A Passionate Missionary to the West
Charles Beecher in Fort Wayne, Indiana, 1844-1850

PEGGY SEIGEL

In the decades before the Civil War, the Reverend Lyman Beecher and his accomplished children challenged the consciences and held the imaginations of Americans as few others of their day. When Beecher left Boston in 1832 to become the first president of Lane Theological Seminary near Cincinnati, he was considered the preeminent New England preacher, “a general and a statesman” in “the Kingdom of Christ” and a leader of Presbyterian reform. Under his leadership, Lane was charged with training Presbyterian ministers as missionaries “to hold the great West for Protestantism.” Beecher’s sons and daughters followed in his venerable footsteps as pastors, educators, and leaders in the struggle against slavery. Sharing the reform passions of their period, the Beechers felt it was their mission to

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establish a just kingdom on earth by spreading the gospel of a loving God.¹

Within the Beecher family, Charles (1815–1900), the ninth of eleven children, has remained a shadow behind his more famous older siblings, Edward, Henry Ward, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, and their luminous father. An examination of Charles Beecher during his six years as pastor of Second Presbyterian Church in Fort Wayne, Indiana, brings recognition to this self-described “original” member of the Beecher family. Looking at Charles’s struggles in Fort Wayne on behalf of New School Presbyterianism also helps us understand the changes within the denomination on the western frontier. Finally, Charles’s emergence in the early 1850s as a national spokesman for abolition can be understood as part of a continuum begun during his years in Indiana.

When Charles Beecher arrived in Fort Wayne in May 1844 to take the pulpit of the newly organized Second Presbyterian Church, he was an unlikely candidate for success. Twenty-nine years old, he had only the previous year been licensed as a Presbyterian minister after a long period of self-doubt and rejection of traditional Calvinism. Although every one of Lyman Beecher’s children diverged from their father’s Calvinism to some degree, Charles seems to have had the hardest time coming into the Presbyterian fold. Following in his brothers’ well-worn footsteps by entering the ministry ran counter to his temperament. Studies of Charles during the decade before he arrived in Fort Wayne portray him as extremely self-absorbed and given to adolescent affectations that embarrassed his family. While his moody personality no doubt reflected an extreme case of angst, Charles seems to have been ill-equipped to cope with the world.²

Growing up in the Beecher family under Lyman’s strong influence, Charles developed a love of music and learning that was intensified by


his years at the best New England prep schools and Bowdoin College. His passion for music was such that he declared he would earn his living from it—a keen disappointment to his father, who assumed that all of his sons would follow the deathbed wish of his beloved first wife, Roxana, that they enter the ministry. Even more distressing to Lyman and the family was Charles's rejection of fundamental Presbyterian theology. His interest in the popular “science” of phrenology led him to doubt that human beings could possess free will; his personal reading of Jonathan Edwards's theology confirmed that belief. Charles further rea-
soned that the inevitable human condition—his own included—was that of infidelity. In the words of biographer Marie Caskey, Charles now believed that “[w]ithout free will, there could be no such thing as religious faith or hope.”

Despite his doubts, in 1834 Charles returned to the Beecher fold after his graduation from college. Controversy had followed Lyman from Boston, even though he had moved west to avoid theological dispute in favor of saving the inhabitants of the new western frontier. By the time Charles arrived, Lyman had already survived a trial for heresy, arising from the growing New School/Old School split within Presbyterianism. Lane Seminary had also lost fifty-one students the previous school year, when the board of trustees had forbidden them to express support for abolitionism. Despite Lyman’s attempts to moderate between factions, a large group of students had angrily withdrawn from the seminary.

Other members of the Beecher family, too, faced controversy over their antislavery beliefs. Charles’s scholarly oldest brother Edward, president of Illinois College in Jacksonville, published a series of sermons outlining a revisionist theology aimed at elevating the “standard of personal holiness throughout the universal church.” Edward had closely aligned himself with fellow minister Elijah Lovejoy and his struggle to continue his abolitionist newspaper in Alton, Illinois. After Lovejoy was assassinated in 1837, Edward became a national leader in the cause for immediate abolition. In Cincinnati, where violent mob attacks twice destroyed the presses of the abolitionist newspaper The Philanthropist, Henry Ward and Harriet, both then living in Ohio, felt compelled to take

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3 Meredith, Politics of the Universe, 213; Lyman Beecher Stowe, Saints, Sinners and Beesers (Indianapolis, 1934), 336; Caskey, Chariot of Fire, 143.

4 Caskey, Chariot of Fire, 34-67, is helpful on Lyman Beecher’s theology. The Old School/New School division within Presbyterianism involved a number of factors. Doctrinal disputes raged over narrowly differing views of “sin, human ability, and salvation.” Old School leaders wanted the Presbyterian Church to have complete control over its missionaries; the New School cooperated with other denominations, particularly through the American Home Missionary Society. New School adherents were more likely to be active in reform movements, especially for the abolition of slavery. For a summary of the issues and how the split played out in Indiana, see L. C. Rudolph, Hoosier Faiths: A History of Indiana’s Churches and Religious Groups (Bloomington, Ind., 1995), 125-27. For a deeper discussion of the theological differences, see George M. Marsden, The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience: A Case Study of Thought and Theology in Nineteenth-Century America (New Haven, Conn., 1970), 31-58.

5 Sources vary over the number of students who withdrew from Lane; Marsden, The Evangelical Mind, p. 94, puts it at fifty-one. On abolitionist sentiment at the school, and the split led by Theodore Weld, see Robert H. Abzug, Passionate Liberator: Theodore Dwight Weld and the Dilemma of Reform (New York, 1980), 74-122.
action. Henry volunteered for a home militia charged with protecting the city from further violence. He and Harriet both wrote antislavery articles condemning the violence and the attacks on free speech.

Both Henry and Charles attended classes at Lane Seminary. Henry assiduously prepared for the ministry, was ordained, and began to serve a small congregation in Lawrenceburgh, Indiana. In contrast, Charles withdrew from political conflicts and intellectual debates into a solitary melancholy. Having proposed marriage to Sarah Coffin while in college, Charles now broke off the relationship, believing himself to be in love with another girl. He became his own brooding romantic fictional character, hopelessly yearning for a beautiful young maiden. In 1838, at the age of 23, he cut himself off from his family to seek adventure as a musician in New Orleans. Lyman was distraught. Later in life, Charles recalled how his father said goodbye: “‘My son,’ he said, with quivering lip, ‘eternity is long!’ and, with a glance of anguish and a grasp of the hand, he turned away.” The absent Charles became the focus of Sunday morning family prayers.

