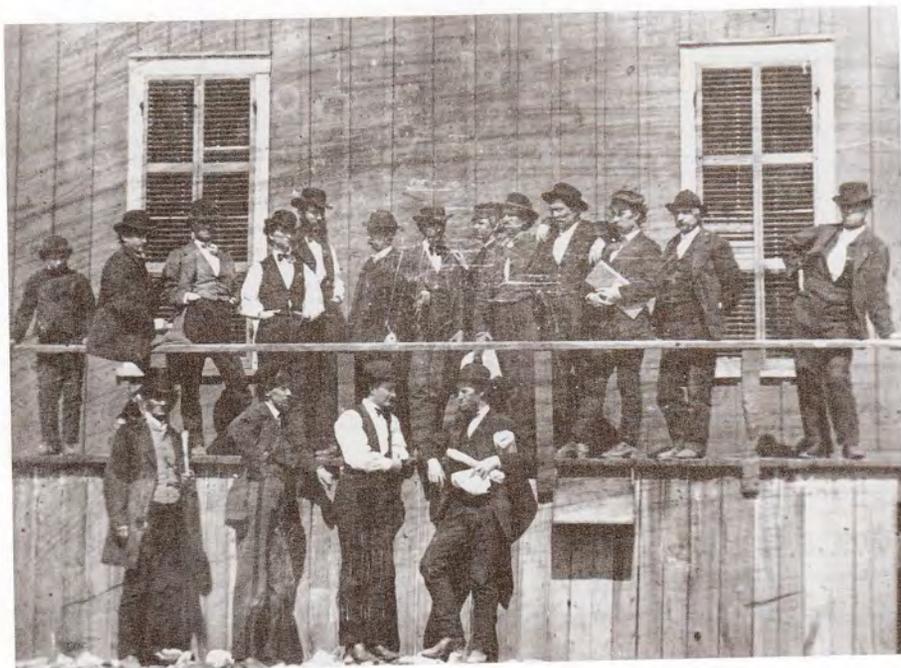




“The war is wrong
and I shall not pray for it.”

St. Louisans were no strangers to slavery. Missouri had entered the Union as a slave state amid great controversy in 1821. Slavery lay at the heart of the bloody border wars between Missouri and Kansas in the 1850's, where men “went at each others' throats like bloodhounds,” according to Dr. Anderson. Because of the city's location, St. Louis was a center for the domestic slave trade with connections to Natchez and New Orleans. Many “Negro dealers” operated in the city, including Bernard Lynch, whose slave pen was located within walking distance - six blocks - of Central. Articles regarding runaway slaves and slaves for hire regularly appeared in the local papers alongside news of steamboat dockings and ads for extract of sarsaparilla.

Central members had personal experiences with slavery as well. Taylor Blow, for example, one of Central's first trustees, grew up with Dred



Lynch's Slave Market, an active slave trading venue in the 1850's, was located between Fourth and Fifth Street on Locust Street, just six blocks from Central. ("Lynch's Slave Market, 1850", daguerreotype by Thomas M. Easterly, Missouri Historical Society)



Dred Scott was remanded to Taylor Blow, an early Central member. Written on the stone marking Dred Scott's grave in Calvary Cemetery in St. Louis are the words, 'Freed from slavery by his friend Taylor Blow.' ("Dred Scott", oil on canvas by Louis Schulze, Missouri Historical Society)

Scott. Blow's father was Scott's original owner and it was to Taylor Blow that Scott was remanded when the Supreme Court declared him to be a non-person in 1857 (Blow promptly freed him). Elder Edward Bates, at one time a slave owner, later represented slaves in lawsuits seeking their freedom. Bates was numbered among the "gradual emancipationists." No Central member seems to have been a radical abolitionist; few people in St. Louis were.

Churches were reluctantly drawn into the controversy. By 1861, all major denominations had divided over the issue. Although Presbyterians divided over theological issues in 1837 and not along sectional lines, most outspoken anti-slavery advocates (predominately New Englanders) were in the "New School" camp. The more theologically conservative "Old School" followers ran the gamut from gradual emancipationists to outright pro-slavery advocates. They tacitly agreed not to discuss the South's "peculiar institution." Central had been originally and specifically established as an Old School(OS) Presbyterian church and would remain in that tradition.

The New School Presbyterians split in 1857. Early in 1861, Dr. Anderson was able to report of the Old School Presbyterians that "Our 300,000 communicants are scattered all over this broad land, and yet we have kept the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. All these fierce sectional strifes have been unable to divide us." He attributed this success, in part, to the fact that only twelve of the Old School's 3,000 ministers "deserve to be called abolitionists." All this was about to change.

On April 12, 1861, rebel forces fired on Fort Sumter. Three days later, President Lincoln issued a call for volunteers to suppress insurrection and preserve the Union. The war had begun. By the time the Old School General Assembly met in May in Philadelphia, public opinion in the North was quickly turning toward support of the federal government. In the South, people were transferring their allegiance to the newly formed Confederacy. The bond that had held the church together was shattered. Dr. Gardiner Spring of New York City introduced resolutions committing the church to the Union cause and expressing loyalty to the federal government. After five days of debate and under intense public pressure, the General Assembly (OS) voted 156 to 66 to adopt the Spring Resolutions. This action became the catalyst for the founding of the Southern Presbyterian Church later that year.

