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This dissertation examines the cultural and religious dynamics of the North Carolina Piedmont's non-planter social order. I look in depth at the modernizing elements of antebellum religion, particularly the sensibility of liberality that accompanied institutional development, how church disciplinary procedures adapted to changing social reality, and the formation of middle class style nuclear families under the aegis of evangelical prescription. In addition to using denominational records, I utilize four diaries of ordinary Piedmont residents in extended explorations of how individuals enacted in their private lives the public lessons of evangelicalism. I conclude that an evangelical ethic developed that existed alongside the dominant planter ideology, and that ethic formed the basis for both unity, and dissent, in the late antebellum period.

FAITH AND FAMILY IN THE ANTEBELLUM PIEDMONT SOUTH

by

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Approved by

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Committee Chair

To Mom, who made all this happen, and the memory of my father.

APPROVAL PAGE

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: FAITH AND FAMILY IN THE NORTH CAROLINA PIEDMONT

Strong Thomasson did not care for Ann Benbow's poetry. He mocked it as "one of the wonders of the world, viz. a poem (or something else)." Some lines Ann Benbow had composed upon the death of her daughter-in-law had circulated around Yadkinville. He faithfully transcribed a sample,

She decesed on the first month the 5 day  
She fell a sleep in Jesus' armes,  
And her spirit took its flight in the ralmes,  
Who has said he would gather his lames  
With his armes and cary them in his bosum.

The twenty-six-year-old Thomasson, full of youthful confidence, wrote his reaction, "Hem. Ha! Ha! Ha! I think Ann will have to screw up her machine and try again." Ann Benbow was not another youth but a Quaker matriarch locally renowned and respected for being a physician and minister.<sup>1</sup> Strong did not privately laugh at Ann

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<sup>1</sup> Paul D. Escott, ed. *North Carolina Yeoman: The Diary of Basil Armstrong Thomasson, 1853-1862* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 83. Ann Mendenhall Benbow was a Quaker minister dispatched with her husband from the New Garden settlement in Guilford to revive Quaker interests in Yadkin County. See Francis C. Anscombe, *I Have Called You Friends: The Story of Quakerism in North Carolina* (Boston: The Christopher Publishing House, 1959), 336. At the time of this entry, Strong worked as a clerk in a store owned by a member of the Benbow family in Yadkin, though the connection between the proprietor and Ann is unknown.

Benbow for her public stature, or her womanhood, but because he genuinely despised the quality of her poetry. But he was not above composing his own doggrel,

Mollie and I, in ease,  
Have spent the day in re[a]ding,  
Save what was spent in writing,  
And in—*eating our peas*.

Indeed, Strong, a Methodist frequently attended Quaker meetings and at least on one occasion heard Benbow preach. “She gave us,” he noted, “as I think, very good advice.” He did not think ill of a woman preacher.<sup>2</sup> Nor did he think that women should remain hidden behind the political authority of men. At a temperance meeting, Strong lamented the lack of enthusiasm showed by local ladies. He noted, “how strange it is that the ladies will not go forward and engage in this great reformation with might and main, and at once put down the liquor traffic when they might so easily do it.”<sup>3</sup>

Strong Thomasson owned no slaves, very little land, and devoted his life to farming, teaching, and Christianity. These brief glimpses offered by his diary reveal an unexpected southerner. He did not aspire to wealth, reputation, or honor. He cultivated an interest in literature and writing—as the contents of his poem suggest—and a firm conviction that devotion to Christ required that he stay at home with his wife Mollie in Sunday reveries of quiet study. Indeed, Strong Thomasson

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<sup>2</sup> Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman*, 121, 280.

<sup>3</sup> Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman*, 68-69.

was not the southerner described by most historians: a rural man enmeshed in maintaining his place in networks of power, interested only in personal independence and the violent defense of it.<sup>4</sup> He, like many other ordinary southerners confound our expectations and allow us to peer into an under-examined world where evangelical and social forces collided and combined to create new forms of faith and family.

My curiosity about the social power of ordinary white evangelicals in the slaveholder-dominated South has driven this inquiry. This dissertation examines the lives of ordinary white people, long dominated in the historiography by distinctions of class, race, and gender. Denominational records are the basis of my survey of the religious landscape of the Piedmont but the diaries of four individuals offer the most compelling insights into how deeply an *evangelical ethos* shaped the cultural and social life of the antebellum Piedmont South. I will argue that the evangelical ethos of ordinary antebellum Piedmonters differed from a “planter ideology,”<sup>5</sup> in that

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<sup>4</sup> These characteristics are usually attributed by historians to wealthy slaveowners and the marginalized poor. See for instance Drew Gilpin Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in teh Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 25th anniversary edition, 2007), and Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover, eds., *Southern Manhood: Perspectives on Masculinity in the South* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2004), and Charles C. Bolton and Scott P. Culclasure, *The Confessions of Edward Isham: A Poor White Life of the Old South* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> I will use the term “planter ideology” and “planter ethos” interchangeably to describe the webs of social and gender mores that supported the political and cultural power of the planter class. This includes, particularly, codes of honor, paternalism, sexual control, and violence. The planter ideology has been described by Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, Eugene D. Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Fatal Self-Deception: Slaveholding Paternalism in the Old South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), Drew Gilpin Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South*, and Stephanie

dominance of gendered and racial minorities did not *primarily* define it. Nor was it confined to a particular social or economic class. The evangelical ethos is how I describe a sensibility that generated a social environment for public and personal improvement, a discipline that insisted upon peace and harmony in public relationships, and the most contemporary conceptions of nuclear family structures. Whereas current scholarship explores culture through the discursive representation of gendered spheres, racial categories and economic classes my initial reading of the sources suggests the primary reality for ordinary white people lay in how evangelical religion defined their everyday experiences.<sup>6</sup> Religion prioritized faith and family above all else. Faith and family, not gender and race, I will argue, are default dispositions by which ordinary whites interpreted their lives and experiences in a changing society.

This topic of common whites' worldviews—and the countless ways to interrogate them—is far too large for one study. Indeed, many generations of historians have contemplated the problem of small slaveholders and non-slaveholders in a society dominated by planters.<sup>7</sup> To address the “worldview” of a group of people is monumentally complex, and all manner of historical

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McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds*, and Paul D. Escott, *Many Excellent People: Power and Privilege in North Carolina, 1850-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

<sup>7</sup> A useful and recent summary of the literature may be found in Charles C. Bolton, “Planters, Plain Folk, and Poor Whites in the Old South,” in *The Blackwell Companion to the Civil War and Reconstruction*, ed., Lacy K. Ford (Malden, Ma.: Blackwell Publishers, 2005).

methodologies have been deployed to the problem.<sup>8</sup> For the sake of manageability, I have limited my study to the cultural worldview of *some* southerners: evangelicals in the North Carolina piedmont. Thus, this is *admittedly* not a comprehensive view of ordinary people, their world, their politics, and their labors. Yet it does offer, in the focus on evangelicalism, an essential component of that worldview that has, interestingly, not been well covered by historians, and may be applied to white southerners more broadly across economic conditions and geographic spaces. While I do not address the political or economic views of ordinary southerners in the antebellum years, those questions that initially animated this project still remain. Church growth, the status of personal belief, religious discipline, and companionate marriages all point to the centrality of religious culture in the lives of non-planters, the men who ultimately voted for secession and served in the ranks of Confederate armies. I hope, by the end, to use this perspective to offer a new look on the problem of ordinary white people in the South and the Civil War.

I need to discuss my approaches to a variety of analytical categories that undergird this dissertation. First: the location. This dissertation is set among ordinary white people in the North Carolina piedmont. Approximately 275,000 white and black people lived in the Piedmont in the last three decades of the

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<sup>8</sup> See for example the discussion in Darrett B. Rutman with Anita H. Rutman, *Small Worlds, Large Questions: Explorations in Early American Social History, 1600-1850* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), chapter 2.

antebellum years.<sup>9</sup> The southern Piedmont is that place between the fall line and the Appalachian Mountains. It is noted for being hilly and cut with ocean-bound rivers and streams, but not mountainous.<sup>10</sup> The *cultural* landscape known to geographers as the Atlantic Lowland and to historians as the Piedmont is formed by a combination of geographic and historical development patterns. European trade and settlement outside the Chesapeake and Charles Town coastal plains began in the early eighteenth century. While planters and other aristocrats controlled land distribution and local governance, the majority of the Piedmont population flooded in from central Pennsylvania and Virginia after the 1740s in a patchwork of religious and ethnic diversity. Isolation, religious fervor, and political instability marked the Colonial and Revolutionary experience of the backcountry, but by the nineteenth century, the region was largely settled as commercial inroads wended up the rivers, plank roads, and railroads of the region.<sup>11</sup> Soil types and market access

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<sup>9</sup> Sixth Census of the United States, 1840, Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, and Eighth Census of the United States, 1860.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Pillsbury, ed., *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* Volume 2: Geography (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 15-16, and 192-193. I count the following counties as constituting the piedmont: Surry, Stokes, Rockingham, Caswell, Orange, Alamance, Guilford, Forsyth, Yadkin, Wilkes, Caldwell, Alexander, Iredell, Davie, Rowan, Davidson, Randolph, Chatham, Montgomery, Stanly, Cabarrus, Catawba, Burke, Rutherford, Cleveland, Lincoln, Gaston, Mecklenburg, Union, and Anson. For an environmental history of the region, see Timothy Silver, *A New Face on the Countryside: Indians, Colonists, and Slaves in the South Atlantic Forests, 1500-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>11</sup> My view of the settlement of the Piedmont and its penetration of markets is informed chiefly by A. Roger Ekirch, *Poor Carolina: Politics and Society in Colonial North Carolina, 1729-1776* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), Marjoleine Kars, *Breaking Loose Together: The Regulator Rebellion in Pre-Revolutionary North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001) and Ann Smart Martin, *Buying into the World of Goods: Early Consumers in Backcountry Virginia* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

did indeed encourage the spread of plantation slavery into the Piedmont, but an overwhelming number of small farms and low rates of slaveholding marked the region. Allen Tullos has called the Piedmont “the heartland of the antebellum Southern yeomanry,” or “middling agriculturalists.”<sup>12</sup> Paul Escott’s sample of Caldwell, Randolph, and Alamance counties reveal that over 50 percent of landowners owned 100 or fewer acres and that slaveowners numbered only between 11 percent and 16 percent of total white populations. Of those slaveowners, most owned under ten people.<sup>13</sup> These seem essential preconditions for the flourishing of a non-planter worldview.

Historians have identified a particularly robust non-planter ideology in the North Carolina Piedmont. Paul Escott, in *Many Excellent People* (1985), writes of an “elite” and a yeomanry locked in perpetual class struggle, the “common folk” forever resentful, dedicated to democratic egalitarianism, and always on the verge of forming a bi-racial coalition to attack the “squirearchy,” local gentry entrenched by an undemocratic selection process in county government.<sup>14</sup> Victoria Bynum, in *Unruly Women* (1993), describes the “religious and ethnic diversity and nascent entrepreneurial outlook of the Whig planter class [that] gave rise to a social ethos distinct from that of the eastern Democratic planter class,” attributable not only to

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<sup>12</sup> Allen Tullos, *Habits of Industry: White Culture and the Transformation of the Carolina Piedmont* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 4.

<sup>13</sup> Escott, *Many Excellent People*, 13-14, 16-17.

<sup>14</sup> Paul D. Escott, *Many Excellent People*, xvii.

diverse religious backgrounds but the high concentration of nonslaveholding yeomen. According to Bynun, “Whig newspaper editors tended to celebrate the hardworking farmer and farm wife as the social equals (if not superiors) of the eastern aristocratic planter and mistress.” Bynun’s people expressed an abolitionist and anti-planter bent with an outbreak of Wesleyan Methodism in the early 1850s.<sup>15</sup> David Brown, too, in his recent biography of Hinton Rowan Helper, *Southern Outcast* (2006), posits a “particular socioeconomic situation” found in the North Carolina Piedmont of Helper’s youth. He attributes the conflict between nonslaveholders, yeoman (he is not clear on his terms) and planters as the result of political tension between the western and eastern parts of the state, a common explanation dating from historians J. Carlyle Sitterson and Guion Griffis Johnson of the mid-twentieth century.<sup>16</sup> The political implications of this non-planter ideology lie in the hesitancy of Piedmont regions to embrace secession in 1861 and subsequent disaffection from the Confederacy.<sup>17</sup> Yet the fact that piedmonters did not actually create an antislavery movement, successfully oppose secession, or combine to fight the Confederacy has made historians’ conclusions ambivalent; nascent class identity

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<sup>15</sup> Victoria Bynun, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), quotes on page 8.

<sup>16</sup> David Brown, *Southern Outcast: Hinton Rowan Helper and the Impending Crisis of the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 83, see Chapter 4 for his analysis of the political situation. J. Carlyle Sitterson, *The Secession Movement in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1939), and Guion Griffis Johnson, *Ante-Bellum North Carolina: A Social History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1937).

<sup>17</sup> See for instance Daniel W. Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates: Upper South Unionists in the Secession Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).



failed to coalesce into full-fledged class formation. As social history tends to look out for oppositional tendencies, the few traces that have been observed do not amount to convincing or comprehensive explanations for apparent and actual differences.

I look to evangelical religion to account for those differences. I must begin with a discussion of how scholarship on southern religion, American class, and culture, have shaped my approach. The chief focus of antebellum southern religion historiography has been southern evangelicalism's transition from radicalism in the late eighteenth century to conservatism by the 1820s and how powerful elites utilized religion to orient the currents of the slave power.<sup>18</sup> This cynical turn placed southern evangelicals in support of slavery and patriarchy and channeled religious fervor into the salvation of one's own soul and away from reformist critiques of a system that countenanced slavery, drunkenness, depravity, and an unequal social hierarchy. This historiography analyzes religion as a servant to the secular slave power, a bulwark of resistance to cultural change, and a bastion against

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<sup>18</sup> Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), William G. McLoughlin, *Religion and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), and John B. Boles, *The Great Revival, 1787-1805: The Origins of the Southern Evangelical Mind* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1972). Others have taken exception to this "declension" narrative. Charles Irons, for instance, found that Virginia Baptists and Methodists, instead of pursuing a radical racial agenda in the eighteenth century, "shunted the divisive debate over emancipation to the civil sphere." Stephanie McCurry has also insisted that her South Carolinians very early rejected Methodism's egalitarian impulse of the Great Awakening, eventually imprinting their existing social hierarchies on church institutions. Charles F. Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 96. Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds*, 130-170.

modernity.<sup>19</sup> “The premodern character of slavery,” writes Beth Barton Schweiger, “has been so often linked to revival religion that it has become akin to a geological formation in the literature.”<sup>20</sup>

Schweiger suggests new directions. Southern evangelicalism can be viewed as fostering both individualism and more modern communal institutions. “It may now stand as Exhibit A in defense of an emerging understanding that stresses the compatibility of modernity with persistent, and even growing, religiosity,” she writes. Revivals and religion may be viewed as expressions of modernism that “pressed converts forward, demanding the progress of the soul in a powerful affirmation of American material progress.” The ecclesiastical dialogue over “nostalgia,” taken by historians as evidence of conservative positioning, slyly shielded the enactment of innovations. Schweiger discourages categorization of religious individualism and communalism as battles between premodernism and modernism, or subsistence versus markets. Individualism and communalism met on a religious plane and adapted to the world changed by slavery and markets.<sup>21</sup> In this

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<sup>19</sup> See particularly Boles, *The Great Revival*, and Jean E. Friedman, *The Enclosed Garden: Women and Community in the Evangelical South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), and C.C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schisms and the Coming of the Civil War* (Atlanta: Mercer University Press, 1997).

<sup>20</sup> Beth Barton Schweiger, “Max Weber in Mount Airy Or, Revivals and Social Theory in the Early South,” in *Religion in the American South*, ed., Donald Mathews and Beth Barton Schweiger (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 33.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

study, I will interpret faith practices as expressions of progressive, if not modern, tendencies.

Schweiger's warning about false dichotomies is most relevant in the study of religious women. Scott Stephan and Frederick Bode have explored the "vast territory in between" submission and resistance into which historians have placed Southern women's religious experience.<sup>22</sup> In *Redeeming the Southern Family* (2008) Stephan found that within the prescriptions of patriarchy in Southern households, women wielded considerable power as moral exemplars and organizational stalwarts. Bode noted that "much of the evidence for women's initiatives was obscured by a religious discourse that affirmed their deference and subordination to men and hid the reality of cooperation among women, as well as between men and women, behind a veil of female helplessness."<sup>23</sup> Thus, the dichotomy between authority and submission is misleading. As Stephan argues, "neither evangelical women nor Christian slaves began a revolution, but this fact does not begin to tell the story of their lives. Social protest is far too blunt an instrument by which to

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<sup>22</sup> Despite the positioning in this sentence, this is Schweiger's phrase.

<sup>23</sup> Frederick A. Bode, "A Common Sphere: White Evangelicals and Gender in Antebellum Georgia," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 74 (Winter 1995): 785. See also "The Formation of Evangelical Communities in Middle Georgia: Twiggs County, 1820-1861," *The Journal of Southern History* 60 (November 1994): 711-748.

measure liberation and change among Christians in the slave South.”<sup>24</sup> Practice, rather than protest, will thus be a focus of this dissertation.

I intend to build on Schweiger, Bode, and Stephan by further exploring the ways men and women used theological conviction to give order to their lives together. To do this, I will go outside the realm of sermons, theological injunction, and clerical families into what David Hall and Robert Orsi have called “lived religion.”<sup>25</sup> I will carry the investigation of religious conviction into (traditionally) non-religious territory and suggest extra-congregational locations for men’s and women’s religious adjustments to societal change—the household and in the company of others. Men and women both channeled anxiety about idleness and sin into vocational fulfillment. That meant, in the first half of the nineteenth century in America, defining fulfillment in an environment of material plenty, commercial dislocation, and political uncertainty. That Protestants did so is no surprise. How they did so in a slave society that exalted leisure, and supposedly privileged the afterlife over the present life, has yet to be fully explored.

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<sup>24</sup> Scott Stephan, *Redeeming the Southern Family: Evangelical Women and Domestic Devotion in the Antebellum South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008).

<sup>25</sup> “Lived religion” is the study of how faith is enacted in daily routines. Scholars of lived religion do not view religion as composed of “elite” and “popular” branches, confined to denominational debates, or used as a balm for secular irritations. That “vocabulary,” as Orsi notes, “encodes ...dualism, reifies discrete segments of experience, and erects boundaries that do not exist in the real world that belie the protean nature of religious activity.” Instead, the study of religion must move “toward a study of how particular people, in particular places and times, live in, with, through, and against the religious idioms available to them in culture—all the idioms, including (often enough) those not explicitly their “own.”” Robert Orsi, “Everyday Miracles: The Study of Lived Religion,” in *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice*, ed., David D. Hall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), quotes on page 11.

My assumptions about the lives of common white southerners are a bit different from those that inform most social histories of the region and period. I am skeptical that culture is always a direct reflection of struggles over power based in representations of the “objects” of race, class, and gender.<sup>26</sup> My work will follow Daniel Wickberg’s description of culture as “the condition of being and action rather than primarily an instrument or object of action.” I will, for the moment, decouple culture from power in my analysis. I do this because I believe my subjects not only placed religious concerns before proslavery politics, gendered power, and economic decisions, but because my subjects valued the non-confrontational and socially unifying aspects those religious concerns addressed. I refer to this ordering as “prioritizing.” My analysis examines how ordinary people “prioritized” thoughts and actions in their lives. Thus, I assume that many people placed the imperative of religious and familial experience before the imperative of representing gendered and racial power.<sup>27</sup> This is not to say that racial and gendered differences did not matter to my subjects. On the contrary, those differences mattered a great deal as

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<sup>26</sup> This paragraph is drawn from Daniel Wickberg, “What Is the History of Sensibilities? On Cultural Histories, Old and New,” *American Historical Review* (June 2007): 661-684. He notes, “the overwhelming focus on instrumentalizing culture as a tool of power in some of the dominant forms of cultural history finds no room for those elements of culture that cannot be implicated in power relations. Culture is *not* power, nor is power the only or the most important element in culture. Power is but one dimension of culture... It is an impoverished vision of human life that insists on turning people’s whole ways of experiencing, perceiving, and feeling into expressions of one dimension of human life.”

<sup>27</sup> Or, as Stephan notes, “neither evangelical women nor Christian slaves began a revolution, but this fact does not begin to tell the story of their lives. Social protest is far too blunt an instrument by which to measure liberation and change among Christians in the slave South.” Stephan, *Redeeming the Southern Family*, 6.

the burgeoning middle class built social distinctions, rather than broke them down. It is meant to suggest that significant parts of peoples' lives were not subject to struggles for social and political power. My analysis hews closer to cultural studies wherein objects are not placed in contention with one another but react fluidly to negotiation and adaptation.

The evangelical ethos and its adherents did not consciously oppose the planter ideology. In fact, both codes shared more assumptions than not. Yet in the development of an evangelical middle class conscience the planter often stood as the example by which religious people defined themselves against. Planter ideology and culture has been the central subject of historians' queries for generations. From Eugene Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese to Stephanie McCurry and Edward Baptist, historians have described planter ideology as a conservative force devised to maintain the hierarchical power of white men through the subjugation of women and non-whites.<sup>28</sup> Bertram Wyatt-Brown has elaborated on the honor culture that went hand-in-hand with planter and pro-slavery ideologies. Wyatt-Brown's prickly southerners based their behavior entirely on public perception. How one behaved, or was treated, in public reflected honor, status, and power. Planters, particularly

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<sup>28</sup> Eugene D. Genovese, *The World The Slaveholders Made: Two Essays in Interpretation* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969), Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds*, and *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), and Edward E. Baptist, *Creating an Old South: Middle Florida's Plantation Frontier Before the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

men, utilized brute violence to avenge breeches of or slights to that reputation.<sup>29</sup>

These ethics, which I will refer to as “planter ideology,” were the dominant ethics of the social and political classes of the slave.

I use the terms “non-planter” and “ordinary white people” here carefully. In the historiography of southern people, historians have defined planters narrowly, to essentially mean white men and their families holding twenty or more slaves. In contrast, “common” whites are defined variously as those holding fewer than twenty slaves, holding *no* slaves, artisans, or those owning no land at all.<sup>30</sup> Here, by “non-planter” I mean to refer to those people who did not adhere to a “planter ideology,” regardless of property ownership. The evangelical ethos resided among and across classes as variously defined but found firm lodgment among that group we think of as non-planters.<sup>31</sup> Thus, my inquiries are of the people historians have referred to as “plain folk,” “common whites,” “yeomen,” and “countrymen.”

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<sup>29</sup> Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), and *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace and War, 1760s-1890s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001). I should note that Wyatt-Brown’s examination of the honor culture does indeed deal effectively with the “grace” of religion.

<sup>30</sup> Sam Hyde, “Plain Folk Reconsidered: Historiographical Ambiguity in Search of Definition,” *Journal of Southern History* 71 (November 2005): 803-830.

<sup>31</sup> Jane Turner Censer and Jan Lewis have found these characteristics firmly implanted among the planter class in North Carolina and Virginia. Jane Turner Censer, *North Carolina Planters and Their Children, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), and Jan E. Lewis, *The Pursuit of Happiness: Family and Values in Jefferson’s Virginia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Cynthia A. Kierner tracks the “revolutionary backlash” against public-minded women and the evolution of gender-defined roles for women in the household. *Beyond the Household: Women’s Place in the Early South, 1700-1835* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1998).

Archival repositories are filled with the manuscript records of non-elite people in the piedmont. That I use only four diaries requires some explanation of my criteria for choosing my subjects. I excluded planters, or, people who owned more than twenty slaves, or whose property exceeded \$10,000. Thus, familiar Piedmont voices like Mary Jeffreys Bethell and the Lenoir and Avery families are largely absent. I included people who might be considered “self-working.”<sup>32</sup> I looked for those who farmed and toiled in their own fields, cleaned their own kitchens, and threaded their own needles, even if side-by-side with enslaved people, and thus shared the experience of labor common to most North Carolinians. I also excluded politicians and clergy, for the sake of focusing on a more historically neglected, and non-exceptional, group. To examine interior lives with any depth also required that I consider the use of diaries that contain guarded thoughts, self-scrutiny, and imaginative musings. To fully examine the personalities revealed in diaries required that these journals cover more than a few years in duration, thus fragmentary diaries like that of Quaker farmer Thomas Hunt are considered but not featured.<sup>33</sup> As this dissertation documents the lives of evangelicals, I have also not considered conscientiously non-religious people. Unfortunately, this means that two colorful roustabouts, Edward Isham and William Thomas Prestwood, do not receive

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<sup>32</sup> Carl Osthaus, “The Work Ethic of the Plain Folk: Labor and Religion in the Old South,” *Journal of Southern History* 70 (November 2004): 745-782.

<sup>33</sup> Hunt’s diary is located in the Emsley Burgess and Thomas H. Hunt Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



consideration.<sup>34</sup> Finally, three of my subjects lived in the North Carolina piedmont, while one, Mary Davis Brown lived just across the border in South Carolina. I have included her for several reasons: to boost my sample from three to four, to include at least one non-Methodist, and to gain another female voice. My ordinary people, admittedly, tend toward the literate and propertied. Indeed, Caroline Lilly married into the squirearchy, and John Flintoff nurtured his evangelical ethos in the home of his uncle, a Mississippi cotton grandee. By not pegging my criteria exclusively to economic factors and to cultural and religious ones, I am signaling that this behavior might be attributable to the poor, middling, and the wealthy alike. I do not believe these criteria have limited my search but have instead allowed me to focus on a group of people who are often neglected—ordinary laypeople who worked and lived on farms. I have two reasons for calling my subjects “ordinary people.” First, I wish to steer away from association with classifications based on economic or property measurements. Second, I wish to emphasize the non-exceptional nature of my subjects. None were wealthy. None were political strivers. None were particularly outstanding in the social and cultural lives of the region. All were perfectly ordinary.

In this dissertation I make frequent references to “middle class values” as a point toward which many parts of southern evangelical culture bent. The term is weighted with analytical baggage that I must clarify before proceeding. Marxists,

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<sup>34</sup> Bolton and Culclasure, eds., *The Confessions of Edward Isham*, and Nathaniel C. Browder, ed., *The William Thomas Prestwood Enciphered Diary, 1808-1859* (Raleigh, N.C.: N.C. Browder, 1983).

Weberians, and Liberal scholars of the middle class utilize a score of material indicators to describe the middle class broadly as people who were engaged in market economies, who had access to a wide selection of manufactured goods, who worked in professions or specialized industries, who engaged in educational and literary cultures of the day, who constructed social communities detached from traditional family networks, who worked in various voluntary or humanitarian causes, and who exemplified refined manners at work, at home, and in public.<sup>35</sup> Jonathan Wells and Jennifer Green, in their *The Southern Middle Class* (2011), define their southern middle class not with intellectual or social culture, but with occupation, and declare that subsequent qualities of status and shared cultural values derived therefrom.<sup>36</sup> The limitations are explicit for the South, as the authors suggest that social status from non-planter occupations could stake no claim to status or worth. Whether so or not, Wells and Green leave little room for non-material considerations, especially where religion is concerned. My interpretation will offer an alternative view.

I cannot claim my subjects were part of an emerging middle class, for a number of reasons. Though ordinary lay evangelicals did engage in the market economy, and did have access to a wide selection of manufactured goods, the people

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<sup>35</sup> This paragraph is drawn from Burton J. Bledstein, *The Middling Sorts: Explorations in the History of the American Middle Class* (New York: Routledge, 2001), "Introduction."

<sup>36</sup> Jonathan Daniel Wells and Jennifer R. Green, eds., *The Southern Middle Class in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011). Wells, of course, pioneered the study of the southern middle class in his influential *Origins of the Southern Middle Class, 1800-1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

I study here were born, lived, and died in and among traditional family networks in a rural agricultural society. The physical and spatial disruptions so critical to the development of the northern middle classes simply did not occur in the North Carolina countryside. Yet, at the same time, those same people did experience dramatic cultural change. Historians Christopher Clark and Jennifer Goloboy have recently written about class in early America. Goloboy defined social signifiers lying almost entirely in self-measures of personal values. Clark seconded Goloboy, emphasizing not the materialism of the middle class but the “ideological process” that was highly fluid in America.<sup>37</sup> These assessments of class identity in America detach the discussion of class from material measures altogether. My subjects availed themselves of that ideological process with consumption of current printed literature in magazines and newspapers, financial contribution (with varying degrees of enthusiasm) to education, missions, and temperance reform—and in the process imbibed in the cultural and social prescriptions of the contemporary Western world. Those social signifiers included sobriety, restraint, modesty, hard work, domesticity, and an aversion to violence, ostentation, and various forms of self-aggrandizement. These cultural expressions are what I consider to be “middle class values.” Critically, I will find that the social and individual prescriptions of faith formed a pathway for expression of those values.

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<sup>37</sup> Jennifer L. Goloboy, “The Early American Middle Class,” in *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Winter, 2005): 537-545, and Christopher Clark, “Comment on the Symposium on Class in the Early Republic,” *Ibid.*: 557-564.

This detachment of ideological from material makes sense particularly when examining antebellum southerners, because most urban areas remained modest and their professional classes small. My discussion of middle class values presupposes a number of things. I privilege non-material elements in my assessment of cultural change in evangelical communities. When I invoke “middle class values,” I do not mean to suggest that my subjects were conscientiously becoming a middle class in the conventional understanding of that process. Simply, the distinctive ethos they made and embraced in a changing world had significantly similar resonances with established middle class culture. Donald Mathews, from a religious context, best described the status of a non-class community formation when he described a “constituency...not quite a class—although it was first expressed as a class movement—not quite strictly a religious mood apart from social conflict, institution-building, and class consciousness.”<sup>38</sup> What Mathews calls a constituency, or a mood, I think of as an ethos, an ethic, or a sensibility, and will use those terms almost interchangeably. Perhaps later, it offered a foundation for a more articulated middle class, but in the late antebellum era, the evangelical ethic existed in flux with other conceptions of social and cultural value in the South. My key finding here is that the evangelical ethic that presaged more formal middle class values made resolute headway in penetrating the rural, non-planter, countryside in the antebellum era. Farmers—landless, yeoman, and slaveowners alike—experienced similar cultural transformations as their professional cousins in town.

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<sup>38</sup> Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), xiv.

My use of sources and how I organize my chapters—while I trust will be clear to the reader—may require some preliminary explanation. In this dissertation are three parts, each examining a theme. The first part contains one chapter (1) that explores the religious landscape in the late antebellum period, while at the same time comparing (and sometimes linking) the maturity and changeability of denominational practice to the internal urgencies that evangelism produced in individual believers. The subsequent parts are organized around two themes: discipline, and family. The first chapters (2 and 4) of each of the two parts explore in narrative and analytical fashion a particular theme as it unfolded in the religious landscape of the Piedmont. For these sections I have drawn primarily upon denominational and other ecclesiastical records. In the second chapters (3 and 5) of each part I explore that same theme, but in regard to the lives of two diarists. This technique is inspired by the diversity of perspectives with which historical topics may be viewed—even more so for a subject like faith that had such profound consequences for both communities and individuals. An exploration of a subject—religious discipline, for example—from a variety of perspectives will demand slightly different questions and produce slightly different answers, thus complicating our picture of a critical social phenomenon. I chose this organizational tactic as a way to emphasize the intertwined and complex forces at work on both the self-conception of the public and the hearts of individuals. This experiment also highlights a dilemma common to social historians—the problematic uniqueness of individuals in the face of generalizations about institutions and other large social

organizations. Rarely does an individual conform to an archetype defined by an institution he or she may (or may not) be a part of. For instance, in the course of this study, I have encountered quite a few cheerful Presbyterians and just as many fatalistic Methodists. This is not a trite observation but a necessary precaution, as many historians who study this time and place are confused by apparent inconsistencies. Why would a non-slaveholder support the Confederacy? Why would a slaveholder stand by Old Glory? Untangling these paradoxical knots is necessary to understanding them.

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The North Carolina piedmont is the geographical location of this study, but the religious milieu requires some explanation and introduction. I adhere to David Bebbington's much-cited definition of evangelical as a Protestant Christian who believed in the Bible as the only source of spiritual truth, the necessity of Christ's atonement for sin and for the individual to experience conversion, and that the lessons of the gospels must be constantly expressed in everyday life.<sup>39</sup> Evangelicals in the North Carolina piedmont included Presbyterians, Moravians, Baptists, Methodists, German Reformed, and Lutherans. Quakers might not be considered evangelicals, but they share enough Protestant tradition with the others, and have such a central if understated place in the piedmont's religious life that they will be

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<sup>39</sup> David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 1989), and Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), xiv.

considered here. Much of this dissertation explores what non-specialists might think of as the baroque hierarchy of these evangelical churches. These administrative levels, however, proved the location for much of the religious and denominational modernizations that transformed religious life in the nineteenth century. To introduce them we must explore the religious landscape on the eve of the late antebellum period.

The Great Revival that had originated in Kentucky and spread back to the Carolinas peaked in 1801, faded out, and religious fervor for the following generation never reached the same level.<sup>40</sup> Yet small, localized outbursts of enthusiasm routinely broke out at congregational and county level and initiated a cyclical pattern of enthusiasm and lethargy that continued, and eventually adapted, to new religious modes in the two decades before the Civil War.<sup>41</sup> Most evangelical denominations grew rapidly even in this time of lethargy. The Methodists, most notably, surged in membership. In 1854, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, claimed well over fourteen thousand members in their piedmont districts.<sup>42</sup> By then, the renowned circuit riders had passed away and ministers settled into routine

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<sup>40</sup> On the Great Revivals, see Boles, *The Great Revival*, and Paul Keith Conkin, *Cane Ridge: America's Pentacost* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).

<sup>41</sup> On frequent outbreaks of enthusiasm in the upcountry, see Lacy K. Ford, *The Origins of Southern Radicalism, 1800-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), especially chapter 1.

<sup>42</sup> This number does not include the sizeable Charlotte District, then a part of the South Carolina Conference. *Journal of Seventeenth Annual Session of the North Carolina Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1854* (Raleigh: Wm. C. Doub, Printer at the "Star Office," 1855), 9-10.

administration of regional Districts and county-wide Circuits.<sup>43</sup> The Lutherans responded to the Great Revival by forming a statewide body, the Lutheran Synod of North Carolina, in 1803, to enforce the Lutheran confessional and thereby more actively protect their ranks from enthusiastic Methodist poachers. Yet Lutheran churches remained so weak that they often shared church space with their Calvinist cousins in the German Reformed Church.<sup>44</sup> Language, not theology, bound these two denominations together, but by the late 1820s, the Lutheran Synod and German Reformed Classis had grown enough that they separated from each others' churches, and very soon thereafter, ceased conducting church business in German.<sup>45</sup> In 1850, the German Reformed Classis claimed 1,174 adherents while the Lutheran Synod counted 2,682 "communing members" in 1857.<sup>46</sup>

Presbyterians, organized into three major Presbyteries in North Carolina (the statewide body being called a Synod)—Fayetteville, Orange, and Concord, the later two being in the Piedmont. All of the North Carolina Synod's Presbyteries sided with the Old Schoolers in the doctrinal schism in the national General Assembly in 1837.

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<sup>43</sup> Elmer T. Clark, *Methodism in Western North Carolina* (n.p.: Historical Society of the Western North Carolina Conference, 1966).

<sup>44</sup> James I Good, *History of the Reformed Church in the United States* (Reading, Pa.: D. Miller, c. 1897), G.D. Bernheim and George H. Cox, *The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod and Ministerium of North Carolina* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1902), 1-32.

<sup>45</sup> Jacob L. Morgan, Bachman S. Brown, and John Hall, eds., *History of the Lutheran Church in North Carolina* (n.p.: United Evangelical Lutheran Synod of North Carolina, c. 1953).

<sup>46</sup> *Proceedings of the Eighteenth Convention of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States, 1857* (Gettysburg: Henry C. Neinstedt, 1857), 46, and *Acts and Proceedings of the Synod of the German Reformed Church of North America, 1850* (Chambersburg, Pa.: Publication Office of the German Reformed Church, 1850).



Presbyterians numbered 8,745 in the Orange and Concord Presbyteries.<sup>47</sup> Baptists fragmented all over North Carolina. Many congregations and Associations (the local Baptist administrative body) desired to form a statewide organization to pursue educational and missionary initiatives. Some Baptists objected, not finding the missionary or the administrative imperative in Scripture. While Baptists tended to ally themselves by Association to the unorganized Antimissionary (Primitive) side or the Baptist State Convention, many individual churches and individuals changed their allegiances throughout the 1830s. The Baptist State Convention formed in 1830 and in 1850 counted 8,686 black and white members in the piedmont.<sup>48</sup> Even the Methodists split. In 1828, several circuits, mostly in Eastern North Carolina, aligned themselves with the Methodist Protestant sect in a dispute over the authority of bishops in their churches. Their presence in the piedmont remained limited to a few small congregations in Guilford County until a critical moment in 1847.

Of the Moravians and the Quakers, the former underwent perhaps the greatest change between American Independence and the Civil War. In that span, the Moravian church loosed its grip on control of communal property and the

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<sup>47</sup> D.I. Craig, *A History of the Development of the Presbyterian Church in North Carolina and of Synodical Home Missions* (Richmond: Whittet & Shepperson Printers, 1907), Neill Roderick McGeachy, *Confronted by Challenge: A History of the Presbytery of Concord, 1795-1973* (n.p.: The Delmar Company, 1985), and Paul Keith Conkin, *The Uneasy Center: Reformed Christianity in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

<sup>48</sup> On Antimission Baptists, see James R. Mathis, *The Making of the Primitive Baptists: A Cultural and Intellectual History of the Antimission Movement, 1800-1840* (New York: Routledge, 2004). *Proceedings of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, 1830* (Newbern: John I. Pasteur, 1830).

gendered segregation of its congregations, while allowing its members to become increasingly integrated into the political and cultural world around them. Notably, in 1830, the Moravians reversed their position on state power and violence and permitted state militias to be formed from among themselves. One thousand eight hundred fifty three Moravians lived in their Southern Province in 1855.<sup>49</sup> Quakers, however, changed very little. They continued to worship in Monthly Meetings and organized their Meetings into Quarterly Meetings (the Friends' analog to Circuits and Associations). Like the Presbyterians, the North Carolina Quakers chose to side with the orthodox branch in the Hicksite schism of 1827. Massive out-migration contributed to Quaker lethargy, and approximately 1,946 adult Friends remained in North Carolina in 1850.<sup>50</sup> An exact count of evangelicals in the 1850s is impossible, but a rough estimate may be made. Denominations counted at least 39,000 members in the 1850s. (This is a low estimate. It fails to account for Antimission Baptist congregations and does not include the population of the Charlotte District of the MEC,S. In addition, historians recognize that *adherents* of Protestant denominations tend to far exceed mere *members*.)

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<sup>49</sup> C. Daniel Crews and Richard W. Starbuck, *With Courage for the Future: The Story of the Moravian Church, Southern Province* (Winston-Salem, N.C.: Moravian Church, Southern Province, 2002), population number on p. 832. On Moravian cultural transformation, see Jon F. Sensbach: *A Separate Canaan: The Making of an Afro-Moravian World in North Carolina, 1763-1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), and S. Scott Rohrer, *Hope's Promise: Religion and Acculturation in the Southern Backcountry* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2005).

<sup>50</sup> Stephen B. Weeks, *Southern Quakers and Slavery: A Study in Institutional History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1896), and Thomas D. Hamm, *The Transformation of American Quakerism: Orthodox Friends, 1800-1907* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), Chapter 1.

The very gradual development of denominations over the antebellum decades makes more profound shifts in religious culture difficult to discern. Historians tend to attribute the most significant changes in southern religious life to the racial and political economies of the south. The evangelical accommodation to slavery in the early 1800s, for instance, or Nat Turner's Rebellion, or the national schisms over slavery are turning points in the historiographical narrative of southern evangelicalism. But these events do not sufficiently explain the rise to mainstream status of religious people, or how evangelicalism became a dynamic force strong enough to intervene with new family styles and behavioral expectations.<sup>51</sup>

Two trends, both unrelated to racial politics, must be considered to understand the context of late antebellum religious life. Eighteenth Century evangelicals were, as so ably described by Rhys Isaac and others, indeed a marginalized and despised minority. Their chief expressions of religious identity and piety were limited to the conversion experience, emotional expressiveness at revivals, and strangely circumscribed public behavior. The early Nineteenth Century, however, witnessed an explosion of church activity and membership.