During the next two years, Charles’s rebellion was tempered by his exposure to slavery, as well as by personal illness and prolonged poverty. Forced to take a job as a clerk at a wholesale house, he was sickened by what he saw of slavery when he visited cotton plantations to collect debts from planters. Prostrated by yellow fever and again dependent on his father for financial survival, Charles realized that he needed to change the direction of his life. He reestablished his relationship with Sarah, and they married in 1840. While Charles had languished in New Orleans, Henry Ward had advanced his ministerial career, leaving his small-town parish for Second Presbyterian Church in Indianapolis. When Henry offered Charles a position as organist and choir director at the rapidly growing church, Charles eagerly accepted. The young couple, with their first-born son, became part of the extended family of Henry Ward and Eunice Beecher.

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For the next few years, Charles turned Second Presbyterian Church into a center for classical and religious music. His Bible studies classes and occasional sermons were popular and well attended. Aside from any recognition he earned, however, he had little income and was again forced to depend on his father’s limited resources.

Charles’s life made an abrupt turn in March 1843 when he underwent a transformative experience that his family understood as a coming to God and acceptance of Christ. The last of Lyman and Roxana’s sons to undergo this apparent conversion, Charles was now considered “safe” in his religious beliefs and ready to enter the ministry. Henry lost no time in arranging for Charles to be brought before an examining board of the Indianapolis Presbytery in August 1843. According to records, Charles was granted a license to preach anywhere within the bounds of the Presbyterian Church. When Henry learned of an opening in Fort Wayne’s First Presbyterian Church, he saw an opportunity for Charles to have a church of his own and, for the first time, a regular, if meager, income with which to support his family.9

Henry was eager to help Charles for personal reasons as well. Located on the Wabash and Erie Canal, Fort Wayne was Northeast Indiana’s main trading center. Its population of 3,000 was growing daily with new settlers arriving from the East and from Germany. First Presbyterian Church was the denomination’s most important church in the area; securing control of its pulpit would add to Henry’s growing reputation for church leadership. Henry also embraced the challenge as one more chapter in the continuing New School-Old School war. Nowhere was the competition for control more bitter than among the emerging Presbyterian congregations in Indiana.10

Under its former minister, Rev. Alexander T. Rankin, First Presbyterian Church had affiliated with the Old School. Rankin’s allegiance was divided, however, for while he opposed separation from the denomination, he supported his brother and mentor, Rev. John Rankin of Ripley, Ohio, an outspoken leader in New School reform and the anti-slavery movement. Among the 139 members of Fort Wayne’s congrega-

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9Within the family, Henry Ward assumed most of the responsibility for guiding Charles into the ministry. Caskey, Chariot of Fire, 162; Elsmere, Henry Ward Beecher, 203-220.

10George R. Mather, Frontier Faith: The Story of the Pioneer Congregations of Fort Wayne, Indiana, 1820-1860 (Fort Wayne, Ind., 1992), 163-64. Rudolph details the thirty-year conflict in Indiana and notes that, by 1850, the number of Old School and New School ministers in the state was equal. Rudolph, Hoosier Faiths, 125-27.
tion, a significant number were known to favor the more liberal New School theology.\footnote{Larry Gene Wiley, “The Reverend John Rankin: Early Ohio Antislavery Leader” (Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 1976), 127; Elsmere, \textit{Henry Ward Beecher}, 206.}

Henry’s effort to take over the pulpit of First Presbyterian was blocked before he was able to reach Fort Wayne. Old School supporters, learning of his intentions, had hastily arranged for the scholarly Old
School pastor and Hanover College professor Dr. William C. Anderson to preach on the Sunday morning before Beecher's arrival. Intent nevertheless on establishing a New School congregation for Charles, Henry wooed prospective churchgoers for two weeks in April, preaching in the musty Allen County Courthouse and visiting in homes. Henry also had the support of prominent banker Hugh McCulloch. McCulloch had often visited Henry's church when he traveled to Indianapolis, and the two men had become friends. The banker offered Charles and his family a place to stay in his spacious home. By the time Charles arrived in early May, Henry had drawn six members away from the First Presbyterian congregation. Among these charter members was Susan Man McCulloch, Hugh's wife, who as a schoolgirl had attended Catherine Beecher's female academy in Hartford, Connecticut. Six others joined, altogether a small but sufficient number. Plans were put into place to secure partial funding from the American Home Missionary Society (AHMS), the New York-based New School organization that funded missionaries in the West.12

Two days after Charles arrived, Henry returned to Indianapolis, and Charles found himself “pitched” into what he came to consider “the hardest [religious] field in all Indiana.” Only a few people entered into full membership, but attendance at Sunday evening meetings often reached 150. People came to services in the courthouse expecting debates with First Presbyterian's pastor and leaders. Charles later recalled being told that he needed to “put in [his] best licks” and “knock the socks off those Old School folks!” Beecher instead told people that he “had nothing particular to say for New School” because he “always supposed his father knew all about that.” When asked why he had come to Fort Wayne, he replied that he did not know, but that if “the Lord wished him to stay he would show.”13


As Charles began to visit people about town, he met many who were not aligned with organized churches. They were intellectually curious, some leaning toward Universalism, others Unitarians like Hugh McCulloch, “skeptical, utterly beyond the reach of any existing organization.” Although they did not agree with what he preached, they opposed the persecution of his little church. Charles later wrote that
they were willing “to hear the Gospel,” and “before they knew it, the Lord had a cord around their hearts and they became warm personal friends.” Committing themselves to the growth of the congregation, the new supporters pledged $300, no small sum for the day.14

In the following weeks, Old School leaders, including a visiting pastor from Indianapolis, continued to label Charles’s small congregation as a group of Unitarians and heretics and attempted to persuade newcomers that First Presbyterian Church was the real New School church. Once again, Charles’s strategy was disarming. He encouraged members and friends in his congregation to attend meetings that First Presbyterian organized. Charles invited their visiting pastor to preach at his service, and in turn he attended prayer meetings at First Presbyterian, where he “talked and sang and prayed and wept.”15

The new pastor’s early months in Fort Wayne tested his physical and emotional fortitude. In his first quarterly report to the AHMS home office in September 1844, Charles candidly reported the difficulties he faced. He was still recovering from an illness that had kept him confined all winter. His wife’s health was poor as well, preventing her from visiting new acquaintances. Membership in his church had risen to nineteen, but only a very small number were males. Stressing the importance of Fort Wayne to both factions of Presbyterianism, Charles wrote that the Old School had sent a second pastor to the area to build support; he hoped that the AHMS as well would send more missionaries. The Old School’s charges of heresy against his church continued to be “unpromising,” even if disguised in “civil” and “polished” language.16

Charles felt that his greatest difficulty, however, was his personal deficiency in faith—“my own evil heart & want of genuine conformity to the spirit & example of Jesus.” Haunted by old feelings of inadequacy, he confided to the director of the AHMS that he had “the misfortune” of being “rather original” which led to charges of being “any thing but

14 Charles Beecher to Amelia Ogden, May 20, 1845, folder 27, reel 1, Beecher-Stowe Family Papers.
15 Ibid.
sound in the faith.” Adversity nevertheless helped Charles recognize his commitment to his mission: “Now if I thought that New School were not worth something – If I thought it were not somehow dear to God, I would not stand a day longer.”

