

“A DAY OF GRACE”  
EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY IN *UNCLE TOM’S CABIN*

A Report of a Senior Thesis

by

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Majors: Literature in English and Religion

Maryville College

Fall, 2005

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## ABSTRACT

*“A Day of Grace”: Evangelicalism in Uncle Tom’s Cabin* reviews the current status of scholarship on Harriet Beecher Stowe’s best known work, asserts that this discourse on *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* lacks a proper understanding of Stowe’s theological context, and proceeds to interpret the novel’s theology in this context. Despite the divergent interpretations of modern critical scholars, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* can and must be understood as a literary artifact of American evangelical Christianity. Chapter one’s literature review documents critics of Stowe who have either rejected or distorted Stowe’s Christianity, critics who have mistakenly viewed her as a theological revisionist, and critics who have tried to pin her to a particular denominational stance within Christianity. The second chapter offers an evangelical reading of the novel in the light of ancillary documents by Stowe, including pertinent correspondence and the *Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and in the light of the Bebbington quadrilateral, a historical criterion for evaluating evangelicalism. The conclusion suggests that reading Stowe as an evangelical might ignite further academic interest in her writings and should redefine the way in which mainstream religious scholars and theologians view evangelical Christian social thought.

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## CHAPTER I

### IN WHICH THE READER IS INTRODUCED TO A WOMAN OF PIETY

“The first part of the book ever committed to writing was the death of Uncle Tom. This scene presented itself almost as a tangible vision to her mind while sitting at the communion table in the little church in Brunswick. She was perfectly overcome by it, and could scarcely restrain the convulsion of tears and sobbings that shook her frame. She hastened home, and wrote it; and, her husband being away, she read it to her two sons of ten and twelve years of age. The little fellows broke out into convulsions of weeping, one of them saying, through his sobs, ‘O mamma, slavery is the most cursed thing in the world!’ From that time the story can less be said to have been composed by her than imposed on her.”

Harriet Beecher Stowe, “The Story of ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin’” (xix)

Though it carries more historical and literary importance in American history than many other recognized and studied works of American literature, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was largely neglected by the official American literary academy until the late twentieth century. Even where Stowe has been read, she has often been berated for her supposedly “sentimental” style, her unabashed use of Biblical verses and language, and other qualities that tend to rankle the postmodern sensibility. As her biography in a

contemporary edition of the novel puts it, "...her constant interpolation of Christian aphorisms and her use of routine plots kept these novels on the level of conventional nineteenth-century romance and local color fiction" ("Harriet Beecher Stowe" viii). Scholars still seem to step back from Stowe's opus magnum with a mild air of pretension, echoing Abraham Lincoln's famous exclamation: "So you're the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war!" (Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life* vii)

In the midst of what is now called "The Stowe Debate" concerning sentimental literature, however, the power and the original purpose of this important American novel have been forgotten. Often forgotten is the evangelical piety evidenced by Stowe's statement above, that set of religious convictions that influenced her to examine two monolithic American institutions, slavery and Christianity, and lock them in deadly combat. Stowe believed in the active intervention of God in human history, and her writings show that as the author of this important novel, she saw herself as instrumental in a spiritual confrontation of the evils of slavery. Though Stowe's novel blazes with spiritual potency and achieves a union between sincere religious narrative and unsparing realism, some of Stowe's most prominent critics have misunderstood her greatest work, confined it as a work of religious sectarianism, or rejected it altogether. Because these responses are colored by historical location and ideological commitments, the available evaluations of the theological content of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* have failed to grasp the undeniably evangelical character of the novel.

As a theologically charged work of American social protest literature, the faith to which Stowe exhorts her readers in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is an evangelical Christian faith based on conversion to Jesus Christ; it is in this grand stream of American Christian piety

that the novel draws its religious vision. In the following pages I will seek to offer a critique of the present Stowe discourse and its weaknesses and present an explication of the novel that highlights the way Stowe employs the fundamental tenets of evangelical Christianity.

Before fully defining what is meant by a specifically “evangelical” Christianity, we can begin to understand the inadequacy of current Stowe scholarship by examining the three primary types of critiques of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*: critics have either rejected Stowe’s Christianity as trivial or oppressive, critics have cast her as a radical feminist or theological revisionist, and critics have attempted to pin Stowe’s novel in a variety of sectarian molds.

Some of the most prominent critiques of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* have largely ignored the theological content of this novel due to its perceived triviality or oppressiveness. One of the best-known critiques of the novel, James Baldwin’s “Everybody’s Protest Novel,” falls under this type of *Uncle Tom* criticism. In the review, Baldwin calls *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* “a very bad novel, having, in its self-righteous, virtuous sentimentality, much in common with *Little Women*” (495-496). His negative review of the novel focuses a great deal on Stowe’s fundamental theological assumptions:

Uncle Tom’s Cabin, then, is activated by what might be called a theological terror, the terror of damnation; and the spirit that breathes in this book, hot, self-righteous, fearful, is not different from that spirit of medieval times which sought to exorcise evil by burning witches; and is not different from that terror which activates a lynch mob. (498)

Displaying a typically modern mistrust of traditional Christian theology and revealing his own philosophical preconceptions, Baldwin essentially accuses Stowe of merely writing against slavery out of a desire to save her soul – “a panic of being caught in the flames, of being caught in traffic with the devil” (498). But not content to reject “this merciless doctrine” of Stowe’s Christianity, he further charges that Stowe’s Christianity is inherently racist in its undertones:

Here, black equates with evil and white with grace; if, being mindful of the necessity of good works, she could not cast out the blacks – a wretched, huddled mass, apparently, claiming, like an obsession, her evil eye – she could not embrace them either without purifying them of sin. She must cover their intimidating nakedness, robe them in white, the garments of salvation; only thus could she bury, as St. Paul demanded, “the carnal man, the man of the flesh.” Tom, therefore, her only black man, has been robbed of his humanity and divested of his sex. It is the price for that darkness for which he has been branded. (498)

Important to note here is Baldwin’s assumption that Uncle Tom is essentially *not male*, an important assumption that undergirds many of the feminist readings of the novel. However, the theological thrust of Baldwin’s critique lies in his claim that Stowe’s Christianity is racist. He seems to mark Harriet Beecher Stowe as a proponent of what has been called the “Son of Ham” theology, once acceptable among both liberal and conservative American theologians and clergymen. This theological position held that the slavery of African Americans was justified by the curse of Ham (and therefore the peoples of Canaan) in the Book of Genesis. Stowe repeatedly takes up this issue in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, the passages concerning which are explicated in chapter two of the present

work. Admittedly, Stowe makes sweeping generalizations about the spiritual nature of African American slaves that would no longer be acceptable in the contemporary climate of race rhetoric. The content of these generalizations, however, is not that the slaves need to be baptized but that their overall sensibility is more sanctified than that of white people. Baldwin's secular "hermeneutics of suspicion," to use Ricoeur's term, as chapter two's examination of the novel's evangelical commitments will demonstrate, is not borne out by the theological thrust of Stowe's Christianity, which regarded both black and white human beings as being sinners in radical need of a Savior. Stowe's evangelical view of human nature, which demonstrates this fundamental conviction, will be examined in chapter two.

One negative critique of the spirituality of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Jeremy Lerner's introduction to the Harper Classics edition of the novel, reflects a common objection to the novel's religious content. "The animus of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is its spiritual passion" ("Introduction" x), he says, immediately identifying the core theme of the novel. Later in his brief analysis of the novel, however, he offers a somewhat dim view of this animus:

...the spirituality that drove Mrs. Stowe to write the book finally falls short as a tool of novelistic analysis. Christianity as Love is one thing; but Christianity as Jesus the Saviour [sic] is quite another. The concept of Jesus supplies a magical promise of something beyond, a day of judgment ... Now the notion of higher justice may be worth discussing metaphysically. But in terms of Mrs. Stowe's purpose, i.e., to show "the living dramatic reality" of slavery, Tom's heavenly escape hatch sells her short ... Christian submission is one problem of slavery that

Mrs. Stowe couldn't touch. She shrank, finally, from the sight of purposeless suffering and unredeemed evil. (xiii)

Here it seems that Lerner is playing the Marx to Baldwin's Freud. Whereas Baldwin locates the theological heart of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in Harriet Beecher Stowe's fear of hell, Lerner questions the validity of Uncle Tom's otherworldly redemption on the basis of its perceived lack of political value. His distinction between "Christianity as Love" and "Christianity as Jesus the Savior" makes his objection to Stowe's evangelical faith even clearer. While Uncle Tom's staunch Christian discipleship may taste of the "opium of the people" to Lerner, for Stowe it is nothing less than a sermonic illustration of the enormity of slavery and the superiority of Christian faith. Lerner misses the revivalist dimension of Stowe's novel, which as a work of evangelical piety is aimed at the conversion of the reader – both in his/her assumptions about the role of Jesus Christ as Redeemer and in his/her assumptions about the moral validity of slavery in a Christian worldview. Working from such a modernist viewpoint, it is little wonder that Lerner views the radical conversionary faith of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a copout. In explicating the evangelical characteristics of the novel in the next chapter, a discussion of Stowe's Christian activism will reveal both Stowe the social crusader and Stowe the evangelical.

Hortense J. Spillers is a more recent critic who rejects Stowe's evangelical Christianity. In her "Changing the Letter: The Yokes, the Jokes of Discourse, or, Mrs. Stowe, Mr. Reed" examines the way in which Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Ishmael Reed's *Flight to Canada* deal with the "peculiar institution" of slavery. Like most contemporary African American intellectuals, Spillers resents the figure of Uncle Tom and is deeply suspicious of Stowe's antislavery novel. She praises Baldwin's famous

critique of the novel, holding that “a unitary reading of ‘slavery,’ ‘according’ to the ‘Gospel,’ springs the trap of Tom’s dismemberment” (551). Furthermore, she eschews Stowe’s claim that God inspired her to write the novel, arguing that the text deconstructs itself and does not lend itself to a divinely appointed meaning (552). Although she is careful not to completely rule out the possibility of a meaningful “Gospel” for the purpose of African American empowerment, she does not seem open to the possibility that the Gospel involves sacrifice: “It is entirely possible to read the texts of a demotic (or preaching) Gospel in a subversive way, that is, in a way that does *not mandate* the sacrifice of children, or the crucifixion of black bodies, male or female” (551). As evidence of this subversive “Gospel,” she briefly cites some previous form of African American religious rhetoric that she does not care to develop in depth. For Spillers, the point is that this doctrine of sacrifice is ultimately oppressive:

That Stowe “orchestrates” a thematics of sacrifice as an instance of a posited “necessity”; that this segment of the eschatological attaches itself to the history, or to the narratives about the history, of children and “The Negro,” altogether reinforce the phallogocentric motives of slaveheld “private property” in a woman’s hands, since it insists that somebody *else* pay the *price* of its own unmitigated desire. (551)

A few things ought to be pointed out about Spillers’ explication of the novel here. First, she understands Uncle Tom as a “Christ-figure,” even going so far as to suggest that the presence of Sam and Quimbo and their conversion at Uncle Tom’s death mirrors the two thieves crucified alongside Christ in the Gospel accounts (547). In using this idea of the “Christ-figure” as her interpretive key for understanding Uncle Tom, she mistakenly

understands Uncle Tom's death as itself a blood Atonement, a common understanding that clouds the evangelical character of the work. That Stowe posits the necessity for a substitutionary atonement (by Christ and not by Uncle Tom) may seem theologically backward to postmodern interpreters like Hortense Spillers, but such a theological backbone was necessary for Stowe's novel to be spiritually relevant as it was to her peers. Chapter two will reexamine the view of Tom and Eva as "Christ-figures" and suggest a more thorough-going Protestant view of the Atonement in the light of Stowe's evangelical worldview.

Yet another significant modern critic who finds Stowe's evangelical Christianity odious is the deconstructionist Christine Zwarg, whose "Fathering and Blackface in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*" attempts to show how the text's appeals to patriarchy are often destabilized by shifting sources of meaning. Zwarg sees Christianity in particular as evidence of such an appeal to patriarchy, and shares the widely held modern assumption that it is impossible for God to have dictated *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or somehow inspired Harriet Beecher Stowe. Echoing the common disdain for the Christian piety of Uncle Tom, Zwarg notes that

Indeed the most surprising aspect of the text is the way that Tom moves from an interesting and cunning subversion of the patriarchal system imposed on the slave community to a complicity with the overarching patriarchy of Christianity ... In effect, Tom is a Christ in blackface and the same riot of conflicting meanings arise. The resurrection of a "black" Christ can no more displace the dangerous hierarchy of Christian rhetoric than Eliza's escape in men's clothing can displace the hierarchy between men and women. (577)

In addition to being marked by the implicit assumption of Tom being a Christ figure, Zwarg's inability to comprehend the possibility of "Jesus as Savior" being a liberating force prevents her from understanding the radical theological and political implications of the novel. Although the experience of Christian spirituality is open to both men and women, whites and blacks throughout the course of the novel, and indeed people of many different denominations and stripes practice it in the novel, Zwarg's characterization of Christianity as an inherently patriarchal religious system leads her to reject Stowe's appropriation of it as a form of social critique. Her negative critique of Stowe's power as a social protest novelist resounds with many of the doubts echoed previously by Baldwin, Larner, Spillers, and company.

These critics represent a sampling of contemporaneous literary criticism which retains a dim view of the spirituality of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. While these critiques are consonant with the naturalist and sometimes even Marxist loyalties of their authors, these critiques cannot fully understand the spiritual power of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the importance it had on a generation of readers because they throw Stowe's religious convictions out of the window as a first principle of interpretation. Stowe's feminist supporters share some of these philosophical assumptions. While some of them apprehend important religious dimensions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the collage of the critical perspectives on this aspect of the novel remains incomplete.

Perhaps the best-known contemporary interpretation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is presented in Ann Douglas' *The Feminization of American Culture*. In *Feminization*, Douglas interprets *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a Victorian novel, as her use of Little Eva as a governing model in her Introduction indicates:

Little Eva's virtue lies partly in her femininity ... And her greatest act is dying, something we all can and must do. Her death, moreover, is not particularly effective in any practical sense ... Little Eva's death is not futile, but it is essentially decorative. (4)

Douglas asserts that "Eva suggests Christianity beginning to function as camp. Her only real demand on her readers is for self-indulgence." Douglas' primary argument in the study is that female readers and male clerical writers helped to establish a mass commercial culture in America, and the idea of popular religiosity (as distinct from doctrinal religion) is an important aspect of this study, as her reconstruction of American historical theology in *Feminization's* fourth chapter ("The Loss of Theology: From Dogma to Fiction") seeks to demonstrate. To deny the religious import of a figure like Evangeline St. Clare, whose character is fraught with religious imagery and implications, pushes this sentimentalist interpretation too far. Even in this early interpretation of the novel Douglas offers, she recognizes that part of *Uncle Tom's* power lies in its Christian bombast:

*Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a great book, not because it is a great novel, but because it is a great revival sermon, aimed directly at the conversion of its hearers. In subsequent years, in a series of sometimes rambling, sometimes sentimental but always witty and alert narratives Stowe conducted the most brilliant exploration of New England Calvinism as a theology and a lifestyle ever conceived by an American. No one understood better Calvinism's repressive aspects, especially in relation to women; no one saw more clearly the inevitability of its decline; but Calvinism was nonetheless the subject of Stowe's best work. (245)

Elsewhere, Douglas claims that “Calvinism itself is predictably the first male achievement which Stowe is intent on demolishing. It is important to remember that these novels and sketches are Episcopalian” (248). Although other critics have supported this claim (see the discussion of sectarian critics below), it is definitely characteristic of Douglas’ incessant anti-patriarchal interpretation of the Calvinist tradition.