The division was not so clear cut for Presbyterians in the border states. Although the Synod of Missouri (which included Central) remained in the Old School, it rejected the Spring Resolutions outright:

It was unanimously resolved that the action of the General Assembly in May last in relation to the political condition of the country was unscriptural, unconstitutional, unwise and unjust and we therefore solemnly protest against it and declare it, of no binding force whatever on this Synod or upon the members of the Presbyterian Church in our bounds.

Still a slave state, yet destined to remain in the Union, Missouri was placed under martial law in 1861. As was the case throughout the state, St. Louisans were of divided loyalties.

Central members were divided as well. Several were prominent supporters of the Union cause. O. D. Filley, for example, elected mayor of St. Louis in 1858, headed the Committee of Safety during the war. The Committee was the civilian counterpart of the military which governed St. Louis from 1861 - 1865. Edward Bates spent most of the war years in Washington, serving as Lincoln's Attorney General. Mrs. A. F. Shapleigh was active in the Western Sanitary Commission which established hospitals for wounded soldiers and supported other charitable organizations, including the Freedman's Relief Society.

Andrew Park, on the other hand, was identified as a Southern sympathizer and assessed by the military for the cost of caring for war refugees pouring into St. Louis. The very first member of Central, John Wimer, was also a Southern sympathizer. Wimer had served two terms as mayor and was a director of the Pacific Railroad. In the spring of 1862, he was arrested for disloyalty and held in the Gratiot Street Military Prison. He escaped while being transferred to the Alton Penitentiary, joined the Confederates and was killed in action in 1863 at the age of 52.

The Session minutes made no reference to the war at all, even when the conflict came right to Central's doorstep. Following the Union defeat at Bull Run, President Lincoln called for a day of fasting. He asked citizens to "confess their sins before God, to implore his blessing, and to pray for their country and the success of its arms." In preparation for that day, the Old School ministers met to discuss a combined prayer service for all their churches. As recalled by one of those present,



Central elder Edward Bates was a Republican hopeful for the presidency in 1860 and later served as U.S. Attorney General under Abraham Lincoln. Mr. Bates had sons in both the Confederate and Union Armies. (Missouri Historical Society)

The question came up, Shall we keep the national fast, and in the usual way? To this [Dr. Anderson] replied, in substance, "Yes, let us keep the fast, but not such a fast as Lincoln calls for." It was asked, in what respect? Anderson replied, "Mr. Lincoln asks us to pray for the success of the Federal arms and I am not going to do it. The war is wrong, and I shall not pray for it."

Such statements were consistent with Dr. Anderson's earlier pronouncements. In a sermon delivered a few months before the war began, Anderson saw the gathering storm and appealed to "the 4,000,000 of believers in the gentle Jesus that dwell in this land, and asked if there is no power in the religion of him who bought them with his blood to bind them together, to enable them to forget their animosities; do justice, love mercy, and seek the things that make for peace."

Dr. Anderson understood the Church's mission to be an exclusively spiritual one. It was not to involve itself in various civil and social issues. "I am persuaded," he said, "that the Church of Christ in this land could hold these States together in golden bonds, if they had the spirit of their Master, and were true to their mission. But the sad fact is, that many have got their religion enlisted on their side of this strife, and rise up from their knees where they have said 'forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us,' to take a brother by the throat, and say, 'pay me what thou owest.'"

As was true of most Americans at the beginning of the war, Dr. Anderson did not perceive the conflict to be about slavery per se. Rather, it was a question of whether or not the Union could or should be preserved. Speaking as a native Virginian, Anderson concluded:

I have endeavored to set before you the value of the Union, and to urge you to do what in you lies to preserve it. But candor compels me to say that much as I would strive to preserve it by honorable means, yet a disruption may become at once a patriotic and christian duty. If a mere numerical majority shall persistently deny equal rights, and avail itself of the force of arms or the ballot-box, to crush any section of this land, then the Union is nothing worth. Resistance becomes a sacred duty. For rebellion against tyrants, domestic or foreign, is obedience to God.

Despite increasing pressures, Dr. Anderson held fast to his convictions. A fellow minister, Dr. Samuel McPheeters of the Pine Street Church,



During the Civil War, the Sanitary Commission was organized to reform military sanitation and was part of a cluster of humanitarian and war relief organizations staffed mainly by women. ("Sanitary Fair, St. Louis", stereograph image by J.A. Scholten, Missouri Historical Society)

had been forced out of his pastorate on orders of the military. Major General Samuel R. Curtis banished McPheeters and his wife from the state of Missouri because the pastor had allowed “his wife, his brother, and intimate associates, to seduce him from an open and manly support of the Government into active sympathy with the rebellion,” and because he had “refused to observe, in their various meaning, and intent, the recommendations of the President of the United States, to the various churches.”