On a reassuring note, Charles reported that he had been well received when he preached in the country and that he knew of four locations where New School churches could be organized. Furthermore, he had obtained music books; the ladies’ sewing society was raising funds for oil lamps needed for evening services; and Henry’s church in Indianapolis had sent him a violin. His spirits were particularly lifted because there was “a good prospect of a large singing school” later in the fall.

Family letters tell a similar story of Charles’s hardships. Charles confided to his father that he felt pulled down by a “jaded, overworn sense of inability” and was again plagued by religious doubt. Recalling his own periods of despondency, Lyman responded with a long letter detailing rules he tried to follow that kept him in balance and prevented doctrinal conflict. Lyman cautioned Charles that only after great consideration should he “push noiselessly, and with unprovoking, meek modesty, a new truth amid the prescriptive rights of error.” Furthermore, Lyman advised to “[n]ever attack the opposite opinion, or amplify its absurdity or mischief, or stigmatize it by hard names.” In the early fall, Henry learned that attacks by Old School opponents were so serious that Charles might lose his church and be permanently damaged by accusations of Unitarian sympathies. In a letter hastily written to their father on September 13, 1844, Henry stressed “that everything depends upon his [Charles] succeeding in this enterprise.” Needing to stay in Indianapolis with Eunice, who was due to give birth, Henry urged Lyman to hurry to Fort Wayne to bolster Charles’s position.

Lyman refrained from rushing to Fort Wayne, but in the weeks preceding Charles’s November ordination, both he and Henry continued to send letters filled with advice. Lyman’s explication of Presbyterian

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17 Charles Beecher to Milton Badger, September 16, 1844, reel 56, series 1, AHMS Papers.
18 Ibid.
theology reassured Charles that the Presbyterian Confession was open to more than one interpretation. Above all, he wrote, if Charles would “provide no mark for the enemy to fire at, all, with diligence and spirituality, will go well.” Knowing Charles’s penchant for originality, Henry advised his brother to avoid conflict and misunderstanding by keeping his sermons “practical” and “popular.”

A week prior to Charles’s examination for ordination, Lyman Beecher rode up to Hugh McCulloch’s home in Fort Wayne late on Saturday afternoon, covered with mud but in high spirits following a day and a half of continuous travel. From his home in Walnut Hills outside of Cincinnati he had traveled north by canal to St. Mary’s, Ohio. Then, following a brief rest, he had set off around 10:00 p.m. to ride the remaining sixty-two miles to Fort Wayne through the often impassable area known as the Black Swamp. While he was accompanied part way by a guide, the elderly man’s stamina was clearly reason for celebration. Revived by a cold bath, a whiskey rubdown, and a hearty supper, Lyman rose the next morning with renewed energy to deliver sermons twice that day. On each successive evening he led worship services and discussions until Henry’s arrival at the end of the week. Clearly, Lyman relished the challenge of establishing Charles in a New School stronghold in Fort Wayne. Hugh McCulloch, for one, was deeply impressed by the elder Beecher’s personal charm, confirming the reputation the church statesman had among his students. He “proved to be one of the most social and agreeable of men,” McCulloch wrote. “[H]e abounded in sympathy, in geniality, in good-will for everybody.”

Charles’s ordination by the recently established New School Presbytery of Fort Wayne on November 8 was marked by solemnity and decorum. His responses to questions regarding doctrinal beliefs and his trial sermon on faith no doubt reflected the family advice he had received over the previous months. In the evening candlelight ceremony, following a sermon by Henry, Dr. Beecher concluded the service by giving the ministerial charge. Charles was fulfilling his late mother’s dying wish that all her sons were to be ministers, Lyman remarked. His son’s

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Lyman Beecher. Charles’s father had been an important influence on his decision to become a minister. The elder Beecher continued to give advice and support during his son’s pastorate in Fort Wayne.

Charles Beecher, ed., Autobiography, Correspondence etc. of Lyman Beecher, D.D. (1865)
future role “as an ambassador of Jesus Christ” would be “to negotiate peace between God and men – the mightiest power God delegates to mortals.” Revealing his belief that they were experiencing “a period of high conflict and glorious history,” Lyman issued a call for spiritual rebirth: “Take heed of the heart… The power of the heart set on fire by love is the greatest created power in the universe… LOVE can, by God’s appointment, carry the truth quick and powerful through the soul, and will, in a few generations, subdue and tranquillize the world.” Finally, he reminded Charles of the great cause before them: “To plant Christianity in the West is as grand an undertaking as to plant it in the Roman empire, with unspeakable greater permanence and power.” Commenting upon Lyman’s remarks, Susan McCulloch wrote that “there was not a dry eye in the house.”

Henry and Lyman remained in Fort Wayne for the next three weeks, holding religious services and drumming up support for Charles’s church. Nine members were added to the congregation. Most promising was the financial commitment from business leaders and new friends to a building fund so that the church could move out of the stifling room at the courthouse and into a building of its own by the next summer. At the end of November, supporters had pledged a total of $1500. A suitable lot “two blocks from the public square” on Berry Street, “[t]he prettiest spot in town,” was secured. According to Susan McCulloch, major donors included her husband; Royal Taylor, a prosperous wholesale merchant who had married her good friend Alida Hubbell; Dr. Charles Sturgis, a member of First Presbyterian Church; Capt. Asa Fairfield and William Rockhill, also directors of the State Bank; and Alexander Ewing, a major land developer.