Douglas’ published remarks on *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* did not end with the wildly popular *Feminization*, and the feminist author has provided a fuller discussion and interpretation, “The Art of Controversy,” which appears in the Penguin Classics edition of the novel. In this essay she declares *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* to be “a powerfully feminist book” (13). Much of her discussion echoes her brief remarks in *Feminization*, including her characterization of Stowe as a revivalist and her contextualization of the novel in the Victorian literature of Stowe’s day. Like other critics, she views Uncle Tom as being emptied of inherently male characteristics: “In a sense Tom also fits into this pattern, since he evinces the ‘feminine’ virtues, and not incidentally inspires almost all who come in touch with him” (19).

Douglas’ examination of the theology of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in this later article is trenchant and worth noting. She observes that “The religiosity of Stowe’s antislavery sentiment is of far sterner stuff than many of the pious platitudes that *Uncle Tom* evoked” (20). She correctly identifies Stowe with the mainstream of American Christian thought when she notes that in Stowe’s theology,

Slavery was a sin – one of a darker cast – and it called for a more dramatic response than any concept of wrong in the Unitarian moral lexicon. It was theologically close to original sin, as the Calvinists defined it, for it was inherited

from and transmitted by the founding fathers that, as Garrison and Phillips never tired of pointing out, legalized it in the constitution of their new country over the protest of their own consciences. (23)

Other aspects of Douglas' introduction also help to articulate the evangelical Christian foundation on which the novel's argument is built. She explains that

the gravest charge Stowe leveled against slavery was that it could kill the soul in slaves ... and in masters ... Slavery is, in Stowe's vision, the ultimate sin: it is atheism. Those who accept it as truth, whether despotic owners or desperate rebels, are lost. (24)

Although Douglas does not explicitly reject the common interpretation of Tom and Eva as Christ figures, she does begin to move toward a more thoroughly evangelical Protestant understanding of the Christian piety of the novel's characters. She points out that they ought not "to be seen as impossibly good human beings," but rather as individuals saved by God's grace according to divine election (24). Although Douglas herself, like many modern and postmodern critics, rejects out of hand the possibility that Douglas might have been inspired by God (30), she offers a fresh look at the novel that allows the interpreter to more fully understand Stowe's theological context.

An even deeper understanding of Stowe's Christian theological leanings is offered by Jane Tompkins in "Sentimental Power: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the Politics of Literary History." In this article, Tompkins articulates one of the clearest and most comprehensive arguments for the conversionary nature of Stowe's Christianity available contemporaneously. She defines *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as "the *summa theologica* of nineteenth-century America's religion of domesticity, a brilliant redaction of the culture's

favorite story about itself: the story of salvation through motherly love” (504). Like Ann Douglas, she locates *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as a Victorian novel of the nineteenth century, but she goes into even greater depth concerning the religious trappings of the novel. In reflecting on Douglas’ famous interpretation of the death of little Eva, Tompkins suggests that

In *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, death is the equivalent not of defeat but of victory; it brings an access of power, not a loss of it; it is not only the crowning achievement of life, it *is* life, and Stowe’s entire presentation of little Eva is designed to dramatize this fact. (507)

Tompkins suggests that it is the conversionary faith of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* that gives the novel its power. In her discussion of Topsy’s conversion, she notes that “Eva initiates a process of redemption whose power, transmitted from heart to heart, can change the entire world” (509). Without mentioning it, Tompkins has described how Stowe applies the evangelical doctrine of conversion by regeneration in her theological vision. Tompkins’ reading of the novel is also heightened by her sensitivity to Stowe’s eschatological vision “which remind[s] the reader constantly that historical truths can only be seen for what they are in the light of eternal truths” (512). Like Douglas, she also steps away from the temptation to deify these characters when she notes that “They are not defined primarily by their mental and emotional characteristics – that is to say, psychologically – but soteriologically, according to whether they are saved or damned” (513). However, like most other critics, she finally insists on viewing Uncle Tom and Eva as Christ-figures (516). She also suggests that the novel ultimately fails as a tool of social protest because the society of evangelical domesticity and peaceful non-resistance

which she sees Stowe as imagining in the novel did not come to pass (518). It is here that, like many other interpreters, Tompkins still interprets Stowe as a theological revisionist, even going so far as to suggest that Stowe's evangelical domesticity was a millenarian vision:

The woman in question *is* God in human form. Seated in her kitchen at the head of her table, passing out coffee and cake for breakfast, Rachel Halliday, the millenarian counterpart of little Eva, enacts the redeemed form of the Last Supper. This is Holy Communion as it will be under the new dispensation: instead of the breaking of bones, the breaking of bread. (519)

While Tompkins has perhaps provided the most insightful religious commentary on *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to date, her feminist revisioning of Stowe's evangelical outlook ultimately falls short. Although Stowe was sensitive to the experiences of women, children, and African American slaves, to understand her as a liberation theologian interested in inaugurating a Kingdom of God built on the political success of a spiritual proletariat totally misunderstands her nineteenth-century evangelical religion. Part of the force of Stowe's theological vision comes from the fact that it does draw from what feminist critics might call the "patriarchal" mainstream of American evangelical Christianity. Tompkins' central insight, I would suggest, is that "Stowe's very conservatism – her reliance on established patterns of living and traditional beliefs – is precisely what gives her novel its revolutionary potential" (521). With some reservations, Tompkins' essay is incisive and theologically savvy, and many of her insights will be useful in examining Stowe's evangelical theology in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Joan D. Hedrick is a feminist critic and Stowe biographer whose views of Stowe as a theological revisionist are far more outspoken. In “‘Peaceable Fruits’: The Ministry of Harriet Beecher Stowe,” she endeavors to explain what she sees as a theologically radical Stowe by pointing out the differences between the revivalist theology of the Calvinist Beecher clan and the letters and sermons that Stowe produced while a student at husband Calvin Stowe’s Lane Seminary. In the article, she briefly touches on *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and *The Minister’s Wooing*, the latter actually being a novel reflecting some of Stowe’s sentiments on Calvinism. She suggests that these novels propose a kind of radical feminist antithesis to the strict doctrinal theology preached by men like Jonathan Edwards (318-319). Hedrick even goes so far as to cast Stowe as an early liberation theologian when she says that “By valuing the human experience of ‘lowly’ characters, Stowe forces a reevaluation of white, male systems of thought and, as feminist critics have pointed out, depicts women and blacks as instruments of salvation history” (319). She does not provide much evidence for this dichotomy between male and female systems of thought beyond a very brief discussion of the chapter in which Senator Bird is forced to take in fugitive Eliza and her child, thus “forcing the Senator to unite his public and private life ... [placing] him into a woman’s mode of being” (320).

While Stowe certainly views both men and women, whites and blacks as being used as instruments by God in salvation history, the extent to which her novel constitutes an antithesis to white male theology is in question. Her evangelical Christian worldview is largely dependent on the surrounding religious culture which is dominated by Calvinist theological figures like Jonathan Edwards and Samuel Hopkins. Stowe’s later attitudes toward doctrinal theology may be reflected in *The Minister’s Wooing*, but the case for

theological revisionism, and especially liberation theology, in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is negligible.

Among the feminist critics who extol Stowe's work, there is a tendency of varying degrees to view her as a theological revisionist. In noting areas of agreement and disagreement with these critics, already some of the major religious issues of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* have been discussed. There is a third and final group of Stowe's critics that must be examined, namely, the critics that view Stowe's novel as endorsing one form or another of denominational or sectarian alliance. I will seek to show how these interpreters err in failing to identify Stowe as being broadly evangelical.

John Gatta has recently examined the Episcopalian facet of Stowe's writing which Douglas holds (at least as late as *Feminization*) is so fundamental to understanding Stowe's religious sentiments. In "The Anglican Aspect of Harriet Beecher Stowe," he writes,

... the well-known Congregationalist aspect of Harriet Beecher Stowe's background did not shape the whole of her religious training or her later outlook. As Stowe testifies autobiographically in *Pogonuc People* (1878), her maternal connections to Episcopal faith and practice through the family of Roxana Foote also had an enduring influence on her developing religious and artistic sensibility.  
(412)

Using primary historical sources, Gatta manages to articulate the points of juncture between the evangelical Calvinism of Stowe's ancestors and the Anglicanism to which she growingly became attracted throughout her lifetime. However, in his brief discussion of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Gatta is forced to hedge his argument concerning Stowe's

Episcopalianism. He holds that Calvinist theology must have still captured her imagination somewhat in the 1851-1852 period:

In at least one crucial way, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* sustains the New Light evangelism of Jonathan Edwards, who believed that preachers must move the affections in order to release the grace of conversion. It cannot be denied that in the novel Stowe subsumes her theological inheritance of sectarian Congregationalism within a more broadly Protestant and sentimental religion of the heart. But even as this novel rejects the gradualist anti-slavery stance of Stowe's father, its homiletic and hortatory style marks it as a production of Lyman Beecher's child. Plainly, there is nothing distinctively Anglican about the authorial voice of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. (Gatta 416)

Later, Gatta notes the ecumenical tendencies of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, including the diverse religious communities which Stowe paints in a favorable light and her almost Catholic tendencies toward hagiography and "Marian symbology," as Gatta puts it (417). Gatta does not make the broad claim that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is Episcopalian in its theological assumptions, but he suggests that Stowe's presentation of human beings is somehow Anglican or Catholic in its tendencies. In establishing Stowe as a Protestant evangelical, I will examine her theological anthropology and the theological import of her characters in chapter two.

One critical study that treats of the similarities between Stowe's theology and the theology of the Second Great Awakening is "Christian Revolution." This article maintains that Stowe's theology is staunchly in the camp of Second Great Awakening revivalism, and he directly links Stowe to the Christian Perfectionist theology (the

“Oberlin Theology”) of Asa Mahan, Charles Finney, and others (Hovet 537). In attempting to make this connection, he notes that

Mrs. Stowe clearly envisions the destiny of America as the creator of a revolutionary force which will break down institutions standing between God and man, thereby insuring the absolute freedom and equality promised by the new covenant ... Not only did it [slavery] violate the principles of the new covenant, it also prevented America from fulfilling the task which God had placed on her shoulders. (540)

Hovet clearly perceives Stowe’s view of providential history. However, he insists on interpreting Stowe within the idiosyncratic Oberlin Theology, which held that total sanctification is possible in this earthly life, thus earning the title of Christian Perfectionism. While Hovet points to some salient evidence that Stowe herself endorsed this view at one point in time, his discussion of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* does not account for such theological revisionism:

By tying religious doctrine to the class struggle, Mrs. Stowe clearly envisions the destiny of America as the creator of a revolutionary force which will break down institutions standing between God and man, thereby insuring the absolute freedom and equality promised by the new covenant. (540)

While Hovet, again, is correct in his view of Stowe’s providential history, he does not establish how this view would be any different from the view of the evangelical Calvinism which rejected Oberlin Theology’s perfectionism as a vile heresy. Although Hovet sees such an idiosyncratic theological position as central to Stowe’s theological vision, the evidence could lead to an interpretation of Stowe having an entirely

mainstream, even Calvinistic view of human nature. Essentially, Hovet fails to establish how *Uncle Tom's Cabin* clearly participates in the sectarian concerns of Second Great Awakening revival theology.

A Catholic critic, Thomas Steele, attempts to decipher Stowe's theological position in terms of different biblical traditions concerning the nature of Jesus Christ. In "Tom and Eva: Mrs. Stowe's Two Dying Christs," Steele reiterates the common interpretation of these two characters as Christ-figures in Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel. "Eva approaches death like the Christ of the Last Discourse in St. John's gospel, Uncle Tom like the Suffering Servant of the synoptic tradition" (85). He uses some excellent textual arguments for this point, including the fact that Eva constantly uses language drawn from the Gospel of John shortly before her death, and the idea of a "suffering servant" is not very far removed from the actual suffering which the slave Uncle Tom suffered at the hands of Simon Legree. Nonetheless, the once-for-all nature of the sacrifice of Christ in evangelical Protestantism is particularly important in terms of the way that the doctrines of justification and sanctification were formulated, and the unique nature of this sacrifice is certainly important in American evangelical Christianity. While Steele's sensitivity to Stowe's use of Scripture is insightful, the need to understand Tom and Eva apart from their current status as "Christ-figures" in the available literature must be countered to deal with Stowe's theological realities.

Some of the most interesting contemporary interpretations of Stowe's theological outlook in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* have begun to take account of Stowe's inherited doctrinal Calvinism. In "Confronting Antichrist: The Influence of Jonathan Edwards's Millennial Vision," Helen Petter Westra traces Harriet Beecher Stowe's millennial eschatology to

Edwardsean Calvinism. As “A self-described product of Calvinism, she generally upheld its views of God's sovereignty, humanity's fall, Christ's redemptive work, and the Bible's infallibility” (141). Westra outlines the affinities of Stowe's novel with and Edwardsean eschatology. However, even Westra must admit points of departure between Edwards and Stowe, particularly with regard to ecumenism. Stowe's inclusion of Quakers and Catholics in her Christian vision is much more expansive than Jonathan Edwards' or Lyman Beecher's (150). Although the emphasis on Stowe's eschatology is helpful here, and useful to an understanding of Stowe as an evangelical, the actual denominational loyalties that Stowe holds are not as clear as a loyalty to Edwardsean Calvinism, as Westra asserts. Chapter two's close reading of the novel will argue for a more basic understanding of Stowe's version of Christianity.

The three groups of critics that have been outlined and discussed here – Stowe's secularist/naturalist critics, Stowe's feminist critics, and Stowe's sectarian critics – have begun to provide a mosaic of interpretations that can be put together to grasp the way in which Stowe's novel is Christian and the theological implications of Stowe's narrative. However, even in this fairly extensive swath of interpretations, religious elements of Stowe's discourse have yet to be considered by critics. What seems particularly lacking in the present critical discourse about Harriet Beecher Stowe is an essentially Christian reading of the text, one that accepts fully the Christian character of Stowe's worldview and which seeks to ascertain what this worldview looks like based on the clues Stowe left in her magnum opus and in other primary texts. This task occupies the second chapter. In the second chapter, a comprehensive theological interpretation of the novel will be offered, examining the basic tenets of evangelical Christianity and tracing their contours

in the scenes of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Particular attention will be paid to the use of Scripture in the dialogues Stowe constructs, the theological implications of allegory and character, and the overall trajectory of Stowe's theological reflections à la the novel. In general, I will argue for a view of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as the literary product of a nineteenth-century evangelical woman who ardently opposed slavery in the light of her conservative Christian convictions.

## CHAPTER II

### “THE VICTORY”: READING THE EVANGELICAL STOWE

In a brief literature review, chapter one of this discussion examined the modern critical gauntlet through which a contemporary theological interpreter of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* must charge. Essentially, these critics have generated three responses to the novel: these include a secular or naturalistic rejection of a perceived theology in the novel, an interpretive alignment of the novel with the modern feminist enterprise, or an attempt to identify the novel within one or another sectarian confessional position within Christianity. Still, few of these authors have thoroughly examined the novel in light of a thoroughly evangelical Christianity. Despite the divergent interpretations of modern critical scholars, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* can and must be understood as a literary artifact of American evangelical Christianity.

In seeking to demonstrate the extent to which *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a consciously *evangelical* Christian novel, an acceptable definition of the term “evangelical” must be adopted and applied to the theological conclusions which the novel suggests and sometimes directly preaches to the reader. Like most theological definitions, the history of defining “evangelical” is not an enterprise which can be engaged with mathematical accuracy, since evangelicalism is a Christian movement that continues to change and

adapt to its surroundings. To ensure that the present author does not taint his analysis by tailoring the definition of “evangelical” to a prior interpretation of the novel, the well-accepted “Bebbington quadrilateral,” with some qualifications, will be used to examine Stowe’s novel.

