enlightened, uplifted, reconciled or otherwise improved. Third, there appears to be some consensus (excluding James) that the change brought on by conversion occurs rapidly and often in the face of adversity. Fourth, the change itself represents a drastic alteration in the convert's psychological orientation. It suggests the adoption of beliefs or values that were once vigorously rejected.

The views of these scholars are enlightening, but what this study needs is an analysis of what happens in the human mind when conversion occurs. Milton Rokeach offers a framework of understanding which appears to be useful. According to Rokeach, every person possesses attitudes or "enduring organizations of beliefs about an object or situation predisposing one to respond in some preferential manner." In addition, an individual approaches life through his personal "belief system" which "represents all the beliefs, sets, expectancies, hypotheses ... that a person at a given time accepts as true of the world he lives in." Lastly, Rokeach affirms that people operate from value systems. A value, to his way of thinking, is
"an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end--state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence." 

Rokeach makes it clear that some beliefs and values are more important to an individual than other beliefs and values. Specifically, he differentiates between primitive beliefs (unquestioned beliefs about the nature of physical and social reality) and nonprimitive beliefs (those held with varying degrees of intensity and which derive from some authority). Closely tied into the belief system is the "self-concept" Rokeach observes.

Self-conceptions include all one's cognitions, conscious and unconscious, about one's physical image, intellectual and moral abilities and weaknesses; national, regional, ethnic, racial and religious identity; the sexual, generational, occupational, marital and parental roles that one plays in society.

In essence, the self-concept is the center of the belief system. As Rokeach states, "all remaining beliefs, attitudes, and values can be conceived of as functionally organized around the innermost core."

Using Rokeach's constructs, the following concept of conversion can be synthesized: conversion takes place when, for whatever reason, an individual experiences a complete overhaul in his self-concept or a change in a primitive or nonprimitive belief which in turn induces a change in the self-concept. Once the self-concept has changed, other
beliefs will also change. This is because—as Rokeach mentions—the self-concept is functionally linked to the entire belief system. When it changes the entire system must also change.

With these facts in mind, it is possible to define an evangelical abolitionist as someone who sought to win devoted adherents to the antislavery cause by dramatically altering people's self-concepts and belief systems through the use of rhetoric. Having reached this point, however, a second problem emerges: exactly where does one go to look for evangelical abolitionists? Bormann at least hints that there was a regional division between the two rhetorical camps:

... the agitators of abolition were led by and tended to cluster around William Lloyd Garrison and the Boston antislavery forces, while the evangelists for abolition were associated with the benevolent empire and the headquarters of the American Anti-Slavery Society in New York City.22

Later on, Bormann makes frequent references to Ohio in discussing the activities of Theodore Weld and several other prominent evangelical spokesmen. He notes that Weld and many of his followers first gained public attention during the Lane Seminary debates in Cincinnati and thereafter traveled around the state giving speeches on behalf of the antislavery cause.23

Further revelations of Ohio's importance to the evangelical abolitionists are contained in the texts of
letters, speeches, reports, and local newspaper stories now housed at the Ohio State University Library, the Ohio Historical Society Archives, and the Western Reserve Historical Society Archives. An insight into the rhetoric of the evangelicals and their ideas, beliefs, and values can be gained from the review of these sources.

With the focus of research narrowed to the state of Ohio, a small problem arose over who and what should be encompassed by this study. If the main topic was to be the rhetoric of Ohio's evangelical abolitionists, some clarification of the terms "rhetoric" and "evangelical abolitionist" was clearly necessary.

The parameters of rhetoric have been a topic of debate for centuries and the issue remains unsettled to this day. For the purpose of this dissertation, however, the term "rhetoric" will apply to written and oral discourse that was specifically intended to move adult citizens of Ohio to accept the proposition that slavery should be immediately abolished in the United States.

With respect to printed rhetoric--newspapers, tracts, essays--only documents originating in Ohio and intended at least in part for an Ohio audience will be examined. However, the fact that an abolitionist tract or journal might have circulated outside of Ohio will not preclude it from consideration so long as its point of origin was in the Buckeye State.
As for oral rhetoric, only speeches presented on Ohio soil to Ohio audiences will be encompassed by this report. This does not mean, however, that residents of other states were never present when these addresses were delivered. Public speeches were often significant events in ante-bellum America. Not only did they break the monotony of frontier life, they gave friends and relatives from different communities the opportunity to socialize. Thus, a major speech in Cincinnati was almost certain to draw people from Kentucky and Indiana as well as Ohio.

In a certain sense, the problem of who to study solved itself. The people who were generating the abolitionist speeches, tracts, newspapers, and pamphlets were naturally the individuals on whom to focus. Of particular interest, however, were the rhetors who had a statewide audience, that is, those who presented the antislavery message to different communities around Ohio rather than to a single locality.

There were at least two good reasons to focus on these men—perhaps 12 or 13 in number—rather than the innumerable local antislavery spokesmen who were seldom heard outside their own towns or counties. The first reason was purely technical. It is much easier to concentrate on a dozen men than on several hundred. Moreover, the state speakers were more likely to generate publicity where they
went and, thus, leave some permanent record of their activities. They were also more inclined to print their speeches after delivering them orally.

The second and more important reason for focusing on the state rhetors is that their role in developing and mobilizing antislavery sentiment in Ohio appears to have been far more important than that of the local abolitionists. The abolitionist spokesmen who made the whole state their mission field gave cohesion and continuity to Ohio's antislavery crusade. They were the ones who organized the state's drive against the Congressional ban on antislavery petitions. They were also the ones who established the Ohio State Antislavery Society and made it a viable instrument for the abolitionist cause.

Most importantly, perhaps, the state abolitionists supported each other both spiritually and rhetorically. When obstacles arose in their path, they were quick to offer encouragement to one another. Not long after he was literally thrown out of Chillicothe, Marius Robinson received a consoling letter from Theodore Weld which said, "you have been zealous for the truth, anxious for the conversion of men, and liberal in supporting the cause of freedom. . . . I pray that all those who labor for our cause may have a compassion for sinners like to your own."
The state spokesmen for abolition also supported each others' efforts to win people to the antislavery movement. Although each of them worked independently, the messages they delivered were all built on the same beliefs and assumptions about God, man, and slavery. Moreover, as this dissertation will show, they had a common strategy for bringing their persuasive appeals to bear upon the minds of their readers and listeners.26

United as they were in thought and technique, every speech, tract, or essay the state abolitionists put forth had a kind of cumulative effect. This was all the more true since it was common for a procession of different abolitionists to visit the same community one right after the other or for a single spokesman to make several return visits to one locality. In either case, each argument that was offered at any given time confirmed or reinforced another argument that had been introduced earlier and was in turn supported by still another argument that came later. Thus, a speech delivered in Akron, a tract handed out in Cincinnati or a newspaper sold in Mansfield were not isolated acts but rather separate battles in a campaign with each battle representing another step toward the fulfillment of the campaign's objective.

With the problem of who and what to study solved, there remains only the business of stating the thesis of the
dissertation and outlining the steps which will be taken to prove it. That thesis can be stated as two questions to be answered:

(1) What was the nature of the rhetorical strategy Ohio abolitionists followed in their attempt to win people to the antislavery cause?

(2) Did this strategy actually result in the "conversion" of the people to abolitionism?

The abolitionists in question will not be referred to as "evangelicals" since that, in effect, is what this dissertation is trying to prove. If, as Bormann states, an evangelical abolitionist is one who practices the rhetoric of conversion, it is necessary first to prove the stated thesis before imputing that label to them. The following brief chapter synopsis will clarify how that will be accomplished.

Chapter 1 provides a survey of relevant scholarly works in the general topic area along with a clarification of terms, an analysis of the parameters of the research effort, and a thesis statement.27

Chapter 2 introduces the leading figures in Ohio's abolitionist crusade and focuses on the different roles they played in bringing the antislavery message to Ohio's people. Some of the relevant social events that affected their effort are also discussed.
Chapter 3 surveys the basic beliefs that undergirded the arguments Ohio abolitionists put forth against slavery.

Chapter 4 examines the different religious, patriotic, and humanitarian arguments Ohio abolitionists presented in their attempt to prove slavery was evil.

Chapter 5, similarly, looks at how they sought to prove that slavery was dangerous.

Chapter 6 analyzes their arguments regarding the need for immediate abolition and the inadequacy of alternative solutions.

Chapter 7 uses the Golden, Berquist, and Coleman model to explain the rhetorical strategy of Ohio's abolitionists.

Chapter 8 evaluates how well the model served its purpose and recommends possible refinements that might enhance its ability to explain conversion rhetoric. Suggestions for future research into related areas are also offered.
NOTES


3 Bormann, Black Power, p. 41.

4 Carmack's work was a potential resource for this dissertation. Unfortunately, technical difficulties made it impossible to procure. There is no microfilm of it at the University of Michigan and the University of Syracuse, according to its policy, would not send it out on inter-library loan.

5 Sojourner Truth, born Isabella Baumfree, was the first black female orator to speak out against slavery. The message she brought to her audiences emphasized that people can best show their love for God by their love and active concern for less fortunate people.

6 Bormann, Black Power, p. 6.

7 Ibid., p. 28.

8 Ibid., p. 35.

9 Ibid., p. 36.


21. Ibid., p. 216.


23. Ibid., pp. 9-10.

24. The *Emancipator*, chief newspaper of the American Antislavery Society, sometimes reprinted material that had earlier been presented in Ohio. Accordingly, occasional references will be made to this journal. Since William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator* gave only superficial attention to events in Ohio, it has not been cited. For the most part, the *Liberator* appears to have been Garrison's special vehicle for bringing his opinions to bear upon the New England populace.


26. Local abolitionists will not be totally ignored. However, they will only be given attention insofar as their rhetoric supports or complements the major themes of the state abolitionists.

27. The abolitionist movement, of course, has hardly been the exclusive domain of rhetoricians. Literally hundreds of historians, psychologists, sociologists, and other scholars have analyzed the movement from their own particular academic perspective.
CHAPTER II

ABOLITIONISM IN OHIO

Prior to 1835, but little had been done in Ohio for the cause of emancipation... But now, with unaffected surprise, we find ourselves engaged in a contest, involving the most momentous consequences: not our nation's prosperity merely, but the very existence of our free institutions, are staked upon the issue. It is a contest we must enter as one... for where we are divided amongst ourselves--there shall our cause be lost.

These words from the Executive Committee's Report to the First Anniversary Meeting of the Ohio State Antislavery Society betokened a new stage in Ohio's antislavery campaign. For the first time, abolitionist leaders from different parts of the state were striving to turn Ohio's population against human bondage in a coordinated and comprehensive crusade. During the society's three day convention at Granville, plans were laid for financing abolitionist newspapers, circulating petitions, distributing tracts, and providing economic and educational assistance to resident free blacks. "Our business," declared Samuel Crothers of Greenfield, "is to strike in every peaceful way at those corruptions in legislation or policy which do not conform to the beautiful theory of our
social organization—to make this republic as free in fact, as it is in hypothesis."  

Although officially established at Zanesville in April, 1835, the Ohio State Antislavery Society could trace its origins at least as far back as 1815. In that year, Quaker Benjamin Lundy organized the Union Humane Society in Mount Pleasant. "I had lamented the sad condition of the slave," Lundy explained in a letter to a friend, "so I called a few friends together and unbosomed my feelings to them. The result was the organization of an antislavery association . . ." Union Humane Society members limited their activities to assisting black families living in or near Mount Pleasant and corresponding with community leaders in other parts of the state.

Lundy remained active in the group even after becoming an agent for Charles Osborn's journal The Philanthropist. Published out of Mount Pleasant, The Philanthropist was the first newspaper in the United States to be entirely devoted to the cause of abolitionism. Osburn accepted almost any kind of composition—song, poetry, essay—as long as it dealt in some way with the eradication of human bondage. More successful than The Philanthropist, however, was Lundy's own newspaper The Genius of Universal Emancipation which he began publishing in 1821. Although similar in style to Osburn's paper, The Genius of Universal Emancipation gave its attention to a much wider range of
topics. A typical issue might include a report on anti-slavery activities in foreign nations or perhaps the accomplishments of free blacks living in another part of the country. The deliberations of both the national and state governments were also scrutinized and decisions harmful to the abolitionist cause were vigorously attacked. In August, 1821, for example, Lundy's journal lashed out at a recently passed Massachusetts law which revoked the freedom of any emancipated slave who stayed in the state more than one year after his release.7

Because of its varied content and Lundy's managerial skill, The Genius of Universal Emancipation acquired a widespread circulation that ultimately extended outside Ohio's borders. Other antislavery journalists in the state, observing Lundy's success, soon established their own antislavery newspapers in their respective communities. By 1835, there were no less than 40 abolitionist journals being printed and sold within the state.8

Notwithstanding the efforts of Osburn and Lundy, antislavery sentiment developed slowly in Ohio during the 1820s. Here and there a few people banded together to form small associations akin to Lundy's Union Humane Society, but many others regarded abolitionism with suspicion or even hostility. Such unfavorable feelings apparently stemmed from the paradoxical attitude which most Ohioans assumed toward the issue of race. This attitude was
perhaps best described by Randall and Ryan in their *History of Ohio: The Rise and Progress of an American State:*

There was a very aggressive opposition to the least toleration of slave labor in Ohio, which was very different from the sentiment in Illinois and Indiana. ... Notwithstanding this antipathy to slavery on the part of the people of Ohio, the feeling also existed that they did not want the negro within their borders. They did not object to slavery except within their own state. Indeed, it was a free expression that slavery in the South was a good thing for the people of Ohio.9

Actually, there probably were pockets of proslavery sentiment in certain parts of the state. The area around Chillicothe, for example, was originally settled by a group of Kentuckians under the leadership of Nathaniel Massie, a Revolutionary War veteran. They were later joined by a group of "cultivated, energetic, and well-to-do Virginians." Some other Kentuckians took up residence in Cincinnati.10

According to historian Harlan Hatcher, these early settlers came right after the Revolutionary War when the spirit of national unity was still very weak.

Men were first of all Virginians and were Americans only as an afterthought. They carried this feeling of separateness with them into Ohio where all kinds of people from everywhere came in so quickly that the state was from its inception cosmopolitan and decentralized.11

In such conditions, proslavery or anti-black prejudices among the Southern settlers could easily have survived from generation to generation.
The belief that blacks were undesirable for Ohio found expression in a series of "Black Laws" passed almost immediately after statehood was conferred in 1803. One such law required Negroes and mulattoes seeking permanent residence in the state to present a certificate of freedom from some court in the United States. In 1807 an even harsher law was passed requiring resident blacks to provide a bond of $500, signed by two freeholders, guaranteeing that they would obey the law and not become a county charge.\footnote{12}

In the face of such prejudice and mistrust, the abolitionist movement in Ohio might never have become a significant force had it not been for one man—Theodore Dwight Weld. A convert of Charles Grandison Finney, Weld first came to Ohio in the winter of 1832 to persuade schools and colleges in this state to supplement their academic offerings with manual labor programs. While lecturing at Hudson, Weld made the acquaintance of Charles B. Storrs, Elizur Wright, and Beriah Green all of whom were active abolitionists.\footnote{13} Under their influence, Weld's attitude toward slavery began to harden. To be sure, he had never regarded the South's peculiar institution with much favor, but now he came to see it as a heinous sin; as a stain upon the whole character of the nation. Weld corresponded with Wright and Green after leaving Ohio and gradually the anti-slavery cause took on greater significance in his life.\footnote{14}
After submitting his report to the Society for Promoting Manual Labor in Literary Institutions, Weld sought to fulfill a lifelong ambition to enter the ministry. He selected Cincinnati's Lane Seminary as the site for his clerical training. It was an appropriate choice inasmuch as Lane had a well developed manual labor program as part of its curriculum.15

A short time after his arrival at Lane, Weld began to speak with his fellow students about joining the anti-slavery cause. Working quietly but persistently, he won over William T. Allan, a native Alabamian. Born and raised in the midst of slavery and a prospective slaveholder himself, Allan proved to be a powerful compatriot. Working together, he and Weld soon enlisted so many students that they challenged Lane's Colonization Society to a public discussion. This discussion—known later as the Lane Debates—lasted eighteen nights during the winter of 1834.16 Speakers during the first nine nights focused on the question of whether slaveholding states had a duty to eliminate slavery immediately. Benjamin P. Thomas, Weld's biographer, provides a synopsis of what was said:

Weld opened the inquiry and held forth for two whole evenings. Then William Allan told about the slaves' condition in Alabama. Asa Stone, who had been teaching in Mississippi, described what he had seen there. James Bradley, the colored man, had the audience in tears as he related how he was brought to the U.S. on a slave ship as a child, and sold to a South Carolina planter, who, moving
to Arkansas, had allowed Bradley to work out his freedom. James A. Thome, a Kentuckian, told how slavery demoralized the planters' sons and degraded society generally. Huntingdon Lyman described slave life in Louisiana. At the conclusion, all except four or five students who had not yet formed an opinion, voted for immediate abolition.\(^\text{17}\)

The last nine nights were devoted to the issue of whether the "doctrines, tendencies, and spirit" of the American Colonization Society were worthy of acceptance by Christian people. Weld apparently gave a most convincing speech against the society and on the last day of the debates the students voted down colonization almost unanimously and proceeded to organize an abolitionist society. Once formed, this group undertook a variety of projects in the Cincinnati area. A lyceum offering the city's black population free lectures on reading, grammar, arithmetic, and geography was initiated along with three Sunday Schools and several Bible classes.\(^\text{18}\)

Not everyone regarded such activities with favor. The Western Monthly Magazine, published in Cincinnati, condemned the Lane abolitionists as "precocious undergraduates" and "embryo clergymen" whose "sophomoric declamations were raising malignant passions and rancorous party spirit." Attitudes among Cincinnati's populace worsened after several Lane students were seen fraternizing with blacks in public. There were outcries for the expulsion of abolitionists from the seminary along with rumors of an impending march on the school.\(^\text{19}\)
In the face of such pressure from the outside, Lane Seminary President Lyman Beecher and the school's board of trustees pressured Weld and his followers to curtail their involvement in the abolitionist cause. When they refused, the board's executive committee decreed a ban on all student societies except those intended to promote academic study. Moreover, public statements by students in meetings or at meals were forbidden unless prior approval was obtained. Violators were threatened with expulsion.

The Lane "rebels," as they came to be called, responded to the decree with a statement of protest coupled with a notification of their intention to withdraw from the seminary. Of the fifty-one students who did leave, thirty-eight went to nearby Cumminsville and established a new school where they attempted to carry on with their religious training even as they continued their work with Cincinnati Negroes. For his part, Weld took on the responsibilities of a full-time agent for the American Antislavery Society and embarked on one of the most exhaustive speaking tours ever initiated for the cause of abolition. In the span of four months, he lectured five times at Concord, seven times at Oldtown, nine times at Bloomingsburg, and fourteen times at Circleville.

Wherever he went, Weld not only spoke but also helped organize local antislavery associations. By April, 1835,
Weld had visited over forty towns and villages throughout the state and had left behind an abolitionist society in almost every one. At this time, feeling the need for a coordinated statewide campaign, Weld called for a convention to meet at Zanesville on April 22, 1835 to organize an Ohio State Abolition Society. Representatives from twenty local societies attended along with a delegation from the Quaker communities in the southeastern part of the state.\textsuperscript{23} Agreement was reached on such matters as providing support to abolitionist newspapers and conducting studies on the problems Ohio blacks were facing. More might have been accomplished had not the proceedings of this first meeting been interrupted from time to time by unruly mobs.

Recognizing the need for more agents to carry the antislavery message into the field, Weld traveled from the state convention to Oberlin College where many of the Lane Rebels were now enrolled. For twenty-one consecutive nights, Weld lectured on abolition in the school's chapel. "You may judge something of the interest," he reported to Lewis Tappan, "when I tell you that from 5 to 6 hundred males and females attend every night, and sit shivering . . . without anything to lean back against, and this too until nine o'clock."\textsuperscript{24} Before he was finished with his lectures, six students--all former seminarians at Lane--volunteered to accept antislavery agencies within the state:
Samuel Gould, William T. Allan, James A. Thome, John W. Alvord, Sereno W. Streeter, and Huntingdon Lyman. Two other Lane Rebels, Marius Robinson and Augustus Wattles, were already at work in the Cincinnati area giving speeches and teaching blacks.  

Over the next fifteen years, these men criss-crossed the state bringing the gospel of abolition to almost anyone who would listen. For the most part, Ohio antislavery spokesmen shied away from the larger cities and concentrated on smaller farm towns and commercial centers. Wherever they went, however, the threat of physical harm was ever present. Club-wielding ruffians disrupted more than a few speeches and occasionally abused speakers themselves. One particularly vicious mob beat Marius Robinson into unconsciousness, stripped off his clothes, and then tarred and feathered him. To be sure, some towns, with sympathy for the antislavery cause, were more hospitable to these itinerant agents, but the task of bringing people into the abolitionist camp never lost its danger.

Weld gave his six recruits a two week indoctrination session in Cleveland and then moved back unto the lecture circuit. Speaking from church pulpits or from the steps of a general store, Weld brought home the same message time and again: slavery was a moral travesty; a sin unto God and a stain on the nation. Ignoring the economic arguments
against slavery, Weld appealed to the consciences of his listeners, bringing to bear "the accumulated pressure of myriad wrongs and woes and hoarded guilt" upon each individual.  