Charles’s December quarterly report to the AHMA was a marked contrast to the one sent a few months earlier. He was hard pressed to

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23Susan Man McCulloch to Maria Halsey, Plattsburgh, New York, January 13, 1845, and Susan Man McCulloch to Mary I. Man, November 20, 1844, both in Richards, ed., Fort Wayne Letters of Susan Man McCulloch.
identify the Old School factions as a significant difficulty. While he still struggled to feel a “pure love like that of Christ,” he reported that “[p]ublic opinion is now settled that the enterprise will Succeed & hence audiences increase.” Church activities now included a Sabbath school for young people, Sunday afternoon and evening services in the courthouse, the hoped-for singing school (with 57 attendees), and a monthly concert series. He was meeting as well with a group of people five miles west of town, where a young man of his church led a Sabbath school. Indicating that he was not able to stay away entirely from controversy, Charles confided that during the fall presidential elections he had made it known he would not vote, even though members of his congregation, with one exception, were staunch Whigs. “It is well however for them to learn at the start that their pastors vote is his own, not theirs,” he wrote. What Charles left unstated was his opposition to Henry Clay as the Whig candidate for president.24

Although his success had owed much to his inimitable family, during his first seven months in Fort Wayne Charles Beecher had clearly demonstrated his own personal gifts. In the next five and a half years, he drew people from across denominational and socioeconomic lines to a wide range of religious and civic programs. One could argue that his successes were due to the sheer exuberance of his personality and his unflagging energy, qualities generally attributed to all of the Beechers. Unquestionably, Charles also impressed people with his remarkable intellect and his gifts as a preacher and musician. As one would expect from a Beecher, Charles also strove to be a moral compass for the Fort Wayne community. At personal risk, he challenged church practices and politics of his day.

In the spring of 1845, Charles and his family were able to settle in their own house, helped by the generosity of church members and friends. In “A Card” to the local newspaper, he thanked all who had recently gathered at his residence “doubly expressing their regard by their presence and presents.” Hoping that they would return, he declared “[t]he latch string always on the outside.”25

24 Charles Beecher to Milton Badger, December 16, 1844, reel 56, series 1, AHMS Papers. The congregation west of town was described as on the Yellow River Road.
25 Fort Wayne Times & People’s Press, March 29, 1845. The home was located on lot number two, block twenty-six of Ewing’s division (on present-day Wayne Street, land now occupied by the First Presbyterian Church parking lot). Allen County Indiana Land & Property Records, 1829-1901, Book N, p. 484, Book P, p. 712.
While mutual affection helps explain the continued growth of the congregation, Charles obviously felt he had found his calling. He organized concerts, singing classes, Bible study and prayer meetings, as well as classes for children, all in addition to his regular preaching. Members found him “witty, being similar to his brother, Henry Ward, in this respect” and “a splendid musician” who led hymn singing on his violin. Writing to her mother in New York, Susan McCulloch remarked that “Nobody goes to sleep under his preaching.” Attendance at Sunday services grew to be as high as 200; singing classes swelled to 130. In the church’s first years, several community leaders served as trustees, including Royal Taylor, Benjamin W. Oakley, and Hugh McCulloch.26

Charles rejoiced that people who attended his services had “more intellect than any other or all others here.” He was particularly pleased by a prayer meeting led by congregation members and an evening discussion group that encouraged even the most shy to talk about subjects ranging from temperance to prayer to church business. As his church grew, he thought that members showed “more seriousness . . . & less skepticism.” As Charles had hoped, his congregation served as an example to other churches, if not yet of “a progressive state of holiness” then at least of a new religious consciousness.27

Charles’s ministry continued to reach into surrounding rural areas. Before the new building was completed in February 1846, he reported to the AHMS that he had scheduled regular Sunday morning meetings alternately in five different areas near Fort Wayne, riding back to town for the afternoon and evening services at the courthouse. The congregation five miles west on the Yellow River Road toward Columbia City included about fifty persons. At another location, typical of new settlements in northeast Indiana, followers of five different denominations met together and, according to Charles, “agreed to lay aside their differences & unite upon a simple congregational plan.” Several young men who were members of the church walked as far as fifteen to twenty miles to many of these locations to conduct Sabbath schools. Charles felt that Columbia, the seat of Whitley County and “a drinking wicked place”


27 Charles Beecher to Milton Badger, October 27, 1843, April 5, 1847, February 15, 1848, reels 56, 57, 58, series 1, AHMS Papers.
that was growing up “without Gospel,” especially needed a missionary. After Second Presbyterian had its own building, Charles continued to ride out in the early mornings to preach in two rural neighborhoods. A number of country people also joined his Fort Wayne congregation.28

Charles’s ministry extended beyond New School Presbyterian borders through various reform associations. In the spring of 1845, for example, he formed a committee with other pastors and lay leaders to “seek out indigent persons and persons in distress, in this vicinity and afford them relief.” In October, he led community religious leaders in forming a society to bring about the “moral and social improvement” of laborers and boatmen who had swarmed into the area due to the rapid growth of the Wabash and Erie Canal. Charles was one of three ministers who agreed to contact the American Bethel Society to request that a missionary be sent to the area the next spring. Soon afterward, collections were taken to purchase Bibles to be distributed to “the destitute of the counties of Allen and Adams”—for religious reasons, certainly, but also to promote literacy among people with few opportunities for schooling. In addition, Charles frequently wrote to the AHMS on behalf of Rev. John Bayer, a missionary among German immigrants in Allen and Adams Counties.29

In this same period, Charles was also taking a public stand in support of New School Presbyterianism. In October 1845, less than a year after his ordination, he joined his brother Henry and twenty-seven other ministers and elders to form the Constitutional Presbyterian Church of Indiana. In one of the first of many efforts by New School ministers to push the Presbyterian General Assembly (New School) to take a stronger position against slavery, they called for a meeting prior to the May Triennial Assembly in Philadelphia to try “to devise a remedy for the evil.” Charles’s association with this initiative did not prompt a response from more conservative ministers within the Fort Wayne (New School) Presbytery, but what did become an issue of debate among his

28 Other meeting places were three miles northwest on the Goshen Road, north on the St. Joseph River, and along the Maumee River. Charles Beecher to Milton Badger, April 22, August 1, October 27, 1845, July 19, 1847, reels 56, 57, series 1, AHMS Papers.

fellow ministers was a Bible discussion class, open to the public, that Charles offered at the courthouse.\textsuperscript{30}

The four-part lecture series entitled the “Genuineness, Authenticity, and Entire Inspiration of the Sacred Scriptures” began with a study of the first five books of the Bible. In a quarterly report to the AHMS, Charles described a generally positive response from large audiences he categorized as skeptics, infidels, Jews, Universalists and “Nothingarians,” eager to hear evidence “that the Bible was God’s word.” He encouraged open discussions, emphasized understanding biblical texts apart from any religious creed, and promoted study and prayer. He declared his lectures a welcome alternative to Alexander Rankin’s “stiff dose of Calvinistic Logic as dry as brick-dust & hard as the nether mile-stone.” Out of knowledge of the Bible, Charles believed, would come faith.\textsuperscript{31}

The dedication of the new Second Presbyterian Church building on February 22, 1846, was a celebration of accomplishment. In little over one year, the young congregation had raised some $2500 and built an attractive brick edifice that was completely furnished and paid for. Charles alone had collected $500 from other New School congregations. Aside from the celebration, however, the dedication ceremony was also an opportunity for Charles to challenge his opponents and test the degree of support his fledgling congregation was willing to give him.\textsuperscript{32}

Morning and afternoon, before a crowded sanctuary, Charles preached in support of greater religious freedom, arguing that it was unrealistic to expect “to create absolute unity of belief.” He told the assembled listeners:

> Even on what we are pleased to term fundamental truths, there must exist different modes of seeing; different grades of believing; different forms of expressing; and the only unity that ever will be attained before the Resurrection of the Just, on earth, will be a unity of thinking differently, in love.