The Bebbington quadrilateral, named for historian David Bebbington, refers to the four-part definition of “evangelical” Christianity which he developed in his *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*. Although originally applied to British Christianity, it applies just as well to Christianity shaped by the Great Awakenings in the United States (Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity* 13). The Bebbington quadrilateral describes evangelicalism according to four key emphases:

conversionism (an emphasis on the “new birth” as a life-changing experience of God), biblicism (a reliance on the Bible as ultimate religious authority), activism (a concern for sharing the faith), and crucicentrism (a focus on Christ’s redeeming work on the cross, usually pictured as the only way of salvation). (13)

In Mark Noll’s *American Evangelical Christianity: An Introduction*, the noted evangelical historian from Wheaton College acknowledges the Bebbington quadrilateral as one of the most agreed upon and lasting definitions of evangelical faith. Another definitive work, *The Evangelicals: A Historical, Thematic, and Biographical Guide*, also acknowledges the normative nature of the Bebbington quadrilateral (Krapohl and Lippy 6-7).

Certainly, this interpretive lens does not account for the fullness of what “evangelical Christianity” usually encompasses. Many individuals and religious communities of the nineteenth century who qualify as evangelicals would probably

willingly conform to doctrinal standards like the Nicene Creed, the Westminster Confession of Faith, and other classic orthodox expressions of Christian beliefs. However, such doctrinal tests do not adequately convey the nature of evangelical religious practice, the evangelical Christian ethos, and other characteristics of this Christian movement. Evangelicalism, although strongly tending to affirm Christian orthodoxy, also affirms the importance of a life of faith totally transformed by the believer's experience of God's grace through Jesus Christ. This focus on the necessity of personal transformation through conversion will begin to explain the religious character of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

#### Conversionism

Stowe's conversionism can be construed in broader terms than specifically individual conversion to the Christian faith, but conversionism itself highlights the doctrine of regeneration, meaning literally "the new birth" by the Holy Spirit. Historian Mark Noll describes how this doctrine functioned in the preaching of one nineteenth-century evangelical leader: "Whitefield's message featured the 'New Birth,' a phrase taken from Jesus' dialogue with the Jewish leader Nicodemus as recorded in the third chapter of the Gospel of John. In Whitefield's sermons, the new birth grounded a compelling appeal to be converted" (Noll, *The Old Religion in a New World* 52). Nineteenth-century evangelicals highlighted this passage in the Gospel of John as well as other passages in the New Testament which describe the conversion to Christian faith as a "born-again" experience. The emerging evangelical churches and parachurch organizations of the burgeoning American nation coupled the orthodox Christian

theology of the established Reformed churches with a concern with an individual believer's personal testimony of Christian conversion.

A major theological underpinning of the doctrine of regeneration is the doctrine of justification by grace through faith. This Protestant teaching, famously articulated by Martin Luther, provides the doctrinal backbone of evangelical religious experience:

Luther insisted that this offer is not contingent in any way on one's ability to meet God's demands. For sinners – even sinful believers – are totally incapable of meeting God's standards. So the believer flees to Jesus, trusting upon Christ and what he has accomplished. Because of Jesus' atoning sacrifice and righteous life, those who have faith in Jesus know that they can stand in the presence of God without the fear of being punished. Reconciliation between God and the sinner is established. Salvation is an act of God's grace, a free gift. (Phillips and Okholm 162-63)

So although the doctrine of regeneration finds a partial basis in an individual evangelical believer's experience of forgiveness for sins and reconciliation to God, the doctrine also shares an organic connection with other important doctrines in confessional Protestantism. Both the nature of the conversion experience and its theological content will be important to the discussion of conversionism in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

In the vast canon of correspondence which Harriet Beecher Stowe collected during her lifetime, Stowe wrote frequently of theological topics, and these letters indicate that the doctrine of conversion by regeneration was one of the key aspects of her Christianity. Joan Hedrick, author of what is perhaps the most important Stowe biography of the late twentieth century, aggressively critiques the "patriarchal" Calvinism

of American Christianity in *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life*. In the midst of this dim view of Stowe's religious upbringing and what she sees as Stowe's rejection of it, she acknowledges Stowe's deep evangelical convictions concerning conversion:

As the evangelical emphasis on "experiential" religion and the necessity for a "second birth" became matters of dogma rather than experience, the conversion process was codified into a set formula and then held up as a yardstick against which to measure individual religious experiences. (144)

Given the considerable availability of the bulk of Stowe's correspondence, the careful reader of Stowe's writings can gain a deeper perspective on her theology without 20<sup>th</sup> century feminist hermeneutics. Stowe wrote with spiritual sensitivity and with keen insight on the issue of conversion by regeneration. In a June 16, 1845 letter to husband Calvin, Stowe shares her fatigue and her feelings of inadequacy in doing the vast array of domestic chores that she maintained as a nineteenth-century American wife and homemaker. Although she seems weary, she places her confidence in her relationship to God through faith:

God, the mighty God, is mine, of that I am sure, and I know He knows that though flesh and heart fail, I am all the while desiring and trying for his will alone. As to a journey, I need not ask a physician to see that it is needful to me as far as health is concerned, that is to say, all human appearances are that way, but I feel no particular choice about it. If God wills I go. He can easily find means. (111)

Not only does Stowe assert confidence in her converted state through faith, but she also stresses the fact that this confidence is independent of her own works. This emphasis

highlights her commitment to the doctrine of justification by grace through faith. As a result, she holds no doubts concerning the state of her soul before God.

Stowe primarily understood her conversion to have been wrought through the person of Jesus Christ. Christology, then, is very important to Stowe's evangelical theological convictions. The experience of being given over to Jesus Christ was the key mark of what Stowe regarded as her conversion experience (to be discussed later), and she regarded her continuing relationship with Jesus Christ as the seal of this assurance, as indicated by this early letter to Edward Beecher:

I wish I could describe to you how I feel when I pray. I feel that I love God, - that is, that I love Christ, - that I find comfort and happiness in it, and yet it is not that kind of comfort which would arise from free communication of my wants and sorrows to a friend. I sometimes wish that the Saviour were visibly present in this world, that I might go to Him for a solution of some of my difficulties. . . . Do you think, my dear brother, that there is such a thing as so realizing the presence and character of God that He can supply the place of earthly friends? I really wish to know what you think of this. . . . Do you suppose that God really loves sinners before they come to Him? Some say that we ought to tell them that God hates them, that He looks on them with utter abhorrence, and that they must love Him before He will look on them otherwise. Is it right to say to those who are in deep distress, "God is interested in you; He feels for and loves you"? (61-62)

The implicit critique of Beecher's Calvinism notwithstanding in this passage, Stowe believes in a relationship with God mediated through Christ. Furthermore, she recognizes a difference between the sinner "before" knowing God and the sinner "after"

knowing God. This constitutes Stowe's key evangelical assumption in this passage. Stowe seems confident of her own Christian faith – she believes that she has “come to Christ.”

She does exhibit a great deal of concern for whether or not those close to her are regenerate. A particularly poignant example is her correspondence with Eliza Stowe on the subject of her son Henry's death in 1857. Less than a decade after the publication of her landmark novel, Stowe's cherished son drowned, leaving his mother to sort out the possible state of his soul. In several letters to close friends, Stowe expressed a tentative hope that her young son was saved by Christ and enjoying the state of the blessed in heaven:

Yet right above where their boats were gliding in the evening light lay the bend in the river ... from whence our boy went upward to heaven. To heaven -- if earnest, manly purpose, if sincere, deliberate strife with besetting sin is accepted of God, as I firmly believe it is. Our dear boy was but a beginner in the right way. Had he lived, we had hoped to see all wrong gradually fall from his soul as the worn-out calyx drops from the perfected flower. But Christ has taken him into his own teaching. “And one view of Jesus as He is Will strike all sin forever dead.” (242)

Even in this letter, Stowe does not appear to hold perfect confidence that her son has been saved. Stowe works through the metaphor of Henry as a flower in the garden of God, sharing her intimations that he has been delivered by Christ. Then she ends the letter with an ominous expression of doubt: “What Henry is, is known to Jesus only” (243). Stowe's wishful thinking notwithstanding, she belonged to a tradition of Christianity that regarded regeneration by the Holy Spirit and personal assurance of that process as the

only sure ground for Christian conversion and eternal salvation. She is certain from her religious experiences that God loves human beings, but her religious experiences also tell her that conversion comes by regeneration, and so her letters show that she was working through two seemingly paradoxical religious convictions. Continually in her correspondence, Stowe returns to the fact of her relationship with God through Christ as reason to be unafraid in the midst of trials:

A day or two ago, my mind lay clear as glass, and I thought I had no will but God's, and could have none. Lo! his hand touches a spring, and I see what poor trash I am. But I am his chosen one for all that, and I shall reign with Him when all the stars have done blossoming, and if I am so poor I am betrothed to One who is Heir of all things. (169)

Far from revealing a nascent opposition to the doctrinal Calvinism of her Reformed clerical relatives, Stowe's sense of her spiritual security lies in her status as a possession of God. As the above correspondence shows, Stowe spoke of God being hers and of belonging to God, language which historians record her as using on the occasion of her first experience of conversion:

The family story of Harriet Beecher's conversion at the age of thirteen portrays a rather mild affair in which the schoolgirl announced to Lyman Beecher after hearing one of his sermons that "I have given myself to Jesus, and he has taken me." (Hedrick 144)

Although some have argued that Stowe's concept of conversion is not the dramatic, "Damascus road" experience that some evangelicals describe, Stowe understood the significance of the conversion experience, however it might be diffused over time. The

narrator relates many experiences of Christian conversion in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but at least one of them (the conversion of George Harris) takes place over a considerable length of time and is accompanied by a similar confession to the one made by Stowe as a teenager.

Critic Jane Tompkins identifies Stowe's method of characterization as essentially religious – that is,

Its characters, like the figures in an allegory, do not change or develop but reveal themselves in response to the demands of a situation. They are not defined primarily by their mental and emotional characteristics – that is to say, psychologically – but soteriologically, according to whether they are saved or damned. (513)

Although she is correct that Stowe's method in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is soteriological, her assumption that the characters are revealed rather than affected in the narrative must be challenged in the light of a thoroughly evangelical reading of the novel. More accurately, Stowe's characters in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are characterized not according to some static state of nature, but according to the extent to which their hearts have been transformed by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. The broad theme of conversionism plays an important role in the characterization of two minor characters in the narrative – Mr. Haley and Topsy.

Mr. Haley's status as a villain in the novel is cemented not only by his occupation as a slave trader but by his status as an unregenerate individual. He has not experienced the reconciliation to God through Jesus Christ that marks evangelical conversion, and Haley holds a view of religion that is almost diametrically opposed to that of evangelical

Christianity. He effectively rejects the doctrine of justification by grace through faith, favoring a self-made moralism (rendered the more despicable as Stowe reveals Haley's moral depravity), planning a future act of repentance that denies the urgency of the evangelical message, and denigrating the genuine Christian piety of slaves as merely a useful social tool. In characterizing him in this way, Stowe reveals how inimical such a slave trader's spirituality is to the orthodox evangelical faith held by many American Christians of her time.

Most commentators on Stowe's Christianity have failed to take notice of the religious morality play that constitutes the first chapter of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. "In Which the Reader is Introduced to a Man of Humanity" highlights what Stowe obviously sees as the sub-biblical standard of Haley's religion. Both Haley's self-understanding as a self-made man of religion and his understanding of the instrumentality of slave religion are immediately revealed by Stowe in this chapter. Haley thinks of himself as a pious and "religious" man because his manner of treating slaves is relatively less brutal (in his own mind) than that of his peers:

"It don't look well, now, for a feller to be praisin' himself; but I say it jest because it's the truth. I believe I'm reckoned to bring in about the finest droves of niggers that is brought in,-at least, I've been told so; if I have once, I reckon I have a hundred times,-all in good case,-fat and likely, and I lose as few as any man in the business. And I lays it all to my management, sir; and humanity, sir, I may say, is the great pillar of *my* management." (7-8)

Haley's sense of religion is deeply caught up in external matters of moral observance, a half-hearted, self-governed form of attempting to "keep the Law" which nineteenth-

century evangelical thought would have found odious. Furthermore, he directly connects his self-perceived humanitarian sentiment to the profit motive. Even when Haley quotes Scripture, Stowe shows the unregenerate state of his heart. In trying to convince the relatively good-natured Arthur Shelby to sell his relatively well-kept slaves, Haley preaches, “Every man, you know, Mr. Shelby, naturally thinks well of his own ways; and I think I treat niggers just about as well as it’s ever worth while to treat ‘em” (9). This statement appears to be a reference to biblical verses like “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the heart” (Proverbs 21:2, KJV). Whether or not Stowe’s audience would have been readily familiar with this particular verse, it is significant that the full verse which Haley partially and perhaps unwittingly references strikes a contrast between a human and a divine standard of “rightness” – the very dichotomy which constitutes the divide between an evangelical doctrine of justification by grace through faith and the kind of religious externalism which Haley represents. This clever use of biblical material provides one example of Stowe’s profoundly religious mode of characterization; we will consider this issue further in the discussion of Stowe’s biblicism.

This chapter also uncovers Haley’s view of the Christian piety of slaves as a useful social tool. Before Haley’s more expansive treatment of his own piety, he treats slave religion in a similar utilitarian manner:

“Some folks don’t believe there is pious niggers, Shelby ... but *I do*. I had a fellow, now, in this yer last lot I took to Orleans-‘t was as good as a meetin, now, really, to hear that critter pray; and he was quite gentle and quiet like. He fetched me a good sum, too, for I bought him cheap of a man that was ‘bliged to sell out;

so I realized six hundred on him. Yes, I consider religion a valeyable thing in a nigger, when it's the genuine article, and no mistake.” (4)

The affront to Christian sensibility here is clear – it seems that the more the Christian piety of slaves represents genuine Christian piety as an evangelical like Stowe would understand it, the more Haley is willing to abuse that religious feeling for the sin-darkened lucre of the slave trade. In this first chapter of the novel, Stowe directs a considerable amount of narrative skill toward describing evangelical Christian spirituality through the *via negative* of Haley's unregenerate excuse for religious sentiment. The hypocrisy of Mr. Haley is plain when it is considered from a conversionist standpoint.

Another dark satire Stowe offers on Haley's substandard spirituality regards his designs on planned repentance at the end of a decadent life as a slave trader. When Eliza escapes with son Harry to rescue him from the vile hands of Haley, the budding humanitarian slave trader enlists the help of Marks and Tom Loker, the latter of whose slave trading methods Haley critiques in chapter one in his conversation with Arthur Shelby. Even wicked Tom Loker suspects the thin veneer of Haley's Christian life when Haley delivers one of his frequent sermons:

“I'll say this now, I al'ays meant to drive my trade so as to make money on 't, *fust and foremost*, as much as any man: but, then, trade an't everything, and money an't everything, 'cause we's all got souls. I don't care, now, who hears me say it,- and I think a cussed sight on it,-so I may as well come out with it. I b'lieve in religion, and one of these days, when I've got matters tight and snug, I calculates to tend to my soul and them ar matters; and so what's the use of doin' any more

wickedness than 's re'lly necessary?-it don't seem to me it's 't all prudent."  
(69)

Haley thinks that his plan is solid as Providence until Stowe uses Tom Loker to show that even in the eyes of a sinning slave runner:

"I can stand most any talk o' yourn but your pious talk,-that kills me right up. After all, what's the odds between me and you? 'Tan't that you care one bit more, or have a bit more feelin',-it's clean, sheer, dog meanness, wanting to cheat the devil and save your own skin; don't I see through it? And your 'getting' religion,' as you call it, arter all, is too p'isin mean for any critter;-run up a bill with the devil all your life, and then sneak out when pay time comes! Boh!"  
(69)

The novel severely critiques Haley's religiosity. Haley has ignored the crisis of faith which enables the repentant to be saved in the evangelical worldview; instead, he has adopted a religion of works-righteousness which, Haley thinks, will allow him to sin unrepentantly without real cost. Just as Haley uses slaves as tools for his own financial profit, Stowe reveals that Haley tries to use God as a tool for his salvation. In characterizing Haley in this way, she makes a connection between his spiritual state and his material station in life as a slave trader.