In the winter of 1836, Weld, believing his work in Ohio to be finished, moved on into western Pennsylvania and from there into New York. The 133 local abolitionist societies as well as the state organization which he left in his wake testified to the effectiveness of his campaign. Moreover, his whole concept of how the slavery issue should be approached—as a moral/religious question which touched each person individually—left an indelible mark on the minds of those who carried on the work he started.  

While Theodore Weld was storming through Ohio on his speaking campaign, a friend of his in Northern Kentucky was using the press to lash out against slavery. James G. Birney, a former slaveholder who had lived in both Alabama and Kentucky, met Weld when the latter came through the South promoting the cause of manual labor in education. After Weld returned to the North, they maintained a steady correspondence and often discussed what should be done about slavery. Birney agreed with Weld that slavery was an undesirable system of labor, but initially he felt that colonization was the best way to eliminate it. Accordingly, he became an agent for the American Colonization Society in Danville, Kentucky. From his experiences with that
organization and from what Weld said to him in his letters, Birney ultimately came to believe that colonization did not offer an acceptable solution to the slavery problem. He perceived moral as well as practical weaknesses with the colonizationist plan. "If gradual emancipation be insisted on," he declared in a letter to a Kentucky acquaintance, "the conscience of the slaveholder is left undisturbed, and you gain nothing."  

In 1836, not long after changing his position on slavery, Birney purchased a printing press in Danville and began publishing an abolitionist newspaper. Almost immediately cries of anger and protest arose from the surrounding community and the city's authorities warned that they would not be able to protect either him or his property from the impending violence. When Weld learned of Birney's difficulties in Kentucky, he invited his old friend to move to Cincinnati and continue publication of his newspaper from that city. Birney readily agreed.

The journal which he edited—known as the Philanthropist—became one of the most eloquent voices for abolition west of the Alleghenies. Its pages were typically filled with stories depicting the cruel conditions which slavery imposed on blacks. These stories were commonly told by people who had visited the South or who had once owned slaves themselves. The Philanthropist also gave attention to what was being done both in and outside of the state for
the abolitionist cause. The initiation of a new petition
drive or the creation of a local antislavery society some­
where might be announced on its pages. An article in one
issue even went so far as to solicit food, money, and
clothing for a runaway slave who was hiding in some undis­
closed part of the state.

Public hostility became almost as much of a problem
for Birney in Cincinnati as it had in Kentucky. At a pub­
lic meeting in January, 1836, a group of Cincinnati
businessmen and political leaders resolved to suppress all
antislavery activity within their city. They sent a
deputation of twelve prominent citizens to persuade Birney
to cease publication of the *Philanthropist*. He refused
claiming that freedom of the press could not be sacrificed
for the sake of public convenience. Several weeks later,
a mob broke into Birney's office and destroyed his printing
press along with other materials he needed to produce his
journal. Undaunted, Birney purchased a new press and moved
to a different part of the city. He served as editor and
publisher of the *Philanthropist* until March 1838 at which
time he went to New York to become secretary of the American
Antislavery Society. Following Birney's departure,
Gamaliel Bailey took over the *Philanthropist* and continued
its publication until just before the Civil war.

When Birney's first printing press was destroyed, the
Ohio State Antislavery Society helped the beleaguered
journalist secure funds for the purchase of a replacement. Unlike most other state abolitionist organizations, the Ohio State Antislavery Society was an active and powerful force for emancipation. Besides supporting numerous community abolitionist journals and several schools for free blacks, the Ohio State Antislavery Society conducted successful petition campaigns first to protest Congress' "gag rule" with respect to discussing the slavery issue and later to raise objections to America's war with Mexico. When noted colonizationist N. L. Rice offered to publicly debate the issue of slavery's morality with anyone from the abolitionist camp, the Ohio State Antislavery Society sent the Reverend Jonathan Blanchard from its own ranks to represent its cause. When Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, society members throughout the state organized meetings of protest and brought forth prominent figures like Joshua Giddings and Salmon P. Chase to denounce the measure. 34

Not all antislavery activities in Ohio took place in public. More than a few abolitionists in this state played key roles in the Underground Railroad. As explained by Randall and Ryan, this "railroad" was the "name given to the mysterious methods by which the ignorant slave was enabled to make an intelligent effort for liberty, and which furnished him transportation to a point where slavery was unknown." 35 Those who assisted in the escape and
deliverance of slaves were often given names associated with the railroad industry. Thus, people who planned and directed rescue operations were called "managers" while "conductors" were the ones who actually escorted the fleeing blacks from one "station" to another. In most cases, these "stations" were the homes of abolitionists who concealed the runaways until their journey could be safely resumed.

Ohio was unusually suited for the purposes of the Underground Railroad. Not only did it border on two slave states—Kentucky and Virginia—but its entire southern boundary ran alongside the Ohio River. This great flowing body of water helped to mask the runaway's route of escape from any slave-hunters who might be following him. Once across the river, slaves could find Underground Railroad stations in any one of twenty small towns between Cincinnati and Marietta. Moving north from these points, they may have received assistance from such prominent figures as John Rankin, an outspoken Presbyterian clergyman in Chillicothe or Julian Giddings, son of the controversial abolitionist congressman. Just as significant, however, were the efforts of lesser known individuals, many of them in the Quaker communities of southeastern Ohio, who in helping escaped slaves avoid capture risked prosecution under the Fugitive Slave Law. It was this same law which authorized slaveholders to seek and seize runaways on free state soil and which, in consequence, prompted fleeing slaves to make
Canada rather than the free North their final destination.

Although both the state and local abolitionist organizations continued to function up to and beyond the outbreak of the Civil War, the intensity of their campaign began to lessen by 1850. By that time, the six agents recruited by Weld had all retired from the field and more than a few of the antislavery newspapers which sprang up after Lundy's success with the *Genius of Universal Emancipation* had ceased publication. And while new local societies were still being formed, membership in some of the older ones—established during Weld's crusade through the state—declined noticeably.  

Some evidence suggests that this reduction in abolitionist activity resulted from a growing belief at the end of the 1840s that most people had made up their minds about slavery and continued efforts of persuasion would yield little fruit. This sentiment comes out in the records of the Western Antislavery Society in the years just preceding the Civil War. There are frequent complaints made about the lack of progress and about people who would not pay for their subscriptions to the society's newspaper. The lethargy of abolitionists themselves was a constant source of frustration. "The spirit of martyrdom," the society's 1858 annual report dryly observed, "is never diffused through a community." Even those abolitionists who were working hard had little to show for their efforts. "Would
that we could point to brilliant campaigns, to victories commensurate with the magnitude of the object we seek," the report continued, "but in view of the great work to be done, we can make but a meagre exhibition of the results."

The despondency which appears to underlie this statement may betoken a more important reason behind the decline in organized abolitionist activity in Ohio after 1850. Specifically, it appears that the will of the abolitionists to continue their struggle may have been substantially weakened by two events which took place at about that time.

In 1846, the United States went to war with Mexico over the issue of Texas annexation. From the perspective of abolitionists all across the country, this war was nothing less than an unholy crusade to extend slavery into new territory. Years before the outbreak of hostilities, they had called attention to the vast number of slaveholding settlers who were moving into Texas and even then had foreseen an eventual move to bring that mass of land under American control. More than anything else, abolitionists feared that if Texas were brought into the union, it would ultimately be subdivided into as many as five separate states each of which would send proslavery congressmen to Washington where the balance of political power would become even more unfavorable than it already was. Yet in spite of their warnings, their protests, and their petitions, the United States Government had initiated a bloody conflict
which kept the disputed land under its domain.  

Less than three years after the conclusion of the Mexican War, abolitionists received another jolt when Congress approved the so-called Compromise of 1850. Anti-slavery advocates regarded this "compromise" as a complete sell-out to the Southern slavocracy. Not only did this measure leave the territories of Utah and New Mexico open to human bondage but it also introduced an even harsher fugitive slave law which authorized severe punishment for anyone who assisted runaways and abolished jury trials for fugitive blacks who were recaptured. The enactment of this new law must have dealt a severe blow to the spirits of abolitionists, many of whom had spent considerable time and money in an effort to repeal the original Fugitive Slave Law of 1793. For them, the compromise's provisions for admitting California to the union as a free state and abolishing the slave trade in Washington D.C. provided little, if any, consolation.

But abolitionists in Ohio, at least, may have been more successful than they realized at first. In 1855, Salmon P. Chase, an avowed abolitionist, accepted the Republican nomination for governor of the state. His reputation as a foe of slavery was forged in the U.S. Senate where he fought for the exclusion of human bondage from the national territories and opposed the fugitive slave law. Randall and Ryan observe that "against Chase was all the
proslavery and Know Nothing sentiment of the State." Yet the former senator won the election by a 15,750 vote plurality over his Democratic and American Party opponents. In 1857, he was reelected.40

The so-called "Oberlin-Wellington Rescue Case" was another revealing event. This incident occurred when an Oberlin College professor and several students attempted to free a fugitive slave who was being returned to the South by federal officers. The would-be rescuers were arrested under the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 and arraigned before the U.S. Court at Cleveland. Two of them were convicted. After that, lawyers for the accused sought to have the Ohio Supreme Court overturn the decision. Although this court agreed to hear the case, it ultimately sustained the judgment rendered in Cleveland.41 More significant to this study is the fact that during these proceedings public sentiment throughout the state was solidly behind the Oberlin rescuers. Mass meetings were held to denounce the federal court’s decision while newspapers which were not known for their support of abolitionism added their voices to the storm of protest.

In the final analysis, Ohio abolitionists, while perhaps not winning as many wholehearted converts to their cause as they had hoped, apparently succeeded in giving their beliefs a certain measure of respectability. They gained this respectability because the message they conveyed
through their rhetoric was compatible with both the religious and political values of their listeners. People who heard their speeches or read their tracts eventually became aware that abolitionism—at least as it appeared in Ohio—was philosophically grounded on the same principles that undergirded the whole structure of American life. For this reason, an examination of the philosophical foundations of Ohio abolitionism will enhance our understanding of the antislavery campaign in this state.
NOTES


2 Ibid., p. 22.

3 Part of this first convention was held in nearby Putnam after unruly crowds disrupted the proceedings in Zanesville.


5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 The Genius of Universal Emancipation, August 14, 1821, p. 5.

8 Listed in the Ohio Historical Society Archives' Guide to Ohio Newspapers.

9 Randall and Ryan, History of Ohio, p. 119.


11 Ibid., pp. 87-88.

12 Randall and Ryan, History of Ohio, p. 120.


14 Ibid., pp. 36-37.

15 Ibid., p. 41.

16 Ibid., p. 71.

17 Ibid., Thomas' source of information was the Emancipator, March 25 and April 22, 1834.

18 Ibid., p. 72.
Ibid., p. 77.

Cincinnati Daily Gazette, August 30, 1834, p. 4.

Thomas, Theodore Weld, p. 85.

Ibid., p. 92.

Ibid., pp. 93-94.


Thomas, Theodore Weld, p. 98.

Except for Gould who left the state shortly after the indoctrination session.

Memorandum dated June 13, 1837 in Marius R. Robinson Papers, MS 1660, Western Reserve Historical Society.


Thomas, Theodore Weld, p. 111.

Dumond, Birney Letters, I, xxii.

Randall and Ryan, Ohio History, p. 127. This newspaper had no connection with the one started years earlier by Osburn.

Ibid.

Randall and Ryan, Ohio History, p. 133.

Ibid., p. 130.

Texas officially entered the Union in March, 1845 so the war was actually fought to preserve its annexation and to bring land to the north and west of Texas under American control. Under the Treaty of Guadelupe-Hidalgo, the U.S. acquired territory which later became the states of Arizona, New Mexico, California, Nevada, Utah and Colorado.


Randall and Ryan, Ohio History, pp. 141-142.

Ibid., pp. 134-135. This case which emerged from the Oberlin-Wellington Rescue was significant to American jurisprudence inasmuch as it nearly brought a state court into direct conflict with a federal court.
CHAPTER III

THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF
ABOLITIONISM IN OHIO

In his essay "Where Is Argument?," Wayne Brockriede asserts that one of the distinguishing features of an argument is "an inferential leap from existing beliefs to the adoption of a new belief or the reinforcement of an old one." Given the validity of this observation, we must conclude that to comprehend fully the arguments offered by Ohio abolitionists, we must have some knowledge of the beliefs which served as the starting points for the "inferential leaps" that they made. Such knowledge, which Brockriede labels the rhetor's "perceived rationale," should also help us explicate the pattern of rhetoric through which they advanced their arguments.¹

According to Ernest Bormann, the ideology of the abolitionist movement was rooted in Puritan religious concepts. Bormann finds antislavery advocates in both the New England and western states speaking for abolition "in language reminiscent of the sermons of the Puritan divines of the eighteenth century."² This language emphasized that "man was a mean, miserable creature who had grieved God mightily."³
Although man was unworthy to enter the kingdom of heaven, God, through his perfect grace, offered salvation to an elected few in return for their faith and good works. But action had to be taken immediately because those seeking salvation were required to make great efforts and face severe trials before they could attain it. Thus, Puritan preachers stressed the need for their parishioners to seek God's grace without delay "lest they miss the nick of time that might be their only way to heaven."^4

Bormann perceives these same ideas, with some variation, underlying the rhetoric of nineteenth-century American reformers including abolitionists.

While the reformers differed from their Puritan forebears in their optimism and belief in free grace, they embraced the inheritance from Puritan rhetoric that time was pressing. Their sense of destiny led them to believe that violent exertions and sacrifices on their part would result in great good works in a very short period of time.^5

This is a revealing observation insofar as it sheds light on the general thinking of abolitionists in Ohio and other states. However, our purpose in this chapter requires us to look deeper for those particular fundamental beliefs which undergirded the arguments they advanced. Given what Bormann has said about the religious roots of abolitionist rhetoric, we need to discover what beliefs Ohio abolitionists had regarding the character of God, God's relationship to man, and man's responsibilities to him.
Some insight into their thoughts on America's "mission" and the role of the individual in shaping his own destiny should also be useful since, as Bormann notes, abolitionists in the west "participated in some of the great sustaining cultural myths that celebrated the American experience and gave it meaning." 6

Because Ohio antislavery spokesmen seldom discussed their basic principles in speeches or newspapers, our investigation must necessarily center on their private communication: letters, diaries, and memoranda. In addition, some attention must be given to the thoughts of Charles Grandison Finney and Asa Mahan. These two men did not actively participate in Ohio's antislavery crusade but they did influence the thinking of several people who did take part in it. Finney, best known as a Christian revivalist, would be worth studying for the simple fact that he persuaded Theodore Weld to adopt the fundamental Christian convictions which later became the foundation for Weld's attack on slavery. But Finney almost certainly influenced the religious views of other Lane rebels as well. He served as professor of theology and later President of Oberlin College between 1835 and 1865 during which time he preached hundreds of sermons in the school's chapel and conducted classes on the Holy Bible. 7 Even more importantly, perhaps, Finney's rhetorical style; his ideas on how the "unsaved" should be turned away from sin and brought to salvation
served as a guide for almost every important spokesman for abolition in Ohio.

For his part, Asa Mahan made an impact on many young abolitionists first as a professor of moral philosophy at Lane Seminary and later as President of Oberlin College. Mahan had the distinction of being the only trustee at the seminary to side with the Lane rebels in their dispute with President Beecher over student involvement in the anti-slavery movement. When Weld and his followers left Cincinnati, Mahan went with them and won the president's chair at Oberlin largely because the dissidents from Lane made his appointment to that post a pre-condition for their entrance to the school. 8

As noted in Chapter 1, most of the leading Ohio abolitionists were devout Protestants who accepted the Holy Bible as the complete and final revelation of God's will for humanity. This Judaeo-Christian God to which they owed allegiance was an all-knowing, all-powerful sovereign who was not limited by time or space. "That God, and space, and duration, are infinite; that all God's attributes must be infinite, are self-evident truths of reason," declared Finney in his Lectures on Systematic Theology. 9 Ohio abolitionists usually emphasized God's love and concern for humanity above all his other attributes. They believed their deity was directly involved with all the events transpiring on earth and that he controlled these events in
such a way as to bring the most good for humanity from them. God could even use man's sinful deeds for benevolent purposes. Finney made this a major point in his lecture "The Purposes of God":

It is true that God has taken occasion to show forth the glory of his benevolence through the existence of sin. He has seized the occasion, though mournful in itself, to manifest some of the attributes of his benevolence by the exercise of them. It is also true that we can not know how or by what means God could have revealed these attributes if sin had not existed, and it is also true that we can not know that such a revelation was impossible without the existence of sin, nor that but for sin the revelation would have been necessary to the highest good of the universe.  

Ohio abolitionists believed that the ministry and sacrifice of Jesus Christ was the greatest manifestation of God's love for humanity. Through his teachings on earth, Jesus, God's one and only son, had given mankind a perfect example for righteous behavior. But, more importantly, through his death on the cross, he had made full atonement for the sins of every person who would ever live on earth. As John Rankin explained, "His atonement consisted not in setting us an example by his death as a martyr, but was the voluntary substitution of himself in the sinner's place, the just dying for the unjust, Christ, the Lord, bearing our sins in his own body on the tree."  

Weld agreed that sending Christ to die for man's salvation was the supreme act of God's love. At the same time, he regarded the creation of the family unit as another significant revelation of God's good will. God created the
parental state, Weld declared, not only to assure stability within the human community, but also to illustrate "his own relations to the whole human family." It was through that special institution, too, that man and woman could responsibly carry out God's commandment "to be fruitful and multiply" and could "nurture their children in the admonition of the Lord."  

But while believing God to be well-disposed toward humanity, spokesmen for the antislavery cause in this state also believed that he was a just and righteous ruler who would not ignore the transgressions of his children on earth. According to Romans 3:10-11, everyone stood condemned as a sinner and those who did not repent and seek redemption through Christ were doomed to eternal damnation in hell. Others who accepted Christ as saviour but persisted in their sin would be harshly chastised. To lead the proper Christian life, Weld confided in a letter to Lewis Tappan, one had to combine "good works with a strong faith" and "abstain from those forms of conduct which the Bible reveals are displeasing to God."  

Ohio abolitionists regarded God's relationship to humanity as analogous to the relationship between a father and his offspring; a view which tied in with their perception of the Almighty as a loving but authoritative master. Like a good earthly parent, God taught his children how to lead a moral life. The Bible and the guidance of the Holy
Spirit were the chief instruments he used for that purpose. When men strayed from the path of righteousness, God punished them not, Jonathan Blanchard asserted, "as an act of vengeance" but as a "means of exposing them to the error of their ways . . . and restoring them to the proper course once again." 15 Blanchard also believed that God did not take favorites among his children but treated each "as not the better or worse than another." 16 Others in Ohio's antislavery camp apparently shared this view. Weld once confided his belief that "everyone stands as an equal before the Lord's throne," 17 while John Rankin declared that God sought salvation for all people on earth and "offered grace as freely to the ignorant pagan as to the lettered scholar." 18

But although they did not believe that God favored or disfavored any particular group of people in the human community, Ohio abolitionists were certain that he selected individuals or even entire nations to be instruments of his will. God specifically entrusted men like Noah and Moses to carry out divine missions and, with his guidance and protection, they succeeded. Similarly, God gave the nation of Israel a special task to fulfill. That task, according to Blanchard, was to worship and glorify the one true God in the very midst of a civilization which was sunken into idolatry. To guide the Hebrews as they carried out their mission, God laid down a set of laws for them to follow.
Blanchard believed that these laws were perfectly suited for the situation in which the Hebrews found themselves. He noted, for example, that the Mosaic law of bondservice was "a sort of missionary mill . . . a system of moral screwblocks and pulleys, to elevate the heathen from their abject degradation . . . to the pure and holy and elevated worship and service of the true God." Blanchard also felt that the overall thrust of the Hebrews' law was toward increasing the level of human freedom:

The few restrictions which Mosaic bondservice imposed on Hebrew servants . . . were made necessary by merciful reasons in existing circumstances. In the Hebrew system, the utmost that can be said is, that Moses did not take away all restraints, which the world had imposed on human liberty, at once. . . . Everyone knows that the Jews became a free nation. . . . It was the operation of the Mosaic code which made them free.20

Ohio abolitionists had no doubt that God could use them to solve the problems of their own age just as he had used selected people to work his will on earth during Biblical times. Indeed, many of them came to perceive themselves as participants in a divine crusade for improving the quality of human life all across the world. They considered the abolitionist movement to be only one part of this crusade. Accordingly, several prominent figures in Ohio's antislavery camp--while never abandoning abolition as their first priority--devoted some of their energy to other social causes. Alvord and Streeter became active
proponents of temperance; Thome championed women's rights; Weld embraced both of these causes along with several others including abstinence from tobacco.21 Weld, himself, perhaps best described how he and his colleagues viewed their relationship to God in a letter to Lewis Tappan:

All the members of the body of Christ have not the same office. Let Delavan drive temperance, McDowell moral reform, Finney revivals, Tappan antislavery, etc. Each of these is bound to make his own peculiar department his main business, and to promote collaterally as much as he can the other objects.22

Ohio abolitionists believed that just as earthly parents required their children to fulfill certain obligations within the family unit, so, too did God impose certain responsibilities on those who claimed him as their heavenly father. Anyone who accepted the saving grace of Jesus Christ and who had the Holy Spirit in his heart would not fail to make the fulfillment of these responsibilities the first priority in his life. Although the chief spokesmen for the antislavery cause in Ohio were not always in accord on how best to serve God, they apparently perceived that each of them was charged with two main duties: having faith and obeying the "Law of Love."