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<sup>51</sup> On the marginalization of Eighteenth Century evangelicals, see Janet Moore Lindman, "Acting the Manly Christian: White Evangelical Masculinity in Revolutionary Virginia," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 57, no. 2 (April 2000): 393-416. On process of institutionalization of churches in nineteenth century America, see Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, revised edition, 2005), and Schweiger, *The Gospel Working Up*, 5-9. See also Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 164-202, and George M. Marsden, *Religion and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (Belmont, Ca.: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2001), 58.

Evangelicals went from an insignificant number in the 1770s to 40% of the American population by 1860, due in no small part to massive revivals in Kentucky lead by Barton Stone in 1799 and further explosive growth in northern churches in the 1830s under the revival leadership of Lyman Beecher and Charles Finney. This growth spurred a process of institutional maturity in churches. By the 1840s religious identity and piety could be attached to education through colleges and schools, cosmopolitanism through foreign missions, social responsibility through the ethic of Christian slaveholding, the professionalism of bureaucratic management, the sophistication of theological explication, and the expectation of sober public behavior. These platforms lifted evangelicals from the margins to the dynamic center of American life.

So, too, did changing sensibilities in the Atlantic world. Broadly put, the Eighteenth Century's "age of reason" had given way to the Nineteenth Century's Romanticism. Under the former, rationality and decorum reigned and Enlightenment leaders condemned expressions of emotion as evidence of ignorance and superstitious intellects. Evangelicals fell victim to this criticism. But the Romantic age dismissed the orderliness of 1700s classicism and exalted the chaos and transcendent power of emotion and the supernatural. Mystery, Romantics proclaimed, existed, and there could be found God, or at least sublimity. Whereas the old order despised marginalized people, the Romantic order respected and admired alienated members of society. It thus viewed evangelicals in a much more respectful light. As Michael O'Brien has noted, Romantic thought and evangelical

suspicion blended almost seamlessly in the American south. With institutional success and an altered sensibility, southern evangelicals stood poised in the late antebellum at the crest of various social and cultural waves.<sup>52</sup>

The four diarists I examine are:

Caroline Matilda Brooks Lilly (1835-1846): This extraordinary woman, born illegitimate and dispossessed, grew up in poverty before her religious conversion in the early 1830s. As a single woman, she taught school, aided the organization of camp meetings, and participated in public life in Concord, North Carolina. Following her marriage in 1839, Caroline settled in rural Montgomery County with her husband James, but continued teaching. She focused more and more on her domestic life as she produced, eventually, four surviving children. Her diary *Antebellum Southern Romanticism* chronicles her activities between 1836 and her death in 1848, including her thoughts on marriage, childbirth, female education, work, love, and religion.<sup>53</sup>

John Flintoff (1841-1901): Born to a down-and-out faction of a middling Orange County, North Carolina, family, Flintoff traveled to Adams County, Mississippi, to oversee an uncle's plantation. After a year, he attended Centenary College in Jackson

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<sup>52</sup> Ralph H. Gabriel, "Evangelical Religion and Popular Romanticism in Early Nineteenth-Century America," *Church History* 19, no. 1 (March 1950): 34-47, and Michael O'Brien, "The Lineaments of Antebellum Southern Romanticism," *Journal of American Studies* 20, no. 2 (August 1986): 165-188.

<sup>53</sup> Caroline Brooks Lilly Diary and Account Book, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

before returning to North Carolina. Flintoff lived in Caswell County in the 1850s with his wife, children, and slaves growing tobacco, hauling wood, attending church, and slowly building a legacy for himself and his family. The antebellum period, when Flintoff's economic success seemed uncertain, is the focus of this dissertation.<sup>54</sup>

Basil Armstrong Thomasson (1853-1862): This young teacher in Yadkin County, North Carolina, eagerly planned for the day of his marriage by subscribing to domestic journals and envisioning scenes of conjugal happiness that would have delighted Catharine Beecher herself.<sup>55</sup> In the meantime, this devout Christian promoted temperance, built his own home and blacksmith shop, and spent nearly every spare hour laboring on his father and friends' farms.<sup>56</sup>

Mary Davis Brown (1854-1859): From York County, South Carolina, Mary Davis Brown raised a large family on her farm, and fretted over her isolation and inability to maintain social networks because of onerous parenting duties. The diary is kept until 1901, but the sections from 1854-1858 will be considered here.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> John F. Flintoff Diary, North Carolina Office of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina. The state archive owns a photocopy of the original diary, which has been returned to the donors.

<sup>55</sup> Catharine Beecher wrote extensively about home economics and the moral importance of families and is considered the chief founder of American Victorian domesticity. Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973).

<sup>56</sup> Paul D. Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman: The Diary of Basil Armstrong Thomasson, 1853-1862* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994).

<sup>57</sup> The Descendants of Mary Davis Brown, eds., *Oil in Our Lamps: The Journals of Mary Davis Brown from the Beersheba Presbyterian Church Community, York, SC, 1854-1901* (n.p.: Self-published, 2010.)

In the chapter of this dissertation, I track the institutional growth of the Piedmont's Protestant churches. The creation of schools, Sunday Schools, domestic and foreign missions, the "mission the slaves," and routinized camp meetings all provided evangelicals new ways to experience and express faith in a communal context. I intertwine the stories of Mary Davis Brown and Caroline Lilly to explore how faith motivated individuals to action in times of vulnerability and pain. In the next two chapters I explore how religious discipline offered practitioners a guide for ethical public behavior. In doing so, in Chapter 2, I take into account the progress of the temperance movement in western North Carolina, and the Wesleyan episode in the early 1850s. The individuals I study in Chapter 3, John Flintoff and Strong Thomasson, both relied on those lessons of discipline to shape their expectations for worldly existence. In the next two chapters I trace the inroads evangelical publications made into the South. Chapter 4 explores how ordinary people consumed the modernizing messages tracts, newspapers, and prescriptive manuals in great number. I close in Chapter 5 by looking at the ways Strong Thomasson and Caroline Lilly implemented the ideals of a middle class family in their own households. In an epilogue, I suggest ways the evangelical ethos guided people's reaction to secession and Civil War.

This is a complicated story that yields reluctantly to clear explanations. In the milieu of social, political, and religious life in the Piedmont South, evangelicals approached the great issues of the day—temperance, slavery, and the construction

of families and households in a changing economy—with a contradictory mixture of enthusiasm, ambivalence, restraint, outrage, dissent, and assent. At the base of these contradictory actions lay the most contemporary version of the evangelical order.



## CHAPTER II

### ANXIETY AND LIBERALITY: THE RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE OF THE POST-REVIVAL PIEDMONT

The North Carolina State Baptist Convention met in 1846 and surveyed their ongoing work of carrying the Word of God to the destitute. Being Baptists, they primarily concerned themselves with missionary efforts, and proposed reorganization of its body into Boards for Home Missions and Domestic Missions to more efficiently manage their networks and to draw more members into the labor. (Their Board of Education was already underway.) From China to Yadkin County, the North Carolina Baptists espied numerous likely opportunities. Within the state, the Convention looked to the fielding of ministers in growing urban congregations. Places like Yanceyville and Milton had new congregations but no ministers. The bustling prosperity of the day inspired them, and the Convention compared itself to a commercial enterprise. "If Rail Roads are to be built, or Banks established, or the defences of the country undertaken, capital is furnished in abundance, the best talents are employed, and systematic effort is put forth till the result is accomplished. Why can we not come up to the work before us with equal zeal and

liberality?"<sup>1</sup> Baptist elders badly wanted to harness the spirit of the day to meet their spiritual aims.

Caroline Brooks found the 1838 camp meeting at Center in Montgomery County full of delight but somewhat lacking in devotion. She herself fell victim to the social rounds. The thirty-five year-old single teacher spent a great deal of the four-day meeting having breakfast, tea, and dinner at the tents of the meeting's finer attendees. Over tea, she caught up with old friends, met new ones, and engaged in spirited conversations with both men and women about "female education." One of her friends, Brother Martin, preached one scheduled sermon "in behalf of the Randolph Macon College." She observed, "I do not recollect having ever seen a finer or more fashionable looking congregation." This pleasure, however unusual for the usually pious Caroline, reflected the importance of routine social expedience of annual camp meetings. But the need for worshipful behavior did not elude her. "It was announced on Thursday evening that the day following was to be set apart as a day of humiliation fasting and prayer—but I could discover no difference between this and other days." The pressing need for pious behavior did not escape her or the other attendees. On the third night as a Mr. Harrison preached by candlelight, "there was a great deal of noise and a larger number of professed mourners than there had been at any previous time of the meeting." The enthusiasm of potential converts, however, did not touch Caroline as much as the example of her friend, the Reverend

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<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings of the Sixteenth Annual Baptist State Convention, Raleigh, 1846* (New Bern: Printed by J.I. Pasteur, 1846), 22.

Dr. Treadwell, who took “great pains” to fill his tent not just with “the rich, the gay or the fashionable” but ensured also that “the poor, the \_\_\_\_\_ and the maimed share[d] equally of his liberality.”<sup>2</sup>

The era of Francis Asbury had passed, while the era of James O. Andrew thrived. The religious landscape in the post-revival South had changed. No longer did Methodists and Baptists utilize nimble organizations of unordained and itinerant preachers to spread their faith. They and their ecclesial cousins settled ministers on land, started schools, sent missions abroad, and created within denominations the bureaucratic scaffolding to fund and administer these efforts. An examination of the exterior expressions of faith of southern people produces complicated results. It adds depth to our understanding of the process of change in religion and society and belies formulations of southern white religion as conservative or primitive. It developed a public ethos of liberality but did not practice a liberal theology. Individual believers harnessed the personal anxiety that arose from evangelism’s Calvinist tendencies to effect moral action in the modern secular world. Those two terms—liberal and modern—are more appropriately deployed to describe American religious culture in the post-Civil War period, to describe religious grappling not just with technology and science but also academic challenges to the sanctity of scripture. Instead, antebellum southerners developed

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<sup>2</sup> August 28, 30, September 1, 2, 1838, in Caroline Brooks Lilly Diary and Account Book, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Hereafter cited as Lilly Diary.

their religious culture in an earlier context Martin Marty has called the “Evangelical empire.” Evangelicals, according to Marty, worked “to attract the allegiance of all the people, to develop a spiritual kingdom, and to shape the nation’s ethos, mores, manners, and often its laws” in an environment free from later, and more familiar, cultural conflicts. In the post-establishment era, denominations and even congregations adopted a “competitive” culture to lure congregants and ministers.<sup>3</sup> Mark Noll called this the “Christian Enlightenment” in America. This intellectual synthesis “successfully clothed the Christian faith in the preeminent ideological dress of the new Republic.” A maturing ideology, American Christian Enlightenment combined four elements, some orthodox, and some new: a continued understanding of the Covenantal relationship that required frequent repentance and renewal; a belief that private virtue (or vice) had a causal effect in public as expressed in the character of individuals; a fervent belief, drawn from Enlightenment positivism, that moral people could overcome immoral obstacles to achieve social perfection; and finally, an accommodation to the reality of a burgeoning economy.<sup>4</sup>

Institutional maturity had a salient effect on how ordinary white southerners practiced religion and integrated their faith with the secular world. As

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<sup>3</sup> Of the later applicability of “liberal” and “modern,” Marty said “Ironically, no sooner had these new forms been developed than their rationale was removed from under them. In the second half of the nineteenth century industrialism and the urban setting were so enlarged and their impacts so intensified that very little of the earlier forms applied directly to the world of factories and cities.” Martin E. Marty, *Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America* (New York: The Dial Press, 1970), 1, 35-45, 68.

<sup>4</sup> Mark A. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 19-21.

denominations developed bureaucracies, Marty noted, “it was necessary to invent new forms or radically rework old ones.”<sup>5</sup> These new forms included more than committees and fundraising, but new ways to interpret and express individual piety. Thus, southern religious people did not practice liberal religion, but religion produced an ethic of liberality in religious practitioners.<sup>6</sup> The ethic of liberality placed selflessness and pious generosity above all other concerns and insisted that piety transcend worldly divisions of race, class, and gender. Yet the effects of liberality are not always apparent when examining the interior lives of individual believers. Both Caroline Brooks and Mary Davis Brown incorporated elements of contemporary religion into their lives while prioritizing the anxiety of salvation alongside the need to interpret daily joys and pains through the traditional lens of repentance and renewal. This apparent contradiction, between a cosmopolitan, external, religious expression and a constrained, internal one should be a reminder that individuals seldom conform to broad archetypes, and that often, individuals contained contradictions. It should not, however, be thought that external and internal religious expressions could not coexist.

Like its subjects, southern religious historiography is dominated by a number of interrelated and occasionally contradictory conclusions in regard to this transformation of faith in the post-revival period. First, historians hold that

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<sup>5</sup> Marty, *Righteous Empire*, 67.

<sup>6</sup> On emergent liberal religion in the antebellum period, see Molly Oshatz, *Slavery and Sin: The Fight Against Slavery and the Rise of Liberal Protestantism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

denominations and clergy conscientiously associated themselves with agents of social and secular power after 1800, and religion subsequently catered to, and served as an adjunct of, racial and masculine authority.<sup>7</sup> Scholarship has thus focused on the development of theologies that privileged white, wealthy men, marginalized blacks, women, and poor people, and offered justification for southern nationalism. Historians, in fact, have focused almost exclusively on the relationship between religion and slavery and religion and gendered power. At the same time, historians contend, conservative theology hindered numerous social movements. Clergy deflected concern for the secular world by maintaining strict theologies of individualism, buttressed by a doctrine called “spirituality of the church,” in which churches eschewed political activity. Denominations allegedly invoked religion as a way to resist the intrusion of markets, industry, and other cultural transformations.<sup>8</sup> Of related concern is the Weberian notion that the development of modern relationships based in corporate bureaucracies and market choices sapped religion of its social and cultural authority. A subset of this interpretation insists that the refined and respectable religion of the late antebellum stifled the emotional appeal

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<sup>7</sup> See Randy J. Sparks, “Religion in the Pre-Civil War South,” in John B. Boles, ed., *A Companion to the American South* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 156-175; Christine Leigh Heryman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1997); Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); and Eugene D. Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Fatal Self-Deception: Slaveholding Paternalism in the Old South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Samuel S. Hill, *Southern Churches in Crisis* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s-1890s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), and Sidney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 659.

of evangelical Protestantism, and thus, a great connection between denominations and their members.<sup>9</sup>

Some historians have worked to expand the historiographical view of southern denominations by looking at religious experience beyond the concern for race, power, and individualism. Of interest here, particularly, is the work of Beth Barton Schweiger who follows Donald Mathews in noting the organizational tendencies of denominations after the major schisms of the 1840s. Not as cold, insular souls, but as enthusiastic, generous, congregants did evangelicals pursue connections to regional, national, and global ecclesiastical bodies. They did so through the creation of institutional boards, publishing societies, schools, and missionary enterprises. “The organizing of society accomplished by revivals,” Schweiger wrote, “worked against any notion of tradition in the Old South.”<sup>10</sup>

So, an intense motivation for piedmont evangelicals arose from the internal anxiety and external optimism of their religion. From that discourse emerged a prescription for evangelical behavior—liberality—that subtly stood as a challenge to the planter ethics of paternalism and honor. Simultaneously, benevolent and

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<sup>9</sup> Randy J. Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks: Evangelicalism in Mississippi, 1773-1876* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), Heryman, *Southern Cross*, and John B. Boles, *The Irony of Southern Religion* (New York[?]: Peter Lang Publishing, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> Beth Barton Schweiger, “Max Weber in Mount Airy, Or, Revivals and Social Theory in the Early South,” in *Religion in the American South: Protestants and Others in History and Culture*, ed. Beth Barton Schweiger and Donald G. Mathews (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 53, Donald G. Mathews, “The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Process, 1780-1830: An Hypothesis,” *American Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (Spring 1969): 23-43, and Beth Barton Schweiger, *The Gospel Working Up: Progress and the Pulpit in Nineteenth-Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

bureaucratic schemes designed to build denominations expanded the potential fields for spiritual refreshing. As ordinary lay people actively participated in the new religious landscape, they continued to regard evangelicalism as a source of individual strength, anxiety, and guidance. The modern world had altered religious experience but had not robbed it of its emotional impact.

### **Mary Davis Brown's Persistence**

Two related ideals fed Mary Brown's religious worldview. First, earthly existence was never meant to be anything but painful. "Well," she wrote,

this is a world of cares and sorrows but what of that they verry [weary?] traveler never dreams of rest unto he lands at his journeys end and why should I expect enjoyment here while travling in this wilderness of sin, pain and sorrow.<sup>11</sup>

Second, nearly every moment of travail, strife, and pain represented a rebuke and reminder to maintain focus on God and the promise of joy in the afterlife. A sore throat in 1856 left her to hope that "these afflictions ware sent fore something."<sup>12</sup>

The solemn ordination of a new preacher at Bershaba reminded her "that we must all give an account fore at death."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The Descendants of Mary Davis Brown, eds., *Oil In Our Lamps: The Journals of Mary Davis Brown from the Beersheba Presbyterian Church Community, York, SC, 1854-1901* (n.p.: Self-Published by The Descendants of Mary Davis Brown, 2010), 32. Hereafter cited as Descendants, *Oil In Our Lamps*.

<sup>12</sup> Descendants, *Oil In Our Lamps*, 28.

<sup>13</sup> Descendants, *Oil In Our Lamps*, 41.



These notions defined everything in Mary Brown's existence, from the weather, to aging, to the death of children. An evening of bad weather in November 1854 "reminds me of the long night of darkness that awaits the wicked sinner [sic]. [O]h, that I may always have before my eyes that I am born to die and be prepared fore that change."<sup>14</sup> Even the afflictions of other people portended religious instruction. When a murderer, James Vickers, "was hung fore stabbing Daubson," she did not dwell on the legality or morality of Vickers' crime but took the opportunity to note that "great is our warefair, great is our work; and far greater than ever I expected it to bee, is my weekness, but my sufficiency is of God."<sup>15</sup> All life's passages served to explain the pain of earth and enlighten the path to heaven. At the end of 1854, she noted,

Their has been too born, too married and one died in my family this year. But thou hast commanded us to remember all thy ways which thou hast led us in this wilderness. The seen of our journeying has indeed been a wilderness. But the hand that has conducted us is divine... I have had my afflictions, but how few have they been in number, how short in continuance, how alieviated in degree, how merciful in design, how instructive, and useful in their result. It is good fore me that I have been afflicted.<sup>16</sup>

The chronic illness of Mary's elderly father constantly offered her particular proof of the stark line between life and death, pain and salvation. On one visit to William Brown's house, she noted, "he says theirs [there's] but one step between

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<sup>14</sup> Descendants, *Oil In Our Lamps*, 16.

<sup>15</sup> Descendants, *Oil In Our Lamps*, 17.

<sup>16</sup> Descendants, *Oil In Our Lamps*, 17, 28.

him and the grave. And it will be a glorious change fore him, from pain and sickness to a place prepared fore him and that long and wait fore his coming.”<sup>17</sup> He appeared at a quilting bee at Mary’s house, but warned that “he thought it might be the last time he ever would be here. It makes me feel verry sober ever time he gose home from here.”<sup>18</sup> The prospect of illness, pain, and death quickened William’s anticipation for the peace of heaven. He spent his days studying scripture and regailing visitors with his hopes. “When ant Emily came she says, ‘Unckle, you are in a bad fix.’ ‘Oh no, I hope I will soon be in a good fix.’ He said it was nothing to live and it was nothing to die but felt it was a great thing to be redly to die. He longs to be gone and be with that dear savior he has loved and served so long.” That William Brown declared his eagerness to leave life while presumably in the presence of his family might seem rather insensitive, but the sentiment inspired Mary: “O if i could but follow his example as far as he followed Christs example and only be as well prepared fore another wourld as he is, i need not care fore the things of this wourld.”<sup>19</sup> He died a month later.

The view of life as a singular source of pain served as a rebuke to remember rewards of salvation. It also, strangely, served as a salve for earthly grief. Mary

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<sup>17</sup> Descendants, *Oil In Our Lamps*, 22.

<sup>18</sup> Descendants, *Oil In Our Lamps*, 29.

<sup>19</sup> Descendants, *Oil In Our Lamps*, 57, see also 30.

particularly used this strange comfort to console herself after the death of an infant in 1854. She quoted English Baptist tract writer J.G. Pike when she wrote,

He is landed on that peaceful shore where the stormes of trouble never blow; he is forever out of the reach of sorow, sin, temptation and snares. Now he is before the throne, singing the sweet songs of reediming love forever more.<sup>20</sup>

This is not to say that Mary Brown lived in a state of perpetual or imposed grief. She skillfully manipulated the reality of pain into the terms of her happiness, or at least contentment. Upon reviewing the events of 1854, she lamented the passing of her infant son and the birth and marriage of others in her family by recalling that “[t]he seen of our journeying has indeed been a wilderness... I have had my afflictions, but how few have they been in number, how short in continuance, how alleviated in degree, how merciful in design, how instructive, and useful in their result. It is good fore me that I have been afflicted.”<sup>21</sup> The death of her baby son had emotionally crushed her, but in perspective, and with prayer, she found relief, not from the pain, but in it.

Mary Brown’s faith served a simple need—the alleviation of earthly pain in a world rife with physical torment, imminent death, and easy separation. A simple requirement lacking in intellectual sophistication and theological complexity, yet the imperative of that faith subtly laid a foundation for a larger ethos that will be

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<sup>20</sup> Descendants, *Oil In Our Lamps*, 17.

<sup>21</sup> Descendants, *Oil In Our Lamps*, 17.

discussed later but is visible in one of Mary Brown's New Year's prayers. As she contemplated the forthcoming year, Mary pleaded that she "live in the spirrit"—particularly with "wisdom and strenth," because life presented far more "adversity," which caused her "to sink." This is more than the imposition of a justification for the arbitrary powerlessness Mary Brown experienced. Her prayers for submission and alleviation are a common dynamic of sin and salvation. Mary Brown, along with countless other Protestants, continued to practice a pedestrian form of "experimental religion" in which connection to the divine occurred through non-rational emotions of the heart. The keen emotions of mourning and physical desperation betokened a connection to God. For most Protestants, that connection was a message that sin prevailed but salvation was possible.<sup>22</sup>

The cycle of sin and salvation applied to much more than life's pains.

Evangelicals saw sin and temptation also in certain forms of happiness and comfort.

"O let not prosperity destroy me ore injure me," Mary wrote.

May i know how to be abased without despaire and to abound without pride. If my realtives comforts are continued to me, may I love them without adrolitry [sic] and hold them at thy disposal, and if they are recold from me, may I be enabeled to say, 'The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken, and blessed be the name of the Lord.'<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> A. Gregory Schneider, *The Way of the Cross Leads Home: The Domestication of American Methodism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 42-58.

<sup>23</sup> Descendants, *Oil In Our Lamps*, 19.

Mary Brown's prayer to forestall the temptations of material wealth reflected a growing southern concern for the place of piety in an increasingly prosperous world and the foundation of an earthly ethic of living within a world of money and material goods.

### **Caroline Lilly's Anxiety**

A perfunctory reading of Caroline Lilly's diary suggests the teacher and farm wife practiced a very traditional, and very stultifying, religion unrelated to the bureaucratization of denominations and other impulses of mid-nineteenth century religion. As a young single teacher in Cabarrus County, North Carolina, she did indeed participate fully in the religious life of the community with regular attendance at Sunday services and protracted meetings, participation in Sunday School (proceedings), wide reading in religious periodicals and tracts, and cultivating close bonds with both Presbyterian and Methodist divines. Yet anxiety plagued her, and pursued her to Montgomery County, where she married James Lilly and bore six children. That anxiety stemmed from religious insecurities, and despite her efforts, her faith failed to provide a balm. By the end of her life, Caroline's diary entries reflect the voice of a person shattered by religious anxieties.

Caroline Lilly represented a modern inflection of Protestantism primarily because of her struggles with the *self*, or what she called the “Egomet.”<sup>24</sup> Despite the self-negation required in conversion and submission, Caroline possessed a keen awareness of herself as an autonomous actor with desires and foibles that she could control. The struggle over the articulation and, equally important—the bounds—of those desires and foibles, form a central theme of her diary.<sup>25</sup> In fact, when she opened the diary in 1836, she fully intended it to be a standard evangelical document meant to examine and thereby improve her own religious character. Though she quickly began to record secular items, the diary remained ever a location for self-reflection where she could question her own heart, express its desires, and negotiate an adequate equilibrium.

Caroline’s ruminations on *self* and her acts of self-abnegation are complex and difficult to untangle. Caroline harbored the spiritual, and therefore, secular goal of being useful to God’s will. She did not obsess over her status as saved or unsaved, converted or unconverted, present life or afterlife. Caroline agonized that her “faint desire to be useful in thy vinyard be greatly increased and speedily put into practice.”<sup>26</sup> “May I,” she prayed, “be enabled to devote my worthy self entirely to his

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<sup>24</sup> At the opening of the third volume of her diary, Caroline tried to categorically analyze the part of her life, including “Domestic,” “Physical Department,” “School Department,” “Mental,” “My own feelings,” and “Egomet.” See July 29, August 1, 6, 12, and 29, Lilly Diary. This scheme did not last.

<sup>25</sup> Rodger M. Payne, *The Self and the Sacred: Conversion and Autobiography in Early American Protestantism* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1998), especially chapter 3.

<sup>26</sup> August 23, 1836, Lilly Diary.

service.”<sup>27</sup> Caroline discovered her vocation to be teaching and child-rearing (explored in Chapter 3). But satisfaction with those paths, and self-satisfaction with her life in general, did not derive simply from fulfillment of those goals. She did teach and she did bear children, but her secular contentment always remained in tenuous balance with spiritual anxiety.

Caroline’s anxiety derived from her yearning for sanctification, and her battle with spiritual temptations that yearning engendered. In sanctification (also called perfection and holiness), Methodists knew that conversion itself did not cleanse the soul or the heart of temptation or assure salvation. Post-conversion spiritual life of the Methodist faithful continued the struggle for sanctification, a state in which the believer accepted and returned unalloyed love of God. Outward evidence of the achievement of sanctification might include a falling away of pain and sorrow.<sup>28</sup> *Might*, because true sanctification proved so difficult to achieve. Caroline struggled on the road to sanctification in ways the matter-of-fact Presbyterian Mary Brown did not.

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<sup>27</sup> December 4, 1838, Lilly Diary.

<sup>28</sup> Though the holiness of Phoebe Palmer and the Wesleyan Methodists appeared in North Carolina in the 1850s, Caroline’s perfectionism harkened to John Wesley’s eighteenth century sermons. Randall J. Stephens, “Ohio Villains’ and ‘Pretenders to New Revelations’: Wesleyan Abolitionists in the South, Perfectionism, and the Antebellum Religious Divide,” in *Southern Character: Essays in Honor of Bertram Wyatt-Brown*, ed. Lisa Tendrich Frank and Daniel Kilbride (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), 73-88, Cheryl Fradette Junk, “‘Ladies, arise! The World has need of you’: Frances Bumpass, religion, and the power of the press, 1851-1860,” Ph.D diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2005, and Schneider, *The Way of The Cross Leads Home*, 51-52.

Caroline's perfectionism drove her to a persistent desire for self-improvement. She prayed, "I do beseech thee to grant me the Sanctifying influences of thy holy spirit to purify my heart."<sup>29</sup> But prayer was hardly enough. Doubt about her own Christian character plagued her. Soon after she opened her diary, Caroline cried out, "I am some distressed for account of my extreme unworthiness in the sight of a proud & holy God who is my best friend and to whom I am indebted for all the blessings that I enjoy."<sup>30</sup> On April 15, 1837, she wrote, "I am much oppressed with cares and anxieties of various kinds but chiefly because I am not a better Christian. The adversary of souls has assaulted me during this week."<sup>31</sup> This arresting statement reveals much about Caroline's worldview. "Cares and anxieties," though unstated in this passage, may be an allusion to a conflict she perceived herself to be in with another teacher, or it may have arisen from her ongoing—and disappointing—attempts to stanch a habit toward recriminative gossip, or her uncertainty about future employment.<sup>32</sup> Whatever the cause, she clearly did not base her spiritual unhappiness directly on her worldly annoyances. She attributed her "cares and anxieties" to her apparent failure as a Christian. Her secular troubles came from the doubt she harbored about her ability to serve God's will. The lineaments between spiritual anxiety and earthly behavior could not have been

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<sup>29</sup> April 20, 1836, Lilly Diary.

<sup>30</sup> April 18, 1836, Lilly Diary. See also December 1, 1836.

<sup>31</sup> April 15, 1837, Lilly Diary.

<sup>32</sup> See August 31, 1837, Lilly Diary.



shorter. The theological problem was, indeed, a very tangible earthly problem. But the key here is that the spiritual solution was also an earthly solution.

Physical pains and anxieties manifested in Caroline's mind as religious doubt most intensely during pregnancy. In the summer of 1839, during her first pregnancy, she described the interconnectedness of faith and physical pain. On July 21, near her sixth month, she desired to attend church, but "the infirmities of the flesh and the cares of the world press heavily upon me and very much retard my progress in spiritual things." Though she stayed home from church, she still attended a session of her "Sabbath School," where, "though suffering pain spent an hour or two quite pleasantly."<sup>33</sup> She overcame, or at least found the fortitude to endure, her pain because she found the time for devotion. Three months later she found that faith did not forestall the weight of gravity. "I have now become familiar with affliction being very seldom free from pain." But she continued to alleviate her discomfort with appeals to heaven and interpret her physical pain as theological, not biological. "I pray for resignation and submission to the chastisements of my Heavenly Father."<sup>34</sup> Perhaps she thought that had she been more devoted, her Heavenly Father might have spared her the pains. Her reaction to

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<sup>33</sup> July 21, 1839, Lilly Diary.

<sup>34</sup> September 14, 1839, Lilly Diary.

an apparent miscarriage the following year was to desire an “increase of faith in the promise of God with renewed strength to perform his will.”<sup>35</sup>

On August 23, 1844, Mary Caroline, one of her twins, died. That portion of Caroline’s diary is missing, but when it picks up again, five months later, we find her shattered and still seeking submission. “Let me be entirely devoted to his service and submissively resigned to his holy will.”<sup>36</sup> A year later, the deceased daughter still haunted her mother. “Sweet Mary Caroline is frequently before me with her innocent prattle and childish glee and frolicsome motions.” The vision unsettled Caroline, “Does she not rest in a happier sphere free from the cares and disappointments that awaited her,” she asked.<sup>37</sup> As to herself, Caroline “felt feeble. Met with trials. Know not how to act. Want a clean heart and a right spirit and entire conformity to the Will of Heaven.”<sup>38</sup> Her laments shorter, reflecting overwhelming grief, she still yearned to adhere to the “Will of Heaven.” In the final months of her last pregnancy, and near-paranoid with fear, she began to simply quote scriptural verse, from Psalm 32:5 (“I acknowledge my iniquity and my sin is ever before me”) to Hebrews 13:6 (“The lord is my helper.”) October 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> marked the apogee of fear, as she scribbled in her diary “Troubled with headache—Nervous—Long for the hour of d2l3v2r5 but strive through divine aid to exercise patience,” and “Get

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<sup>35</sup> November 2, 1840, Lilly Diary.

<sup>36</sup> January 1, 1845, Lilly Diary.

<sup>37</sup> August 5, 1845, Lilly Diary.

<sup>38</sup> August 3, 1845, Lilly Diary.

thee hence Satan' and terrify me not to sin against God. For through divine aid I am resolved to flee to the strong holds."<sup>39</sup> Two days later she gave birth to George Henry Albert in an uneventful delivery.

A safe delivery did not relieve Caroline of her agonies and she plunged further into monotonous scriptural prayer. The Biblical passages she regularly copied into her diary after 1845 were not simply a response to a general spiritual anxiety, but keyed directly to a variety of daily (or longer) events. "Blessed is he that considereth the poor, the Lord will deliver him in the time of trouble (Psalm 41:1)," she wrote at a corn shortage in November 1845.<sup>40</sup> From Matthew 25:36, she recalled the command to "visit the sick" on a day that James carried her to visit an ailing relative.<sup>41</sup> This strategy failed to offer relief, as she wrote on December 14,

I am conscious of having deviated far from that path of piety and usefulness in which I have from my infancy both wished and endeavored to walk. Wish to walk more closely near God.<sup>42</sup>

None of her strategies did. For the remaining months of her life, Caroline wrestled with unnamed temptations, suffered afflictions, plead for divine aid, and "Contented [sic] with a host of Spiritual enemies which I found difficult to vanquish."<sup>43</sup> While

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<sup>39</sup> October 18, 19, 24-25, 1845, Lilly Diary. "d2l3v2r5" is deliverance, with numbers replacing vowels. I do not understand this mode of expression.

<sup>40</sup> November 12, 1845, Lilly Diary.

<sup>41</sup> December 6, 1845, Lilly Diary.

<sup>42</sup> December 14, 1845, Lilly Diary.

her appeals did not relieve her, they did offer her fortitude. On a particularly fatiguing day in June 1846, she noted “I am greatly strengthened at intervals and enjoy an almost invisible flow of spirits.” Those spirits helped her “regulate my conduct by the precepts of the Holy Scriptures regardless of the creeds and opinions of men.”<sup>44</sup> Thus, not with self-actualization but with self-regulation did Caroline seek personal satisfaction from God. Caroline’s perfectionism did drive her to a lifetime of desperate anxiety and fear. Yet the same urge to unsettling spiritual self-criticism also produced a secular impulse to action, to be discussed below.

Individual evangelicals operated in mental spaces that viewed the physical world and the spiritual worlds in tandem, and the dynamics never remained static. If one were not subject to an outpouring of God’s spirit, or if one did not progress toward fulfillment of God’s intentions, one was in the terrible grips of apathy, the enemy of souls. The apathetic state required the urgent attentions of prayer and pious behavior. Increasingly, people measured the progress of souls by the evidence of pious behavior in the secular world.

Evangelical denominations operated with similar assumptions. Ministers described the “state of religion” within congregations, circuits, or entire regions as either advancing or retreating. The advancing religious life of a congregation was exhibited by the number of converts, enthusiasm expressed at ordinary functions,

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<sup>43</sup> May 21, 1846, Lilly Diary. See also March 6, April 8, April 18, and May 7, 1846.

<sup>44</sup> June 18, 1846, Lilly Diary.

and increasingly, in participation in benevolent and educational causes. Places suffering from apathy exhibited moribund congregations, few converts, and little interest in benevolent activity. To maintain religious enthusiasm, denominational leaders in North Carolina built the bureaucratic structures necessary to sustain missionary and educational efforts. Through these structures, evangelicals adapted to the latest religious styles and measures of piety.

### **Domestic and Foreign Missions**

The domestic mission endeavor was central to the institutional growth of evangelical churches. Domestic missions were a successor to both the early itinerancy system of ministerial supply and an expression of the patterns of advance and retreat evident in denominational life. In the work of domestic missions denominations did not seek to break new ground but to shore up flagging spirituality in an already evangelized place. Agents representing the Baptist State Convention or the Methodists Conferences toured the state and identified places that had once had religion but then lost it. As one Lutheran who surveyed the languishing condition in Davidson County noted, these places were “like a dying man...unless immediately attended to, would be lost.”<sup>45</sup> They then committed denominational resources to the supply of ministers and published material to the destitute region.

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<sup>45</sup> *Minutes of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod and Ministerium of North Carolina, 1847* (Salisbury: Printed at the Caroline Watchman Office, 1847), 28.

“Destitute,” of course, is a subjective term, but one that had a very specific meaning to churches—not poverty-stricken, but an area lacking in ministers, functioning congregations, or access to religious materials. Destitution of these things amply demonstrated to denominational leaders that an area did not possess a suitable level of spirituality. The Reverend Eli Phillips served as a missionary in Randolph, Rowan, Montgomery and Davidson Counties and reported “that section of the State is lamentably destitute of Baptist preaching.”<sup>46</sup> The Baptist report on home missions in 1834 laid out a frightful scene:

Our churches are some of them destitute, others cold and declining, with the walls of discipline broken down, some pastors cold and backsliden, and the flocks scattered; error, with its many heads, introduced by false teachers, professing to be preachers of the everlasting Gospel, and too many, alas! corrupted from the simplicity of the truth.

Destitute areas risked spiritual damnation. Elsewhere in the Convention’s proceedings, Agent J. Culpeper described healthy Baptist churches, in which “a glorious work is progressing, and extending its reforming, powerful, and harmonizing influence through different grades of society. Hundreds and thousands are bowing in obedience to the Redeemer’s standard.” Culpeper could identify healthy associations not just by their piety but by the fact that they “approve of, and

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<sup>46</sup> *Report of the Third Annual Meeting of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, 1833* (Fayetteville: Printed by Edward J. Hale, 1834), 13.

encourage the Institutions of the day” namely, the Convention’s efforts to promote education, tract circulation, and temperance.<sup>47</sup>

The Lutherans in 1847 recognized their own tenuous condition. The leaderless flocks in Catawba County looked hopefully to Brother J.D. Stingly of South Carolina to become their pastor. But when Stingly arrived expecting the Synod to pay his salary, he was disappointed. The local churches in Catawba had not informed the Synod of the expectation, and the Synod had neither the money nor mechanism to offer the stipend. Stingly returned to South Carolina. The minister overseeing congregations in Davidson and Stokes Counties removed to southwestern Virginia, and left those two counties without pastoral care. Meanwhile, Brother Benjamin Arey, the ordained minister in Statesville, reported that a number of Lutherans “on the Statesville Road” near Salisbury, to whom he had been preaching, desired to erect a church. Hopewell Church, Sandy Creek, Pilgrim’s and Beck’s Church also petitioned the Synod to supply a minister. In the face of these needs, the Lutheran Synod’s Missionary & Education Society resolved to encourage further congregational giving by having “all the Ministers in connection with this Synod preach Missionary and Education sermons to their several churches, and take up collections in behalf of this Society.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Meeting of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, 1834* (New Bern: Printed at the office of The Recorder, 1835), 10, 15.

<sup>48</sup> *Minutes of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod and Ministerium of North Carolina, 1847*, 6, 20, 26-27.

Three years earlier, in 1844, the Presbyterians moved to create a stronger infrastructure. Their Synod resolved that each Presbytery become an auxiliary of the General Assembly Board of Missions, request the General Assembly to deploy missionaries to them, that churches receive said missionaries, and that congregants subscribe to the *Missionary Chronicle* newspaper. To support this effort, the Synod charged each Presbytery to create three different committees—“standing, corresponding, [and] Executive Committee of Domestic Missions”—to coordinate missionary work and the fundraising required to support it. To the latter end, the Synod charged that pastors regularly appeal to their churches “for their liberal support.”<sup>49</sup> The Baptists, of course, had the best developed system for sending agents into a variety of associations. In 1846, for instance, missionary R.J. Devin reported that he had traveled 2,000 miles in the Yadkin and Liberty Associations, delivered 140 sermons, and converted 100 people, while missionary J. Robertson’s 185 days in Stokes, Surry, and Guilford Counties yielded 119 sermons, 60 conversions, and four Sunday Schools organized.<sup>50</sup> In 1849, the Convention employed eleven missionaries in the state, six in the Piedmont.<sup>51</sup>

Supporting a missionary meant providing not only his pay, but increasingly, a house in which to stay and a farm by which a married minister might support his

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<sup>49</sup> *Minutes of the Synod of North Carolina, at their Thirty-First Sessions, 1844* (Fayetteville: Edward J. Hale, 1845), 16-17.

<sup>50</sup> *Proceedings of the Sixteenth Anniversary of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, 1846* (Raleigh: Printed at the Recorder Office, 1847), 17-18.

<sup>51</sup> *Minutes of the Twentieth Annual Session of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, 1849* (Raleigh: Printed at the Biblical Recorder Office, 1849), 18-24.



family. Methodists, after abandoning the itinerant system in the 1810s, began to increase collections to settle preachers, even circuit ministers who tended to a number of congregations in a one or two-county region.<sup>52</sup> The Iredell Circuit, for instance, in 1849 purchased fifty-seven acres near Statesville for \$260 for a parsonage.<sup>53</sup> The purchase entailed more than buying a house and land—since it was congregational property, it required congregational oversight. Trustees appointed for the parsonage organized a committee in 1853 to raise money to pay the debt incurred for purchase.<sup>54</sup> To housing for a circuit minister was added the costs associated with travel. What had been an annual stipend of \$80 in 1800 had increased to \$650 in 1854.<sup>55</sup> Throughout the Methodist conference, circuits organized committees and trustees to raise money. The Methodists in 1840 stridently advocated parsonages by writing,

Should a doubt be entertained whether this permanent location of a preacher's family be for the interest of the Conference & Church [then] it should be recollected that these brethren [the ministers] have adopted that course in obedience to the first laws of nature, self preservation, and in this present state of things many others [ill.] soon follow their examples, because the Church has not provided for their accommodations & support.

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<sup>52</sup> John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven By Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 184-185.