\textsuperscript{30}The Anti-Slavery Bugle, February 20, 1846. Two other ministers of the Fort Wayne Presbytery, Thomas Anderson of Huntington and Alexander Lemon of Wabash, were also listed, along with Luther and Samuel Donnell, known leaders of the Underground Railroad from Decatur County. Beginning in 1846, New School General Assemblies passed resolutions condemning slavery. Nationwide, the New School became united against slavery in 1857, when the Presbytery of Lexington (Virginia) withdrew. See Marsden, \textit{The Evangelical Mind}, 188.

\textsuperscript{31}Fort Wayne Times & Peoples Press, October 11, November 29, 1845; Charles Beecher to Milton Badger, February 5, 1846, reel 57, series 1, AHMS Papers.

\textsuperscript{32}Charles Beecher to Milton Badger, March 16, 1846, reel 57, series 1, AHMS Papers.
Ministers, he urged, must be freed from narrow paths of religious study which required them to follow a denominational creed in addition to the Bible: “[L]iberty of opinion in our Theological Seminaries is a mere form.” No doubt speaking from his own experience, he made the case that ministers who deviated from their denominational creed were “whispered to be unsound, unsafe, heretical.” They risked losing their members, their reputations, and their very livelihood. “There is something criminal in saying anything new. It is shocking to utter words that have not the mould of age upon them.” More than ever, Charles said, he was firmly convinced that the Bible was “the perfect and thorough furniture of the Christian minister.” Finding God’s love in the Bible offered hope to a world that otherwise seemed to be set on a course of destruction. This was his strategy for winning the religious war for the West, for enabling mankind to avoid “that final storm of divine indignation which shall sweep away the vain refuges of lies.”

Susan McCulloch considered Charles’s sermons “two of the best…I have ever heard. If you were to hear him now you would hardly believe him the same person he was when you were here,” she wrote her mother. Indicating a noticeable difference of opinion in the community, however, she added, “If he is spared, he will make a noise in the world.” Following his sermons, a committee of fellow New School ministers of the Fort Wayne Presbytery interviewed him to express grave concerns over what they considered his “misapprehension of the views and practices of the Presbyterian Church.” While they agreed not to press charges of heresy against him, they filed a report expressing their opinion that some of Charles’s views were “subversive of all order in the house of God.”

Although Charles was thus marked as “unsound” in his faith by his religious peers, members of his congregation stood strongly behind him and would have agreed with Susan McCulloch’s observation that “every person that I have seen or heard of that was not prejudiced in favor of the other denominations came out of church delighted with the sermons.” Furthermore, influential members and friends of his congre-
gation, including Hugh McCulloch, encouraged Charles to publish the sermons in a booklet entitled *The Bible, a sufficient creed*. In their opinion, the sermons were “an able and fearless exposition of truths, which lie at the very foundation of Protestantism, and which seem for years to have been lost sight of by the great body of Protestant Christians.” According to Beecher family records, Charles’s bold defense of religious freedom became “widely quoted throughout the country,” although it was sometimes attributed to his more famous brother Henry.35

The following winter, a New School Presbyterian minister then serving in Wells and Adams Counties commented to the AHMS on a visit with Charles Beecher in Fort Wayne. “Much interest prevails in that church at present on the subject of religion,” he reported. “God’s spirit is evidently operating upon the hearts of sinners there and the members of the church are awakened to their responsibility.” Charles’s own reports to the society exposed a less public side of his ministry. He had found it too costly to feed his horse, he wrote, and preferred instead to sell it so that he could have additional income. Revealing the common practice of paying the minister in goods rather than currency, he reported that church members had been tardy with contributions of wood, bringing five loads only when the need became known; a sexton had only recently been appointed to help; and he was waiting for the quarterly support from the AHMS to pay his rent. Moreover, he was once again doubting his calling to the ministry.36

In correspondence with Lyman, Charles revealed his hesitancy to stand out as a public adversary. He had “been digesting all the good advice brought away with me,” he wrote, and had come to think that “however wrong the world is, I was not born to set it right.” “I feel disposed to get behind the scenes where I can sit on quietly,” he told his father, to write only lectures that were not controversial. Charles, however, could not stay long on the sidelines of issues he regarded as morally impelling.37

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37Charles Beecher to Lyman Beecher, Walnut Hills, Ohio, June 24, 1847, folder 24, reel 1, Beecher-Stowe Papers.
Less than two months after his doubt-filled letter to his father, Charles delivered a sermon on principles “which must be applied... in all ensuing elections, high and low, or our country is forever ruined.” The text was published in full in the local Times & Press on August 21, 1847, to quell what he termed “some misunderstanding.” Charles took a step into the political arena, building a case against voting for either candidate in the campaign underway for U.S. Representative for the Tenth Congressional District. Voting was “a high privilege, a duty,” and “a principle that must revolutionize the world,” he argued. Even if a man were in “a minority of self alone,” a Christian was justified in withholding his vote from any candidate who violated God’s universal and eternal commandments. Without naming either candidate, he clearly targeted Whig William G. Ewing and Democrat William Rockhill, both prosperous businessmen from Allen County. Ewing’s candidacy was particularly controversial because he allegedly owned slaves in Missouri. 

Public reactions to Charles’s sermon were surprisingly muted, given the local Whig support for Ewing. Reporting to the AHMS in the spring of 1848 on events of the last year, he wrote that he was making some progress, although the period had been difficult. “Moral influences came to a head in that year tendi[n]g to drive me away. Odd fellowship, Sons of Temperence, Infidelity, And Universalism, had all received rebuke, & grown restive. Politics also had felt a little sore.”

