RELIGION AND RECONSTRUCTION:
A CLERIC'S CONCEPTION

by Burton J. Williams

The observations of the Reverend Cyrus R. Rice concerning the problems of reconstruction provide an interesting, though sometimes contradictory, contemporary analysis. Rice's thoughts on reconstruction, however, are made even more interesting as a result of his own past experiences. He had been a clergyman of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Suddenly, on January 21, 1865, he appeared before the fourth quarterly meeting of the Clinton and Tecumseh Circuit, Baldwin City, Kansas District, to request membership in the Methodist Episcopal Church. The meeting was being conducted in the Clinton Methodist Church, and from the minutes of that conference the following is revealed: "Bro. C. R. Rice a presiding Elder from St. Louis dist. Mo. of the church South presented himself before the conference making certain statements for our consideration."

Subsequent to the Clinton conference, Minutes of the Tenth Session of the Kansas Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1865, on page 9, reveal that on March 17, 1865, at a meeting in Topeka, Rice, as an Elder from "... the Church South, shall be considered a member of this Conference when he shall produce his testimonials..." Coincidentally or otherwise, at the eleventh hour of the dying Confederacy, we are witnesses in retrospect to the conversion of Rice from the Methodist Episcopal Church, South to the Methodist Episcopal Church. The reader is left to determine for himself what, if any, influence this transition from South to North had on Rice's views with regard to reconstruction. Rice was well aware of many of the obstacles which cluttered the road to reunion, not the least of which was the problem of the divided churches. As Rice saw it the religious and political problems posed by reconstruction were inseparable. Perhaps his religious-political view of reconstruction is a more perceptive analysis of the self righteous attitudes reflected in the policies of the more radical members of Congress than historians have generally conceded. For Rice, at least, the Civil War had been a religious war.

The following address, entitled "Reconstruction of the Rebel States," was delivered by Rice before the Baldwin City District Conference meeting in Lawrence, Kansas on June 23, 1865.

In September, 1910, Rice gave the holograph manuscript of this address to the Kansas Methodist Historical Society and this manuscript along with other historical manuscripts, including conference and church minutes referred to in this monograph, are housed in the Kansas Methodist Historical Library, Baker University, Baldwin, Kansas. The editor as a former director of the Kansas Methodist Historical Library, is indebted to those at Baker University who made this research possible.
"Reconstruction of the Rebel States"

The subject is difficult. We have no data from which we can draw our conclusions. There never was such a Union of States in any government before ours. There never was such a rebellion before. Everything connected with the question is new; and while it affords ample room for thought there are no way marks by which we may guide our thoughts. We have to launch out into a new field and build up our own theories without precedent.

The rebels are conquered, but what are we to do with them? What are we to do with their country? What relation do the revolted states sustain to the government? Are they in the Union, or out of it? If in the Union, why talk about a reconstruction? If they are out of the Union, how are we to get them back? If they are out of the Union have they not the right to say upon what terms they will return? Shall we take them back with their old state constitutions, or require new ones?

These questions, with many others of a kindred nature, have arisen in my mind since I began to investigate the subject. And they are difficult. There seems to be two different views taken by the leading men of the country. One of them denies the doctrine of secession in toto. With whom we agree. The others, to my mind, acknowledge the truth of a secession, whether they acknowledge the right of it or not, by taking the ground that Southern States should be treated as conquered provinces, and congress the sole right to legislate for them. Accept this as the true theory and there would be no end to the exciting Congressional contests, and reconstruction would be the clog to national legislation instead of slavery, as heretofore.

But rebellion does not destroy the status of a state. A state cannot rebel. The people of a state may rebel, but their rebellion does not change the relation of the state to the Government. If the rebellion of any portion or, all the inhabitants of the State carried the State out of the Union there we would have no right to invade the State with our armies, and how could we suppress the rebellion of the people? If the rebellion of the people does not change the relation of

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1 Rice is reflecting the thinking of his day, and after, with this series of theoretical questions. More recent studies devoted to reconstruction generally pay less attention to theoretical problems. President Johnson's position has generally been maintained while the "radical" views have been generally criticized as consisting of a series of shams which were used for political and/or economic opportunism.

For a penetrating analysis of these problems see Eric L. McKitrick, Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1960).