For Ohio abolitionists, the word "faith" meant much more than just attending church and reading the Bible. For Finney, faith entailed "a trusting in Christ, a committing the soul and the whole being to him in his various offices
and relations to men. It is a confiding in him and in what is revealed of him in his word and providence, and by his Spirit." Thus, people with faith did not rely on their own strength to solve problems but rather communicated their cares to God through prayer and allowed him to deal with those cares "in the proper manner and at the proper time." Along with this willingness to rely on God's strength, Finney asserted, the man of faith enjoyed a special "fellowship or sympathy with Him (God) in regard to the great end upon which his heart is set and for which he lives." This fellowship impelled men to abandon their own selfish desires and to accept what happened in their lives as God's will. In a similar way, it led them to believe that God could bring good out of severe hardship or the most heinous of sins.

In a journal he kept while traveling throughout the state, Marius Robinson spoke of a faith that was slightly different from the one described by Finney. For Robinson, faith was a kind of "knowing" or "understanding" which did not come from what was observed through the senses. Rather, it came from within the soul and manifested itself as an "inner peace" and a "confidence" that God would use "what we perceive as evil as much as what we perceive as good to work his perfect will." Robinson thought that while faith did not result from empirical observation, it was directly linked to the evidence of God's power provided in
the Holy Scriptures. From reading the Bible, one could establish a strong foundation for faith by becoming acquainted with God's promises to man and seeing how he worked in the lives of selected individuals. "And when we come to realize," said Robinson, "that we can claim these promises or be used of God as were a Moses or Joshua . . . then do the roots of faith find their way into our souls." 27

Others in Ohio's antislavery camp apparently had ideas on faith that were similar to those of Finney and Robinson. Thome, for example, spoke of faith as "a relinquishing of human power to divine power . . . a trust in God's wisdom over man's wisdom." 28 Beyond this, most Ohio abolitionists believed that faith was something they owed to God; something he could rightfully expect from them. In Robinson's words, "Can the Father who spared Abraham's son at Moriah, who took his chosen seed from the hand of Pharaoh and led them past the Canaanites' sword . . . and who sacrificed his only begotten son for our salvation expect less from us than absolute faith and obedience?" 29

But the Christian's obligation to God did not end with faith. However strong it was, faith had to be combined with a zeal to perform good works; a desire to obey what some Ohio abolitionists called the "Law of Love." As explained by Rankin in his 1838 "Address to the Churches," the Law of Love "not only prohibits every species of injury
to our fellowmen, but it enjoins the positive doing of good
to every human being so far as we have opportunity.\textsuperscript{30}

For Ohio's antislavery crusaders, "the positive doing
of good" meant taking part in any activity which promised
to improve the overall quality of human life or which aimed
to uplift some particularly unfortunate group of people.
In terms of human effort, it meant contributing money,
delivering speeches, writing essays, or perhaps just circu­
lating petitions. As already noted, several prominent
antislavery advocates in this state found time to devote
some energy to other social causes most notably temperance
and women's rights.

The Bible seemed to support the notion that God
desired good works from his children as much as he desired
their faith; a fact which Theodore Weld brought to the
attention of his audiences more than once. James 2:14,
Acts 26:20, and Ephesians 2:10 were only a few of the
passages which seemingly revealed the importance God placed
on the performance of good deeds. Moreover, Christ's
admonitions "To do unto others as ye would have them do
unto you," and "to love thy neighbor as thyself," were seen
as clear commands for the practicing Christian to be involved
with the welfare of his fellow man. And while they did not
regard benificence on earth as a means of salvation, Ohio
abolitionists had few doubts that God would punish them if
they remained indifferent to the suffering and injustice in
the world around them. At the same time, they envisioned possible treasures for themselves in heaven as a reward for diligent service to humanity on earth. Robinson spoke of the day "when I might hear the joyful sound of 'Well Done!' from the lips of the Divine Master."31 Others firmly felt that God had done them a great honor by giving them the power and opportunity to serve those less fortunate than themselves. "Promoting the happiness of our Lord's children," wrote James G. Birney, "is an incomparable privilege in itself."32

The distinctly Protestant character of abolitionism in Ohio undoubtedly made Jews and Catholics reluctant to join the state's antislavery campaign. There were other reasons for their noninvolvement outside of religion. In the case of the Jews, their numbers in the state during the time period in question were just too small to make any meaningful impact.33 Catholics were more numerous but their position in society was not secure enough to allow them to become embroiled in a controversial cause. Catholic clergymen were constantly defending themselves against charges of "popery" and political meddling.34 There was particular concern about the Catholic approach to education. In her thesis "The Catholic Church in Ohio, 1830-1840," Anna Marie McNamara notes that a heated debate erupted on this issue at the College of Teachers Association Convention of 1837. The chief protagonists were Catholic Bishop Jean Purcell
and the Reverend Alexander Campbell, a Baptist minister. Faced with such challenges to their conduct, Catholics probably had little time or inclination to become active supporters of abolition. 35

Like many of their contemporaries, Ohio abolitionists believed in an American mission. They were convinced that God had ordained the United States to lead—by counsel or example—all other nations in a worldwide struggle for self-determination and republican forms of government. They were equally convinced that as long as the United States tolerated human bondage within its borders, it could never carry out this sacred assignment. "Slavery neutralizes the power of our example upon other nations of the earth," Sereno Streeter lamented in an 1839 speech, "and checks the progress of republican principles." 36 In the journal he kept during his statewide lecture tour, Marius Robinson confided his belief that the outcome of America’s struggle against human bondage would have no small impact on current European revolutions for national independence. "To save this land to universal liberty and universal brotherhood, supported by universal law and sanctified by universal piety," he declared, "is to save all lands." 37

Belief in an American mission served vital functions for Ohio abolitionists. It infused their cause with great urgency but, at the same time, made those who opposed them seem more abstract and less human: abolitionists were
fighting for God's will rather than against real people; their true enemies were not Southern slaveholders but rather such intangibles as "tyranny" and "inhumanity." The rhetoric associated with the American mission, moreover, provided Ohio abolitionists with a culturally acceptable vocabulary for expressing their hopes and fears regarding the future of the United States. James G. Birney, for example, asked readers of the Philanthropist:

Have we not reason . . . to think, that if, in modern times, there should be found a highly favored nation which God has made the theatre of the most remarkable displays of his grace and mercy—but the great bulk of whom should still go on in sin—with the great national sins unpunished and unforsaken—that such a nation would be probably marked for signal and sudden judgments? 38

On the other hand, Birney continued, if repentance came in time, the future would be wonderful. Americans could look forward to living in a world characterized by peace, prosperity, and brotherhood.

By phrasing their feelings and arguments in terms of an American mission, Birney and his colleagues were able to reconcile their audiences' nationalistic impulses with their own belief in human unity and submission to God's will. 39 For them, concern for the well-being of mankind was the highest form of American nationalism.

Even while Ohio abolitionists believed that the United States, as a nation, was important because of the special mission it had to pursue, they also believed that the
individual human being was something to be held in high esteem. They placed a particularly high value on the individual's right to determine the direction of his own life and to improve the society in which he lived. From their perspective, there was nothing incompatible between upholding the worth and dignity of human life on one hand and accepting the Christian view of man as a sinner on the other. Asa Mahan observed that although man had rebelled against God and fallen from his grace, God still cherished man "as a creature exalted above all others." The evidence for this was in Jesus Christ who was "God become man to walk amongst man . . . to teach them the way of righteousness . . . and to shed his sinless blood so that man could be redeemed." And, Mahan continued, if Christ could serve "sinful man" how could those who professed to believe in his teachings do less than follow his example?  

But by what means were Christians to serve humanity and improve the quality of human life? On this matter there was some disagreement. James G. Birney, among others, felt that political action in the form of lobbying for legislation, organizing political parties, and running candidates for office was a worthwhile channel for affecting change; some of his colleagues were less certain. After spending several months in Washington where he championed the antislavery cause in Congress, Theodore Weld wrote a letter to Gerit Smith expressing his disgust with politics
in general and congressmen in particular:

Of all earth's crawling slaves, they are the most abject who, of their own free will . . . crouch on their marrow bones before public sentiment and drag their naked bellies around their masters feet, wriggling for the privilege of licking his spittle as it falls. Just such creatures are nearly the whole of the democratic delegation in Congress and a majority of the Whigs. . . .

The principal approach which Weld, Birney, and most other Ohio abolitionists adopted for altering public opinion on the slavery issue was "moral suasion." The American Antislavery Society's Declaration of Sentiments defined moral suasion somewhat vaguely as "the destruction of error by the potency of truth--the overthrow of prejudice by the power of love--and the abolition of slavery by the spirit of repentance." Weld undoubtedly gave a more detailed and illuminating description of moral suasion in a letter of commission sent to the six agents he recruited from Oberlin:

Our object is, the overthrow of American slavery, the most atrocious and oppressive system of bondage that has ever existed in any country. We expect to accomplish this, mainly by showing to the public its true character and legitimate fruits, its contrariety to the first principles of religion, morals, and humanity, and its special inconsistency with our pretensions, as a free, humane, and enlightened people. In this way, by the force of truth, we expect to correct the common errors that prevail respecting slavery, and to produce a just public sentiment.

Weld's analysis makes it clear that the success of moral suasion depended on forceful rhetoric; a rhetoric intended to stir people's consciences and produce within
them "an abiding, inwrought, thoroughly intelligent feeling, based on principle and acting out with the energy and high intensity of passion, but with none of its irregularity and impulsiveness." 44

The rhetoric of Ohio abolitionists centered on three general claims: that human bondage as practiced in the United States was immoral, that it was also dangerous, and that the only way to solve the problems it had created was to abolish it totally and immediately. The arguments which were advanced in support of these claims will be examined in the next three chapters.
NOTES


3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., p. 6.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid., p. 29.


9 Charles G. Finney, Lectures on Systematic Theology (New York: Clark and Austin, 1867), p. 3.

10 Ibid., p. 503.


13 Ibid., p. 106.


Ibid., p. 50.

Weld, The Bible Against Slavery, p. 23.

Third Anniversary Report, p. 33.

Debate on Slavery, p. 462.

Ibid., p. 465.

Thomas, Theodore Weld, p. 165.


Finney, Lectures, p. 82.

Ibid.

Ibid., p. 83.

Marius R. Robinson Papers, MS 1660, Western Reserve Historical Society. Passage is taken from diary on page dated September 18, 1838.

Ibid.


Robinson Papers.


Robinson Papers. From undated manuscript #6.

Dumond, Birney Letters, I, p. 337.

In his book The Jewish Experience in America (New York: KATV Publishing, 1969), III, pp. 1-4, Abraham Karp states that the U.S. Jewish population numbered about 50,000 in 1850. The majority of these people were on the eastern seaboard. In discussing the immigration of German Jews to the U.S. in the first half of the 19th century, Karp makes mention of only one Jew who came to Ohio.
See the Cincinnati Journal, March 15, 1837, p. 2 for an example of an editorial attacking Catholicism.


Robinson Papers. In letter to Alvan Stewart dated August 8, 1838.

Phielanthropist, June 12, 1836, p. 3.

As a rule, Ohio abolitionists were immune to the excitement of Manifest Destiny, especially since it meant acquisition of possible slave territory in the west. But their acceptance of the idea of America's mission and their desire to bring mankind together in moral and spiritual fellowship were not far removed from the most idealistic excuses used to justify national expansion.


Barnes and Dumond, Weld-Grimke Letters, II, p. 999.

Emancipator, May 18, 1833, p. 1.


Ibid., p. 297.
CHAPTER IV

THE EVIL OF SLAVERY

Slavery as an Abomination to God

In a letter to Theodore Weld in February, 1839, James Thome wrote that "the church ought to be an Anti-Slavery Society for certainly its charter is both an Anti-Slavery Constitution and Declaration of Sentiments, and if it were there would be no need of other organizations for the same object."¹ Thome must have felt some pain as he penned these words for both he and Weld knew that most Protestant churches in the North had failed to give any significant support to the abolitionist crusade. Many of them refused to allow abolitionist speakers to address their congregations while others sought to prohibit any discussion that touched on the slavery issue. In Massachusetts, a group of Protestant clergymen issued a public letter in which they completely disassociated themselves from William Lloyd Garrison and his activities. Denouncing Garrison as "harsh and un-Christian," they observed that for him "slavery is not merely to be abolished but nearly everything else . . . the Sabbath, the Christian ministry, the churches, and all civil and family government."²

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Although Ohio church leaders saw no need to openly condemn Weld and the other Lane rebels, they did feel that steps should be taken to keep their denominations out of the antislavery crusade. Besides squelching discussion on slavery and closing their doors to abolitionist lecturers, a majority of the Protestant churches in Ohio also refused to circulate petitions which dealt with any issue even remotely concerned with human bondage. Clergymen in Ohio and elsewhere defended such policies on the ground that slavery was strictly a political question. They reasoned that since the state and federal governments controlled, protected, and sustained the South's system of human bondage, these bodies alone had any business discussing that system's elimination. Religious leaders would violate the separation of church and state principle if they injected their views into the controversy. Other ministers felt that any disquisition on slavery would only deepen sectional hostility and enhance the possibility of disunion. An anonymous Methodist preacher enunciated this fear in a letter to the Cincinnati Journal:

The threat is held up to us that unless we speedily pass laws to prohibit all expression of opinion on the dreadful topic of slavery, the Southern States will meet in convention, separate themselves from the North, and establish a separate empire for themselves.\(^3\)

The mob violence which often came in the wake of anti-slavery activity was another consideration that probably
weighed against Ohio's abolitionists. Bands of unruly men wielding clubs and throwing stones interrupted more than a few abolitionist gatherings and sometimes even injured the speakers. Weld himself was nearly knocked unconscious during a speech in Circleville when he was struck on the head by a rock. The buildings in which abolitionist meetings took place also absorbed considerable abuse. Rioters smashed windows, knocked down doors, and sometimes set fires. A minister who considered allowing an abolitionist to address his congregation could not ignore the danger to people and property that might arise if he consented.

The aloof posture assumed by most Ohio churches hurt the state's antislavery crusade in several ways. First, abolitionist speakers were denied an important communication channel to the public. In 1840, there were ninety-six Protestant denominations active in Ohio. The two largest of these, the Methodists and the Presbyterians, each claimed over 75,000 adherents.

As in other parts of antebellum America, churches in Ohio frequently helped to shape popular attitudes on contemporary issues. For example, church support for the temperance movement greatly enhanced the credibility of that cause in Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana and other western states. Similar support for abolitionism could have given Weld, Thome, and the other Lane rebels a much needed aura of public acceptance. In the absence of that support,
however, they were much more vulnerable to attacks from their enemies. Besides decrying their antislavery message, neighboring Kentucky's journalists questioned the character and motives of Ohio abolitionists:

The incendiaries (abolitionists) appeal only to the passions; and endeavour, by falsehood and misrepresentation, to mislead and excite the unthinking. Their arguments consist altogether of specious but misty and unintelligible abstractions. They industriously endeavour to enlist religious feelings in favour of their designs; and are constantly fulminating religious denunciations to move and appall the conscientious but weak.7

Attacks such as this might have been more difficult to make in the face of widespread church support for Ohio's anti-slavery spokesmen.

Above all, perhaps, the lack of assistance from organized religion undercut a key component in the belief system of Ohio abolitionists. As noted earlier, Weld and those who came after him firmly believed in the divine righteousness of their cause. In their rhetoric, they compared themselves to Biblical characters who with heaven's help had overcome severe obstacles to carry out God's will. Although Ohio abolitionists never abandoned this belief, the failure of organized religion to back them up hampered attempts to impart the belief to others. If slavery was such an ungodly evil, people asked, why wasn't the church taking an active stance against it? And how could abolitionists claim that their cause was sanctioned by God when
ordained ministers were having nothing to do with it? W Köln and other antislavery speakers who worked in Ohio undoubted­ly spent more time than they wanted explaining how the antislavery movement could still have God's support even when the churches were not behind it.

Even as they labored to arouse Northerners from their indifference, Ohio's abolitionists grappled with Southerners who claimed that the Holy Bible, properly interpreted, vindicated the institution of slavery. John Fletcher, a Louisiana philosopher, provided the most thorough Biblical defense of human bondage in his book Studies on Slavery. Fletcher essentially built his case around two passages from the Old Testament. The first passage, drawn from Genesis 9:25-29 deals with the curses and blessings Noah placed upon the heads of his three sons and their descend­ants:

> And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of ser­vants shall he be unto his brethren. And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. And God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.8

Ham, Canaan's father, incurred Noah's wrath after the older man became intoxicated and lay naked on the ground. Rather than give Noah any assistance, Ham stared at him and then apparently ridiculed him before Shem and Japheth. These other sons of Noah took pity on their father and covered him with a cloth without looking upon his nakedness.
When Noah found out how his sons behaved, he made the pro-
nouncements cited above.

Fletcher pointed to Genesis 9:25-29 and argued that the
descendants of Ham--the people condemned with God's approval
to perpetual servitude--included black Africans. To sup-
port this claim, the Louisiana scholar referred to histori-
cal accounts by Josephus and Herodotus indicating that the
black inhabitants of northern and eastern Africa were of
Hamitic descent.9

Fletcher supplemented this evidence with reports from
physiologists who ostensibly found the Negro male's physical
structure to be better suited for hard labor than that of
his Caucasian counterpart. Quite probably, Fletcher de-
clared, God gave the blacks stronger bodies to better
enable them to perform the heavy jobs their masters would
require of them. In any event, he continued, it was only
right for blacks to be enslaved. Their condition could be
attributed to Ham's sin and the consequent punishment which
fell upon him and his descendants. Conversely, it was only
right for Americans to be slavemasters since they were
descended from Japheth and thus had a share in the blessing
Noah bestowed upon him.10

Fletcher found additional support for his case in
Leviticus 25:45-46:
Moreover of the children of the strangers that do sojourn among you, of them shall ye buy, and of their families that are with you, which they begat in your land: and they shall be your possession. And ye shall take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit them for a possession; they shall be your bondmen for ever. . . .

Here, Fletcher claimed, God forthrightly told his chosen people that they could put another race of human beings into slavery. Like any other piece of property, these human beings (the unfortunate Canaanites) could be sold, transferred, or inherited. And because they were "possessions" of their Hebrew masters, Canaanite bondmen never truly owned anything themselves. Whatever they produced or accrued through their labor rightfully belonged to the men who held them. So it was, too, with American slavery. Significantly, Fletcher observed, God placed no time limit on the duration of the Canaanites' servitude. Since they were to be "bondmen forever," why couldn't 19th century Americans enslave these accursed people just as the ancient Hebrews had?

Ohio abolitionists quickly challenged the statements made by Fletcher and other apologists for slavery. In speeches and writings, they presented arguments which collectively aimed to prove that God unequivocally opposed slavery. These arguments revolved around three basic ideas: (1) The bondage permitted under Jewish law differed completely from American slavery; (2) Specific teachings and admonitions in the Bible clearly indicated God's
hostility to slavery; (3) Wherever instituted, slavery invariably fostered a sinful social climate. An examination of the specific arguments offered to support each of these ideas will clarify how Ohio abolitionists integrated their attack on pro-slavery Biblical interpretations with an aggressive campaign to arouse abolitionist sentiments in the North.

Not all Ohio church leaders stayed out of the abolitionist movement. John Rankin, a Presbyterian pastor from Chillicothe, delivered over 100 antislavery sermons from his pulpit between 1835 and 1840. He also served as a delegate to the first four conventions of the Ohio Antislavery Society and spoke before those assemblages on at least two occasions. Not content with attacking slavery merely in word, Rankin turned his home into a station on the Underground Railroad and helped runaway slaves escape to freedom.\(^\text{12}\)

John Blanchard, pastor of the Sixth Presbyterian Church in Cincinnati, was another clergyman who actively participated in the abolitionist crusade. As a member of the Ohio State Antislavery Society's Executive Committee, Blanchard helped conduct petition drives, organize local societies, establish schools for free blacks, and solicit support for the state's antislavery journals. In 1845, he accepted an invitation from the Ohio State Antislavery Society to debate the Reverend N. L. Rice on the question of
whether slavery was "in itself" sinful. This six-day debate which was held in Cincinnati gave citizens of Kentucky and Ohio a rare opportunity to hear both sides of the slavery issue in a comparatively unstrained atmosphere.14

Although other abolitionist speakers in Ohio formed arguments around the differences between American slavery and Old Testament Hebrew servitude, few of them went into the subject as deeply as Rankin and Blanchard. In Rankin's "An Address to the Churches" and Blanchard's sixth debate speech against Rice, we find a thorough, point-by-point analysis of how the two systems differed not only in practice but also in theory.

