CHRISTIAN MANLINESS AND THE VOLUNTEER DELEGATE SYSTEM

CHAPTER 1

The founding goal of the United States Christian Commission was simple but ambitious: to minister to the spiritual needs of the entire Union army and thereby bring about such a wave of religious fervour that the morals of the entire nation would be reformed and the souls of the unregenerate saved. This daunting task would require the concerted and organized efforts of a great number of people both on the home front and the battlefront. To execute their mission, the Executive Committee devised a network of roles designed to maximise the reach of the Commission's efforts and to ensure no soul was left untouched. Foremost among these roles was the 'volunteer delegate.' Over the course of the Commission's existence, several thousand delegates travelled south, usually for a period of six weeks at a time, to minister to the wants of the Union army wherever the physical and spiritual need was perceived to be greatest.[1] "Whatever of efficiency the Commission attained," Commission secretary Lemuel Moss later wrote, "must be referred mainly to the labors of these volunteer Delegates and the manner in which their labors were directed."[2] As we will see in this chapter, the Commission intended that these delegates would subscribe to and further the evangelical ideology of the USCC, by conforming to an ideal of Christian manliness that combined physical vigor and energy with moral uprightness and compassion. The duties and traits expected of delegates, and their precarious status as non-combatant civilians in battle spaces, illustrate that northern ideas about manliness and labor were multiple and malleable in the middle decades of the nineteenth century and were complicated by the circumstances of war.

The temporary and voluntary nature of delegate labor – delegates claimed reasonable travel and living expenses but did not draw a wage – set the system apart from the rival Sanitary Commission's workforce of paid, permanent agents.[3] Reflecting the increasing move towards the bureaucratization and professionalization of philanthropy in the mid-nineteenth century, the Sanitary Commission believed that voluntarism led inevitably and deleteriously to zealotry and idealism, and considered their paid employees to be more efficient and dispassionate. Conversely, the Christian Commission deemed the volunteer delegate system the best way to harness the enthusiasm and generosity of the northern public. As a result, the only Christian Commission workers who drew a regular

[1] Jeanie Attie, *Patriotic Toil: Northern Women and the American Civil War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 158-59; Robert H Bremner, *The Public Good: Philanthropy and Welfare in the Civil War Era* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1980), 57-59; Gardiner H Shattuck, *A Shield and Hiding Place: The Religious Life of the Civil War Armies* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1987), 26-27; Steven E Woodworth, *While God is Marching On: The Religious World of Civil War Soldiers* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 168-70.
[2] Lemuel Moss, *Annals of the United States Christian Commission* (Philadelphia: JB Lippincott, 1868), 551.
[3] Attie*, Patriotic Toil*, 161.

wage were a small number of permanent 'field agents' who oversaw operations assigned geographical areas and maintained continuity in the face of rapid volunteer turnover, and the diet kitchen 'lady managers', about whom more in the following chapter.[4] The volunteer delegates, that is to say, constituted the largest part of the Commission's workforce on the battlefront.

Volunteering to become a Christian Commission delegate was relatively straightforward. Applications (consisting of a letter of interest along with two letters of references testifying to the man's integrity and evangelical piety) were vetted either by the head office in Philadelphia or by the local branch to which the prospective delegate applied. Successful applicants were then obliged to present themselves at the head office to receive their badge and commission, along with any supplies they were asked to transport south. The paper commission, which delegates carried with them at all times, bore the delegate's pledge to uphold the values of the USCC and to obey and respect military and medical officers at all times.[5] It also doubled as a pass, entitling the bearer to free or discounted rail travel on lines run by companies friendly to the USCC. Once sworn in, delegates were assigned to a Christian Commission station. These stations were primarily established at supply centres, regimental camps, large hospitals, and other points at which large numbers of soldiers might be expected to gather. Station apparatus varied, but often consisted – in deliberate homage to the YMCA rooms of the 1850s – of a storeroom, reading room, quarters for workers, and space that could be used for worship (a tent or otherwise improvised structure). Experienced delegates who had served on multiple occasions, or had particular business skills, were appointed to the position of station agent and were responsible for coordinating religious services, allocating the delegates under their charge to the various duties within the station (such as visiting patients, leading prayers, helping the army chaplain, and fetching supplies), and dutifully filling out the weekly and monthly reports.[6]

The names, hometowns, and dates of service of each man, along with his commission number, were recorded in ledgers kept at the Philadelphia office. These ledgers contain the names of over 5,000 men who served as delegates, many of them serving on multiple occasions. Once the delegate system took off in earnest, and until the end of the war, there were at any one time no fewer than three hundred delegates in the field. These volunteer delegates were recruited by posters and newspaper advertisements, by individual appeals from existing members of the Commission, and by local congregations anxious to be represented on the battlefront. A circular sent to all Philadelphia clergymen, for example,

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[4] David Raney details the names of USCC field agents and the departments they supervised in "In the Lord's Army: The United States Christian Commission in the Civil War" (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2001), 30-33.

[5] Moss, *Annals,* 541; "Commission no.66," n.d., Scrapbooks; United States Christian Commission Records, 1861-66; Records of the Adjutant General's Office; Record Group 94; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

[6] J R Miller, "Circular," March 30, 1864, Scrapbooks; USCC.

encouraged them to help recruit volunteers, as "not less than One hundred Delegates are imperatively demanded […] the testimony [from the front] is that the harvest is ripe as well as great, and the sickle should be vigorously thrust in with the least possible delay."[7]

The delegate recruitment process was designed to prove to the Northern public that the USCC was a useful, moral, respectable organization worthy of support. This drove the Commission leadership to place particular constraints on the sorts of people they recruited. Wary of public opprobrium, the Commission confined delegate service to men. We will examine in chapter 2 how and why the Commission created restricted and heavily prescribed roles for women that were deliberately distinct from delegate service. Not only was the delegate workforce almost entirely male: as far as I have been able to ascertain it was also entirely white. This was indicative of the organization's ambivalence towards issues of race and racism. The Commission contained in its ranks many veterans of antebellum antislavery organizations, and considered the persistence of American slavery a key obstacle to the perfection of the nation in God's image. After the war, Commission elders hailed the Emancipation Proclamation for giving "definitiveness and character to the contest."[8] Edward Parmelee Smith went so far as to call the war "the death grapple with slavery and rebellion."[9]

But these unequivocal pronouncements were rare – and usually retrospective. The Commission did not systematically seek to attack the peculiar institution, nor to prioritize aiding freedpeople or Black soldiers. This is not to say Commission workers were indifferent to the challenges of navigating emancipation. Delegates devoted considerable energy to education schemes for Black troops and the USCC struck up partnerships with the American Bible Society to distribute religious texts and workbooks to freedpeople.[10] Notwithstanding the residue of paternalism that suffused accounts of interactions between USCC delegates and freedpeople, delegates seem not to have discriminated in offering their aid and comfort to African American soldiers and refugees who fell under their purview.[11] Some effusively praised Black troops as "pious, zealous, and devotional people," and expressed admiration for "the bravery with which they threw themselves into the heart of the battle in every

