

Religion, Slavery and Secession: Reflections on the Life and Letters of Robert Hall Morrison



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Abstract

RELIGION, SLAVERY AND SECESSION: REFLECTIONS ON THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF ROBERT HALL MORRISON

(Abstract)

A North Carolina Presbyterian minister and founder of Davidson College, Robert Hall Morrison was also a slave owner and father-in-law to three Confederate generals; yet he opposed slavery and often spouted anti-secessionist rhetoric. He preferred living in the Northern states. However, at the time of North Carolina's secession, he opted to stay in the South. Morrison expressed sentiments in letters written to family and close friends that together reveal no less than a paradoxical man.

This thesis attempts to explore the contradictions expressed by Morrison in a series of letters, written primarily to a cousin and fellow Presbyterian minister, James Morrison, in the four decades leading to the Civil War. The letters unveil the contradictions that shaped Morrison and his views on slavery, secession and his society. In so doing, the thesis intends to flesh out an historic figure in North Carolina education and southern religion, and provide insights into various and similar contradictions and social issues in the antebellum South through the case study of one man. It examines paths he selected, and reveals Morrison as a fallible man who made strides in the name of education while questioning the inherently southern institution of evangelical religion.

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