Charles continued to devote much time to bringing the Bible to life for his congregation. “I am . . . stedfast in faith — and steadily teaching — teaching — unfolding the Bible — explaining, defending — & pouring out of it waters of life,” he reported to the AHMS. Scenes from Christ’s life became so real to him that he collected a series of lectures into a narrative entitled The Incarnation; or, Pictures of the Virgin and Her Son. Helped in part by Harriet’s editing and by her growing reputation as a writer, the book was published by the New York firm Harper and Brothers in 1849. Episodes such as the journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem and Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness were packed with emotional description and a visceral immediacy. In the wilderness, as night falls, “a thousand beasts prowl forth,” and Jesus “hears their

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38Fort Wayne Times & Peoples Press, August 21, 1847.
39Charles Beecher to Milton Badger, May 5, 1848, reel 58, series 1, AHMS Papers.
stealthy tracks, their fierce pantings, and the gloom is lurid with their fiery eyes.”

A review from the New York Weekly Mirror reprinted in the Fort Wayne Times described Charles's work as one of “delicate fancy, dramatic power, felicity in description, and occasional instances of splendid imagination,” on a level with Milton's Paradise Regained. The reviewer for the Times was far less kind, describing Charles's writing style as obscure and redundant. The book was available locally at the bookstore of D. W. Burroughs on Columbia Street, the commercial hub of the town near the canal.

In his correspondence with the AHMS and with his family, Charles again despaired over his role as a minister. He felt that churches had become a business, “seeking to secure the patronage of that half of the community that contributes.” “I feel deeply sensible that we are in Babylon here,” he wrote in one letter to the AHMS; a few months later he wrote that “the Enemy here is So Mightily Entrenched in the Church so-called.” In letters to family, he predicted the consequences of humanity living in “alienation from God” and “alienation from his neighbor.” “This guilty land will not escape,” he wrote to Harriet. “Father may not live to see it. But I for one expect either to die by violence or to live in the fastness and retreats of the forest. The plot is laid. The explosion will come soon.” In predicting a coming judgment day, Charles expressed a militant zeal that was widely shared by Protestants in the years leading up to the Civil War. Given his commitment to righting the wrongs of the world, Charles could also have been reacting to the increasing conflicts in his own life.

Charles and Sarah now had four children, and lack of finances continued to beset the family. In January 1849, a local newspaper ran an invitation to a “Donation Visit” to the Beechers, for which visitors brought clothing and other goods for the pastor's household. Epidemic disease was still a concern as well. In late summer, cholera spread across

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*Fort Wayne Times, November 8, 1849.

**Charles Beecher to Milton Badger, October 30, 1848, February 24, 1849, reel 58, series 1, AHMS Papers; Charles Beecher to Harriet Beecher Stowe, May 1, 1848, folder 29, reel 1, Beecher-Stowe Papers.
the Ohio Valley to Fort Wayne, where at least sixty residents died. Charles led community prayer services and attended the dying. In these same months, Charles expanded his reform activities, participating in a series of temperance meetings with other ministers and civic leaders aimed at curtailing the sale of liquor.43

Outside forces began to loosen the hold of Second Presbyterian Church and Fort Wayne on Charles and Sarah. Edward Beecher had left Illinois to return to Boston, the beginning of the end of the Beecher family mission to the West. In 1847, Henry accepted a call to Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, New York. By late 1849, Harriet and her husband Calvin Stowe, devastated by the loss of a baby to cholera, were making plans to move to Brunswick, Maine. Family loyalties were pulling Charles back to the East.

The family’s overwhelming health problems became a decisive factor in their departure. Charles was so exhausted and weak that Lyman and several of his friends recommended that he step down from the ministry altogether. Sarah was “nearly prostrated” by illness, and three of their four children suffered from a malarial fever, known at the time as ague. Years of living on a missionary’s limited salary were taking their toll, and the coming Indiana summer was something to dread. “The indications of providence have been such as to determine me to remove my family to the East to spend the summer,” he wrote to the AHMS.44

In fact, Charles had made the decision to leave his church and Fort Wayne. The timing for his planned departure, however, was unfortunate. In April 1850, he had become the stated minister for his congregation, a position that implied a long-term mutual commitment. Over his six years in Fort Wayne he had earned wide respect and affection. He had more often than not been accepted, “originality” and all. “The people are unanimous in wanting me to stay,” Charles wrote to the AHMS. He had built a congregation out of a cross-section of society with different religious beliefs and socioeconomic backgrounds, ranging from

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43Fort Wayne Times & Peoples Press, January 4, December 6, 1849; Charles Beecher to Milton Badger, October 31, 1849, reel 58, series 1, AHMS Papers. Charles described his sickness as the first stage of cholera, but reported that he had recovered quickly. Lyman Beecher’s stepsister Esther reported that while staying with Charles during a cholera scare, his family was “suffering from lack of fresh food, being too poor to buy any. The quarterly stipend from the AHMS had miscarried,” so she used personal funds to cover the grocery bill. Caskey, Chariot of Fire, 13.

44Charles Beecher to Milton Badger, February 24, May 27, 1850, reel 59, series 1, AHMS Papers.
community leaders like the McCullochs to “young persons in humble life.” He had reached hundreds of people through his sermons, Bible classes, and prayer meetings. His choirs and music-making had brought great joy. He had made friendships that were hard to break, including that with Hugh McCulloch, for whom, as Charles would write to Susan, “he would give more for his differences than for most men’s agreements.” Finally, through his ministry, he seemed to have fulfilled his father’s charge to make peace between God and men, and done so on his own terms. His ministry had moved beyond his father’s cautious guidelines, even if that sometimes meant being “a minority of self alone.”

Charles’s last day in Fort Wayne was June 3, 1850. He told his congregation that he hoped to be able to return in the fall and that he could be reached at the home of his brother, Rev. Edward Beecher, in Boston.

As he became more confident in his Fort Wayne ministry, Charles was inevitably pulled into debates over the great moral issue of slavery. He also confronted fellow ministers in the Fort Wayne Presbytery and fellow temperance leaders over institutional racism toward free blacks that few whites wanted to acknowledge. By the time he returned to New England in the summer of 1850, he was ready to join Edward, Henry, and Harriet on the national antislavery stage.

As far back as 1818, the Presbyterian General Assembly had declared slavery “a gross violation of the most precious and sacred rights of nature,” “utterly inconsistent with the law of God” and “totally irreconcilable with the spirit and principles of the Gospel of Christ.” Moreover, the same assembly had urged Christians “to efface this blot on our holy religion” by completely abolishing slavery “throughout Christendom, and if possible throughout the world.” Since that time, however, Presbyterian leaders had avoided “harsh censures” on their religious brethren. Following the Old School-New School division in 1838, New School ministers had become even more restrained.