Stowe affords the reader yet another glimpse of Haley's spiritual state at the end of chapter four, when Arthur Shelby reluctantly sells Uncle Tom and Harry to the trader. In reassuring Mr. Shelby of the fate of his former slaves, Haley says, "If there's anything that I thank the Lord for, it is that I am never noways cruel" (33). The narrator then notes that this declaration reassured Mr. Shelby very little. One can imagine that a

nineteenth-century evangelical would not share Haley's optimism concerning his nature. Indeed, "In Which the Reader Is Introduced to a Man of Humanity," the sharply satirical title of chapter one, places such a reaction at the exposition of the novel itself. The textual evidence, then, suggests that the tone of the narrative also balks at Haley's confession in chapter four. The Man of Humanity is caught in a sinful institution, as Stowe indicates in her notes on Haley in *The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*:

If there is an ill-used class of men in the world, it is certainly the slave-traders; for, if there is no harm in the institution of slavery - if it is a divinely-appointed and honourable one, like civil government and the family state, and like other species of property relation - then there is no earthly reason why a man may not as innocently be a slave trader as any other kind of trader. (7)

Nonetheless, Stowe rejected the idea of slavery as an inherently "honorable" institution both in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and in its *Key*; Stowe casts Haley's moralistic spirituality in contrast with what nineteenth-century evangelicals would consider a healthy relationship with God through Christ.

Not only did Stowe deplore the idea of slavery as a noble institution, but she also seems to have regarded slavery as a stumbling-block to the genuine preaching and teaching of the Christian Gospel. In Part Four of *The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe treats extensively of the incompatibility of the Gospel and slavery. In a chapter titled "Is the System of Religion Which Is Taught the Slave the Gospel?" Stowe comments on catechisms, sermons, and other evangelical religious materials given to slaves that encouraged them to submit totally to the yoke of American slavery (480-81). She

devotes a great deal of attention to reproducing these materials, and then proceeds to preach vociferously against their contents:

Who preaches the gospel to the slave-coffles? Who preaches the gospel in the slave-prisons? If we consider the tremendous extent of this internal trade - if we read papers with columns of auction advertisements of human beings, changing hands as freely as if they were dollar-bills instead of human creatures -- we shall then realise how utterly all those influences of religious instruction must be nullified by leaving the subjects of them exposed "to all the vicissitudes of property." (493)

Harriet Beecher Stowe exhibits a characteristically evangelical concern for the proclamation of the Gospel. That she believes that the Gospel ought to be preached to black slaves indicates both her fierce insistence on the exigency of this orthodox Gospel and on the fact that both black slaves and their white owners were in need of Jesus Christ the Savior. Furthermore, she sees the evangelical goal of conversion through belief in the Gospel as utterly incompatible with the keeping of blacks as property under the economy of slavery. This belief in the necessity of Christian conversion and in the incongruity of the slave trade with this religious imperative lies at the core of the meaning of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Stowe illustrates this conflict through the conversion of George Harris, who becomes a follower of Christ in spite of and not because of slavery. According to the evangelical theology of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, George Harris is unable to accept the Gospel until passionate Christian resistance to slavery and its deleterious effects finally persuades him.

In chapter three, “The Husband and Father,” George and Eliza Harris engage in a brief interchange rife with spiritual import, and George reveals the connection between his religious skepticism and his outrage against the evils of slavery. George expresses his anger at his master for taking away a factory job he had gained through honest labor, vaguely threatening to secure revenge (18-19). When Eliza encourages George to trust in God’s deliverance, he replies, “I an’t a Christian like you, Eliza; my heart’s full of bitterness; I can’t trust in God. Why does he let things be so?” (20). The searing theological content of George’s complaint is undeniable: “Who made this man my master? That’s what I want to know!” (19). Toward the end of the chapter, George announces his plans to escape to Canada and somehow purchase Eliza and child Harry out of slavery; when Eliza encourages him to pray about the matter, he replies, “Pray for me, Eliza; perhaps the good Lord will hear *you*” (21). George rails against a society which regards slavery as divinely ordained; he also rails against a divine being who would ordain slavery. Early in the novel, then, Stowe articulates George’s theodicy— for George, the existence of a good God and the lack of resistance to an evil human institution like slavery are mutually exclusive conditions.

Stowe uses George’s spiritual pilgrimage again to set up the theological controversy of Christianity and slavery when the reader encounters him in chapter nine, “In Which Property Gets into an Improper State of Mind.” George, traveling in disguise on his way to Canada, runs into Mr. Wilson, the kindly factory-owner for whom George’s cruel master had once hired him out. Although Wilson seems curiously hesitant to return the escaped slave of a former business partner, the factory owner does attempt to

quench George's desire to seek liberation by posing traditional theological justifications for slavery:

“Why, George, no-no-it won't do; this way of talking is wicked-unscriptural. George, you've got a hard master-in fact, he is-well he conducts himself reprehensibly-I can't pretend to defend him. But you know how the angel commanded Hagar to return back to her mistress, and submit herself under her hand; and the apostle sent Onesimus back to his master.” (112)

George's struggles with Christianity and slavery are too basic and existential to bother with engaging in apologetics with Mr. Wilson; Stowe argues systematically and articulately against a barrage of such arguments in *The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*. But George responds to this familiar set of arguments in a fashion that reveals some of his deepest spiritual convictions and longings:

“Don't quote Bible at me that way, Mr. Wilson,” said George, with a flashing eye, “don't! for my wife is a Christian, and I mean to be, if ever I get to where I can; but to quote Bible to a fellow in my circumstances, is enough to make him give it up altogether. I appeal to God Almighty;-I'm willing to go with the case to Him, and ask Him if I do wrong to seek my freedom.” (112)

Ambiguous in this context is what George means when he says he “means to be” a Christian “if ever I get to where I can.” But his present state of slavery, as noted above, prevents Christianity as a real possibility for him. “All men are free and equal *in the grave*,” (116) he notes in his despair. Like Eliza, Mr. Wilson encourages George to “trust in the Lord,” (118) to which George responds, “*Is there a God to trust in ... O, I've seen things all my life that have made me feel that there can't be a God. You*

Christians don't know how these things look to us. There's a God for you, but is there any for us?" (118) By his own confession, George's experience of evil in the world (particularly those evils promoted and permitted by slavery) has left him unconverted and unconvinced of the truth of the Gospel.

At the end of the chapter, Mr. Wilson's response to George's question and his charity in dealing with George does not leave George unaffected; in this scene, Stowe reveals that George begins to apprehend the Gospel through a living Christian witness against slavery. Mr. Wilson responds that there is a God of justice "who will set things right" (118). The narrator notes that "The real piety and benevolence of the simple old man invested him with a temporary dignity and authority, as he spoke" (118). George's response indicates a slight change in his outlook: "George stopped his distracted walk up and down the room, stood thoughtfully for a moment, and then said, quietly, 'Thank you for saying that, my good friend; I'll *think of that*'" (118). In an earlier chapter, George recognized his wife as a Christian; now he actually acknowledges a former slave owner as a Christian (117). Although George encounters more openly benevolent witnesses to the Christian faith (as the discussion of the Quaker settlement below demonstrates), this small act of charity on the part of Mr. Wilson is not without its spiritual dimensions for George's experience. In recognizing a former master as a Christian, George seems more willing to explore the possibility of God's existence and the validity of Christian faith. In the slow soteriological process of Stowe's characterization, his path to Christian conversion begins with this encounter.

In chapter thirteen, "The Quaker Settlement," Stowe shows how the consistent opposition of the Quakers to slavery and their willingness to help the Harris family

escape oppression warms George's heart to the possibility of believing in God and in the Gospel. The narrator records little dialogue of George speaking, but notes that George has never before sat at table to eat with white people. In her/his third-person omniscience, the narrator reveals George's spiritual state:

This, indeed, was a home,-*home*,-a word that George had never yet known a meaning for; and a belief in God, and trust in his providence, began to encircle his heart, as, with a golden cloud of protection and confidence, dark, misanthropic, pining, atheistic doubts, and fierce despair, melted away before the light of a living Gospel, breathed in living faces, preached by a thousand unconscious acts of love and good will, which, like the cup of cold water given in the name of a disciple, shall never lose their reward. (142)

Although the Quakers successfully harbors the Harris family before the next tumultuous steps of their journey out of slavery, the narrator shows that even their simplest acts of kindness to George Harris witnesses to him of the Good News. Stowe herself wrote much on the spirituality of the Quakers in the religious polemic of *The Key*:

But will it be said, "The abolition enterprise was begun in a wrong spirit, by reckless, meddling, impudent fanatics?" Well, supposing that this were true, how came it to be so? If the Church of Christ had begun it *right*, these so-called fanatics would not have begun it *wrong*. In a deadly pestilence, if the right physicians do not prescribe, everybody will prescribe - men, women, and children will prescribe; because something must be done. If the Presbyterian Church, in 1818, had pursued the course the Quakers did, there never would have

been any fanaticism. The Quakers did all by brotherly love. They melted the chains of Mammon only in the fires of a divine charity. (436)

Stowe viewed the Quakers as model Christians, a view not shared by other conservative Protestant Americans like Jonathan Edwards. In keeping with Stowe's evangelicalism, however, the Quakers function in George Harris' conversion as witnesses of the Gospel, reflecting an emphasis on the *euangelion* as the heart of Christian faith.

When the reader meets George Harris again in chapter seventeen, "The Freeman's Defence," George is not merely legally free. The once atheistic, embittered slave is on a spiritual path to freedom as well as on a literal, geographic odyssey. As the Hallidays and Simeon Fletcher endeavor to liberate the Harris family, for the first time George expresses a strong personal desire to be a Christian:

"I'll try to act worthy of a free man. I'll try to feel like a Christian. God Almighty knows that I've meant to do well,-tried hard to do well,-when everything has been hard against me; and now I'll forget all the past, and put away every hard and bitter feeling, and read my Bible, and learn to be a good man." (188)

George's encounters with the Quakers change his perception of Christianity and his willingness to at least tentatively think about believing in it. Nor is it merely the Christian love of white people that stirs George's sentiments. George speaks of his wife's love in unabashedly theological terms: "...Till I knew you, Eliza, no creature ever had loved me, but my poor, heart-broken mother and sister...And your loving me,-why it was almost like raising one from the dead! I've been a new man ever since!" (192) However, George is not yet fully persuaded, as his ruminations on the theodicy indicate:

“Is God on their side? ... Does he see all they do? Why does he let such things happen? And they tell us that the Bible is on their side; certainly all the power is. They are rich, and healthy, and happy; they are members of churches of churches, expecting to go to heaven; and they get along so easy in the world, and have it all their own way; and poor, honest, faithful Christians,-Christians as good or better than they,-are lying in the very dust under their feet. They buy ‘em and sell ‘em, and make trade of their heart’s blood, and groans and tears,-and God *lets* them.”  
(193)

Although the narrator suggests that the kind works and words of his Quaker fellow travelers has made an impression on George earlier in the chapter, still George has not confessed a personal faith in Christ and testified to a conversion. George’s initial resistance to the intellectual issues of orthodox Christian faith remains.

Although the novel does not provide a specific account of George’s conversion, George’s letter, recorded in chapter forty-three, indicates that George eventually becomes a Christian around the time of his arrival in Canada. Although George Harris’ letter primarily addresses his desire to relocate to Liberia as an African nationalist, his personal resolution of the theodicy shine forth in the document:

“I grant that this Liberia may have subserved all sorts of purposes, by being played off, in the hands of our oppressors, against us. Doubtless the scheme may have been used, in unjustifiable ways, as a means of retarding our emancipation. But the question to me, Is there not a God above all man’s schemes? May He not have overruled their designs, and founded us a nation by them?” (435-36)

Although Harris does not directly and literally assert the existence of divine Providence here, other passages suggest that he answers “yes” to the above questions, particularly when he says, “*Our nation* [Liberia] shall roll the tide of civilization and Christianity along its shores, and plant there mighty republics, that, growing with the rapidity of tropical vegetation, shall be for all coming ages” (436) and when he notes that he trusts that God will cause Europe to become “a grand council of free nations” (436).

Furthermore, in this letter George personally confesses not only to being a Christian, but to being interested in the spread of Christianity on the African continent:

“... as a Christian, I look for another era to arise. On its borders I trust we stand; and the throes that now convulse the nations are, to my hope, but the birth-pangs of an hour of universal peace and brotherhood ... I trust that the development of Africa is to be essentially a Christian one.” (437)

George provides a deeper account of his new-found Christian faith in the letter:

“In myself, I confess, I am feeble for this,-full half the blood in my veins is the hot and hasty Saxon; but I have an eloquent preacher of the Gospel ever by my side, in the person of my beautiful wife. When I wander, her gentler spirit ever restores me, and keeps before my eyes the Christian calling and mission of our race. As a Christian patriot, as a teacher of Christianity, I got to *my country*,-my chosen, my glorious Africa!-and to her, in my heart, I sometimes apply those splendid words of prophecy: ‘Whereas thou hast been forsaken and hated, so that no man went through thee; *I* will make thee an eternal excellence, a joy of many generations!’” (437)

George triumphantly ends this brief statement of Christian faith with a reference to Isaiah 60:15, a text which personifies the city of Jerusalem as a woman and announces Yahweh's plans for "Dame Zion's" redemption (Clifford 589). This verse constitutes the capstone of Stowe's meticulous soteriological characterization of George Harris in the time of his conversion to Christianity. Stowe noted in her *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* that slavery was an impediment to the preaching of the Gospel and its acceptance on the part of African slaves. In George Harris, Harriet Beecher Stowe provides a peculiarly allegorical example of this: the progress of his conversion corresponds to the extent from which he has escaped from slavery. The text from Isaiah, which proclaims redemption to the people of a particular place (Jerusalem) fits George Harris' Christian experience; though he finds explicit religious piety impossible in the bonds of Southern slavery, he vouchsafes his "Liberty" (the title of chapter thirty-seven) as well as his Christian faith when he arrives in the Canaan of Canada.

The text being superabundant in examples, Mr. Haley and George Harris are merely two literary demonstrations of Stowe's theological conviction that the entire system of slavery makes evangelical faith in Christ almost impossible. Stowe characterizes the piety and spiritual health of her characters, as this discussion of Haley and Harris has shown, to the extent that they have or have not extricated themselves from the sinful institution of slavery. Stowe herself seems to directly declare this in the Author's Introduction to an 1878 edition of the novel:

"Uncle Tom's Cabin" shows that, under circumstances of utter desolation and despair, the religion of Christ can enable the poorest and most ignorant human being, not merely to submit, but to triumph,-that the soul of the lowest and

weakest, by its aid, can become strong in superhuman virtue, and rise above every threat and terror and danger in a sublime assurance of an ever-present love and an immortal life. (xxv)

As Stowe herself suggests, the spiritual ruminations of these characters force the reader to grapple not only with the ideological implications of slavery but also to grapple with the ideological implications of Christianity. As a Christian novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* reveals the author's personal emphasis on conversion by regeneration. The novel consistently aligns liberation from physical slavery by abolition with liberation from spiritual slavery by conversion through regeneration. In regarding *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a revival sermon, one would necessarily regard the whole Bible as its selected text. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe regards conversion through regeneration and repentance from the sin of slavery as mandated by God; she found justification for these beliefs in evangelical Christianity's sole authoritative source of divine revelation: the Scriptures.

### Biblicism

Having summarized the novel's propensity for a *conversionist* Christianity, we now turn to the use of Scripture in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Biblicism organically connects to the conversionary aspect of evangelical Christianity and provides a theological context for conversion itself. Although the Bible remains a normative text for most major branches of Christianity, evangelical Christianity holds an understanding of the Bible that regards it as a complete revelation of God and a solitary authority over the life of the converted believer (Phillips and Okholm 46). Furthermore, evangelicals regard the Bible to be a work of supernatural origin:

Scripture's self-authenticating authority refers to the conjunction of the inspired Holy Scripture and the Spirit's supernatural illumination [of the reader]. Here Scripture confronts one as having God's own authority. God's Word shatters the subject's own ideas and establishes itself as the authority over the believer. Only then is Scripture's authority as God's own Word self-evident to the believer. (Phillips and Okholm 49)

Establishing the biblicism of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, then, requires more than merely demonstrating that Stowe uses Scripture, a fact readily established in the above discussion of the novel's conversionism; instead, it requires showing the extent to which *Uncle Tom's Cabin* reflects common evangelical assumptions about the Bible.