[7] George Stuart, circular, January 7 1865, Scrapbooks; USCC.
[8] Moss, *Annals,* 143.
[9] Ibid., 200.
[10] John Fea, *The Bible Cause: A History of the American Bible Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 79-80.
[11] For instance, William Fulton was "peculiarly impressed with the quietude, discipline, and moral order" of the freedpeople he encountered near Hampton. "The Gospel among the Colored Troops," *Presbyterian Standard,* February 16 1865. J W Harding said "these colored soldiers have strong arms and strong hearts." Smith, *Incidents,* 358. In expressing surprise at Black soldiers' appetite for reading material and eagerness to learn to read and write, accounts like these betrayed the author's racist assumptions about the intellectual capacity of Black people. This is even more explicit in the recounting of other encounters with African Americans, where the Black interlocutor's speech was often rendered in a grotesque and exaggerated dialect. See, for instance, *Incidents,* 358-68.

engagement."[12] Commission personnel also frequently identified the education and support of formerly enslaved people as the most pressing priority as the war drew to a close. "It is to the great work of improving their condition physically, socially, morally, and intellectually, that the energies of the country should now be, in a great measure, directed," George Stuart wrote in October 1865:

> This is a duty which we owe to them—a debt which it is obligatory for us to pay. […] They stand before us to-day with the chains of slavery broken. They demand as a right, in the name of justice and humanity, that we do something to destroy the effects of their long and bitter years of oppression and bondage fastened upon them by unholy legislation. We shall be recreant in our duty to God and our country if this appeal is despised.[13]

Yet while Richard Levine's offhand comment that the USCC was "unconcerned with slavery" might not carry water, it is nonetheless clear that a general animus towards slavery, overall admiration (often inflected with a tone of surprise) for the comportment and competence of the USCT, and a vaguely expressed concern for the spiritual and material futures of freedpeople were not enough to overcome worries that commissioning Black delegates, or prioritising work undertaken with and for formerly enslaved people, would damage the public appeal of the Christian Commission for white donors across the North.[14]

With public respectability and appeal of paramount concern, then, the white men who were sent to the army under the USCC's banner had to demonstrate to the government and to the army officials with whom they interacted daily that the work of the USCC was necessary and valuable to the Union cause. In some cases, the Executive Committee was able to secure letters of commendation and praise, good wishes for a prosperous and blessed endeavor, and, most importantly, permission from various dignitaries, including the President, the Secretary of the Navy, the Surgeon General, and even the Postmaster General.[15] Ulysses S Grant also lent his practical support, issuing orders to ensure "permission will at all times be granted by the proper military authorities to such delegates to pass to all parts within the lines, without hindrance or molestation."[16] These endorsements were widely published in official reports, commemorative volumes, and in religious newspapers friendly to the Commission. Other high-ranking officials were less enthusiastic, however; some were apt to look upon the USCC as overzealous busybodies likely to get in the way rather than contribute tangibly to the war effort. General Sherman's

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[12] Theodore Schnitzler, report, June 10, 1865, Weekly Reports of Delegates; USCC; Robert Patterson to George H Stuart, September 16 1863, Reports; USCC.
[13] *The American Freedmen's Aid Commission,* African American Pamphlet Collection, Library of Congress, 1865.
[14] Richard R Levine, "Indian Fighters and Indian Reformers: Grant's Indian Peace Policy and the Conservative Consensus," *Civil War History* 31, no. 4 (1985), 329-52: 334.
[15] *First Annual Report,* First Annual Report, February 1863; YMCA Archives.
[16] Ulysses S Grant, "Special Order No 23," December 12, 1863, quoted in "Authority" in in *Christ in the Army*: *A Selection of Sketches of the Work of the US Christian Commission* (Philadelphia: Ladies Christian Commission, 1865)*,* 53.

curt reply to a request that two delegates join his army in Chattanooga was not unusual. "Certainly not," Sherman responded by letter. "There is more need of gunpowder and oats than any moral or religious instruction."[17]

Sherman's unequivocal rejection was representative of a wider public suspicion surrounding the motivations and competence of non-combatants on the battlefront. Widespread negativity towards the position of army chaplain was a case in point. This role was ambiguous, precarious, and often maligned. Reflecting the queasiness of the federal government surrounding the religious welfare of its troops, thorny questions concerning the status of chaplains as officers, their place in the army chain of command, and their entitlement to military pensions, were not formally settled until April 1864.[18] There were only thirty regular army chaplains in the Union army at the outbreak of the Civil War, and although the Civil War precipitated a rapid expansion of the army chaplaincy – over 2000 men were appointed to the role by 1865 – the system could not cater for the sheer volume of troops fighting for the Union.[19] There was a chronic shortage of applicants throughout the war, and many regiments were left without a chaplain for the duration of the conflict.[20] Even where army chaplains were appointed, their presence was not always welcome, and the office attracted frequent ire and derision. Worries abounded that chaplains were being overpaid and that applicants to the chaplaincy were nothing more than cynical mercenaries.[21] The shortage of applicants and the haphazard approach to their appointment meant men of varying degrees of piety, moral strength, and ability made it onto the roster. Some were discredited for stealing, desertion, or drunkenness, while others were deficient in temperament or ability, preaching dull sermons or suffering from exhaustion which impeded their work.[22]

In reality, Christian Commission delegates often worked well with chaplains, sharing resources, setting up interdenominational prayer meetings and Bible study groups, and striking up friendships with their religious co-workers. Benjamin Waddle, for instance, praised the chaplains he encountered at Warrenton Junction as "worthy and faithful men," while G H Hall called his colleagues "a noble band of laborers and Christian gentlemen" remarkable for their "faithfulness and efficiency."[23] But while actual instances of hostility

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[17] Sherman, quoted in Moss, *Annals,* 496.

[18] Woodworth, *While God is Marching On,* 169-70. "General Orders, No. 49," United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), series 3, vol. 1, 382. Courtesy of Cornell University Library, Making of American Digital Collection.

[19] Benedict Maryniak, "Union Military Chaplains," in John W Brinsfield, Williams C Davis, Benedict Maryniak and James I Robertson, Jr, eds., *Faith in the Fight: Civil War Chaplains* (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 2003), 43-47; Shattuck, *Shield and Hiding Place,* 62; Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank: The Common Soldier of the Union,* 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Charter Books, 1962), 263-64.

[20] Maryniak, "Union Military Chaplains," 4.

[21] Shattuck, *Shield and Hiding Place*, 52-4.

[22] Woodworth, *While God is Marching On,* 152.