<sup>53</sup> April 8, 1849, Iredell Circuit, United Methodist Church Records, 1784-1984, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Hereafter cited as UMC Records.

<sup>54</sup> February 26, 1853, Iredell Circuit, UMC Records

<sup>55</sup> n.d. 1854, Iredell Circuit, UMC Records. Wigger, *Taking Heaven By Storm*, 49.

The Conference still lamented that ministers married and settled, but the days of Asbury's circuit riders were far behind. To adapt required congregations to boldly confront new realities: that they needed to pay for the inevitable farms and families. In fact, the Conference concluded, to neglect this charge would be a betrayal of Methodism and congregations themselves—"an evil of no ordinary magnitude."<sup>56</sup> In the process, denominations added layers of bureaucratic complexity to the evangelical enterprise.

The cause of foreign missions became the purview of North Carolina's Baptist and Presbyterian denominations. Moravians had ongoing missionary endeavors to Native Americans, but their considerable global efforts did not receive much attention within North Carolina.<sup>57</sup> The German Reformeds and Quakers did not participate in missionary activity. The Lutherans of North Carolina put their efforts into opening a church in Wilmington in the antebellum period, and while they contributed to Home Mission efforts, showed little interest in the General Synod's missionary efforts in India and Liberia.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> 1840, Journal of the Annual Session of the North Carolina Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, UMC Records.

<sup>57</sup> Jon Sensbach, "Slavery, Race, and the Global Fellowship: Religious Radicals Confront the Modern Age," in *Pious Pursuits: German Moravians in the Atlantic World*, ed. Michele Gillespie and Robert Beachy (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 223-238.

<sup>58</sup> Jacob L. Morgan, Bachman S. Brown, and John Hall, eds., *History of the Lutheran Church in North Carolina* (n.p.: United Evangelical Lutheran Synod of North Carolina, 1953?), 61-62. Interestingly, when the Lutheran General Synod founded the Foreign Evangelical Missionary Society in 1843, they reported that the South Carolina Lutherans, along with Pennsylvanians, chiefly supported it. *Proceedings of the Twelfth Convention of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States, 1843* (Baltimore: Lutheran Publication Rooms, 1843), 20-23, 30-37.

Baptists dominated the discussion of foreign missions. Ennobled by the success of the itinerant system and inspired by high profile efforts by William Carey and Luther Rice in India, many Baptists took to heart the Great Commission of Jesus to spread His teachings throughout the world.<sup>59</sup> The State Convention fervently followed the career of Andorinam and Ann Judson's mission to Burma, and associations in the eastern piedmont celebrated the raising up of native Matthew Yates to spread the gospel in China, starting in 1849.<sup>60</sup> Yates, a young Baptist from Wake County, was active in Baptist State Convention activities, and while a seminarian at Wake Forest, committed himself to the Foreign Mission cause in China. He was the first Southern Baptist missionary dispatched to that country.<sup>61</sup>

The 1842 State Convention noted that enthusiasm for the missionary effort had multiple positive influences at home.

We can easily imagine what eager eyes the little boy would follow the finger of a fond mother, as she traces the map the spot that marks Calcutta; and as a mother's lips tells of the toils and difficulties of Cary and his partners in missionary toil, his little heart would pant that he were a man and could

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<sup>59</sup> Sidney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 858-860.

<sup>60</sup> On the Judsons, see Jay Riley Case, *An Unpredictable Gospel: American Evangelicals and World Christianity, 1812-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 24, 31-37, and 46. *Proceedings of the Second Annual Meeting of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, 1832* (Edenton: Miscellany Press, 1832), 13, and *Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Meeting of the Baptist State Convention, 1835* (Newbern: Printed at The Recorder Office, 1835), 19.

<sup>61</sup> *Proceedings of the Sixteenth Anniversary of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, 1846*, 7-8.

follow over the wide Atlantic, stand where stood the man of God, preach that same Gospel, and at last fill so honored a grave.<sup>62</sup>

The foreign mission effort had a purpose at home. The missionary cause could plausibly reinforce the imagination and education of young people, and strengthen the bonds between mother and child.

Despite the authenticity of feeling among the preachers and the editors, the lay Baptists burned with more fervor for home missions than they did for foreign missions, if fund raising is any indication. At the 1842 Baptist State Convention the Cartelege Creek Association and the Pee Dee Association each gave five dollars to the home mission effort and to the foreign missions. Orange County's Sandy Creek Association, however, gave \$54.26 to home missions and none to foreign missions. The Caswell Foreign Mission Society raised three dollars for each cause while four people from the Wilkes Association gave four dollars to home missions and none to foreign missions. In total, the convention raised \$316.62 for home missions and \$155.48 for foreign missions.<sup>63</sup>

### **Mission to the Slaves**

Evangelicals did not limit their missionary efforts to white people or potential converts overseas. Some piedmonters engaged in a missionary effort to

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<sup>62</sup> *Proceedings of the Twelfth Annual Meeting of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, 1842* (Newbern: Printed at the Office of the Spectator, 1843), 21-22.

<sup>63</sup> *Proceedings of the Twelfth Annual Meeting of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, 1842*, 12-13.

enslaved people. Evangelicals in Georgia and South Carolina pioneered the “mission to the slaves” in the 1820s, and by the mid-1840s, its practitioners could be found across the slaveholding states. In the efforts formulated by Charles Colcock Jones and William Capers, ministers coordinated with masters to schedule preaching, Sunday Schools, and catechetical instruction to plantation slaves. Further, denominational publishing arms produced catechisms and prayer books specifically for an enslaved audience. Evangelicals pursued the mission to the slaves for a variety of reasons, chief of which being the salvation of black souls. Yet the mission served political functions and social needs as well. Partisans endorsed the effort because it demonstrated—against the charges of abolitionists—that masters humanely addressed the cruelties of slavery, and thus needed no intrusive advice from antislavery activists. The rhetoric of the mission contained as many prescriptions for masters as it did for the enslaved. It concerned itself equally with the proper role of white people in the master-slave relationship by emphasizing the familial aspect of slaveholding. Whites had a responsibility to care for blacks as they would their own children, and that included religious instruction.<sup>64</sup>

Charles C. Jones’ promotional material concerning the mission to the slaves reached the Concord Presbytery in 1844. The “memorial” Jones sent laid out how the mission to the slaves would fit into the church’s larger domestic mission

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<sup>64</sup> Donald G. Mathews, “Charles Colcock Jones and the Southern Evangelical Crusade to Form a Biracial Community,” *Journal of Southern History* 40 (August 1975): 299-320, Erskine Clark, *Wrestlin’ Jacob: A Portrait of Religion in the Old South* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979), 1-81, and Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 78-109.

enterprise. Jones assured his readers that missionaries would only respond to requests from masters (e.g. they would not encroach upon a master's prerogative by going among unchurched slaves as they might among unchurched whites.) He promised that attention to slaves' salvation would "*practically gratify* all...benevolent sympathies for the negroes" and deflect political anxieties by focusing on evangelism. The Presbytery of Concord assembled a committee of ministers and elders to consider Jones' proposal. They approved, and noted that

the religious instruction of the Coloured people living in our midst, and constituting a part of our families, is admitted on all hands to be a great and important work. Important to the happiness of the slaves themselves, important to the peace of the families in which they live, important to the increase and prosperity of the church of the Redeemer.

The committee, however, made an important change. Whereas the mission structure in Georgia had charged one preacher with ministering to a black flock separate from white churches, the Concord Presbyterians insisted that enslaved people be integrated into congregations as part of their white families.

What we need at the present time, in the bounds of this Presbytery, is not a distinct class of ministers to labor exclusively for the spiritual good of the Coloured people; but that all our ministers should feel that they are settled over churches made up of Masters and their servants, and that it is their duty to watch over entire households committed to their Care.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Neill Roderick McGeachy, *Confronted by Challenge: A History of the Presbytery of Concord, 1795-1973* (n.p.: Presbytery of Concord, 1985), 164-167.

This operational shift was due likely to the relative difference in slaveholding between lowcountry Georgia and Piedmont North Carolina. In the former, large plantations of hundreds of bondspeople required the attention of separate ministers; in piedmont North Carolina, the pool of black slaves diffused in smaller groups on the smaller farms, thus not requiring the creation of a new system to bring together slave and minister. Indeed, that intimacy made the rhetorical positioning of the language of families, black and white, far more achievable in the Piedmont.

The Presbyterians resolved that attention to the spiritual instruction of the slaves be included among the increasing number of bureaucratic duties to be undertaken by ministers. To promote the endeavor, the Presbyterians recommend “that all our ministers preach a sermon, before the next meeting of Presbytery, to Masters and servants, teaching masters the obligation resting on them to give their personal attention to the religious instruction of their own Servants.” And finally, they required that all ministers report back to the Presbytery their individual plans to carry out the instructions.<sup>66</sup>

Though the language of families and domesticity runs through the rhetoric of the mission to the slaves—and even though the Presbyterians gave considerable thought to the effort—little evidence exists to suggest that the mission became a concern for the ordinary lay people in the congregations. None of the denominations

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<sup>66</sup> McGeachy, *Confronted by Challenge*, 166-167.

devoted fundraising efforts to the cause, and the mission paled in comparison to the intense advocacy for schools, missions, and temperance. Only two discrete moments of defiance suggest that the mission was of any concern to ordinary lay people. The first, at St. Paul's German Reformed congregation in Catawba County will be discussed in the second chapter. The second regards the strange case of the Beavers brothers, Baptists of Chatham County. On the eve of the Civil War, the Mt. Pisgah Baptist congregation charged George, R.H., and Sidney Beavers—all young men—along with three others, with

grossly immoral and unchristianlike conduct which consist in forming a plot and assembling themselves together at the Church on sunday of our las[t] meeting and closing the doors and braking up the religious worship of the church and congregation.<sup>67</sup>

The congregation acquitted R.H., but expelled George and Sidney Beavers. The young mens' foray appears on the surface to have been shenanigans fueled by liquor. George and Sidney enlisted in the Confederate army, and Sidney died of disease in late 1861. His tombstone carried the defiant claim that he had been excommunicated for "opposing the equality of white and black." Only in the context of the mission to the slaves does this make sense, as what Beavers likely opposed was not a general declaration of equality between the races, but a church-sponsored

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<sup>67</sup> May, July, and October, 1861, Minutes of Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church, Wake Forest University Baptist Collection, Z. Smith Reynolds Library, Wake Forest University. The Beavers' Brothers letters are in the Isham Sims Upchurch Letters, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University. My thanks to Ernest A. Dollar for bringing this story to my attention.



program to evangelize to the slaves and bring them into communion with white people.

### **Schools**

In 1855 Mary Davis Brown scoffed at an itinerant Presbyterian “begging money fore to pay fore the female college in Yorkville.”<sup>68</sup> By 1855, however, the prospect of ministers preaching sermons in favor of education was hardly new. Denominations, for a generation, had invested in schools and dispatched missionaries to raise money and promote their establishment. Evangelical advocacy for schools began with a desire to supply ministers to the domestic missions, but by the 1850s, that advocacy had coalesced into a full-throated support of literacy and education in general.

In 1813 the German Reformed congregations of North Carolina recognized lethargy among themselves toward religion. The disaffection resulted from a lack of ministers. As denominational historian Jacob Leonard wrote, “There was no shepherd and the sheep were scattered.”<sup>69</sup> A number of licentiates and lay people oversaw meetings and performed sermons, but for dozens of congregations, only one ordained minister, Reverend George Boger, was present to perform sacraments and other sacred functions. Unlike the Baptists and Methodists, and much like the Presbyterians, Moravians, and Lutherans, the Reformeds required college-educated

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<sup>68</sup> Descendants, *Oil In Our Lamps*, p. 24.

<sup>69</sup> Jacob Calvin Leonard, *History of the Southern Synod Evangelical and Reformed Church* (Lexington, N.C.: n.p., 1940), 35.

and ordained ministers of the gospels to baptize, confirm, and marry members, and to organize congregations. Reformed churches east of the Yadkin River sent pleading letters to the national Synod for new ministers and described the destitute condition of the congregations. The Reverend James Reily, dispatched from Pennsylvania, went south, and his inspection tour, punctuated by much needed preaching, baptizing, confirming, and celebrating Communion, prompted the Reformed church, based in Pennsylvania, to initiate a Board of Domestic Missions. Though the Synod lacked the resources to dispatch ordained men to permanent positions, it did dispatch missionaries—temporary and itinerant preachers—for the next decade. The local congregations still “expressed an earnest longing for a settled minister of the Gospel among them,” the Synod reported; “These congregations especially deserve the attention of Synod. In them a true love for religion and a special inclination to the order of the Evangelical Reformed Church is manifested.” The reliance on occasional missionaries by the Piedmont congregations, however, was not relieved until 1828 when John Fritchey and John Crawford, graduates of the denominational seminary in Mercersburg, Pennsylvania, joined the ranks of settled German Reformed pastors in North Carolina. An increase in congregations followed this supply. In the 1820s and 1830s five new Reformed congregations were founded, resulting in the creation of the thriving North Carolina Classis in 1830.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Leonard, *History of the Southern Synod*, 27-31 on the search for ministers. Carl Hammer, Jr., *Rhinelanders on the Yadkin: The Story of the Pennsylvania Germans in Rowan and Cabarrus* (Salisbury, N.C.: Rowan Printing Company, 1943), 55-56 on congregational expansion.

The chronic deficiency of ministers haunted the German Reformeds who, like all other Christian denominations, knew that the promotion and preservation of vital religion rested on the active engagement of a corps of capable and learned ministers. This central principle motivated a great deal of institutional growth as denominations developed infrastructures of committees, schools, fundraising efforts, and management to raise up potential preachers, educate them, and house them. The German Reformed Classis began to address the connection between education for local children and a fruitful ministry in 1834. They created an Education Society “to aid in the education of indigent and pious young men...for the Gospel Ministry.”<sup>71</sup> Nonetheless, the educational agenda began as a means to supply ordained ministers in the years after the Great Revival but grew through the late antebellum period to offer a sweeping endorsement of universal white literacy through public education. Evangelical educational concerns sometimes did, and sometimes did not, work in concert with the secular educational reform effort. The former sprang from a desire to grow and reinforce the tenets of salvation. The later concerned itself with the cultivation of public virtue and also with the concerns of maintaining racial solidarity. Both, however, promulgated a liberal public ethic.

The same elders of the German Reformed church determined that the modern liberal ethic include a “relish for knowledge.” “[A]lmost every charge is surrounded by those who teach doctrines of devils...all the while glorying in their

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<sup>71</sup> Leonard, *History of the Southern Synod*, 35.

ignorance and shame.” They lamented “intellectual Christian intelligence in many congregations” as the source of weakness. Pastors “must tarry long in the inculcation of first the principles of our holy religion, and can but feed with milk.”<sup>72</sup> “Feed with milk” is a reference to 1 Corinthians 3:2 and indicates that the elders considered a basic education of young people to be the prime concern of their denomination. All denominations promoted education as necessary to the life of families and young people. When evangelicals enshrined a broad regard for education, they endorsed a general regard for a cosmopolitan view of the world. Literacy lead to the truth of sound doctrine, and the accoutrements of literacy included schools and newspapers.

The Baptists not only wanted to enforce sound doctrine on their fractious congregations through support of education, but saw education as the means to explain themselves to an unsympathetic world.

As a denomination we have much reason to seek to be better understood by the public. It is not known as it should be, why we do not bring our infants to baptism, why we refuse to communicate with other professed christians at the sacrament of the supper, why we so tenaciously adhere to immersion, etc. All this is set down, not to our love of truth and strict conformity to scripture, but to bigotry and want of benevolence, if not to something worse. How plain and important the duty, then, to multiply and circulate suitable publications? There is no other means by which we can act so extensively on the public mind; and, *caeteris paribus*, that cause will make most progress, which make the most use of the press.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Minutes of the Reformed Church, North Carolina Classis, 1844, Evangelical and Reformed Historical Society, Phillip Schaff Library, Lancaster Theological Seminary.

<sup>73</sup> *Proceedings of the Twelfth Annual Meeting of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, 1842*, 18.

The educational impulse among North Carolina's religious people sprang from the desire to defend and promote sectarian religion. That this impulse was not simply an evangelical concern is evident in the Quaker efforts to establish schools. Like other sects, the Society of Friends had sponsored common schools associated with Monthly Meetings but the need for advanced facilities to teach religion led in 1829 to the call by the Meeting for Sufferings for local libraries "of books of information respecting the principles and doctrines of Friends." The Yearly Meeting endorsed the plan, noting,

We believe that with care it may be through Divine blessings the means by which the minds of our young Friends in particular may become imbued with more enlarged and correct views of the nature of our Christian testimonies and better prepared to resist the insidious encroachment of the spirit of infidelity of our religious profession.

A committee of the Yearly Meeting discovered the following year that "all schools amongst Friends are in a mixed condition," meaning they had been inconsistent in applying educational standards and indifferent to enforcing the doctrines specific to the Society of Friends. To resolve this distressing situation, the Yearly Meeting proposed the creation of a boarding school, graduates of which would essentially perform pastoral work in congregations that opposed the ministry. The co-educational New Garden Boarding School opened in 1837 in Guilford County.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Seth B. Hinshaw, *The Carolina Quaker Experience: An Interpretation* (n.p.: North Carolina Yearly Meeting, 1984), 75-77, and Hiram H. Hilty, *New Garden Friends Meeting: The Christian People Called Quakers* (Greensboro: North Carolina Friends Historical Society, 1983), 43-44.

Evangelical interest in the education of ministers accompanied a popular and political enthusiasm for education. In North Carolina, state senator Archibald Murphey of Hillsborough inaugurated a movement in the General Assembly in 1816 with a widely read report calling for state aid for public schools. For the next ten years governors and legislators routinely repeated Murphey's call. On two occasions, Governor William Miller succinctly summarized the primary concern of secular education advocates: "In a country like ours, nothing should be more carefully guarded against, than the establishment of anything like different orders in society." (Clearly, the Governor considered only free white people.) Education for the wealthy and powerful only risked the emergence of "an order of men...[who] look upon those who have been less fortunate, with a degree of supercilious contempt." Education, he believed, would ensure the maintenance of America's Revolutionary egalitarianism. The following year, Miller did not overlook North Carolina's racially bifurcated society and declared, "Men intended slaves the more ignorant the better. But, if for freedom, they ought, of course, to be enlightened."<sup>75</sup> He encouraged North Carolina to look to "a neighboring state" as a model for funding universal education. The necessity to promote a virtuous citizenry permeated the educational reform rhetoric. The most likely to fall victim to vice, legislators noted, were the poor. Thus the state bore primary responsibility for securing its own future by ensuring the education of its most marginal—and

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<sup>75</sup> Charles L. Coon, ed., *The Beginnings of Public Education in North Carolina: A Documentary History, 1790-1840*, Volume I (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton Printing Company, 1908), 100, 103.

potentially most dangerous—citizens. Legislators considered universal white education an Internal Improvement, and by the 1820s, added commercial affluence to the reasons for funding common schools. Joseph Caldwell, president of the University of North Carolina, approvingly cited New York City administrators who noted, “National wealth proceeds chiefly from activity of mind, and must therefore be proportioned to the extent and universality of its development.”<sup>76</sup> Advocates looked to New York, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts as examples of states that had successfully invested in roads, canals, and schools—and reaped prosperity from the investments. Another advocate succinctly noted, “Our citizens must learn how to spell Internal Improvements before they can comprehend the meaning of the term.”<sup>77</sup>

The legislative struggle for state-sponsored common schools stumbled, however, as conservative members balked at the proposed taxes required for the scheme and doubted the state could, or should, construct a large centralized system of schools. In 1825, the Literary Fund Law passed the General Assembly. Legislators intended the Literary Fund to operate schools based on the income of state investments in canals and swamp drainage companies. The Fund did indeed support a number of subscription schools and private academies but never raised enough

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<sup>76</sup> Charles L. Coon, ed., *The Beginnings of Public Education in North Carolina: A Documentary History, 1790-1840*, Volume II (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton Printing Company, 1908), 590.

<sup>77</sup> Coon, ed., *The Beginnings of Public Education*, Volume II, 554, 559, 573, 670.

money to fund a statewide system, and spent the next decade squabbling over management of its investments.<sup>78</sup>

In the years after 1815, as legislators pushed forward public schools as a cause, denominations first poised themselves for involvement in educating young people. Initially, they favored education as a way to enlarge the pool of potential ministers, and the colleges that did emerge in the late antebellum period remained the chief focus—outside of Sunday Schools—of popular education. By the 1830s, however, denominations began to campaign for universal literacy apart from the preparation of ministers. They received little assistance from their potential allies in the legislature, especially after the Literary Fund began doling out small amounts to local academies after 1825. In fact, the General Assembly hesitated to grant incorporation to denominational education groups because, as one failed bill noted,

if these bills be passed into laws a class of individuals in their corporate capacity may have conferred upon them privileges, if not incompatible with our Constitution and Bill of Rights, yet inconsistent with the freedom and genius of our institutions.

But as the Literary Fund continued to be ineffectual, education's advocates, in frustration, began to weaken their scruples about separation of church and state. As one bill author noted, "these bills having no object but to found and establish institutions or promote learning and disseminate knowledge, it would seem to us,

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<sup>78</sup> See documents in Coon, ed., *The Beginnings of Public Education*, Volumes I and II.



that no just apprehension could well be entertained.” Soon after, the legislature began granting charters to denominations to found schools.<sup>79</sup>

Indeed, with increasing pace, denominations established scores of academies across the piedmont. The Baptists immediately chartered the Wake Forest Institute and the Methodists the Greensboro Manual Labor Institute. The Quakers founded the New Garden Boarding School in 1837, and the German Reformed Classis opened the Western Carolina Male Academy in 1853 in Mt. Pleasant.<sup>80</sup> The Baptists, by 1850, backed the Rockford Female Institute in Surry County and the Milton Female Institute in Caswell, while the Methodists endorsed the Clemmons ville Academy and the Female Collegiate Institute in Greensboro.<sup>81</sup> These schools remained private, but the Methodists retained the right for the Conference to appoint trustees, thus ensuring concordance with Methodist aims. The Methodist Conference also endorsed regular preaching on the necessity for education.<sup>82</sup>

Evangelical advocates for colleges, academies, and common schools, like their counterparts in the legislature, searched widely for pedagogical guidance. Joseph Caldwell referred to “Bell’s plan” for common schools in British India and

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<sup>79</sup> Coon, ed., *The Beginnings of Public*, Volume II, 660-669.

<sup>80</sup> Hilty, *New Garden Friends Meeting*, 44, and *Acts and Proceedings of the German Reformed Church*, 1853.

<sup>81</sup> *Proceedings of the Twenty-Fourth Annual Session of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, 1853* (Raleigh: Biblical Recorder Office, 1853), 23-24.

<sup>82</sup> 1838, Minutes of the North Carolina Conference, Methodist Episcopal Church, UMC Records.

approvingly noted the efforts of Phillip von Fellenberg at Hofwyl Seminary in Switzerland.<sup>83</sup> In the 1830s, the latest pedagogical fad, Manual Labor Institutes, enchanted the Baptists who founded Wake Forest and the Presbyterians who started Davidson College. Manual Labor institutes had originated in Europe, but grew with a special purpose in the United States. Manual Labor schools cast their net among America's middling and poor youth, offering an inexpensive, and therefore accessible, education. They sprang up on the grounds of a farm, where students worked part time to produce a crop and profit that paid for tuition. Yet manual labor schools, advocates claimed, did more than provide accessible education—they nurtured values of hard, physical, labor in a generation of young men at risk of succumbing to the vanity and ease of the burgeoning market and consumer world. Newly ordained ministers may have been expected to possess the college education necessary to defend sectarian theologies and the practical skills and intelligence to balance books, but elders knew that hours and days at labor “in the vineyard” of congregations, or in making a parsonage sustainable, required draining exposure to the elements and diligent physical exertion. No minister of the gospel could fall victim to the desiccation of the office-bound bureaucrat.

The chief national advocate of manual labor schools was Theodore Weld, whose 1833 report on the Oneida Institute became required reading for all

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<sup>83</sup> Coon, ed., *The Beginnings of Public*, Volume I, 573-575.

prospective educators.<sup>84</sup> The Concord Presbyterians approvingly cited Weld's report when conceptualizing Davidson College. Yet whereas Weld's report—and the discussion surrounding manual labor institutes in the North—is awash in anxiety over gender identity and class in a changing economy, the southern advocates focused almost entirely on the preparation for the physically demanding work of being a missionary, "Their constitutions [will be] prepared to endure hardships as Missionaries; and they will acquire habits of industry, and a knowledge of business, by which the amount of cost for their support, to Missionaries [sic] Societies, will be greatly reduced, and they enabled to support themselves, in case of emergency." What mattered to these Presbyterians was not suppressing gender anxiety; it was to prepare students for physically draining pastoral work in a growing market economy. Such language might be expected from an itinerant Methodist, but that Presbyterians could utter such concern after 1830 suggests that the ministry retained its hazards and risks even in the period of institutionalization. A nod to the modern demands of ministry is given, however, with the assertion that one had to be as competent in business and commerce as in the Bible, as ministers in the present age had to tend to balance sheets as diligently as the gospels.<sup>85</sup> Weld's growing reputation for immediate abolitionism did not seem to disturb the founders

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<sup>84</sup> On manual labor institutes and Weld's influential report, see Paul Goodman, "The Manual Labor Movement and the Origins of Abolitionism," *Journal of the Early Republic* 13 (Autumn 1993): 355-388.

<sup>85</sup> Neill Roderick McGeachy, *Confronted by Challenge: A History of the Presbytery of Concord, 1795-1973* (n.p.: The Delmar Company, 1985), 96.

of Wake Forest and Davidson. If they were aware of his associations, they did not mention them.<sup>86</sup> That the concept of manual labor institutes did not survive into the 1840s is a reflection of their general (nationwide) failure to actually produce a sustaining income, rather than any connection to radically inclined northerners.<sup>87</sup>

Common schools became a practical reality after the state received just over \$1.5 million in surplus funds from the United States government in 1837, and the legislature appropriated those funds to the Literary Fund in 1839. The managers of the Literary Fund did set out to establish school buildings, teachers, and school superintendents in each county, but administrative laxity continued to be a problem until the appointment of Presbyterian minister Calvin H. Wiley as Superintendent of the Department of Public Instruction in 1853.<sup>88</sup> Baptists looked approvingly on the founding of the Wake Forest Institute, but evangelicals realized colleges were not enough for the field of pious society. They directed their efforts toward colleges, academies, and Sunday Schools but largely embraced the project of the common schools. The Baptist State Convention in 1842 described its logic. It began by decrying the fact that lay giving to missionary efforts fell behind that of other states.

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<sup>86</sup> Generalized provincialism did concern the Presbyterian elders, who were concerned that northern-born ministers “would not be so well fitted for usefulness here neither in the constitutions nor habits.” That had apparently been alarmed by how many of them had rushed to fill vacancies in the newly opened southwest. McGeachy, *Confronted by Challenge*, 97.

<sup>87</sup> Schweiger, *Gospel Working Up*, 57-64.

<sup>88</sup> Harry L. Watson, “The Man with the Dirty Black Beard: Race, Class, and Schools in the Antebellum South,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 32 (Spring 2012): 1-26, and William S. Powell, ed., *Encyclopedia of North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 377-378.

“Only twenty eight of our 421 churches supposed to be favorable to missionary operations, were represented in this body last year, and these contributed, on an average, only \$16 each.” Exacerbated, the Committee wondered, “Is it proper to *provoke* one another to exertion?” They looked to a lack of trained ministers as an explanation for why “we do so little.” As with all evangelical denominations, the Baptists found the crux of pious congregations to be a charismatic minister. And charisma depended on the ability of intelligent ministers to persuade intelligent lay people to practice piety not only through spiritual rebirth, but through a benevolent attitude toward the world.

They need more the spirit of benevolence and good will which actuated our Savior...[T]he course before us is plain. We must labor to benefit our children, and our children’s children. They young must be educated...If our churches are ever brought to do anything worthy of the name of christian [sic] effort and christian benevolence, it must be accomplished by diffusing more generally among our people the means of education.<sup>89</sup>

It was a circular process: educated ministers must meet educated congregants in an agenda to spread piety abroad.

Baptists turned to “Free Schools,” the newly initiated common schools, as a solution. The committee prompted ministers to encourage lay participation in the administration of common schools as teachers and superintendents: not to exert Baptist influence over them, but to promote their quality. “It should never be

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<sup>89</sup> *Proceedings of the Twelfth Annual Meeting of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, 1842* (Newbern: Printed at the Office of the Spectator, 1843), 15.

forgotten, than in a few years they [students] will make the community. From these, too, will be formed the churches and the ministry." Wake Forest's apparent success, the committee noted, "has awakened to a considerable degree, an interest on this subject [education] among our churches." In 1855 the same committee rejoiced at the interrelated work of common schools and their own Institute, "The means of education are now within the reach of almost everyone," they wrote, echoing the desire for universal literacy shared by secular advocates, "and the people being more generally thorough instructed, require an enlightened ministry."<sup>90</sup>

The financial commitment to educating both ministers and laypeople had increased. The Baptists had determined that an endowment was absolutely necessary to sustain a college and in 1857 reported nearing their goal of \$50,000—a far cry from the initial investment of \$2,000 for the Wake Forest Institute fifteen years earlier. Even the Lutherans by 1853 had raised more than \$16,000 for a college.<sup>91</sup> These unprecedented sums reflected the evangelical immersion in the market economy. To a degree.

Individual churches took up regular, if sparse, collections for the college and academies. Interestingly, while the desire for educated and ordained ministers

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<sup>90</sup> *Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth Annual Session of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, 1855* (Raleigh: Biblical Recorder Office, 1855), 36.

<sup>91</sup> *Proceedings of the Twenty-Fourth Annual Session of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, 1853, 23-24*, and *Proceedings of the Sixteenth Convention of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, in the United States, convened in Winchester, Va., May 21, 1853* (Harrisburg: Royal & Schroyer, Printers, 1853), 29.

permeated religious communities, evidence that the supply of ministers had priority in the minds of ordinary people remains sparse. How well did people respond to denominational education initiatives? The Baptist State Convention's 1854 tally of money collected by various agents is suggestive and reminiscent of their education committee's 1842 complaint. Not every church donated; some did. Some money is accounted to Associations, suggesting that ministers not congregants collected the money from among themselves at their associational meetings. By far, the sum collected for Home Missions across the state—\$758.43—and for Foreign Missions—\$577.20—outdid the \$385.83 given to Education. The Baptist Church in Hickory gave \$2 to Foreign Missions and none to Home Missions or Education. The Jersey Church (Davidson/Davie) equally divided its \$10 donation to all three causes, as did the Pee Dee Association, which gave \$10.08 to each. The largest donations to Education, not surprisingly, came from the Baptist churches in Raleigh (\$14), New Bern (\$30), and Fayetteville (\$55). Even the Hillsborough Baptist church skimped, giving \$3.40 to education while it gave \$20 to home missions.<sup>92</sup> Despite a level of popular ambivalence, the denominational bureaucracy to support education by the 1850s, absorbed a great deal of pious energy.

Notably absent from the evangelical rhetoric about colleges, academies, and common schools was a discussion of slavery or accommodation to the power of slaveholders. Evangelical momentum for growth did indeed draw them closer to the

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<sup>92</sup> *Proceedings of the Twenty-Fifth Annual Session of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina 1854* (Raleigh: Steam Press of the "Southern Weekly Post," 1854), 27.

cultural mainstream. But it happened not because of a desire for access to power, but a desire to facilitate salvation using the most current methods available to modern Americans.

### **Caroline Lilly's Vocation**

The desire to fulfill Christian duty drove Caroline Brooks to teach. At age thirty-three, when she began her diary, the single Caroline possessed some teaching experience—probably in Montgomery County—but how much is unknown. In 1836 she accepted a position teaching at a private subscription school in Concord, Cabarrus County. There, in her first term, she began to articulate her ideals about “female education” and develop a curriculum for teaching herself the craft. At the same time Caroline expressed the links between her desire for perfection and her urge to teach.

Honoring God meant teaching children. “Can I honor & glorify my Heavenly Father,” she wondered, “by properly training those entrusted to my care[?]”<sup>93</sup> Thus, Caroline prayed earnestly because her spiritual status depended on her success in the classroom. At the first public examination of her class in Concord she experienced a rather immodest “anxiety...Probably as much as Bonaparte felt on the eve of the battle of Waterloo or Ceasar at the Pharsalea [sic] or Alexander at the

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<sup>93</sup> August 14, 1837, Lilly Diary.



Granicus.” The anxiety did not stem from pride, nor did it arise from the expectation of further employment.

[M]ine is a far nobler cause than theirs and if I succeed in properly and faithfully cultivating their youthful mind I shall be entitled to riches \_\_\_\_ than they. For education unquestionably implies preparation for eternity, and if I can be so fortunate as to be the means of influencing one soul to make suitable preparation of that state to which we are all hastening it will be a star in my crown which they have never dreamed of.<sup>94</sup>

She restated her conviction in a more blunt fashion when she placed her students’ success in the balance with “thy dread tribunal I must answer.”<sup>95</sup>

Despite Caroline’s dread concerns, she channeled her motivation into the pedagogy of middle-class refinement. She laid out that vision in an 1837 prayer:

Let me be successful at imparting scientific and moral instruction to those who are entrusted to my care... May I be enabled to inculcate my charges in cultivating sisterly & social affections & every domestic virtue, and to acquire elegant, refined & accomplished manners, and above all to cherish sentiments of piety and devotion to the Almighty to whom they are indebted for life and every blessing they enjoy.<sup>96</sup>

In another prayer during her second term in Concord, Caroline happily noted that “good order prevailed throughout the school room,” a serenity she attributed to God. She hopefully added, “I think I see in them a manifest improvement in manners,

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<sup>94</sup> September 4, 1836, Lilly Diary.

<sup>95</sup> September 10, 1836, Lilly Diary.

<sup>96</sup> n.d., February, 1837, Lilly Diary.

and an increased attention to study.” Caroline placed her role, and her duty to the students, in context: “Let me omit nothing that might contribute to promote their intellectual progress and the formation of good morals.”<sup>97</sup> Where quiet behavior and moral improvement represented the felicity of God, disruptive behavior represented a darker power. In August 1836, “A spirit of indolence or irresolution or a degree of mental \_\_\_\_ ... appeared to pervade the school room.” Caroline could not abate the desultory behavior and even chastised herself for succumbing to it. “Instead of adopting measures which would excite the interest and stimulate mental activity, I became impatient & unstable & very imprudently had recourse to scolding.” Bad pedagogy had undermined order and caused Caroline to lose her composure, but she referred to it simply as “evil.”<sup>98</sup> Caroline’s classroom struggles resembled the ebb and flow of denominational life.

Piety also drove Caroline to study the latest educational theories. She sought her Heavenly Father’s affirmation of her interest in female education. “Is it the sphere in which my Heavenly Father designed me to move?” Apparently receiving that affirmation, she resolved, “Then let me carefully endeavor to fill it with dignity, with honor & unselfishness.”<sup>99</sup> Caroline read on the Swiss school at Hofwyl, consumed Emma Willard’s journals, and sought out the guidance of locally

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<sup>97</sup> October 17, 1836, Lilly Diary.

<sup>98</sup> August 2, 1836, Lilly Diary.

<sup>99</sup> April 7, 1837, Lilly Diary.

renowned advocate and teacher Susan Nye Hutchinson. A favorite pedagogical guide was Jacob Abbott, a New England minister and educator who pioneered Christian teaching theory. In *The Young Christian*, published in 1832 by the American Tract Society, Abbott used fictional proverbs to convey the “principles of Christian duty” to a young audience. Though as much a parenting manual as a teaching guide, its lessons of patience, restraint, and understanding could be applied in both classroom and domestic settings. In the introduction, he directed an instruction to mothers that teaching “must be done, not in the suspicious manner of hearing a lesson which you fear has not been learned, but with the winning tone of kindness and confidence.” Abbott believed a child’s instruction lay in the ignition of his or her own native imagination.<sup>100</sup> Thus, whipping with switches countered the intended effect of education. Caroline, subject to the “austere pedagogue” and his rod in her youth, paid particular attention to Abbott’s instructions about discipline. She copied two of his paragraphs into her diary. The excerpts charged teachers to sympathize with childlike impulses that might disrupt a classroom or break its rules. Illustrating with an example of a boy unable to contain his talking, Abbot instructed, “Now if any severe punishment should follow such a transgression, how disproportionate would it be to the guilt!”<sup>101</sup> Though Caroline copied Abbott’s paragraphs into her diary, she altered their wording. She wrote this passage to say, “Should any teacher inflict

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<sup>100</sup> Jacob Abbott, *The Young Christian: or, A Familiar Illustration of the Principles of Christian Duty* (New York: American Tract Society, 1832), 5.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-46.

severe punishment for such a fault he would certainly be guilty of an act of cruelty which no person who distinctly recollected the feelings of childhood would commit.” She clearly understood Abbott’s intent. Abbott pursued this thoroughly modern understanding of childhood and educating the young in dozens of other publications and at the female schools he founded in New England.<sup>102</sup>

Caroline struggled with the problem of classroom (and later, domestic) discipline. She tried, but she could never completely give up the rod. A year after reading Abbot, she wrote of her Concord school, “I have not yet learned the very desirable art of governing without the rod though I am fully persuaded that it should be used with temper and not until other means have failed.” She succeeded well enough that a Mrs. Ledbetter “told me plainly that I was too indulgent with my pupils and used the rod too sparingly.” Still later, though, she confessed to frustration about “three or four rude chubby boys to whom I give instruction in a few branches of learning.”

### **Sunday Schools**

Indifferent teachers produced indifferent results, as Sarah Davidson of Charlotte noticed in 1837. “A Sabbath School was first commenced here... [but] none of them engaged as teachers...were pious[,] its existence was brief.” The recently converted, and very fervent, Davidson recorded this fact in preparation for her

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<sup>102</sup> “Rev. Jacob Abbott” on *Shaping the Values of Youth: Sunday School Books in 19<sup>th</sup> Century America*, <http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/ssb/search.cfm?AuthorID=182> (accessed December 15, 2011)

assumption of teaching duties in a revived Sunday School. No instructions from a church motivated her; piety did.

In my ignorance I imagined I could do something in returning the love of God... Stimulated by these feelings, I exerted all my influence and powers of persuasion—and finally prevailed with my female friends and acquaintances to join me—in reviving the Sabbath School.

Davidson and her fellow teachers also founded a “Benevolent society” to raise money for schoolbooks.<sup>103</sup>

Sarah Davidson discovered after three months, however, that religious fervor had failed to sustain her interest, yet she determined not to quit. “I have considered too much what was pleasant to—myself in teaching in the Sabbath School,” apparently her overweening spiritual satisfaction. “[B]ut from this time I will endeavour to avoid all selfish considerations & willingly & cheerfully do what is considered by the superintendant for the general good of the School[.]” Davidson never explained the apparent disagreement with her superintendent but concluded, “It is not by our own strength that we do any thing this is instrumental in leading souls to the Knowledge of God & the way of Salvation.”<sup>104</sup> Whether moved by religious enthusiasm or a resigned sense of duty, the goal remained the salvation of

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<sup>103</sup> Karen M. McConnell, Janet S. Dyer and Ann Williams, eds., *A Life in Antebellum Charlotte: The Private Journal of Sarah F. Davidson, 1837* (Charleston, S.C.: History Press, 2005), 44-45.

<sup>104</sup> McConnell, et. al., eds., *A Life in Antebellum Charlotte*, 69-70.

souls. She later complained of a fellow teacher who was “not so warmly interested in this blessed cause as he ought to be.” She reiterated,

Oh Lord impress each one engaged as a Teacher of a Sabbath School of the great & high priviledge they enjoy of being cooperators not only of Gods Ministering Servants but of God The Father—God the Son & God the Spirit in leading souls.<sup>105</sup>

Davidson herself recognized the positive effect of pious enthusiasm on her students, and herself. “Attended Sabbath School & felt myself particularly strengthened & prepared for teaching & never did I discharge the duty of teacher with so much satisfaction to myself—My pupils were very attentive--& conducted themselves with becoming solemnity.”<sup>106</sup>

Sunday Schools in the Piedmont targeted both the indigent and the established youth of the region. In Sarah Davidson’s revived Sunday School in Charlotte, she herself recruited students from among the poor in the town’s mining neighborhoods. That she did so by riding her slave-chauffered carriage to miner’s houses might have been a bit off-putting at first, but she seemed satisfied that the girls she recruited persisted in attendance. A new class later that year (1837), however, consisted of the children of her wealthy neighbors.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> McConnell, et. al., eds., *A Life in Antebellum Charlotte*, 69-71.

<sup>106</sup> McConnell, et. al., eds., *A Life in Antebellum Charlotte*, 115.