Harriet Beecher Stowe seems to share the evangelical concern for the study of the Bible and its importance in Christian discipleship in her extended polemic on slavery's horrendous effects on the preaching of the Gospel in *The Key*:

Again these teachers tell them that they should search the Scriptures most earnestly, diligently, and continually, at the same time declaring that it is not their intention to interfere with the laws which forbid their being taught to read. Searching the Scriptures, slaves are told, means coming to people who are willing to read to them. Yes; but if there be no one willing to do this, what then? Anyone whom this catechism has thus instructed is sold off to a plantation on Red River ... no Bible goes with him; his Christian instructors, in their care not to interfere with his civil condition, have deprived him of the power of reading; and in this land of darkness his oral instruction is but as a faded dream. Let any of us ask for what sum we would be deprived of all power of ever reading the Bible for

ourselves, and made entirely dependent on the reading of others - especially if we were liable to fall into such hands as slaves are - and then let us determine whether a system of religious instruction, which begins by declaring that it has no intention to interfere with this cruel legal deprivation, is the gospel! (482-83)

Stowe indicates in *The Key* that she respected the genuine efforts of those who proclaimed the Gospel to the slaves and provided them with catechesis and read the Bible to them (480). In her "Author's Introduction" to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, she describes the revival of interest in and the rapid increase in sales of the Bible that Heinrich Heine sparked in Europe when he remarked that his admiration for the novel had led him to re-examine the Judeo-Christian Scriptures (xxv). Stowe goes on to describe how

The accomplished translator of M. Charpentier's edition said to the author that, by the researches necessary to translate correctly the numerous citations of Scripture in the work, she had been led to a most intimate knowledge of the sacred writings in French. (xxiv-xxv)

Stowe seems elated at the spiritual ripples which her novel incited in this Introduction.

Stowe's written correspondence shows that she regarded the Bible as the only certain touchstone of faith and practice, a standard against which even her intense religious experiences were to be tested. Most Stowe scholars have failed to fully document the evangelical author's attraction to the budding ritual practices of nineteenth-century spiritualism, which experienced a heyday in the North in Stowe's time. Even as Stowe dabbled in these practices, her devotion to the Bible as the Word of God remained. A January 16, 1860 letter to Calvin Stowe reveals this conviction as she speaks of a medium adjudged by Stowe to be both a spiritualist and a devout Christian:

My advice was substantially to try the spirits whether they were of God, - to keep close to the Bible and prayer, and then accept whatever came ... One thing I am convinced of, - that spiritualism is a reaction from the intense materialism of the present age. Luther, when he recognized a personal devil, was much nearer right. We ought to enter fully, at least, into the spiritualism of the Bible. Circles and spiritual jugglery I regard as the lying signs and wonders, with all deceivableness of unrighteousness; but there is a real scriptural spiritualism which has fallen into disuse, and must be revived, and there are, doubtless, people who, from some constitutional formation, can more readily receive the impressions of the surrounding spiritual world. Such were apostles, prophets, and workers of miracles. (253-254)

Although Harriet Beecher Stowe attested to intense spiritual experiences in her life, including the vision which inspired her to write *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe's reverence for what she believed to be God's self-revelation to her was matched by her reverence for what she believed to be the revealed Word of God. Her advice to "test the spirits," a reference to I John 4:1, places authority in the divinely inspired New Testament text over the religious experiences of the believer, a belief in Scripture which characteristically marks evangelical Christianity.

But the use of Scripture in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* reflects a far deeper affinity with traditional evangelical doctrine on the nature of the Bible than any of these ancillary texts suggest. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* portrays the Bible as a source of immense spiritual power, both in facilitating Christian conversion and in preserving those who are already converted.

Though Uncle Tom's Christian piety manifests itself frequently in the novel without direct recourse to the Bible, the narrator suggests that the devotional reading of Scripture provides Uncle Tom with a supernatural devotion to God. Uncle Tom reads a verse from Hebrews, one reference of many in the novel to a spiritual reward in the hereafter. The narrator comments on Uncle Tom's devotional:

These words of an ancient volume, got up principally by "ignorant and unlearned men," have, through all time, kept up, somehow, a strange sort of power over the minds of poor, simple fellows, like Tom. They stir up the soul from its depths, and rouse, as with a trumpet call, courage, energy, and enthusiasm, where before was only the blackness of despair. (120)

Not only does the narrator identify the Scriptures as part of Uncle Tom's strength, but she/he also seems to assent here to the factual validity of Acts 4:13, drawn almost verbatim from the Authorized Version: "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus." To assert that Peter, John, and other apostles who, according to Acts, "had been with Jesus" authored the Bible over which Uncle Tom pores is not a typical assertion of liberal theological modernists. Instead, this appeal to apostolic authority is more typical of a staunch evangelical belief in the divinely-inspired nature of the Holy Scriptures. The next line of the novel reveals the unregenerate Mr. Haley (a characterization defended in the above discussion of conversionism) to be removing from his pocket "sundry newspapers," an ironic juxtaposition against Uncle Tom's Christian piety. More than a mildly humorous distinction between the two men, the focus of their reading material indicates the

attentions of their hearts. This contrast, then, further suggests that the theology of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* sees the Bible as more than a collection of morals and stories normative for Christian faith, as theological modernists did, but rather that the Bible is itself an accurate, divinely inspired, authoritative text.

Stowe's first characterization of Uncle Tom in the novel, in chapter four, provides a view into Uncle Tom's biblicism which shows the roots of his spirituality in sacred Scriptures. In describing Uncle Tom's propensity for prayer, the narrator notes,

But it was in prayer that he especially excelled. Nothing could exceed the touching simplicity, the child-like earnestness, of his prayer, enriched with the language of Scripture, which seemed so entirely to have wrought itself into his being, as to have become part of himself .... (32)

The hero of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, then, draws part of his spiritual strength from the Bible. This idea of the Holy Spirit's operation through the reading of Scripture appears throughout the novel's theological treatment of the Holy Scriptures.

The biblicism of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is further revealed through the narrator's description of Uncle Tom's devotional habits in chapter fourteen, "Evangeline." The narrator exalts Uncle Tom's lack of formal education and how this allows him to fully appreciate the vast worth of the Scriptures:

Having learned late in life, Tom was but a slow reader, and passed on laboriously from verse to verse. Fortunate for him was it that the book he was intent on was one which slow reading cannot injure, -nay, one whose words, like ingots of gold, seem often to need to be weighed separately, that the mind may take in their priceless value. (146)

Although the explicit doctrine of the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures did not appear until the heated theological battles of the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy of the early twentieth century, the narrator seems to share a traditional evangelical regard for the plain truth of the Scriptures and for the value of each word within them. Moreover, the value of Scripture for Uncle Tom himself does not lie in the rationality or the outside authentication of the text, but on something of a self-authenticating nature which evangelicals themselves espouse, as the narrator indicates:

Cicero, when he buried his darling and only daughter, had a heart as full of honest grief as poor Tom's ... but Cicero could pause over no such sublime words of hope, and look to no such future reunion; and if he *had* seen them, ten to one he would not have believed,-he must fill his head first with a thousand questions of authenticity of manuscript, and correctness of translation. But, to poor Tom, there it lay, just what he needed, so evidently true and divine that the possibility of a question never entered his simple head. It must be true; for, if not true, how could he live? (146)

Far from ridiculing or castigating Uncle Tom's lack of formal education, then, the novel seems to invest it with a special spiritual sensitivity. In the view of the novel's evangelical theology, this "simple head"-ed attitude toward the Bible enables Uncle Tom to effectively apply it to his Christian life.

Moreover, the narrator identifies Uncle Tom's devotion to the Bible as influential in the development of his moral sympathies in chapter twelve, "Select Incident of Lawful Trade." In describing Uncle Tom's horror at seeing a recently purchased slave deprived of her only child, she/he comments:

To him, it looked like something unutterably horrible and cruel, because, poor, ignorant black soul! he had not learned to generalize, and to take enlarged views. If he had only been instructed by certain ministers of Christianity, he might have thought better of it, and seen in it an every-day incident of a lawful trade; a trade which is the vital support of an institution which an American divine tells us has “*no evils but such as are inseparable from any other relations in social and domestic life.*” But Tom, as we see, being a poor, ignorant fellow, whose reading had been confined to the New Testament, could not comfort and solace himself with views like these. His very soul bled within him for what seemed to him the *wrongs* of the poor suffering thing that lay like a crushed reed on the boxes; the feeling, living, bleeding, yet immortal *thing*, which American state law coolly classes with the bundles, and bales, and boxes, among which she is lying. (132)

Already the narrator’s apparent assent to the authority of the Holy Scriptures (and the New Testament especially) has been delineated. Read in this light, the narrator must be fiercely ironic. She/he draws a binary opposition between the pretext for the “Select Incident of Lawful Trade” and the New Testament pretext for Uncle Tom’s feelings on the subject. Thus the narrator seems confident that the New Testament itself must speak differently than the some of the prevailing winds of doctrine of the day. The narrative effect produced here depends heavily on a view of the Bible as authoritative and divinely inspired. Most important, the narrator and the novel’s theology directly connect Uncle Tom’s reverence for the revealed Word of God to his sanctified view of reality.

The novel articulates its strongest testimony to the theological belief in the spiritual power of the Scriptures in a scene of chapter seventeen in which Simeon

Halliday answers George Harris' doubts of Christian faith with a passage from the Bible. The Quaker responds to George by saying, "Friend George ... listen to this Psalm; it may do thee good" (193). The Quaker man then begins to read the Seventy-Third Psalm:

"But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well-nigh slipped. For I was envious of the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They are not in trouble like other men, neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore, pride compasseth them as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness; they have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression; they speak loftily. Therefore his people return, and the waters of a full cup are wrung out to them, and they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High?" (193)

Halliday pauses briefly to ask George if he [George] feels as the Psalmist does. When George agrees, the Quaker continues:

"Then hear, When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me until I went unto the sanctuary of God. Then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places, thou castedst them down to destruction. As a dream when one awaketh, so, oh Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image. Nevertheless, I am continually with thee; thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me by thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory. It is good for me to draw near unto God. I have put my trust in the Lord God." (193)

Although the conversion of George Harris is still relatively far-off, Stowe leaves no question as to the reaction which the words of the Bible provoked in him:

The words of holy trust, breathed by the friendly old man, stole like sacred music over the harassed and chafed spirit of George; and after he ceased, he sat with a gentle and subdued expression on his fine features ... If these words had been spoken by some easy, self-indulgent exhorter, from whose mouth they might have come merely as pious and rhetorical flourish, proper to be used to people in distress, perhaps they might not have had much effect; but coming from one who daily and calmly risked fine and imprisonment for the cause of God and man, they had a weight that could not but be felt, and both the poor, desolate fugitives found calmness and strength breaking into them through it. (193-94)

Admittedly, Stowe recognizes here that the ethos of the Quaker man contributes to the spiritual power of the biblical text. Much of *Uncle Tom's Cabin's* theological content is devoted to the proper interpretation of the divinely inspired Scriptures, particularly with regard to the issue of slavery. Nonetheless, Stowe continually portrays her poor, beleaguered characters with Bibles in their hands and Scriptures issuing from their mouths. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the Bible goes beyond being a mere collection of religious texts, becoming the voice of God to the characters who believe in Christ as well as to the narrator. Unsurprisingly, the two characters in the novel that continually speak the words of Scripture and pore over biblical texts are the two characters alleged by most critics to be the dual Christ-figures of the novel. In examining the crucicentrism of Stowe's novel, this common interpretive stance stands among many assumptions which must be reevaluated in the light of the mores of Stowe's evangelical Protestantism.

## Crucicentrism

Although activism falls third in the list of aspects in the Bebbington quadrilateral, one must the most problematic issues in the traditional theological interpretation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* before examining the activist element. The problem is that almost universally, critics of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* have read a liturgical symbolism into its Christlike protagonists. One biographer reads *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as “the Protestant equivalent of the Roman Catholic mass, a dramatic re-enactment of the Crucifixion” (Hedrick 215). Catholic priest Thomas Steele, S. J. leaves no doubt as to the allegorical tone of his interpretations in “Tom and Eva: Mrs. Stowe's Dying Christs.” As the previous literature review demonstrated, this allegorical reading of the novel has influenced the majority of its theological interpreters. Although these interpreters certainly recognize the *crucicentrism* of Stowe's narrative, they fail to identify the characteristically Protestant way in which Stowe configures the doctrine of the Atonement in the novel. These interpreters do not recognize the Atonement as a historical, once-for-all sacrifice that need not be repeated. As an evangelical and a Protestant, Harriet Beecher Stowe likely did recognize this view of the Atonement.

The cross-centered nature of evangelical Christianity lies in its adherence to what is variously known as a substitutionary, vicarious, or penal-substitution theory of the Atonement (Ryrie 356-57). In this theory, Christ, the second person of the Trinity, is incarnated and lives a sinless life so that he might die on the cross as a substitute for lost sinners, only to be resurrected from the dead. Evangelical Christianity unites this view of the Atonement with the view of conversion by regeneration and asserts that forgiveness of sins for the elect (regardless of how “the elect” are defined) has been provided by this

Atonement, and that sinners are converted by receiving this forgiveness through Christ. Furthermore, evangelical Christianity, as a tradition of various traditions within Protestantism, views this sacrifice of Christ as a single historical sacrifice, offered on Calvary and sufficient to the end of time. The scriptural pretext for this view is usually offered from the New Testament Epistle to the Hebrews:

“For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people’s: for this he did once, when he offered up himself. For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore.” (Hebrews 7:26-28, KJV)

In evangelical Protestantism, then, the propitiation made for sinners on the cross occurred only once.

Perhaps more than any other evangelical doctrine, Harriet Beecher Stowe clung to the doctrine of the substitutionary Atonement. Her theology seems to have been not only Christocentric but crucicentric. Stowe viewed the Crucifixion as the central event in the ministry of Jesus Christ, and she regarded Christlike suffering as the epitome of Christian discipleship. One letter of 1863 in particular demonstrates the importance of this theological tenet to Stowe:

I have thought about you all, many a sad long, quiet hour, as I have lain on my bed and looked at the pictures on my wall; one, in particular, of the moment before the Crucifixion, which is the first thing I look at when I wake in the morning. I think how suffering is, and must be, the portion of noble spirits, and no

lot so brilliant that must not first or last dip into the shadow of that eclipse ...

Under my picture I have inscribed, “Forasmuch as Christ also hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same mind.” (269-270)

This letter reveals the centrality of the Crucifixion not only to Stowe’s theological practice but also to her theology proper. Although she continually focuses on the need for Christians to imitate Christ in her letters, her focus on emulating Christ is almost always accompanied by a reflection on the incomparable sufferings of Christ’s own cross. Like most evangelicals of her time, Stowe saw the Crucifixion as an important theme of evangelical preaching. Her novel has been read by many as an attempt to place American slavery within the context of Calvary. This crucified theology lies at the conclusion of the theological portion (part IV, chapter ten) of *The Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin*:

Did it never seem to you, O Christian! when you have read the sufferings of Jesus, that you would gladly have suffered with him? Does it never seem almost ungenerous to accept eternal life as the price of such anguish on his part, while you bear no cross for him? Have you ever wished you could have watched with him in that bitter conflict at Gethsemane, when even his chosen slept? (503)

In this passage, Stowe points to the need for Christians to follow their Master into costly suffering and even death, a theological idea which she later relates to opposition to slavery. The question above referring to “eternal life as the price of such anguish on his part” reveals Stowe’s evangelical understanding of Christ’s vicarious Atonement for the sins of the world. She explicitly relates the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to the death and resurrection of saved sinners in a letter written to Susy Howard in 1860: “For,

if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so also them that sleep in Jesus shall God bring with Him” (279).