[23] Benjamin Waddle, diary entries, March 3 and 16, 1864, Diaries; USCC. Waddle worked alongside Edward Phillips Payson, a Congregational minister with the 146th New York, and Joseph Mateer, a Presbyterian with

were few and far between, and for the most part delegates and chaplains muddled along together cordially and to mutual benefit, USCC leaders remained concerned that the negative reputation of the chaplaincy as a whole would rub off on the delegate system, and were keen to distinguish firmly between chaplains and delegates. "[The chaplain's] position is at best embarrassing and is rarely filled with comfort and satisfaction to all concerned," one delegate concluded.[24] Undeniably, like the army chaplaincy, the Commission attracted volunteers of wildly varying quality. The sheer number of delegates in the field, and the attendant difficulty of overseeing and directing their actions, despite the Commission's extensive system of paperwork, meant it was impossible to control every aspect of the delegates' lives and behaviour or to fully predict their suitability for the work. As one public defense of the Commission put it, "in the large number of agents necessarily sent out by the Commission almost inevitably some will prove inefficient, some will fail in tact or good judgement, and some will even betray the cause."[25]

Sure enough, the Commission was frequently forced to counter instances of delegate incompetence and disobedience. Some delegates merely tended to daydream or forget tasks or took a lax approach to paperwork. W L Tisdale at Fortress Monroe despaired of the "negligent" delegates who consistently failed to invoice goods orders correctly, while in the Shenandoah Valley, J R Miller dismissed three delegates from Michigan "on account of the fact that they were rather difficult to manage and keep in appropriate places."[26] The unethical behaviour of some delegates, however, had greater potential to damage the reputation and public standing of the Commission.[27] There were several instances of petty pilfering and of unscrupulous delegates selling donated USCC supplies for a profit. Hearing alarming reports of delegates running small private businesses fencing supplies, Stuart immediately and forcefully decreed that "the Christian Commission never sells any hospital stores of any kind under any circumstances to soldiers. If any agent has done so […] we shall dismiss him immediately."[28] Two men went so far as to pose as USCC fundraisers, touring various neighbourhoods and defrauding unsuspecting civilians by asking for cash donations.[29]

The Commission's concern about public reputation was reflected in its insistence that delegates cooperate productively with other bodies and authorities on the battlefront.

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the 155th Pennsylvania. G H Hall, "Religion in the Army," *Christian Advocate*, February 23, 1865; Scrapbooks; USCC.

[24] "B. H.," report dated November 21 1864, Reports; USCC.

[25] N.a. "The US Christian Commission," *The Congregationalist,* January 20, 1865, Scrapbooks; USCC.

[26] George Stuart to W L Tisdale, July 15, 1864, Letters Sent; USCC; RG94; NAB; George Stuart to Charles C Clark, December 12, 1864, Letters Sent; USCC.

[27] I have written elsewhere about the problems and scandals created by delegate misbehavior. See Rachel Williams, "Heaping Coals of Fire on the Enemy's Head: The Political Uses of Benevolence in the Civil War," in Ben Offiler and Rachel Williams, eds., *From Civil War to Cold War: US Philanthropy at Home and Abroad* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), 17-32.

[28] George Stuart to W J King, April 13, 1865, Letters Sent; USCC.

[29] Lemuel Moss to Mary Chase, February 14, 1865, Letters sent; USCC.

Anxious to preserve the trust of the government and military authorities, the Executive Committee instructed all delegates to cooperate with and yield to the authority of all government representatives, be they officers, surgeons, or army chaplains. The paper commission with which each delegate was issued upon his departure to the front contained a pledge to this effect:

> He is strictly enjoined, if with our forces when a battle is approaching, passing, or passed, to abstain from reporting anything on the subject not authorized by the commanding officer, and in general strictly to observe all Army and Navy regulations, and abstain from casting reflections upon the authorities, military, medical, and clerical.[30]

Instructions issued to delegates embarking on service were laden with advice on cooperating with and deferring to army officers, surgeons, and other government personnel. "It is always desirable to see first the commanding officer of the regiment, brigade, division, or corps, in which [the work] is to be done, and explain it to him," one passage read, "and also see and explain to such other officers as may be convenient and expedient." The same set of instructions urged delegates to commend themselves to military personnel through their "gentlemanly Christian courtesy," in order to maintain good working relationships.[31] This deference to military hierarchy could reap rewards: officers frequently welcomed and supported USCC delegates in their work. George Downey recalled with pleasure the "kindness of Capt. Newton in showing and explaining" the heavy artillery held at Fort Totten where he was distributing reading.[32] Not all relations between delegates and officers were so cordial, however. With the delineation of the delegate's place and status at the bottom of the army hierarchy made abundantly clear and fearing that insubordination and aggravation might lead to vital privileges being revoked across the armies, the Executive Committee dealt harshly with any delegates threatening to defy these rules. J E Hall, for instance, was dismissed from the Commission's service because of his "forgetfulness of relations to the authorities."[33]

Nonetheless, the public ambivalence towards chaplains and other civilian non-combatants placed pressure upon the Christian Commission to prove the indispensability and worthiness of the delegates. The leaders of the Commission expended significant amounts of energy defining their ideal delegate and his contribution to the Union war effort. These ideal delegates were, it was claimed, akin to Christ's disciples: "men full of faith and the Holy Ghost, men so loving the world as to be willing to leave their homes and go without fee or reward to bear the glad tidings of a Saviour to the lost."[34] Published

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[30] "Commission no.66," n.d., Scrapbooks; USCC.
[31] "Documents of the Christian Commission," 1862, Reports; USCC.
[32] George Darius Downey, diary entry, July 19, 1862, United States Christian Commission Diary, 1862 – circa 1865; Library of Congress; Miscellaneous Manuscripts Collection; Washington, DC.
[33] William Boardman to J E Hall, August 24, 1864, Letters sent; USCC.
[34] William E Boardman, "The Principles of the Christian Commission," in *Christ in the Army*, 25.

pamphlets and information booklets listed desirable characteristics and attitudes, outlining a narrow and consciously gendered ideal of moral, spiritual, and physical strength intended to successfully execute the USCC's mission and uphold its reputation and appeal. "Four things are indispensable in all," one circular read. "Piety and patriotism, good common sense and energy."[35] In short, the USCC set out in these publications their blueprint for how to be a good Christian man in the United States in the midst of war. The language they used to articulate these expectations demonstrated the mutability of ideas about manhood and manliness during the Civil War.[36] A body of scholarship on the construction and evolution of masculinity, most closely associated with the work of Anthony Rotundo, has often identified a shift from a version of northern manhood which, in the earlier decades of the nineteenth century, expected and rewarded self-control and selflessness, towards a more aggressive, virile model of masculine behaviour by the turn of the twentieth century, one epitomised by the emergence of athletic competition and organized sports – including the YMCA's increasing preoccupation with physical activities.[37] While some of these impulses were channelled in secular directions and were even hostile to religion, by contrast the so-called 'muscular Christianity' movement, which reached its height in the last decade of the nineteenth century, considered a combination of athleticism and religion the natural antidote to the perceived fragmentation and feminization of American society, and placed a premium on action, competition, and physical prowess as markers of mental strength and moral discipline.[38] Whether the evolution of American models of masculinity was as smooth or universal as this narrative suggests is another matter, however. Rather, throughout the century, a range of what Amy Greenberg calls "practices of manhood" jostled for attention and primacy, a consensus rarely, if ever, winning out. [39]

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[35] George Stuart and William Boardman, "United States Christian Commission: Information about Delegate Work," n.d., Reports; USCC.

[36] Most scholarship on masculinity and the Civil War focuses on the experiences of soldiers and veterans. The best example of this is Lorien Foote's *The Gentlemen and the Roughs: Violence, Honor, and Manhood in the Union Army* (New York: NYU Press, 2010). See also, for example, David W Blight, "No Desperate Hero: Manhood and Freedom in a Union Soldier's Experience," in Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber, eds., *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 55-75; Steven J Ramold, *Baring the Iron Hand: Discipline in the Union Army* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010); and Lauren K Thompson, *Friendly Enemies: Soldier Fraternization throughout the American Civil War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2020).