<sup>107</sup> McConnell, et. al., eds., *A Life in Antebellum Charlotte*, 50, 53, 109.

The need to supply ministers led to the creation of colleges. The desire for a steady pool of ministerial candidates spurred enthusiasm for common school education. Thus, evangelicals strode confidently into the public discussion about the imperative of state action on public education as they joined their rhetoric about strengthening denominations with secular rhetoric promoting the necessity of broad education to a virtuous citizenry and a prosperous economy. Evangelicals had embraced the liberal outlook of many Americans regardless of region. Southern evangelicals' reach into the modernizing sentiments of the "benevolent empire" did not happen smoothly, however. The implementation of a program of Sunday Schools in piedmont North Carolina was not slowed by opposition to national reforms and abolitionism, but by more mundane roadblocks. Disease, weather, and spiritual apathy countered frequent moments of enthusiasm and organization. These successes and impediments offer critical insights into how the rhetoric and language of revivalism slipped seamlessly into public discussions and appraisals of institutionalization.

Churches had long engaged in catechetical instruction, particularly the Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Moravians. Many congregations hosted catechetical schools from an early date. The Presbytery of Concord began formal classes in 1811 while the Quakers at New Garden established a Sabbath School in 1818. In the 1820s, the evangelical Sunday School became a popular educational form in the

hands of urban northerners.<sup>108</sup> As Anne Boylan points out, urban people founded Sunday Schools as a way to teach literacy to indigent children, but by the late 1820s, as secular schools assumed the initiative to teach reading and writing, evangelicals changed the focus of the schools to exposing all children to the means of salvation.<sup>109</sup> Sunday Schools differed from catechism classes in that they taught more than the details of various denominational confessions; they taught literacy and morals and received pedagogical guidance from market sources. While unions of Sunday School teachers formed in Philadelphia during that decade, interest in Sunday Schools sprouted in North Carolina. Moravians endorsed their operation in 1827 and so enthusiastically embraced them that one member complained of people “going to extremes” in 1831.<sup>110</sup> During Samuel Wait’s first tour as the agent of the State Baptist Convention in the same year, he noted a popular outcry for Sunday Schools.<sup>111</sup> Though impossible to tell the number of churches, teachers, and students

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<sup>108</sup> The Baptists in 1836 noted “This State has enjoyed the blessings of Sabbath Schools, to some extent, for some thirty years. Schools have been formed and sustained by some of the churches of different denominations during the period; in other cases by benevolent individuals.” *Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Meeting of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, 1836* (New Bern: Printed at The Recorder Office, 1837), 16.

<sup>109</sup> Anne E. Boylan, *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790-1880* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

<sup>110</sup> C. Daniel Crews and Richard W. Starbuck, *With Courage for the Future: The Story of the Moravian Church, Southern Province* (Winston-Salem, N.C.: Moravian Church in America, Southern Province, 2002), 255.

<sup>111</sup> *Proceedings of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, 1831* (New Bern: John I. Pasteur, 1831), 10-12. The Lutherans had established at least one Sunday School as early as 1807. Bernheim and Cox, *The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod and Ministerium of North Carolina*, 77.



engaged in Sunday Schools, it is safe to suggest that many local classes preceded the institutional push for them in the 1830s. In September 1834, the Charlotte Circuit of Methodists resolved to form a “Bible, Tract, & Sunday School Society,” and by the following quarterly meeting, reported nine schools and twenty-six teachers. Some of the schools were deemed “flourishing” and some “languishing,” but it seems clear that these schools probably were operational before the Circuit had acted.<sup>112</sup>

All sects, except of course the Antimission Baptists (AMBs), endorsed the use of Sunday Schools. Ever attuned to the nuances of Calvinism and Arminianism, Piedmont Protestants carefully justified Sunday Schools’ place in ecclesiastical and theological construction. The Schools were not considered to be divine things, nor a recreation of First Century structures, as the AMBs might require. They were recognized as modern, human, instruments to assist with the dissemination of religion. Both the Lutherans and the German Reformed churches made clear that not only were Sunday Schools “useful human expedients” but ones particularly “efficient...in church activity and growth.”<sup>113</sup> Thus, by the 1830s, six of the seven major Protestant sects approved of the use of these modern tools. Baptist J. B. Ballard reported in 1835 that the Convention considered Sunday Schools “when properly managed a powerful means under God of promoting learning, the morals,

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<sup>112</sup> September and November, 1834, Minutes of the Charlotte Circuit, Methodist Episcopal Church, Archives of the Western North Carolina Conference, Charlotte North Carolina.

<sup>113</sup> Bernheim and Cox, *The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod and Ministerium of North Carolina*, 77.

and the salvation of the rising population of our country; that it is the means of promoting a better observance of the Sabbath and of producing a missionary spirit.”<sup>114</sup> His report the following year amply demonstrates the goal of North Carolina’s Sunday School organizers:

How often has it changed the moral aspect of a whole neighborhood. How often has the wayward youth been allured by it, from the path of vice and sin to that of morality and virtue—How frequently has it been the means, in the hand of God, of the salvation of souls. In many destitute parts of our country, where the schools are carried on in a *religious* manner, as all should be, they are a substitute for the preaching of the gospel. They collect the children and youth, and in many instances adults, who would perhaps, if not employed in this way, be violating God’s law in a variety of ways.

Ballard did not claim that Sunday Schools would enable children to be better citizens. That Sunday Schools evidently (to Ballard’s committee) improved the morals of a neighborhood was proof not necessarily that republicanism or democracy had succeeded (or been tempered) but that large communities had found Christ. Certainly a moral neighborhood necessarily preceded a desirable civil life, and the Baptists knew it, if they did not frequently articulate it. The Baptists resolved, “that we conceive that the great object of S. School instruction is not barely to impart literary instruction, but to be instrumental in the conversion of the soul to God.”<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> *Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Meeting of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, 1835, 19.*

<sup>115</sup> *Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Meeting of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, 1836, 17.*

Interestingly, while the statewide denominations encouraged lay participation in Sunday Schools, they made little effort to organize them. The Baptist State Convention in 1833 urged its constituent members to systematically support them.<sup>116</sup> What followed was a yearly litany in the Convention, that apathy threatened the survival of Sunday Schools and that the Convention should make further appeals for their support, but no formal resolution appropriating money or organizational resources was forthcoming. The Convention heartily endorsed the entrance of the American Sunday School Union (ASSU) into North Carolina in 1835 and enthusiastically reprinted the ASSU statistics in their own minutes. Not until 1845 did the Baptists commit Convention resources to Sunday Schools by creating the North Carolina Baptist Publication and Sunday School Society. This group collected money to purchase literature and establish dispensaries (book stores) around the state to stock the material. It thrived, but by the 1850s, when national enthusiasm for Sunday Schools waned, the Society had become primarily a publishing concern with no interest in the actual operation of Sunday Schools. Many Baptists churches, however, became directly engaged as auxiliaries to the American Sunday School Union, bypassing the State Convention. Presbyterians endorsed the ASSU in both 1833 and 1835, the Presbytery of Concord (not the Synod of North Carolina) being the conduit for ASSU publications.<sup>117</sup> In Salem, the Moravians hosted gigantic Sunday School conventions in the 1830s, numbering over one

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<sup>116</sup> *Proceedings of the Third Annual Meeting of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, 1833* (Fayetteville: Printed by Edward J. Hale, 1834), 13, 17.

<sup>117</sup> McGeachy, *Confronted by Challenge*, 126.

thousand attendees. The cross-denominational meetings drew many Baptist, Methodist, and German Reformed members.<sup>118</sup>

The life of Sunday Schools followed the same patterns of all benevolent institutions. They thrived and declined on the local level no matter what church elders desired. The engagement of someone like Sarah Davidson—or the disengagement of some of her friends—mattered more. In the Pee Dee Association, around Montgomery County, for instance, the Forks of the Little River Church already hosted a Sunday School when the Associational elders ordered the other churches to do the same in 1841. As interest in the schools faded in the late 1850s, Forks continued supporting its school while the others went defunct.<sup>119</sup> On the Methodist's Iredell Circuit, the elders appointed a committee to oversee Sunday Schools. The attention produced “avid” attendance in the Circuit by 1845, an interest that thrived until 1848. Yet in the nearby Franklinsville Circuit, the elders wrote lamely, “The preacher reported one Bible School in Franklinsville. Nothing has been done for the special instruction of the Children.”<sup>120</sup>

Sunday Schools suffered the same problems that afflicted common schools, and churches in general—weather and disease could derail any momentum they

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<sup>118</sup> Crews and Starbuck, *With Courage for the Future*, 265.

<sup>119</sup> 1841, 1847, and 1849, Minutes of the Pee Dee Association, Wake Forest University, Baptist Historical Collection, Z. Smith Reynolds Library.

<sup>120</sup> March 23, 1850, Minutes of the Franklinsville Circuit, UMC Records.

might have accumulated. A reported harsh winter in Iredell County in 1847-48 effectively stamped out the Sunday School revival that had been occurring there.<sup>121</sup> At the Suggs School House Sunday School in Randolph County, the superintendent noted in 1843, "Many of the scholars are sick. Five (all) children sick in one family, one of them at the point of death. Some of the children in the country." In place of a full lesson, the teacher made "some remarks...in reference to the importance of being prepared for death." In 1848 Suggs reported, "The school was not continued during winter & was late in being revived."<sup>122</sup> Cold weather and sickness could not only stymie the enthusiasm of the church hierarchy but also dampen any spiritual revival among the people. Religious people, however, identified the problem not as environmental or biological happenstance but as apathy to religion.

### **Mary Davis Brown's Family Circle**

The practice of religion for individuals not only included internal struggles, but also the reinforcement of social bonds on the margins on minister-centered congregational activities. Emile Durkheim called religious-social groups "moral communities" united in a "system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things."<sup>123</sup> Interaction around the edges of sacred things, for rural Americans,

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<sup>121</sup> April 8, 1848, Minutes of the Iredell Circuit, UMC Records.

<sup>122</sup> October 1, 1843, December 3, 1848, and June 3, 1849, Sunday School Minute Book, Tabernacle and Union Churches, Suggs Schoolhouse, Randolph County, UMC Records.

<sup>123</sup> Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2008; originally published 1915), 47, and Ian Hamnett, "Durkheim and the study of religion," in

cemented the bonds of community and the lessons of contemporary evangelical morality. Sunday services and annual camp meetings offered believers opportunities to reinforce pious notions about relationships and public behavior in informal ways.

Mary Brown's family ranged the countryside. Husband Jackson visited York, attended muster, and went to church at a variety of places.<sup>124</sup> Mary's eldest daughter and adopted niece, both fifteen in 1857, visited family and friends on their own. The comings and goings of these three meant Mary, her husband, and Eliza and Emily were rarely at home together. For instance, on May 2, 1857, Jackson attended muster while Eliza and Emily went to their grandparents' home. That night, Jackson and Emily came home, but Eliza stayed at the grandparents' for a week. The following week, the two eldest went to the Cain household to bid adieu to cousin Martha Alexander, about to return to her home in Alabama. Mary herself was not confined to home, and she traveled as much on her own as she did with her husband or children. On August 21 of the same year, she paid a call on her friend Jane, newly delivered of a baby, and the following day visited her parents.<sup>125</sup> Soon after, she skipped preaching to visit Hannah, who was sick with the cold. In the meantime,

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*Durkheim and Modern Sociology*, ed. Steve Fenton (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 202-218.

<sup>124</sup> *Descendants, Oil In Our Lamps*, 41, 42.

<sup>125</sup> *Descendants, Oil In Our Lamps*, 45.

Eliza and another daughter (Jaily) went to church at Smyrna.<sup>126</sup> Mary's family was one defined by rural networks and patterns. (Not primitive, though: many of the visitors to her own house arrived by train from Tennessee and Arkansas.) As such, her family—as it shows up in her diary—appears not as a cohesive unit, but as a clutch of individuals, each pursuing their communal obligations at home and abroad.

In that network, Mary, more than any other white person on her place, was home bound with new children, sick family members and slaves, or pregnancy, and these reasons, more than any other, prevented her from going to Sunday services as much as her husband and daughters. "Lawson has been sick to day," she wrote on June 22, 1856," and I did not go to preachen to day but he is better." Sickness struck in more deadly fashion during a measles outbreak in the spring of 1858. "[O]ure people has got the measles. Sally, Nell, Martha, John has got them now. Sally is bad." Mary missed the next two Sundays at church, "to stay with the measles peopel [sic]."<sup>127</sup> Later that year, a "caugh" amongst the children caused her absence again. Mary's own illness prevented her attendance at church, but her pregnancies necessitated long absences.<sup>128</sup> She missed all church functions in October and November of 1857 because of pregnancy and childbirth. So too was she unable to attend most functions from July through September of 1859. Though she expressed

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<sup>126</sup> Descendants, *Oil In Our Lamps*, 45.

<sup>127</sup> Descendants, *Oil In Our Lamps*, 55.

<sup>128</sup> Descendants, *Oil In Our Lamps*, 34.

occasional sadness upon missing meetings, she just as readily found religious satisfaction, noting, "Theire [sic] is a sacrament theire to day [at Bethany Presbyterian] and I have been at home with the little children today, have been reading in ould Burchet to day. I have been redding Christs sermins on the mount, an explanation. Theire is great promises and precepts and examples contained in them three chapters."<sup>129</sup>

Despite the occasional absences from communal worship, Mary Brown attended Sunday services, communions, singings, and the visitation associated with religious practice. A typical span occurred in May and June of 1857. She admired Mr. Davis' "tex" on May 11, noting "He mad 2 good sermons and there was a great turn out of people." While she did not accompany her husband and daughters to "sackrament" at another Presbyterian church on the 31<sup>st</sup>, she did attend "prachen" back at Beersheba on the 7<sup>th</sup> of June. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of that month, she "heard fine preachen and saw Mr. Jeams Davis baptisse his first" infant. "I don't think he can be beet fore his practice."<sup>130</sup> Mary paid particular attention to communion, or sacraments, at Beersheba. Communion in the Presbyterian church consisted of several days' of preaching, culminating in a solemn ceremonial breaking of bread, limited to church members only. Mary attended all three days of the September 1856 communion.<sup>131</sup> The April, 1857 communion featured the ordination of a new

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<sup>129</sup> Descendants, *Oil In Our Lamps*, 35. See also 66.

<sup>130</sup> Descendants, *Oil In Our Lamps*, 42-44.



minister for Beersheba. Though the Browns hosted visitors during the communion, Mary absorbed the spiritual lessons, “oh if we have not been made better, it will be fare wrose fore in the great day if we ware in heathern lands. But i hope and trust it is not so with me.”<sup>132</sup>

Visiting enhanced the social aspect of religious functions for Mary Brown. In fact, a considerable portion of her religious interaction took place in the context of visits to or from family and friends. On June 13, 1856, for instance, she wrote, “I have been to preachen to day and yesterday was the day of sin[g]ing at bershaba. I had company, [cousin] John Alexander from alabamiam was here.”<sup>133</sup> At the April 1857 communion, the Browns hosted a “Mr Watson” at their house, and in January, 1858, she noted, “Mother and Hiram was up here last knight and we have been at preachen to day.” On occasion, Mary mixed travel and church. In October she combined an overnight visit to her sister and brother-in-law’s house with attendance at a sermon in York.<sup>134</sup> Mary loved to attend singings, whether at church, at someone else’s house, or occasionally, her own. A singing master usually led these functions. Singings and visiting associated with church services combined secular and social needs. For instance, Mary’s daughter Eliza Ann courted Rufus Whitesides, her future husband, and cultivated his relationship with his new in-laws at singings

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<sup>131</sup> Descendants, *Oil In Our Lamps*, 31.

<sup>132</sup> Descendants, *Oil In Our Lamps*, 41.

<sup>133</sup> Descendants, *Oil In Our Lamps*, 28.

<sup>134</sup> Descendants, *Oil In Our Lamps*, 31-32.

and on visits. (Eliza Ann even spent a part of their courtship at Whitesides' Baptist church.)<sup>135</sup> Mary even incorporated the hymns, declaring that she hoped to hear Mrs. Dana's hymns, O sing me of heaven, "to hear when I am dieing."<sup>136</sup>

Historical depictions of southern camp meetings have tended to highlight the emotional spontaneity of the religious gatherings, illustrated by tales of congregants' trembling, barking, and fainting. Such scenes are drawn primarily from the Great Revival of 1801-1805 and have offered historians a standard of measurement for the depth of religious feeling by lay people. Historians have interpreted the decline of revivalism and the rise of a methodic and non-spontaneous worship style by the late antebellum period as a loss of religious vitality in congregations—that religious feeling had decreasing relevance for the lived experience of ordinary lay people.<sup>137</sup> The nature of camp meetings did indeed change. Protracted meetings in the late antebellum offered different social and emotional opportunities than those of the late eighteenth century. Yet protracted meetings continued to be an important element in the religious lives of lay people, one of many locations for pious fulfillment, even in the bureaucratic landscape of the late antebellum.

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<sup>135</sup> Descendants, *Oil In Our Lamps*, 72, 73, 75 -76.

<sup>136</sup> Descendants, *Oil In Our Lamps*, 53.

<sup>137</sup> Some historians have taken into account the continued importance of periodic revivals, particularly Lacy Ford and Stephanie McCurry for South Carolina in the 1830s.

The major denominations all established a schedule and routine for annual camp meetings, usually in the autumn after congregants brought in their harvests. Moravians did not have camp meetings, neither did Quakers or Primitive Baptists. The larger campgrounds, however, became important communal sites on the landscape. In the Piedmont, places like Union Grove in Iredell County, Rock Springs campground in Lincoln County, and Ball's Creek Campground in Catawba County, drew thousands of believers and observers to regular meetings.<sup>138</sup> The Methodists and Baptists claimed ownership of these locations. The Lutherans were not inclined to revivals, but made a half-hearted attempt in the mid-1830s to introduce the camp meeting to their rituals. A new minister from Maryland, Daniel Jenkins, began hosting protracted meetings at New Bethel Church in Stanly County in 1835. The revival spirit did not catch on and after several years, Lutheran campgrounds stood abandoned and succumbing to nature.<sup>139</sup>

Clergy looked to camp meetings as a place for revival or refreshing in the same way they looked to the exercise of discipline and the vitality of voluntary societies for the same end. While clergy and lay people hoped Sunday Schools and missionary efforts would engender religious feeling on a routine basis, they still looked particularly to protracted meetings as sources of new members and

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<sup>138</sup> Author Unknown, *The Heritage of Iredell County* (Statesville: The Genealogical Society of Iredell County, 1980), 141, and Gary R. Freeze, *The Catawbans: Crafters of a North Carolina County, 1747-1900* (Newton, N.C.: Catawba County Historical Association, 1995), 114-115.

<sup>139</sup> Bernheim and Cox, *The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 75-76, G.D. Bernheim, *History of the German Settlements and of the Lutheran Church in North and South Carolina* (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Book Store, 1872), 516-517.

heightened religious spirit. Methodist minister John Robinson reported on three meetings that aided in the revival of the apparently moribund Rockingham Circuit in 1837. At the first two meetings, “we had pleasant weather, and the preaching of the gospel with not without success.” Despite his ambivalent language, Robinson counted seventy-five new converts. At the third meeting, “we had but little opportunity for preaching, owing to sever weather at the time; and the congregation was unusually small.” The weather and small turnout, however, did not forestall the spirit of the Lord: “The people of God, however, appeared to be much refreshed and strengthened in waiting upon him.”<sup>140</sup> The regularness of camp meetings may be illustrated by T.W. Postell’s report of a camp meeting on the Deep River Circuit. He found it notable that many attendees chose to stay at the campground overnight. In fact, what began as a meeting intended to last but a day or two lasted twenty-one days, during which “twenty-five souls were soundly converted to God; thirty-three joined our Church.” In this remarkable effort, Postell had the assistance of a Presbyterian and a Baptist minister but did not count souls that might have joined their churches.<sup>141</sup>

These routine meetings occurred in every circuit, association, and presbytery in every year. Participants often found camp meetings as amusing as they were occasionally profound. And what protracted meetings did for the soul was often

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<sup>140</sup> *Southern Christian Advocate*, December 8, 1837.

<sup>141</sup> *Southern Christian Advocate*, July 13, 1849.

surpassed by the social satisfaction encountered. Strong Thomasson's observations on camp meeting life are unique but likely represent the experience of many piedmonters. In Iredell County, Methodist Thomasson, a member of Aylesbury Church, attended every extra-circular church activity he could, including preaching at the local Baptists churches and Quaker meetings and up to two or three camp meetings a year. In 1855, the Thomasson family had a tent at the Temple Hill camp meeting, "erected of small pine logs hewed on 2 sides and notchd up. The size of it was about 12 by 16 feet—quite a good tent." The meeting began "at the sound of the horn for the 3 o'clock sermon." After that, Strong and his brother erected a "brush arber" beside the tent and stood up a table beneath it.<sup>142</sup> At an 1854 meeting that coincided with a visit from the circuit preacher, Strong's program included a sermon, followed by the trial of one congregant for "telling one falsehood and sanctioning two others."<sup>143</sup> In 1853, at Mount Tabor, Strong sold boxes of tobacco out of his wagon and considered the highlight of his four days on site to be a reunion of "lots of my old friends, & brother Wiley." On the way back home, he stopped in Pfaff Town to buy some new clothes and boots and in Salem to mend a watch.<sup>144</sup>

Strong enjoyed the camp meetings he attended; he appreciated the weather, the company, the reunions, and particularly the preaching. He noted with approval

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<sup>142</sup> Paul D. Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman: The Diary of Basil Armstrong Thomasson, 1853-1862* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), 95.

<sup>143</sup> Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman*, 48.

<sup>144</sup> Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman*, 6-7.

the regular conversion of sinners. Yet he just as much noted the rather frequent disappointments at camp meetings, caused as much by happenstance as anything else. Strong considered one meeting at Union Grove to be a bit stingy in giving, but he guessed that “the amount collected was small as the congregation was mostly composed of poor people who had but little to live, and was rather small for Sunday.”<sup>145</sup> Weather, more than any other factor, disrupted the routine of the camps. “After preaching we went to our tent and soon were sleeping soundly, but alas! our rest was soon broken, and sleep driven from our eyes by the noisy rain drops which came down in torrents making a tremendous clatter upon the roof of our tent, and by ‘the dreadful thunder’ which roared long and loud.” The storm, however, did not wash the meeting away, and preaching commenced, despite Strong’s understatement: “Things are a little wet.”<sup>146</sup> A less intense freshet sent another meeting running for cover in 1855: “Before night it rained and wet the straw and seats under the arbor, so the congregation assembled in the church for night meeting. There was no preaching, but the congregation sung, a few prayed, and many shouted aloud the praise of Israel’s God.” The rain did not spoil that meeting for Strong; the lack of converts did—“Among all the campmeetings that ever I attended I’ve no recollection of one such as this. Notwithstanding the many gospels warning sermons, there was not the first soul converted during the

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<sup>145</sup> Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman*, 94.

<sup>146</sup> Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman*, 95-96.

meeting!”<sup>147</sup> Strong and his wife, Mary, went to one meeting at Union Grove unprepared, and “suffered with some hunger.” They left early: “Before the meeting broke, and while the good people were bawling and squalling, and kicking up a considerable dust, Mary and I left for ‘home, sweet home.’”<sup>148</sup>

### **A Variety of Places**

In 1837, Methodist minister David Derrick reported on his progress in Centre Circuit, Cabarrus County, to the *Southern Christian Advocate*. His description of four years in the field reflected many of the ways denominations had then experienced growth. Derrick described Cabarrus County in 1837 as did many domestic missionaries in new ground--“strangers both to Methodism and vital religion.” But Cabarrus did not lack religion; the Presbyterians dominated around Concord and the Lutherans held sway in the German-speaking eastern half of the county. A German-speaker himself, Derrick labored and soon, “the circuit was enlarged to four weeks.” He celebrated the congregational growth--“whole families have been converted and joined the church; new societies formed; churches built for worship—six of which have been dedicated during this year [1837].” Certainly, Derrick regarded the conversion of “at least one hundred souls” his chief accomplishment—though one he attributed to God, not himself—but the creation of societies and buildings also marked the success. Derrick noted a related

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<sup>147</sup> Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman*, 96.

<sup>148</sup> Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman*, 94.

phenomenon. Conversions took place “in class-meetings, some in prayer-meetings, some in retirement for prayers in the woods, and some at the family altar.”<sup>149</sup>

Though he did not mention schools and foreign missions, apparent in Derrick’s summary is the expanded venues for pious activity. Old venues saw the appearance of new forms. For instance, traditionally extemporaneous and emotional in the evangelical tradition, now included regularly scheduled admonitions to promote missions, temperance, and schools. But new places for the expression of piety appeared: in public in place of a barroom, in the bookshop, or in public schools. Most importantly, as Derrick noted, piety should be conducted within the family circle.

Denominations in the 1830s and 1840s had successfully joined traditional piety to the modern sentiment of liberality. To be clear, liberality is not the same as liberal theology. By no means did piedmont religious people practice the liberal theology only then emerging in the north that prioritized the abstract spirit of scriptures over the words of the Bible. Yet in liberalizing, piedmont churches fully embraced an ethic that placed selflessness and pious generosity above all else in the modern world. Religious authorities first promoted “liberality” first as a motivation to give generously to building efforts and other fundraising campaigns. In 1844, the *Southern Christian Advocate* published a notice—under the heading “Liberality”—about an Ohio Methodist who gave “*twelve hundred acres* of finely improved lands,” to the Ohio Wesleyan University and endowed a missionary professorship. “The... noble instance of zeal in the cause of liberal education, is commended to the notice

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<sup>149</sup> *Southern Christian Advocate*, October 28, 1837.



of our wealthy Carolina and Georgia friends, who could, with no great effort, 'go and do likewise.'"<sup>150</sup> Surely, denominational leaders did not expect donations of quite that much land from ordinary lay people, but they did expect that lay people would be equally generous.

The German Reformed "state of religion" in 1845 explicitly appealed to liberality in the form of "brotherly love." "Want of brotherly love," they wrote, "has a tendency to lessen the true dignity of the Christian character, in as much as love is the bond of perfection and the badge by which we are known as Christians, who bear the image of that God who is love." That year the elders deplored the want of brotherly love and a corresponding lack of "divine life" in some churches. Yet the following year saw an increase in "Bible Class instruction" and "reading of sacred scriptures in private" that led to "bearing pleasant fruit to the good of the church and the praise of God's grace." These activities moved congregants "to strengthen & extend the bonds of gospel charity and thus enable all to obey the 'new commonwealth' given us of our Lord 'to love one another.'" Evangelicals intended this brotherly love to transcend the inequities of wealth, and bridge divides between the believers and unbelievers. This mindset, like Caroline Lilly and Mary Brown demonstrated, indicated the tandem nature of spiritual and worldly progress.

The "progressive" nature of liberality becomes apparent when compared to other descriptions of southern social ethics, most notably the system of honor

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<sup>150</sup> April 19, 1844, "Liberality," *Southern Christian Advocate*. The notice quoted Luke 10:37.

elucidated by Bertram Wyatt-Brown. Planters and other southerners adhered to an Old World concept of status and pride that made them particularly sensitive to reputation and primed for violence in defense of it. In Wyatt-Brown's interpretation, however, honor culture and evangelical Christianity uneasily adapted to one another in the nineteenth century. Christian gentility, according to Wyatt-Brown, consisted of three elements: sociability, learning, and piety. It "involved mastery of quite subtle marks of status—the proper accent, the right choice of words and conversational topics, the appropriate attire, an acquaintance with various kinds of social properties and other rules not easy to follow with aplomb." It served as a signifier of wealth and suitability for command, thus a social attribute of privileged planters only.<sup>151</sup>

Christian gentility depended on outward appearance in performance and display. The performative nature of Christian gentility, however, marks its significant difference from evangelical liberality. Wyatt-Brown, for instance, notes that sociability signaled a preference for gregariousness over seriousness and indicated the largesse of the wealthy. While liberality called for peaceful and happy social relations, largesse is not the same as charity, and charisma is hardly the same as the struggle of souls. In regard to learning, the veneration of knowledge is

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<sup>151</sup> Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics & Behavior In the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 88-114, quote on p. 88. Some scholars have worked to find moments of peaceful coexistence between honor and Christianity, and I do not wish to perpetuate an artificial distinction between the two. See Edward R. Crowther, "Holy Honor: Sacred and Secular in the Old South," *Journal of Southern History* 58 (November 1992): 619-636, and Robert Elder, "Southern Saints and Sacred Honor: Evangelicalism, Honor, Community, and the Self in South Carolina and Georgia, 1784-1860," Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 2011.

apparent in both ethics, but where Wyatt-Brown's planters valued classical education, the initiators of North Carolina's religious colleges and common schools pressed for practical application of knowledge while valuing the cosmopolitan attitude it cultivated.

The chief difference is the prioritization of the three elements of gentility. In Wyatt-Brown's interpretation, planters considered sociability the primary virtue while piety remained an afterthought, attached after the second Great Awakening. In my interpretation, piety generated the social and practical imperatives of liberality. Evangelical selves reflected deep, if shifting, values of the moral community. Religious practice was thus not an affectation to prove genteel refinement but the source of public and private promotion of learning, ethical behavior in the marketplace, and in social relations.

The modern evangelical ethic appealed to Piedmonters primarily because it did not have master-slave relations as its motivating engine. Scholars of the antebellum South have long identified slavery as the unifying core of southern social and cultural life. Slavery demanded stoic behavior and violent reaction from whites determined to demonstrate mastery. The demands of caste, accordingly, prescribed ruthless and domineering behavior by whites. "Virtually all white men," Edward Baptist has written, "agreed on the need to reject and resist—by violence if

necessary—the attempts of others to force them into a position of subordination.”<sup>152</sup> As I will demonstrate in Chapter 3, white men of all classes subordinated themselves to the demands of faith and often that meant a disavowal of violence and arrogance of all kinds. Evangelicals—lay people and clergy both—prioritized theology. Not an abstract or intellectual theology, but an adaptable and practical one, shaped by modern impulses and ordinary experience.

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<sup>152</sup> Edward E. Baptist, *Creating an Old South: Middle Florida's Plantation Frontier before the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 102.

CHAPTER III  
DISCIPLINE AND THE EVANGELICAL SENSIBILITY

Friedberg, in southern Forsyth County, had been one of the Moravian Church's country congregations since 1773. It boasted a school, a church, a parsonage, and even a used organ. To this rural enclave of religious institutions the local Moravians, under the leadership of Pastor Henry Schultz, added the South Fork Debating Society. In 1834 the Debating Society posed the question, "now widely presented by the Temperance Societies and discussed so zealously: 'Is the distiller, or the retailer, or the drinker of spirituous drinks to be blamed or not?'"<sup>1</sup> Schultz did not record the results of the debate in the Friedberg Diary.

Caroline Brooks, always self-conscious about her lower-class origins, occasionally dwelled on perceived social slights. In April 1837, while still teaching in Concord, she encountered an old colleague who had once been a teacher, but was then married. "My former rival," Caroline wrote, "who has recently returned from

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<sup>1</sup> Adelaide L. Fries and Douglas LeTell Rights, *Records of the Moravians in North Carolina* Volume VIII (1823-1837) (Raleigh: State Department of Archives and History, 1954), 4152, and C. Daniel Crews and Richard W. Starbuck, *With Courage of the Future: The Story of the Moravian Church, Southern Province* (Winston-Salem, N.C.: Moravian Church in America, Southern Province, 2002), 73, 133, 200, 209, and 260.

Washington was there dressed in better taste than when I last saw her.” Caroline had spent time in prayerful struggle to adhere to Methodist doctrine on wealth and status. The year before, she declared, The possession of all wealth & honors & power that earth could afford would be infinitely less than the smallest atom of matter when compared with the soul ennobling and truly sublime principles of love to God. Mrs. Coleman’s affectations unnerved Caroline: “To me she appears equally as distant and reserved as formerly, not manifesting the smallest desire to cultivate an acquaintance with me.” Caroline, however, refused to harbor resentment or distrust for her rival. The evangelical rejection of ostentatious wealth was not, after all, about the wealth itself but about the ability of wealth to spoil the individual’s relationship with God, and with his or her fellow Christians. Caroline determined to avoid that unholy state. She exclaimed,

let me not cherish improper feelings toward her. I meant to love her. I will strive to do it. She is a professed follower of the adorable Savior & an instructress of the young, and in all probability is worthy of love and esteem.<sup>1</sup>

The Moravian example, if brief, offers a number of important insights into the disciplinary process. The definition of sin, for instance, was debatable and changeable. Forces within and without ecclesiastical structures caused those changes. The South Fork Debating Society was not a church body, but it fully engaged in shaping opinion about the most important theological controversy of the

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<sup>1</sup> March 15, 1836, and April, n.d., 1837, Caroline Brooks Lilly Diary and Account, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

day. Caroline's encounter with Mrs. Coleman offers a view into how ordinary evangelicals enacted discipline in highly personal, daily decisions that have been largely invisible to historians. This later form of discipline—individual, internal motivation to adhere to religious precepts, even while away from the direct surveillance of congregations and ministers—offered a bridge for evangelicals to find their way in a secular world. Individual evangelicals aggressively carved out a morality-based place in the secular world. There, they turned the theological discipline of their congregations into expectations for moral public behavior by all people. Evangelicals applying their discipline in public, however, could not escape tensions inherent in the practice of discipline.

Discipline consisted of more than surveillance and public condemnation, but was a comprehensive program for maintaining the religious and social character of the congregation. I define discipline in two related ways. First, discipline is the methods used to ensure unity with pious goals of denominations. Of utmost concern to clergy and lay people alike, active pursuit of doctrinal unity, and subsequent harmonious efforts at benevolence, signaled fulfillment of "vital religion." Second, discipline was the individual desire to adhere to doctrine and pious goals. The fields of disciplinary struggle were thus not limited to Sunday proceedings. To see the practice of discipline at work within and without sacred and secular institutions is to witness the multidirectional flow of power in the antebellum South.

Historians have long considered the interplay of religion and social reality and have long suggested that churches in the South had succumbed to “cultural capture”: that is, agents of secular social power demanded theological subservience to existing hierarchies of gender and racial power and privilege. This thesis has shaped a historiographical narrative of a granulated, oppressed, religious life in the South, especially as compared to a flourishing social life of evangelicalism in the North.<sup>2</sup> For John Boles, the “southern mind” never recovered from the imprint of the Great Revivals of 1799-1803. A “theology of individualism” made southern religion “personal” and “provincial.” That individualism arose from the primacy of the conversion experience and the clergy’s need—because of the voluntary nature of churches—to maintain salvation within people, not their communities. Therefore, southern churches never adopted the communal concerns that occupied northern sects and led to “numerous reform efforts, voluntary societies, and ultimately the social gospel.” This denial of an exterior mode for Christian ethics made southern religion personal, provincial, and conservative.<sup>3</sup>

Historians of women’s history took up this theme most prominently. Jean E. Friedman determined that evangelical practice (primarily the dominance of men in church administrative functions) reinforced the power of traditional patriarchal

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<sup>2</sup> Samuel S. Hill first noted the “cultural capture” of southern churches in *Southern Churches in Crisis* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967).

<sup>3</sup> John B. Boles, *The Great Revival: The Origins of the Southern Evangelical Mind* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1972), Chapter 9, quotes on 127 and 130.



kinship networks and squashed both women's autonomy and any chance at creating a reforming women's culture.<sup>4</sup> Stephanie McCurry enhanced Friedman's interpretation, and described a desolate women's existence, crushed in the tension between religious notions of egalitarianism and secular need for hierarchy.<sup>5</sup> Implicit in the arguments of these historians is that evangelical values failed to gain a foothold as an ethic in public or in other forms of social life and that religious discipline served as the hammer of oppression.<sup>6</sup>

Donald Mathews argued the opposite: that religion formed a positive basis for social life. Evangelicals stressed the sacred aspects of religious power and did so in a way that transcended secular boundaries. "[C]haracteristic of such people," he wrote, "was their insistence on initiating the individual into a permanent intimate relationship with other people who share the same experience and views of the meaning of life and who were committed to the goal of converting the rest of society." This understanding of religious understanding complicates our description of power, as these historical actors prioritized social-ecclesial ethics in ways that subordinated the strict polarities of race and gender, mastery and subversion, to the

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<sup>4</sup> Jean E. Friedman, *The Enclosed Garden: Women and Community in the Evangelical South, 1830-1900* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985).

<sup>5</sup> Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, & the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> Christine Heryman argued that evangelicals did indeed succeed in creating a public Christian ethos in the south, but at the cost of betraying the egalitarianism of the early evangelical movement. Ministers themselves bent their message to fit the needs of the patriarchy. Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997).

needs of doctrinal unity. “The polarity of ‘community’ and the ‘individual,’” Mathews wrote, “simply did not exist for Evangelicals.”<sup>7</sup>

Historians who have examined religion in the Piedmont have mirrored Mathews’ description of faith as an effective basis for social behavior. Paul Escott recognized that many yeomen prioritized sacred values over secular ones when he noted, “this religious world created its own, autonomous standards by which the pretensions of secular powers were, by definition, dross.” Escott suggested “faith... moderated the aristocratic tendencies in the social order” of North Carolina. He is correct, but never explained how this process worked.<sup>8</sup> Bill Cecil-Fronsman not only tied evangelical belief to the lower class, but he identified its application as an alternative to elite codes of violence and aggression. His common whites utilized religion to define their public behavior in a way that set them apart from elites. He was, in part, correct, in that evangelical codes of behavior offered an alternative to aristocratic concepts of honor. Yet I interpret the evangelical ethic as practicable across class lines (even while it helped define new middle class boundaries). Cecil-Fronsman further wrote, “[T]he common whites’ religion scarcely provided them with the cultural tools they would need to challenge the planter class’s hegemony,”

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<sup>7</sup> Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), 40-46.

<sup>8</sup> Paul D. Escott, *Many Excellent People: Power and Privilege in North Carolina, 1850-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 24-27.

because their faith encouraged a “reject[ion] of the world.”<sup>9</sup> This chapter will assert quite the opposite; evangelical practice braced its practitioners for entrance into the world. That people did not mount an effective *political* challenge to the social order of patriarchy and slavery is obvious. Prioritizing sacred values over secular ones and devaluing the need for dramatic social challenges, however, only meant that evangelical attention to the world did not produce partisan political conflict. Yet, evangelical values, practiced as a social ethic, *did* produce cultural change in southern society. Evangelical practice was a social act, and as pious people shaped their place in the world, they, perhaps unwittingly, began to shape the world itself.

*How* they did so requires us to not only examine the process and lessons of discipline but also how evangelicals blended those lessons with other contemporary prescriptions for public behavior. The churches’ engagement with the major issues of the day—temperance reform and anti-slavery agitation—was often ambivalent. That ambivalence, however, did not result from a fear of the world, or of upsetting its social order, but from the internal contradictions of a vigorous disciplinary process.

Historical analysis of religious discipline has given us broad and valid observations about church court cases. For instance, they persisted longer in the South than in the North, and the number of disciplinary cases declined from the

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<sup>9</sup> Cecil-Fronsman, *Common Whites: Class and Culture in Antebellum North Carolina* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992), 170, 188-189.

early nineteenth century until the Civil War and continued declining thereafter.<sup>10</sup> Disciplinary cases corrected men far more often than women, men most often for intoxication and women for sexual transgressions.<sup>11</sup> To focus on church court trials as the goal and sum of religious discipline, however, is a narrow and misleading view and tends to miss the larger theological reasons for maintaining discipline. To do so is understandable, as the historical records of local congregations are dominated by proceedings making it appear that church life was a catalog of judicial condemnation. But these judicial proceedings must be viewed as a single, if highly visible, portion of a larger disciplinary practice that included both internal personal regard for theology and doctrine and extra-congregational standards of social behavior.

Some historians have recently explored the implication of discipline beyond that of surveillance and control. “[V]iewing discipline as social control goes only a short way in explaining its place in the lives of churchgoers,” writes Gregory Wills. “The faithful did not exercise discipline in order to constrain a wayward society. That was the task of families, communities, and governments. Churches disciplined

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<sup>10</sup> Friedman, *The Enclosed Garden*, 11, Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1785-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), and Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 203.