Stowe’s understanding of the substitutionary Atonement did not prevent her from encouraging herself and others to imitate Christ in the sufferings of the cross. In her written correspondence, Stowe repeatedly sets cruciform discipleship as the standard for Christian life and witness, as a brief letter to Edward Beecher indicates: “I have never been so happy as this summer. I began it in more suffering than I ever before have felt, but there is One whom I daily thank for all that suffering, since I hope that it has brought me at last to rest entirely in Him” (68). Stowe paradoxically embraces the dolorous sufferings of her Christian life because she sees it as a necessary imitation of her Savior. In a letter of encouragement to a friend, she deliberately compares her friend’s sufferings to that of Jesus Christ:

My dear Friend, - I did long to hear from you at a time when few knew how to speak, because I knew that you did knoweverything [sic] that sorrow can teach: you whose whole life has been a crucifixion, a long ordeal. But I believe that the “Lamb,” who stands forever in the midst of the throne “as it had been slain,” has everywhere his followers, those who are sent into the world, as He was, to suffer for the redemption of others, and like Him they must look to the joy set before them of redeeming others. (247)

Undoubtedly, then, the Cross forms the axle on which Stowe’s understanding of the Christian faith turns. Her writings suggest that she saw a difference between the atoning suffering of Christ and the imitative suffering of the Church – though both possess a

power for “the redemption of others,” the suffering of the Church is only possible because of the suffering of Christ.

This critical evangelical distinction between the literal body of Christ and the Body of Christ as the Church, especially in terms of their suffering obedience to God, is lacking from the allegorical readings of the characters Tom and Eva. Because the evangelical Christian doctrine of the vicarious Atonement views the sacrifice of Christ as wholly metaphysically and morally unique, to cast Tom and Eva as fulfilling similar propitiatory roles would be blasphemous in the evangelical worldview.

Furthermore, why Stowe would need to allegorize not only one but two Christs has never been satisfactorily explained by these interpreters. The novel takes place in the historical context of pre-Civil War America, in which the various denominational modes of Christianity are the dominant religious expressions of the day. If true allegory consists in veiling a political or religious symbology beneath the literal surface details of the narrative, then any explication of this allegory will inevitably see Stowe’s manipulation of this device as heavy-handed and amateur. The cultured despisers of “evangelical domesticity” and “sentimental literature” may stand to gain from denigrating Stowe’s considerable literary talent and from casting aspersions on the growing appreciation for Stowe as a canonical American author. In examining the role of the doctrine of the cross in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, a more thoroughly evangelical Protestant reading of the novel, by dispensing with the allegorical interpretations, can explain Tom and Eva less as Christ-figures and more as martyrs, exemplifications of Christianity whose faith and devotion ought to be imitated. This reading, I will venture, preserves Stowe’s literary credibility and provides a more accurate rendering of the theology of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

Appropriate to Stowe's crucicentric theology, Tom and Eva do suffer in ways analogous and even referential to the sufferings of Christ as recorded in Scripture. These biblical allusions which Stowe makes to the Gospels through the words and actions of Uncle Tom and Eva have provided the foundation for the traditional understanding of them as Christ-figures in the novel. Stowe first characterizes Evangeline in an unabashedly religious fashion that leaves little doubt as to where the young girl's spiritual loyalties lie:

Her form was the perfection of childish beauty, without its usual chubbiness and squareness of outline. There was about it an undulating and aerial grace, such as one might dream of for some mythic and allegorical being ... Always dressed in white, she seemed to move like a shadow through all sorts of places, without contracting spot or stain; and there was not a corner or nook, above or below, where those fairy footsteps had not glided, and that visionary golden head, with its deep blue eyes, fledged along. (147)

Indeed, some similarities appear here between "Evangeline" (whose name is a variant of the Greek *euangelion*, or "Good News) and the evangelical view of Jesus Christ. Both are seen as possessing grace (John 1:14, KJV: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."), both are seen as being sinless (Hebrews 4:15, KJV: "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."), and both are characterized, in some sense, as having been on earth and in heaven (Hebrews 4:14, KJV: "Seeing then that we

have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.”).

However, the stainless white clothes which Evangeline wears could just as easily be read as a reference to the Book of Revelation (a text frequently referenced in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*), where a number of passages describe individual saints being given white garments in heaven (Revelation 3:5, 6:11). When Evangeline is read as a redeemed saint rather than as an incarnation of a Redeemer, the references to grace, sinlessness, and being in the heavens can be justified in this light from an evangelical perspective.

Although Evangeline exemplifies the love of Christ, she also holds an optimistic view of slavery that reveals her naiveté; Stowe understood Christ and the religion of Christ to be utterly opposed to slavery, making Evangeline an impossible Christ-figure in her theology. As Augustine St. Clare argues with his wife about the morality and biblical tenability of the institution of slavery, he asks his daughter Evangeline what she thinks of it. She replies, “O, of course, our way is the pleasantest” (186). When St. Clare asks her to clarify, she explains, “Why, it makes so many more round you to love, you know” (186). Although Stowe certainly identifies Evangeline closely with Jesus Christ, she also shows that this identification is not complete. She is still a child, and imperfect in the wisdom which Stowe believed she had about the utter incongruity between a biblically faithful vision of Christianity and the institution of slavery. Thus, Evangeline cannot be viewed as a complete Christ-figure for Stowe's theology.

Admittedly, the novel makes many allusions between Eva and the depiction of Jesus in the biblical Gospels, allusions which attest to the considerable crucicentrism of Eva's Christian faith; nonetheless, Stowe differentiates between Eva the Christlike

follower and Christ, Eva's Savior. In chapter twenty-four, "Foreshadowings," Eva describes an intense desire to emulate Christ the Savior when she tells Uncle Tom that "I can understand why Jesus *wanted* to die for us ... because I've felt so, too" (277). Throughout the chapters that narrate Uncle Tom's time at the St. Clare estate, Eva exhibits countless premonitions of her imminent fate, the most evidently allusive being her address in a chapter titled "Death" to the assembled slaves and white family members in which she tells them, "I sent for you all, my dear friends ... because I love you. I love you all; and I have something to say to you, which I want you always to remember. . . . . I am going to leave you. In a few weeks, you will see me no more-" (289). This and other similar statements recall verses like John 14:19, which records Jesus as saying, "Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also" (KJV). Although critics have mistakenly viewed these references as indications that Eva's death is propitiatory in the same sense as Christ's, the cross-centeredness of the Christian characterization of Evangeline is significant. In casting Eva as a model of exemplary Christian faith, Stowe shows how willing Eva is as a Christian to face suffering for the sake of others.

Eva continually makes reference to a "Savior" and to "Jesus," indicating that she herself had need of Christ's saving grace. In the dramatic speech mentioned above, she tells St. Clare's slaves that "You are thinking only about this world. I want you to remember that there is a beautiful world, where Jesus is. I am going there, and you can go there" (290). This passage also references similar material in the Gospel of John, such as John 7:33-34: "Then said Jesus unto them, Yet a little while am I with you, and then I

go unto him that sent me. Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come” (KJV).

Eva recognizes a distinction between herself and Jesus Christ the Savior. In “Foreshadowings,” Eva attempts to winsomely convince her father to follow Christ: “To our Saviour’s home; it’s so sweet and peaceful there – it is all so loving there! ... Don’t you want to go, papa?” (279). It would be facile to deny that Evangeline’s dialogue seems directly drawn from the words of Christ in the Gospel of John and that Evangeline often emulates Christ. Nonetheless, Stowe’s characterization of Evangeline does not cast her entirely as a Christ-figure. Instead, Evangeline is continually portrayed as a Christ-like character who encourages her peers to be reconciled to the real Christ. Evangeline’s status as an evangelist will be treated in the examination of Stowe’s activism later.

Harriet Beecher Stowe’s interpreters have often regarded Eva as a Christ-figure. While a pervasive crucicentrism lies at the heart of Eva’s Christian experience, this devotion to Christ ought not to be confused with the strict identity *of* Christ. Instead, Evangeline functions as a crucified follower of Jesus, a worthy disciple whose faith, according to Stowe’s theology, ought to be imitated. This same distinction must be applied to a theological interpretation of the character of Uncle Tom. Even more so than Eva, the novel compares Uncle Tom to Christ at multiple times in many different ways. In Stowe’s crucicentric theology, Tom provides a model of Christian discipleship. Even in Tom’s case, though, Stowe distinguishes between Uncle Tom and his Savior.

One of the novel’s clearest points of distinction between Uncle Tom and Jesus Christ occurs in chapter twelve, “Select Incident of Lawful Trade.” Thus far, the novel has characterized Uncle Tom in a rather flattering light. Still, the narrator reveals one of

Uncle Tom's shortcomings in this chapter when he receives word that he must sit in jail while being transported by Mr. Haley:

Tom received this agreeable intelligence quite meekly; simply wondering, in his own heart, how many of these doomed men had wives and children, and whether they would feel as he did about leaving them. It is to be confessed, too, that the naïve, off-hand information that he was to be thrown into jail by no means produced an agreeable impression on a poor fellow who had always prided himself on a strictly honest and upright course of life. Yes, Tom, we must confess it, was rather proud of his honesty, poor fellow,-not having very much else to be proud of;-if he had belonged to some of the higher walks of society, he, perhaps, would never have been reduced to such straits. (120)

To point to Tom's pride as a distinction between Tom and Christ, we must note, is not to denigrate Tom. The narrator clarifies the fact that this offense is nowhere near the pride of a man like Mr. Haley. Nonetheless, the narrator seems to regard this sense of pride which Uncle Tom possesses as a moral flaw, however minor, and so does not collapse the characters of Uncle Tom the saved individual and the Savior who saves Uncle Tom in Stowe's novel.

As a model Christian, Uncle Tom embraces the cruciform way of life championed by Harriet Beecher Stowe. An interchange between Simon Legree and Uncle Tom at the end of chapter thirty-three presents one of the novel's most dramatic testimonies of a cross-centered evangelical piety. The text suggests at many times that Legree sees Uncle Tom's deep piety as a challenge and an insult. Uncle Tom's defiantly disobeys master Legree in the novel by refusing to flog his fellow slaves, holding that such atrocities are

unconscionable to a person of Christian faith. When Legree asks him whether he owns Uncle Tom's soul as well as his body, Uncle Tom's response is at once thoroughly evangelical and thoroughly cruciform:

In the very depth of physical suffering, bowed by brutal oppression, this question shot a gleam of joy and triumph through Tom's soul. He suddenly stretched himself up, and, looking earnestly to heaven, while the tears and blood that flowed down his face mingled, he exclaimed, "No! no! no! my soul an't yours, Mas'r! You haven't bought it,-ye can't buy it! It's been bought and paid for, by one who is able to keep it;-no matter, no matter, you can't harm me!" (358)

Even Uncle Tom's greatest act of defiance against slavery comes in the form of an act of suffering servitude. Uncle Tom's ultimate victory over Simon Legree lies in his self-understanding as a possession of Jesus Christ. This confession of faith infuriates Simon Legree in its power. Uncle Tom's victory, according to Stowe's theology, consists in the spiritual superiority of his cause and in the inevitability of his vindication – if not in this world, then in the next. Uncle Tom makes a similar confession in chapter thirty-six, when he says in the midst of being tormented, "Mas'r ... I know ye can do dreadful things; but,-he stretched himself upward and clasped his hands,-'but, after ye've killed the body, there an't no more ye can do. And O, there's all ETERNITY to come, after that!'" (382) References to the Crucifixion, such as Tom stretching upward, abound here and elsewhere. In keeping with the reading of Uncle Tom as martyr rather than Savior, then, we note here that although Uncle Tom provides an example of the novel's crucicentrism, even Uncle Tom needs a Savior in Stowe's theology, and therefore Uncle Tom is not a Christ-figure properly speaking.

Stowe herself suggests the model of Uncle Tom as martyr in chapter thirty-eight, “The Victory.” She provides a reflection here on the nature of the martyr and clearly connects this reflection with Uncle Tom’s own experiences at the Legree plantation:

The martyr, when faced even by a death of bodily anguish and horror, finds in the very terror of his doom a strong stimulant and tonic. There is a vivid excitement, a thrill and fervor, which may carry through any crisis of suffering that is the birth-hour of eternal glory and rest. But to live,-to wear on, day after day, of mean, bitter, low, harassing servitude, every nerve dampened and depressed, every power of feeling gradually smothered,-this long and wasting heart-martyrdom, this slow, daily bleeding away of the inward life, drop by drop, hour after hour,-this is the true searching test of what there may be in man or woman.

(391)

This passage directly connects to the continuation of the narration of Uncle Tom’s suffering at Legree’s hands. The passage implies that Uncle Tom himself ought to be viewed as a martyr – he is willing to obey unto death for the principles of his Savior, Jesus Christ. The martyrdom described here, much like Uncle Tom’s, requires not only the courage to face the possibility of death, but also to deal with the drudgery and temptations of suffering for long periods of time. Such temptations come in varied forms, but especially in the person of Simon Legree, who blasphemously encourages Uncle Tom to “join his church” (393) of slavery. Far from placing Uncle Tom as the incarnation of Christ in some kind of Protestant liturgy, then, Uncle Tom functions as but one martyr in what we might call Stowe’s Book of Martyrs, a collection of hagiographies that demonstrate the faith of past saints. Although Uncle Tom emulates his Savior, the

Savior/saved distinction is maintained in the evangelical Protestant worldview of this novel. This view of Uncle Tom as martyr maintains the novel's crucicentrism and its firm evangelical Protestant convictions simultaneously.

We see that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* exhibits the evangelical tendency toward crucicentrism and that Uncle Tom is a martyr rather than a Savior in chapter forty, "The Martyr." This final torture scene, usually interpreted as an allegorical Crucifixion, contains a great deal of imagery that at least refers to Christ. In this final scene of Uncle Tom's life, Sambo and Quimbo torture him. At least one interpreter has obliquely likened Sambo and Quimbo to the thieves of the Gospel accounts who were beside Christ as he was crucified (Spillers 547). The text does not provide any specific scriptural allusions to vindicate this particular view, but the affinity between Uncle Tom and Christ is much clearer. As they begin to torture and eventually kill him, Uncle Tom cries out, "Into thy hands I commend my spirit!" (Stowe 414). In the Gospel of Luke, Christ alludes to this Psalmic lament (from Psalm 31) shortly before "breathing his last" (Luke 23:46). This allusion would seem to cast Uncle Tom as a Christ-figure. However, the narrator seems to place a distinction between Uncle Tom and Christ later when she/he notes:

The savage words [of Sambo and Quimbo] none of them touched that ear!-a higher voice there was saying, "Fear not them that kill the body, and, after that, have no more that they can do." Nerve and bone of that poor man's body vibrated to those words, as if touched by the finger of God; and he felt the strength of a thousand souls in one. (414)

The voice quotes Matthew 10:28, in which Jesus sends out the disciples to do the work of ministry and proclaim the Gospel. Thus, although the narrator does not indicate who actually speaks to Tom, in a sense the words of Jesus Christ the Saviour are spoken to Tom. This “crucifixion” scene makes repeated use of the idea of blood, as when Legree threatens to drain Uncle Tom of it: “I’ll count every drop of blood there is in you, and take ‘em, one by one, till ye give up!” (415) Uncle Tom’s reply defies Legree but still shows some concern for the fate of Legree’s immortal soul:

Tom looked up to his master, and answered, “Mas’r, if you was sick, or in trouble, or dying, and I could save ye, I’d *give* ye my heart’s blood; and, if taking every drop of blood in this poor old body would save your precious soul, I’d give ‘em freely, as the Lord gave his for me. O, Mas’r! don’t bring this great sin on your soul! It will hurt you more than ‘t will me! Do the worst you can, my troubles’ll be over soon; but, if ye don’t repent, yours won’t *never* end!” (415)

This passage undoubtedly affirms Uncle Tom’s belief in a substitutionary Atonement, perhaps the boldest confession of this doctrine in the novel. Furthermore, Uncle Tom’s sufferings reflect that of his Savior in that Tom shows a genuine desire to see mercy bestowed on his tormentors, as Christ is recorded in the Gospels as showing.