Both Rankin and Blanchard contrasted American slavery and Jewish bondage in terms of the amount of civil liberty each institution granted to those held under it. Whereas the unfortunate Negro slave in the United States had no civil liberties whatsoever, they noted, the Old Testament "ebeh" possessed certain rights guaranteed to him under Jewish law. Specifically, he had the right to own property, the right to religious worship (which brought with it the right of marriage) and the right to legal protection. To support this observation, Rankin and Blanchard relied principally on the book of their trade—the Holy Bible. Blanchard believed, for example, that 1 Samuel 9:7-8 offered indirect proof that Hebrew bondmen were allowed to accumulate money for their own personal use:
Then said Saul to his servant, But, behold, if we go, what shall we bring the man? For the bread is spent in our vessels, and there is not a present to bring to the man of God: what have we? And the servant answered Saul again, and said, Behold, I have here at hand the fourth part of a shekel of silver; that will I give to the man of God, to tell us our way.¹⁵

Here then, Blanchard declared, was an ebeh who had a sizeable amount of silver in his possession which he evidently could spend as he pleased. Looking on to 2 Samuel 9:10, Blanchard found another bondman named Ziba who owned twenty ebehs himself. Although admitting ebeh-holding ebehs were probably rare, the Cincinnati minister affirmed that their presence in ancient Hebrew society indicated that all ebehs had a right to own property.¹⁶

Rankin and Blanchard extracted other passages from Scripture to show that Jewish bondmen enjoyed the rights of religious worship and judicial appeal. Rankin in particular emphasized the ebeh's right to take grievances before the Hebrew judges who usually stood by the gates of the cities. As decreed in Deuteronomy 16:18-19, these judges were to give no consideration to the wealth or social standing of those who came to them. Even a king might hear complaints from his lowest subjects as Solomon did from two harlots who were quarreling over an infant (1 Kings 3:16-27). Thus, an ebeh could be confident of a fair hearing in any dispute with his master. Moreover, Rankin continued, the judges and kings who made the rulings were legally bound to enforce a set of laws that protected the ebeh's life and property.
Under one law (Exodus 21:27) an ebeh who lost no more than one tooth as a result of physical abuse from his master gained his freedom. If the ebeh died from the beating, then the master forfeited his own life. Another law specified that bondmen were to be compensated for their labor:

> Thou shalt not oppress a hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates. At this day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it, for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it: lest he cry against thee unto the Lord, and it be sin unto thee.17

And what rights did the Negro bondman have in America? Absolutely none replied Blanchard and Rankin. They both cited passages from Southern state laws which legally reduced the black slave to the level of an animal. Blanchard called attention to a Mississippi statute which decreed that if an "outlying slave" was hailed and did not stop, he could be shot without question. At the same time, he pointed out, Mississippi did not permit any Negro—free or slave—to testify in court or even be a party in a legal suit. Other laws throughout the South prevented blacks from voting, submitting petitions, signing contracts, or assembling for political purposes. Blanchard affirmed that the collective effect of such laws not only took away the black's "security to life," but left him without any means of changing his oppressive environment.18

Besides having no legal rights as the Hebrew ebeh did, the black slave had no right to own property or worship
God. According to Rankin, everything the slave had—the
clothes on his back, the food on his table, or the roof
above his head—belonged to his master who could take them
away at any time. Although admitting that some masters let
their slaves accumulate enough money to purchase their own
freedom, Rankin asserted that this was a privilege granted
to the slave and not a right protected by law. Indeed, he
noted, some masters made a cruel joke of allowing a slave
to accumulate money toward his manumission and then selling
him just before he acquired the necessary sum. Even worse,
masters could keep their slaves away from religious ser-
vices on the sabbath and prevent them from receiving even
the most basic religious education. Rankin especially
lamented the laws—in effect throughout the entire South—
which prohibited slaves from learning how to read and write.
A black who could not read could not understand the Bible
wherein God outlined his plan for saving humanity. As a
result, his soul "formed for companionship with angels, is
despoiled and brutified, and consigned to ignorance, pollu-
tion, and ruin." 19

Blanchard and Rankin declared that Jewish servitude and
American slavery differed in other important respects out-
side of the civil liberties they granted. Blanchard built
an argument around the means by which bondmen were acquired
and liberated under the two systems. Negro slaves in
America, he noted, fell into bondage against their will.
More specifically, they were kidnapped; "stolen from Africa, directly in their own persons, or in the persons of their ancestors, and doubly stolen when infants at their birth: for human beings are born free." In contrast, Hebrew ebehs became bondmen through their own free will. Blanchard explained that these individuals sold themselves to their masters; i.e., they received a sum of money in return for placing themselves at the disposal of another man. The poor Negro, of course, received nothing when he was sold. The money paid by his master went to a slave-dealer instead.

Continuing his argument, Blanchard called attention to the fact that the Hebrew ebeh always had the means to take himself out of bondage if he so desired. Not only did he have a guaranteed right to receive wages for his work—which at his discretion could be accumulated and used to purchase his freedom—he could also secure his liberty during the jubilee. On this special day, which came every fifty years, Mosaic law demanded that Hebrews "proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubilee unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family." Thus, even the poor ebeh who could not afford to save money to pay for his manumission would eventually gain his freedom when this day arrived. Blanchard observed that American statutes made no corresponding provisions for
freeing blacks held in bondage. On the contrary, state laws throughout the South complicated the process of manumission and imposed severe restrictions on the few blacks who were free.

Looking even closer at American and Hebrew law, Rankin observed that the latter did not establish any enforcement machinery for keeping the ebeh in his place:

There is no trace of a system of legislative appliances necessary for keeping up a slave system, like the American where patrol are provided, informers and prosecutors paid, punishments by stripes ascertained; rewards provided for arresting fugitives; and sheriffs fined for not keeping slaves from all access to types and letters. . . . In the Mosaic code, there is no trace of this.22

Nor could Rankin find any "fugitive clause" for catching runaway bondmen in Hebrew law. In fact, he discovered a strict admonition against returning escaped ebehs in Deuteronomy 23:15-16:

Thou shalt not deliver unto his master the servant who is escaped from his master unto thee; He shall dwell with thee, even among you, in that place which he shall choose in one of thy gates, where it liketh him best; thou shalt not oppress him.23

How completely different, then, Rankin declared, American slavery was from Hebrew servitude. The instruments of oppression so evident in the United States could not be found in ancient Israel and "surely we would expect to see these wherever men are made the property of men."24

The two Ohio clergymen carried their comparison of Jewish servitude and American slavery beyond matters of
practical operation to the philosophic foundations underlying each respective system. Both men agreed that American slavery grounded itself on the belief that the Negro was little better than an animal; a "chattel personal."

Totally unfit to have any rights, he had to be constantly supervised and closely restricted in case his animal passions suddenly flared up. In contrast, the ancient Jews never questioned the humanity of their bondmen. Indeed, Rankin considered the ebeh to be more like an apprentice than a slave. "He is a bondman, but not a slave; his standing in society is just as good as if he were free; he receives an equivalent for his services; and his master may correct, but not abuse him."²⁵

For his part, Blanchard perceived a fundamental difference in the purposes of the two systems. He contended that American slavery existed merely to provide cheap and plentiful labor to the Southern aristocracy. Rooted as it was in the economic needs of an elite class, American slavery disregarded the welfare of those it subjugated. But the servitude which existed under Mosaic law sought to do more than just provide workers and servants for wealthy Hebrews:

That bond service was a system for drawing men out of heathen slavery into the freedom of the children of God. All the servants procured from the heathen had to become Jews, by circumcision, within one year, or they must be sent back. When circumcised, they were reckoned among the
Hebrews and of course the law of the Hebrews applied to them.\textsuperscript{26}

To support this contention that proselytizing gentiles was a key function of Hebrew servitude, Blanchard cited Biblical passages wherein God outlined the responsibilities Hebrews had with respect to "the strangers" who dwelt amongst them. In Leviticus 19:33-34, the Hebrews were told that "if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him. But the stranger who dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thy self. . . ." Further on in Deuteronomy 31:12, they were instructed to "gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger who is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord your God." From such admonitions, Blanchard claimed, one could reasonably assume that the Hebrew institution of bondage had been established (at least in part) to give nearby heathen peoples access to a more fulfilling life.\textsuperscript{27}

Although other antislavery speakers in Ohio did not examine the differences between American slavery and Hebrew bondage as thoroughly as Blanchard and Rankin, most of them did present at least some of the arguments mentioned by the two clergymen. Ohio abolitionists realized that the overall argument on the differences between American slavery and Jewish bondage was important simply because Southerners
were saying there were no significant differences. To have remained silent on the issue would have been a tacit admission that Fletcher's proslavery interpretation of the Bible was essentially valid. In a broader sense, however, this argument was even more important because it paved the way for other arguments which were directed exclusively at the nature of American slavery. Once abolitionists established the notion that the South's system of human bondage was totally alien from God's will; totally different from the system of servitude his chosen people instituted, they could logically link other Biblical precepts with antislavery arguments.

Quite apart from their efforts to divorce American slavery from Hebrew servitude, Ohio abolitionists laid considerable emphasis upon specific Biblical teachings and admonitions which seemed incompatible with the way Southerners administered their peculiar institution. Rhetors for the antislavery cause had an almost inexhaustible supply of verses which they used to support claims that slavery was a totally sinful unGodly institution. Although these verses varied considerably in terms of context and location, they generally tied in with at least one of five indictments Ohio abolitionists commonly leveled against the South's system of human bondage: (1) Slavery defiles marriage and destroys families; (2) It bases its existence upon the crime of kidnapping; (3) It subverts man's position
as an exalted creation of God; (4) Slavery violates the Golden Rule; (5) It also violates the greater "Law of Love" enunciated by Jesus Christ.

James Thome made the first indictment a key element in his case against human bondage in America. "You know that by the law of God the man is the head of the woman as Christ is head of the church, and the father also, of the house, and gives name to the child." But slavery tore apart marriages which God had decreed "no man should put asunder" and took children away from their parents. As a result, blacks were left completely outside of God's "Law of Paternity" and were placed instead under the same law which applied to animals in the field "where, if progeny is found, the owner of the cow drives away and owns the calf."28 Once reduced to the level of a brute, the black seldom ever learned of God's love:

The 'Our Father' which begins with the eternal Father of all, and connects by heads of families the whole chain of intelligent being to its source is annihilated. Slave children, stript of parentage and subject to masters, cannot feel the sweet and awful force of the words, "Our Father which art in Heaven."29

Sereno Streeter also attacked slavery for destroying families but based his argument on the grounds that when husband, wife, and children were separated they could not fulfill their obligations to God. The Bible commanded that a man should leave his mother and father and cleave unto his wife, but clearly the black slave could not do
this if his wife were sold to a different master. Neither could the wife "be subject to her husband" if she were the property of another man who could legally make sexual advances towards her if he desired. The Bible also commanded the black male and female slaves in their capacity as parents "to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." But again, this was impossible if their children were taken from their arms and sold to a different master. Even if the children remained with their parents, the master could force them to work on the sabbath and prevent them from receiving any religious education.  

Exodus 21:16 provided the basis for the second indictment against slavery: "And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death." William T. Allan, among others, argued that the entire structure of slavery was rooted and sustained through kidnapping. In an essay published in the Medina Circular, he offered this description of how black Africans fell into slavery:

Every one knows how the kidnapper acquires his title to the slaves whom he fetches from Africa. He fires their villages at night; (or pays some petty chief whom he has made drunk to do it). Lies in ambush for wretched men and women who have never injured or owed him. Catches them. Takes them from manhood and reduces them to slavehood.  

After returning to America, the slave-dealer sold the unfortunate black to a master who "buys the privilege of continuing upon the person of the slave, the criminal
violence which the kidnapper began. . . ." And if, there­
after, the slave managed to escape, slave hunters were
dispatched to kidnap him once again. 32

When making his last trek through Ohio in the autumn
of 1834, Theodore Weld gave considerable attention to the
charge that slavery undermined man's position as an exalted
creation of God. Weld built his case around an argument
from definition. Specifically, he argued that the Bible
defined man as a special creature; one held above all others
and possessing unusual dignity. To support this assertion,
Weld naturally relied on passages from Scripture. In con­
trast to most of his colleagues, however, he introduced his
Biblical evidence within the context of a story which
dramatized the substance of his claim:

'In the beginning' it was uttered in heaven, and
proclaimed to the universe as it rose into being.
Creation was arrayed at the instant of its birth,
to do it homage. It paused in adoration while
God ushered forth its crowning work. . . . 'Let
us make man in Our Image after Our Likeness, and
Let him have dominion over the fish of the sea,
and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle,
and over all the earth.' Then while every living
thing, with land, and sea, and firmament, and
marshalled worlds, waited to swell the shout of
morning stars--then 'God Created Man In His Own
Image; In The Image of God Created he Him.'
Well might the sons of God shout, 'Amen, alleluia'
--'For Thou hast made him a little lower than the
angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor.
Thou madest him to have dominion over the works
of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his
feet. 33

Then, to drive home the detrimental affect of slavery
on man's exalted status, Weld made a point-by-point analysis
of how slavery reversed God's intentions for humanity:

(1) 'Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels.' Slavery drags him down among brutes.
(2) 'And hast crowned him with glory and honor.' Slavery tears off his crown, and puts on a yoke.
(3) 'Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of Thy hands.' Slavery breaks the sceptre, and casts him down among those works—yea, beneath them. (4) 'Thou hast put all things under his feet.' Slavery puts him under the feet of an owner.34

Weld evidently impressed other Ohio antislavery speakers with the importance of this indictment since most of them reiterated it—sometimes using words very similar to his own—in the years after his departure for New York.

Whatever the importance Ohio abolitionists attributed to the indictments against slavery for breaking up families, encouraging crime, and undermining man's position in the universe, the one accusation they stated most often centered on the incompatibility between slavery as practiced in America and the Golden Rule. Undoubtedly, the simplicity of this argument accounted in part for its popularity. Almost everyone could understand the meaning of "Do unto others as ye would have them do unto you." They could also understand from a few descriptions of slave life that no one would ever want to be treated as blacks were in the South. At the same time, this argument derived its significance from the fact that it came—however indirectly—from the teachings of Jesus Christ and all the power and majesty of his name carried over to it. Abolitionists in
Ohio and elsewhere declared that to violate the Golden Rule—as slaveholders did—not only conveyed contempt for God's authority but also contempt for the wisdom of his Son and perhaps even ingratitude for the sacrifice he made.

Several abolitionist speakers argued that the Golden Rule was only one part of a more comprehensive "Law of Love" which slavery tore asunder. The substance of this law derived from what Christ had said about the love each person should have for friends, neighbors, strangers, and even enemies. Such statements as "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" and "I say unto you, love your enemy," conveyed more than just a prohibition of wrongdoing and injury. As Rankin pointed out, they enjoined "the positive doing of good to every human being so far as we have opportunity." But how could any deed performed in connection with slavery be regarded as a "positive good?" How could the selling, whipping, branding, and hunting of human beings be seen as anything other than a vicious violation of Christ's commandments? "That slavery is a positive injury," concluded Rankin, "cannot be intelligently and honestly denied; and therefore it must be opposed to the Law of Love."

Other Ohio abolitionists—Blanchard among them—spoke of the Law of Love in terms of God's intent for mankind. Drawing support from Luke 2:14, Romans 10:3-10, and John 16:24, they pronounced that the whole of God's kingdom on
earth could be concisely defined as "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" for all humanity. But slavery overturned each one of these elements. "It (slavery) is unrighteous as a relation," claimed Blanchard, "for it is not founded in natural equity, but in force." Similarly, he found it unrighteous as a practice "for its principle is to take every thing from the slave, even the possession of himself, thus excluding the possibility of giving him a just consideration."37

In a speech delivered in Ravenna, J. W. Alvord observed that slavery also disrupted peace; the second element of God's kingdom. He called attention to the armed guards and slavehunters who could be found in almost every Southern town. Even ordinary citizens in that region carried firearms and were "liable in an hour to be summoned to immediate and bloody action." In addition, armories and arsenals, "bristling with war appliances," covered the South in effect making the area "one vast camp." Alvord astutely bolstered his argument with statements by prominent Southerners admitting that their region was in a veritable state of war. For example, he cited a South Carolina congressman's candid confession that "ours is a frank and bold system which sustains itself by naked, undisguised force."38

Both Blanchard and Alvord argued that the elimination of joy--the third element of God's kingdom--came about
through slavery's usurpation of "marriage, parentage, and equal neighborhood." A husband who had his wife taken away could experience no joy; neither could the mother who had her child sold to another master. And how, both men asked, could any enslaved black find happiness as long as he lived in fear of being whipped, branded, beaten, or even killed. Even if legally freed, the unhappy black faced the danger of being kidnapped back into bondage or going through life despised and shunned as an inferior being.39

Taken collectively, all the arguments which sought to show why or how slavery offended God had one ultimate purpose: to make Americans in every part of the country feel guilty. Northerners were supposed to become aware of their own hypocrisy; to perceive the contradiction between professing Christian values on one hand and ignoring the slave's plight on the other. At the same time, these arguments were intended to enlighten Southerners on the true nature of God's intentions for mankind; to reveal the fallacies in the thinking of Fletcher and other slavery apologists, and engender feelings of regret in slaveholders themselves for overturning God's plan for humanity with their obnoxious system. The "God against slavery" arguments, just as the arguments concerning the differences between Hebrew and American servitude, served an additional function insofar as they opened up a new avenue of attack for abolitionist rhetors. If God, in his infinite wisdom,
declared slavery to be evil, they asserted, then surely anyone who had even the remotest connection with that institution would suffer the consequences of its evil influence. Thus, a new line of argument developed around the scope and nature of those consequences.

Ohio abolitionists generally agreed that slavery degraded and brutified any society in which it appeared. Most would have concurred with Thome's assessment that "it (slavery) is the channel to every vicious indulgence. Idleness, intemperance, gambling and debauchery are its genuine fruits; and it is itself a soul-destroying sin." Although they also agreed that the scope of slavery's evil influence spanned across the whole country, Ohio abolitionists usually only focused on the system's impact within the Southern states. At the same time, however, they always sought to clarify that slavery's evil affected nonslaveholders in that region almost as much as masters and bondmen.

Marius Robinson laid considerable stress upon the excessive cruelty which became almost a character trait of anyone who owned slaves or encountered them frequently. He talked at length about people (some of whom he knew personally) who were quite civilized until they went to live in slaveholding areas after which time they became unusually vicious. Robinson spared no detail in outlining
the extremes some people went to in mistreating blacks. He recounted one tragic case where a mulatto boy who was about to be sold by his white father had asked a gentleman from Baltimore to intervene on his behalf. The man was willing to help but he arrived at the boy's home "only in time to see this youth, in spite of tears, exertions, and entreaties, driven off like a brute to a distant market, handcuffed and chained." Robinson cited another instance of a black minister--a free man--who was flogged for preaching a eulogy at the funeral of a slave. Significantly, he noted, no one who committed such abuses ever faced criminal charges in a Southern court.

Gamaliel Bailey, editor of the Philanthropist following Birney's departure, linked the South's proclivity for violence and force to its system of involuntary servitude. He pointed to the emphasis which Southern academies placed on marksmanship and other military skills; he discussed the "code of honor" which prevailed among slaveowners and which led so many of them to engage in duels; and he cited the slave hunts, brawls, and public floggings which were all inevitable products of a society "which allows men to place their brothers under the yoke." Thome also lamented the South's preoccupation with violence but examined that characteristic with respect to its impact on women. The South, he argued, had given itself over to the principle that the strong should rule the weak. This could be
inferred from the importance which Southern society placed on military skills as well as from their habit of abusing slaves. In such a belligerent environment, the female sex could "never be elevated to its true dignity and to the enjoyment of its dearest rights." Their attempts to obtain political freedom were invariably scorned by those who placed the force of arms above the force of reason. Moreover, their self-respect as wives and mothers fell prey to men who used female slaves as sex objects. To the Southern male, Thome concluded, women were nothing more than pawns to be manipulated for personal gain.45

The message from these various illustrations of slavery's impact on society was clear: Christian virtue and fellowship with God could not coexist with human bondage. An individual's humility, mercy, reverence, and self-control literally dissolved when he came into contact with the South's peculiar institution. Unfortunately, few of Ohio's abolitionists attempted to explain just how slavery brought about the excesses they described. In other words, they generally argued from sign rather than from cause and effect. They would point to some debauchery, note its proximity to the institution of slavery, and declare that where the latter occurred one could reasonably expect to find the former.

Unlike most of his colleagues, James Thome looked deeper into the relationship between involuntary servitude
and social disruption. "It is a certain truth," he observed, "that the habitual exercise of arbitrary power begets a ferocious temper, and converts even the most amiable into monsters of ungovernable passion." Thus, the domineering spirit and aggressive nature a slaveowner developed when managing his blacks soon carried over into other spheres of his life. Unpressured by any specific obligations towards his bondmen, the slaveowner's overall sense of responsibility to family and community also deteriorated. Although less clear about how slavery affected the behavior of nonslaveowners, Thome did suggest that too often these people patterned their lifestyles after those who held men in bondage and consequently acquired the same depraved character.  

The argument that slavery created a sinful, unGodly environment completed the abolitionists' Christianity-based attack on human bondage in America. From this line of attack, they hoped that all Americans—and particularly Southerners—would see that blacks were not the only ones suffering under this evil system. They realized that if whites could begin to perceive themselves as co-victims of slavery, the task of motivating them to action would be far easier. Significantly, this final general argument tied in with a whole new approach to fighting slavery: having ostensibly shown how the institution affected the whole South, the next step for abolitionists was to examine its
influence on the entire nation. The specific arguments they developed on this subject will be discussed in the following section.