<sup>11</sup> Guion Griffis Johnson, *Ante-Bellum North Carolina: A Social History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1937), 450-453, Friedman, *The Enclosed Garden*, 14, Frederick A. Bode, “The Formation of Evangelical Communities in Middle Georgia: Twiggs County, 1820-1861,” *Journal of Southern History* LX (November 1994): 711-748, and Courtland Victor Smith, “Church Organization as an Agency of Social Control: Church Discipline in North Carolina, 1800-1860” (Ph.D. diss., the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1966), 206-209.

to constrain confessing saints to good order and to preserve their purity. Church discipline was not about social control but about ecclesiastical control.” The Georgia Baptists that Wills studied practiced discipline not to keep congregants segregated *from* the world but “filled their conference meetings with ‘matters of fellowship’ that established the boundaries between iniquity and purity.”<sup>12</sup> Iniquity and purity could exist both inside a church and out in the world, and congregants had to know how to negotiate those boundaries. Wills notes, most importantly, that active church discipline signaled to congregants the likelihood of salvation, and good discipline required unity. Like Mathews, he concluded, “churches that harbored an immoral member were ‘not in union’ but divided. Without discipline, they might outwardly profess unity but inwardly they were torn asunder.”<sup>13</sup>

For the faithful, and even the recalcitrant, the practice of discipline *primarily* concerned the prioritization of evangelical ideals, not the coercion of social dissenters of secular power. Essential here is that discipline expressed, first and foremost, theological and doctrinal beliefs. Infractions of each posed a threat to the integrity of a congregation. For example, a congregant who abhorred infant baptism or the tenets of Calvinism had threatened the social community as much as the drunk or the malcontent. Decades of practice, however, had provided the religious

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<sup>12</sup> Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 9, 13-14.

<sup>13</sup> Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 32-33. Robert Elder agreed with both Mathews and Wills, “one of the aims of church discipline was undeniably the maintenance of personal holiness within the context of communal purity and harmony. Robert Elder, “Southern Saints and Sacred Honor: Evangelicalism, Honor, Community, and the Self in South Carolina and Georgia, 1784-1860” (Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University 2011), 69.

methods of peaceful resolution to sins, thus creating a region-wide mood that defined acceptable social behavior.<sup>14</sup> While the disciplinary process proved a negotiation between doctrinal orthodoxy and changing social reality, it did establish that mood. In short, religion instrumentalized secular society as much as social power shaped religion.

This assertion is not to suggest that ordinary evangelicals obsessed over separation between sacred purity and worldly iniquity. In fact, for late antebellum evangelicals, the boundary between sin and salvation only vaguely resembled the boundary between congregation and “the world.” One could sin within a religious community just the same as one could be pious in public.<sup>15</sup> This distinction is important because it explains better the evangelical approach to life in the secular world that discipline defined. Southern evangelicals criticized “the world,”—indeed, criticism arose from disciplinary expectation—but they did not recoil from entering it for fear of crossing a prohibited boundary.<sup>16</sup> So while entering the world never

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<sup>14</sup> The term *mood* is borrowed from Donald Mathews. He defines it as “that invisible nexus where the individual, family, class, and society are defined and expressed.” Expressed, that is, among a “social constituency that was not quite a class—although it was first expressed as a class movement—nor quite strictly a religious mood apart from social conflict, institution-building, and class consciousness.” Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, xiv.

<sup>15</sup> Monica Najar defined the congregational understanding of spiritual life as not divided by race, class, and gender, but between the sacred and the secular, a distinction operable within and without congregations. Najar, *Evangelizing the South: A Social History of Church and State in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), and also, “The Devil’s in the Details: Revisiting the Early Baptist South,” *Journal of Southern Religion* 13 (2011): <http://jsr.fsu.edu/issues/vol13/najar.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Kenneth Startup, “‘A Mere Calculation of Profits and Loss’: The Southern Clergy and the Economic Culture of the Antebellum North,” in *God and Mammon: Protestants, Money, and the Market, 1790-1860*, ed. Mark A. Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 217-235.

became an evangelical “project,” evangelicals themselves, girded with lessons from discipline, about sin, and behavior readily and frequently drifted over the boundary between secular and sacred that they did not particularly fear.

A distinguishable guidance emerged from the practice of discipline. First, discipline fostered an aversion to violence, hostility, and confrontation. Second, discipline elevated patience and forbearance. Third, discipline insisted on maintenance of theological and doctrinal orthodoxy. The social ethic these characteristics produced stood in marked contrast to the prevailing mores of the planter class that privileged impulsive violence and the indulgence of wealth and power and the public display thereof.<sup>17</sup> Yet, the first two characteristics stood in tension with the third. Sinful practices, including challenges to orthodoxy, could be resolved, in the end, by removal or schism. The aversion to hostility and adherence to patience ensured that large and small schisms in the antebellum era remained relatively peaceful. In fact, the first two characteristics became part of orthodoxy itself, that when violated in combination with the third, produced impasses that transcended evangelical practice and behavior. At that point, evangelicals dropped their opposition to hostility, and reluctantly endorsed non-peaceful solutions to doctrinal disputes.

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<sup>17</sup> For the latest iteration of this historiographical theme, see Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover, eds., *Southern Manhood: Perspectives on Masculinity in the Old South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), vii-xvii.

Each denomination had its own peculiarities in disciplinary practice. Baptists, for instance, featured disciplinary action by the congregation of lay people, and decisions made there were rarely appealed to super-congregational clergy. Not so with the Methodists, who encouraged the settlement of disciplinary breaches by class meetings and with direct clergy involvement, not in open congregation. So, too with the German Reformed churches in the Piedmont. Friends in North Carolina, much like their Baptist neighbors, kept disciplinary action at the Meeting level. Their actions proved slower, but more comprehensive than Baptist discipline. The Moravians had perhaps the most hierarchical church structure, with centralized decision-making in the Aeltesten Conferenz, but it was far from the most authoritative, and its leaders often followed their flocks in disciplinary enforcement.

In interpreting religious discipline, we encounter an obstacle. While single church court cases or disciplinary proceedings might have encapsulated a point of doctrine, a single example rarely offers a view of the spiritual and social lessons of discipline. With this in mind, I turn now to a narrative (and brief discussion) of a variety of disciplinary proceedings, hoping, in the process, to elicit those lessons.

### **The Blackwood Baptist Cases**

Between its founding in 1852 and 1856 Blackwood's Chapel Baptist church of Montgomery County processed a typical course of disciplinary actions. The church accepted into membership fourteen individuals, some by letter and some by experience; it excluded sixteen people—several more than once. It charged one with



abuse of his wife, three with intoxication, one for striking another, one for theft and flight (a white man), seven for neglect of attendance, three for unknown reasons. All persons charged were men. The church convened seven committees to cite individuals, or decide their fate.<sup>18</sup>

William Usery's travails began in November 1852 when the church cited him for intoxication. Elders W.B. Jordan, A.W. Chambers, and Jeremiah Luther composed a committee to visit Usery and command his presence at the next month's meeting. The committee's entreaties worked, as Usery "came forward and acknowledged his fault and beg[ged] forgiveness of the church which was freely granted and the committee discharged."<sup>19</sup> The following month, Martin Baldwin "acknowledged that he had been drinking too much and was sorry for it, and hoped the church would forgive him, which was accordingly done." Later that year after drinking again, Baldwin again "acknowledged his fault and begged forgiveness from the church which was granted."<sup>20</sup> Lewis Thompson, a young farm laborer who had previously been excluded for "whipping his wife," stood alongside William Usery, also charged with drunkenness, and acknowledged "a portion of the charge and after much admonition and good advice from the moderator, were retained in fellowship."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> 1852-1856, Blackwood Chapel Baptist Church Minutes, Baptist Collection, Z. Smith Reynolds Library, Wake Forest University.

<sup>19</sup> November and December 1852, Blackwood Chapel Minutes, WFU.

<sup>20</sup> February and December, 1853, Blackwood Chapel Minutes, WFU.

<sup>21</sup> July 1854, Blackwood Chapel Minutes, WFU. Seventh Census of the United States, 1850: Montgomery County, North Carolina.

Meanwhile, a deacon of the church, Jeremiah Luther confessed “as having been provoked to willfully strike a man with a stick. The cause of which he expected much regret. On motion, Brother Luther was excused [acquitted].”<sup>22</sup>

The congregants at Blackwood’s Chapel maintained great forbearance, particularly in the repeated offences of Usery, Thompson, and Baldwin, but what all these cases have in common is the willingness of the church to keep the offender in fellowship so long as they “acknowledged” their faults, “begged” forgiveness, and accepted “admonition” and “advice.” This outcome stands in contrast to simultaneous cases of E. Skinner and Calvin Kellis. Skinner had neglected to attend meetings, whereupon the church “appointed a committee to cite him to the next conference and answer the charge.” He did not appear until June at which time he “wish[ed] to have his name stricken from the church Book.”<sup>23</sup> It was. In 1854, a long-time prominent member, Calvin Kellis, was “convicted of violating rule 12<sup>th</sup> (making & vending arduous spirits).” Like Skinner, Kellis did not beg forgiveness but “refused to comply.”<sup>24</sup> He too was excluded.

These cases suggest a key element in church discipline. They do not demonstrate a concern for secular hierarchy—as poor laborers like Lewis

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<sup>22</sup> June 1856, Blackwood Chapel Minutes, WFU

<sup>23</sup> March and June 1853, Blackwood Chapel Minutes, WFU.

<sup>24</sup> April 1854, Blackwood Chapel Minutes, WFU. Kellis had been present at the founding of Blackwood Chapel in 1852 and had served on the committee that cited Martin Baldwin in February 1854. Seventh Census of the United States, 1850: Montgomery County, North Carolina.

Thompson received more forgiveness than a planter like Calvin Kellis. Status, honor, and public reputation played no discernable part in their discipline. Repentance and submission mattered. Those who expressed a willingness to submit, publicly or privately, to the spiritual purity of the congregation received its forgiveness. Those who chose not, did not, suggesting that while the church demanded conformity, individual members maintained a considerable autonomy regarding their relationship with it. A church, however, did not endlessly forgive. Blackwood's Chapel's remarkable forbearance found its limits with Usery and Thompson. The church's primary concern, after all, was for their spiritual status, not their chronic alcoholism. As they continued to become intoxicated, Blackwood's reciprocated with a loss of patience. The appointed committee failed to find Usery to cite him, and "upon motion Brother Wm Usery was excluded from the fellowship of the church." The exclusion, however, was not meant to permanently cast him from church membership but to offer a rebuke so strong that he would reconsider his recalcitrant position. Exclusions and excommunications were always issued in hopes that the offender would eventually return. It worked, as Blackwood's "welcomed again [Usery] to fellowship of the church." But after a two-year struggle, the church expelled Brother Usery a final time in October 1854.<sup>25</sup> Lewis Thompson, interestingly, who had also been previously excluded and readmitted, did not

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<sup>25</sup> April and July 1853, October 1854, Blackwood Chapel Minutes, WFU.

receive an official exclusion, but after February 1855 attended Blackwood's no more.

### **The Brown Creek Baptist Cases**

The importance of maintaining doctrinal fellowship with one's congregation is apparent in a handful of disciplinary proceedings of Brown Creek Baptist Church in Anson County. In the early 1840s, the Baptist communion still reverberated with Antimissionary tremors. In April 1842, two cases ultimately relating to the issue of temperance reform appeared before the congregation at Brown Creek. First, John Cochran appeared and confessed to having been drunk. He accompanied his voluntary confession with an expression of "great concern and contrition on the account, and asked forgiveness."<sup>26</sup> Cochran's willingness to seek repentance and the forgiveness of the congregation led the congregation to maintain him in fellowship, but that decision required deliberation, and "his privileges [were] suspended as a matter of course." Baptists, apparently, could not abide even a regrettable sin. In April, Peter and Martha May also appeared before Brown Creek. They explained that they were members of the nearby Lawyer Spring Baptist church, but "the Wife had some years passed joined a Temperance Society at B.C. and on that account had been excluded from Lawyer Spring Church, and the Husband thinking her ill treated withdrew." In this case, honor may have propelled Peter May to action, his wife having been "ill treated," but the more serious concern the couple had was the

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<sup>26</sup> April 1842, Brown Creek Baptist Church Minutes, WFU.

doctrinal stance of their chosen congregation. The Mays requested a “full meeting of members” at Brown Creek, apparently to assess that body’s fitness for their membership. The following month, the congregation assembled and received the Mays into fellowship.<sup>27</sup>

In June, Brown Creek again addressed John Cochran’s case. He again promised to “try for the future to be more particular and that if he used spirits at all it should be principally as medicine.” Cochran, apparently infirm, slipped into a disciplinary gray area that still allowed alcohol consumption on some occasions. His attempts at reconciliation worked. The church “was agreed on account of his debility of body & of mind to return him to church priviledges which was done.”<sup>28</sup> But as if the acceptance of Peter and Martha May had marked an official confirmation of Brown Creek’s stand on the missionary/anti-missionary divide, three members, Lurancy Horn, Lucy Horn, and Joel Rushing, withdrew. The church reported “that the cause of their disaffection was that they did not like the missionary principals of our church & particularly we suppose because the church favors the Temperance reformation.” Their official withdrawal did not occur until September of that year, but when the Horns and Rushing received their dismissal, so did John Cochran. We do not know if John Cochran’s decision to reject Brown Creek was based on opportunism or deeply held principle, but apparent in his action is a desire to avoid conflict with his congregation. Indeed, the transmission of the

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<sup>27</sup> April and May 1842, Brown Creek Baptist Church Minutes, WFU.

<sup>28</sup> June 1842, Brown Creek Baptist Church Minutes, WFU.

memberships of the Mays, the Horns, Rushing, and Cochran were accompanied by very little strife, considering the doctrinal disagreements and potential personal friction at issue. Cochran's motivations likely involved both doctrinal concerns of societal importance, his individual conscience, and his body. He blended them in a fashion that preserved his personal autonomy and satisfied larger societal needs to ameliorate drinking and maintain congregational peace.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Back Creek and Deep River Friends Cases**

Quakers did not require, like the Baptists, to exercise discipline with hopes of revival. The Quaker path to salvation was contemplative and highly individualistic, dependent on nurturing the "inner light." God was not likely to pour out his spirit onto a Monthly Meeting as He might in a Methodist Church. Thus, the disciplinary thrust in the Quaker community differed a bit from mainstream evangelicals.<sup>30</sup> As a self-conscious minority, the Society of Friends in North Carolina concerned itself with maintaining strict membership rites in the community. Yet their disciplinary process mirrored those of the evangelical churches.

The Monthly Meeting for Women of the Deep River Friends Meeting is illustrative of this concern. In April 1848, having fielded the request of Samira Mendenhall to marry Nathan H. Clark, the committee reported that "they found nothing to hinder she is therefore left at liberty to accomplish her Marriage." The

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<sup>29</sup> April, June, and September, 1842, Brown Creek Baptist Church Minutes, WFU.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas D. Hamm, *The Quakers in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

Meeting appointed Matilda Stuart and Margaret Davis “to attend the Marriage and Marriage entertainment and see that good order be observed and report their care to the next meeting.”<sup>31</sup> The committee of two reported, “they attended [and] saw nothing but what was orderly.”<sup>32</sup> At the same meeting, the congregation filed complaints against two women, Polly Jeans and Lidya B. Hill for “accomplishing... marriage contrary to Discipline.” Polly and Lidya had not sought permission to marry and thus had not been “cleared.” Elva Lasand and Penelope Gardner formed a committee to call on Polly, and Matilda Stuart and Mildred Gluyes constituted the team to investigate the charges against Lidya.<sup>33</sup> In August, the committee that visited Lydia Hill reported that “she produced an offering, to this meeting, which was read and referred to next meeting,” and in September she again “produced an offering which was read and she continued under further care.” The Meeting had forgiven her and welcomed her back into fellowship. The committee dispatched to meet Polly Jeans found a less willing subject. They reported that “she not appearing in disposition of mind to make satisfaction, this meeting disowns her from being a member of our society.”<sup>34</sup> In two identical cases, the fates rested on the decisions of individuals, not the churches.

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<sup>31</sup> April 1848, Deep River Monthly Meeting (Women) Minutes, Friends Historical Collection, Hege Library, Guilford College.

<sup>32</sup> Undated, probably May 1848, Deep River Monthly Meeting (Women) Minutes, FHC.

<sup>33</sup> Undated, probably May 1848, Deep River Monthly Meeting (Women) Minutes, FHC.

<sup>34</sup> August and September 1848, Deep River Monthly Meeting (Women) Minutes, FHC.

The Quaker Meeting at Back Creek in Randolph County took a wider range of disciplinary cases. In 1840, for instance, the Meeting granted five certificates to migrate out, accepted three to migrate in, took “under care” two potential converts to Quakerism, investigated the membership status of two Quakers, and charged one man with marrying contrary to discipline and attending a muster.<sup>35</sup> The latter case involved Henry Henley, first charged in February. Phineas Nixon and Joseph Cosand formed the committee “to visit & labor with him on the occasion and report to next meeting.”<sup>36</sup> From the language of their charge, the committee’s duty was clearly not to confront Henly with the purpose of expelling him but to attempt to return him to the fellowship of the Meeting, probably with prayers and appeal to loving brotherhood. In this regard—the desire to heal rifts in the fellowship with labor—Quaker disciplinary procedure differed little from other Protestant denominations.

Nixon and Cosand did not meet with Henley in March but in April discovered “that he did not appear inclined to make any satisfaction this Meeting therefore disowns him the sd Henry Henley from being a member of our society.” As with the Baptists, the transgressor held the power to effect a reconciliation, but chose not to do so. Interestingly, the Quakers did not consider the matter settled until they had

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<sup>35</sup> January, February, March April, May, June, July, and August, 1840, Back Creek Monthly Meeting Minutes, FHC.

<sup>36</sup> February 1840, Back Creek Monthly Meeting Minutes, FHC.



presented Henley with a certificate announcing their decision. He evaded that committee until June.<sup>37</sup> The entire process had taken five months.

The following year, 1841, Back Creek witnessed a series of more severe sins unique to Quaker Meetings yet still exhibited characteristics common to evangelical discipline. In February 1841, the Meeting charged Micajah Davis, whose rite of membership had been examined the previous year (and found sound), with “joining in Political devises & associations also neglecting the attendance of our Religious meetings.” The next month, the Meeting found him “unrepentant therefore disowned.”<sup>38</sup> Nixon Henley and Barnaby Nixon simultaneously entered into an unnamed dispute and turned to the Meeting for resolution. Four men formed the committee and when they found the problem intractable, requested the addition of another man. The committee labored, with additional members, for seven more months to bring a reconciliation between Henley and Nixon. When the effort failed, in November 1841 they decided in Barnaby Nixon’s favor, stating that his “claim is just.”<sup>39</sup> The decision did not bring peace, as Nixon Henley apparently still felt aggrieved, for in January he requested permission “to sue a member of this meeting at law.” The Meeting considered Henley’s request valid, but instead of allowing him to go to law, they appointed yet another committee to alleviate the situation. For

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<sup>37</sup> April, May, and June 1840, Back Creek Monthly Meeting Minutes, FHC.

<sup>38</sup> January 1840, February and March, 1841, Back Creek Monthly Meeting Minutes, FHC.

<sup>39</sup> February, March, April, May, June, July, August, September, October, November 1841, Back Creek Monthly Meeting Minutes, FHC.

four more months they deliberated before they reported that “the matter of interest in dispute is settled...that good order was observed and the parties used moderation toward each other.”<sup>40</sup> If Nixon Henley considered himself vindicated is of no matter. The disciplinary process had proven successful because it maintained peace.

The earlier case of Micajah Davis, who had engaged in politics *and* neglected meetings, illustrates a characteristic unique to Quaker discipline—the multiplicity of charges in a single motion. This habit suggests that Quakers tended to move to discipline not immediately but after a member had time to accumulate a number of deviations. For Davis, it was both participating in politics and neglecting meetings. This apparent hesitation to act quickly meant that some Quakers faced an overwhelming number of charges. Manering Brookshire, who had become a Quaker in 1841, found himself charged in 1843 with neglecting Meetings, the “unnecessary use of Spiritous Liquors and keeping a house of ill fame.” Back Creek struggled with Brookshire despite the outrageousness of the charges, but he made no satisfaction and the Meeting disowned him in June.<sup>41</sup> Likewise, a Friend named Levi B. Horney of Deep River had neglected his meetings, deviated from plainness in dress, and attended a militia muster. For two months, a committee pleaded with him to repent, but “he not appearing to make satisfaction after term of deliberation there on this

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<sup>40</sup> January, February, March, April, July, 1841, Back Creek Monthly Meeting Minutes, FHC.

<sup>41</sup> February 1840, October, November, December 1843, February, March, April, May, and June 1844, Back Creek Monthly Meeting Minutes, FHC.

meeting disown him from being a member of society.”<sup>42</sup> Again, the process occupied the time of three committees and took four months.

Quaker discipline differed from that of evangelicals in its singular focus on maintaining the outward signs of their distinct community. Yet Quaker practice also mirrored that of their Protestant cousins. They approached discipline as a struggle that prized unity over individual consciences. They exhibited patience, and in some cases forbearance, before resorting to the drastic act of disownment. And as in evangelical cases, Quakers placed the individual member in charge of his or her own fate. Those who refused to return to fellowship did not do so. Those who begged forgiveness or “offered something” did.

### **The Irony of Orthodoxy and Change**

Statewide denominational organizations often did dictate, explicitly and implicitly, the expectations of piety and the methods for achieving disciplinary adherence. The Presbyterian Synod of North Carolina in the 1840s, for instance, added the religious instruction of slaves and the distribution of religious tracts to the duties to be carried out by the Presbyteries.<sup>43</sup> Thereafter, Synodical accounting of Presbyterian piety included successes and failures to pursue these objects. At the same time, the Presbyterians grappled with the status of Truth in the changing

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<sup>42</sup> August, September, October and November, 1848, Deep River Monthly Meeting, Minutes, FHC.

<sup>43</sup> *Minutes of the Synod of North Carolina, at their Thirty-First Sessions, 1844* (Fayetteville, N.C.: Edward J. Hale, 1845).

world. In the Pastoral Letter for 1845, Presbyterian elders expressed their fear that religion waned. They gave three reasons. First was the “indulgence of a worldly spirit, in the form of selfishness, avarice, and cupidity.” The elders drew a distinction between greed and “dire necessity” and condemned the former because it “shuts out the soul from the claims of benevolence...freezes up the channels of charity, excludes God and religion from the mind,” and otherwise hindered liberality. Second, the elders more directly claimed that

so long as Christians love their money or property more than they love the means of grace, or the souls of their fellow-men, they need not expect the Holy Spirit to give efficiency to those means of grace, either in comforting their hearts, or enlarging the church.

In these two complaints are reflected the economic prosperity and relative commercial abundance of the late antebellum decades.<sup>44</sup>

But material wealth alone did not threaten the Presbyterians. New ideas haunted them. In their third complaint, “the love of novelty and change, instability and vacillation of the mind, in regard to doctrines, institutions, and ministry of the church, must be mentioned as another growing evil, of disastrous tendency.”

Certainly these elders had in mind the 1837 schism, but this condemnation was not of a particular theological movement. They condemned a general sensibility evident in their congregations that valued all things new and discarded tradition, even in the religious realm. The elders lamented, “men, under its influence, whenever there is a

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<sup>44</sup> *Minutes of the Synod of North Carolina, at their Thirty-Second Sessions, 1845* (Fayetteville, N.C. Edward J. Hale, 1846)

protracted meeting, or a strange preacher within reach, will leave the most faithful Pastor to preach to vacant seats and empty walls.” That same spirit threatened to

drive from their homes, however comfortable, and from their fields of labor, however important and inviting, the best of men, however eminent for piety, sound in doctrine, and indefatigable in duty; for no other cause than the desire to change, the love of novelty, or the hope of having their ear tickled by the popularity of a new preacher.

The Presbyterians had encouraged protracted meetings; they had backed itinerants. The Presbyterians in the 1840s were in the process of building up their educational and publication institutions. Indeed, the first two of their three complaints rested on the modern language of the church—“benevolence” and “charity.” The new methods of evangelism, like the fact of personal wealth, did not themselves constitute sin. But they might signify it. As the elders explained,

we...caution you against all these forms and systems of error...which either exclude or undervalue the old-fashioned, but fundamentally scriptural doctrines of Original sin; total depravity; the absolute necessity of a change of heart; regeneration of the Holy Spirit; justification by the imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ; and good works, as the indispensable evidence of a man’s being in a state of grace. <sup>45</sup>

The Presbyterians had changed. They had recently embraced new methods but in pursuit of “old-fashioned” doctrine. They encouraged missionaries, Sunday Schools, and the temperance reform and made them markers of piety, thus fundamentally altering the direction of their churches. Yet, they continued to abhor

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

theological innovation. So too did the German Reformed church of North Carolina. “From each [parochial] report,” the 1844 State of Religion noted, “is uttered a wail of intense sorrow over the sins that are found in their midst.” The Classis’ diagnosis mirrored that of the Presbyterians. Members of German Reformed churches lacked motivation to maintain intellectual and doctrinal rigor that threatened

the purity of the church...The danger for our Classis is increased from the fact, that there is a lamentable want of intellectual Christian intelligence in many congregations. This is a barrier to all relish for knowledge & make it easy for errorists to entrap; and difficult for Pastors to effect favorably for the interests of the great cause of truth and benevolence, or even to raise the standard of piety.<sup>46</sup>

Without united focus on the elements of German Reformed doctrine, church members risked error and a decline in fellowship.

What caused this lack of focus? First—“a fearful tendency to drunkenness” and a “neglect of secret & family prayer.” More importantly,

[i]lberality is an evil that has been made to grow by the late [illegible] in business. Church members who profess to value the Gospel & to love the souls of men, are diseased by the canker of covetousness, which is corroding their bowels of compassion, and now they can see their brethren have need & shut their ears to the cry & close their hearts to charity saying by their actions that the love of God dwelleth not in them.

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<sup>46</sup> 1844, Reformed Church, North Carolina Classis, Minutes, Evangelical and Reformed Historical Society, Phillip Schaff Library, Lancaster Theological Seminary.

Like the Presbyterians, the German Reformed elders condemned not wealth but the “canker of covetousness” because it drove apart men and women and gave them excuses to disregard “charity,” the “love of God,” and the prioritization of their fellows’ souls.<sup>47</sup> The “purity of the church”—both its doctrine and the well being of its members—was threatened by the restlessness and novelty of the secular world.

Though small in number (1,035 members in 1844), thus limiting their ability to put resources behind institutional building efforts, the German Reformed church, because of its close connections to Mercersburg and Pennsylvania, was hardly unaware or afraid of the modern world.<sup>48</sup> They looked hopefully to revivals, funded North Carolina scholars at Mercersburg, and had tentatively invested in a newspaper (it failed).<sup>49</sup> In 1851, they followed their co-religionists in establishing a school for its members in North Carolina (Catawba College, eventually).<sup>50</sup> They too had embraced the modern world. Yet, in all denominations, the demands of that modern world upended doctrinal assumptions and elicited innovative responses, even if clergy and lay people maintained an orthodox stance. Often, shifting doctrine produced confusion in congregations about the proper way to assess sin and rebuke members.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> 1847, Reformed Church, North Carolina Classis, Minutes, E&RHS.

<sup>50</sup> 1851, Reformed Church, North Carolina Classis, Minutes, E&RHS.

Peter Harman, a member of St. Paul's German Reformed church in Catawba County, encountered such confusion in 1845. The session at St. Paul's, including the clergy and most of the elders, "decided that they (the people of color) ought to be received as members & church privileges [sic] extended to them."<sup>51</sup> Their endeavor to extend Christian fellowship to enslaved people was not as comprehensive as the Presbyterian effort; St. Paul's seems to have responded to the North Carolina Classis' 1838 resolution to afford "pews for the colored people in the house of God."<sup>52</sup> Harmon, a farmer, nonslaveholder, and elder at St. Paul's, objected.<sup>53</sup> The reasons for his objection are not known, but feeling himself outside of fellowship with his congregation, he voluntarily "left the Classis, on account of alleged indisposition," while Elder Andrew Shuford appealed Harman's objection to the Classis. The German Reformed Classis in North Carolina had not previously held a position on the relationship between masters and slaves, except for an offhand comment in their constitution prohibiting cruelty to servants.<sup>54</sup> That the St. Paul's consistory now deemed the inclusion of enslaved people in the "church privileges" as a necessary element of fellowship indicates a doctrinal innovation at work.

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<sup>51</sup> 1845, Reformed Church, North Carolina Classis, Minutes, E&RHS.

<sup>52</sup> James I. Good, *History of the Reformed Church in the United States in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Board of Publications of the Reformed Church in America, 1911), 199.

<sup>53</sup> Seventh Census of the United States, 1850: Catawba County, North Carolina, and Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: Catawba County, North Carolina.

<sup>54</sup> Good, *History of the Reformed Church*, 199.



The Classis decisively upheld the work of the St. Paul's consistory. They resolved that:

Whereas in the Providence of God, domestic slavery exists in our midst and as many professors of religion hold the relation of masters: therefore be it

1. Resolved that the duties that devolve upon Christian masters and mistresses arising out of this relation toward the bodies and souls of their servants be explained and enforced by the ministers of this classis.
2. That the ministers and elders of this Classis be required to give particular attention to the spiritual instruction and training of the servants belonging to the families under their care.
3. That wherever it be practicable, they have special preaching for their benefit and adapted to their situation.
4. That the violation of the 11<sup>th</sup> Art of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sec of Part B of the constitution, prohibiting cruelty to servants be met with they appropriate penalty.<sup>55</sup>

The appropriate penalty was not mentioned. Unfortunately, Peter Harmon's fate is unknown. Perhaps prompted by the case, the Classis elaborated on the Christian duty of masters in 1848.

1. The relation of Christian master & slave makes the part of our Christian household & that the master should give his slaves every religious advantage & discharge toward them the duty of the head of a Christian family as toward his own children.

2. Believing that slaves be part of the masters family & entitled to its religious privilege; it be enjoined on the members of our churches to have their slave children baptized, as Abraham commanded his, and that they pay particular attention to give them religious instruction & so train them up as to make it an eternal blessing to their souls to have been members of a Christian family.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> 1845, Reformed Church, North Carolina Classis, Minutes, E&RHS.

<sup>56</sup> 1848, Reformed Church, North Carolina Classis, Minutes, E&RHS.

Thus, what had been unarticulated a decade before, by 1850 had become doctrine for the German Reformed church in North Carolina. Disciplinary action was often the result of such swift changes.

The Methodists experienced a similar matter of confusion, as church disciplinary guidance rapidly evolved to keep up with the changing world. Elam Gaither of Iredell County distilled liquor for which his Methodist class meeting charged him in 1847.<sup>57</sup> The apparently simple case produced complications because of the shifting Methodist doctrine and discipline on the permissiveness of spirituous liquors. Historian Courtland V. Smith has pointed out that Gaither's case, which his class meeting turned over to the Iredell Circuit Quarterly Meeting for resolution, arose right when the Methodist Conference was rethinking its stand on alcohol. Their latest published discipline declared that if "disorders occurred on the premises" of a member who distilled liquor, that member should be expelled. As Smith noted, "Because distilling itself was not forbidden, and because 'disorder' and 'premises' were not clearly defined, variations in interpretation and enforcement developed throughout the Conference."<sup>58</sup> Apparently, Gaither's crime was not technically a violation of discipline, but he committed it in the context of social—and ministerial—pressure to quash intemperate behavior of all sorts. It should be noted

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<sup>57</sup> Gaither's case is recorded in the November 13, 1847, and April 8, 1848 minutes of the Iredell Circuit, UMC Records.

<sup>58</sup> Courtland Victor Smith, "Church Organization as an Agency of Social Control: Church Discipline in North Carolina, 1800-1861" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, 1967), 78 and 104.

that Elam Gaither was not an easy target. Holding \$1,300 in wealth in 1850, with a wife and eight children, Gaither stood solidly in the propertied ranks of Iredell County. Further, his brother, Enos, and brother-in-law, Perry Tomlinson, had served the Iredell Circuit as Sunday School superintendents, firmly entrenched in the Methodist hierarchy.<sup>59</sup>

Gaither's case came before the Iredell Circuit primarily because the published Methodist disciplines were unclear about the exact nature of his crime. The national Methodist Conference, in 1790, had deleted the activities of "buying and selling" ardent liquors from its objections (while drinking them remained a prohibited activity.) The Methodist Protestants, interestingly, after they split from the Methodist Episcopal conference, added a complete rejection of the "fatal custom" of drinking, except for supervised medicinal application, but the Methodist Episcopalians continued their ambivalence.<sup>60</sup> In 1840, the New York and New England Conferences attempted to restore "buying and selling" to the list of objectionable actions, and North Carolina's representatives added to the successful thwarting of the proposal. In that same year, in response to the Duplin Temperance Society's

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<sup>59</sup> On the Tomlinson and Gaither family connections, see <http://www.eaves-klinger-genealogy.info/p723.htm> (accessed June 20, 2012). Seventh Census of the United States, 1850: Iredell County, North Carolina. Also, March 1844, Minutes of the Iredell Circuit, Duke.

<sup>60</sup> *Constitution and Discipline of the Methodist Protestant Church* (Baltimore: John J. Harrod, 1830), 139-141.

request for an agent, the Conference declined to appoint one, citing a statutory inability to do so.<sup>61</sup>

Gaither's case turned not on legalisms of the published discipline but the larger dangers of the culture of drinking: disorderliness. Underlying the published discipline was a general rule that whatever caused disorder was a sin, whether explicitly delineated in the discipline or not. The re-animated crusade against liquor (discussed below) more zealously condemned participation in the liquor trade as disorderly, no matter the circumstances, and Elam Gaither fell victim to the onslaught. In 1848, the Quarterly Meeting found him guilty of "violating the rule which forbids the doing of harm & evil of every kind in the matter of making & vending spirituous liquors."<sup>62</sup> Unfortunately, the records do not indicate if the Methodists rebuked him, expelled him, or if he sought forgiveness.

The case did, however, cause the North Carolina Conference to clarify their stance on distilling. In 1848, they resolved that any member engaged in distilling ardent spirits—where that activity did not produce disorder—be privately rebuked. Those who distilled liquor "where drunkenness, or intemperate drinking and disorder are connected therewith on the premises or in the near neighborhood...the offender should immediately be brought to trial." Expulsion, presumably, followed.

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<sup>61</sup> Matthew Simpson, ed., *Cyclopedia of Methodism: Embracing Sketches of its Rise, Progress, and Present Condition* (Philadelphia: Everts & Stewart, 1878), 852-854, 1840, Minutes of the North Carolina Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, UMC Records.

<sup>62</sup> Iredell Circuit, Quarterly Meeting for April 8, 1848, UMC Records.

Gaither might not have been bothered in 1830, but in 1848, his activity was worthy of punishment and correction. The Conference penetrated, yet again, the deep concern evangelicals maintained about drinking: “for the reason that it tends that way, is of bad example, and contrary to Christian charity and prudence, so that it cannot be allowed without a bar to Christian fellowship and a stumbling block dangerous to morals.”<sup>63</sup>

Religious discipline orbited around theological doctrine. Evangelicals prioritized the fundamental elements of Protestant theology, including Christ’s sacrifice and the purity required to approach salvation. Religious discipline’s primary purpose was to uphold those elements. *How* it did so changed throughout the late antebellum period, as the methods of discipline strove to keep abreast of social reality. In the process of disciplinary change, the practical meaning of pious behavior shifted in uncertain and confusing fashions.

This tension created an irony of orthodoxy and change. At the heart of the tension lay a desire to adapt to the world while maintaining Truth. In the process, disciplinary methods themselves became the basis of orthodoxy. For instance, at the same time that the Presbyterians initiated their “mission to the slaves,” they excoriated the emerging abolitionist movement. In 1835, the North Carolina Synod “*Resolved Unanimously,*”

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<sup>63</sup> 1848, Minutes of the North Carolina Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, UMC Records.

That the sayings and doings of Abolitionists,--their bitter and indiscriminate denunciation of Southern Christians,--their attempts to flood the South with publications of an incendiary character, fraught with consequences most disastrous, tending to interrupt and destroy all friendly intercourse between the different Sections of the Union, and to disturb the peace and tranquility of the whole Southern country exhibit indications of mind, surcharged with indiscretion and fanaticism, incompatible with the feelings of humanity.<sup>64</sup>

Though a standard counterblast to abolitionist fervor, the language of this resolution reveals the social and religious behavioral expectations of evangelicals: denunciations “bitter and indiscriminate,” the tendency to “destroy all friendly intercourse,” and “to disturb the peace and tranquility” of the countryside. These alleged or perceived actions stood in contrast to the proper workings of the disciplinary process—prayerful negotiation, patience, avoidance of hostility, and an expected peaceful outcome. Though southern Presbyterians hardly agreed with the political objectives of abolitionists, what had made them truly intolerable was their hostile temperament. And like the drunk man, whose sin was not drinking itself but placing obstacles between himself and salvation, the Presbyterians found the abolitionists sinful because they were willfully “incompatible with the feelings of humanity.” The Antimission Baptists agreed. Burwell Temple, a preacher and editor of the Raleigh-based *Primitive Baptist* newspaper, described and condemned the contentious “neighbor,” one who is “proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmising,

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<sup>64</sup> *Minutes of the Synod of North Carolina, at their Twenty-Second Sessions, 1835* (Fayetteville: Edward J. Hale, 1836). The resolutions also repudiated “sympathy and cooperation” with abolitionists, and noted that the “movements of Abolitionists” had already had a demoralizing effect in the south.

perverse disputing of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth.”<sup>65</sup> Strife threatened the peace throughout the antebellum period, but the practice of discipline facilitated a useful equilibrium to accommodate the needs of individuals, church doctrine, and social constituencies. Religious people did not shy from strife, but they defined it primarily as a sin to be avoided.

### **The Wesleyan Episode**

The Wesleyan episode of 1847-1851 evolved and escalated. And it did, in its later years, become a political eruption. Yet it began early, stoked by the introduction of a religious style that rejected peace and embraced hostility in a way that mobilized and awakened evangelicals to the abolitionist threat. The resulting conflagration revealed the tension between the social behavior prescribed by religious discipline and the ability of religion to shape social behavior.

Between 1847 and 1851, the Ohio-based Wesleyan Methodist Church attempted to make inroads into the slave states. These Wesleyans preached an explicitly anti-slavery gospel.<sup>66</sup> They came to North Carolina at the invitation of a splinter group of Methodists who separated from the church at its 1846 schism. The missionaries dispatched to Guilford County, Adam Crooks and Jesse McBride,

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<sup>65</sup> Burwell quoted 1 Timothy Chapter 6, verse 4-5. In the editorial this is from, he repeated the condemnation about “doting questions and strifes of words” numerous times. *The Primitive Baptist* (Raleigh), vol. 13, no. 14, July 28, 1849. Original in possession of Dirk Allman, Charlotte, North Carolina.

<sup>66</sup> Many Methodists adopted the term “Wesleyan” during the pre- and post-Civil War eras, including a number of sects that harkened to mid-eighteenth century teachings. Wesleyans in this context refers specifically to the denomination founded in New York and Ohio by Orange Scott in 1843.

attempted to organize a Wesleyan circuit, but by 1850, could not preach without being confronted by violent mobs. Local officials charged them with distributing anti-slavery literature, and when convicted by a Forsyth County jury, were forced to flee the state in 1851.<sup>67</sup>

The most telling doctrinal difference was not that between the Wesleyans and their proslavery opponents in North Carolina, but the difference between the Guilford splinter group in North Carolina and the Allegheny Wesleyans from Ohio. The core group of Guilford Wesleyans formed in 1846. Daniel Wilson had been unhappy about the schism between the northern and southern branches of the church over slavery. The Guilford Circuit of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MEC,S) expelled Wilson in May 1846 with an unusual distemper.<sup>68</sup> Wilson elaborated on the desires of his co-religionists in a letter to the *True Wesleyan* newspaper, requesting a copy of the Wesleyan discipline. He claimed,

there are many Methodists with whom I am personally acquainted, who together with myself, feel so conscientiously scrupulous on the subject of

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<sup>67</sup> Adam Crooks' memoir contains the most complete account of the Wesleyan episode. E.W. Crooks, ed. *The Life of Rev. A. Crooks, A.M.* (Syracuse: Wesleyan Methodist Publishing House, 1875.)

<sup>68</sup> May 2, 1846, Guilford Circuit Quarterly Conference, UMC Records. The citation reads "Resolved that it is the opinion of this Conference that Daniel Wilson, in withdrawing from the M.E. Church South, has thereby placed himself out of the pale of the Church & consequently has no right legally to preach or act as an ordained minister and be it further resolved that the preacher in charge, make known his withdrawal at every appointment on Guilford Ct." A Daniel Wilson appears as a regular attendee at the Quarterly Conference meetings from 1835. He would have been thirty years old at the time he split from the MEC,S.



slavery that we cannot hold fellowship with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.<sup>69</sup>

For these Guilford residents, the formation of a body to practice “true and vital religion” required them to form a body without slaveholders. To fellowship with those who did not practice the same discipline would be a sinful action. As some Methodists considered slaveholding—and slavery itself—a sin, those who held slaves could not be countenanced in the same way an unrepentant drunkard or recalcitrant could not stay in fellowship. Though Wilson expressed sympathy with the general Wesleyan antislavery cause, his focus was not emancipation, abolition, or even ministry to enslaved people. It was to fellowship with other nonslaveholders. Wilson’s assertion in 1847 sounds like abolitionist “comeouterism,” but in the North Carolina context, it is not an articulated political position but an organic expression of religious experience.<sup>70</sup> The Guilford Wesleyans stopped short of abolition. This point is important. That a religious constituency aimed to form their own fellowship—even one at odds with the prevailing social norms—is in itself not odd nor out of place. Similar divisions over doctrine had a well-established history in the region, and at a national level.