An acknowledged leader within the St. Louis Presbytery, Anderson and like-minded colleagues succeeded in tabling all pro-Union motions through 1863. These motions sought to declare the rebellion a sin and urged the churches to actively support the Federal government. When it was discovered that Anderson’s son had joined the Confederate army, Anderson came under increasing attack in the newspapers. He was arrested and tried for disloyalty in military court in the summer of 1863.

Much of the testimony against Anderson centered on the positions he took at Presbytery meetings and on his conversations with fellow ministers. He maintained that his signing of the loyalty oath required of all ministers satisfied his duty as a citizen and abstaining from politics (including prayers for the success of the Union) satisfied his duty as a pastor.

The persecution of several pastors, including McPheeters and Anderson, clearly influenced fellow church leaders. In a special meeting (and in Anderson’s absence), the Presbytery took action in support of the Union. In 1864, the military actually sat in on the Presbytery meeting, its presence occasioned by yet another order requiring that all persons attending religious assemblies first sign an oath of allegiance.

When the war ended, it was easier to lay down arms than set aside the memories and convictions of the past. The predominately northern Old School General Assembly, meeting in May of 1865, declared that as a test for readmission, Southerners would have to repent of the “sins” of secession and slavery. Hardly an olive branch of reconciliation, the action offended many in the border states who had remained in the Old School. The Presbytery of Louisville, Kentucky, adopted a “Declaration and Testimony” against the General Assembly’s action. Central elder

**TRIAL OF THE REV. S. J. P. ANDERSON
FOR DISLOYALTY.**

HIGHLY INTERESTING DISCLOSURES.

Abstract of the Testimony for the Prosecution.

[Continued from Yesterday.]

Q.—What has been the language of the accused for two years past, in reference to the rebellion and to the United States Government in its relations to the rebellion; state, so far as you may know, fully? A.—I have never heard Dr. Anderson speak a word in favor of the Government in any of its efforts to put down the rebellion, or a word that indicated that he wished the Government to put down the rebellion; although I have heard him talk once or twice

The trial of Dr. Anderson made headline news in the Missouri Democrat in June, 1863.

John Gill signed it. The following year, the General Assembly condemned the document and refused to seat signers from Kentucky.

A deeply divided body gathered when the Synod of Missouri (OS) convened for its annual meeting in October, 1866. After much emotional debate, a minority of thirty pastors and elders who supported the General Assembly in its action against the dissidents left to form a separate group. They would eventually join the reunited Old and New Schools - the Northern church. Central sided with the majority. Unwilling to make the final break, the Synod declared itself independent of the General Assembly. Efforts by Central ruling elder David Bishop and others to come to some compromise with the denomination failed and in 1874, the Synod formally joined the Southern church.



Seal of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (1861-1983) Central joined the PCUS - the Southern Presbyterian Church - in 1874

A history of Central written in 1883 says little of the war years. It allowed that there was a "great diversity of opinion among the members" and that many members left and joined other churches "with which they were more in sympathy." Nevertheless, Central apparently did not suffer the wrenching controversies that divided the Pine Street Church and Second Church, which actually separated into two bodies in 1864. The Session's support of Dr. Anderson was an important factor in holding the church together. "There were those in the Church," continued the history, "on both sides of the political questions then agitating the country, who loved the Church and who would not allow their differences in such matters to break up their long cherished Christian fellowship and intercourse. But still there was not that cordiality of love and friendship that had been in the olden time."

The war experience raised troubling questions. There was the question of slavery, itself. In 1818, the General Assembly condemned the abolitionist movement, but also declared "the voluntary enslaving of one part of the human race by another...utterly inconsistent with the law of God...and totally irreconcilable with the spirit and principles of the gospel of Christ." By 1861, Dr. Anderson preached that "the institution of African slavery, as it exists in our Southern States, has brought the blessings of civilization and christianity, to more persons who would otherwise have been heathens to day, than have been reached by the effort of all christendom besides." Dr. Anderson was in no way unique. He reflected an acceptable understanding of slavery in his day.

There was also the question of the proper relationship between church and state. Anderson consistently maintained that “The church and the state are so separated that neither trammels the other, while each confers unspeakable benefits on the other. There is here no unholy alliance of the sword and the altar. ...From our inmost souls we say, what God hath put asunder, let no man join together.” Surely Anderson’s experience during the war confirmed his convictions.

Finally, there was the related question of the church’s social responsibilities. Does the church have an obligation to address societal injustice? With regard to slavery and “our Northern brethren” Anderson wrote, “They have a right to disapprove and decline all participation in African slavery. - Their mistake is in meddling with a subject that was placed out of their control by the original compact between the States for which they have no responsibility to God or man...I believe most conscientiously that they should leave that most perplexing and portentous social problem to be solved by those to whom the providence of God has committed it. This certainly was the course of Christ and the Apostles.” Not everyone agreed and Central would face this question again in the future.

Dr. Anderson had been in ill health for several years and after the war he developed an unspecified “disease of the throat.” As a result, he resigned his pastorate in May, 1868: the silver tongued orator had lost his voice.