[37] See Clyde Griffen, "Reconstructing Masculinity from the Evangelical Revival to the Waning of Progressivism: A Speculative Synthesis," in Mark C Carnes and Clyde Griffen, eds., *Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 183-204; J A Mangan and James Walvin, "Introduction," in J A Mangan and James Walvin, eds., *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 1-6; E Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: BasicBooks, 1993),10-30.

[38] See Roberta J Park, "Biological thought, athletics, and the formation of a "man of character," 1830-1900," in Mangan and Walvin, eds., *Manliness and Morality,* 7-30; Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

[39] Amy S Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 10.

For the Christian Commission, the question was not simply how to be a man, but how to be a *Christian* man. In his 1985 book *The Sinews of the Spirit,* Vance explored how English novelists Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes created Victorian heroes whose lives fused physical prowess and manly adventure with self-discipline and, ultimately, a willingness to submit to God's will.[40] He called this (sometimes uneasy) combination 'Christian manliness.' This is a potentially useful concept for understanding the expectations the Christian Commission placed upon its male volunteers. In a succinct appraisal of the requisite criteria for delegate duty, G R Bent, a field agent with the Army of the Potomac, wrote to Commission president George Stuart, "we need men of judgement (who understand men), we want men of enterprise, strong men, physically, and men of good common sense, men full of faith and of the Holy Ghost."[41] Bent's assessment emphasizes that the crux of true manhood – without which all the physical strength and business acumen in the world was useless – was the moral incorruptibility and evangelizing vigor only possible through belief and trust in God.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, the most important criterion upon which the USCC insisted was the Christian identity of the delegates. The Christian Commission stipulated that delegates belong to a recognised evangelical denomination and that they be professing members of a specific congregation. Applicants who failed to supply two references, at least one of which came from a minister confirming church membership and Christian character, were rejected outright.[42] As we will explore in greater detail in subsequent chapters, the evangelical denominations, despite their practical and doctrinal differences, were united by their emphasis on a crisis-like conversion experience, and by their commitment to converting the world.[43] The insistence on evangelical membership, therefore, emphasizes how the USCC remained devoted to its founding mission; no matter how involved with physical welfare (as demonstrated by its widespread distribution of food, medicine, and clothing) it became as the war progressed, its main focus as conceived by the Executive Committee remained the conversion of souls to Christ. Although the Commission required proof of evangelical church membership, it remained resolutely interdenominational in character, welcoming delegates from across the ecclesiastical spectrum. "The Commission is

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[40] Norman Vance, *The Sinews of the Spirit: The Ideal of Christian Manliness in Victorian Literature and Religious Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). See also Donald E Hall, "Muscular Christianity: reading and writing the male social body," in Hall, ed., *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 3-13.

[41] G R Bent to George H Stuart, September 14, 1863, Letters Sent; USCC.

[42] Membership implied not only regular church attendance, but also proof that a congregant had undergone a moment of crisis through which they had subsequently been converted to Christ. Therefore members, and by extension, delegates, were the most zealous and committed sections of a congregation, which was further made up of "hearers" who professed belief or interest in Christ crucified but had yet to undergo this conversion process. See Richard J Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997 – first published 1993), 43; Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, "Turning Pews into People: Estimating Nineteenth-Century Church Membership," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 25 (1986): 186.

[43] Paul Conkin, *The Uneasy Center: Reformed Christianity in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 66, 114-15.

anti-sectarian," one pamphlet read. "Episcopalians, Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Lutherans, German Reformed, etc. all meet here, and forgetting everything that has divided them at home, join hearts and hands in the great work of doing good and glorifying God."[44] Interdenominationality was a prominent feature of many of the reform movements which had flourished in the antebellum period, fostering coordinated actions in an attempt to spread religious and moral ideas as far as possible.[45] Amid bloody sectional strife (which had, of course, torn apart evangelical denominations in the years before war broke out), Commission leaders were similarly anxious to emphasize points of commonality rather than divergence.[46] "Often in a company of Delegates there were as many Christian denominations represented as there were men," one worker recalled, "yet they came together without knowing or caring to know their several distinctive names. They were unanimous in their prayers, their aims, their labors; and that was sufficient for the time being – ecclesiastical relations, by no means unimportant in themselves, were unimportant there."[47]

These noble sentiments notwithstanding, interdenominationality was, on occasion, difficult to maintain. Some delegates found it difficult to suspend or forget the confessional identity that had first qualified them for delegate service. This was particularly problematic when it came to Holy Communion and baptism, rituals that generated considerable conflict over their theological meaning and the correct method of observance. Despite guidance to the contrary, in March 1864, Henry Safford baptized four soldiers in a stream near his station, while K Atkinson conducted several mass baptisms by total immersion and also sprinkled others with water to renew their infant baptism.[48] Baptism was not the only contentious rite performed by Atkinson: he also reported that on one evening at Camp Convalescent, "a crowded house rec'd the Sac[rament] Of the Lord's Supper."[49] These denominationally specific rites threatened to compromise the impartiality and broad appeal of the USCC, and Commission leaders were anxious to distance themselves from these actions and to reinforce the ecumenical image of the organization, not least to avoid alienating its donor base, which was as denominationally diverse as its workforce. When a delegate named A K Potter complained about delegates administering Communion, Lemuel Moss apologised on behalf of the disobedient delegates, stressing "all question of ecclesiastical organization + ordinances + discipline are foreign from [the Commission's] province + work."[50] Likewise, in response to George Nair's request for permission to baptize

[44] "Pacific Christian Commission," n.d., Scrapbooks; USCC.
[45] Clifford S Griffin, *Their Brothers' Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States 1800-1865* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983 [reprint]), 60.
[46] C C Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schisms and the Coming of the Civil War* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985).
[47] *Annals,* 575.
[48] Henry G Safford, report, March 27, 1864, Delegates' Statistical Reports; USCC.
[49] K Atkinson, report, September 7, 1863, Delegates' Statistical Reports; USCC.
[50] *Information for Army Meetings, November 1864* (Philadelphia: J B Rodgers, 1864), 12, 36. Lemuel Moss to A K Potter, December 12, 1864, Letters Sent; USCC.

soldiers, William Boardman replied, “the Commission is not an ecclesiastical body but a spiritual one. We have no power to form churches, receive members to the church, baptize or perform or authorize any ecclesiastical act or function.”[51] J J Abbott, Nair’s field agent, also rebuked the delegate and halted the proposed baptisms, an action which Boardman applauded. “Being an agency of all denominations,” Boardman wrote to Abbott, “[the Commission] is bound to prevent anything being done by its delegates conflicting with the public sentiment.” [52]

“HARD WORK”