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<sup>69</sup> Roy S. Nicholson, *Wesleyan Methodism in the South* (Syracuse, N.Y.: The Wesleyan Methodist Publishing House, 1933), 27-28. The *True Wesleyan* published the letter anonymously, but Crooks later identified Wilson as the author.

<sup>70</sup> When Daniel Wilson again became the chief spokesman for the North Carolina Wesleyans after Crooks and McBride departed in 1851, he began to adopt the language of the American Missionary Association and the “comeouters,” expressed moments of sympathy for some slaves, and even advocated integrated Sunday Schools. See Stanley Harrold, *The Abolitionists and the South, 1831-1861* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 94.

Adam Crooks and Jesse McBride, the Allegheny Wesleyans missionaries, sought other goals. The Wesleyan discipline included regular and uncompromising hostility to other Methodists. Crooks' (passive-aggressive) sermons emphasized the *wholeness* of Methodist doctrine. By using the word "wholeness," Crooks intentionally signaled an innovative approach to scriptural interpretation at variance with general practice in North Carolina. Thus, as Burwell Temple had warned, Crooks acted "proud, knowing nothing...doting on questions and strifes of words." *Wholeness*, of course, meant a doctrine that included an antislavery element.<sup>71</sup> McBride landed in North Carolina one year after Crooks, and where Crooks had been circumspect, McBride's sermons were fearless in attacking slaveholding as a heresy.<sup>72</sup> They both delighted in identifying and antagonizing Methodists who owned and abused slaves, especially Methodist ministers. Crooks, for instance, identified James Lumsden, a Methodist Episcopal Church minister on the Guilford Circuit, as having "tied up his slave, whipped him a while, and then

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<sup>71</sup> Crooks' emphasis on *whole* doctrine is most clear in a sermon he delivered in March 1848 and is discussed in E.W. Crooks, ed., *Life of Rev. A. Crooks, A.M.* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Wesleyan Methodist Publishing House, 1875), 28. When Crooks said *whole* doctrine, he specifically invoked the anti-slavery elements of the Discipline created by Francis Asbury for American Methodists early in his career. Crooks cited Robert Emory, *History of the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York, 1843).

<sup>72</sup> Crooks regarded McBride as saintly and pure, thus contributing to the righteous ferocity of McBride's sermons. The difference between the two may be seen in two reports submitted to the *True Wesleyan*, Adam Crooks, "From the South," March 8, 1851, and Jesse McBride, "From North Carolina," April 12, 1851. Denominational historian Roy Nicholson characterized McBride as "a bit more daring in his preaching." Nicholson, *Wesleyan Methodism in the South*, 45. On Wesleyans and perfectionism, see Randall J. Stephens, "'Ohio Villians' and 'Pretenders to New Revelations': Wesleyan Abolitionists in the South, Perfectionism, and the Antebellum Religious Divide," in *Southern Character: Essays in Honor of Bertram Wyatt-Brown*, ed. Lisa Tendrich Frank and Daniel Kilbride (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), 73-88.

prayed for him; then whipped and prayed for him, whipping and praying alternately.” He readily condemned Presbyterian slaveholders, of whom he wrote sarcastically “(See how those Christians (?)—love SLAVERY.)”<sup>73</sup> Their practice had a hard edge that belied their disciplinary aspirations of brotherly love and peaceful fellowship.

The difference here is that for the general population in the Piedmont, simple fellowship among nonslaveholders was socially acceptable and unexceptional. Quakers had done so. So had some Antimission Baptists.<sup>74</sup> The confrontational Wesleyan style of impatience and sarcasm was not ordinary or acceptable. One offhanded comment illustrates this tone. In 1851 when Crooks attempted to expand his ministry into Montgomery County, he found a sympathetic audience in the Forks community. His presence aroused the local squirearchy who turned out to demand his departure. In the confrontation, someone referred to O. Hulin, a friend of Crooks, a Wesleyan, and a native of Montgomery—“Oh—we have nothing against Mr. Hulen.”<sup>75</sup> Everyone tolerated the desire to fellowship separately; they had no toleration for the introduction of strife.

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<sup>73</sup> Both quotes in Crooks, ed., *Life of Crooks*, 32. The last sentence of this quotation is a sarcastic rendering of Tertullian’s quote, “See how they [Christians] love one another.”

<sup>74</sup> Gilliam’s Church, an Antimissionary congregation in Alamance County had expelled a member in 1836. April 30, 1836, Minutes of Gilliams Church, North Carolina Baptist Historical Collection, WFU.

<sup>75</sup> Crooks, *Life of Crooks*, 82-83. The haphazard editing of Crook’s account makes the identity of the accuser unclear, but it may have been Samuel Christian. For more on the Hulin family, see Victoria E. Bynum, *The Long Shadow of the Civil War: Southern Dissent and Its Legacies* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

The Allegheny Wesleyans inadvertently sparked denominational competition as well. Coincidentally, Crooks and McBride's mission took place in the immediate wake of the Methodist Protestant (MP) Church's efforts to expand their sect into the exact same region. The Methodist Protestants in the late 1840s looked similar to the Methodist Episcopalians in terms of doctrine and denominational activity, including their strong proslavery stance. The only significant difference was the greater presence of laymen in the Methodist Protestant church hierarchy. The Methodist Protestants had been a small sect of 3,452 members located primarily around eastern Halifax County where they originated. In 1845 they founded the Methodist Protestant Missionary Society to expand the denomination and eyed Guilford County, where they had an outpost at Liberty Methodist Church, as a promising field of work. Led by Reverend Alson Gray, the MPs set to the work of building a circuit; congregating people into meetings; establishing meeting grounds; appointing class leaders, exhorters, and licensed local ministers; and establishing the church's discipline—the same work Crooks and McBride did a year later.<sup>76</sup> The Methodist Protestant effort met some success. They likely gained from the Episcopal schism, offering a new home for disaffected members. Among those disaffected Methodist Episcopal members the Methodist Protestants targeted were Daniel Wilson's Methodists. The Methodist Protestants initially cooperated with Crooks' and

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<sup>76</sup> J. Elwood Carroll, *History of the N.C. Annual Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church* (Greensboro, N.C.: McCulloch & Swain, 1939), particularly 26-62.

Wilson's Wesleyans.<sup>77</sup> They shared meeting grounds and church space and occasionally worshipped together, presumably in anticipation of swelling their own ranks.

When the Methodist Protestants fully realized Crooks' and McBride's antislavery doctrine and the apparent success they had with recruiting new converts, the relationship turned sour. A telling episode occurred on an unspecified date when Adam Crooks approached an outdoor meeting being held by Alson Gray. "I do not think," Gray added extemporaneously into his sermon when Crooks appeared, "it right for the martins to build the nests and the blue-birds to come and steal them away."<sup>78</sup> Thereafter, according to both the Wesleyans and the MPs, Gray and his cohort became the implacable foes of the Wesleyan effort. The North Carolina Methodist Protestant Conference issued a condemnation (though squarely anti-abolitionist) of the Wesleyans in 1849, well before civil courts took notice of Crooks and McBride.<sup>79</sup> The Wesleyans in turn claimed prizes with the addition of former Methodist Protestant Reverend William Anderson to their ranks and a camp

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<sup>77</sup> Crooks, *Life of Crooks*, 25.

<sup>78</sup> Nicholson, *Wesleyan Methodism in the South*, 40-41.

<sup>79</sup> It read "That in view of some efforts that are being made under the spurious name of Wesleyan Methodism to introduce and enforce the doctrine of Abolition of Slavery in this State by the agency of certain men who have dared to assume the name of Christian ministers that it is the duty of all the ministers and preachers of this Conference to show their unqualified disapprobation of all such associations and not to assist or participate in any of their mischievous and wicked and lawless efforts to subvert order, peace, and prosperity of the citizens of our State. Resolved, furthermore, that those evil and arch agents in this mischief, McBride, Crooks, and Bacon, should not be permitted to assume any part of any religious service performed in any of our charges or preaching places." Carroll, *History of the N.C. Annual Conference*, 34. The members of the mob in Montgomery County had been aware of this condemnation. Crooks, *Life of Crooks*, 82.

meeting in Alamance County in which half of the attendees came from the Methodist Protestant church.<sup>80</sup> Not until the next year, 1850, did the Wesleyan cause in North Carolina become a major source of public political crisis. But by 1850 the MPs perceived a decline in the Wesleyan movement. Methodist Protestant missionary W.H. Wills reported in late 1849 that he believed the Wesleyan growth had reached its limit, and was satisfied that its appeal and strength faded.<sup>81</sup>

Wills perceived correctly. Wesleyans claimed 275 members in North Carolina in late 1849.<sup>82</sup> Methodist Protestant advance in the upper Piedmont between 1845 and 1850 fueled the statewide denominational increase of 735 members.<sup>83</sup> The Wesleyans had grown, but the MPs had grown larger. Neither rate of growth was extraordinary among Protestant denominations. And as a comparison, in a population of approximately 553,028 white people in the Piedmont in 1850, nearly 20,000 were Baptist (Missionary and Antimissionary), about 8,745 Presbyterians, and about 13,000 adhered to the Methodist denominations.<sup>84</sup> Against these

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<sup>80</sup> Nicholson, *Wesleyan Methodism in the South*, 36, 49.

<sup>81</sup> Carroll, *History of the N.C. Annual Conference*, 34.

<sup>82</sup> Nicholson, *Wesleyan Methodism in the South*, 40. A census of Wesleyan members is difficult to compile, this mention in Nicholson being the only assessment I have seen that includes a hard number. He also counted 111 members in Grayson County, Virginia. Crooks himself later estimated a membership of nearly 600, but the number seems optimistic. Daniel Wilson, in 1856, reported 213 members. Harrold, *The Abolitionists & The South*, 197 fn28.

<sup>83</sup> Carroll, *History of the N.C. Annual Conference*, 62. A sign of Methodist Protestant's rapid growth in Guilford County can be found in Nicholson, who noted that the MP congregation at Sandy Ridge had risen from four to 174 members since the arrival of Alson Gray in 1844.

<sup>84</sup> This estimation of population and census of religious people is taken from conference minutes, national yearbooks, and church histories.

numbers, the Wesleyan appeal is put in perspective at 275. Their success in converting souls was limited, although their success in alarming North Carolinians was more far reaching.

In this Wesleyan episode we see how the ideal of discipline manifested in public life. Ultimately, the Wesleyan gospel triggered a hysterical and violent political reaction. Yet the expectations for social order arising from theological orthodoxy, congregational peace, and non-confrontational interactions are apparent. Southern evangelicals derived these expectations from the desire to act and to be as in a state of grace, not sin. The threat of abolition proved an explosive theological and social issue, but evangelicals carried their expectations into other public realms, with just as much cultural consequence.

### **The Temperance Reformation**

Discipline provided a bridge for many evangelicals to embrace the “temperance reformation.” The imperative to improve individual souls by providing a nurturing environment blended neatly with the larger reform effort to purify the social and political world by eliminating the problem of alcoholism. Religious doctrine sometimes conflicted with the secular temperance effort and few denominations established corresponding temperance societies. The differences do reveal the limits of both religious and social action and a continuing divide between congregational and worldly aspirations. But more often, churches facilitated the entrance of their members into the world of social reform. The Lutherans effectively

summarized the position in an 1855 Synodical resolution against making, vending, and selling liquor: “When the immorality of any business is placed beyond the possibility of doubt, it is the duty of all Christians to frown upon every attempt to license such traffic or crime.”<sup>85</sup>

Churches’ embrace of the “temperance reformation” is illustrative of how ordinary evangelicals approached the changing matters of the secular world. Temperance was a unique category of the benevolent impulse because it, unlike education and missions, did not contribute directly to the institutional strength of denominations. And temperance, unlike the building of schools or publishing networks, edged ever more closely to an articulated political stance in the secular world. Across denominations, many clerics did indeed resist the blending of sacred methods with the secular world, resulting in the appearance of an ambivalent approach to political power; yet many, if not the majority of, evangelicals supported ecclesiastical and individual participation in secular efforts to restrict the manufacture and consumption of alcohol. Churches might have equivocated over the appropriate authority to resolve sin, thus blunting their political potential, but the similarities between ecclesiastical and secular remedies to alcohol overshadowed the differences. The conflation of belief, doctrine, and behavior helped bring the alleviation of sin and the secular movement for moral reform into

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<sup>85</sup> G.D. Bernheim and George H. Cox, *The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod and Ministerium of North Carolina* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1902), 80.



one social act—the expression of “middle class values.” In this way, southern evangelicals exerted indirect influence on the political world.

Churches, as discussed above, considered the chief problem with alcohol to be a problem of sin. Vending it, even in an orderly fashion, as Elam Gaither discovered, and drinking it, produced and promoted barriers to salvation. “Evil,” the Methodists called it, and classed the “selling or using of intoxicating liquors as a beverage” alongside “neglect... impudent conduct, [or the] indulging sinful tempers, or words.”<sup>86</sup> In 1844 the German Reformed judged of intemperate members—“that their crime will exclude them from the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>87</sup> Alcohol abuse remained a sin to churches because its use prevented people from behaving in a manner designed to achieve salvation. It was, after all, a “spiritual” concern.

Nonetheless, temperance societies flourished, nurtured by churches. The Presbyterians took the first organized stand when the Orange Presbytery created “A Society for the Suppression of Intemperance” in 1826 and later urged all churches in its charge to form temperance societies.<sup>88</sup> The Baptist State Convention and the Moravians most wholeheartedly endorsed the creation of temperance societies

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<sup>86</sup> 1840, Minutes of the North Carolina Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, UMC Records, *Journal of the Nineteenth Annual Session of the North Carolina Conference at its Session Held in Greensboro, 1856* (n.p.: n.p., 1857).

<sup>87</sup> 1844, Reformed Church, North Carolina Classis, Minutes, E&RHS.

<sup>88</sup> Robert Hamlin Stone, D.D., *A History of Orange Presbytery, 1770-1970* (Greensboro, N.C.: Orange Presbytery, 1970), 83. Apparently, the Orange Presbyterians copied their name from the pioneering temperance group, the Massachusetts Society of the Suppression of Intemperance, created in 1816.

within congregations. Beginning in 1833, the Baptist State Convention, simultaneous to the development of other benevolent enterprises, recommended that “immediate efforts be made to form Societies in all our churches and neighbourhoods [sic], and by example and every lawful means, to put a stop to the destructive practice of intemperance; and to be careful to avoid all arguments that will prejudice the minds of those that are taken captive by this snare of the devil.” In this part of the endorsement, the language of discipline is present; the sin of intemperance lay in drink’s ability to psychically stand between an individual, God, and his fellows. Non-doctrinal language, however, seeped into the report: “They [The committee on Temperance] deem this Society to be worthy of the patronage of all religious and philanthropic individuals, especially when they consider the happy effects of it in reclaiming many of our fellow men from the destroying monster, Intemperance; and restoring them to the bosom of their families, and to the respectability of society.”<sup>89</sup> The sensibility of liberality [discussed in Ch.1] is present here, with its implications of Christian morality in the secular world.

But the great concern of this passage has shifted subtly from the sin and disorder of intemperance to the social and public consequences of intoxication. Not the soul, but the “bosom of their families,” no doubt loving and warm, and the “respectability of society,” were now in the balance. These concerns for the physical safety of the domestic circle mirrored the rhetoric of the larger temperance reform

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<sup>89</sup> *Proceedings of the Third Annual Meeting of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina* (Fayetteville: Printed by Edward J. Hale, 1834), 17-18.

movement. By the 1820s, national reform efforts focused on the danger intoxicated men posed to families, largely because those same reformers were themselves in the avant-guard of middle-class families. Secular reformers were not without religious language themselves, as the calamity of drunkenness risked not just the precious nuclear family but Godly foundations on which it was built.<sup>90</sup>

The State Convention's action remained a recommendation, not a directive, even if the Convention reiterated the call on a yearly basis. Associations variously implemented the cause. The wealthy and influential Buelah Association in Caswell County waited until 1845 to bring up temperance, and not until 1852 did they form a committee to formally advocate the creation of temperance societies.<sup>91</sup> The Pee Dee Association proactively pushed the formation of temperance societies beginning in 1841. In that year they reported that Bethel Baptist Church (the home church of the Lilly family) had thirty members. Temperance, like the state of religion in general, underwent undulations over the years. The Pee Dee Association believed that in 1847, "Temperance Societies and Sabbath Schools are on the decline within our bounds," but two years later discovered "that the temperance reformation is rapidly advancing in many places in our Association."<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Scott C. Martin, *Devil of the Domestic Sphere: Temperance, Gender, and Middle-class Ideology, 1800-1860* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008), 20-25, and Ian R. Tyrrell, *Sobering Up: From Temperance to Prohibition in Antebellum America, 1800-1860* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1979).

<sup>91</sup> 1845 and 1852, Beulah Baptist Association Minutes, WFU.

<sup>92</sup> 1841, 1847, and 1849, Pee Dee Baptist Association Minutes, WFU.

Despite the Baptists' frequent enthusiasm about temperance societies within their churches, they despised their members' participation in particular anti-alcohol movements. Even some Baptist State Convention churches and Antimission churches could agree on their dislike of the Sons of Temperance. The Sons, founded in 1842, catered to reformed drinkers among the working classes in urban areas, yet it spread quickly among the rural people of North Carolina. At its high point, in 1851, the Sons of Temperance claimed twelve thousand members in North Carolina. Daniel Whitener claims that the Sons met obstacles to growth because of its democratic reputation.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, one of the primary functions of the Sons (and the Daughters of Temperance) was the collection of dues to provide insurance and death benefits to impoverished members. In 1851, Baptist associations in the northwest Piedmont split apart over the Sons of Temperance. The schism developed when the Mountain Baptist Association (in western Wilkes and Ashe Counties), connected to the Antimissionary Baptists, announced its rejection of the Sons. At the same time, the Missionary-friendly Lewis Fork Association expelled two members for membership in the Sons.<sup>94</sup> Baptist historian G.W. Paschall concluded that Lewis Fork objected to temperance societies because of the threat the latter posed to "personal liberty"—perfectly in keeping with the long-held concerns of the

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<sup>93</sup> Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1946), 29-34.

<sup>94</sup> M.A. Huggins, *A History of North Carolina Baptists, 1727-1932* (Raleigh: The General Board Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, 1967), 155-156, and George Washington Paschall, *History of North Carolina Baptists*, Vol. II (Raleigh: The General Board North Carolina State Baptist Convention, 1955), 307.

Primitives. The primary stated reason for objections to the Sons, however, was that it was a secret society, complete with special gestures, handshakes, and symbols. Baptists were touchy about secret societies—particularly the Masons—and campaigned relentlessly against them. Thus, Baptist objection to the Sons of Temperance combined the primacy of church law with hostility to secret societies.<sup>95</sup>

Not all denominations rejected the Sons of Temperance; the Sons collaborated with the Moravian Young Men’s Missionary Society to build a meeting hall in downtown Salem, with the approval of the church, in 1849.<sup>96</sup> Not even all the Baptists objected. Seventy members of the Lewis Fork Baptist Association withdrew and formed the Taylorsville Association so their members could continue in membership with the Sons.<sup>97</sup>

In 1831 the North Carolina Temperance Society organized to coordinate the rapidly growing number of local temperance groups and associated with the American Temperance Society. A convention of temperance societies from the western Piedmont met in Salisbury in 1839 and reported twenty-one societies with 3,599 white and 240 colored members. Daniel Jay Whitener examined the delegates to the Salisbury convention and discovered that most of them were preachers,

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<sup>95</sup> Paschal, *History of North Carolina Baptists*, Vol. II (Raleigh: General Board of the Baptist State Convention, 1930), 305-311.

<sup>96</sup> C. Daniel Crews and Richard W. Starbuck, *With Courage of the Future: The Story of the Moravian Church, Southern Province* (Winston-Salem, N.C.: Moravian Church in America, Southern Province, 2002), 281-282.

<sup>97</sup> Huggins, *A history of North Carolina Baptists*, 146.

doctors, or professional men.<sup>98</sup> This developing vanguard of temperance, before the 1850s, consisted of individuals from the ranks of the wealthy and the poor; professionals and rural people; men and women; and black and white. They were what Ian Tyrrell called “improvers”; “ambitious and upwardly mobile men...working to create a society of competitive individuals instilled with the virtues of sobriety and industry.”<sup>99</sup>

Ordinary evangelicals interacted with secular temperance societies at regular meetings. Secular temperance society membership included a public pledge of abstinence, regular debates and addresses, and after 1840, participation in parades and other displays. In three ways, secular temperance societies resembled congregations. First, members who violated their pledges risked dismissal from the organizations. Second, the focus of their efforts was the reform of individual and of society by means of persuasion. Only in the 1850s did advocacy of legal prohibition become a goal of North Carolina temperance reformers. Finally, temperance experienced highs and lows of enthusiasm over the antebellum period. The late 1830s and early 1840s appear to have been one peak of temperance activity while the years 1850 and 1851 saw another rise in temperance zeal.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Daniel Jay Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina*, Bruce Stewart seconds this assessment of the convention in “‘The Forces of Bacchus Are Fast Yielding’: The Rise and Fall of Anti-Alcohol Reform in Antebellum Rowan County, North Carolina,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 87 (July 2010): 310-338.

<sup>99</sup> Tyrrell, *Sobering Up*, 125-131.

<sup>100</sup> Everything in here is from Daniel Jay Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina, 1715-1945*.

Ordinary people worked public temperance activity into regular routines. For instance, farmer and Quaker Thomas Hunt of Guilford County recorded his attendance at monthly meetings throughout 1845 and 1846, occasionally held in conjunction with Quarterly Meetings, though he never commented on their content.<sup>101</sup> Jennie Speer, the daughter of a Surry County farmer and a Methodist in search of perfection, went to a temperance meeting on Christmas Day in 1847 and noted “[w]e had several interesting lectures and six persons gave their names to the temperance pledge.” Likely her father, Aquilla, a farmer and Methodist elder organized and spoke at that particular meeting. Three years later, Miss Speer attended a Sons of Temperance meeting where a speaker, Phillip L. White, electrified her.

His speech far exceeds anything I have ever heard on the subject of temperance. The Sons all looked so independent and happy that for once I was glad that I had a brother and father whose names were enrolled among the brave Sons of Temperance.

The Sons experience moved Jennie to apply for membership in the Daughters of Temperance, who “initiated” her in an “affecting” ceremony in late January 1851. Jennie’s sister, Ann, a sixteen-year-old student at the Jonesville Academy, was likewise inspired by the Sons and composed these lines:

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<sup>101</sup> August 3, September 7, October 5, November 5, 1845, March 14, and April 5, 1846, Emsley Burgess and Thomas H. Hunt papers, SHC.

Hail noble band, thy cause divine,  
Encircles all the human race—  
In every land in every clime,  
Thy deeds of charity we trace.  
Deliver us from a galling chain,  
Whose fetters bind—whose iron sway,  
Enslaves our friends—to thee we look,  
And hail the first grey peep of day.  
The mother's sigh by thee is hushed,  
The orphan's low and bitter wail,  
The widow's tears are stanch'd that gushed,  
On brothers then, we bid thee hail!<sup>102</sup>

Like the Baptist State Convention before her, Ann had redefined the problem of intemperance away from the distraction of sin and toward the danger to domestic order where the family, not the soul, was at stake.

The secular appeal to domestic order had implications for evangelical action in the sphere of public morality. It conflated the sin of intoxication and the domestic disorder of alcoholism, thereby tacitly sanctioning secular social action even while strict church doctrine caused denominational hesitancy.

### **Indirect Influence**

The evangelical community was far from unified on a doctrinal approach to the secular world. But the majority of laity and clergy did approach it by active participation in the temperance reform. Denominations never mobilized their members to direct political action, and thus, evangelical reformers did not form a

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<sup>102</sup> Allen Paul Speer and Janet Barton Speer, eds., *Sisters of Providence: The Search for God in the Frontier South (1843-1858)* (Johnson City, Tn.: The Overmountain Press, 2000), 42, 56-57, 71-72.



political bloc. Historians have interpreted this apparent aversion to political action as a reaction to the political contest over slavery. As a way to oppose abolitionists who made evangelical antislavery arguments, southern religious people eschewed politics of all types.<sup>103</sup> Yet, southern religious people's approach to slavery as a partisan cause mirrored their approach to temperance. Southern churches expressed their political will regarding slavery indirectly through the cultural and institutional action of the "mission to the slaves." That way they could prioritize both institution building and the enacting of faith. The temperance reform did not obviously offer a way to build denominations, but faith could still be enacted through temperance advocacy, thus having an indirect influence on politics.<sup>104</sup> The approach to secular politics is absolutely ambivalent, but in practicing discipline, evangelicals entered the world where—if not politically articulated—their concerns for peace, domesticity, and sobriety became elements of the cultural conversation in the 1850s that had significant political consequences.

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<sup>103</sup> Samuel S. Hill, Jr., *Southern Churches in Crisis* (New York: Holt, Rinehard and Winston, 1966), and John Boles, *The Irony of Southern Religion* (New York: P. Lang, 1994). See also Laura Rominger Porter, "The Losing War Against 'Sin' in the Upper Southwest, 1861-1877," paper delivered at The Society of Civil War Historians, Biennial Meeting, 2012, Lexington, Kentucky.

<sup>104</sup> The evangelicals in this study certainly moved closer to rectifying sacred and secular movements, but they fall somewhat short of the partisan nature of Richard J. Carwardine's Methodists in, "Methodists, Politics, and the Coming of the American Civil War," in *Methodism and the Shaping of American Culture*, ed. Nathan O. Hatch and John H. Wigger (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001). See also Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997).

CHAPTER IV  
THE PRIVATE FACE OF DISCIPLINE

The public face of discipline does not offer a complete view of how belief shaped the lived experience of ordinary evangelicals. To complete the picture, the internal workings of discipline on evangelicals must be examined. People adhered to discipline through individual action. Though they did not articulate their actions as disciplinary, individuals made efforts to seek peaceful relationships devoid of hostility and strife, in accordance with the lessons of discipline. Discipline manifested in individual action did not always result in articulated behaviors visible to congregational record but in internal ways—decisions about relationships and the world—only apparent to the individual. John Flintoff and Strong Thomasson each reveal the shaping influence of disciplinary adherence in their diaries. This perspective on adherence, however, does not reveal strict conformity with the three lessons of discipline. Though in general, they both aspired to peace and orthodoxy, the manifestations of their adherence lay almost entirely in the realm of the social and economic decisions they made.

## John Flintoff's Competency

On April 27, 1841, John Fletcher Flintoff noted in his diary, "Yesterday I arrived here safe from Orange County, N.C."<sup>1</sup> "Here" was his uncle John Robson's cotton plantation just outside of Natchez, Mississippi. Flintoff, seventeen years old, had migrated from North Carolina to oversee his uncle's farm, and presumably, set himself up as a planter. He never explicitly stated his reasons for migrating, but most of his extended family had made the trek. If personal ambition drove him or if he had simply been swept along with his family is not known. But Flintoff did embark upon a familiar path designed to bring prestige and prosperity to southern planter families. But like many poor migrants to the cotton South, he failed in his aspirations.<sup>2</sup> John Flintoff did not enjoy a good relationship with his uncle. They fought often, and though the young overseer hinted that the cause of their friction was pecuniary, it is apparent that the two could not exist outside of a state of strife. Flintoff attended college in Mississippi and oversaw on other men's plantations before he returned, frustrated, to Orange County. It was the first of his two tenures in Mississippi, and his second attempt included a new wife and slaves. He still failed and limped back to North Carolina in 1854 with a sick wife, fewer slaves, and a wagonload of despair. The root of John Flintoff's unsettled existence lay not in his

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<sup>1</sup> April 27, 1841, John F. Flintoff Diary, Office of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina. (Hereafter, Flintoff Diary.)

<sup>2</sup> Edward E. Baptist, *Creating an Old South: Middle Florida's Plantation Frontier before the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 19, and Charles C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), chapter 4.

financial failure (though that certainly swayed him) but because his initial ambitions clashed with his desire to adhere to doctrine and pious goals.

In Mississippi John Flintoff discovered a perpetual concern for evangelicals, the tension between pious aspirations and the strife inherent in worldly life. Flintoff did not draw boundaries between the two and did not withdraw from the world. Instead, he revised his earthly expectations, not to the dictates of economic and social ambition but to the needs of his soul. Flintoff is perhaps not the obvious choice to follow a discussion of church discipline. He did not flaunt church doctrine. He did not disagree with his fellow congregants. He never, as far as can be discovered, had any disputes with his congregations, though he likely underwent examination to receive letters of dismissal. But this pattern makes Flintoff an almost perfect example. The majority of religious adherents did not encounter church courts. Like most religious people, John Flintoff employed the dictates of discipline in his daily life.

The Flintoffs had always been on the margins of the wealthier Robson family. All of the elder generation hailed from England, and when the Robson family decided to migrate to America, sister Mary Robson, who had married William Flintoff, went along, in 1818. They entered through Wilmington and settled in Orange County. The brothers William and Edward Flintoff invested in land and a mill on New Hope Creek, and they all ingratiated themselves into the existing Orange County gentry of Hogans and Johnstons. William Flintoff died in 1826,

leaving his widow and three children dependent on a third Robson brother, John. The third Flintoff child, John Fletcher, was but two years old, and thus raised entirely by his mother, who never remarried. John Flintoff's older brother William died in the Mexican War and their elder sister Jane joined the Robson migration to Mississippi.<sup>3</sup> Mary's dependency on her Robson relatives continued with John Flintoff's subservience to them in Mississippi. Otherwise, little is known about the Flintoff family in Orange. Young John recorded his date of conversion as October 4, 1833, three days after his tenth birthday.<sup>4</sup> Under what circumstances he found religion is not known.

Flintoff's disappointment in Mississippi began almost immediately. When he arrived at his uncle's Prospect Hill plantation, expecting a job "managing" the place, he discovered that Uncle John had already hired an overseer.<sup>5</sup> Flintoff instead attended school and in the summer took up management of H.J. Bass' plantation near Fort Adams.<sup>6</sup> He considered the land good, but absent "good preaching," he considered the "society irreligious."<sup>7</sup> In 1842, Flintoff finally assumed the position of

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<sup>3</sup> Biography of John F. Flintoff in Jeannine D. Withlow, ed., *The Heritage of Caswell County* (Winston-Salem, N.C.: Caswell County Historical Association, 1985). See also Stewart Dunaway, *George Johnston and William Robson, Mill History* (n.p.: LULU.COM, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> October 1, 1843, Flintoff Diary.

<sup>5</sup> July 1, 1841, Flintoff Diary.

<sup>6</sup> Henry Joel Bass (1814-1870). Bass family from Fayetteville. H.J. married a Margaret P. Robson <http://familytreemaker.genealogy.com/users/b/r/o/Eleanor-M-Brown/GENE1-0008.html>

<sup>7</sup> July 1, 1841, Flintoff Diary.

overseer on Uncle John's plantation and finished the year in his family's good graces.<sup>8</sup> Flush with cash, Flintoff yearned to attend college, apparently in an effort to advance his ambitions.

John Flintoff had not noticed the change—or at least he did not note it in his irregular diary entries—but his time in plantation country had sapped his religious convictions.<sup>9</sup> Only when he entered Jackson's Centenary College in 1843 and its nurturing atmosphere did he recognize the difference. "I fear I have miserably backsliden," he noted at his enrollment, "though God in his goodness to me has not yet entirely deserted me."<sup>10</sup> Surrounded by the pious community at the Methodist school and mentored by the college president, Flintoff regained his spiritual focus. "[M]y Soul has been revived much," he wrote after seven months of study and prayer. "I have enjoyed the privilages of attending clas=meetings & associating with Christian Friends. Praise God for those blessings[.]"<sup>11</sup> The young man's semester at Centenary reinforced his sensibility of contentedness in pious living. Pious living required a combination of personal and social habits of peace. Assurance arose not just from satisfaction with proper deportment of self, but in how one interacted with his or her peers.

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<sup>8</sup> January 17, 1842, Flintoff Diary.

<sup>9</sup> On religion in the quickly developing Mississippi frontier, see Randy J. Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks: Evangelicalism in Mississippi, 1773-1876* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> January 5, 1843, Flintoff Diary.

<sup>11</sup> July 28, 1843, Flintoff Diary.

John Flintoff tested this conviction upon his return to Prospect Hill in the summer of 1843. Uncle John fell ill that August, and young John took over management of the plantation. Where Flintoff had always been on the margins of the family, now he sat at its center, and he felt the burden. "Give me O! Lord a word in season," he proclaimed in a traditional prayer for the weary. "[M]ay I be enabled to act toward all me Relatives in that manner that becomes me situated as I am, & enable me to be contented with whatever Thou see best to bless me with."<sup>12</sup> In his cry for relief, one senses a conscience pricked by irritable relations, or at least a young man profoundly discomfited by his position.<sup>13</sup>

Uncle John returned to his post at the head of his family that October, just after young John's twentieth birthday. Flintoff, despite his earlier discomfort, felt deposed, or at least humiliated, as he steeled himself with a prayer to "act towards my Relations & friends in that manner that becomes me situated as I am."<sup>14</sup> By the end of the month, boasting new clothes and having devoted himself to study, he returned to Centenary. He arrived to hosannahs and a spirit of love he had not noted at Prospect Hill.<sup>15</sup> He soaked up what he could not on the plantation—a regular

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<sup>12</sup> August 15, 1843, Flintoff Diary.

<sup>13</sup> John and his Uncle's frequent strife was by no means unique. William K. Scarborough, in fact, noted the transient nature and hostile relationships particular to Lower South plantations. William Kauffman Scarborough, *The Overseer: Plantation Management in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966).

<sup>14</sup> October 7, 1843, Flintoff Diary.

<sup>15</sup> October 13, 16 and 28, 1843, Flintoff Diary.

routine of sermons, quarterly meetings, and class meetings, some of which the Centenary students held in Flintoff's own room. Judge Shattuck, the college's professor of laws, sermonized on the admonition to "keep the God of our Fathers." Certainly Flintoff reflected in that moment upon the temptations of spiritual loneliness subjected upon him at Prospect Hill. Altogether, Flintoff considered his stay at Centenary to be "glorious times."<sup>16</sup>

Flintoff's revival continued in the spring of 1844. He rededicated himself to the service of God and stored up reserves of spiritual strength for his inevitable return to his family, expecting "that when I shall have to face again the unfriendly world I may conduct myself in a provident[?] & God-like manner."<sup>17</sup> By the end of his term that summer, Flintoff's diary entries filled with prayers, exaltations, and calls for self-improvement. He left that July with a prayer for "God to direct me for I calculate an difficult trial, turmoils & deprivations."<sup>18</sup>

Upon graduation, Flintoff assumed management of John Thornton's plantation just east of Jackson. In this location, Flintoff found himself isolated from white society. The enslaved people who surrounded him may or may not have been Christian, but it mattered not to the overseer. He aspired to better society—not only

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<sup>16</sup> November 5 and 18, December 10 and 17, 1843, Flintoff Diary.

<sup>17</sup> May 12, 1844, Flintoff Diary.

<sup>18</sup> July 25, 1844, Flintoff Diary.



suitable for a white man, but suitable for a Christian.<sup>19</sup> His sojourn among the slaves lasted only two months, at which time he returned to Prospect Hill. There he found two cousins, Wesley Robson and Joseph Johnson, just arrived from North Carolina. The reunion pleased him, but not for long.<sup>20</sup> When cousin Joseph departed for New Orleans, Flintoff exclaimed, "Oh! That I may ever live holy & acceptably before God." Cousin Wesley stayed at Prospect Hill but began immediately to indulge himself with the social routines of the planter--"Cos Wesley has gone to Woodville with two ladies & Uncles carriage to be back shortly[.]" John disapproved, "I want to get into business again not idle I feel grateful to God for providing a plenty for me."<sup>21</sup>

The cousins' interlude only reinforced for Flintoff the conviction that a particular style of work and spiritual satisfaction required one another. Uncle John's offer of yet another managerial position made him happy. He attended class meetings and sermons again with regularity and noted, "I feel encouraged to press forward in the cause of Christ."<sup>22</sup> That spring Flintoff's reverie ended when John Robson suddenly fired him. He did not state the reason, though he evidently felt wronged, as he "left it with a clear conscience," which he attributed to "walk[ing] uprightly."<sup>23</sup> Uncle John hired him back the next week, but a month later, Flintoff left

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<sup>19</sup> September 15, 1844, Flintoff Diary.

<sup>20</sup> November 3 and 5, 1844, Flintoff Diary.

<sup>21</sup> November 16, 1844, Flintoff Diary.

<sup>22</sup> January 12, 1845, Flintoff Diary.

<sup>23</sup> May 6, 1845, Flintoff Diary.

Prospect Hill in a huff.<sup>24</sup> He returned to his uncle yet again that August to work “to keep clear of expenses,” but the experience left him “rather low spirited because I am making nothing.”<sup>25</sup> Flintoff then went to John Robson’s Dry Bayou plantation to work for the balance of the year.

Flintoff’s unsettled work routine continued when he got free of Uncle John and went to work for Stephen Duncan, an enormously wealthy planter, at Duncan’s Holly Ridge Plantation, some miles away from Prospect Hill.<sup>26</sup> Flintoff was grateful for the work—more toward God than Dr. Duncan—but he soon sank into a deep depression. He only made two painful entries into his diary that year. In May he noted, “Have heard no preaching since I left Natchez. Sister has left Uncles & gone to N.C. I was opposed to this but of course said nothing.”<sup>27</sup> He was again succumbing to the sin of isolation, alone among slaves and without access to preaching or meetings, his dire deepened by the departure of his only friendly relation. Duncan did not renew Flintoff’s contract, and the later “Left Holly Ridge for Natchez out of employment have not enjoyed Religion this year managing negros & large farm is

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<sup>24</sup> June 3, 1845, Flintoff Diary.

<sup>25</sup> August 6, 1845, Flintoff Diary.

<sup>26</sup> On Duncan, see Martha Jane Brazy, *An American Planter: Stephen Duncan of Antebellum Natchez and New York* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006).

<sup>27</sup> May 24, 1846, Flintoff Diary.

soul destroying.”<sup>28</sup> The phrase “soul destroying” neatly summarized Flintoff’s despair, caused not by economic failure but by spiritual desolation.

Flintoff not only left Holly Ridge, but Mississippi altogether. John returned to his mothers’ farm in Orange County and concerned himself primarily—at least his diary entries seem to suggest—with the acquisition of slaves. Between 1848 and 1849 he purchased at least two young black men and pleased himself by paying for one before the entire amount was due, thus escaping indebtedness.<sup>29</sup> At Christmastime in 1849, Flintoff recorded a visit to “Miss Mary M Pleasants who visited My Mothers family last June[.]” Mary Pleasants lived in Caswell County and how she knew John’s mother is unknown, but John found himself “pleased with the young lady[.]”<sup>30</sup> His courtship continued into the Spring of 1850 when Flintoff made a telling observation: “visited Miss Mary Pleasant in Caswell Co better satisfied in young ladies company than I used to be when deprived of Society of both sexes.”<sup>31</sup> Flintoff alluded to his time in Mississippi, near family but distant in meaningful relationships. Steeped in the love of his mother and sister, he found happiness in society in general, and Mary in particular. The two married at the Caswell County home of Micajah Pleasants on June 5, 1850.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> December 15, 1846, Flintoff Diary.

<sup>29</sup> April 15, October 1, December 7, 1848, and December 26, 1849, Flintoff Diary.

<sup>30</sup> December 26, 1849, Flintoff Diary.

<sup>31</sup> February 15, 1850, Flintoff Diary.

Flintoff continued to concern himself with the acquisition of enslaved people—he gained one by marriage when Mary’s father offered a twelve year old girl as a wedding gift. For the next few years, he took special notice on his birthday (October 1) to contemplate his place in the world. In 1850, on his twenty-seventh birthday, he noted the competing interests of spiritual satisfaction and economic ambition: “I am too hasty & impatient in business matters & oftimes pray god to enable me to be more moderate I intend to overcome this.”<sup>33</sup> Flintoff’s aspirations for domestic happiness and his aspirations for success as a slaveholder had caused discord in his life, and he turned to God for mediation and moderation.

