

# In-Archives Handout

by Alexandria Egler



Part of an in-archives exercise at <http://www.teacharchives.org/exercises/politics-religion>

---

We will examine a letters written during the Civil War that reflect the era's intersection of religious and civic life. Reflect on the ways in which people expressed their religious beliefs during this very tumultuous period of American history.

## **All groups should discuss the following:**

How deeply connected are religion and politics? Does this connection transcend time or was it merely isolated at this period?

Was religious freedom something that was experienced by all Americans at this time?

### **Group 1:**

Why do you think this mother was so concerned that her son died as a “good Christian?” Do you think your religious practices (or lack thereof) might be something that your parents/guardians worry about with you? Why or why not? Does this mother's concern reflect religious sentiment in the 21st century?

### **Group 2:**

How do you view Henry Ward Beecher? Do you think his form of Christianity was one that was embraced by all? Do you think it was a “feel good” type of Christianity that was practiced by those of the privileged class, or was it embraced by many different Christians? Why or why not?

### **Group 3:**

How do you view John Brown? Was he justified in his actions? Is there any correlation to what he was doing to events that have occurred in recent history or in current events?

## **Wrap up questions:**

Did religious belief divide or add to the division between the north and south? Was the slavery issue a separate issue or was it interconnected to religious beliefs and practices? Do religious attitudes towards slavery in the 19th century correlate to a “hot button” topic in America in the 21st century?

Were Americans at this time concerned about President Lincoln's religious beliefs? Does Lincoln in any way publicly express his religious sentiments and perspective on religious freedom? Think about Lincoln's speeches “House Divided,” the Gettysburg Address, and his second inaugural speech.