Before proceeding further, a brief comment on the evidence which Ohio abolitionists used in their effort to prove the unGodliness of slavery is in order. Not surprisingly, the Bible (King James Version) served as their chief source of support. For them, the Scriptures provided the only true revelation of God's will for mankind. At the same time, however, Ohio abolitionists sought to give their message added credibility by introducing antislavery testimony from Christian leaders of past ages and foreign countries. Blanchard, for example, made a lengthy citation from the Free Church of Scotland's 1845 Report on American Slavery in his debate with Rice and also discussed the language in charters of manumission issued under medieval popes. For his part, Alvord used statements by Grotius and John Wesley to bolster his contention that slavery overthrew God's "Law of Love." To disclose the nature of slavery, Ohio abolitionists commonly looked at what Southerners themselves said about it in books, speeches, newspapers, and legislative acts. A few rhetors such as Marius Robinson called on personal experience to give weight to their statements, but for the most part Ohio antislavery spokesmen sought to condemn the institution out of its own mouth.
Slavery as an unAmerican Institution

Although Ohio's antislavery advocates gave priority to arguments which focused in some way on slavery's apparent incompatibility with God's will, they did not ignore other lines of attack which were grounded in secular beliefs. They—like other abolitionists who Ernest Bormann identifies with the evangelical camp—adhered to the great sustaining myths which gave meaning to the American experience. To their way of thinking, America had a clearly defined mission to perform: not only was it to serve as a haven for oppressed people but, more importantly, it was to carry out a grand experiment in preserving and extending the natural rights of man. As it fulfilled this dual mission, the United States would lift a guiding light to other, less civilized nations. J. F. Robinson eloquently voiced these sentiments in his secretary's report to the Third Annual Convention of the Ohio State Antislavery Society:

We have trusted that the paternal character of our institutions, the leniency of our laws, and the purity of our political creed, would so effectually secure the affection and confidence of the people, and beget such a sacred regard for law and order, as to insure exemption from the evils of anarchy on the one hand, and of despotism on the other. . . . We imbibed the idea that whatever of wrong was permitted to exist in our institutions, or was through negligence incorporated with our constitution or laws, would soon yield to the remedies prescribed by patriotism and that, in process of time, we should advance from point to point, until all our institutions, based on the principles of eternal right, should become the admiration of the nations.47
Ohio abolitionists' belief in a sacred American mission interwove with their devotion to the principles of human freedom outlined in the Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution. In drafting a Declaration of Sentiments, delegates to the Ohio State Antislavery Society's first annual convention stressed the phrase from the Declaration of Independence "that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." This phrase was heard many times again in abolitionist newspapers, tracts, and essays which were circulated throughout the state.

Notwithstanding its apparent compromise with slavery in the controversial "3/5 clause," the U.S. Constitution was also regarded as a key part of America's experiment with human rights. "This one thing is certain," declared Huntingdon Lyman in a Cincinnati speech, "that the Constitution was formed as a bona fide instrument of liberty. Its framers never thought that it would be twisted into an instrument to build up slavery." Lyman was one of several Ohio abolitionists who defended the Constitution in the face of criticism from William Lloyd Garrison and his followers. Not long after Wendell Phillips had condemned our government's founding document as a "convenant with hell," he published a letter in the Philanthropist in which he evaluated the Constitution from the standpoint of its
position on slavery.

Lyman frankly admitted that the Constitution did not take a forthright position against involuntary servitude. But, he continued, this omission did not result from any proslavery bias on the part of the Founding Fathers but rather from a prevailing belief among them that slavery would soon die of its own accord. Even so, Lyman affirmed, the Founding Fathers sought to hasten slavery's demise by providing for a ban on the importation of African blacks by the year 1808. Human bondage might then have vanished from our shores except "a time came when commercial profits became connected with slavery; the cultivation of rice, and cotton, and sugar became profitable, and then slavery became rejuvenated."^51

Lyman and several other Ohio abolitionists vehemently contended that slavery—far from having any positive role in America's mission—totally usurped our "grand experiment" along with the hallowed principles of our founding documents. The main argument they put forth held that slavery denied freedom to creatures who were in fact fellow human beings and who, in that capacity, deserved the same "inalienable rights" enjoyed by white Americans.

Ohio abolitionists had no difficulty in proving that the South's system of human bondage put blacks outside the reach of the U.S. Constitution. Most Ohioans already knew something about their plight from newspaper accounts and
direct or indirect contact with the slave systems in neighboring Kentucky and Virginia. Ohio abolitionists amplified the oppressed condition of slaves by citing specific instances where they had been grossly mistreated. John Blanchard described one such instance in his debate with Rice:

A young slave boy, named Auguste, was sent by his owner to the jail of the first municipality, and so flogged, for a succession of days, that he was one mass of putridity. He was discovered by his falling down, when attempting to crawl home; was placed by humane persons on a window-shutter, face downward, and carried to the hospital; where some of the first physicians examined him, and pronounced that there was little hope of his life.52

Blanchard observed that no formal charges had been made against the poor slave nor had any trial been held. The Constitution had offered no protection to him because under Louisiana law he and other slaves were placed outside of its jurisdiction.53

Ohio abolitionists bolstered their descriptions of slave suffering with frequent references to laws like the one in Louisiana which stripped the black slave of all Constitutional rights. They could point to ordinances in effect throughout the South which forbade slaves from submitting petitions, assembling in public, testifying in court, or even attending school. Jonathan Blanchard found a provision in the Mississippi criminal code which stated that "the provisions of this act shall not be construed to
apply to slaves." This legislation by itself effectively put slaves in that state "under the brute's criminal code, to be whipped, sold, or killed as the owner's exigencies may demand."\textsuperscript{54}

While Ohioans could hardly disagree with the observation that slavery took away the black man's human rights, they were less inclined to go along with the statement that he was a "fellow human being" who deserved those rights as much as any white American. Many Ohioans along with other Northerners believed Negroes to be innately inferior beings who could not responsibly exercise the rights and privileges granted under the Constitution. This prejudice undoubtedly developed in part from contact with free blacks most of whom lived in ignorance and poverty. However, these sentiments also received reinforcement from stories out of the South which characterized blacks either as naive morons or powerful, potentially violent brutes.\textsuperscript{55}

To eliminate this prejudice and uphold the black man's claim to equality, Ohio abolitionists followed some advice which Theodore Weld once confided to Lewis Tappan:

It is of immense importance that the public should see what blacks can do. The blacks here (Cincinnati), having mostly emancipated themselves by their own efforts, are their own letters of introduction on the score of energy, decision, perseverance, and high attempt—an excellent material to work upon.\textsuperscript{56}

Accordingly, every effort was made to publicize the accomplishments of black people. While Ohio abolitionists gave
some attention to individual blacks who had achieved success, they placed more emphasis on proclaiming the overall progress of Ohio's black population. Amzi D. Barber's Report on the Condition of the Colored People in Cincinnati provided statistics on the progress which blacks in that city had made in such school subjects as reading, writing, geography, history, and arithmetic. Barber found that they had made significant strides in moral reform and Christian education as well. Temperance, in particular, seemed to be gaining wider acceptance among them. "The success attending the feeble efforts . . . to elevate them (blacks)," Barber concluded, "shows most conclusively that they are not only made of 'one blood' with ourselves, but that they are endowed with the same susceptibilities for mental and moral improvement."57

John Rankin also introduced evidence of the black man's intellectual and moral progress in his speeches but gave equal attention to historical studies which indicated that the black and white races came from one species of man. Drawing on statements from Count Buffon's Natural History and Horne's Introduction to a Critical Knowledge of the Scriptures, Rankin declared:

Mankind are not composed of species essentially different from each other; that, on the contrary, there was originally but one individual species of men, which, after being multiplied and diffused over the whole face of the earth, underwent various changes from the influence of climate, from the difference of food, and the
mode of living, from epidemical disorders, as also from the intermixture, varied and infinitum, of individuals more or less resembling each other.58

For his part, James Thome laid more stress on the black man's capacity for emotional feelings than on his proclivity for self-improvement. The same sentiments of love and loyalty which held white families together, he contended, could also be found in free black families and even—where masters permitted them to exist—in slave families. Accordingly, Thome drew poignant parallels between the grief experienced by a white mother who loses a child to disease or accident and the grief of a female slave whose baby is sold into slavery. He then gave his narrative added force by subtly raising the possibility that slavery could some day be extended to whites.

A spirit so ferocious as that of slavery, will not long be satisfied with making the black man its prey. Color is but a feeble barrier, and who can tell how long ere it will be broken down? . . . The monster who will tear a sable mother from her children, and then mock her childless woe, only waits the power to break into your house, and snatch your little ones from you.59

From observations on the black man's success in self-improvement, his capacity for emotional feeling, and his common ancestry with white Americans, Ohio abolitionists ultimately concluded that members of the Negro race could properly be regarded as human beings. And, as humans (residing in the United States), they were entitled to all
the rights, privileges, and immunities granted under the Constitution. As long as the provisions of our nation's founding document did not apply to blacks, antislavery advocates affirmed, America's mission could never be fulfilled. Oppressed people from other lands could have no confidence in our commitment to human rights; neither could the "Founding Fathers'" vision of a free country where people were equal before the law ever be more than an empty illusion.

In conjunction with their argument that slavery denied constitutional rights to a people who were entitled to them, Ohio abolitionists declared that slavery created a tense, hostile environment in which the rights of all Americans were in jeopardy. This inhospitable environment developed in large measure from widespread fear over the possibility of slave uprisings. In an address to the women attending the Ohio State Antislavery Society's third annual convention, James Thome painted a vivid picture of the hysteria which gripped many Southern towns:

A whole village may at any time, upon the slightest suspicion or alarm, be thrown into the wildest consternation—presenting a scene which would beggar descriptions. Men hurrying to and fro, seizing in their frenzy, clubs, stones, butcher knives, hoes and axes—women flying through the streets with their infants in their arms. . . . From every quarter may be heard cries of terror, implorings of mercy, mingled prayers and curses and all that confusion which arises from fright and defencelessness.60
Dreading the worst, Southern state legislatures and town councils passed strict ordinances limiting the black's freedom to move about and associate with other members of his race. At the same time, these governing bodies also took drastic steps to silence even the most moderate expression of antislavery sentiment. Ohio abolitionists were quick to point out that in their desperate efforts to keep the antislavery message out of the South, slaveholders and their elected officials trampled down the rights of many white people. The secretary's report to the Ohio State Antislavery Society's Third Annual Report made general reference to some of these excesses:

Freedom of speech exists only in name—its exercise being at the hazard of personal safety: the right of petition is called in question. Brute force has in many instances usurped the place of law—passion, of reason—abuse, of argument—and insult, of urbanity. The United States mail has been plundered, and its contents burned. . . . Citizens of the free states can no longer travel at the South but at the peril of their lives, unless they seal their mouths on the subject of slavery or justify the system.61

Several spokesmen for the antislavery cause in Ohio were more specific in their denunciations. Marius Robinson sometimes referred to a former slaveowner in Charleston, South Carolina who was jailed for teaching blacks to read while James Alvord called attention to the plight of a New York abolitionist who was flogged in Nashville for the "crime" of distributing antislavery tracts. For his part,
Huntingdon Lyman cited specific instances where Southern postmasters had confiscated abolitionist literature and noted other cases where mobs had broken into post offices just to destroy documents which criticized their system of human bondage.  

Ohio abolitionists may have saved their harshest words for Congress' gag rule under which the nation's legislature ignored all antislavery petitions which came into its halls. Speaking, no doubt, for all abolitionists in the state and perhaps throughout the country, James G. Birney decried the gag rule in his *Letter on the Political Obligations of Abolitionists*

Arguments addressed to the understandings and consciences of members of Congress are as much moral, as when addressed to our fellow-citizens generally. . . . If any one maintain that arguments, of whatever value, ought not to be addressed to the understandings and consciences of our representatives, to prove that slaveholding is a heinous crime . . . such an one cannot be said to consent to the principles of the Constitution.  

From these assorted illustrations and observations, Ohio abolitionists tried to prove to their listeners that slavery goaded its supporters to actions which overturned the freedom of many white Americans. In doing so, it placed America's mission even further out of reach and made an even greater mockery of our alleged commitment to human freedom and democratic institutions.
Slavery As a Cause of Human Misery

As Ohio abolitionists decried slavery as an abomination to God and a threat to American principles, antislavery advocates in New England were focusing on different issues. One of the main arguments put forth by William Lloyd Garrison and his followers held that slavery was evil simply because it caused unjustified human suffering. This argument was at the core of Garrison's controversial 4th of July address of 1838 which he delivered in Boston:

Fellow-citizens! at this hour—O, blush for shame!—on this advent of Liberty, there are millions of our countrymen in chains, not in Turkey or Algiers, but in our very midst! And such a fate, and such woes, and such deprivations, and such liabilities, and such torments, as are theirs. . . . their bodies branded with red hot irons, or scarred by the flesh-devouring lash, or galled by the iron chain and their spirits. . . . trodden upon at every stride of despotism, till they are crushed to the earth.64

Ohio abolitionists also spoke at length about the slave's suffering but usually in connection with arguments that slavery offended God or usurped the Constitution. At times, however, some abolitionists in this state did make an issue out of the slave's misery in and of itself.

On beginning the third day of his debate with N.L. Rice, Jonathan Blanchard concentrated on the terrible pain and anguish blacks experienced while in bondage. He produced testimony from slaveholders themselves to the effect that most slaves received only "the bare means of subsistence"
and seldom had enough clothes or shelter to protect themselves from the elements.\textsuperscript{65} He also discussed the different kinds of cruel and agonizing punishments imposed on blacks who failed to perform to their masters' satisfaction. "Mangling, imprisonment, starvation, every species of torture may be inflicted upon him (the slave), and he has no redress."\textsuperscript{66} But if this was not enough, Blanchard continued, "our system proceeds still further, and strips him, in a great measure, of all protection against the inhumanity of every other white man who may choose to maltreat him." The Cincinnati clergyman found such harsh handling of blacks to be totally immoral because the slave was a "rational creature" with the same need for security, love, and self-dignity as white people.\textsuperscript{67}

James Thome made similar observations on slave suffering in some of his speeches and supplemented them with grisly illustrations drawn from his own experiences in Kentucky and Tennessee. Thome emphasized that the slave's punishment invariably was out of proportion to the offense he committed. A slave caught napping during work, for example, might receive as many as ten lashes on his bare back while one who tried more than once to escape might have his achilles tendon severed.\textsuperscript{68}

Marius Robinson followed a somewhat different tack by focusing on the legal structure which wantonly inflicted so many abuses and restrictions on all black people. From the
Maryland lawbooks, he found a statute which prohibited free blacks from moving into the state or even from spending a single night as a visitor in a Maryland home. Virginia, he noted, forbade all blacks--slave or free--from attending school while Louisiana made it a crime for anyone to use "language or any other means to produce discontent among free blacks or insubordination among slaves." The effect of such laws, Robinson concluded, was to keep the black man in his degraded condition.69

One issue related to slave suffering that did receive fairly wide (though superficial) attention among Ohio abolitionists was the sexual exploitation of female slaves by their masters. Theodore Weld referred to the problem in his Ohio speeches and later wrote that "slaveholders covet them (negresses) for purposes of gain, convenience, lust of dominion, of sensual gratification, of pride and ostentation."70 William Allan, speaking to an Elyria audience, noted that Southern law "leaves the chastity of a female slave entirely in the power of her master. If a master attempts their chastity they dare neither resist nor complain."71 As evidence that masters did, indeed, take advantage of female slaves, Allan introduced statistics on the growing number of mulattoes and quadroons in the South. Clearly, he asserted, the female slave was quite often nothing more than an object for the master's erotic
gratification; a thing whose own feelings, needs, and self-respect were of no concern. 72

Other Ohio abolitionists who spoke of the slavemaster's sexual oppression of female blacks linked it to the argument that slavery was a sin. These men--Thome and Blanchard among them--claimed that such behavior on the part of the masters could not help but offend God inasmuch as it abrogated marriage and overturned the Tenth Commandment.
NOTES


3 Cincinnati Journal, July 12, 1843, p. 7.


6 Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University Press, 1969), p. 254.

7 Lexington Observer, March 22, 1842, p. 3.

8 Genesis 9:25-29.

9 John Fletcher, Studies on Slavery (Natchez, Mississippi: Jackson Warner, 1852), pp. 478-482.

10 Ibid., p. 274.

11 Leviticus 25:45-46.

12 Fletcher, Studies, p. 118.

13 Siebert Papers, MS 116, Ohio Historical Society.

14 Debate on Slavery; Held in the City of Cincinnati on the First, Second, Third, and Sixth Days of October, 1845 (Cincinnati, Ohio: William H. Moore, 1846), p. 179. Rice was not so much a defender of slavery as he was a critic of abolitionism. Admitting his distaste for American slavery, he nonetheless argued that the evils found in the American system were not inherent and might be absent in another place.

15 1 Samuel 9:7-8.


18. Debate on Slavery, p. 299.


25. Ibid.


27. Deuteronomy 31:12; Debate on Slavery, p. 345.


30. Western Antislavery Society Records, MS 554, Western Reserve Historical Society.


32. Ibid.

33. Cited in Ernest Bormann, ed., Forerunners of Black Power (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971), p. 48. Also see Barnes and Dumond, Weld-Grimke Letters, I, p. 429. Although this exact passage may not have been delivered in Ohio, Weld's letter to Sereno Streeter on October 6, 1834 indicates that something very similar to it was presented.

34. Ibid.

That is, they only looked at its social consequences within the South. They did not try to link slavery with crime and vice in the North.

Marius Robinson Papers, MS 1660, Western Reserve Historical Society.
58 First Anniversary Report, p. 16.
60 Ibid.
61 Third Anniversary Report, p. 5.
62 Robinson Papers, letter dated June 24, 1839; Emancipator, August 28, 1839, p. 6; Emancipator, October 29, 1839, p. 3.
64 Bormann, Forerunners, p. 24.
65 Debate on Slavery, p. 376.
66 Ibid., p. 377.
67 Ibid.
68 Antislavery Bugle, May 14, 1837, p. 2.
69 Robinson Papers.
71 Emancipator, March 20, 1842, p. 5.
72 Ibid.
CHAPTER V

THE DANGER OF SLAVERY

As noted earlier, Ohio abolitionists based their opposition to slavery primarily on moral grounds. Above all else, they said, slavery was evil because it offended God. It stripped blacks of rights enjoyed by the Hebrew ebeh, undermined such basic Christian commandments as the Golden Rule, and created an environment in which reverence toward God all but vanished. But if this were not enough, they continued, slavery's evil was all the greater as a consequence of the misery it needlessly inflicted on thousands of innocent people and its insidious corruption of American principles.

For many Ohio abolitionists a case built around proving the evils of slavery seemed quite sufficient, but others sought to go one step further. These individuals supplemented their discussion of slavery's evils with an analysis of slavery's dangers, specifically the dangers which that institution posed to all white Americans. While not totally unrelated to arguments on the immorality of human bondage, arguments on the dangers of slavery served an entirely different purpose: the former were
intended to make people feel guilty whereas the latter were meant to instill feelings of fear.

And what better way to arouse fear in white Americans than to raise the possibility that slavery might be extended to them too; that they, side-by-side with blacks, might work without pay for a master who had complete freedom to do with them as he pleased. Several Ohio abolitionists argued that such a day might not be far off. Early in his debate with N.L. Rice, Jonathan Blanchard referred to an instance where an 8-year-old Irish girl nearly ended up as the slave of a man who seized her in public and then had eight of his friends testify that she was his legitimate property.¹ Soon thereafter, Blanchard brought up an even more disturbing case:

Read also the case of Sally Muller, lately freed from slavery in New Orleans: a German girl, who was held and treated as a slave for twenty-five years, and was at last accidentally discovered by a woman who was an acquaintance of her parents, and was thus providentially restored to liberty.²

If Ohioans were not troubled by Blanchard's illustrations, they may yet have found cause for worry from what James Thome said about Southern attitudes towards extending slavery to whites. Thome, whose apprehensions about white slavery have already been noted, provided numerous instances where Southerners had candidly admitted that slavery was an appropriate status for many members of the Caucasian race. He pointed to no less a figure than
Georgia Senator Robert Toombs who had publicly declared that he "looked forward to the day when slaves might be counted amongst the lower classes of New York and New Hampshire." Thome found Toombs' sentiments echoed in newspapers throughout the South including a South Carolina journal that bluntly affirmed "slavery is the natural state of the laboring man black or white." More upsetting to him, however, was the fact that several Northern newspapers including the Pittsburgh Post and New York Herald also made flattering comments about slavery as a labor system for the uneducated masses.

Thome and other Ohio abolitionists who raised the issue of white slavery found the source of the danger in the Southern state statutes which specified what proportion of Negro blood an individual had to have flowing in his veins to be considered as a Negro for slavery's purposes. From the myriad laws which regulated every aspect of the slave's spartan existence, they discovered that in eight states below the Mason-Dixon line a person who was less than 1/10 of 1 percent black could still be counted as a slave. With this information in hand, Thome and his colleagues reasoned that if a person who was 99.9 percent white could nonetheless be claimed as a slave, the next logical step was to impose that institution on the nation at large.
Notwithstanding what Ohio abolitionists found regarding the South's predisposition toward white slavery, a retrospective analysis reveals two factors which would have weighed against such an expansion of human bondage on this continent. First, Southerners widely believed that Negroes were peculiarly suited both physically and mentally for the hard work which the South's agricultural economy demanded. Their bodies were deemed to be superior both in terms of muscular strength and heat toleration. Conversely, their minds were appropriately weak to make them more pliable in the hands of their masters.6 These beliefs, as mentioned earlier, undergirded Fletcher's contention that God made Negroes stronger and more stupid in anticipation of the heavy labor they would have to perform as slaves. Thus, if Southern state legislators had extended slavery to whites, they would have implicitly contradicted one of the principal justifications for putting blacks in bondage in the first place.