In the spring of 1853, John’s mother sold her farm and moved to Mississippi, accompanied by John’s sister. John and Mary spent the balance of the growing season in Orange County, but in the autumn of that year, he loaded Mary and eight enslaved people into his wagon and headed again to Natchez. He had secured, yet again, a post managing at Prospect Hill for his uncle. (He evidently hoped to profit also by renting his slaves to his uncle.) If he harbored hope for a new start in Mississippi, certainly it was dashed before the first month passed. He wrote on January 20, 1853, “My health is not good too much fatigued with laboring traveling & exercize of mind disappointed in life.”<sup>34</sup> In Mississippi, old habits returned. “[L]ow

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<sup>32</sup> June 5, 1850, Flintoff Diary.

<sup>33</sup> October 1, 1850, Flintoff Diary.

<sup>34</sup> January 20, 1853, Flintoff Diary.

spirited...Uncle John he is unkind to me,” Flintoff wrote in early 1853.<sup>35</sup> Later that year, Mary gave birth to their first son, Johnny, in the same week that Uncle John discharged Flintoff and yellow fever raged in the neighborhood. He soon regained his position at Prospect Hill—“because I can do no better”—while Mary suffered from mastitis. In November the trouble between Flintoff and his uncle came to a head, and the young man burst out,

Discharged by Uncle Jno. & treated shamefully, brutally nothing but aggravation & distraction & abuse he will no pay me my wages tho rich & can command money out of a house & home For family & negroes put them in old house near the Stone tresling in God for protection. This has been the most unhappy time of my life rather work for my daily bread than to live this way oh! God deliver me.<sup>36</sup>

Flintoff’s lament revealed a great deal. The strife between John and his uncle had indeed been pecuniary. But Uncle John had not only delivered young John a personal slight, but in his miserliness revealed a standard of behavior—that of an arbitrary aristocrat—that his nephew found abhorrent. Flintoff had once aspired to that status, but now he rejected it—not because he failed, but because the social behavior required stood in stark contrast to his own growing appreciation for the ethics of evangelical life.

The cry about working for his daily bread, however, is perplexing. He had worked at Prospect Hill and had worked hard. His oversight of the plantation had

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<sup>35</sup> April 15, 1853, Flintoff Diary.

<sup>36</sup> November 20, 1853, Flintoff Diary.

not been accomplished by leisure by any means. With this cry, Flintoff appears to have recognized that the life of a cotton planter demanded participation in behavior unbecoming a Christian. Flintoff could not find satisfaction as part of a patriarchal network, but rather, determined to constrain his aspirations to himself and his immediate family. By moving his white and black family to the “old house near the Stone tresling,” he delivered his family (including slaves) not only from Prospect Hill, but into the hands of God, as if representing his final rejection of youthful aspirations.

Flintoff still had to endure Mississippi for almost another year. He found work for himself and his slaves on the plantation of Robert Tickell, some fifty miles south of Natchez. In moving his goods, he noted wearily “nothing to feed my horse with my Soul is disquieted almost tired of my life.”<sup>37</sup> In his torment, exiled from his mother and surrounded by sickness, he appealed, “Lord help me to stand fast & see as Moses did the Salvation of God.”<sup>38</sup> His tenure at Tickell’s lasted until August 1854, whereupon he sold off two sick slaves, boarded a riverboat with the rest, and headed east. His annual birthday review found him and his family trudging through Stokes County, North Carolina, begging milk for his sick wife and son. “May I live to provide for my family.”<sup>39</sup> In his despair, he had identified a new aspiration.

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<sup>37</sup> November 23, 1853, Flintoff Diary.

<sup>38</sup> February 27, 1853, Flintoff Diary.

<sup>39</sup> October 1, 1853, Flintoff Diary.

John Flintoff never drew a direct line between his religious and his earthly aspirations. Following him from 1854 in North Carolina until the outbreak of Civil War does not lead to clear narrative points at which he made decisive turns away from economic strife toward religious happiness, or eschewed aristocratic choices in favor of middle-class ones. But by 1861, the direction of his life as a yeoman farmer had become apparent. Flintoff continued to work hard, and avoidance of debt and acquisition of land and slaves always remained prime concerns. He purchased land from his father-in-law just east of Yanceyville and he missed his mother. He settled into the life of a yeoman farmer, growing tobacco and corn; hauling crops in his wagon; toiling alongside slaves in fields and groves; tending to a chronically ill wife; and baptizing, raising, and burying new children. His contentedness was a dawning sensibility. In 1857 he lamented the distance between himself and his own family but rejoiced that "I feel as tho I had many friends" among which he now lived.<sup>40</sup> In 1859 an accident while logging shocked him into a realization of the role God had played in his recent life. A tree fell near him and his slaves and killed two of his horses. "Kind Providence is good to me," he reflected on his fortune. "I am the more resolved to serve him better been trying to do this many years oh help me to prove faithful to the end."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> December 25, 1857, Flintoff Diary.

<sup>41</sup> January 17, 1859, Flintoff Diary.

Flintoff attended church and evidently counted members of his congregation his friends. But he never wrote about them and how their society contributed to his own sense of happiness. Nevertheless, his Methodist church became an ever-growing element of his life. In December, 1859, he wrote, “Some members of the church have asked[?] me to be Class Leader.” He felt unease about the honor, but with the Lord’s guidance and several months’ deliberation, he accepted.<sup>42</sup> He began to regularly attend Quarterly and Circuit meetings and subscribed to the North Carolina *Christian Advocate*, the newspaper of the North Carolina Methodist Conference.<sup>43</sup> Yeomanry, therefore, presented the surest path to salvation.

Not until after the Civil War did Flintoff begin to articulate his satisfaction with agricultural and religious life. Yet his antebellum career represented a stellar example of religious concerns shaping social life. John Flintoff’s conception of happiness depended on the presence of a nurturing religious environment—not just the status of his own soul, but the state of his relationship with other Christians. This practice was adherence to discipline, even if Flintoff never expressed doctrinal disagreement with his congregations. He desired to live in harmony with his family and peers. He discovered in Mississippi that his aspiration to planter status directly conflicted with his disciplinary ideal. Aristocratic arrogance, the elite styles of leisure and ease, and physical isolation from society that life on subsidiary plantations required all conspired to create a state of personal strife for Flintoff.

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<sup>42</sup> December 25, 1859, September 25, 1860, Flintoff Diary.

<sup>43</sup> October 6 and 28, 1860, Flintoff Diary.



When he readjusted his earthly aspirations and found them in accordance with expectations for a pious life, he achieved self-satisfaction. In North Carolina as a yeoman farmer, Flintoff found peace with a focus on his nuclear family, the ability to control his income and finances, and a settled community of religious people who recognized his evangelical talents.

### **Strong Thomasson's Balancing Act**

The son of Methodist local preacher, Strong Thomasson grew naturally into the habits of a Christian. He did not record a conversion experience or speak of a time before he found God; he presumably had always been saved. By the time the twenty-three-year-old began writing his "Book of Remembrance," he was intelligent, curious, and familiar with the socio-religious landscape of Yadkin and upper Iredell Counties. His home church was Aylesbury Methodist Episcopal, but he did not go there exclusively. He regularly attended sermons at Macedonia, and Flat Rock ("Flatrock"), a Baptist Church. At Aylesbury, Thomasson attended class meetings and Sunday School classes, and sang in a choir.<sup>44</sup> He also enjoyed regular attendance at Methodist Protestant, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Quaker services.

Strong thoughtfully critiqued many of the sermons he heard and the preachers he saw. He expected preachers to exhibit certain standards of education, reserve, and clarity, and he did not shy away from passing positive and negative

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<sup>44</sup> Paul D. Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman: The Diary of Basil Armstrong Thomasson, 1853-1862* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), 4, 32, 167, 174, and 242. [Hereafter Escott, ed., *Diary*.]

assessments, often with a great deal of levity. His favorite style of sermon was a short and plain one, which he considered “the right kind of sermons for the common people.”<sup>45</sup> By plain he did not mean trite—he engaged best with sermons that presented then proved an argument—but rather ones that made a simple a theological point. Most preachers Strong frequented shied from hellfire and sermonized in thoughtful and lively tones. He disapproved of “Mr. Briam,” who “preaches mildly, and uses but little energy,” while he commended Mr. Wood, who “preaches with energy.”<sup>46</sup> Thomasson’s favorite preachers were John Gunn, a Methodist Episcopal, Quinton Holton; Methodist Protestant; and Zachariah Adams, a Baptist. His comments on Holton’s preaching indicate the priority he placed on content rather than style. He preached doctrines new to me, and contradicted the preaching of many learned divines. He says ‘We are not sinners by nature’! Many say that all men are sinners by nature, the Rev. H says it is not so; and I am [of] his opinion.” He later commented that, “Holton can preach if he is ugly.”<sup>47</sup> Of the Reverend Joseph R. Cheek, Strong wrote, “I do not remember that I ever heard this text used before. I gained a few new ideas from Mr. C’s sermon.”<sup>48</sup> Isaac Avent, a preacher at Masadonia, regularly dazzled Thomasson even if his sermons

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<sup>45</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 139.

<sup>46</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 95-96.

<sup>47</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 10, 94.

<sup>48</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 77.

occasionally were “tedious” or had not “contained any new ideas.”<sup>49</sup> After an impressive sermon by John Gunn, he quipped, “the Gunn shot us all.”<sup>50</sup>

Thomasson did not refrain from criticizing preachers. “Edward[s] preached a short & dry sermon, --then tried a few of the members for not attending church, and left.”<sup>51</sup> His favorites were not immune from criticism; “Adams spoils his preaching with the old Baptist tone, or ham rather.”<sup>52</sup> On another date he noted “one Tom Poindexter tr[ie]d to preach but he could not come it,”<sup>53</sup> and “Rev. John Webster, a Baptist minister, tr[ie]d to preach.”<sup>54</sup> Thomasson believed a preacher must be educated. He criticized the young Reverend James Minish’s sermon, stating, “If he had been educated he might have been of great use to the church, but as it is he can only exert quite a limited influence.”<sup>55</sup> Thomasson did not hesitate to criticize points of theology and doctrine. He laughed at a Reverend Carter for mistakes in his sermon.<sup>56</sup> Of another preacher, the Reverend G.W. Brown, “said in his preaching if I understood him rightly, that the love of sin once killed in the soul never returned!

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<sup>49</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 195-204.

<sup>50</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 45.

<sup>51</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 44.

<sup>52</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 49.

<sup>53</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 67.

<sup>54</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 77.

<sup>55</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 129. See also 57.

<sup>56</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 176.

Poor man! to fall back on that long since exploded doctrine.”<sup>57</sup> His criticism and comments point not only to Thomasson’s complete rejection of Calvinism, as might be expected of a Methodist, but his interest in rigorously updated doctrine.

Strong Thomasson eagerly attended the services of other denominations. He twice attended Presbyterian sermons and frequently listened to Baptist preachers.<sup>58</sup> Though he considered Baptists themselves rather clannish, they seemed to populate his view of the landscape. Of their preachers, he considered the Reverend Dr. Parks “the ablest.”<sup>59</sup> Thomasson harbored a keen interest in the Society of Friends, and he approached them with the usual humor, “Heard a Friend or Quaker preach. He said some very good things, but it was a long time *between draws*.”<sup>60</sup> One another date he noted,

I and Mary went to the Quaker’s monthly meeting at Hunting Creek Church. The congregation was not very large. The Rev. Martin, a Quaker minister, talked interestingly on the peculiarities of their church, giving reason why they discard Baptism, the Sacraments, etc.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 57.

<sup>58</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 31, 93, 11, 282.

<sup>59</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 282.

<sup>60</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 67.

<sup>61</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 105.

He even saw Ann Benbow preach and noted, “she gave us, as I think, very good advice.”<sup>62</sup>

A feisty and playful desire to engage others in discussing doctrinal differences drove Strong in his interest in other denominations. Of particular interest to him was baptism and how others practiced it. “Not many months since I conversed with a member of the Quaker Church,” he wrote in early 1856, “who told me the reason why their church did not believe in baptism is, because it used (they say) a tipe of the ‘Holy Ghost’ which was to, and which *did* desend on the ‘Apostles,’ Acts II, 4, and that it (Baptism) was there done away, as the scripture was then fulfilled so far as to baptism.” But Strong disagreed and he cited Peter’s admonition to “repent and be baptized every one of you” as justification for individual baptism. The difference caused him no hard feelings toward Quakers, but his response exhibited a defensiveness. Strong claimed that “the Apostles, notwithstanding some of them ‘were unlearned and ignorant men,’ knew as much about this matter as the most learned of our Quaker friends.”<sup>63</sup> Yet he turned around and said of Baptists, “I can’t see for the life of me, how the Baptists can conceive that Baptism is essential to Salvation. Where is their scriptural proof?” Strong speculated that the “proof” could be found in Mark 16:16 but argued that the passage was applicable only to John, not

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<sup>62</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 280.

<sup>63</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 143.

Christ.<sup>64</sup> Thomasson however, did not press the issue to the point of tension between himself and others. In fact, he reported having left a camp meeting sermon by Billy Garner “as I chose not to hear him talk about Baptism and other churches,” preferring his ministers to preach the gospel, not rail against his co-religionists.<sup>65</sup> In short, Strong Thomasson wielded a keen and informed interest in doctrine. He never entertained unorthodox positions and discouraged doctrine-based hostility, yet at the same time enjoyed doctrinal debate. He was his own agent in religious affairs, and as his walkout on Billy Garner demonstrated, Strong’s religious faith took precedence in his enactment of social behaviors.

In March 1860, the elders at Aylesbury Methodist Church appointed Strong Thomasson to the position of Class Leader. In that role, Strong would have been expected to shepherd a group of congregants by meeting with them regularly to discuss religious progress and offer rebuke to individuals for sinful behavior. This latter element was the first stage in the disciplinary process. The potential for confrontation in a position of leadership unnerved the young man, as he explained how he felt, “like I needed leading myself tha[n] I do like leading. I’m too blind, and if I know not the way, as I should, how shall I lead others therein?” He considered his own faith sound enough, but doubted his ability to lead others. “[W]ill the sheep follow? Some will, others will not, or at least very reluctantly, frequently straying

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<sup>64</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 142.

<sup>65</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 149-150.

from the fold, and generally at a great distance behind.” He feared most those who drank, noting that

it sometimes happens, on a publick day at least, that we see members of our church not among the sober qui[e]t men of the crowd, but with the drunken rabble, at the tale end of some liquor cart, just where the devil wants them to be. now, what should be done with such members? They say by their actions—which is the loudest kind of saying—that they are not followers of Christ, that they have gone over to the ranks of the enemy. If they *will* suffer the devil to lead them ‘captive at his own will,’ why not dismiss them from the church?<sup>66</sup>

He reluctantly accepted the role of Class Leader but never recorded conflict resulting from it. This passage reveals a great deal about Strong’s view of religious discipline and social behavior. He was a strict disciplinarian—insisting on one occasion that a man who desired forgiveness for lying be denied because of insufficient evidence of repentance.<sup>67</sup> Sinners, “by their actions,” signaled a non-rigorous maintenance of faith and thus a conscientious rejection of God. Strong insisted on affirming and signaling salvation by daily practice of religious belief. The chief practice Strong affirmed was sobriety and constant warfare against liquor.

Strong hated drunkenness and expressed his hatred through membership in temperance organizations and condemnation of drunken behavior. He likely learned this behavior from his father, who regularly preached temperance sermons around

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<sup>66</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 270-271.

<sup>67</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 174.

Hamptonville.<sup>68</sup> Strong habitually attended temperance sermons and lectures and read Charles Deems' *The Ballot Box*.<sup>69</sup> In 1855, while working as a clerk in a store in East Bend, he and some friends joined the Providence Temperance Society after attending a meeting hosted by Aquilla Speer. His convictions hardly needed reinforcing, but he was "moved" in 1859 when he witnessed the death of a violent old drunk, Denis Dinglar. Dinglar remained quiet for several hours before his passing, tacitly indicating that he died without God. But worse, Strong noted, "No efforts were made, that I know of to prolong his life. All seemed willing for him to depart, as it was thought he never would be any better."<sup>70</sup> Dinglar had chosen "king Alcohol" over the Kingdom of Heaven, and thus, chose to die separated from God, friends, family, and the assurance of salvation.<sup>71</sup>

Strong considered the scourge of alcohol to be not just a spiritual problem but also a social problem. "How long—O how long will the people continue to 'lay up for themselves wrath against the day of wrath?'"<sup>72</sup> He made conscious decisions to stay away from functions likely to be flush with liquor. He skipped tax-collecting day at Jim Green's place because of its rowdy reputation: "I dont go to Greens when I can

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<sup>68</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 200.

<sup>69</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 15, 51, 24.

<sup>70</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 228-229.

<sup>71</sup> On death rituals, see Craig Thompson Friend, "Little Eva's Last Breath: Childhood Death and Parental Mourning in 'Our Family, White and Black,'" in *Family Values in the Old South*, ed. Craig Thompson Friend and Anya Jabour (Gainesville: The University Press of Florida, 2010), 62-85.

<sup>72</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 128.



stay at home or go any where else.” He noted in disapproval that “they had no less than two fights, and that one poor wretch, Bill Foster, was taken off to jail.”<sup>73</sup> He avoided communal events such as barn raisings and corn huskings that threatened liquor.<sup>74</sup> Those he did attend, and those he hosted, were strictly temperance affairs, evident by the lack of local enthusiasm. “Prepared the *goodies*,” he wrote of a husking at his house in 1856,”but no one came to help us.”<sup>75</sup> Thomasson clerked at an 1857 election and noted with relief that the “sixteen gallons of liquor” provided for treating did not last, and “the Town was, when I left after the poles were closed, unusually calm.”<sup>76</sup>

He linked the waste of spirituous liquor to ignorance and attendant social consequences. Once, lamenting low female participation in a temperance society, he lamented, “our females generally are raised up in stupid ignorance, hence they are not aware of the extent of their influence, and of the good they might do were they to engage heartily in the temperance reform.”<sup>77</sup> And a year later, he noted that “if the money that is anually expended in the trafic of rum, tobacco, & coffee, was added to the School fund what a great blessing it would bring upon our people, where as it

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<sup>73</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 177.

<sup>74</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 182.

<sup>75</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 183.

<sup>76</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 178.

<sup>77</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 68-69.

now only adds to the cup of their misery and wretchedness.”<sup>78</sup> Early in the spring of 1859, when supplies of corn lagged, he complained that

notwithstanding the scarcity of breadstuff many are boiling up 4 and 5 bushels of corn a day, converting the ‘staff of life’ into the vilest of the vile, and dealing it out to their neighbors. Such men are a curse to the land they lie in. Instead of feeding the hungry, and clothing the naked, some of them will take the last peck of corn from a family of starving children, and give their drunken father in exchange a quart of nasty liquor. Remember, O man! that for all this God will bring thee into judgment.<sup>79</sup>

With this outburst, Strong’s evangelical objection to liquor blended with a moral critique of society based on a middle-class sensibility. He readily equated drunkenness, poverty, and filth in an animalistic fashion. “How can I describe the scene?” he asked at one muster day.

Imagin[e] 50 half famished hogs in a lot, throw them an ear of corn, see the rush and bustle—the stronger over powering the weaker—and all together making a hideous noise, and you will have a faint idea of the scuffle, to day, around the tin cup that contained the liquor. How disgusting!<sup>80</sup>

He considered poor people to be bound by filth and sin. After a rained-out funeral, he judged a

‘shower bath,’ ... would, no doubt, do some of our unwashed neighbors a vast amount of good, as the large drops of pure cold water might remove the

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<sup>78</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 128.

<sup>79</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 230.

<sup>80</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 128.

scales and dirt which have for years been accumulating on their filthy persons, open the pores of the skin and cool the fever occasioned by filthiness of person.<sup>81</sup>

His spiritual fear of people mired in poverty extended to physical fear. When he purchased land and a house in Iredell County, he had to evict two squatters, “those old women, Ann Sudivan & Till Cass.” He took along “Old Mr. Wm. Coffin,” as “a kind of ‘bodyguard,’” as “I do not like to go among such stock... The ladies, if ladies they be, are in our house yet.”<sup>82</sup> By way of comparison, Strong Thomasson owned property but never possessed much wealth, and spent the days on his farm de-hiding premature calves, chasing pigs through creeks, and shoving new cuds into cow’s mouths. He spent no small amount of time covered in filth and gore himself, but as far as he was concerned, faith made him entirely clean.

Strong’s dedication—indeed any farmer’s diligence—circumscribed his activities primarily to his land. The farm demanded constant attention and the majority of Strong’s time was spent in plowing, sprouting, tending livestock, repairing fences, putting up buildings, and hauling fuel from the woods or corn to the mill. He devoted his time away from his farm to visiting with his and his wife’s extended families. Still, he directed all his free time to worship and endeavors calculated to produce personal improvement. Strong disparaged idle pursuits. He refused to go to a magic lantern show and “table moving” with some friends,

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<sup>81</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 98-99.

<sup>82</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 232.

declaring, “That’s another humbug, and no mistake.”<sup>83</sup> He regretted attending an “exhibition” in Iredell County, saying it was “nonsense, very wicked and very disgusting. I had other business else I should not have been there at all.”<sup>84</sup> Like John Flintoff and Caroline Lilly, Strong Thomasson could not abide idle chatter, or gossiping among friends: “What a sad, and awful thing it is to spend our golden moments in idle chit-chat, when there are so many good books we might read and be eternally benefited there-by. There is seldom any [sic] anything gained by visiting, so I must visit less and read more.”<sup>85</sup> His impulse to use time wisely ultimately led him to the “domestic felicity” of Sabbatarianism after marriage and fatherhood, to be discussed in the next chapter. In the meantime, he occupied himself with debating societies, booksellers, temperance meetings, school committee meetings, and most of all, with reading.<sup>86</sup>

Strong Thomasson’s practice of religious discipline did not center on church court hearings, but he nonetheless applied discipline to his daily life. In doing so, he conscientiously demurred from opportunities to exhibit physical prowess or otherwise engage in the manly behaviors of the muster ground, election treating, and other violent ribaldry. Though he never lived in any environment other than the

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<sup>83</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 38-39.

<sup>84</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 205.

<sup>85</sup> Escott, ed., *Diary*, 126.

<sup>86</sup> This is a rather Whiggish social agenda. Paul Escott contends that Thomasson sided with the Whigs and their successors, I am not so sure he did not have Democratic sympathies.

rural South of extended families and communal relations, he very evidently had adopted the sensibilities of an emergent middle class.

### **Eased by Discipline**

A broad generalization may be safely made regarding religious practice in the South after the 1820s: the faithful vanguard contained forward-looking Protestants—confident and engaged in the cultural and social currents of contemporary America.<sup>87</sup> Religious southerners found their way into those cultural and social currents eased by discipline. Evangelical values expressed in discipline bore a striking resemblance to emerging middle-class values. As nineteenth century evangelicals did not readily identify a firm boundary between their congregations and *the world*, the impulse to create an environment free of sin easily spilled over to the public, secular space. As a consequence, religion eased southerners through the larger cultural transformations of antebellum America.

Further, religious discipline created an evangelical sensibility in the North Carolina Piedmont. Evangelicals did not foreground struggles over race or politics in their daily lives, even as interpreted through religion. Their “primary reality” consisted of the desire to achieve the goals of religious discipline and those included

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<sup>87</sup> On other southerners who fit this description, see John W. Quist, *Restless Visionaries: The Social Roots of Antebellum Reform in Alabama and Michigan* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), Jonathan Daniel Wells, *The Origins of the Southern Middle Class, 1800-1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), and L. Diane Barnes, Brien Schoen, and Frank Towers, eds., *The Old South's Modern Worlds: Slavery, Region, and Nation in the Age of Progress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

an adherence to peace, an aversion to hostility, and devotion to orthodox doctrine.<sup>88</sup> The exact meanings of doctrine and the methods used to enforce it, however, changed, forcing religious communities to continually adapt to new realities. Secular and sacred forces ultimately exerted a centrifugal pull on one another. Evangelical communities did not act as one body in the changing world, but they largely approached it in a progressive fashion. Very few rejected the world.

As evangelicals strove for disciplinary adherence in their public lives, they pursued and produced social and cultural objectives that manifested themselves in the secular world. The evangelical sensibility actually resembled the cultural norms of the emergent middle class: sobriety, self-restraint, and the nuclear household. And the evangelical sensibility encouraged participation in the domesticity of temperance reform and resisted the hostility offered by abolitionists. Perhaps this contrast best illustrates the conflicted sentiments of Piedmont North Carolina as the South careened toward war.

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<sup>88</sup> This interpretation is taken from Daniel Wickberg, "What is the History of Sensibilities?: On Cultural Histories Old and New," *The American Historical Review* Vol. 112, No. 3 (June 2007): 661-684, "primary reality" on page 663, and *The Senses of Humor: Self and Laughter in Modern America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 1-12.

CHAPTER V  
DOMESTIC FELICITY IN THE PIEDMONT

A colporteur for the American Tract Society in North Carolina reported in 1853 about the dismal prospects in his field:

[T]he world has taken a powerful hold on the minds of the people generally; even the Sabbath is sacrificed in honor of it. The spirit of religion is very low. Family instruction and government according to Bible principles, are much neglected. In a district containing 104 families, there are but three family altars, and on two of these, none but the Sabbath oblation is presented. In the same district there are nine places where liquor is kept for sale; and three families, who are so poor that they cannot buy a barrel of whiskey at once, get some in a jug, and ape the retailed by pouring it out into a gill cup for their pliant and perishing neighbors. Of these 104 families, 35 were destitute of an entire copy of the Scriptures, and more than sixty destitute of all religious books except the Bible. Here we get on very slowly. We have to go into these dark places and *kindle up a little brush-light with the pictures in The Child's Paper and Almanacs*; and when the interest is sufficiently raised, read a little, talk some, and show "Tales about the Heathen."<sup>1</sup>

Darkness, literally illuminated by the pages of tracts; the agent could not have described his mission better. The local heathens learned about American missionary efforts to the heathens in Ceylon and India from the American Tract Society's 1849

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<sup>1</sup> *Twenty-eighth annual meeting of the American Tract Society* (New York: n.p., 1853), 100-101.

publication, *Dr. Scudder's Tales for Little Readers, About the Heathen*.<sup>1</sup> That the power dynamics inherent in the relationship between white masters and black slaves provided the ideological foundation for the ordering of all social, cultural, economic, and political relationships in the South has been historiographical assumption for several generations. From Eugene Genovese's description of pre-modern seigneurs locked in a give-and-take with their bondsmen to Stephanie McCurry's republican-oriented yeoman households, the necessity for white male dominance explained aspects of familial relationships in all types of southern households.<sup>2</sup> In these traditional families, the male head alone issued forth all moral, judicial, and political authority, authority the family was bound to obey. In contrast, other historians described northern urban areas as harbingers of modern families owing to economic innovation. Middle-class sensibilities arose in places where men left the house for a professional career, women turned the domestic space into a place for nurturing children, and material abundance provided nuclear families with

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<sup>1</sup> John Scudder, *Dr. Scudder's Tales for Little Readers, About the Heathen* (New York: American Tract Society, 1849)

<sup>2</sup> Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974). See also Eugene Genovese, "'Our Family, White and Black': Family and Household in the Southern Slaveholders' World View," in *In Joy and In Sorrow: Women, Family, and Marriage in the Victorian South*, ed. Carol Bleser (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 69-87, and Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, & the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). Elizabeth Fox-Genovese confirmed that the physical nature of southern plantation life, and the presence of slavery, caused planter families rejected the "separate spheres" of the northern middle class and so, to, did Catherine Clinton, who described the subservient place of women on the plantation. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), and Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982).



a gloss of respectability.<sup>3</sup> These explanations all arise from the presence of slavery—that the need for patriarchs to maintain racial supremacy served as a conservative force in all social, political, and economic relations. Stephanie McCurry extended this explanation in *Masters of Small Worlds*. She described planter instrumentalization of cultural power—particularly religious and republican rhetoric—to ensure the survival of elite political power. Yeoman farmers, according to McCurry, embraced the rhetoric of patriarchy by application of the gendered authority of planters to their own modest farmsteads, thereby defining themselves as on equal political footing with their wealthy neighbors. Plantations and farms might be seen as independent fiefdoms, girded against the flood of modernisms gushing from the industrializing North.<sup>4</sup>

In answer to this general thesis of pre-modern family life, scholars, particularly women’s historians, have identified emergent elements characteristic of middle-class values into the South. Joan Cashin, Jane Turner Censer, Jan Lewis, and Steven M. Stowe each described the prevalence of nuclear family forms, intimate,

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<sup>3</sup> See for instance Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: “Woman’s Sphere” in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), and Stuart M. Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>4</sup> Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, & the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

affectionate, bonds, and the creation of a nurturing environment for children among planter families.<sup>5</sup>

Craig Thompson Friend and Anya Jabour neatly summarized southern white families as a “confusing quagmire of ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity.’”<sup>6</sup> They carefully describe the landscape of the southern family as awash in a variety of rhetorical and prescriptive influences and market and cultural forces. The nuclear family form, in short, laid askew atop the rural, productive, slaveowning household and was directed by the male head interested in upholding racial and gender hierarchies of power. Modernisms emerged, yet the dominant influence in southern life remained, according to them, aggressive patriarchs, defensive, and anxious for their positions of power. “If there was a set of core values,” they write, and subsequently suggest “those values were rooted in the common experience of racial slavery.”<sup>7</sup>

The description of the hodge-podge of family styles that Friend and Jabour offer is invigorating. Yet the description contains limitations, that when examined

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<sup>5</sup> Joan Cashin, “The Structure of Antebellum Planter Families: ‘The Ties that Bound us Was Strong,’” *Journal of Southern History* 56 (February 1990), 55-77; Jane Turner Censer, *North Carolina Planters and Their Children, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1984); Jan Lewis, *The Pursuit of Happiness: Family and Values in Jefferson’s Virginia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); and Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987). Stowe, to a greater degree than the others stressed the overarching needs of patriarchal hierarchy. See also William Kauffman Scarborough, *Masters of the Big House: Elite Slaveholders of the Mid-Nineteenth-Century South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 90-121.

<sup>6</sup> Craig Thompson Friend and Anya Jabour, “Introduction: Families, Values, and Southern History,” in *Family Values in the Old South*, ed. Craig Thompson Friend and Anya Jabour (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010), 7.

<sup>7</sup> Friend and Jabour, *Family Values*, 10.

might allow for more complexity in our view of how modern elements became integrated into the southern family. The chief weakness of their argument is continued focus on wealthy—usually lowcountry—planters as the lodestars of family modeling for all other southerners. This focus has strong interpretive foundations; the political and economic sway of large planters over southern society is evident, and their prevailing interest in imposing racial and gender hierarchy may be safely assumed. Beginning with Genovese, most scholars have taken for granted that wealthy southerners exerted political and social hegemony over all other classes of whites. Recently, Friend (in a separate essay) has suggested that planter hegemony, by force or example, was the singular source of cultural influence over the families of all other economic and social classes. And patriarchs themselves looked to “aristocratic conceptions of manhood”—in particular, the advice of British essayist Lord Chesterfield—to model familial behavior. Chesterfield, as Friend noted, “encouraged the individual to use institutions and people for his own ends,” those ends invariably being self-interested. Planters *performed* gendered behavior as “affairs ‘of theater and ideology,’” acting parts to prove to others what they imagined about themselves.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> “Beyond literature, patriarchs developed a rhetoric of mastery that appealed to yeoman farmers who controlled small worlds, binding the two classes in common political interest.” By literature (check this), Friend means primarily Chesterfield. Craig Thompson Friend, “Sex, Self, and the Performance of Patriarchal Manhood in the Old South,” in *The Old South’s Modern Worlds: Slavery, Region, and Nation in the Age of Progress*, ed. L. Diane Barnes, Brian Schoen, and Frank Towers (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 250-251. In the “affairs” passage, Friend quoted Stephen Stowe. Friend cites Ted Ownby, “Southern Manhood,” in *American Masculinities: A Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. Bret E. Carroll (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE, 2003), Jennifer R. Green, *Military Education and the*

This interpretation depends on the view of wealthy patriarchs as *mediators* of social and cultural life for all white southerners but overlooks the fact that ordinary families eagerly consumed alternative sources of familial rhetoric and prescriptive authority *unmediated by the slave powers*. Evangelical religion offered a foundation for individual autonomy from worldly strictures, and a basis for the organization of social communities and created a variety of experiential relationships with authority and power. Ordinary people in the North Carolina Piedmont, relying on the power of religious belief, rejected the consideration of planter patriarchs and constructed a social *mood* based on contemporary practice and the conversation of the religious marketplace. The following does not dispute Friend and Jabour's description of the southern family as an unsteady amalgam of traditions and modernisms. It does suggest that the forces that shaped southern families did so independently of planter hegemony. And it suggests that adherence to faith led to modern family styles before any other market forces began their work in the rural South. Through the use of tract societies, bible societies, newspapers, Sunday Schools, and other tools of the publishing market, evangelical sources served as a channel for modern ideas about families and social relations, sources not implicated in the maintenance of patriarchal power. Ordinary southern whites who consumed these sources enacted their lessons in the creation of new familial forms.

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*Emerging Middle Class in the Old South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), and McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds*

## Textual Models

In the 1840s and 1850s, the countryside crawled with agents distributing books and tracts. Scores of ministers and seminary students scoured the roads and cabins of the United States seeking to sell or give away religious publications. Both secular and denominational publishing houses hoped to distribute the Word as widely as possible. The Methodist circuit riders had since the 1780s carried and sold books published by their Book Concern, and the Baptists inaugurated their General Tract Society in 1824. After 1820 and advances in printing technology, religious people harnessed the power of the publishing industry to aid in the spread of religious doctrine. The American Bible Society and the American Tract Society took the lead. Founded respectively in 1816 and 1825, these organizations based in New York City aspired to place religious publications into the hands of every American.<sup>9</sup> From North Carolina, Presbyterians and the State Baptist Convention participated most heavily in the national ecumenical endeavor, even while continuing their own publishing houses.<sup>10</sup> (The unorganized Antimission Baptists, naturally eschewed all participation.) The Presbyterians in 1844 found themselves “impressed with the belief, that the press is an important engine to operate upon the minds of men” and resolved to “bring these works, or, at least, one or more of them, within the reach of

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<sup>9</sup> On religious reading and the origins of national publication networks in the early Nineteenth Century, see David Paul Nord, *Faith in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth of Mass Media in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), particularly chapter 4.

<sup>10</sup> 1837, Minutes of the Presbyterian Synod of North Carolina, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

every member of our respective congregations.”<sup>11</sup> The Methodists, for all their desire to preach with other sects, did not affiliate with the national organizations and maintained their own publishing and distribution networks.<sup>12</sup> Their ministers, however, formed the backbone of national tract distribution in North Carolina.

The use of tract literature by ordinary North Carolinians likely preceded the avalanche sent forth by the national societies. Samuel Wait, agent of the newly formed Baptist State Convention (BSC), embarked in 1831 to raise money for Baptist schools. Much to his surprise, the churches he visited were more engaged in theological disputes arising from the formation of the BSC disputes enflamed by members “engaged in the business” of tract circulation. Wait did note, perhaps not recognizing the irony, a contradiction: he encountered opposition to the BSC by proto-Antimission Baptists who believed that “the whole Missionary concern, together with Bible and Tract Societies, is only a mere speculation,” meaning these institutions only sought to make money. Where had these people learned to articulate their opposition? “These effects it is believed, have been chiefly produced

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<sup>11</sup> *Minutes of the Synod of North Carolina, at their Thirty-First Sessions, 1844* (Fayetteville: Edward J. Hale, 1845.)

<sup>12</sup> The Methodist Episcopal Church, South in North Carolina did not create a statewide Tract distribution society until 1854. *Journal of the Seventeenth Annual Session of the North Carolina Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1854* (Raleigh: Wm. C. Doub, Printer, Star Office, 1855), 4.

by books, sermons and pamphlets of a certain character, which have been industriously circulated among the people.”<sup>13</sup>

Opposition to tract societies and other centralized church government had been organized by the circulation of tracts. It was hardly hypocrisy—Primitive Baptists readily adopted the modern tools of evangelism—it simply represented their hesitation to sanction as Biblical the entrepreneurial characteristics of national organizations, particularly the commerce in money.<sup>14</sup> Tracts themselves were not necessarily impermissible. (The evangelical publishing industry in general harbored scruples about turning a profit and only occasionally conceded that profits alone could sustain an operation.)<sup>15</sup> This early adoption of tract culture represented two things: first, evangelicals before 1830 participated in the literate culture of the market, and second, that culture had a visible effect on denominational change. Wait’s observation about tracts had a significant and immediate effect on Baptist State Convention development. The State Convention, initially organized to supply ministers to wanting congregations, quickly prioritized engagement in the print market to aggressively confront the heresies and ignorance of the Antimission

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<sup>13</sup> *Proceedings of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, 1830* (New Bern: John L. Pasteur, 1831), 10-12.

<sup>14</sup> James R. Mathis, *The Making of the Primitive Baptists: A Cultural and Intellectual History of the Antimission Movement, 1800-1840* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>15</sup> Candy Gunther Brown, *The Word in the World: Evangelical Writing, Publishing, and Reading in America, 1789-1880* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), chapter 2.

Baptists. Creating a Baptist college in North Carolina remained the long-term goal of the BSC, but beginning in 1831, it placed great emphasis on distributing literature.

A mark of how entrenched book agents became in the evangelical consciousness by the 1850s is that the term “colporter”—one who distributes or sells tracts—had replaced the term “itinerant” in Baptist language to indicate almost any travelling or unsettled minister. The American Tract Society, the American Bible Society, and the American Sunday School Union managed national networks of traveling agents much like Francis Asbury had nurtured the early Methodist itinerancy. Local preachers often served as agents selling books, while the national organizations deployed other, usually new ministers, on the circuits as agents.<sup>16</sup> Despite the Methodist’s official lack of enthusiasm for the national organizations, many of their ministers served as colporters. Peter Doub, a stalwart old reverend in Guilford, Forsyth, and Iredell Counties, served as an agent.<sup>17</sup> The American Bible Society, in 1841, dispatched twenty-year-old Charles Force Deems, a native of Baltimore and recent graduate of Pennsylvania’s Dickinson College, as General Agent of the North Carolina Bible Society. Doub introduced the young Deems to camp meeting preaching, which “physically and mentally it nearly wore me out, but it loosened my mental joints and made me uncommonly supple.” The exercise

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<sup>16</sup> David Paul Nord, “Religious Reading and Readers in Antebellum America,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 15 (Summer 1995): 241-272.

<sup>17</sup> On Doub, see Rev. M.T. Plyler, “Peter Doub, Itinerant of Heroic Days,” in *Historical Papers Series IX* (n.p.: Trinity College Historical Society and The North Carolina Conference Historical Society, 1912), 33-50, and Samuel Bryant Turrentine, *A Romance of Education: A Narrative Including Recollections and Other Facts Connected With Greensboro College* (Greensboro[?]: The Piedmont Press, 1946), 62.



proved useful as it conditioned Deems to the skills of extemporaneous speaking and ready solicitation of strangers that an agent required. Deems opened his agency by “visiting and preaching, and becoming acquainted with prominent clergymen and laymen of all denominations.”<sup>18</sup> Deems, as general agent, had an imperative to visit only the prominent men—and though he did live as a colporter, he did not personally carry books to sell—but individual agents carried books and talked to everyone. They stopped at every likely place on their route, or as one agent put it, “I try to visit all—from the governor to the poorest negro.”<sup>19</sup>

The chief goal of American Tract Society and American Bible Society ministers was the conversion of sinners—through textual revelation preferably—and they pursued this goal with preaching and family prayer. This method signaled a subtle but important change in American piety. Some agents did report miraculous conversions, but most agents’ reports convey success in more plodding, everyday, fashions. “One poor widow,” Agent J.R.B. wrote, “thanked God that I had been sent that way, for her children were evidently improving much from their new books.”<sup>20</sup>

Another Tract Society agent “succeeded in forming a Sabbath-school at a place

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<sup>18</sup> Edward M. Deems and Francis M. Deems, eds., *Autobiography of Charles Force Deems* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1897), 71-72, 79. See Deems to Joseph Hyde, Esq., December 13, 1841, American Bible Society Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

<sup>19</sup> *Summary of Colportage, by the American Tract Society in the year ending April 1, 1853* (New York: American Tract Society, 1853), 31-32.