Verifying the prospective delegate’s credentials as an evangelical Christian was merely a starting point, however. Commission leaders held strong views on the personal attributes expected of would-be delegates. Foremost among the desirable attributes were youth and energy. The USCC insisted that the men they engaged as delegates be physically fit and in good health. This was, in part, a practical consideration: due to the arduous nature of the work undertaken by USCC delegates, the Executive Committee attempted to ensure that those commissioned were physically capable of performing their duties. From day to day, men could be expected to carry heavy boxes of supplies, move wounded soldiers, stay awake through the night with the dying, fill out vast amounts of paperwork in their free time, and travel around their district to the stations which needed them. The Commission did not try to disguise this fact; the First Annual Report contained a section plainly called ‘Hard Work’ which explained: “men do not volunteer as delegates of the Commission because the work is easy, and a pleasant recreation. Never was there a service requiring or exciting more self-denying and ceaseless toil.”[53] Delegate reports reveal the detrimental effects Christian Commission work could have on the health of even the previously fit and strong. “After I had been in the field for nearly four weeks I was taken sick and […] was advised by the surgeon to return home as soon as possible,” wrote J P Kennedy, whose service with the 2nd Army Corps was curtailed by illness.[54] James Patton, too, was forced to leave the service early, a shortage of workers at City Point having led him and several colleagues to overwork themselves.[55] Even when sickness did not bring a delegate’s service to an end entirely, it could cause severe disruption to the work. A W Knowlton, stationed at Alexandria, deeply regretted that, due to poor health, he had not been able to do as much as he wished – “But God be praised that I have been able to do any thing,” he added at the end of one weekly report.[56] On rare occasion, the rigours of delegate service proved fatal;

[51] William Boardman to George Nair, October 12, 1864, Letters Sent; USCC.
[52] William Boardman to J J Abbott, October 28, 1864, Letters Sent; USCC.
[53] First Annual Report, 1863; Armed Services U S Christian Commission-related records, Kautz Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota.
[54] J P Kennedy, report, November 22, 1864, Delegates’ Statistical Reports; USCC.
[55] James L Patton, report, August 4, 1864, Delegates’ Statistical Reports; USCC.
[56] A W Knowlton, report, July 23, 1864, Weekly Reports of Delegates; USCC.

six delegates died during the war, five of them from apparent fatigue and overwork, and one, J W Leighton, killed by enemy fire at Chattanooga.[57] Anxious to avoid increasing the Army's workload by diverting medical care to sick or feeble delegates unable to perform their duties, the Executive Committee decreed, "we have to receive from each applicant credentials as to […] bodily strength to endure fatigue, general fitness for the work of exhortation and teaching."[58] For instance, the Committee turned down a Mr. Hill in April 1864, convinced that although he was intellectually and spiritually qualified, he was not physically strong enough.[59]

Although some found the physical challenges posed by the work overwhelming, others found the opposite to be true. Field Agent J R Miller found the work exhausting but ultimately galvanising: "All the Delegates are in the best of spirits, and *all are hard workers.* At night all are weary, and sleep is welcome, but morning finds all refreshed, and ready and anxious to begin a new day's labors."[60] The invigorating impact of battlefront ministry on both physical and spiritual wellbeing was not lost on the Executive Committee, who used this to entice ministers to take a leave of absence from their home congregations and join the Commission: "the change is often very beneficial to the health of the Delegate – it…quickens his zeal for the salvation of men."[61] Notably, they were confident these benefits could be experienced by all, regardless of age. While recruitment propaganda disseminated by the Commission emphasized the importance of physical strength and bodily health to successful delegate service, there were no consistent stipulations made as to age, and old age did not always prove an impediment. Indeed, in some cases, delegate service gave older men a new lease of life. One journalist who dined with several old USCC delegates in Culpepper praised his companions as "jolly, cheery, enthusiastic, delighted with their work, and triumphing with an easy laugh over what are real hardships to men past middle age."[62]

Christian Commission leaders were ambivalent about the age of the ideal delegate. After all, what Paul Ringel calls "cultural presumptions about youth" suggested that, while younger men might be stronger and fitter, youth also presented considerable challenges.[63] A flourishing industry of advice literature and the emergence of organizations like the Young Men's Christian Associations in the decades before the war advanced the premise that the minds and souls of young men – in particular, those navigating the perilous seas between childhood and full maturity – were acutely malleable and receptive to outside influences,

[57] Registers of delegates; USCC.
[58] George Stuart to M S Wells, August 22, 1864, Letters Sent; USCC.
[59] George Stuart to D Harbison, April 29, 1864, Letters Sent; USCC.
[60] *Annals,* 591.
[61] "The Christian Commission and its Work," November 11, 1864, Reports; USCC.
[62] "Dinner and My Hosts," *Ripley Bee,* May 12, 1864. Gale Nineteenth Century Collections Online.
[63] Paul B Ringel, "Thrills for Children: the *Youth's Companion,* the Civil War, and the Commercialization of American Youth," in James Marten, ed., *Children and Youth during the Civil War Era* (New York: NYU Press, 2012): 77-91, 89.

both good and bad.[64] The Christian Commission, building on this tradition, harboured its own anxieties about the susceptibility of young soldiers to vice and temptation. Yet despite these misgivings, their calls for volunteers, by emphasising values of athleticism and strength, tacitly suggested that younger men, in theory, made better delegates.

The question of whether youth was a hindrance or a help was particularly pertinent because a significant number of Christian Commission delegates were college students. Northern institutions of higher education faced considerable upheaval during the Civil War.[65] College students were statistically more likely to enlist than the overall white male population. Enrolments at many institutions plummeted as students suspended their studies to join up.[66] Still accessible only to a tiny elite (roughly 2% of the college-age white male population), a college education was designed not only to channel men into respectable professions but also to instill in them standards of gentlemanly behaviour that fit them for political and civic leadership. Colleges (in theory) trained young men out of the worst traits associated with youth, replacing recklessness and frivolity with sobriety and industry. The Civil War naturally presented students with the opportunity to test their skills in the fire of battle. Yet, while college students joined the armies in disproportionate numbers, many chose not to enlist or found alternative ways to offer their service to the Union.[67] This included, in numerous cases, volunteering for the US Christian Commission.

Among the delegate rolls were at least 118 students of colleges and theological seminaries. These student delegates hailed both from well-established institutions like Yale and from smaller, newer colleges, such as Olivet College, Michigan. Andover Theological Seminary, a Massachusetts institution with a history of abolitionism and benevolent reform that dated back almost as far as its foundation in 1807, was particularly well-represented, with thirty-six students joining the USCC over the course of the war.[68] Institutions like Andover were filled with young men anxious to demonstrate both their piety and their

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[64] Heather D Curtis, "Visions of Self, Success, and Society among Young Men in Antebellum Boston," *Church History* 73, no. 3 (2004), 613-34; Allan Stanley Horlick, *Country Boys and Merchant Princes: The Social Control of Young Men in New York* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1975).

[65] Julie Mujic, "Save a School to Save a Nation: Faculty Responses to the Civil War at Midwestern Universities," in Lorien Foote and Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai, eds., *So Conceived and So Dedicated: Intellectual Life in the Civil War-Era North* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015): 110-28, 110; Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai, *Northern Character: College-Educated New Englanders, Honor, Nationalism, and Leadership in the Civil War Era* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016).

[66] Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai, "College-Educated New Englanders in the Civil War," *Massachusetts Historical Review* 13 (2011) 71-2; for example, 56% of Harvard's class of 1861 and 42% of Yale's class of 1861 served in the Civil War. Andover's rolls went from 133 in 1860 to just 68 in 1864. Henry K Rowe, *History of Andover Theological Seminary* (Boston: Thomas Todd Co., 1933), 77. Richard F Miller, "Brahmins Under Fire: Peer Courage and the Harvard Regiment," *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 30 (2002), retrieved from HJM's online archive at http://www.westfield.ma.edu/mhj/ accessed December 4 2013.