2 This is more or less the position ascribed to the "radical" members of Congress.
he State to the Government neither does the suppression of the rebellion. Where is the right to subjugate and hold any State in this Union as a conquered province? If we hold them as conquered provinces then they are not States. Congress has no right to legislate for the States, and if we hold the Rebel States as conquered provinces, and give Congress the sole right to legislate for them we unState them. And what is this but acknowledging the doctrine of secession? Is it not secession itself? Who has the power to say that because some, or all of the inhabitants for certain States have been rebellious that those States are no longer members of this Union? Has the President? Has Congress? Not until the Constitution is changed.3

Again, this idea contradicts the expressed policy of the Government in the conduct of the war. Our noble deceased President has said all the way through that it was not a war of subjugation. He has offered rebels from the beginning all the privileges of the Union if they would return to their allegiance. Congress has declared to the world that we are only maintaining the authority of the Federal Government. Our Generals and soldiers have understood that it was a war for the Union. The world understands it, that the Southern States were not to be subjugated, but "whipped" back to their allegiance and made to acknowledge the authority of the Federal Government. And shall we turn round now that the rebels are "whipped," and not only contradict the expressed policy of the Government in the conduct of the war, but say to the rebels you did secede, your States are no longer members of our Union, but conquered provinces? God forbid it. No, Sir. Let us say to the rebels your cherished doctrine has been scattered to the four winds by the invincible soldiers of this Union. There is not a single State lost to our Union should be the boast of every man in the land. We have lost many brave men, and spent millions of money, and there are yet rebels in the land, though conquered, but our old Flag has not lost a single Star, and even South Carolina is a State in the Union.4

President Johnson in his proclamation relating to North Carolina has taken the proper stand upon this subject, we think. He ignores anything like secession. The rebellion for a time may overthrow all right Government, and enact laws contrary to the Federal authority, but whenever the Government shall have reasserted its authority, and overthrown the opposition to its lawful power, all laws and regulations of the rebellious come to an end. In a word, all laws in force at the date of and prior to the rebellion, except those contravened by the

3Although Rice generally supported the positions of Presidents Lincoln and Johnson with regard to reconstruction, one gathers from this statement that Rice believed that there really was no constitutional basis for reconstruction unless or until the Constitution was amended.

4The foregoing statements are examples of Rice's general commitment to Presidential reconstruction as opposed to "radical" reconstruction, this in spite of his constitutional qualms.
Federal authorities in the suppression of the rebellion, are at once restored, and the States stand where the rebellion found them. The rebellion is crushed out, but the States as members of the Union are unchanged. The President's legal adviser, Attorney General (James) Speed, in an official paper says: "Reconstruction is not needed, that word conveys an erroneous idea. The construction of this Government is as perfect as human wisdom can make it. The trial to which its powers and capacities have been subjected in this effort at revolution and dismemberment proved with what wisdom its foundations have been laid. Ours is a task to preserve principles and powers clearly and well defined, and that have carried us safely through our past troubles. Ours is not a duty to reconstruct or to change." I am not sure about that last word. I think we need some change, but I am opposed to reconstruction in the full sense of that word.

The objectors to this doctrine say that it will revive slavery. We think not. We take the ground that slavery is abolished by President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. As the chief Executive of State, and Commander in chief of the army he has the right to make use of any means in his power, and to inflict any punishment he saw proper upon rebels, in order to suppress the rebellion and maintain the authority of the Government. Slavery was found to be the stronghold of the rebellion, and the President issued his Proclamation in order to break down this bulwark of their strength. This Proclamation swept the very foundation from beneath the rebels. But did the President have the authority to free the slaves by proclamation? We say he did. The rebellion must be crushed, and the law making power gave him authority to use any means that lay in his reach to accomplish this object. And the freedom of the negro [sic] was one of the means made use of by him, and by the act of Congress the whole thing was legalized. Hence the slaves are already free, and there is no power by which they can be reinslaved. We have no law to make slaves of free men.

The more Rice pursues this line of reasoning with respect to President Johnson's plan of reconstruction the more he proves to be inconsistent. The Presidential proclamation organizing a provisional government for North Carolina was issued May 29, 1865, the same day as his Amnesty Proclamation.

Lincoln himself was not always clear as to what the relationship of the seceded states was or should be. He was convinced that they were not in their "proper practical relations" with the Union and that it was the "sole" object of the government to restore those seceded states to their "proper practical relations."


Here Rice argues that Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation was legal, insofar as Commander-in-Chief he could, conceivably, take almost any course of action deemed necessary to crush the rebellion. However, Rice, like Lincoln, was dubious about the constitutional legality of this matter, consequently he refers to Congress as having legalized "the whole thing." This could be a reference to the passage of the Wade-Davis Bill in 1864, or perhaps to the thirteenth amendment to the Constitution.
Again; the conditions of the surrender of the rebel armies were based upon the acknowledged abolition of slavery. The rebels themselves felt that slavery was destroyed with the rebellion. The most of their slaves have escaped from them and having tasted of liberty should not be enslaved again without a desperate struggle; and the people of the South are not fools enough to try it, under all the circumstances.