Beyond this consideration is the mere fact that blacks were in such abundance throughout the South from about 1800 to the outbreak of the Civil War that there simply was no need to extend the system to whites. In 1850 the ratio of blacks to whites in Alabama was 3:4 in North Carolina it was 1:2 and in Tennessee 1:3. There were several counties in all three states where slaves outnumbered whites by a
substantial margin. When one considers in conjunction with these facts that only a small minority of white Southerners needed slaves or could afford them, the possibility that slavery could have been widened to include lower class whites seems even more remote. Nevertheless, these considerations were not in the minds of most Ohioans who listened to Thome and the others speak and ultimately—as will be seen later—their arguments on white slavery served a definite purpose in the overall rhetorical campaign of Ohio's abolitionists.

Even as they raised the specter of white slavery, Ohio abolitionists sounded the clarion on another, somewhat more plausible, danger. Throughout the 1830s and even before that, antislavery spokesmen in this state decried slavery's "insatiable appetite" for new people and new land. It was their contention that slavery had to expand in order to survive. Thus, slaveholders were constantly driven to find new territory into which their system of labor could spread. This desire to acquire new territory for slavery, claimed journalist Benjamin Lundy, was the chief reason Southern legislators had consented to the "notorious" Missouri Compromise. Under the provisions of this compromise, the admission of free state Maine to the Union was accompanied by the admission of slave state Missouri. But more importantly, the compromise specifically
designated latitude 36° 30' as a line of demarcation for creating free and slave states within the domain of the Louisiana Territory. While involuntary servitude was explicitly banned from any state formed above that latitude, it was implicitly permitted in any state established below. In consequence, the compromise put over one hundred thousand square miles of American land within slavery's reach. This fact was not lost on Lundy, who sadly declared in his Genius of Universal Emancipation that the Missouri Compromise had been "a total victory for the South." In the years following the Missouri Compromise, several abolitionists in Ohio began to speculate that the South might someday try to extend slavery outside the legitimate boundaries of the United States. Until the mid-1830s, however, these apprehensions were expressed in rather vague terms. Essays and articles published in abolitionist newspapers throughout the state commonly discussed slavery's "expansionistic tendencies," but few writers ventured to say just where slaveholders might choose to take their institution. Only Lundy, based in the small Quaker town of Mount Pleasant, seemed to foresee Texas as a target. As early as 1839, he warned of a Southern conspiracy to annex Texas as a means of multiplying slave states. Following several extended visits to Texas in the early 1830s, Lundy claimed to have discovered plots among American settlers to subvert the Mexican government's
antislavery laws and he subsequently argued that the impending Texas revolution was part of a vast Southern conspiracy.  

When the Texas conflict ended in victory for the American insurgents, more Ohio abolitionists began to give credence to Lundy's warnings. Their argument on slavery's "expansionistic tendencies," only vaguely worded before 1836, suddenly took on greater form and substance. In an 1840 speech before a Painesville audience, J. W. Alvord spoke of a new era in American history; an era which would be characterized by conquest and military adventurism all for the sake of acquiring new domains for the slave power. Speaking of the Texas Revolution, he declared that "annexation is now the greatest word in the American vocabulary . . . veni-vidi-vici is inscribed on the banners of every Caesar who leads a straggling band of American adventurers into the chaparral of a territory which an unfortunate war has given them the right to invade."  

Marius Robinson voiced similar sentiments in his speeches and raised the prospect of war with Mexico which, he declared, would not stand idly by while the United States annexed a parcel of territory to which it still had strong ties.  Gamaliel Bailey found the possibility of war with Mexico to be all the more likely because of a propaganda campaign that Southerners were waging against our neighbor. In his words "the people of the free states
are to be excited by tales of the severity of Mexico towards American prisoners; and their enthusiasm in behalf of Texas kindled by flaming accounts of the bravery, determined spirit, and self-denying patriotism of the revolutionists."

To bolster their contention that the slave power's desire for additional land would lead the United States into war, Ohio abolitionists once again pointed to the words of Southerners themselves. In an 1842 speech delivered near Ripley, Robinson referred to an editorial in the Richmond Whig which called on Mexico to recognize the Rio Grande as the legitimate border of Texas and permit annexation of that new republic to the United States. "If you refuse," the editorial continued, "we will ravage your fields, hang you up by the neck until you are dead . . . and leave your towns in smoking ruins."  

At the same time Huntingdon Lyman found something ominous in John C. Calhoun's statement that "our people are like a young man of 18 . . . full of health and vigour and disposed for adventure of any description." Lyman was also concerned with the influence the South's lifestyle would have on their attitudes towards expansion. According to him, people below the Mason-Dixon line lived according to a "cult of arms." This cult placed a high value on physical force and the various skills associated with it. Thus, Lyman explained, "all young men are enjoined, indeed, expected to become proficient swordsmen, marksmen, and
equestrians." To this purpose, many of them attended one or more of the South's innumerable military academies which besides teaching the use of weapons also provided instruction in military strategy and tactics. Lyman felt it was only natural for people who were raised in such an atmosphere to desire wars of expansion wherein their talents could be put to use. When war with Mexico finally did break out in May, 1846, Ohio abolitionists and their compatriots in other states were quick to proclaim that their argument on the slave power's desire for a larger domain was totally validated. Unfortunately for them, however, too many Americans turned their minds to other considerations in the face of armed hostilities.

Historian John H. Schroeder notes that business and financial centers throughout the northeastern states lamented the outbreak of war more for its economic consequences than for its impact on slavery. Businessmen feared that "a blockade of American ports might result, Mexican privateers would surely prey on American shipping, the American export trade would be seriously deranged, and the vital extension of credit from England would be discontinued." In the meantime many people in Ohio and other western states lent their support to the war in the belief that the United States had a providential mission to uplift and civilize lesser races in order to prepare them for
democracy. Schroeder explains that such a belief applied particularly well to the Southwest where Mexico stood in the path of America's drive to the Pacific.\textsuperscript{19}

Ohio abolitionists perceived yet a third danger of slavery which they often linked to their argument that slavery offended God. If the United States continued to permit blacks to live in bondage, they claimed, God would ultimately inflict a dreadful punishment upon the whole nation. Noting that "millions" of innocent people had died as a result of slavery, John Rankin warned that "God is just and will make requisition for all this blood unless the nation repent."\textsuperscript{20}

To prove that God could and would punish nations that resisted his will, Ohio abolitionists once again turned to the Bible. Within the text of that book, they had no difficulty in finding recorded cases where God had chastised entire nations which had defied his authority. Although the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was occasionally cited, antislavery spokesmen in this state gave more attention to the suffering of Egypt just before the Hebrews were permitted to leave. Gamaliel Bailey, writing in the \textit{Philanthropist}, observed that like the United States, Egypt had imposed a cruel and unjust system of labor on an innocent people. In the face of Pharaoh's intransigence, God's punishment had been swift and terrible:
Egypt was made to endure a succession of misfortunes . . . her waters were turned to blood, blains were made to appear on man and beast alike, then came frogs and locusts, and in the last stage, death to the eldest son in each house . . . all because this nation would not turn from the oppression of the Hebrew children. 21

John Rankin ominously observed that the Hebrews themselves had not been spared when they "strayed from the paths of righteousness." Rankin quoted II Chronicles 36:17-18 to illustrate what happened to God's chosen people when they consistently broke his law and ignored his prophets:

Therefore, he brought upon them the kin of the Chaldeans, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him who stooped for age; he gave all into his hand.
And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the king, and of his princes; all these he brought to Babylon. 22

And if God would do such things to his chosen people, what might he do to the people of the United States? Rankin did not elaborate beyond saying that God could inflict retribution "without the interference of a foreign nation." Nor did any other antislavery spokesmen in this state venture to predict the nature of God's punishment or when it would come. Perhaps they realized that their listeners' imaginations would conjure up worse disasters than they could portray in words. However, they were adamant in their belief that the punishment would fall on both North and South.
For the "sin of ignoring the slave's agony will be con­ceived as not the better than the sin of bringing the poor wretch into that agony."
NOTES


2 Ibid., pp. 17-18.


4 Ibid., p. 22.

5 Ibid., p. 26. Also see letter from James Thome to Marius Robinson dated March 3, 1840 in the Marius R. Robinson Papers, MS 1660, Western Reserve Historical Society.

6 For a detailed discussion of this belief see Chapter Three in James B. Sellers' Slavery in Alabama (Birmingham, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1950).

7 W. O. Blake, The History of Slavery and the Slave Trade (Columbus, Ohio: J. H. Miller, 1858), p. 811.

8 Debate on Slavery, p. 460.

9 Genius of Universal Emancipation, April 12, 1824, pp. 1-2.


12 Marius R. Robinson Papers, MS 1660, Western Reserve Historical Society. Notes from speech delivered in Elyria date unknown.

13 Cited in Philanthropist, April 13, 1842, p. 4.

14 Robinson Papers. Notes from speech delivered on June 27, 1842.

15 Cited in Philanthropist, September 20, 1843, p. 4.

16 Ibid., p. 3.

17 Ibid., p. 4.

19 Ibid., p. 34.

20 Cited in Philanthropist, August 6, 1839, p. 1.

21 Philanthropist, June 10, 1841, p. 3.


23 Ibid., p. 23.
CHAPTER VI
ABOLITIONISM AS A CURE TO
THE SLAVERY ISSUE

Taken as a whole, the picture which Ohio abolitionists painted with their words was rather bleak. Here was an institution—slavery—which had become deeply entrenched in the fabric of American life. Not only did this institution offend God, but it also totally usurped every precept of justice and equality upon which the nation had been founded. Moreover, the evils which accompanied this American brand of slavery threatened the physical and spiritual well-being of every person on the continent. Families were torn apart, innocent people were subjected to savage punishment, and an atmosphere ripe for violence and debauchery was created. Worse still, anyone who opposed this institution faced tremendous obstacles. Slavery supporters possessed considerable wealth and power which they were more than willing to use.

But in the midst of this unhappy scenario, Ohio abolitionists held out a ray of hope. Slavery could still be eradicated from our land, they said. If and when it was, all the evils and dangers accompanying it would

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vanish, too. But there was no room for compromise. Slavery had to be removed completely and unconditionally and with as little delay as possible.

This position prompted critics of the antislavery movement in and outside of Ohio to question whether ignorant, unlettered slaves could sustain themselves socially and economically after emancipation. William Jay believed that abolitionists would face a serious dilemma if they were ever called upon to formulate a plan of emancipation:

If they propose the simple plan of proclaiming by act of the State Legislatures the immediate and unqualified abolition of slavery, they are denounced as reckless incendiaries. If they intimate that abolition does not necessarily inhibit all compulsory labor . . . they are reproached with wishing to substitute one kind of slavery for another.¹

Although they never drew up an actual blueprint for releasing slaves, Ohio abolitionists were aware of the practical problems that freed blacks would face. They were quick to point out that these problems, however serious, could hardly put blacks in any worse condition than slavery. They also argued that contrary to popular belief, blacks had an enormous ability to improve themselves. The experience of former slaves in the West Indies, they said, gave eloquent proof of that fact.

On July 31, 1834, Great Britain granted freedom to the 800,000 black bondmen held in their Caribbean possessions. But the hour of liberation did not bring forth any displays
of vengeance toward former owners. Recalling that moment, Jonathan Blanchard said that "they broke forth in prayer; they shouted; they sang, glory, alleluia; they clapped their hands, leaped up, fell down . . . and went to and fro, tossing upward their unfettered arms."  

Once the initial jubilation had passed, the blacks set themselves to the task of self-improvement. To prove that point, the Philanthropist cited the favorable impressions of a Scottish visitor to the island of Antigua:

> After having conversed with the negroes, I visited the schools, and observed the respectful deportment and decent appearance of every class of the population. . . . Here moral and religious instruction is attended to more extensively than I have witnessed elsewhere. . . . A French admiral making a tour of the island expressed to me in strong terms his surprise and gratification at witnessing such a general diffusion of the blessings of education.  

The employment situation was also good. Another account from Antigua, printed in the Philanthropist, noted that the West Indian slaves were set free without going through a transitional "apprenticeship" period. But "by their account, there was no difficulty procuring labor at one shilling sterling per day and most persons think this cheaper than slave labor."  

Ohio abolitionists were certain that the success of blacks in the West Indies could be duplicated in the United States. In the Second Anniversary Report of the Ohio State Antislavery Society, Leicester King, the Society's president,
referred to the achievements and good deportment of the blacks who attended a lyceum for free Negroes in Cincinnati. King concluded that "the success attending the feeble efforts . . . to elevate them (free blacks), shows most conclusively that they are not only made of 'one blood' with ourselves, but they are endowed with the same susceptibilities for mental and moral improvement." If blacks were vicious and ignorant, he continued, "our oppression has made them so," and if they turned to thievery, this, too, was understandable because "they have been robbed of their time, their wives, their children, their bodies and their souls. . . . Is it not natural for a child to walk in the way in which it was taught?"

Amzi D. Barber amplified King's views in his 1837 Report on the Condition of the Colored People in Cincinnati. Barber presented statistics revealing the "great" progress which blacks of that city had made over a one year period in reading, writing, geography, history, and arithmetic. He also presented evidence to show that their commitment to temperance, moral reform, and Christian education was becoming stronger. From the data he assembled, Barber determined that the intellectual capacity of blacks was equal to that of whites. If black children did not learn as rapidly as their white counterparts, he explained, it was due to their difficult living conditions and to the
fact that they could attend school only 1 or 2 days a week instead of 5 days as white children did.  

Ohio abolitionist speakers sometimes cited Barber's findings as proof that freed slaves could—with a little help—be turned into responsible, self-supporting citizens. Some abolitionist spokesmen, including Thome and Rankin, even called for the establishment of publicly funded schools for educating blacks. Others agreed with this suggestion, but thought the schools should be privately financed. In any event, Ohio's antislavery camp was seemingly convinced that liberated bondmen would enjoy a special blessing from God. Whatever hazards confronted them, Sereno Streeter observed, the Almighty would "preserve them in the sweetness of freedom," through which "they might find their way to earthly happiness and a knowledge of God."

Besides affirming that blacks had the potential to become responsible citizens, Ohio abolitionists addressed themselves to at least one other practical issue related to the liberation of slaves. Like "immediatists" in most other states, they would not even consider giving compensation to slaveholders who released their bondmen either voluntarily or under the force of law. Slavery was a sin and one did not pay a sinner for turning away from his evil deeds. The ex-slaveholder received reward enough by the termination of a relationship which placed his immortal
soul in jeopardy. Because as long as he held slaves, the master could never have true fellowship with God, yet would be ever vulnerable to his chastisement.\textsuperscript{11}

Although Ohio's antislavery spokesmen did not totally ignore the practical issues related to abolition, they spent much more time describing the benefits the United States would enjoy after slavery's demise. Some speakers dwelt on the negative benefits—bad things that would stop or not happen if human bondage were eliminated. For example, people who stressed the evils of slavery in their rhetoric contended that when slavery was gone, the moral corruption which it fostered would vanish, too. With the disappearance of human bondage, they affirmed, the threat of a bloody slave uprising would not longer hang over the heads of every Southerner. No longer would the human rights granted by the Constitution be trampled underfoot. No longer would blacks be cruelly mistreated or have their families taken from them.

Others who focused on the dangers of slavery thought the same way. The end of human bondage would end the threat of chastisement from God. America's incentive to initiate wars of expansion would subside and working class whites would never again have to worry about joining the black man in chains.\textsuperscript{12}

But for all the attention they devoted to these negative benefits, Ohio abolitionists spent even more time
elaborating on the good things that would follow in the
wake of slavery's destruction. Several of them envisioned
the resumption and ultimate fulfillment of the "American
mission." Because with human bondage banished from its
shores, the United States could be fully reconciled to the
principals of human freedom, and, thereafter, could once
again serve as a model for other nations. Marius Robinson
even believed that the very act of casting off slavery
would have international repercussions:

> From slavery's fall, the world may see that
tyrranny can be uprooted, and evil put forever
to rest . . . for in ridding ourselves of this
curse (slavery) we prove that one nation may
have a conscience . . . a conscience of the
whole, which may impel that nation toward
righteousness and willful acts of self-
betterment.13

Ohio abolitionists were particularly unified in their
belief that the quality of life in the United States would
greatly improve after slaves were set free. Not only
would violence and depravity cease, but a renewed feeling
of brotherhood, national pride, and Christian love would
emerge from slavery's ashes. Charles Beecher, pastor of
the First Presbyterian Church in Putnam, had an almost
idyllic concept of post-emancipation American society:

> We shall be in every way the freest, the happi-
est, and soon the greatest and most powerful
country in the world . . . we shall enjoy a
unity of spirit and purpose unparalleled in
human history . . . and we shall read of it in
our books and newspapers, hear it in sermons,
speeches and orations, and in prayers of thanks
to God.14
In a letter to a friend in Indiana, John Rankin was somewhat more realistic in his assessment of the future. The Chillicothe clergyman admitted that white prejudice would be a problem for many years after emancipation. He feared that many blacks would lack self-confidence and that many white people would "condemn the whole Negro race for the actions of a few." But Rankin nevertheless felt that American society would experience a moral re-awakening after emancipation:

Justice, good faith, honor, gratitude, and all the other qualities which ennoble a nation and fulfill the ends of government shall be the fruits of our establishment... the cause of liberty will acquire a dignity and lustre it has never yet enjoyed, and an example will be set which cannot but have the most favorable influence on mankind.16

James Thome viewed emancipation within the broader framework of the human reform movement. Thome believed that God had endowed the human race with the seeds for its own improvement. With God's help, man would slowly but inevitably realize his own potential for social, intellectual, and moral achievement. Thome acknowledged that life would be better in the United States without slavery, but in terms of human history, emancipation represented "only a single step in man's journey from barbarism to enlightenment." Other steps—temperance, prison reform, women's suffrage, and better care for the handicapped—remained to be taken.
Writing on the impact of the antislavery movement nationwide, Gilbert Barnes noted that the people who were persuaded that slavery was unGodly and that the Declaration of Independence and Constitution were antislavery documents often began to feel guilty:

Had they not sacrificed principle for expediency in allowing slavery to exist within the United States for all these years? Was it not hypocritical for Americans to condemn the tyrannical policies of European states as long as they tolerated a tyrannical form of human servitude within their own country? As people asked themselves these questions they began to feel unhappy with themselves.18

To those people who were upset over the apparent irreconcilability of slavery with Christian beliefs and American principles, Ohio abolitionists offered a simple solution: join the abolitionist cause. This meant more than just believing that slavery was wrong; it meant taking an active role in its destruction. Everyone, no matter what their station in life, could do something helpful. In his "Address to the Ladies of Ohio," James Thome declared that even women, as politically powerless as they were, could still play an important part in slavery's overthrow. He advised them to petition Congress for an end to slavery in Washington, D.C., to circulate tracts and pamphlets, to help colored schools, to pray for "those in the front of battle," and to "let hatred of oppression be a part of your children's education."19
Ohio abolitionists asserted that by joining the anti-slavery crusade, the American citizen served both God and country. He worked for the eradication of a labor system that not only offended God but also undermined the ideological foundation of the United States. Thus, the abolitionist could rightfully consider himself both a Christian and a patriot. Most importantly, the abolitionist had no reason to feel guilty. The burden of ignoring or abetting an immoral institution was no longer weighing on this shoulders.

Underlying the Ohio abolitionists' plea for adherents were two distinct dramas which together formed a rhetorical vision. In his essay "Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision," Ernest Bormann describes what a rhetorical vision is and how it comes into being:

A small group of people with similar individual psychodynamics meet to discuss a common preoccupation or problem. A member dramatizes a theme that catches the group and causes it to chain out because it hits a common psychodynamic chord or a hidden agenda item or their common difficulties vis-a-vis the natural environment, the sociopolitical systems, or the economic structures. . . . When they need to develop a message for a specific context they often find themselves shaping the drama that excited them in their original discussions into suitable form for a different public.20

In effect, the "dramas" or "fantasies" only become a rhetorical vision when a rhetor, representing a larger group, successfully uses them to impress upon an audience the meaning and significance of his message.
Ohio abolitionists created a rhetorical vision that tied in with their belief that slavery was both un-Christian and un-American. This vision was composed of two separate but related fantasies. In the first fantasy, they likened themselves to the early Christian apostles who, without regard to their own safety, sought to spread the gospel to every corner of the globe. The apathetic citizens of Ohio were the pagans who had to be converted. This "apostolic" or "martyr" fantasy is clearly manifested in this passage from a letter which Marius Robinson sent to his wife shortly after he was beaten by an unruly mob:

> If I am thus to be sacrificed, I submit cheerfully, rejoicing as Paul did that I am counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Jesus. . . . I may be happy, contented and willing that God shall take me and make me just such an instrument of advancing his cause, as he sees best; being assured that our King will cause the wrath of man to praise him; and extend the great cause of liberty by my unworthy sufferings.²¹

The second fantasy, which might be called the "patriotic" fantasy, portrayed Ohio abolitionists as Revolutionary War type heroes struggling for the rights of the oppressed against powerful, aristocratic tyrants, i.e., the slaveholders and their supporters. Gamaliel Bailey, Birney's successor as editor of the Philanthropist, frequently placed great stress on the "patriotic fantasy" in his editorials:

> Slavery is the unfinished business of our revolution; that conflict did not end at Yorktown
as many suppose. . . . The last battle of our revolution is upon us; the final conflict between popular liberty and aristocratic slavery has come; that one or the other must fall; and they (abolitionists) have made up their minds with the blessings of God on their efforts, that their adversary shall die.22

Obviously, each of these fantasies portrayed the antagonists in the slavery controversy in a similar light. The abolitionists were the underdogs who faced grave danger from a more powerful foe. But because they fought for righteousness, God would protect them and guide them to victory.