[67] Julie Mujic, "'Ours is the Harder Lot': Student Patriotism at the University of Michigan During the Civil War," in Ginette Aley and Joseph L Anderson, eds., *Union Heartland: The Midwestern Homefront During the Civil War* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013), 33-67.

[68] Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, *A School of the Church: Andover Newton Across Two Centuries* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 45-49.

patriotism by volunteering for the Christian Commission. Over the course of the war, the Commission found these students' youth and energy to be both a blessing and a curse. In many cases, student delegates acquitted themselves well and were roundly praised in official USCC publications for their commitment, enthusiasm, and resourcefulness. Near Cave City, KY in March 1865, G W R Scott, an Andover student, having run out of bandages, tore up his own shirt to dress patients' wounds.[69] John Calhoun Chamberlain (brother of Joshua), who suspended his studies at Bangor Theological Seminary to join the USCC, was lifted up as an example of tireless service when he walked ten miles at night, crossing a dangerous and swollen stream, to fetch supplies for a hospital outside Gettysburg.[70]

[Figure 04]

Most significant of these exemplary student delegates was James Russell Miller, a Presbyterian from Pennsylvania who began his ministerial training at Allegheny Theological Seminary in 1862. As the war intensified, Miller – who, in his later career, would become both editorial superintendent of the Presbyterian Board of Publications and a popular Christian author – first volunteered as an ordinary six-week delegate for the Christian Commission in March 1863. He acquitted his work so well that his colleagues convinced him to accept a paid position as a field agent, a post he took up just in time to take charge of operations at Gettysburg.[71] This protracted service threatened Miller's studies at Allegheny. USCC secretary William Boardman wrote to the seminary's board of directors to impress upon them Miller's importance to the war effort and justify the prolonged suspension of his studies.[72] "Under ordinary circumstances we would not encourage candidates for the ministry to turn aside for a day," Boardman wrote. "In his case however the case is different. The army is a missionary field white for the harvest. The world presents no other like it. Mr Miller has experience talent and adaptation to aid and direct the labors as a Field Agent which render his services of special value to the work."[73] Miller was granted permission to continue his work with the Christian Commission, remaining with the USCC until July 1865. In the best of cases, therefore, by training students "to act with knowledge [and] confront challenges," delegate service performed a similar didactic function to a college education.[74] Those held up as exemplary embodied the ideal of Christian manliness prized by the Christian Commission: active, intelligent, compassionate, and at their very best, capable of outstanding logistical and moral leadership.

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[69] Ibid., 438.
[70] Smith, *Incidents,* 161-62.
[71] Moss, *Annals,* 370. John T Faris, *The Life of J R Miller: "Jesus and I Are Friends"* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publications, 1912), 25.
[72] *Annual Catalogue of the Allegheny Theological Seminary of the United Presbyterian Church of North America, 1890-91* (Pittsburgh: Murdoch, Kerr, & Co., 1891), 32.
[73] William Boardman to Rev J S Easton, October 20, 1864, Letters Sent; USCC.
[74] Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai, "'What is a Person Worth at Such a Time': New England College Students, Sectionalism, and Secession," in James Marten, ed., *Children and Youth in the Civil War Era* (New York: NYU Press, 2012): 46-62, 49.

This was not always the case, however. Youth could be a drawback, too. It was not only lofty idealism that accounted for the rush of applications from students. Some young men were motivated to apply by a yearning for (relatively danger-free) adventure, and by the short period of service. This was a source of constant frustration for the USCC, especially for the field agents who had to deal with these new recruits. John Cole, field agent for the Army of the Potomac, found the student delegates under his supervision inexperienced and frivolous. Ironically, given that he himself was only twenty-four, Cole wrote several times to the Executive Committee on the subject, dismissing them as "college boys", and complaining that they were prone to absconding before their agreed period of service had expired.[75] Delegate A D Morton also encountered students who took a slapdash approach to their work, exhorting the Executive Committee to remind young volunteers that they were "more than mere colporteurs."[76] Frustrating, too, was the rush of applications that accompanied the start of the summer vacation period, overwhelming the workforce (while leaving the USCC understaffed at other times of the year); as George Stuart lamented to one disappointed applicant, "the college vacations have thrown so many students into the ranks of our delegates that we are compelled to limit the number of that class accepted."[77] At best, therefore, student delegates were dedicated, able young men who readily pledged themselves to the cause, but at worst, they were reckless tourists anxious for a sanitised adventure, who lent legitimacy to the suspicion that young men were incapable of self-discipline and restraint. The mixed experiences and abilities of college students suggest that although youth and physical fitness were desirable attributes for Christian Commission delegates, they were by no means guarantees of aptitude for the work. Steven Woodworth argues that the role of army chaplain "required the stamina, flexibility, and robust health of a young man, but also the wisdom and maturity of an older one": the same might easily be said of the combined physical and emotional demands placed upon delegates.[78]

SOLDIERS FOR CHRIST

Beyond the obvious practical benefits, asserting the physicality of the USCC delegate also had a symbolic significance. Naturally, ensuring that delegates were capable of "Hard Work" was important to maintaining the efficiency of the Commission, but the figure of the young, strong, healthy delegate, laboring manually and gladly for the Lord, was also central to the evangelical ideology of the Christian Commission. [79] Over the course of the nineteenth century, religious leaders feared that a perception of the clergy as effeminate and unfit for the macho competition of the marketplace (a perception compounded by the prominent

[75] George Stuart to John Cole, August 8, 1864, Letters Sent, USCC.
[76] A D Morton, report dated Spring 1864, Delegates' Statistical Reports, USCC.
[77] George Stuart to John L McElroy, August 11, 1864, Letters Sent, USCC.
[78] Woodworth, *While God is Marching On*, 148.
[79] It must be pointed out that the USCC's President hardly conformed to this ideal: George Stuart's chronic asthma often saw him absent from the Philadelphia office, bedridden, for long periods.

role of lay women in religious life) was undermining the reputation of the ministry in American society, and diminishing the power of the church.[80] In order to win the respect and attention of the men, therefore, USCC delegates also had to promote a physical, active masculinity that would cause the targets of their evangelization to perceive them as equal in manliness to those who fought in combat. The physical attributes of the ideal delegate, and the active labor expected of him, aimed to challenge popular perceptions of the ministry as sedentary and gentle - that is, as effeminate – and promoted a new model of clerical masculinity, one reconcilable with the aggression and individualism of the nineteenth-century public sphere.[81] According to Anthony Rotundo, this was a tactic also employed by antebellum ministers anxious to rid their profession of the taint of effeminacy. He argues that the revivals and reform movements of the period enabled ministers to "apply assertiveness, energy, even masculine hostility to the cause of Christian goodness," allowing the clergyman to express the action and aggression of the worldly marketplace "while pursuing the sacred goals of love and goodness that his culture linked to women."[82]

Christian Commission publications often used metaphors that cast delegates in active roles to valorize and legitimize the work. By encouraging volunteers with "fields white for the harvest" and exhortations to "thrust in the sickle without delay" (Rev 14^{19}) the USCC cast its delegates as manual laborers using their hands and their physical strength to reap converts for Christ. Even more telling was the use of deliberately militaristic language and imagery which cast the delegates not as farmers but as soldiers armed for a holy mission. "They are Christian scouts," one pamphlet read, equating the work of delegates to reconnaissance and intelligence gathering, "always alert on the look-out in the advance, first at every place of suffering, keen to find every case of want."[83] An account of the USCC's work in Virginia following the Battle of Fredericksburg was peppered with military terminology:

> a "section" of delegates, under a captain, attended by a four-horse team and wagon loaded with stores, marched with each army corps, five in all, with one team extra as a reserve […] a detachment of delegates came with the wounded to Fredericksburg, and served them there, while the teams went on to Belle Plan for supplies. A corps

[80] The primary proponent of this view is Ann Douglas, in *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1977). Douglas' thesis has not gone unchallenged (see for instance David Schuyler, "Inventing a Feminine Past," *The New England Quarterly* 51, no. 3 (September 1978): 291-308); however, whether this process of feminization was real and identifiable is less important than fears among the clergy that their authority was being eroded. See also Barbara Welter, "The Feminization of American Religion: 1800-1860," in Mary S Hartman and Lois Banner, eds., *Clio's Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 137-57.