In what most interpreters view as the most obvious employment of Uncle Tom as a Christ-figure in a Protestant liturgical allegory, the narrator actually makes a distinction between Uncle Tom and Christ. In the midst of Uncle Tom’s dolorous last moments, according to the narrator, the suffering servant is not alone: “Nay! There stood by him ONE,-seen by him alone,-‘like unto the Son of God’” (416). Here the narrator, quoting the King James Version of the Bible, makes a reference to the fiery furnace of Daniel

3:25, in which Nebuchadnezzar's counselors see Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego accompanied by a fourth man, often interpreted by Christian exegetes as an Old Testament appearance of Jesus Christ. In this scene, the tendency to allegorize Uncle Tom as a Christ-figure becomes complicated and ultimately redundant. A more proper interpretation of the scene might see Stowe characterizing Uncle Tom as a Christian martyr who is ministered to in his last moments by his Savior. However, this passage undoubtedly demonstrates Stowe's belief in the cruciform nature of Christian suffering; although her titular hero suffers in this scene, these sufferings are separate from the atoning suffering of Christ on the literal cross.

The theology of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* finds its spiritual power in the evangelical interpretation of the Cross. The discussion thus far has not only demonstrated the presence of distinctive conversionist, biblicist, and crucicentrist tendencies in the novel, but has also demonstrated the extent to which these traits of evangelical Christianity must be understood as an organic whole. Each of these tenets – conversion by regeneration and salvation by grace through faith in the Gospel, a conviction of the trustworthiness and normative nature of the Bible, and a belief in the substitutionary Atonement of Christ on the Cross for the forgiveness of sins – suggests the last and characteristically evangelical of the elements of the Bebbington quadrilateral. Without question, a theology could not be properly termed “evangelical” without a sense of Christian activism. In many senses of the term, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, I will suggest, is an activist novel.

## Activism

In describing the Bebbington quadrilateral, historian Mark Noll briefly describes “activism” as “a concern for sharing the faith” (*American Evangelical Christianity* 13). In terms of nineteenth-century evangelical theology, this activism often came under the title “revivalism.” In another text, Noll succinctly describes the goal of nineteenth-century revivalism:

The purpose of the revival meeting, though approached in many ways, was always the same: to convert lost sinners to faith in Christ and, through the reformed behavior of the converted, to improve society. Revivalism was thus a perfect complement for dominant social and political norms in the new United States. Revivals were democratic in their appeal to all types and levels of society. They were egalitarian in preaching the same message to all. They were “liberal” in the nineteenth-century sense of the term because they based organization and social activity on the determined action of individuals. But they were also traditional in providing a picture of God similar to what many heard in the older churches. (*The Old Religion in a New World*, 63)

Particularly in the American South, the revivalism of the Great Awakenings is largely credited with the rise of Southern evangelicalism and the existence of the so-called “Bible Belt.” Although revivalism is only one example of the evangelical emphasis on religious activism, Noll’s definition is useful for the discussion of Stowe’s evangelicalism in two ways: it accurately describes the interest in converting sinners as well as the focus on sweeping social and political reforms.

When we conceive evangelicalism in activist terms, it is difficult to see how Stowe herself could *not* have exhibited activist evangelical tendencies. During her time at the Hartford Female Seminary, Stowe herself took steps toward organizing and presiding over a revival by joining three students in scheduling regular prayer meetings (Hedrick 61-62). Even as Stowe's theological and political opposition to slavery increased, she admitted that she appreciated the efforts of pro-slavery white clergymen to preach the Gospel to the slaves, as she relates in *The Key* when she says, "It is a very painful and unpleasant task to express any qualification or dissent with regard to efforts which have been undertaken in a good spirit, and which have produced, in many respects, good results" (480) of those who would simultaneously catechize slaves and teach them that slavery is ordained in the Bible. Stowe's concern with the proclamation of the Gospel and the spread of the Christian message, usually accompanied by the revivalist emphasis on the conversionary power of Christ for social change, is a central concern in her correspondence, as an 1853 letter to Calvin Stowe intimates:

So I am called to draw up this fearful witness against my country and send it into all countries, that the general voice of humanity may quicken our paralyzed vitality, that all Christians may pray for us, and that shame, honor, love of country, and love of Christ may be roused to give us strength to cast out this mighty evil. (171-72)

In a typical revivalist turn, Harriet Beecher Stowe saw slavery as a sin of the American people which could be conquered through the power of God. This union of an emphasis on personal conversion and corporate reform made interesting bedfellows for nineteenth-

century revivalists, Stowe being no exception, as Stowe's rather evangelistic letter to freedman and activist Frederick Douglass indicates:

After all, my brother, the strength and hope of your oppressed race does lie in the church, - in hearts united to Him of whom it is said, "He shall spare the souls of the needy, and precious shall their blood be in his sight." Everything is against you, but Jesus Christ is for you, and He has not forgotten his church, misguided and erring though it be. I have looked all the field over with despairing eyes; I see no hope but in Him. This movement must and will become a purely religious one. The light will spread in churches, the tone of feeling will rise, Christians North and South will give up all connection with, and take up their testimony against, slavery, and thus the work will be done. (136)

Stowe's revivalism and her ardent abolitionism often placed her in sociopolitical union with people whose philosophical and theological convictions differed vastly from her own. Undoubtedly, this letter provides an example of how Stowe used the revival theology both to declare the need for America to repent of the national sin of slavery and to use her position to share the Christian message with people like Douglass who, for one reason or another, felt that they could not accept it - in Douglass' case, because he thought the church unanimously supported slavery. However, Stowe took the opportunity in this letter to vindicate what she understood as the message of Gospel liberty, and in doing so shared the Gospel with Frederick Douglass.

In a November, 1856 letter to her husband, Harriet Beecher Stowe rejoices at the tremendous success of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in France – not necessarily because of rousing opposition to slavery, either:

It is wonderful that the people here do not seem to have got over ‘Uncle Tom’ a bit. The impression seems fresh as if just published. How often have they said, That book has revived the Gospel among the poor of France; it has done more than all the books we have published put together. It has gone among *les ouvriers*, among the poor of Faubourg St. Antoine, and nobody knows how many have been led to Christ by it. Is not this blessed, my dear husband? Is it not worth all the suffering of writing it? (229-30)

For Stowe the activist and revivalist, the conversion of souls was just as important as the social and political causes that stemmed from religious values. For Stowe, all of these concerns were fueled by religious sentiments. When we bring the elements of conversionism, biblicism, crucicentrism, and activism to bear on *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, it is much easier to see that the preaching of the Gospel and the conversion of sinners constitutes one of the aims of the novel. These aims are crystallized not only by Tom and Eva, Stowe’s martyr-evangelists, but also to a certain extent by Miss Ophelia and by the distinctive voice of the narrator herself/himself.

Miss Ophelia provides an example of a missionary attempt in the novel in which the “unchristian” bonds of slavery and the attitudes it engenders quench Christian evangelistic fervor. Augustine St. Clare purchases a young slave girl named Topsy for Miss Ophelia, criticizing Miss Ophelia for being a Northern Christian who is willing to send money to abolitionist and missionary societies but is unwilling to do this work herself. Inspired by the notion of a missionary project, Miss Ophelia takes Topsy as her personal project to “give her a good orthodox New England bringing up,” as St. Clare sardonically describes (241).

Miss Ophelia is not an especially warm tutor for Topsy, however, and her early attempts to catechize Topsy are vain, since “Topsy always made great capital of her own sins and enormities, evidently considering them as something peculiarly distinguishing” (251). At the end of chapter twenty (“Topsy”), we even see Miss Ophelia tutoring Topsy in one of the questions from the Westminster Shorter Catechism, a doctrinal standard of Calvinist extraction. When Miss Ophelia tells Topsy that “Our first parents, being left to the freedom of their own will, fell from the state wherein they were created,” (252), Topsy asks Miss Ophelia whether that “state” was “Kintuck”! Miss Ophelia’s attempts to convert Topsy are futile until the first of Stowe’s martyr-evangelists, Evangeline, shares the Gospel with Topsy.

As we have noted above, Evangeline’s very name refers to the “Good News” of the Christian message, and her status as “The Little Evangelist” gives depth to the claim that proclamation of the Gospel is an important issue in Stowe’s theology. Through the character of Evangeline, Stowe presents a character who, if not entirely devoid of racist tendencies, shows compassion and Christian love toward a slave. Evangeline’s conversion of Topsy demonstrates the novel’s commitment to a conversionary Christianity with evangelistic, activist implications.

Evangeline first reaches to the (almost) incorrigible Topsy by treating her with warm kindness, an emotion with which nobody seems to have engaged Topsy; as a result, Topsy seems incredulous to Evangeline’s advances (283). When Topsy reveals that Miss Ophelia cannot stand her “because I’m a nigger!”, Evangeline then becomes “a living, breathing Gospel,” to use some of Stowe’s previous words, to Topsy, telling her that she

[Evangeline] does love her in spite of her flaws and her tribulations, and that she wishes that Topsy would be good. This living Gospel manages to touch Topsy's heart:

The round, keen eyes of the black child were overcast with tears;-large, bright drops rolled heavily down, one by one, and fell on the little white hand. Yes, in that moment, a ray of real belief, a ray of heavenly love, had penetrated the darkness of her heathen soul! She laid her head down between her knees, and wept and sobbed,-while the beautiful child, bending over her, looked like the picture of some bright angel stooping over to reclaim a sinner. (283)

When Evangeline shares the Gospel with Topsy, telling her that "Jesus loves all alike" (283), the course of Topsy's life is permanently changed: "O, dear Miss Eva, dear Miss Eva ... I will try, I will try; I never did care nothin' about it before" (284). Although Miss Ophelia's attempts to evangelize Topsy are orthodox and systematic, Evangeline preaches the Gospel to Topsy from a deeply spiritual "religion of the heart," and Topsy, though still struggling from time to time, is forever changed. This traditional conversion story, in the midst of what is ordinarily seen as the most important anti-slavery novel, indicates that Stowe was as interested in conversionary Christianity as she was in social reform.

In the following chapter (Twenty-Six, "Death"), Evangeline takes another opportunity to share the Gospel. During one of her speeches bristling with language from the Gospel of John, Evangeline gives the following message to the slaves of the St. Clare estate:

"If you love me, you must not interrupt me so. Listen to what I say. I want to speak to you about your souls. . . . Many of you, I am afraid, are very careless.

You are thinking only about this world. I want you to remember that there is a beautiful world, where Jesus is. I am going there, and you can go there. It is for you, as much as me. But, if you want to go there, you must not live idle, careless, thoughtless lives. You must be Christians.” (290)

In this sermon, Evangeline aims to convert the slaves to Christianity. Since Stowe uses Evangeline as a central model of faith, as an example of what it means to follow Christ, it follows that Stowe views the preaching and sharing of the Gospel as an essential element of Christian faith. Evangeline, as her name suggests, functions not so much as an allegorical Christ-figure as she does as an example to be imitated. As a character, she also shows the importance of bearing the love of Christ in an egalitarian fashion, which means preaching the Gospel in a loving manner to black slaves and white masters alike.

Harriet Beecher Stowe’s other model martyr-evangelist, Uncle Tom, also seeks to lead those around him to Christian conversion. Although his success in leading Prue the slave-woman to redemption is highly debatable, both in his encounter with these two characters and in his successful overtures toward converting Sambo and Quimbo reflect the inherent activism of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

Chapter eighteen, “Miss Ophelia’s Experiences and Opinions,” records one of Uncle Tom’s evangelistic efforts. Having successfully convinced Augustine St. Clare to stop drinking to excess (205), this chapter focuses partly on Uncle Tom’s evangelical activist faith. He encounters Prue shortly before she returns to her master and mistress to be whipped, since she wasted the master’s money on alcohol (215). Seeing Prue’s misery, Tom attempts to preach the Gospel to her. He finds that she knows nothing about “the Lord Jesus,” and when he hears her tragic life story, he replies, “O, ye poor critter ...

han't nobody never telled ye how the Lord Jesus loved ye, and died for ye? Han't they telled ye that he'll help ye, and ye can go to heaven, and have rest, at last?" (218) The pattern of Uncle Tom's description of the Gospel bears deep similarity to the same sermon that Evangeline delivers in the chapter of her "Death." Prue's responds to Uncle Tom in an unexpected way: "I looks like gwine to heaven ... an't thar where white folks is gwine? S'pose they'd have me thar? I'd rather go to torment, and get away from Mas'r and Missis. I had *so*" (218). Stowe's critique of pro-slavery evangelicalism here seems almost vituperative. Here Uncle Tom's activism serves as a backdrop for Prue, who evidently *has* heard the Gospel – a Gospel preached by white people, for the benefit of white people. Again Stowe demonstrates the barrier which slavery places on the authentic preaching of the Gospel to black slaves.

The conversion scene at the end of chapter forty, over which the dying Uncle Toms presides, is much more successful. Here Stowe seems to argue that even in the midst of the dreadful bonds of slavery, Christian conversion still happens and salvation is still worked out by God. Unlike Prue, who has heard a Gospel which seems more interested in preserving the status quo than in preserving Prue's soul for Christ until death, Sambo and Quimbo find that "His [Uncle Tom's] wondrous words and pious hearts" do not fall on their ears in vain. In the quickest conversion story of the whole novel, Sambo and Quimbo begin to realize that they want to know the Savior whom Uncle Tom knows. Many critics have placed the emphasis on Uncle Tom here, reading the scene as a re-enactment of the Crucifixion or as a Catholic mass, in which Uncle Tom himself becomes a propitiatory offering. For Stowe the evangelical, however, the power of salvation lies not in the death of her martyr-evangelist, but in God and in the power of

prayer, as the final lines of the chapter intimate: “‘Poor critters!’ said Tom, ‘I’d be willing to bar’ all I have, if it’ll only bring ye to Christ! O, Lord! give me these two more souls, I pray!’” (417) The final line in the chapter leaves no room for the reader to question whether or not this actually happens: “That prayer was answered!” (417) Although Uncle Tom prays for his tormentors and they hear him speak, Stowe places the reason for the salvation of Sambo and Quimbo in Uncle Tom’s dying prayers. For Stowe the evangelical, prayer has the power to influence the course of human history, and the God she trusts and preaches of listens to human prayers. Even in spite of slavery, then, Stowe stresses the idea that Christian conversion will and must continue under the shadow of the “peculiar institution.”

The strongest evangelical preaching in the novel undoubtedly comes from the narrator herself/himself. This narrator is constantly present in her/his narrative, and as a result the previous pages have tended to view this narrator as a character in the novel. Because the narrator preaches so much to the reader about slavery, it is easy to equate this omniscient narrator with Harriet Beecher Stowe herself. The narrator of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* clearly reveals the activism of the novel through her/his constant, didactic commentary on the narrative action.

Often the narrator expresses moral outrage at slavery through some form of irony or sarcasm. Such is the case in chapter one. This narrator sets the scene in describing Haley and Shelby as “gentlemen,” only to retract: “For convenience sake, we have said, hitherto, two *gentlemen*. One of the parties, however, when critically examined, did not seem, strictly speaking, to come under the species” (3). The narrator then goes on to describe Mr. Haley. More than a cheap caricature of Haley, this statement parodies some

of the harsher racialist sentiments undergirding arguments in favor of slavery. Although Stowe was, by contemporary standards, certainly something of a racist herself, the opening lines of her *magnum opus* turn the tables and force her readers to immediately reexamine their positions on this issue.