Speakers from Ohio's antislavery camp had good reason for creating this kind of rhetorical vision. They undoubtedly realized that the fantasies which composed it complemented the arguments they were making against slavery. They also must have perceived that the heroes and villains within these fantasies reinforced the images they had of themselves and their adversaries. Beyond this, Ohio abolitionists probably understood that the fantasies themselves had a universal appeal that could up to a point, carry over to them. They no doubt believed that the emotions their audiences experienced when hearing or reading these dramas would make them more receptive to the abolitionist message.

Not satisfied with merely publicizing the advantages of their own solution to the slavery issue, Ohio abolitionists took aim at the solutions offered by other groups.
They found their chief competition coming from the "colonizationists." These people sought to extirpate slavery by sending blacks elsewhere, either to Africa or to some unsettled portion of the West. The American Colonization Society, founded in 1817 and counting among its members such men as James Madison and Henry Clay, established the colony of Liberia in West Africa for this purpose in 1822. The society purchased provisions, chartered ships, and even recruited black families to inhabit the new land. In contrast to the abolitionists, the colonizationists envisioned a gradual phaseout of slavery and wanted slaveowners to be reimbursed for any blacks they released.

To Ohio abolitionists, colonization was a totally unacceptable answer to the slavery question. Marius Robinson complained that colonization was very impractical. According to him,

If an annual appropriation of ten millions were actually applied to the purchase and transportation of slaves, the whole number would not be sensibly diminished at the expiration of half a century, from the natural growth and multiplication of the race. It would be an endless and interminable work.

James G. Birney echoed this charge in more specific terms:

The whole number of emigrants sent out in twenty-three expeditions last year was 2,061. Of these, only 613 were slaves. Compare the proportion of these numbers with that shown by
more recent expeditions—say by the four dispatched in March and April of this year (1835). The aggregate number on these expeditions may be set down at two hundred and sixty, of whom two hundred were slaves. Such facts tend to demonstrate the impractical operation of the principles on which colonization is recommended.25

But even if all blacks could be returned to Africa, Ohio abolitionists said, colonization was still undesirable because it avoided the moral-religious issue that was directly linked to the elimination of slavery. Moreover, colonization stigmatized blacks as inferior beings and encouraged white people to use less than honorable means to make them "volunteer" for the journey to Liberia. Birney enunciated these changes in an essay with the simple title of "Colonization":

To the destruction of slavery throughout the world, we are compelled to say that we believe colonization to be an obstruction. It takes its root from a cruel prejudice and alienation in the whites of America against the colored people, slave or free. This being its source, the effects are what might be expected; that it fosters and increases the spirit of caste; that it widens the breach between the two races; exposes the colored people to great practical persecution, in order to force them to emigrate; and, finally, is calculated to swallow up and divert that feeling which America, as a Christian and a free country, cannot but entertain, that slavery is alike incompatible with the law of God and with the well being of man.26

Ohio abolitionists also took issue with people who said that given time, slavery would die out on its own. Sooner or later, they said, Southerners would recognize
the inefficiency of the system and abolish it themselves. The only thing necessary was to confine slavery where it already was, in the southeastern corner of the continent.

These advocates of "containment" joined with abolitionists in objecting to slavery's extension to the western territories. They were also united in their opposition to the policy of "popular sovereignty" whereby settlers in new territories would decide by popular vote whether or not to sanction slavery. But containment supporters did not approve of abolitionist efforts "to arouse public fervor" against involuntary servitude fearing that it "will hasten the destruction of law . . . and promote dissolution."²⁷ To the anger of abolitionists everywhere, several prominent spokesmen for containment, including the Reverend N. L. Rice and J. D. B. De Bow, publicly endorsed the congressional gag rule on antislavery petition.²⁸

Since they were not organized into an identifiable group, containment supporters did not attract as much attention as the colonizationists. Nevertheless, at least one speaker from Ohio's antislavery camp tried to respond to their claims.

To the assertion that slavery would eventually disappear on its own, James G. Birney countered with statistics revealing the growing number of slaves in various counties throughout the South. The slave population in Georgia's Hancock County, he noted, increased by over 3,000 between
1825 and 1830. Amelia County in Virginia experienced an increase of almost 2,500 in its slave population over the same period. Similar trends were noted in several other counties. Surely, Birney concluded, the position of slavery in the Southern economy was solidifying rather than diminishing. But even if slavery were on the decline, he continued, "how many more souls would it destroy before its own destruction?"29

And to the claim that Southerners themselves would eventually realize the inefficiency of human bondage, Birney retorted that most slaveholders were so attached to the system that they no longer cared whether it was practical or not. He offered this hypothetical illustration in a letter to Gerit Smith:

You may take the Kentucky slaveholder . . . show him from the undisputed statistics of our country the quantum of advantage enjoyed by Ohio over his own state—prove to him that it is owning to free labor, and nothing else; . . . and, it will, I apprehend, all amount to nothing. . . . He will reply to you—'sir, I am willing, for the sake of my ease, and the indulgence of those habits in which I have been educated, to pay the sum that you have so satisfactorily shown I shall lose by remaining a slaveholder.'30

Even a foreign visitor to this country was impressed by the willingness of slaveholders to accept economic losses for the benefit of their own comfort. Writing on his travels in America during the early 1830s, Alexis de Tocqueville marveled at the great disparity in wealth
between slave state Kentucky and free state Ohio. De Tocqueville felt certain that Kentucky's slave-based economy was to blame. Under its influence, he said, Kentuckians had drifted into a lethargic and complacent lifestyle:

The Kentuckian scorns not only labor, but all the undertakings which labor promotes; as he lives in an idle independence, his tastes are those of an idle man; money loses a portion of its value in his eyes; he covets wealth much less than pleasure and excitement; and the energy which his neighbor devotes to gain, turns with him to a passionate love of field sports and military exercises. . . . Thus slavery not only prevents the whites from becoming opulent, but even from desiring to become so. 31

For Ohio abolitionists, colonization and containment were false doctrines. They offered deceptively easy solutions to the slavery problem, but in the end they were unworkable and morally undesirable. Only abolition--complete and immediate--would bring salvation to the United States and to each individual American who adopted that cause as his own.
NOTES


2 Debate on Slavery, Held in the City of Cincinnati on the First, Second, Third, and Sixth Days of October, 1845 (Cincinnati, Ohio: William H. Moore, 1846), p. 239.

3 Philanthropist, April 8, 1836, p. 4.

4 Philanthropist, March 4, 1836, p. 4.


6 Ibid., p. 11.


13 Marius R. Robinson Papers, MS 1660, Western Reserve Historical Society. Cleveland, Ohio. Text of speech delivered in Toledo (not dated).

Reprinted in the Emancipator, March 11, 1833, p. 5.

Ibid.

Thomas, Theodore Weld, p. 201.

Barnes, Impulse, p. 226.


Robinson Papers. Letter dated Sept. 20, 1834. This letter was later printed as a tract for public distribution.

Philanthropist, June 27, 1839, p. 13.


Ibid., p. 33.

Debate on Slavery, p. 264.


Philanthropist, Sept. 28, 1833, p. 9.


CHAPTER VII

THE RHETORIC OF CONVERSION: A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING

The emphasis in the last three chapters has been on the substance of the rhetoric produced by Ohio abolitionists. Each specific contention they put forth has been analyzed with reference to a more general line of argument. Nevertheless, the importance of the specific contentions cannot be fully understood unless they are perceived as separate parts of a broad strategy; a strategy that seems to follow a model of conversion rhetoric provided by Dr. James L. Golden, Dr. Goodwin F. Berquist, and Dr. William E. Coleman. This model is outlined in their essay "Rhetoric as Motive: Secular and Religious Conversion" which appears as the sixteenth chapter of their book The Rhetoric of Western Thought (Second Edition).

For Golden, Berquist, and Coleman, conversion is "a far-reaching, long-term change in the belief system and/or self-concept of the individual." Fittingly enough, the authors of The Rhetoric of Western Thought are less interested in conversion itself than in the rhetoric of conversion, i.e., the genre of discourse an evangelist uses
to dramatically alter a person's self-concept and belief-value system. They ultimately conclude that conversion rhetoric revolves around a three stage process.

In the first stage, the evangelist makes the potential convert aware of a severe problem that directly affects him. The listener must perceive that "something is amiss in his life and that his existence falls short of expectations." At the same time, he must believe that he has the power to correct this deficiency. In the second stage, the evangelist shows the potential convert a solution to his problem. The listener is urged to reject his old, unsatisfying approach to life and adopt a system which will solve the shortcoming described in stage one. The evangelist takes care to make the potential convert perceive only one favorable choice of action, i.e., the course he advocates. Consequently, he makes alternative solutions appear to be inappropriate or undesirable.²

Once the listener accepts the new ideas offered to him, the evangelist is ready to enter the third and final stage. At this point, his main concern is to teach the new adherent the associated values and attitudes that go along with his new outlook on life. Most importantly, he must make the convert aware of the types of behavior he is expected to display as well as those he is supposed to avoid. Golden, Berquist, and Coleman explain that the purpose of this indoctrination stage is "to consolidate
gains and to provide a deterrent to possible backsliding."^3

Seen through this model, each argument advanced by Ohio abolitionists fits into one of the three stages outlined by Golden, Berquist, and Coleman. Each stage, in turn, led the individual listener or reader towards conversion to abolitionism.

Stage One: "The evangelist must weave a symbolic reality dominated by a major exigency which consequently requires action. . ."^4

The "exigency-marking" arguments of the Ohio abolitionists were those that stressed the evils of slavery (Chapter IV) and the dangers of slavery (Chapter V). The importance of these arguments can be best appreciated by considering the first problem Ohio abolitionists had to overcome in their campaign. Simply stated, that problem was to convince people that there was an urgent need to eliminate an institution which had existed within our boundaries for 200 years; that failure to take decisive action would have the gravest consequences for the entire nation.

The difficulty of this problem should not be underestimated. Abolitionist spokesmen had to strip away slavery's image as an "unpleasant necessity" and portray it instead as a genuine threat. They had to convince people that the real character of slavery was far more sinister than what appeared on the surface. In short, they had to
transform something that was regarded as tolerable (though obnoxious) into something intolerable.

Golden and his colleagues note that in order for "exigency-marking" to be successful, the rhetor must "create a contradiction within an individual's belief system or self-concept." This is exactly what the arguments on the evils and dangers of slavery were meant to accomplish.

Many Ohioans were devout, Bible-believing Christians. Thus to create a psychological contradiction between their religious beliefs and their tolerance of slavery, Ohio abolitionists portrayed the God they worshipped as an enemy of human bondage and emphasized that the institution itself created conditions where Christian values could not survive. Similarly, most Ohioans were loyal to the United States and to the ideals which set it apart from other nations. Realizing this, Ohio abolitionists pointed out the incompatibility between the practice of slavery and the values of America. Their purpose, once again, was to create tension in the mind of each audience member. One could not be both a loyal American and a tolerator of slavery, they said, because slavery was inimical to everything America aspired to be.

Although Ohio abolitionists did not emphasize the human misery argument that much, it, too, clearly represented an attempt to divorce slavery from the self-images
of audience members. Because in addition to being patriotic and Christian, Ohioans were also civilized. They could not remain indifferent to the suffering of others or to injustices inflicted upon the helpless but the problem for Ohio abolitionists was to make people believe that slavery really caused suffering and injustice. As the Reverend Jonathan Blanchard observed about the residents of his city,

The people here (Cincinnati) have little understanding of slavery beyond what they read of it in letters and journals. Even those who travel to Kentucky see but the surface of the practice and then in its mildest form. . . . It is but to them an unpleasant thing which they are content to avoid but not destroy.

But with the real character of slavery exposed, with the cruelties and humiliations it inflicted on individuals out in the open, Ohio abolitionists were confident that civilized people would find it totally incompatible with everything they believed about themselves.

While the arguments on the evil of slavery were aimed at the self-images of Ohio listeners, the arguments on the danger of slavery were directed toward a different target. Ohio abolitionists believed that people in the northern states had been lulled into a false sense of security. They looked at their situation in life and convinced themselves there was nothing to fear. Conflicts in Europe were far away and had little influence on events in America. Our frontier was expanding and whatever danger the Indians
posed was easily held in check by the U.S. Army. An isolated slave uprising was always a possibility but the feeling was that blacks did not have the intelligence to launch any large scale rebellion that could disrupt life in the North. The introduction to the Second Anniversary Report of the Ohio State Antislavery Society summed up the general feeling:

The people have so long listened to the flattering eulogies of political aspirants and other public speakers—they have so delighted in the prophetic greatness and perpetuity of our country—they have contracted so strong an aversion to any but bright pictures, that it is difficult to excite apprehensions to real danger. 7

The arguments on the danger of slavery were clearly intended to arouse people out of their complacency and warn them of a genuine menace that was right in their midst. It did not matter that the United States was not involved with European conflicts because the expansionist forces at work within the slavocracy could impel us to make war in this hemisphere. Neither did it matter that the Indians posed no great threat to white Americans because they were still imperiled by slavemasters who might wish to put them in chains alongside blacks. And even if these misfortunes never came to pass, a righteous, omnipotent God might still smite the nation for sustaining slavery in any form.

The exigency created by Ohio abolitionists thus derived from two sources: arguments on the evil of slavery directed at the individual's self-image and arguments on
the danger of slavery directed at his desire for self-preservation.

In response to skeptics who wondered what could be so dangerous or evil about an institution that had been on our shores for over two centuries, Ohio abolitionists claimed that slavery had a tendency to blind people to the harm it was causing. Marius Robinson likened the South's system of human bondage to an "anesthetic" which deadened the sensibilities of Southerners to the misery and degeneracy around them. Thome, too, charged that slavery could distort an individual's discernment of right and wrong to the point where he became "a monster of ungovernable passion."  

If Northerners had trouble perceiving slavery as a problem, antislavery spokesmen contended that their unfamiliarity with the system kept them from knowing how bad it truly was. Theodore Weld pointed out that "because of their remoteness from the scene of slave action, they (Northerners) do not possess a knowledge of the subject sufficient for men who aspire to conduct the discussion of its merits."  

James G. Birney went so far as to claim that slaveholders concealed the worst aspects of their institution from public view. In a Philanthropist editorial, he recalled an instance where a master had removed the chains from the necks and ankles of his slaves shortly before
entering a Kentucky town near the Ohio border. After their departure, however, the chains were re-applied. With Northerners thus insulated from slavery's impact and Southerners blinded, Ohio abolitionists concluded, the need to eliminate human bondage from our continent was less than obvious.

Stage Two: "Once the exigency is established, the evangelist must lead the individual to the decision point of repentance and the acceptance of the 'true' gospel . . . the evangelist must make the potential convert perceive only one favorable choice—that being the evangelist's 'answer' or 'gospel.'"  

For Ohio abolitionists, the "answer" to the exigency of slavery was the complete and immediate eradication of that system. As previously noted in Chapter 6, they never offered any specific plan for emancipation and at least some of them were aware of the practical problems that would result if all slaves were given their unconditional release. From their perspective, however, a plan of emancipation was not all that necessary for the solution of the exigency. More importantly, Ohio abolitionists had to persuade potential converts that abolitionism could resolve the contradictions in their respective self-images. Patriotic, Bible-believing Ohioans who were feeling guilty about their toleration of slavery had to be convinced that abolitionism would somehow remove their guilt.
Interestingly, Ohio's antislavery rhetors argued that abolitionism could accomplish this feat not as a fulfilled reality but as an objective to be pursued. It was as though the act of participating in the antislavery crusade brought redemption to those who answered the call. In his "Address to the Ladies of Ohio," James Thome expounded on the great changes that took place in people who joined his cause:

No longer will your ear be deaf to the sound of the lash. No longer will you turn away from sights of blood and mangled females. You will weep over these things, and you will speak of them in tones of melting pity which will touch other hearts... you will awaken your tenderest and warmest feelings until the vast tide of your mingled emotions shall heave only for the slave. 13

Thus, by giving time and energy to the fight against slavery one gained a new awareness and sensitivity which served to remove the contradictions that afflicted the self-image.

Of course, restoring the self-images of guilt-ridden Ohioans only solved half the exigency. The danger slavery ostensibly posed to the nation's freedom and well-being still had to be addressed. So Ohio abolitionists emphasized that if enough people joined their crusade they could keep the slavocracy constantly on the defensive. More tracts could be distributed, more petitions sent to Congress, and more pressure applied to those who were doing business with the "lords of the lash." Thus encumbered with vindicating themselves, slaveowners and their allies would have little
time to initiate wars or extend their system to white people. There was also a chance that God's wrath against America might abate if there were enough people willing to take a stand against slavery. As John Rankin pointed out, "for all of its iniquity, Sodom would have been spared had there been as few as ten righteous men within its walls. . . . Surely, God can be no less generous to our nation which must yet have people with a zeal for righteousness." So if enough people "with a zeal for righteousness" could be enlisted in the antislavery movement, the dangers to America—the second part of the exigency—could be avoided.

In advocating participation in the abolitionist cause as the answer to their exigency, Ohio antislavery advocates were not discounting the importance of actually liberating the slaves. This was a goal they always kept in sight. Well aware that their efforts were being matched in other states, Ohio abolitionists believed that sufficient popular pressure on Washington could bring emancipation. But they were quick to point out that effective pressure on the government could only be applied if abolitionist ranks were swelled with eager, hard-working converts. As they worked to secure the release of all slaves, these converts would heal their self-images and safeguard the nation from disaster.

Stage Three: "Once the convert selects the gospel of a particular group he is taught the value system and world
view of that group. This is designated the stage of indoctrination. Its purpose is to consolidate the gains and to provide a deterrent to possible backsliding.\textsuperscript{15}

Ohio abolitionists did not offer any specific arguments that can be correlated with this stage. At certain points in both their published and oral discourse concepts related to their broader philosophical beliefs were inserted. Thus, one finds James Thome referring to "America's mission as a divine light in the world"\textsuperscript{16} and Theodore Weld asserting that "faith without works is dead."\textsuperscript{17} However, such brief remarks only hint at the broader framework of beliefs that was discussed in Chapter 3.

The temptation is to say that the model's ability to explain abolitionist rhetoric in Ohio breaks down at this point. But a closer look at the evidence reveals that the third stage did occur; it was simply not carried out by the leading antislavery speakers or publishers.

It must be remembered that Weld and most of the other state abolitionist rhetors were constantly on the move. In all probability, they did not stay in any given locality long enough to consolidate whatever gains they made. In any event, the task of organizing and educating new converts to abolitionism fell to local antislavery groups.

The Western Antislavery Society, based in Alliance, apparently had a special group to handle this responsibility.
Article V of the society's executive committee by-laws states that "a committee on agencies, consisting of three, shall be appointed, whose duty it shall be to select the field of labor for agents, confer with them in regard to their operations, and have a general charge of this department of the cause." That this "agencies committee" was involved in indoctrination is further suggested by an entry in the society's records which stipulates that tracts and books belonging to the society should be entrusted to its care. These would have been necessary for anyone seeking to orient new members to the philosophical framework of abolitionism.

The Ashtabula Female Antislavery Society also seems to have made an effort at indoctrination. Their records reveal that a Mr. J. O. Beardsley was appointed for the purpose of "presenting the subject" of abolition to ladies with antislavery convictions and assisting in the formation of auxiliary societies.

Although large antislavery organizations appeared to be interested in the indoctrination of the members, smaller groups--such as those based in a village--may not have shared this concern. Some of them only met once or twice a year and their membership in many cases was not large enough to support any sustained indoctrination program.

The exact content of the indoctrination that was offered to new abolitionists is also unclear. After
recruiting his six agents from Oberlin, Weld told Lewis Tappan that "I meet the . . . brethren who are going to lecture on abolition and spend an hour or two every day in indoctrinating them in the principles, facts, arguments, etc., of the whole subject."\(^{21}\) Huntingdon Lyman, one of the six, added that during these sessions he and his colleagues took part in "earnest and profitable drill" on issues that were likely to come up during their tours of service.\(^{22}\)

Since Lyman was being groomed for special service, the indoctrination that he and the other Oberlin students received was probably different from what was offered to rank and file members of local societies. Marius Robinson provides one of the few clues to what indoctrination at this level entailed. In a letter to his wife, Robinson specifically refers to a man named Bosfield from New Athens College who spoke to the Cadiz Female Antislavery Society on the obligations the **Holy Bible** placed on Christian women and on the contributions they could make to the abolitionist cause.\(^{23}\) These are topics that would logically fit in with an indoctrination lecture. Moreover, although Robinson does not say whether Bosfield made repeated appearances before the Cadiz society, the close proximity of New Athens to that town would have made it easy for him to do so.