[81] Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 172, Richard D Shiels, "The Feminization of American Congregationalism, 1730-1835," *American Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (Spring 1981), 60. As I have suggested in the above note, whether American ministers were indeed "effeminate" is less important here than the perception of effeminacy, which drove attempts to energise and "masculinise" the clergy.

[82] Rotundo, *American Manhood,* 173.

[83] *Information for Army Meetings, June & July 1864* (Philadelphia: James B Rodgers, 1864), 3.

> of minute men with ample supplies meanwhile came to Belle Plain, and were then in advance of all other relief to meet the wounded coming on from Fredericksburg.[84]

This passage drew repeated parallels between the soldiers and the delegates, blurring the distinctions between these positions. Military rhetoric also suffused the hymns collected in the hymnbooks distributed by the USCC; one book was prefaced by an index of subjects that included "Battle," "Christian warfare," and "Victory."[85] Hymn-singing was an integral part of USCC prayer meetings, and leading the singing naturally fell to the delegate; thus, when soldiers and delegates participated in the shared act of singing lyrics like "soldiers of Christ, arise, / and put your armor on," or "sure I must fight, if I would reign / increase my courage, Lord," they conflated not only the acts of fighting for the Union and fighting for Christ, but also the roles of the soldier and the delegate.[86] The instructions included with each delegate's diary further equated these roles, and the determination and bravery required of both: "A heroism not inferior to that which charges to the cannon's mouth to capture the battery, is required on the part of those who would conquer under the banner of the cross, and take captives for Jesus."[87]

The work of the Christian Commission delegate, then, was held up as conforming to the Scriptural idea of the Christian soldier. This paradigm is most evident in the Pauline epistles. Paul commands the Ephesians to put on the "breastplate of righteousness," the "shield of faith," and the "helmet of salvation," and wield the "sword of the Spirit." "Put on the whole armor of God," Paul exhorts, "that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." (Eph 6^{10-18}) So, by commissioning the strong and healthy to perform active, strenuous tasks and employing military-religious language in doing so, the USCC cast its delegates as Christian soldiers in this Biblical mould, clad in the "armor of God," and engaged in a cosmic war that reimagined and transcended the earthly conflict surrounding them.

The physical and moral attributes required of delegates, and the way these attributes fed each other, is abundantly evident in a sermon that was delivered by George Bringhurst. Bringhurst, an Episcopal minister in his mid-thirties from Moyamensing, Philadelphia, was the first delegate to be issued a commission, and he returned to the front several times throughout the war to preach and minister to Union troops. [88] His reliability as a worker and dedication to the cause of the Christian Commission meant he was invaluable as a homefront ambassador for the organization. In order to maintain a steady flow of public donations to the Christian Commission's coffers and to ensure the military and

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[84] Ibid., 6-7.
[85] *Hymnbook for the Army and Navy* (New York: American Tract Society, 1863), 2.
[86] Ibid., 3, 11.
[87] Paul M Duke, ed., *Civil War Diary of Louis Miller Albright* (Medina: Belding Publishing, 2005), Plate XI.
[88] Josiah Granville Leach, *History of the Bringhurst Family* (Philadelphia: J B Lippincott and Co., 1901), 80.

political authorities remained favourable to the Commission's presence on the battlefront, delegates were encouraged to make speeches and even embark on lecture tours in their local areas emphasising the importance and vitality of the USCC. "Will you not now come up to the help of the Lord, and stir up all whom you know, to give liberally?" George Stuart asked in a direct appeal to returning delegates as the war drew to a close. "Will you see that meetings are held in every congregation and school district in your neighbourhood, and collections taken? […] you can tell your story!"[89] Bringhurst was one of the delegates tasked with promoting the work of the Christian Commission; he transcribed the sermon he preached to his home congregation at All Saints Episcopal Church in Moyamensing upon his return from the front and sent it to the head office in Philadelphia for publication. Bringhurst took as his text Acts 4[20] ("we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard"), and set about captivating his audience with an exciting and lurid account of his adventures. His account of his service illustrates well how Christian manliness, as embodied by the USCC delegate, not only required decisive and aggressive action, athleticism, and strength, but also obliged the delegate to demonstrate restraint, self-control, tenderness, and compassion.[90]

Bringhurst framed his service and the role of the Christian Commission delegate more generally, as vital to the Union cause and as equivalent to military service. While paying homage to the young men who "bared their bosoms to the enemy's rage, to save our happy firesides and homes," Bringhurst at the same time emphasized that his own form of service was active, valorous, and manly. "We had no right to put down that sword," he claimed, explaining that his sense of duty drove him to volunteer for the "path" laid down before him by God. "There I want to walk until the monster is crushed," he told his audience, exhorting them to join him in supporting the Christian Commission – and, by extension, the godly cause of the Union. He condemned the "faint hearts" and "timorous souls" that might give up in the face of adversity and suffering, suggesting that his own heart and soul were quite the opposite. Bringhurst cast himself and his fellow delegates as crusading Christian soldiers following God's call and contributing actively to the suppression of the rebellion and the restoration of the Redeemer nation.

Throughout the sermon, Bringhurst's language, channelling the extemporised passion of the most vital itinerant preachers of the Second Great Awakening, brought home the urgency and immediacy of the Christian Commission's work.[91] His use of the present tense sought to convey his audience to the very scene of battle, building an atmosphere of dread and anguish by his vivid portrayal of the adverse conditions in which he labored. Describing a stormy, desperate night at Belle Plain, he said, "Where there is so much distress, I scarcely know what to do! But this is no time to be idle – […] that man must have

[89] George Stuart, "Circular to Returned Delegates," March 9, 1865, Scrapbooks; USCC.
[90] George Bringhurst, sermon, n.d., Letters Received; USCC.
[91] Nathan O Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 130-41. Preaching is discussed at greater length in chapter 4.

some water; there is a man who has lost a leg, has been riding since early morning in the rain, with nothing to eat; I have some biscuit in my haversack, he must have them!" As the sermon progressed, Bringhurst dispensed with grammar altogether, descending into a staccato of fragmentary sentences – "start with a boat load of wounded soldiers for Washington. Wash, dress them, give them a good substantial meal. Write a number of letters. Reach Washington at 1 o'clock" – that mirrored the frenetic pace and variety of tasks that characterized a typical day in delegate service.