In another passage, the narrator chides the reader for even beginning to judge Mr. Haley as a wicked slave trader. The narrator places the responsibility for abolishing slavery on the reader's shoulders, suggesting that Haley is merely a cog in the awful machine of slavery:

“But who, sir, makes the trader? Who is most to blame? The enlightened, cultivated, intelligent man, who supports the system of which the trader is the inevitable result, or the poor trader himself? You make the public sentiment that calls for his trade, that debauches and depraves him, till he feels no shame in it; and in what are you better than he?” (134)

Harriet Beecher Stowe, it seems, does not flinch from using the narrator to preach to her readership. She even expresses the sin of slavery in traditional evangelical terms when she has the narrator noting, “In the day of a future Judgment, these very considerations may make it more tolerable for him [the trader] than you” (134).

The activist and revivalist elements of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* rise to a dramatic conclusion in chapter forty-five, “Concluding Remarks.” Here the narrator takes on the persona of “the writer” of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and few interpreters see a need here to distinguish between the narrator and Harriet Beecher Stowe herself. The novel concludes in a fully realistic situation as Stowe takes her last opportunity to inveigh against slavery.

As her concluding remarks draw nearer to a close, the religious fervor of the narration, like a revival sermon, grows more and more heated:

See, then, to your sympathies in this matter! Are they in harmony with the sympathies of Christ? or are they swayed and perverted by the sophistries of worldly policy ... Do you believe in prayer? or has it become an indistinct apostolic tradition? You pray for the heathen abroad; pray also for the heathen at home. (448)

Although Stowe directly addresses the sin of slavery in this chapter, the remedy remains the same: only through right relationship to God, she suggests, can the American people ever throw off the yoke of slavery.

The final paragraphs of the novel glow with all the soteriological urgency of revival. Stowe uses eschatology of the Second Advent of Jesus Christ to stir the emotions of her readers. As her eschatological preaching reaches its critical mass, she makes characteristically revivalist claims on her readers:

A day of grace is yet held out to us. Both North and South have been guilty before God; and the *Christian church* has a heavy account to answer. Not by combining together, to protect injustice and cruelty, and making a common capital of sin, is this Union to be saved,-but by repentance, justice and mercy; for, not surer is the eternal law by which the millstone sinks into the ocean, than that stronger law, by which injustice and cruelty shall bring on nations the wrath of Almighty God! (451)

Although Stowe continually references the Second Coming of Christ and the Final Judgment, she also emphasizes the “day of grace” in which it would be possible for

individuals and even whole nations to repent. In this passage Stowe's concern with sociopolitical reform and her concern for the salvation of souls are united. For Harriet Beecher Stowe the evangelical, this chapter is not a matter of cleverly using biblical tropes to fit her political persuasion; Stowe genuinely seems to have believed in the premillennial return of Jesus Christ, and so she preached a prophetic sermon of judgment which she believed was ultimately authored by God. That prophetic sermon is *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

To conclude, the theology of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is clearly indebted to the evangelical Christian emphases of conversionism, biblicism, activism, and crucicentrism as described in the Bebbington quadrilateral. Stowe used a soteriological method of characterization, her knowledge of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures, a traditional Protestant view of the Atonement, and a Christian ethic shaped by the Gospel of conversion by regeneration in crafting the theological message of this novel. Without a doubt, her novel can be understood as *evangelical* in the broadest sense of the term.

## CONCLUSION:

### HARRIET BEECHER STOWE, REVIVALISM, AND SOCIAL CHANGE

In essence, the goal of the preceding pages was to decide what sort of Christianity informs the greatest American social protest novel of the nineteenth century. This discussion of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* demonstrated the evangelical religious convictions that drive the novel. Having outlined the basic assumptions of Stowe's naturalist, feminist, and sectarian critics, respectively, a corrective reading of Stowe's magnum opus places her novel more appropriately in its religious context. The results of this effort, undertaken as an undergraduate thesis in the fields of literature in English and religious studies, meaningfully contribute to the understanding of Stowe as an author and Stowe as an evangelical. That scholars recognize her as both leaves some interesting implications.

For one, the present author hopes to add fuel to the still smoldering "Stowe debate" and to the academic consideration of Harriet Beecher Stowe's writings in general. Stowe wrote the most popular novel of her day, and it is only in recent decades that her immensely influential literary efforts have been satisfactorily acknowledged by the academy. Stowe's novel unites the social realism of contemporaries like Rebecca Harding Davis (*Life in the Iron Mills*) with the sense of religious narrative that has driven American Christian writers since the arrival of the Puritans. Drawing on this heritage in her attempt to realistically portray slavery and set it in the context of her evangelical

faith, she produced a profoundly American novel. While Stowe's most famous novel has played a significant role in the questions of literary canon that have occupied those who compile college literature reading lists, the importance of examining Stowe's novel is not a mere question of canon. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, as the present analysis has indicated, is a rich literary artifact of a particular point in American social and religious history. To see it disappear from serious discussion just as soon as it arrived would be to see a pearl trampled in the academic barnyard.

I began this undergraduate thesis in the February of 2005, my intention being to situate *Uncle Tom's Cabin* somewhere in the history of American Calvinist thought. While I still maintain that Harriet Stowe, by birth a Beecher, was certainly influenced by the ancestral Puritanism that continues to influence much of American Christianity, I found that in interpreting *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in solely Calvinist terms, I had fallen into much the same sort of hair-splitting argument in which Stowe's sectarian critics engage. Stowe's vision of Christianity is broader than that of orthodox Calvinism, a vision that encompasses Quakers, Methodists, and even Catholics. Even if the novel did not reference these religious groups in a favorable light, still it is facile to read Stowe's novel as a systematic set of religious propositions. In distinguishing Stowe from other religious Americans of her day – for instance, from pro-slavery evangelicals and from anti- and pro-slavery liberals like the Unitarians – only the terms “abolitionist” and “evangelical” accurately identify the novel's character.

To recognize Stowe as both a successful protest novelist and as an evangelical Christian, furthermore, leads to some of the most interesting implications of all. Evangelical Christianity, unlike many liberal theologies, asserts the essential immortality

of all human beings. For evangelicals, coming to saving faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior determines whether eternity after death will be spent in everlasting bliss and communion with God or everlasting death and separation from God. Some have linked this conviction of the reality of an afterlife with a great conservative sentiment that serves to paralyze social welfare rather than to further it. If God's focus is on the salvation of the church and otherworldly redemption, these critics suggest, then why would Christians focus on the fallen world before the Second Coming? Karl Marx, best known for putting forward this idea of religion as "opium of the people," expresses similar sentiments in a letter written to a German newspaper in 1842:

Read St. Augustine's *De civitate Dei*, study the Fathers of the Church and the spirit of Christianity, and then come back and tell us whether the state or the church is the "Christian state"! Or does not every moment of your practical life brand your theory as a lie? Do you consider it wrong to appeal to the courts if you have been cheated? But the apostle writes that it is wrong. If you have been struck on one cheek, do you turn the other also, or do you not rather start an action for assault? But the gospel forbids it. Do you not demand rational right in this world, do you not grumble at the slightest raising of taxes, are you not beside yourself at the least infringement of your personal liberty? But you have been told that suffering in this life is not to be compared with the bliss of the future, that passive sufferance and blissful hope are the cardinal virtues.

This critique has been offered by Marxists and materialists of every stripe. It has also been echoed by the liberation theology movement in Catholicism and Protestantism, which has argued for a realized eschatology of the kingdom of God on earth in

contradistinction to the traditional imminent or inaugurated eschatology which sees the kingdom of God fulfilled by Christ's Second Advent.

Harriet Beecher Stowe, however, holds the distinction of being both an evangelical Christian, certain of her eternal salvation through Jesus Christ, and one of the most successful social protest novelists in American history. Stowe stands as an exemplar of nineteenth-century revivalisms that proclaimed the necessity of personal redemption, and sought to reform or abolish oppressive social institutions like slavery. Stowe's opposition to slavery is not merely a philosophical turn or a politically convenient plank in an electoral platform. That Stowe sought to critique the institution of slavery so harshly in the light of her evangelical beliefs suggests that she opposed slavery because of, not in spite of, these beliefs. Harriet Beecher Stowe believed in a religion which saw the cross of Christ as the turning point of human history, a religion which emphasized the total reordering of the desires of the heart after the pattern of God's will. Because she believed that this spiritual rebirth enabled human beings to love their neighbors as themselves, she viewed the wholesale denigration of human nature through the "peculiar institution" to be inimical to the kind of love called for by "Christ the consoler."

With a more acute sensibility than many evangelicals of her time, Harriet Beecher Stowe sought to express the clear social implications of the Gospel for human society and brought her biblical faith to bear on the most important political issue of her day. In seeking to be an instrument of divine providence, Stowe railed against the accommodationism and moral relativism of her pro-slavery religious brethren. However, we would be mistaken to view Stowe's practical theology as a prototype of the Social

Gospel theology of mainline Protestantism. Stowe's Gospel is indefatigably orthodox in that it emphasizes the imminent reality of divine judgment and the real possibility of human damnation. Bristling with sermonical rhetoric, Harriet Beecher Stowe draws on the prophets of Israel to conclude Chapter Forty-Five, the end of which seems inescapably revivalistic. She asks, "But who may abide the day of his appearing?" (Mal. 3:2) and quotes the prophet Malachi: "for that day shall burn as an oven: and he shall appear as a swift witness against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, and that *turn aside the stranger in his right*: and he shall break in pieces the oppressor" (451). In the following paragraph, she references the prophet Isaiah:

Are not these dread words for a nation bearing in her bosom so mighty an injustice? Christians! every time that you pray that the kingdom of Christ may come, can you forget that prophecy associates, in dread fellowship, the *day of vengeance* with the year of his redeemed? (451)

Just as the above discussion of Stowe's theology demonstrated that she believed in the immortality of the redeemed in heaven with God, so Stowe also took seriously the hell doctrine and the real possibility of eternal damnation and separation from God. Far from dampening her desire for substantive social change, Stowe's evangelical faith drove her to challenge an entire society to repent of the evils of slavery.

As an abolitionist evangelical, Harriet Beecher Stowe took up a social stance condemned by some of her fellow evangelicals, and as a result she earned some strange political bedfellows, like the Unitarians and Frederick Douglass, who did not share her testimony of faith in Jesus Christ. In accurately assessing Stowe's abolitionism, however, students of her life and writings must understand that she rejected slavery for

staunchly orthodox reasons. Stowe viewed all men and women as lost sinners in need of a Savior, and so she saw the superintendence of the slave system as specially subject to corruption: “There is, actually, nothing to protect the slave’s life, but the *character* of the master” (444) she states in her “Concluding Remarks” (444), her emphasis on the word “character” indicating her indictment of the basic moral tenor of the slave owner. As Ann Douglas has noted, Stowe sees a connection between slavery and the Reformed doctrine of inherent depravity.

This issue of original sin leads me to ask the question again: In *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, why does Stowe seek to preach against the ills of a society which she views as ultimately awaiting the condemnation of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, a society which would fade away with the consummation of the Eschaton? Stowe opposes slavery because she felt that God had condemned American slavery through the Bible. Her *Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin* contains an incredible amount of theological ammunition lobbed at the racist “Son of Ham” theology that enjoyed its heyday in mid-nineteenth century and antebellum America. Stowe’s biblicist worldview did not require natural ethical reflections apart from the Scriptures to justify abolition, and she probably would have seen such efforts as contrary to the cause of revealing biblical religion’s condemnation of slavery. Put bluntly, Stowe calls slavery a sin because she believed that the Bible did the same.

Undoubtedly, Stowe’s orthodox novel speaks powerfully to the American experience. Her characters have taken on the almost archetypal status of American stereotypes – an “Uncle Tom” is understood as a weak and politically ineffectual African-American man, and though Simon Legree occupies a shorter portion of the novel

than other major characters, still he is one of the most hated villains in American literature. As readers, we recognize the shadow of the peculiar institution in these characters. If we are American readers, these characters become a living expression of the fear, guilt, and revulsion that bubbles beneath the surface of the American consciousness. Through these characters we get a sense of the horrors of “the peculiar institution” that once reigned as a bulwark of American agrarian economy, that was justified and even glorified by many arbiters of culture and religion, and which still haunts American race relations after its gory death in the battlefields of the Civil War and the slow, painful expiration of Jim Crow in the twentieth century.

But for Stowe, the specter of Uncle Tom is more than a historical ghost of the vile compromises that led members of ostensibly democratic institutions and ostensibly Christian churches to condone an utterly corrupt and inhuman institution. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the system of slavery is a type of the system that mechanizes human relations. Although Stowe uses evangelical Christianity as a lens for viewing the horrors of slavery, she also uses slavery as a lens for viewing human society. Slavery ultimately corresponds to original sin in Stowe's religious typology. Stowe's prophetic condemnation of slavery shows how the lowliest slave and the richest slave owner share the common debasement which the slave trade engenders. Even the novel's most pious characters, like Uncle Tom and Little Eva, suffer the deleterious effects of the peculiar institution. At the most fundamental level, Stowe's novel is not only a demonstration of “the living dramatic reality” (*Uncle Tom's Cabin* 446) of slavery, but it is a demonstration of humanity in revolt against God. Like the seed of Adam that spreads depravity and death through “man's first disobedience” in the evangelical account of

theological anthropology, the system of slavery depraves those who participate in it in Stowe's account.

Abolition of slavery and opposition to slavery functions as the foil to "the peculiar institution" in Stowe's theology by providing a demonstration of the Gospel of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Stowe does not oppose slavery because she thinks that human beings are capable of forming the eschatological Kingdom of God on their own. Nor does she exchange her orthodox Christian belief in an afterlife for a Kingdom of merely earthly good. Instead, Stowe's theology argues for the proclamation of the Gospel in all areas of life. Her providential view of history led her to understand politics and economics as fallen human endeavors in need of the light of the Gospel, and she sought to be instrumental in the redemption of these endeavors from what she decried as wicked purposes. Although this theology clearly espouses the reality of supernatural salvation from sin and death (or, conversely, supernatural condemnation and separation from God), it also views love of neighbor as a fruit of genuine Christian conversion. Being thoroughly evangelical and thoroughly Protestant, this worldview understands the abolition of slavery to be the natural desire of those whose hearts are fully patterned after the teachings of Scripture and the leading of the Holy Spirit. This thoroughly orthodox theology was not content to accommodate slavery to Christianity. Nor did it see so many Christians advocating slavery and decide to put the Bible away in favor of a stale religious rationalism. Instead, Stowe's theology sought to reform society by forcing American politicians and theologians to consider the full implications of orthodox Christianity and democracy. Stowe believed that God had inspired her to write *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and saw the evangelical calling to preach the Gospel as ultimately

continuous with her understanding of her calling to write the novel. Although *Uncle Tom's Cabin* directs its prophetic attention at the sinful institution of slavery, Stowe's theology is clear: the antidote to bondage to sin is the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Thus, it is a conservative religious vision that drives *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Judging from the spirituality of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, it is easy to surmise that Harriet Beecher Stowe clearly believed that though she held citizenship in the City of God and not in the earthly city, her faith in Christ ultimately led her to pursue responsible citizenship in both. The theology of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* unites a firm conviction in the intervention of a sovereign God in earthly affairs with a hatred for tyrannical institutions that blaspheme God and debase humanity. Stowe preached of a day of grace and a day of vengeance to her nineteenth-century readers, and "the little woman who started this great war" lived to see at least part of her prophecy come true. The following years saw the American nation squirming restlessly in their seats at the words of her evangelical sermon. Whether or not America answered effectively to this call to conversion is perhaps a question best left to the theologians. Stowe, however, would argue that every human soul must answer the question. To pose her own rumination, "For what is this mighty influence thus rousing in all nations and languages those groanings that cannot be uttered, for man's freedom and equality?" (*Uncle Tom's Cabin* 451)

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