Moreover; President Johnson is guarding this point closely. Each voter before he can deposit his ballot has to take an oath to bear true allegiance to the Constitution and laws of the United States, and the different proclamation of the President in regard to slavery. And in his Amnesty Proclamation restoring the rebels to their civil rights and property he is careful to except their slaves. So we see that the resident's Emancipation Proclamation is to hold good.

Again; the Constitution has been so amended that slavery is abolished. And I firmly believe that it will be ratified by the States, notwithstanding the refusal of New Jersey, Delaware and Kentucky. Time will show that many of the rebel States will ratify. There are hundreds of abolitionists in the South now. The rebellion in the place of establishing slavery has freed the slave and made thousands of genuine abolitionists. And abolitionism is on the increase every day. We are destined to become a nation of abolitionists.

The several Southern States will have to amend their Constitutions o as to agree with the Federal Constitution. And that they will do under the restrictions laid down by the President's Proclamation do not believe there is a single State that will refuse to amend. But, make a long matter short, it is no use to talk about enslaving free men, and the negroes [sic] are free to all intents and purposes.

which was proposed by the federal legislature to the several states on Feb. 1, 1865 and declared to have been ratified by the Secretary of State, William H. Seward on Dec. 18, 1865, some six months after Rice's address.

Rice, like most Northerners, apparently did not see nor accept the possibility that he South might be justified in using the same line of reason employed by the North but in behalf of the Southern cause, i.e. The South was willing to secede and "crush" the Union armies as a necessary step in the preservation of constitutional government as they saw it.

9 Here Rice is in error. Recognition of abolition was not a general condition of surrender.

9 It is not clear just which proclamation is being referred to here. Very likely it refers to Johnson's proclamation for the Provisional Government of North Carolina, issued May 29, 1865. It may also refer to Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation of Jan. 1, 1863.

10 Rice is in error once again. The thirteenth amendment, which freed the slaves, was not declared ratified until Dec. 18, 1865. In the very next sentence Rice concedes that the amendment has not yet been ratified.

11 Delaware, New Jersey and Kentucky refused to ratify the thirteenth amendment prior to its promulgation as an amendment to the Constitution on Dec. 18, 1865.

12 This is very likely a reference to President Johnson's Amnesty Proclamation of May 29, 1865.
The next thing that claims our attention is the policy to be pursued toward the rebels. The States remaining in the Union as they were, what shall we do with their rebellious inhabitants? is rather a serious question. Is the President's Amnesty Proclamation right? Does that proclamation restore them to all the rights to bona fide citizens? That is my opinion, and I believe that the proclamation meets the approbation of most men.\(^\text{13}\) I think, however, there should be some restrictions thrown round them. It is but justice to all concerned to make the thing safe. Rebels really have no right in the Government.\(^\text{14}\) I think the safe plan would be to forever prohibit them \([\text{from}]\) holding any high office of trust or honor in the Government. No one can be opposed to this idea that loves our Government. Give them office and thus give them influence and power, and how long would it be ere they would seek to destroy the Government again? They are traitors and they are not to be trusted. They have deceived us once and what assurance have we that they would not deceive us again? I would like to put them upon a long probation, at least. We can see at a glance that it will never do to give them office. The leading men in the rebellion would be the very men that would seek and obtain office. This would be ruinous. It would disgrace our noble men who have stood up for the Government. How do you think that Senators Sumner, Wade, Washburn, and others would like to meet Breckinridge, Toombs, Wigfall and any other of those men in the Senate Chamber as Senators from their respective States?

Again; there are many rebels that should be disfranchised. I am not in favor of disfranchising them by the wholesale. We ought to be careful here, for many honest men were misled in this matter; and there are hundreds that were made rebels by the force of circumstances, that would have been good Union men otherwise. And such men will reform and make good citizens in the future. Let all men that consented to hold high offices, at least in the rebellion be disfranchised. Say all members of Congress, all Senators, all Governors, Judges of all District Courts, members of legislatures, Generals, Colonels, Majors, Captains, Quarter Masters, Commissaries, Surgeons, and Chaplains. Let all such men feel that rebellion has disgraced them.\(^\text{15}\) Let the world know that we are merciful in not executing them according to law, but that we still look upon their crimes as a great one. Let their children see what rebellion has cost their fathers. There are

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\(^{13}\)Once more Rice is obviously referring to the Amnesty Proclamation of May 29, 1865.

\(^{14}\)Rice once more appears contradictory by declaring that Johnson's Amnesty Proclamation was "right" and then declaring that "Rebels have no right in the government," this in spite of the fact that only fourteen classes of ex-"rebels" are potentially excluded from holding public office as outlined in Johnson's Amnesty Proclamation.