Bringhurst outlined at length the large and frequently unpredictable range of duties that his service required of him. According to his account, in addition to leading prayer meetings and hymn-singing, preaching sermons, writing letters for the wounded and dying, distributing religious literature and material comforts such as food and clothing, and performing burial services, Christian Commission delegates might also be called upon to administer basic medical care, transport supplies, and direct the labors of other volunteers. Throughout, the resourcefulness, physical strength, and athleticism required of USCC volunteers was apparent. Bringhurst frequently detailed working late into the night, in all weathers, sleeping in makeshift and highly uncomfortable shelters, grabbing a bite to eat wherever he could, before waking early to walk vast distances – sometimes along stretches of road renowned for guerrilla attacks – to fetch supplies or reach stricken men. Bringhurst used his own body as a shield and as a crutch, holding a gum blanket over one man to protect him from driving rain and propping up another as he helped him limp to a hospital ship. On one occasion, he and his fellow delegates put their hands to use tearing down some old buildings and fashioning crude beds from the lumber so that wounded soldiers would not have to lie on the bare ground.

Yet, at the same time, Bringhurst's efforts were not solely manual. His sermon stressed the emotional perspicacity required of him and his fellow delegates. In his descriptions of bedside conversations with dying men, he emphasized the tenderness with which he touched and spoke to the men, recalling how one man "takes my hand and holds it upon his breast" and thanked God for the opportunity to "smooth the dying pillow" of countless men. He also reflected upon the impact of the work and of the scenes he witnessed on his own emotions. While he expressed gratitude for the "sweet smiles" he received as remuneration for his efforts, the work was emotionally gruelling as well as rewarding, and he recalled to his audience that "the groans of the wounded are hard to bear." Most affecting of all were the burials Bringhurst oversaw – "we wrapped them in their blankets and strewed their forms with flowers," he wrote. "We caught the loving accents meant for loved ones, fond and dear. We bore them to their lowly graves, and shed a sacred tear." As scholars such as Glenn Hendler and Brian Roberts have demonstrated, crying was not inherently coded as unmanly in the mid-nineteenth century. From the reformed drunkard tearfully recounting his intemperate past to Gold Rush miners weeping over shared feelings of homesickness, tears could be heroic, passionate displays of emotion that helped to forge homosocial bonds or manifested an internal process of reformation and

restoration externally.[92] Similarly, in his sermon Bringhurst presented his tears – the bodily expression of his grief – not as unbridled or effeminate, but as a restrained and honourable response that married sentiment and morality and hence fit into the ideal of Christian manliness.[93]

All this suggests that delegate work was not solely about grit and strength. During their service, delegates forged relationships with soldiers that often involved caregiving and emotional support. As one delegate recalled after the war, "their hearts were warm. They had not become accustomed to the sad and necessary scenes of military life, and they were ready to sympathise with all who were in sorrow of body and mind."[94] There was often, in the ways delegates attempted to offer moral guidance or exercise control over soldiers' behaviour, a parental undertone to these relationships, but this was neither straightforwardly paternal *nor* maternal. Some scholars have identified a relatively clear demarcation between roles ascribed to mothers and fathers in the antebellum North, with fathers disciplining and preparing their sons for the rigours and competition of the marketplace and mothers safeguarding Christian morality and raising virtuous, sober children. [95] Reid Mitchell imports this model to the Civil War army camp, suggesting that army officers frequently saw themselves as fathers, combining love for their men with firm, fair discipline, while female nurses and other female workers neatly occupied the role of surrogate mother.[96] As the figure of the male USCC delegate suggests, however, the reality of these interactions was less clear-cut. While his work might require him to employ skills coded as masculine by nineteenth-century society, such as public speaking, administrational and financial acumen, physical strength, and the ability to act as an authority figure, he might also adopt the roles of nurse, teacher, moral advisor, and confidant.

At several points in his sermon, Bringhurst embraced tasks that required emotional sensibility and tenderness, incorporating these elements into his framing of himself as a manly Christian soldier – apparently without consternation or fear of emasculation. Dipping into his haversack for supplies to feed a hungry young soldier, he reminded his audience of "the widow's meat and oil," drawing parallels between himself and the widow of Zarephath,

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[92] Brian Roberts, *American Alchemy: The California Gold Rush and Middle Class Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 160-65; Glenn Hendler, *Public Sentiment: Structures of Feeling in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 36-38.

[93] Mary Chapman and Glenn Hendler's important edited collection *Sentimental Men: Masculinity and the Politics of Affect in American Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) is particularly useful in challenging what they call "the uncomplicated gendering of sentiment as feminine" in earlier scholarship. Chapman and Hendler, "Introduction," 1-18: 7.

[94] Moss, *Annals,* 252.

[95] See for example Stephen M Frank, *Life With Father: Parenthood and Masculinity in the Nineteenth-Century American North* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 1-12; Colleen McDannell, *The Christian Home in Victorian America, 1840-1900* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994 – first published 1986), 108-16, 128-36; Mary P Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 157-62.

[96] Reid Mitchell, *The Vacant Chair: The Northern Soldier Leaves Home* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 51-53, 75-80.

whose service for the prophet Elijah in the face of her own deprivation and hardship was rewarded by God (1 Kings 17^{8-16}). The day before building bunks with his own hands, he busied himself making bouquets of wildflowers to cheer the bedsides of wounded soldiers. Bringhurst emphasized that his role called upon delegates to humble themselves in the face not only of God's will but also of the sacrifices made by countless young men. In a passage evocative of Christ washing the feet of his disciples (John 13^{1-17}), Bringhurst recalled tying the shoelaces of a soldier who had lost an arm: "I stooped to grant his request, and as I kneeled and tied those leathern strings, I deemed my position more honourable than the grandest and most magnificent this world could give." This submission was cast not as shameful or unmanly, but as an act of righteous Christian compassion. In fact, throughout the text, Bringhurst emphasized the morality of self-sacrifice and humility: "I am drenched," he wrote in one of several passages reflecting on the bodily discomfort he suffered as a delegate, "but these boys must be helped." This reflected another variation of mid-century manliness – while submitting (for instance, to a political rival or to a nagging wife) was seen by many as emasculating, for others, "self-denial and cosmic resignation were cardinal virtues" indicating qualities of forbearance and force of will.[97] God's role in Bringhurst's ability to adequately meet the physical and emotional challenges of delegate service was never in doubt: in the face of battle, Bringhurst claimed he "experienced no fear whatever". Puzzled by this, he later realised that the battle had taken place on a Sunday morning while his home congregation were at prayer, sustaining him from a distance.

The Christian Commission, as we have seen, recruited men to further the organization's evangelical mission and to conform to the USCC's image of a Christian soldier. They were charged with preserving the reputation of the Christian Commission in the field and on the homefront, and with upholding its interdenominational, extra-governmental character. In particular, through their physical strength, vigor, and piety, delegates were intended to embody a spirit of Christian manliness that would inspire soldiers to consider the fates of their souls and would add weight to the evangelical message the delegates preached.

[97] James C David, "The Politics of Emasculation: The Caning of Charles Sumner and Elite Ideologies of Manhood in the Mid-Nineteenth Century United States," *Gender & History* 19, no. 2 (2007), 324-45: 329.