The Golden-Berquist-Coleman model on conversion rhetoric appears to be in harmony with the rhetorical behavior
exhibited in Ohio's abolitionist campaign. Some conclusions about the model and the campaign will be presented to Chapter 8. For now, the focus of attention must shift to the second question posed in the thesis: did Ohio abolitionists actually win true converts to their cause? That is, were they able to win over people who had been diametrically opposed to them at first?

From the preceding chapters, it is clear that Ohio abolitionists faced solid and often violent opposition almost everywhere they went. Some of this opposition came from people who had distinct proslavery sentiments; even more came from individuals who regarded the abolitionists as heretical incendiaries who were intent on destroying the union. How often were people in either state of mind turned around so completely that they embraced the antislavery convictions they originally scorned? Judging from the evidence, true conversions were not uncommon.

Prior to the celebrated debates, Weld observed, "there was not a single abolitionist in this (Lane) seminary. Many students were from slave states . . . and abolitionism was regarded as the climax of absurdity, fanaticism, and blood." But after the debates, all but a handful of the seminarians became staunch abolitionists. Huntingdon Lyman recalled one slaveholding student who "went home and emancipated his slaves and put himself to expense for their benefit."
Converts were also won during the statewide campaign. At Marlborough, Sereno Streeter formed a society of 90 members "many of them formerly from slave states, especially Maryland and Virginia." In the same town, Streeter reports spending time with a Dr. Brooke "who came to the first lecture with notes in his pocket to oppose me and is now secretary of the society and a most active member." 26

Another instance of a conversion is offered by Gamaliel Bailey. The editor of the Philanthropist refers to a Southern-born student in the Ohio Medical College who, upon the occasion of his baptism, affirmed that "the only thing which had hitherto kept him back, was his reluctance to believe slavery wrong, and become an abolitionist. Now, he was convinced that slavery found no sanction in the word of God, and he confessed himself an abolitionist." Bailey noted that the student was heir to slave property back in his native South Carolina but that "he will have nothing to do with it." 27

An unusually detailed description of two converts is provided by James Thome in a letter to Theodore Weld. Thome focuses on a Mrs. Griswold and a Mrs. Gordon, two sisters from a slaveholding family in Baltimore who later moved to Canton. "Of Mrs. Griswold," Thome declared, "I was informed that there was no woman in Canton who was more bitterly opposed to abolition and more full of prejudice against the niggers than she." Mrs. Gordon, on the other
hand, "shrank away" from Weld in Pittsburgh and wouldn't even take his arm when he offered to help her up a hill. By Thome's account this woman thought Weld was a "blood thirsty monster" and she "fancied she could see a strange wildness in his eye, which indicated he was crazy." After Thome's lectures, however, both these ladies were thoroughly converted. "They proclaimed their conversion immediately, and began to visit amongst their acquaintances and to labor to convert them."28

In addition to these specific references, many Ohio abolitionists made broader statements indicating that conversions were not isolated incidents. At the end of one series of lectures in northern Ohio, Thome reports that "several gentlemen (including a local editor) arose and declared that their sentiments on the subject of abolition had wholly changed."29

Wherever he went, Weld saw a distinct pattern unfold: "First, coldness, suspicion, opposition, and threats of personal violence; next, interest, respectful attention and anxious inquiry; third, much larger audiences, deep interest, personal kindness; fourth, all the above indications in greater degree and rising to the end of the course."30

It should be emphasized that the majority of the people who were won to abolition in Ohio probably could not strictly be considered converts. Given what Randall and Ryan said about the general attitudes toward slavery in
Ohio prior to the Civil War, it is almost certain that the preponderance of rank-and-file abolitionists were initially either indifferent to the cause or were inclined slightly against it. Nevertheless, the fact that a fair-sized minority of them were genuine converts has considerable meaning as far as the Golden-Berquist-Coleman model is concerned.

Before moving to the next chapter, a brief comment should be made on what Ohio abolitionists really desired from the people they addressed. The evidence on this matter turns out to be rather ambiguous. In a letter to Lewis Tappan, James Alvord talks about "negating" northern support for slavery by attacking the system on religious and humanitarian grounds. Certainly, that objective could have been achieved without turning every individual into a staunch abolitionist. James G. Birney revealed a similar outlook in a Philanthropist editorial when he wrote "we will have accomplished much if we can make our people comprehend the severe depredations slavery has wrought upon freedom in both sections...".

But many colleagues of Birney and Alvord were not so easily satisfied. In describing his speaking campaign to J. F. Robinson, Weld explained what he expected:

In invitations to join antislavery societies, I have asked for hearts and heads and tongues for faith and works, and have proclaimed to all, that to give their names without these, is an imposition upon abolitionists, and a mockery of the slave's wrongs.
NOTES


2 Ibid., pp. 266-267.

3 Ibid., p. 267.

4 Ibid., p. 266.

5 Ibid.


8 Antislavery Bugle, July 10, 1853, p. 2. After completing his lecture tour on behalf of abolitionism, Robinson served for some time as editor of the Antislavery Bugle which was published by the Western Antislavery Society.

9 Medina Circular, September 14, 1837, p. 3.


12 Golden, Rhetoric, p. 266.


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18 Western Antislavery Society Records, MS 554, Western Reserve Historical Society.

19 Ibid.

20 Ashtabula County Female Antislavery Society Records, MS 387, Western Reserve Historical Society.

21 Barnes and Dumond, Weld-Grimke Letters, I, p. 244.


25 Ballantine, Jubilee, p. 63.


27 Dumond, Birney Letters, II, pp. 524-525. Bailey was evidently acquainted with this student and probably played some part in winning him to the antislavery cause.


29 Ibid., p. 282.


31 See Chapter II, p. 20.

32 Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery (Case Western Reserve Press, 1969), p. 204.

33 Philanthropist, August 26, 1840, p. 4.

CHAPTER VIII

THE RHETORIC OF CONVERSION:
A RECONSIDERATION

Golden, Berquist, and Coleman have described their model of conversion rhetoric as "a preliminary statement" and accordingly anyone who applies it to a particular social or historical event must be alert to findings that will expand or refine its meaning. Before any revisions are offered from this dissertation, it should be emphasized that the two thesis questions, posed in Chapter I, have been answered. As the last chapter illustrated, the rhetorical strategy of Ohio abolitionists essentially followed the three major stages of conversion rhetoric as outlined in the Golden, Berquist, and Coleman model. The arguments advanced by Ohio's antislavery spokesmen served to mark slavery as an "exigency" and to move listeners toward a favorable "decision" about abolition. The third stage, indoctrination, did not come through quite so clearly. The major advocates in the state for abolition had little if anything to do with it. However, some of the larger local societies did make an effort to instill a broader range of values in their members and to orient
them to the responsibilities that they should fulfill.

The last chapter also clarified the fact that a fair number of the people who joined antislavery societies in Ohio were originally strong opponents of abolitionism. The radical change of heart and mind that they experienced after being exposed to the abolitionist message provides some ground for calling these people "converts." It also strongly suggests that there is some connection between the phenomenon of conversion and the Golden, Berquist, and Coleman model.

In addition to all this, two general observations which Golden and his colleagues make about conversion rhetoric are corroborated by the experience of Ohio's abolitionist rhetors. First, just after describing their three stage process, they declare that "the rhetoric of conversion . . . is usually a campaign rhetoric which necessitates several attempts at persuasive discourse. Converts are rarely the product of an encounter with a single message." ¹

As this dissertation has shown, the rhetoric of abolitionism in Ohio occurred within the framework of a campaign that lasted at least fifteen years. Over that period, antislavery spokesmen crisscrossed the state sometimes following in each other's footsteps and sometimes making repeated appearances in a single locality.
Further on Golden, Berquist, and Coleman note that an evangelist-rhetor normally identifies his message with "pragmatic as well as ideal truth," and as a result "it contains only one viable solution or choice. All others will be treated as transitory, misleading, or ineffectual."^2

For Ohio's antislavery crusaders, abolitionism was the only cure for the malady of human bondage. If America were to fulfill its divine destiny and if Americans were to have peace with themselves, that hated institution had to be banished from our shores forever. There was no other way. The discussion in Chapter 6 focused on the different issues Ohio abolitionists raised and the devices they employed to sell abolitionism to other Ohioans. Chapter 6 also shed light on the intolerant attitude Ohio abolitionists displayed toward the competing solutions of containment and colonization. In line with the observation of Golden and his colleagues, Ohio abolitionists considered these approaches to be "false doctrines." As such, it was not enough to dismiss them just for their impracticality. Birney and others argued that while both ideas appeared to offer an eventual end to slavery, they only cloaked the underlying moral dilemma which that system created.

The fact that the Golden, Berquist, and Coleman model of conversion rhetoric has worked well in this study suggests that it has some potential for wider use. The model
might help explain the rapid proliferation of religious
cults in America as well as the tactics employed by the
members of these groups. It could also shed light on the
forces operating within many contemporary secular move­
ments. As Golden and his colleagues note, people espousing
drugs, yoga, sensitivity training, psychoanalysis, hypnot­
tism, and similar approaches often assume the role of an
evangelist.  

In an effort to help scholars who may wish to utilize
the Golden, Berquist, and Coleman model of conversion
rhetoric in the future, several possible refinements to it
are offered here. These refinements arise not so much from
the discovery of any error in the model's structure as they
do from findings that expand and deepen its meaning.

The first suggested revision stems from the discussion
of "exigency marking," the phenomenon that characterizes
the initial stage of conversion rhetoric. According to the
authors, "exigency marking will create a contradiction with­
in an individual's belief system or self-concept. When a
belief, value or attitude is demonstrated to be incongru­
ent with the self-image the evangelist has made major
progress."  

The exigency created by Ohio abolitionists did exactly
what Golden, Berquist, and Coleman said it would. It
sought to create a contradiction within the listener's
belief system by contrasting slavery's evils with the
ideals of American freedom and Christian brotherhood. The perception of this contradiction was supposed to arouse feelings of guilt in the listener and make him agreeable to joining the abolitionist cause. Perhaps this would have been enough by itself but Ohio abolitionists, in effect, compounded their exigency by adding arguments on the danger slavery posed to the security of Americans both individually and collectively. The target of these arguments was not the listener's self-image or belief system but rather his perception of the social environment. Slavery was shown to be a threat to that environment; a disruptive force that would change the climate of existence in a way that would harm the listener and his family.

As Chapter 7 pointed out, these arguments on the danger of slavery allowed Ohio abolitionists to confront their audiences with a two-sided exigency. With respect to the model itself, however, they raise the possibility that exigency marking may not always involve the creation of internal contradictions within an individual's belief system; that in some instances an exigency can be created by alerting the individual to an external situation that threatens his world.

Golden and his colleagues have drawn a distinction between "already existing" exigencies and those that are "created" by the evangelist. Perhaps a similar distinction needs to be made between "internal" exigencies, those
directed at the listener's self-image, and "external" exigencies, those directed at some element in his environment. In any event, the finding in this study demonstrates, at the very least, that exigency marking need not be based exclusively upon arguments aimed at the self-image. Even if such arguments are necessary for the successful completion of the first stage, they apparently can be supplemented with additional arguments that touch other sensitive areas of the listener's existence.

A second possible refinement ties in with the third stage of the model. The evidence presented in Chapter 7 indicated that although Ohio abolitionists were concerned about the indoctrination of new converts, they said little about the broader philosophical tenets that supported their abolitionist convictions. They apparently realized that time limitations made it impossible for them to carry out the in-depth instruction that was necessary for effective indoctrination.

Given the fact that any indoctrination process will likely be a prolonged affair, it may be that the third stage of the Golden, Berquist, and Coleman model will almost always be detached from the other two. More specifically, the pattern where the exigency-marking and decision stages occur in an opening message and the indoctrination stage unfolds gradually in a series of subsequent
messages may be typical in all or most displays of conversion rhetoric.

It may also be typical for the third stage to be carried out by people who are not themselves evangelists. As this study has shown, the responsibility for indoctrinating new abolitionists rested largely with local activists. The matter of time limitations on the leading state abolitionist speakers has already been mentioned as one condition which contributed to this situation. Their desire to spread the gospel of abolitionism to as many people as possible made it inconvenient for them to stay in any one area for long. In this regard, they probably differ very little from other evangelists. Any altruistic individual who believes he has some knowledge that can change people's lives will naturally want to share that knowledge as widely as he can. But this desire to "spread the word" will, in effect, force the evangelist to seek help from others in consolidating whatever gains he makes.

There is, perhaps, a second and more subtle reason why indoctrination may often be left to non-evangelists. That reason can best be understood by first analyzing the exhortative type of rhetoric that occurs in the first two stages of the Golden, Berquist, and Coleman model. According to Golden and his colleagues, this form of address relies on "concrete and vivid words and phrases, 'ought' terms, and significant symbols for the purpose of creating
'presence' and 'communion' and setting the 'scene' for the act of conversion. . . ." Exhortative rhetoric draws heavily on emotional appeals, which as Edwin Black explains, create the impetus toward a change in belief:

Such a genre of discourse (exhortative) is that in which the evocation of an emotional response in the audience induces belief in the situation to which the emotion is appropriate. In this genre, a strong emotional experience does not follow the acceptance of a belief, or even accompany it; it precedes it.

But once the evangelist is ready to take his new converts into the indoctrination stage how well can he be served by this exhortative approach? A more didactic form of rhetoric aimed at inducing understanding in the convert rather than emotional upheaval would seem to be fitting at this point. Yet someone who had the ability to present an effective exhortative address might not be able to manage a situation where this type of rhetoric was required. The dynamic, forceful style that would characterize an exhortative speaker might not be easily adjusted to the thoughtful, slow-paced discourse needed for educating new converts. So it may be that non-evangelists are given responsibility for indoctrination in part because that process calls for rhetorical skills that are different from those needed to mark exigencies and move people to change their beliefs.

One final refinement in the model of conversion rhetoric emerges from the discovery that at least some Ohio
abolitionists recognized the importance of turning people against slavery even if they were not willing to embrace the abolitionist cause. It is likely that in many instances where conversion rhetoric is employed the complete conversion of the audience is an ideal rather than an expected goal. Certainly, "evangelists" like Birney and Thome had no illusions about transforming every member of their audience into a fervent abolitionist. They must have known that their message would have a different impact on different individuals. What they probably hoped for was that a handful of people out of each audience would be swayed to abolitionism while the rest would at least begin to edge toward their position. If this is how Ohio abolitionists felt, then their habit of returning to places where they had been earlier makes sense. In this manner, they could gradually wear down the resistance of listeners who might initially be reluctant to join the effort.

The development and nurture of a hard-core group of followers was crucial to the success of Ohio's abolitionist movement. As Neil Smelser points out in his classic work *The Theory of Collective Behavior*, a social movement cannot occur unless the potential participants in that movement are mobilized for action. There must be leaders who will "urge the masses to concrete action, telling them the time for redemptive action is now and that the goals are within reach." If no leaders emerge or if their call
for action goes unheeded, collective action is forestalled.

So each time an abolitionist pamphlet was sent out or an abolitionist speech was delivered the ultimate aim was to win a true convert to the abolitionist cause; someone who would make the destruction of slavery a focal point in his life. But even if that aim were not always achieved, something was still gained if people could be soured to slavery. Individuals who were not abolitionists but who still disliked slavery could prove to be useful allies. For example, while they might not wish to petition Congress for a prohibition of slavery in the western territories, they might be willing to ask for a removal of the gag-rule which banned any discussion of slavery in either the House or Senate. Similarly, while they would probably be unwilling to harbor an escaped slave in their own home, they might refuse to help a fugitive slave hunter or, better still, lead him astray.

The broader implications of this discussion are clear enough. A scholar who studies conversion rhetoric must be attentive to the expectations and aspirations of the evangelists who are generating the discourse. In some instances, the scholar will find that full conversion to the proffered "gospel" is the only acceptable goal. Such is certainly the case with fundamental Christian evangelists. People who believe some tenets of Christianity (e.g., the virgin birth or the sinfulness of man) but fail to accept
the saving grace of Christ are considered to be just as "lost" as those who reject the whole structure of Christian beliefs. Other evangelists, however, will set more moderate goals for themselves. They might claim some success when they convince someone to accept just a portion of their gospel or to become less hostile to it.

In conjunction with this last observation, it should be added that anyone who employs the Golden, Berquist, and Coleman model in any future study must attempt to ascertain whether the rhetoric under examination actually brings about genuine conversions in the target audience. This study found numerous instances of people who came to the antislavery cause only after experiencing a dramatic turnabout in their attitudes as a result of hearing the abolitionist message. Many others who responded favorably to the same message, however, were not converted. They joined the crusade not because their values were drastically changed but probably because the rhetoric they heard made abolition appear more respectable and more in tune with the values they already held. Scholars who use the model in future studies should be alert to similar distinctions that may exist among people who answer an evangelist's call.

Hopefully, scholars will find the rhetoric of conversion to be a worthy topic for further research. In a real sense, this dissertation represents only a small step beyond the "preliminary statement" provided by Golden,
Berquist, and Coleman. Many questions relating to this unique genre of discourse remain to be answered. Most obvious, perhaps, is the question of whether the model of conversion rhetoric, used successfully in this study, can be applied with equal success to other situations where conversion is being sought. Given the large number of cults, causes, and crusades that are currently active in this country, scholars should have ample opportunity to test the Golden, Berquist, and Coleman model in both spiritual and secular contexts.

Those scholars who do use the model in the future may want to clarify the relationship among the three stages or perhaps focus in depth on the rhetoric that characterizes one particular stage. Certainly, there is still much to be learned about "exigency-marking." This dissertation has suggested that evangelists can create an "external" exigency; one aimed not at the individual's self-image but rather at his social environment. Further research may reveal a multitude of approaches that an evangelist can utilize to "make real" a problem and to "create a need for action."

By the same token, the model's third stage (indoctrination) requires more clarification. Not only should the rhetoric used in this stage be analyzed, the overall purpose of indoctrination should be explored in detail.
As defined by the model's creators, indoctrination has a rather defensive function. Its purpose, as they see it, is "to consolidate the gains and to provide a deterrent to possible 'backsliding.'" Indoctrination thus acts as a kind of "preventive medicine" which keeps the new convert pointed in the right direction even during times of trial and temptation.

While this defensive function of indoctrination is undoubtedly important, scholars may well discover that it also has a positive function that is equally essential. The indoctrination stage may be a period of growth and maturation for the new convert; a time when he can try to reach his full potential as a "true-believer." Accordingly, the indoctrination process might seek to teach the convert how to use his new "gospel" to overcome problems and build a more rewarding life for himself. Another objective might be to prepare him to perform a special task that affects the well-being of the cause he has joined. Whatever the case, scholars must be aware of the possibility that the indoctrination stage will have an expanded purpose within the context they are studying.

Lastly, research on the rhetoric of conversion should seek to enhance our understanding of conversion itself. The theoretical constructs of Rokeach and other social scientists are helpful enough for scholarly purposes. What seems to be lacking, however, is a good functional
definition of conversion. Concepts are needed that will help scholars identify conversion when it actually occurs in people. What does a converted person experience physically, mentally, and emotionally as he goes through this process? On the other side, what does the evangelist expect from those who are converted? How are they supposed to be different from persons who have not totally responded to the message?

The answers to these questions must be sought in both the religious and secular realms. One possibility would be to see how well the model of conversion rhetoric can explain what happens in an advertising campaign. Research might reveal that when advertisers used words and visual images to arouse a need in consumers they are actually "marking an exigency." Then, when they amplify the superiority of their product in comparison with "Brand X," they may really be pushing their audience toward the decision stage.

More work also needs to be done on the rhetoric of religious conversion as it is practiced by such groups as the Mormons. Rather than speaking before large audiences, Mormon "evangelists" generally prefer to present their message to just a few people at a time in face-to-face encounters. Working in pairs, they will engage in an informal conversation with their prospective converts during which they will answer questions and challenges about their
faith. This "interpersonal" approach to the rhetoric of conversion contrasts sharply with the "mass" approach practiced by many of the more celebrated Christian evangelists.

Other potential areas for research will probably emerge as the rhetoric of conversion comes under closer scrutiny. It is to be hoped that all research on this topic, whatever direction it takes, will not only expand the parameters of rhetoric but also reconfirm the humanistic foundation of this much maligned discipline. As Richard Weaver once noted, "rhetoric speaks to man in his whole being and out of his whole past and with reference to values which only a human being can intuit."\textsuperscript{11} If this dissertation can clarify this fact to at least a few scholars, it will have more than served its purpose.
NOTES


2 Ibid., p. 269.

3 Ibid., p. 263.

4 Ibid., p. 266.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid., p. 269.


8 This is not meant to suggest that Ohio's abolitionist rhetors were not capable of performing indoctrination. Weld, in fact, took part in an intensive training and indoctrination program for 70 representatives of the American Antislavery Society. These individuals were later sent around the country to speak on behalf of abolition. The rhetorical skills Weld employed in this effort, however, would not have been the same ones he utilized during his days as an antislavery advocate.


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