\(^{15}\)Most of these classes of men were excepted in the Amnesty Proclamation.
and will be loyal men enough in the South to "run the ship of State" without the aid of rebels, and they ought to do it. They must do it. There are some rebels that deserve death. Justice demands their death.

I have said nothing in regard to negro [sic] suffrage, because Bro. Dearborn's noble essay precludes anything from me on that subject. The men that fight the battles for our country ought to vote.

We are unwilling to close this essay until we say something about the restoration of the Churches in the South. There is no doubt about the need of reconstruction in this department. Religion is a mighty power and is calculated to do a great deal of harm. A rebellious Church is the worst thing that could be left among the Southern people. And I speak advisedly when I say that there is not a loyal Church in the South. I speak of them as bodies. And so far as I am capable of judging one Southern Church is as much to blame in this matter as another. They are all alike guilty. And I hold that it is the bounden duty of the Government to look into this matter carefully. We cannot interfere with man's religion, but we can interfere with his politics. And we must not suffer the traitor to cover up his treason with his religion. Let every man worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience, but compel him if it is necessary, to bear true allegiance to the Government.

The reconstruction of the Churches, however, depends mainly upon the efforts of the loyal churches. Let the Methodist Episcopal Church go into the South and swallow up what has been known heretofore as Southern Methodism. I mean by that, that she take all the country and open her doors to all Loyal Methodists, and give the rebel portion of them a chance to repent of their sins and return to the mother Church. The Methodist-Episcopal Church is already engaged in this work, and promises to do a great deal of good for the country in this way. I see that the Baptists and the New School Presbyterians are taking hold of the matter in the right way. But I hear nothing from the Protestant Episcopal or O. S. [Old School] Presbyterian Churches on this subject. What are they going to do? Are they going to recognize their Churches in the South just as they stand? Are our Episcopal brethren going to continue Jeff. Davis in their Church paper without proper contrition and confession? Will Leonidas Polk be allowed to dawn [don] his sacerdotal robes now and officiate as the Bishop of the Diocese of Louisiana? Are the hosts of their rebel clergy-men in the South men of good standing in the Church? And are our loyal Presbyterians ready to acknowledge such men as Drs. Palmer, McPheeters, Anderson and a host of others, as good ministers of Jesus Christ in the Presbyterian Church? If so we have but little hope

16This is probably a reference to George S. Dearborn, who transferred from the New Hampshire Conference to the Kansas Conference in 1865.
of sustaining loyal Christianity among them.\textsuperscript{17}

There is not a Church in the South but what has been corrupted by the rebellion, and I repeat what I have already said, the welfare of the nation demands a thorough reorganization of the Churches, every one of them. Of course, we do not expect Roman Catholics to do anything in this direction, but we do expect Protestant Christianity to take hold of the matter with a will.\textsuperscript{18} And let loyal Christianity unite itself against rebel religion. Let there be no strife in the camps, but let every man go to work in his own way in harmony with all other loyal men to build up loyal churches in the South. We may expect disloyal Churches to unite against loyal Christianity, and we must unite our forces to meet them. In this way we can defeat them and do a great work, not only for the Government, but for true Christianity.\textsuperscript{19}

Finally; the main point should be to love mercy, but deal justly with all men. Let impenitent rebels suffer the penalty of the law. Let the penitent receive pardon, and after proper trial be restored to their former privileges, if found worthy. Let the loyal receive full protection in their rights, whether white or black. Let the Constitution, if necessary, be so amended that no man can possibly have an excuse for the accursed doctrine of secession. Let all the Churches in the South be thoroughly reorganized. Flood the country with schools and Churches, and books and tracts, and thus scatter light and knowledge and the love of liberty everywhere. Let us strive to build up the waste places, heal all the wounds of our countrymen, and restore their former peace and prosperity, and thus constrain them to unite with us in the chorus:

"The Union of hearts, the Union of lands, the Union of lakes, and the Flag of our Union forever!"

\textsuperscript{17}Bishop Polk had taken a leave of absence from his clerical duties in order to accept a commission in the army of the Confederate States of America. Apparently Rice did not know that Polk was killed in 1864. Benjamin Morgan Palmer, an ardent defender of slavery, was active in founding the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States and was the first moderator of its General Assembly.

\textsuperscript{18}It appears that Rice thought that the Roman Catholic Church was "beyond redemption."

\textsuperscript{19}Here Rice reveals his belief in the necessity of a close working relationship between the church (Protestant churches) and the federal government, a relationship he was not prepared to sanction in the case of the Confederacy.