In the 1840s, New School ministers in Indiana felt tremendous pressure to avoid voicing opinions against slavery. If even suspected of

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*Charles Beecher to Milton Badger, May 27, 1850, reel 59, series 1, AHMS Papers.*
harboring abolitionist convictions, ministers were threatened with the walkout of angry parishioners. Charles's colleague, Rev. John H. Brice of Wells County, had written to the AHMS that members of one of his small congregations had threatened to withdraw because of an unfounded rumor that he had organized a temperance and abolitionist church. In 1843, at his church in Indianapolis, Henry Ward Beecher had preached, in careful and particular terms, against the general moral evil of slavery, had called for its gradual extinction under existing laws, and had avoided explicit condemnation of slaveholders, fearing similar reactions, if not mob violence.47

Charles took his first public step into the slavery debate in the fall of 1845. Together with a minority of other Indiana New School Presbyterian ministers and elders (including his increasingly emboldened brother Henry), he urged the upcoming New School Presbyterian General Assembly to take a position that slaveholding was a sin. The ministers declared that slavery was “paralyzing the efforts of the Church in propagating the pure gospel of Christ.” It was “injurious to the soul of the master and a grievous wrong to the slave.” This was a bold contrast to the non-confrontational position prevalent among the national leadership. In urging the denomination to declare slaveholding a sin, Charles publicly joined the abolitionist faction within the Presbyterian Church, separating himself not only from his father but also from most of his Fort Wayne Presbytery and Indiana New School colleagues.48

In May 1847, Charles directly challenged his New School colleagues. In a letter to the *Fort Wayne Sentinel*, he used the occasion of a recent meeting of the presbytery to voice concerns about the conditions of African Americans in Indiana. His colleagues had recently approved two resolutions concerning slavery: “That slavery is a great sin, opposed to the word of God, and Contrary to the rights of man”; and “That slavery in the church should be a subject of discipline the same as any other crime.” While approving both positions, Charles felt the need to address the pressing problems of African Americans in the so-called “free” North. Had he been present at their meeting, he wrote, he would have added another resolution: “Resolved, That the disenfranchisement of free peo-

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48 *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, February 20, 1846; Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind*, 90-91, 93, 188.
ple of color as practiced in the state of Indiana is a crime analogous to that of slavery.”

By the winter of 1848 Charles's reputation as an abolitionist had spread well beyond Fort Wayne. He was asked to consider taking the pulpit of a large, new Congregational church in Washington, D.C., looking for “a preacher of firmness and decision, who is a sound, thinking, reasoning abolitionist.” One of their chief advisers and financial backers was Lewis Tappan, the New York antislavery leader and philanthropist. The church promised a free pulpit and an annual salary of $1500, a far cry from the $400 Charles received from the AHMS.

Writing to his father, Charles anticipated how he might serve such a congregation. He would win antislavery converts not through rationalism but through Christianity's law to “love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and thy neighbor as thy self” and through teaching the Bible. “Hence I should expect to be at liberty to preach sermons, as many as might be necessary, in which I should say nothing about slavery.” Charles did not pursue the offer, and his lack of enthusiasm for such a challenge suggests that he feared that the new church would find his ideology not “sound in the sense that it is like that of the majority (or minority) either.” Moreover, the offer had come at the same time that Second Presbyterian in Fort Wayne was initiating steps to install Charles as their permanent minister. What Charles seems to have left unsaid was that, “originality” and all, he felt accepted at Second Presbyterian Church.

In the fall of 1849, Charles found an opportunity to voice his most forceful arguments to date against the oppression of African Americans in northern states. Through a series of local meetings, he had become acquainted with the Sons of Temperance, a new statewide society that was attracting Fort Wayne followers. The organization’s newspaper had recently defended their decision to deny membership to a new African American group in Lafayette, Indiana. Specifically, Charles challenged the Sons of Temperance to give “a single good reason” why African Americans could not form their own chapter.

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49 *Fort Wayne Sentinel*, May 22, 1847.
50 Charles Beecher to Lyman Beecher, February 1, 1848, folder 24, reel 1, Beecher-Stowe Papers.
51 Ibid.
52 *Fort Wayne Times*, October 4, November 8, 1849.
A representative of the group responded, attempting to put the subject to rest, but his answer appeared, at the very least, evasive: African Americans were not accepted into the Sons of Temperance for the same reason they were not accepted as equals in the larger society—for the sake of “peace and harmony.” To Charles, such an explanation was “essentially bad and worthless … not susceptible of any valid defense.” Presbyterian churches did not deny African Americans “of suitable piety” membership, nor was their ministry closed to anyone who was qualified. When African Americans were not made to feel welcome, Charles argued, it was because of “the wicked prejudice of color”:

Deprived of their vote in some States and of testifying on oath, and subjected to various disadvantages, they are really forced down into a species of low caste like what prevails in India. A phenomenon at war with the Gospel we profess and disgraceful to our free institutions.

With characteristic humor, Charles then turned the question of maintaining “peace and harmony” back to the writer:

[I]t must mean that the belligerent dispositions of some of the harmonious fraternity would be dangerously excited by the sight of a particular color, as is known to be the case with some of the lower species of animals…This is a strange confession to be made concerning an order which we have heard so highly recommended for benevolence and devotion to truth… As highly worthy of being entered by Christians and Christian ministers.

Charles concluded by asking other New School Presbyterian ministers to join him in speaking out against this “unkind – ungenerous – unchristian” conduct.53

Charles may often have felt “a minority of self alone” in Fort Wayne. His growing passion to correct the world and his increasing courage to speak out against racial oppression were nevertheless recognizable Beecher traits. It is risky to draw direct lines of family influence, but undoubtedly Charles was encouraged by Edward and Henry. Edward’s defense of Elijah Lovejoy and his commitment to total abolition in the early 1840s had made him a family maverick as well as a national leader. After moving in 1847 to Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, Henry was vaulted to the forefront of the abolition movement as well. As he gained national headlines for leading efforts to buy slaves their freedom and to harbor fugitives, he became the target of proslavery mobs. Plymouth Church was burned in January 1849, rallying massive public support and funds for rebuilding. Historians have frequently remarked that the Beechers’ unusual family loyalty drew them together and strengthened them. Was it merely by chance that Charles spoke out against racism in the same period in which Henry was taking on national leadership in the antislavery cause? 54

Questions regarding Charles’s participation in the underground railroad in Fort Wayne are also inevitable. His earliest contacts probably came via his sister Harriet and her husband Calvin Stowe. In a letter to Frederick Douglass in 1851, asking for his help writing *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Harriet emphasized her family’s lifelong commitment to ending slavery. As children, she wrote, she and her siblings had frequently been moved to tears by Lyman’s prayers and sermons for the deliverance of American slaves. “Every brother I have has been in his sphere a leading Anti-Slavery man,” she wrote. Harriet also described how she and Calvin were active in helping fugitive slaves during their many years in Cincinnati:

As for myself and my husband, we have for the last seventeen years lived on the border of a slave state, and we have never shrunk from the fugitives, and we have helped them with all we had to give. I have received the children of liberated slaves into a family school, and taught them with my own children. 55

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Charles's participation in Cincinnati's underground is unfortunately largely unrecorded. Only a single note written in 1896, when he was eighty-one years old, provides a personal record of involvement in helping slaves. In response to queries sent out by Wilbur Siebert, an early historian of the underground railroad, Charles wrote that he “had very little personal knowledge” of the network. The only incident he could recall was when, as a student at Lane Theological Seminary, he had helped Calvin Stowe drive a young black woman to a station of the underground railroad north of Cincinnati:

I went one night, dark and cloudy with Prof. C.E. Stowe, in a covered wagon, with a fugitive slave – to the house of (I think) a Mr. Graves in Ohio – but where it was, I cannot tell. He was a conductor on the Underground R.R. In this particular instance our mission was a success, and the girl escaped to Canada as we afterwards heard. 56

Letters and sermons from Charles's Fort Wayne years express, even if indirectly, a moral imperative to support fugitive slaves coming through the area. His emphasis on love of neighbor as self may have extended to helping the fugitives. Clearly, he used stories in the Bible as metaphors for the moral obligations of Christians. In his May 1848 report to the AHMS, he made an oblique reference to underground railroad work. After listing a number of challenges that had come to a head the previous year, he wrote “Besides Sunday matters underground.” It is reasonable to believe that involvement with the underground railroad was then very much on his mind. 57

A note from Fort Wayne businessman Augustus C. Beaver to Siebert offers yet another missing link. If Charles was not directly engaged in the work of aiding fugitive slaves, he drew supporters into the cause. Writing in 1896, Beaver looked back upon the financial support that he and other anonymous donors had provided, remembering

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57 Charles Beecher to Milton Badger, May 5, 1848, reel 58, series 1, AHMS Papers.
as well the extreme risks and secrecy because of the town’s “strongly
democratic” nature. “[A]ll that the friends of fugitives could do was con-
tribute money, which was furnished freely,” he wrote. Beaver, the owner
of a lumber mill, joined Second Presbyterian Church in 1846. His broth-
er Daniel had joined the church the previous year and served as an elder
in 1847. The two brothers were among the unknown number of citizens
who were touched by Charles’s gospel of love.58

While records may never surface linking him to the underground
railroad in Fort Wayne, what matters most was Charles Beecher’s grow-
ing courage to serve as a moral spokesman for his day. He was fortunate
to have the support of a family of freethinkers and moral leaders. He was
also fortunate to have a diverse congregation that avoided quarrelling
religious factions and believed in social justice and a free pulpit.
Ultimately, however, Charles drew upon his own strength.

Charles and Sarah Beecher did not return to Fort Wayne at the end
of the summer of 1850. On August 30, Charles resigned from the pas-
torate.59 The family moved back east, and Charles took a pulpit in
Newark, New Jersey, where, a little more than one year later, he became
nationally known for his denunciation of the Fugitive Slave Bill of 1850.
The same passion that was kindled in Fort Wayne now exploded in “The
Duty of Disobedience to Wicked Laws: A Sermon on the Fugitive Slave
Law.” With the support of his new congregation, the sermon was print-
ed, widely circulated, slandered, and praised.60

Charles gained national audiences on at least three other occasions.
In 1854 his congregation in Newark, the First Congregational Society,
published his sermon denouncing the Kansas-Nebraska Act. The follow-
ing year the American Anti-Slavery Society published his carefully
researched and argued analysis of the Bible’s position on slavery, “The God

58 A. C. Beaver to W. H. Siebert, [n.d.], 1896, roll 2, Siebert Microfilm Collection; Manual of the
Second Presbyterian Church, Fort Wayne, Indiana ([Fort Wayne, Ind.], 1869), Genealogy
Department, Allen County Public Library, Fort Wayne; Charles Beecher to Milton Badger, May
[n.d.], 1847, reel 57, series 1, AHMS Papers.

59 In 1852, Hugh and Susan McCulloch, the former by letter and the latter in person, urged
Charles and Sarah to return to Fort Wayne for a visit or to move back to Indiana. Charles did
neither, but the two families continued to correspond. Mather, Frontier Faith, 175-76.

60 Charles Beecher, The Duty of Disobedience to Wicked Laws: A Sermon on the Fugitive Slave Law
(New York, 1851). One Fort Wayne newspaper condemned the sermon’s “atrocious and inflam-
atory sentiments” and warned against the “insane counsels of the clergy” that could cause
“rivers of blood to flow.” Fort Wayne Times, March 13, 1851.
of the Bible Against Slavery.” Finally, Charles took what has been described as his “most divisive act” on December 23, 1860. On December 14, President James Buchanan had called for a national “day of humiliation, fasting, and prayer” to take place January 4, 1861. The president sought to “restore the friendship and good will” which had existed between northern and southern states and urged northern anti-slavery advocates to forgo their “false pride of opinion.” Characteristically, Charles not only preached against compliance to the proclamation, but also led his congregation in writing resolutions that charged that the “president of the United States is in treasonous conspiracy with rebels to overthrow the government.”

In these same years, Charles would help Harriet write passages describing slavery that were essential to her epic novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*; he would be her companion, manager, and spokesperson on her triumphal European tour as the world’s most famous author. His father’s voluminous life story would be entrusted to him to compile and edit. He would again endure the rebuke of theologians who considered his theology unsound and heretical. He would suffer the death of children, personal illness, and poverty. While he never soared to the heights of popular oratory and writing achieved by Henry and Harriet, through his own battles of words he kindled and ignited the nation’s conscience. He argued for a free pulpit, and when his denomination questioned his theology, he kept the support of his congregations.

Finally, Charles Beecher could find solace in looking back on his years as a missionary at Fort Wayne’s Second Presbyterian Church. As he wrote to the AHMS in late 1848, these were years significant in ways that he could never fully appreciate. “The process thru which I am passing & gradually conducting my people is one which must ultimately yield harvests. Even tho I should not be permitted to reap them.” He had awakened the minds and captured the hearts of his first congregation. He had opened a path that he would continue to follow in the years leading up to the Civil War. This was no small accomplishment.

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61 Charles Beecher, *A Sermon on the Nebraska Bill* (Newark, N.J., 1854) and *The God of the Bible Against Slavery* (New York, 1855). The first sermon was published by Charles’s congregation, the First Congregational Society, as well as by Oliver & Brothers in New York City; the second sermon was published by the American Anti-Slavery Society.

62 Charles Beecher to Milton Badger, October 30, 1848, reel 58, series 1, AHMS Papers.