<sup>20</sup> *Summary of Colportage, by the American Tract Society in the year ending March 1, 1855* (New York: American Tract Society, 1855), 21.

called H-----, in this county. Formerly it was noted for the dissipation of its people, but now there is apparently a disposition to reform."<sup>21</sup> Yet another

visited a very intemperate neighborhood and left a Manual with a man opposed to temperance; since that time I learned that the whole community has abandoned the use of ardent spirits, using coffee in place of whiskey to refresh them while at work.<sup>22</sup>

No doubt some people had conversion experiences, but it is unrealistic to expect that entire communities did. Yet the agents considered the moral improvement or the disposition to reform a success. The Presbyterian Synod of North Carolina described the general approach the agent must take,

the sending round suitable individuals, into the very bosom of our families;-- that, thence, sheltered by the mighty aegis of Southern hospitality, and aided by all the tender associations connected with *home* and the domestic fire-side, they may urge these publications upon the acceptance of all; recommend them to their serious perusal; and, at the same time, accompany their presentation with solemn and affectionate conversation on the subject of religion and with prayer.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, not as harbingers of revelation, but as tutors in new forms and standards of pious worship did tract and Bible society agents prove an innovative force. They did, indeed, continue to preach at camp meetings, as did Deems, but they entered the family home in a way that no camp meeting sermon could. One agent reported thus:

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Minutes of the Synod of North Carolina, at their Thirty-First Sessions, 1844.*

Recently I came to a house; the children ran off, and the old man started as I drew near him. Do not be alarmed, said I; I have come to talk with you and your family about your souls. Now let us all go into the house and spend a short time profitably, as it is our first and may be our last meeting. The cabin was about sixteen by eighteen feet, serving as a dwelling for twelve persons, kitchen, smoke-house, dog-kennel, and pigsty. After greeting each one kindly and explaining my work, I again addressed the children. I said to a boy of fourteen, 'Well, my boy, do you know who made you?' 'I reckon daddy did,' he replied. Asked his grown sister if there was a Bible there. 'Don't know, sir.' 'Did you ever see one?' 'I don't remember whether I ever saw *him* or not.' I talked of the goodness and mercy of God in sending Jesus Christ to die for sinners. The father looked amazed: 'Why, you don't say that Jesus Christ is dead, sir?' Long ago, said I. 'Well, I never heard of it.' The Bible says, 'He had power to take up his life, and to lay it down.' Get your Bible, and I will read you about it. 'I have no Bible, and none of my family can read.' I read from my own; he said he had never heard the Bible read before. I prayed with these poor people—the first prayer the children ever heard. There is a church within three miles of this family.<sup>24</sup>

Another agent reported his method for assembling families for impromptu prayer meetings:

In the after-part of the day, we tell the families we see, that we intend to stay at such a house, say uncle John's, over night, and if you will come over, and bring the children, I will show you all the books I have, and read to you: these are long nights, and you can see all the books, and get home in time to get plenty of sleep. Thus, about dark we will have from five to fifteen come in—no extra preparations—*the neighbors just come in to see*. Then we set out a box of books—put in a big piece of light-wood, (pitch pine)—then give each one a book or tract, and the children an Almanac to look at or read, and be ready to [CHECK] change them about to gratify their curiosity; and when they have done looking, give them some tracts, and then propose to the head of the family, as so many of his neighbors are present, to have prayers before we part. *Thus we can have a prayer-meeting every night.*<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Summary of Colportage* (1853), 30-32.

<sup>25</sup> *Summary of Colportage* (1853), 29-30.

The colporters thus not only distributed religious literature to potential converts, but they physically modeled the structure of a family prayer meeting.

It is, of course, impossible to gauge how genuinely people regarded their apparent transformations due to the reading of a tract or Bible. And it is even more difficult to judge the persistence of a conversion. But what is readily apparent is that the Piedmont in the 1840s and 1850s was awash in the language and tools of modern religion. One agent, the Reverend E.K.B., “sold books to the value of \$168.57, and granted, or, gave away, \$22.13.” He spoke at 63 meetings, and visited with 683 families, of which he prayed with 101.<sup>26</sup> This was the work of one agent in North Carolina. For the entire state in 1855, the American Tract Society reported 18,555 families visited (10,375 prayed with). Of that many, 1,542 families “habitually neglected the house of God,” and 1,001 were “destitute of the bible,” a small number that belies the agents’ claims of region-wide destitution. The same agents—31 in total—held 740 “religious meetings,” sold 22,978 volumes, and gave away 7,951 more.<sup>27</sup> This report is just for the American Tract Society (ATS) and does not reflect the numbers of volumes sold or granted by the American Bible Society (ABS), the American Sunday School Union (ASSU) or the denominational societies. That the efforts of the ABS, the ATS, and their local auxiliaries did in fact actually reach a

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<sup>26</sup> *Summary of Colportage* (1855), 22.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

broad spectrum of white society is clear from an 1851 subscription list of the Montgomery Bible Society.

The agent's name is unknown. He was likely a local preacher, as his list is for the Montgomery Bible Society, not the national organization, and it resides in the family papers of one of the counties' more prominent families.<sup>28</sup> Though the Society is titled Montgomery, one third of the Bible recipients lived in Stanly and other surrounding counties. Six hundred eighty two people received Bibles, of which 364 are identifiable in the 1850 Federal Census. Of the 364 individuals who obtained bibles, 91 paid cash, 155 promised cash in the future, and 34 received bibles free of charge. Reading the list suggests that bible distribution truly was a family affair. Of the 364, 388 were men and 280 of the 364 were heads of their households. Most patrons farmed—253—followed by 50 laborers and a small number of carpenters, millers, teachers, wheelwrights, a constable, a mechanic, a shoe maker, and a gunsmith. Four widows received Bibles. Purchasers included the wealthy, or well off, among them Henry Freeman, with \$1,025 in property, a wife and eight children; William Lucas, a 58 year old farmer worth \$1,000, with a family of 10; and Aaron Sanders, a farmer who claimed \$2,225 in property along with a wife and 5 children. Some laborers with no reported property also purchased Bibles. George Whitley, Jr., a 28-year-old laborer with a wife and four children purchased one, though far more propertyless people obtained Bibles on credit or for free. Among purchasers, those

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<sup>28</sup> Skinner, McRae, Wooley, and Deberry Papers, North Carolina Office of Archives and History, Raleigh.

without property tended to be the children (child or adult) of heads of households with modest property claims. Several women purchased Bibles, including Elizabeth Boles, the 57-year-old wife of William B. Jordan's overseer; and Nancy Munn, a 75-year-old propertyless widow who lived next door to her son and his family. Green Hogan purchased one bible, but he was 2 years old, the son of a miller Zach Hogan. In his case, we might imagine Green coming forth with cash under the approving eyes of his entire family. Some established people did buy bibles on credit—or at least the promise to pay at a later date. William Haywood, a 40 year old farmer with a wife, 8 children, and \$1,500 in property acquired a bible this way. More common, however, are the farmers with modest property, or none at all: William Fraser, a 36-year-old with a wife, one child, and no property; Reuben Morris, 49-year-old farmer with a wife, six children, and \$200 in land; and Lewis Usry, a 53-year-old farmer with a wife, four children, and no property. Michael Wooley, a 33-year-old farmer with a wife, 5 children, and \$75 in property received a bible “gratis,” as did laborer Jesse Gad, Blacksmith Dumas Tedder, and farmer Christopher Singleton, all propertyless. Often, teenaged or adult sons and daughters received bibles of their own, as did 19-year-old Andy Crowell, a laborer on his father's small farm; Berry Ross of Stanly County; and 13-year-old Elizabeth McCallum, who lived with her propertyless mother and four sisters.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: Montgomery, Stanly, Randolph, Davidson, Richmond, Anson, and Moore Counties, North Carolina.

These sales and gifts of Bibles did not depend on the conversion of the recipient. Religious publication societies intended their literature to become integrated into a family's daily life and routines. The efficacy of this outside of individual testimony (see below) is difficult to determine. Some evidence is available to suggest that a few families, at least, treasured religious society bibles and literature in their families. Bibles survive carrying the American Bible Society, American Tract Society, and American Sunday School imprints that served as valuable records of family history for several generations. In fact, some imprints came equipped with pages reserved for recording births, marriages, and deaths of family members. For instance, Harper and Achsas Blackburn, a farm couple with four children lived near Salem in Forsyth County on \$250 of land. Their 1845 American Bible Society Holy Bible remained in use by their family to at least 1871.<sup>30</sup> Tobias and Catharine Sigmon Moser, farmers in Catawba County on \$235 worth of property obtained an 1830 ABS New Testament and maintained their family records in it for a generation.<sup>31</sup> Joseph G. Taylor inherited his 1845 ABS from his uncle William and carried it with him to Indiana.<sup>32</sup> B. Alexander Holt of Stanly County, thirty-two years old in 1860 and married to B. Caroline Honeycutt was a mechanic with no property, but his 1850 ABS New Testament remained in use by his family

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<sup>30</sup> Blackburn Family Bible Records, NCOAH, and Eighth Census of the United States, 1860:Forsyth County, North Carolina.

<sup>31</sup> Tobias and Catharine Sigmon Moser Family Bible Records, NCOAH, Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: Catawba County, North Carolina.

<sup>32</sup> Taylor Family Bible Records, NCOAH.

until 1913.<sup>33</sup> Small farmers John and Susanah Morton, also of Stanly County, recorded family milestones until the 1880s in their ABS Holy Bible.<sup>34</sup> Ketton Gilleland of Iredell County noted in the flyleaf of his Bible, “R.K. Gilleland his Book to Read And Study Bought of hew cimble [Hugh Kimball] Prise \$6.00.” The identity of Hugh Kimball has not been revealed, and the price seems steep, but the Gillelands used the American Tract Society bible well into the twentieth century.<sup>35</sup> William Bodenheimer inscribed in his American Sunday School Union German-language Bible

William Bodenheimer is my name  
Germany is my Nation  
North Carolina is my Dwelling Place  
Davidson Cty is my Station  
August 17, 1845

William’s wife Mary also noted “Her Book 1845.”<sup>36</sup>Of course, adherence to the Word is a far different thing from loyalty to a publisher’s ideology. And certainly, the greater sentimental value lay in the family records and not the publication place.

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<sup>33</sup> B.A. Holt Family Bible Records, NCOAH, and Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: Stanly County, North Carolina.

<sup>34</sup> John Wright Morton Family Bible Records, NCOAH, and Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: Stanly County, North Carolina.

<sup>35</sup> Robert K. Gilleland Family Bible Records, NCOAH, and Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: Iredell County, North Carolina.

<sup>36</sup> Bodenheimer Family Bible Records, NCOAH. Bodenheimer’s inscription was not original. The “identification rhyme” formula, “my name... my nation... my dwelling place... my station...,” is common to Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Atlantic worlds. Kevin J. Hayes noted that such an identification in a book “reflects the owner’s attitude that books were permanent objects and that they would be saved and used by future generations.” Hayes, *Folklore and Book Culture* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 99-100.



Nonetheless, the penetration of actual religious society literature into the hinterlands and lower classes of North Carolina is a testimony to the success of national networks at work in the Piedmont.

The most popular tracts were those that focused on individual salvation and amounted to what Mark Y. Hanley called “a cadence of sin, salvation, and judgment messages.” *Baxter’s Call*, the *Dairyman’s Daughter*, and *The Anxious Inquirer* rated as highly as the perennial Protestant favorite, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. Hanley suggested that tract literature represented an effort by Protestant clergy to maintain “pulpit themes” as part of the religious dialogue in opposition to the perceived encroachment of liberal theology. According to ATS statistics cited by Hanley, lay people received and read far more of the former than the latter.<sup>37</sup> Yet, as Candy Brown specified, the world of evangelical publishing, including the ATS, embraced modern theological ideas.<sup>38</sup> Sunday School books taught that future adults should exhibit behaviors of patience, kindness, and affection, and eschew those of intemperance, passion, and violence. And advice literature for parents, distributed through the ATS and ASSU, taught mothers and fathers how themselves to behave in order to correctly inculcate children with the same moral foundation.<sup>39</sup> This approach is quite different from the aristocratic “lessons of mastery” prescribed by

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<sup>37</sup> Mark Y. Hanley, *Beyond a Christian Commonwealth: The Protestant Quarrel With the American Republic, 1830-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 150, 152.

<sup>38</sup> Brown, *The Word in the World*, 79-114.

<sup>39</sup> Daniel T. Rodgers, “Socializing Middle-Class Children: Institutions, Fables, and Work Values in Nineteenth Century America,” *Journal of Social History* 13 (Spring 1980): 354-367.

Chesterfield and subscribed to by lowcountry or frontier planters. Children would indeed continue to be souls impressed upon by parents to ensure a legacy, but there the similarities end. The conceptualization of children, the methods of reproducing values in them, and parental aspirations for them, as described in Christian literature promulgated in the South, reflected modern middle-class ideals of family form and function.<sup>40</sup>

Candy Brown finds little trepidation from evangelicals who embarked on the publishing trade. According to her, Christian publishers did not shrink from the world but forged into it. Publishers and readers formed a “textually defined community” and employed the latest literary forms and styles to expand its reach.<sup>41</sup> The literature southerners consumed emphasized sentiment and feeling, not cold rationality; illustrated moral lessons with fictionalized vignettes, not with sermons; and described doctrine with personal memoirs, not gospel exegesis. These developments were not introduced in a Trojan horse of evangelism but were the clearly stated intent of authors, publishers, distributors, agents, and readers. These broad changes to evangelical culture have been described by scholars as signaling a dilution of evangelical power—as declension into a non-controversial civic

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<sup>40</sup> Anne M. Boylan, *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790-1880* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988). On frontier planters’ advice to their children, see Mark R. Cheatham, “Patriarchy and Masculinity in Antebellum America: Andrew Jackson and His Male Wards,” paper presented at the 126<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association, Chicago, January 6, 2012.

<sup>41</sup> Brown, *The Word in the World*, 61.

nationalism and bland moralism.<sup>42</sup> Others consider this shift to have been a marker of the “feminization” of American culture. As feminized religion, then, modern evangelicalism would find no purchase in the patriarchal South and churches remained in masculine hands.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, as Randy Sparks has noted, “the scope of women’s contributions to southern churches, the role religion played in women’s lives, and the emergence of a women’s culture closely tied to southern churches and religion are topics that remain either understudied or contested by scholars of southern religion and southern religion.”<sup>44</sup> Brown offers a reinterpretation of this transformation, and the evidence presented here agrees. “The problem with this line of reasoning is that it obscures the extent to which theology mattered to nineteenth-century women and to the imaginative texts they produced and consumed.”<sup>45</sup> The shift to sentimental styles conferred great power to women with little diminution of devotion required for individual salvation. More importantly, the moral lessons contained in evangelical literature had the powerful effect of making sacred domestic settings and the relations enacted in them. Scenes of the everyday—the punishment of a child, at the sickbed of a wife, or a Sunday at home with a husband—were not merely the waning glow of dissipated religion but newly sacred

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<sup>42</sup> Hanley, *Beyond a Christian Commonwealth*, 1-11.

<sup>43</sup> The broad outlines of “feminization” on the national scale derives from Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1977). On the southern religious grappling with perceptions of feminization, see among others, Christine Leigh Heryman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Knopf, 1997).

<sup>44</sup> Randy J. Sparks, “Religion in the Pre-Civil War South,” in *A Companion to The American South*, ed. John B. Boles (Maulden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 168.

<sup>45</sup> Brown, *The Word in the World*, 99.

tools for maintaining salvation. As it was with individuals, so it was with families; daily action secured assurance of salvation.

Subtle but informal changes in piety also include subtle but important changes in language the historian must address. The above-mentioned transformation in family rearing styles did not include the diminution of *authority* in the family. Indeed, prescriptive literature continued to insist on young people's absolute and unquestioned submission to adult authority. The change can best be described as a switch from *paternalistic* authority to *parental* authority. Power no longer derived from a masculine Lord, in lessons wherein obedience, restraint, and honor were the objects. Power still existed, but both mothers and fathers, as moral exemplars, shared and exercised it. They insisted on obedience and restraint but for the purposes of instilling lessons of Christian moral behavior. Some Christian advice literature placed the mother in the role of moral authority, while other publications continued to envision the father in that position. One book, *The Home-Altar*, written in Greensboro by the former American Bible Society agent Charles Force Deems, preserved the father's prerogative in moral instruction but did so in the context of innovative family prayer.

### **Deems's Prescription**

Deems, though born in Baltimore, spent the first ten years of his ministry in North Carolina. In his travels for the ABS, an interesting conversation with a Moravian bishop anticipated his affectionate view of marriage held by many

Protestants. The Moravians still occasionally submitted marriage decisions to the Lot—a communal voting ritual meant to represent the will of God.<sup>46</sup> Deems, the Methodist, insisted that a right marriage in the eyes of God could only be possible when the man and the woman had developed “sentiment,”—or, love—for one another. The Lot, suggested Deems, risked tarnishment should the marriage fail. The Moravian retorted that by the Lot, God had a direct hand in the decision of marriage, and should a Methodist’s marriage fail, only the human partners could be blamed!<sup>47</sup> At twenty-two years old, Deems became a professor at the University of North Carolina, followed by a two-year stint in the late 1840s as president of Randolph-Macon College just over the border in Boydton, Virginia. In 1850, the Greensboro Female Institute called him to its presidency, where Deems spent four years at the helm. While there, he actively participated in the Sons of Temperance, pushed legislation for the abolition of alcohol, preached on the local circuits, published Methodist annuals, and wrote his book, *The Home-Altar*.<sup>48</sup>

Subtitled *An Appeal in Behalf of Family Worship; with Prayers and Hymns, and Calendar of Lessons from Scripture, for Family Use*, Deems’ book consisted of one hundred fifteen pages of argument in favor of family worship, one hundred sixty four pages of prayers (two a day for every day of the week for two weeks), hymns,

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<sup>46</sup> Crews and Starbuck, *With Courage for the Future*, 42.

<sup>47</sup> Deems and Deems, eds., *Autobiography of Charles Force Deems*, 73-74.

<sup>48</sup> Charles Force Deems, *The Home-Altar: An Appeal in Behalf of Family Worship; with Prayers and Hymns, and Calendar of Lessons from Scripture, for Family Use* (New York: M.W. Dodd, 1851).

and a table of lessons matching a bible verse with every day of the year. The argument is a curious mix of traditional and modern assertions, likely well tailored to the southern environment. *The Home-Altar* appears to be a patriarchal manifesto. The man, the father, is the head of the household and the sole dispenser of religious instruction. In fact, Deems' mothers play no part except as a member of the family (though one who did have authority over the children.) Fathers might *persuade* his family to prayer, but Deems cited Abraham's paternal sway and endorsed *command* as the heads' prerogative.<sup>49</sup> Deems' vision of the household also explicitly included slaves, visitors, or anyone else on the property. He clearly stated that adherence to Christian duty would provide example and encouragement for servants to be diligent on behalf of the master. For all these usual tropes about traditional male authority, Deems' prescription for family prayer contained a quite modern perspective on the role of family members and the nature of Christian nurture. The father's primary obligation was to the moral and Christian upbringing of his children. Habitual prayer, Deems claimed, could establish a lifelong pattern of Christian behavior, or serve as a source of inspiration for a wayward soul. This view reflected the generally new approach to moral instruction as a daily endeavor. A father's Christian children and subsequent generations, not his estate or reputation, would be his legacy to the world. The chief benefit of family prayer—aside from soul-saving—was the harmony it produced in the family. Deems explained, "for peace and happiness, and successful labor, it is necessary that the members of a

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<sup>49</sup> Deems, *The Home-Altar*, 24.

family live together in harmony.” Sound and commonplace advice, but Deems presents an often observed, if undesirable, model, “It is possible that a man and a woman and several children *herd* together without sympathy, without reciprocal tenderness, each standing off to himself, or, what is worse, each obstructing and irritating the other.” Only “the reading of the Word of God and the union of all the members in prayer” might save a family the later desolation, and by “sympathy,” “reciprocal tenderness,” and mutual obligation, secure harmony.<sup>50</sup> Deems made no gendered distinctions in his advice, so the same appeals for affection and restraint applied to boys as equally to girls. And with his emphasis on harmony, his beliefs tilted toward expectations for modern middle class families.

Aside from soul salvation, family prayer steeled the child for the world, and reinforced public Christian behavior for the adult. The curse of prosperity troubled Deems the most. Wealth, and the supposedly hard work to achieve it, proved the primary distraction from family prayer. Deems cautioned,

in the morning, the temptation will be to run off as soon as we can to do our business. Let us remember that unless God’s blessings go with us, we may be running into destruction. This were [sic.] indeed to be absorbed in Mammon-worship, if our anxiety to be engaged in the activities of a gainful business should prevent the worship of the Lord our God.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Deems, *The Home-Altar*, 29.

<sup>51</sup> Deems, *The Home-Altar*, 82.

Christian practice thus stood in contrast to Benjamin Franklin-like values of diligent work so popular in mid-century America. Prosperity might actually be a curse, in disguise, from God. Yet Deems did not preclude acquisition. He endorsed wealth as a reward from God, should the rewarded have succeeded within the value system of the faithful. The family that devoted time, daily, to worship, was surely blessed by wealth.<sup>52</sup> Lest the head of the house succumb to the passions of command, Deems assured, family prayer could hedge that as well. The ideal character of the father included not only “supplies of grace,” but that practice would habituate him to “wholesome restraint upon his temper, his tongue, and his general behavior.”<sup>53</sup> Deems prescribed a patriarch, and one with the power to command, but that patriarch was to aspire to “wholesome restraint.” Not *dispassionate* restraint but “wholesome restraint.” Not restraint governed by rationality, but restraint governed by morality.<sup>54</sup>

Deems acquiesced to the realities of southern households. He frequently cited Abraham’s maxim that wherever he pitched his tent, he set up an altar.<sup>55</sup> The importance of the family altar laid not in an actual piece of furniture, increasingly available on the market, but the time, space, and sociality devoted to authentic

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<sup>52</sup> Deems, *The Home-Altar*, 49-53.

<sup>53</sup> Deems, *The Home-Altar*, 37.

<sup>54</sup> Still, a man’s manhood depended on his fulfilling the obligation of leading his family to religion, but his children and his wife. Deems, *The Home-Altar*, 56-57.

<sup>55</sup> Deems, *The Home-Altar*, 24-25, 66, 86.



worship. He did advocate, if possible, the allocation of space for the gathering: ‘This duty will be more easily and profitably discharged if a certain place in the house and a certain hour of the day be set apart and consecrated to family worship.’<sup>56</sup> But he acknowledged that that requirement might be set aside, so long as the gathering took place. Though not illustrated, *The Home-Altar* contained a clear vision for how the service should appear. Father, kneeling, seated, or standing, surrounded by the kneeling family (as traditional a view of the father as lord as imaginable.) He begins the service with a prayer, which Deems helpfully included for each day of the week, morning and evening. A Scripture reading, discussion of its themes, and an extemporaneous petition followed by singing rounded out the devotion. Deems did not insist on strict choreography but encouraged fathers to suit their prayers to their particular speaking styles and the needs of the family. Deems engaged other advocates of family prayer and exemplars of sentimental religious writing. He approved of Jacob Abbot’s *The Mother at Home*, admired James Alexander’s 1847 *Thoughts on Family Worship*, and excerpted Arvine’s *Cyclopedia of Religious Anecdotes*.

In the matter of gender roles, Deems hardly swayed from the paternalism and expansive vision of traditional southern families. Fathers did command subordinates and mothers rarely spoke. Yet Deems advocated middle-class function

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<sup>56</sup> Deems, *The Home-Altar*, 84.

of families as sacred institutions. By mid-century, American Protestants would find the domestic setting to be as religiously compelling as the pew or the campground.

### **“How to Treat a Wife”**

Discussions of family forms in religious literature had an analog in ecclesiastical and secular newspapers. Editors, in original columns and in excerpts from papers across the nation began to articulate forward-thinking advice on gender relations, advice strikingly compatible with evangelical expectations. Victoria Bynum identified a discourse in Piedmont newspapers that eschewed “the code of modern gentility.” Newspaper editors condemned the allegedly frivolous life of planter women. Farm women, editors claimed, should not succumb to a life devoted to ease and materialism. Bynum notes that “the practical needs of a farming economy and the infectious spirit of progress encouraged the view that white women should be active helpmates to their husbands rather than ornaments.”<sup>57</sup> To the “practical needs” and the “spirit of progress” must be added the evangelical expectation of marital fulfillment through moral gender equity.

Religious newspapers proliferated in North Carolina by the 1850s. Among the denominations, the Presbyterians published *North Carolina Presbyterian* in Fayetteville, the Baptists created the *Biblical Recorder* in Raleigh, and the Methodist Protestants received *The Methodist Protestant* from Baltimore. The Methodist

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<sup>57</sup> Victoria E. Bynum, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social & Sexual Control in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 48-50.

Episcopals did not host a state based newspaper, but subscribed to two papers, the *Southern Christian Advocate* from Charleston and the *Christian Advocate* from Richmond. Even the Antimission Baptists had access to *The Primitive Baptist*. Secular newspapers crowded the market as well: Greensboro *Patriot*, *The Watchman* from Salisbury, and *The People's Press* of Salem.

Women should, according to the papers that Piedmonters read, devote themselves to toil. This is not to suggest that the public discourse encouraged an eighteenth century style economic helpmeet or a patriarchal submissive. The modern farmwife performed a vital function as economic manager of the household, skilled laborer, and nurturer of children. A housewife enchanted by the latest dress patters or frivolous gossip could not possibly be serious about making britches or nursing babies.<sup>58</sup>

Religious newspapers elaborated on the domestic duties of women. They urged the moral authority of mothers rather than the laborious duties of the wife. In 1837, the *Advocate* approvingly quoted an unnamed French writer:

It is her [the wife's] happiness to be ignorant of all the world calls pleasure; her glory is to live in the duties of a wife and mother, and she consecrates her days to the practice of social virtues. Occupied in the government of her family, she reigns over her husband by com??; over her children by goodness.

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<sup>58</sup> D. Harland Hagler, "The Ideal Woman in the Antebellum South: Lady or Farmwife?," *The Journal of Southern History* 46 (August 1980): 405-418.

The passage sounds like a severe proscription, as if it condemns wives to a lifetime of toil, but it is not. “[T]o be ignorant of all the world calls pleasure” is to happily avoid a life devoted to false attainments. *True* happiness—human fulfillment—could not be found in the leisure practiced by the rich. Reading, fashion, and idleness led not to “filial order, peace, sweet sleep, and good health.” A hard-working wife, the quote continued, generated moral virtue by her very work: “Economical and studious, she prevents and dissipates the evil passions; the indigent who claim her charity, are never repulsed; the licentious avoid her presence.”<sup>59</sup> Two weeks later, the *Advocate* excerpted noted British women’s education advocate Hester Chapone:

The principal virtues or vices of a woman must be of a private and domestic kind. Within the circle of her own family, and dependants, lies her sphere of action, the scene of almost all those tasks and trials which must determine her character and her fate, here and thereafter. Reflect for a moment, how much the happiness of her husband, children and servants, must depend on her temper, and you will see that the greatest good or evil which she may have in her power to do, arises from her correcting or indulging its infirmities.<sup>60</sup>

Again, the advice confined women to the home, but at the same time the home arose in the estimation of middle class society. The household was not only the scene of female toil and trouble, but also the wellspring of virtue, emanating directly from women’s work.

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<sup>59</sup> July 8, 1837, *Southern Christian Advocate*.

<sup>60</sup> July 22, 1837, *Southern Christian Advocate*.

One editorial advocating female education outlined the benefits of a

regular system of character...I call education not that which is made up of shreds and patches or useless arts, but that which inculcates principles, polishes tastes, regulates tempers, cultivates reason, subdues the passions, directs the feelings, habituates the reflection, trains the self denial; and more especially that which refers all actions, feelings, sentiments, tastes and passions, to the love and fear of God.<sup>61</sup>

Evident here is the tendency to emotional and moral self-control. The verbs—polishes, regulates, cultivates, subdues, directs, habituates, and trains—promoted the ideal characteristics of modernizing middle-class gender roles. Inherent also is the idea that morality and virtue could arise from habitual practices in the everyday, in places of female dominance.

Women were a counterpoint to the iconic man, not as an “other,” but in equilibrium. An advice for men began, “HOW TO TREAT A WIFE.” Answering puckishly, “*First*. Get a wife,” the column continued, describing a vision of gender apartheid, with man in the “open air” and woman “shut in from these healthful influences.” Yet that very inequity engendered the conscientious characteristics of patience, attentiveness, and solicitousness. The man must realize that “[y]our wife may have had trials, which, though of less magnitude, may have been as hard to bear. Do not increase her difficulties...she has trials and sorrows to which you are a stranger, but which your tenderness can deprive of all their keenness.” Abandon impulsive self-interest, then; restrain the impulse to heap your problems onto her.

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<sup>61</sup> August 19, 1837, *Southern Christian Advocate*.

“Do not treat her with indifference.” How? “*Sometimes yield your wishes to her.*” For men who found the thought distasteful, the writer appealed to empathy: “Think you it is not difficult for her to give up *always?*” Submission to masculine impulse and rage was key to reciprocal love and respect—the ideal relationship between husband and wife, the writer summarized. Traditional patriarchal inequality lingered, as in the instruction: “Show yourself *manly*, so that your wife can *look up* to you, and feel that you will act nobly, and that she can confide in your judgment,” but a wife *looking up* to a husband had been surpassed by the admonition for the man to *yield his wishes*.<sup>62</sup>

Evangelical publications thus objected to impulsive masculine behavior advocated by sexually and racially anxious planters and offered an alternative code of conduct based on evangelical standards. Newspapers’ advice to men encouraged a companionate relationship in marriage. A Christian household, then, should be a place of harmony, but moreso, a place where the will of a man should be subjugated in favor of harmony. Newspapers urged the domestication of masculine behavior and promoted the moral authority of mothers, thereby reinforcing the middle class view of family forms and functions. This message of gendered harmony and manhood restrained made inroads into rural North Carolina through evangelical publications. The route is important because it did not originate with the region’s social elite. The projectors of middle-class values may have been just as imperious

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<sup>62</sup> April 12, 1844, *Southern Christian Advocate*.

as the great planters, but their lessons for behavior could not have been more different. In the diaries and lives of Caroline Lilly and Strong Thomasson, we may see the beginnings of these new cultural codes in the South. Caroline and her husband James practiced a companionate marriage. So did Strong and his wife Mollie. Both couples made their households into sacred spaces, and both did so in the belief that such action would ensure their salvation.

CHAPTER VI  
FAMILY LIFE IN THE LILLY AND THOMASSON HOUSEHOLDS

**Caroline and James Lilly**

Caroline Brooks read avidly.<sup>1</sup> She consumed the classics of Latin, botany and astronomy, religious tracts, newspapers, and treatises on female education. That a poor girl from Moore County grew to be as voracious a consumer of the printed word as she was is something of a mystery. Caroline, in her brief autobiography, described herself as a disruptive student, disinterested in learning: “I was sent to an old field school six weeks to a rustic austere pedagogue who taught in a miserable pine cabin, kept no order in his school, and yet applied the rod with all the severity of a Syclian tyrant.” Despite the dilapidated circumstances, she “learned to read & was extremely fond of the employment.” Caroline described another of her country schools as populated with “a rude illiterate set of country boys & girls, and of course my manners received but little improvement from being associated with them.” Though she later attempted to distance herself from her classmates—and despite the apparent literacy gap—Caroline was clearly one of the poor students she described. She remembered, “indeed it is not to be wondered when I was frequently engaged in mischievous pranks and in doing of many thin

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<sup>1</sup> Caroline Brooks Lilly Diary and Account Book, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



to annoy & \_\_\_ them. I would misplace the books of one, tickle another, laugh at the broken dialect or bad spelling or ~~rude manners and tawdry dress of a third~~ and never failed to do my best to bear the secret of the larger girls and communicate ~~them to others.~~" At eight years old, Caroline remembered, her parents ended her scant scholastic career and set her to work in "the parlor, the kitchen & the field." Between her eighth and eighteenth year, she improved her handwriting by "copying the deeds notes" of her stepfather, and—despite living "in a neighborhood where books are scarce"—reading everything that passed before her. Caroline's deprecation of her own childhood fulfilled the requirements of a conversion story by acknowledging evil behavior before turning to God. By striking out a section, she exhibited a particular bit of humiliation and regret for behavioral transgressions that continued to plague her in later life. Having later achieved the perspective of an educated woman, Caroline developed contempt for her former station and pride in her enlightened status. She took two lessons from her childhood experiences: fervent desire to continue learning and a disdain for the classroom's "austere" pedagogy.<sup>1</sup>

As the daughter of a poor family, Caroline might never have been able to afford and pursue her educational aspirations were it not for a fortunate and completely mysterious encounter. She wrote:

In my 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> year I was introduced to several persons of distinction who treated me with attention and kindly loaned me as many books as I had time

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<sup>1</sup> n.d., 1835, Lilly Diary.

and leisure to read. For several years I had free access to two excellent libraries which I shall never forget. I studied geography & arithmetic, reviewed my grammar & read history & poetry until I became tolerably well acquainted with Rollin, Plutarch, Hume, Homer, Shakespeare, Milton, Scott, &c. ~~By preserving industry I was enabled to purchase a few~~ \_\_\_\_ and their writings of \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ afforded me a degree of pleasure.

This is all she said, leaving us no other clue about the identity of her patrons or under what circumstances she accessed their libraries. Nonetheless, this experience invigorated her intellect and provided her with a solid footing in the world of letters and education. During her single years, and for a few years into her marriage, Caroline continued to read the classics. She made a concerted effort to continue lessons in Latin and regularly read botany and astronomy books.

The private library episode is the last of Caroline's autobiography. The events between 1823 and 1836, when she opened her diary, are unknown. We do know several facts. She did not marry, as a young woman in her twenties might; she became a teacher; and she taught in Montgomery County while living with the James Martin family at Allenton near the Pee Dee River. *Why* she did not marry is open to conjecture. Caroline later expressed a lack of confidence in her physical appearance and seemed resigned to life as a single woman. It is entirely possible that she chose to remain single in order to maintain the small independences of an unmarried woman. Teaching was one of the few career opportunities for such an unmarried woman, but Caroline's enthusiasm suggests that she chose the profession, rather than enter it from economic necessity. In 1836 she committed herself to the life of a

single teacher when she left rural Montgomery to accept a position in prosperous Concord, North Carolina.

Caroline's first impulse to teach arose from a desire to aid young people in achieving salvation. "For education unquestionably implies," she wrote, "preparation for eternity."<sup>2</sup> Her own experience of educational opportunity and conversion undoubtedly shaped this goal, but Caroline supported experience with rhetoric from Christian educational theory, primarily Jacob Abbott's *The Young Christian*. At the opening of 1837 she prayed:

Let me be successful in imparting scientific and moral instruction to those who are entrusted to my care, fully giving myself to the work and devoting my whole time and talent to the discharge of my high responsibilities. May I be enabled to inculcate successfully the important duties of self-government, to instruct my charges in cultivating sisterly & social affections & every domestic virtue, and to acquire elegant, refined & accomplished manners, and above all to cherish sentiments of piety and devotion to that Almighty to whom they are indebted for life and every blessings they enjoy.<sup>3</sup>

Not long after, Caroline, in a moment of reflection ("I feel, I fear, too little anxiety for the success of my labors"), expressed an interest in "the interesting and important cause of female education." She looked to God for guidance, "Is it the sphere in which my Heavenly Father designed me to move?" Apparently God approved her direction, but she also had secular guides. Caroline's interest in female education had been nurtured by Jacob Abbott, and she drew inspiration from Willbur Fisk's

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<sup>2</sup> September 4, 1836, Lilly Diary.

<sup>3</sup> January 1, 1837, Lilly Diary.

description of the Hofwyl School in Switzerland<sup>4</sup> (if this is from his book, published the same year as she read it, or in a newspaper excerpt, I don't quite know right now.) She also followed Emma Willard, head of the Troy Female Institute, author of textbooks, and well-known advocate of female education. Caroline read Willard's *Journals and Letters from France and Great Britain* in April 1837 and took the opportunity to reinforce her own pedagogical approach: "May I be activated (?) by motives of benevolence far more than by a mean and sordid love of pecuniary gain and not (as a lady in London replied to Mrs. Willard teach mainly) because it is a genteel way of making a living."<sup>5</sup> Caroline did cast a critical eye on Emma Willard, however, describing her as "evidently too fond of dress and amusement for a professor of religion."<sup>6</sup>

Caroline discovered a teaching mentor closer to home in Susan Davis Nye Hutchison. Hutchison, an emigrant from New York, had married a southerner and, after his death, operated a number of regionally renowned female academies. In 1837, when Caroline taught in Concord, Hutchison opened an academy in Salisbury, where a number of young teachers sought her guidance. Caroline visited a public examination of Hutchison's students in June 1837, and that November—after she had relocated to Montgomery County—travelled to Salisbury to "gain knowledge on

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<sup>4</sup> October 3, 1838, Lilly Diary.

<sup>5</sup> Emma Willard, *Journal and Letters, from France and Great-Britain* (Troy, N.Y.: N. Tuttle, 1833). See page 382 for the London lady's remark.

<sup>6</sup> April 7, 1837, Lilly Diary.

the important subject of female education.”<sup>7</sup> She taught two classes in Concord, then failing to get another contract, considered an offer in Chesterfield, South Carolina to teach. Her former connections in Montgomery County, however, found her a position and she glumly returned to the Martin household.<sup>8</sup>

After she married James Lilly on January 1, 1839, Caroline continued to teach. This transition, in fact, had little effect on her stated desire to use teaching to guide children to salvation, and her husband encouraged her continuance. In fact, James built Caroline her own schoolhouse—that she named Sylvania—somewhere on the Lilly property.<sup>9</sup> Caroline published an advertisement for her school in *The Watchman*, a Salisbury newspaper:

Mrs. Caroline M. Lilly,

Formerly Miss Brooks, respectfully begs leave to inform her patrons, and the public generally, that she will resume the exercises of her School on the first Monday in February next, at her own residence, near Allenton, Montgomery county. The government will be maternal, and the terms as moderate as can be had in any School of equal respectability. Excellent board in highly respectable families can be had at the low price of \$6 per month. The Teacher is prepared to accommodate 8 or 10 young ladies with board, to whose mental, moral and physical improvement she pledges herself to pay the strictest attention. From her long experience in teaching, and her determination to relax neither zeal nor effort for the improvement of those entrusted to her care, she hopes to receive a liberal share of patronage.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> November 24, 1837, Lilly Diary. Hutcheson served as mentor to a number of aspiring female teachers. Sarah Frew Davidson, the Charlotte Sunday School teachers looked to her as a mentor. Karen M. McConnell, et. al., eds., *A Life in Antebellum Charlotte* (Charleston, S.C.: History Press, 2005), 46, 49, 65-66. Sarah and Caroline did not appear to know one another.

<sup>8</sup> November 18, 1837, Lilly Diary.

<sup>9</sup> February 6, 1839, February 11, 1839, Lilly Diary.

<sup>10</sup> January 26, 1839, *Carolina Watchman*. See also January 14, 1839, Lilly Diary.

In addition to regular teaching, Caroline opened a Sunday School at Sylvania, noting, “may it be a blessing to the community and may the most unworthy of all professed followers of Christ be actively employed in doing good while in a state of probation.”<sup>11</sup> Continuing her teaching while being the mistress of the household had two major implications. First, Caroline’s was a boarding school, so within two months of her marriage and assumption of household duties, she also had ten young girls to care for.<sup>12</sup> An instant family. Second, though she did not explicitly say so, her teaching enterprise evidently became a critical part of the Lilly’s household economy. The Lillys, though rich in land and slaves, seemed to always have been on the verge of bankruptcy.<sup>13</sup> The stakes of her teaching, formerly personal and ideological, now included cash. Perhaps it was because of the importance of the school for the family finances that James frequently helped her in the classroom, but Caroline never interpreted the assistance as anything other than signs of affection and love.<sup>14</sup> He took over classes particularly when Caroline suffered from pregnancy. She noted that “Mr. Lilly accompanied me to school in the evening and assisted me very much in instructing a class in writing.” She welcomed, and evidently, enjoyed his help; “I hope he will repeat his visits frequently when he may

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<sup>11</sup> June 16, 1839, Lilly Diary. See also June 9.

<sup>12</sup> March 2, 1839, Lilly Diary.

<sup>13</sup> March 14, 1839, Lilly Diary.

<sup>14</sup> April 16, April 22, 1839, Lilly Diary.

have an opportunity of doing so.”<sup>15</sup> Caroline expressed her pleasure in the occupation in June 1839: “The school room becomes every day more and more interesting and to me the labors I there have to perform are more like recreations than dull monotonous tiresome tasks which too many teachers are apt to complain,” but she noted after her term ended and her boarders were away, “Mr. Lilly and I were alone last night for the first time in six months.<sup>16</sup> I find a temporary respite from the cares of school extremely pleasant.”<sup>17</sup>

This relief, almost four months before her first delivery, proved her last. While marriage did little to alter Caroline’s view of her teaching career, having children of her own did. Twins Ann Martin and Mary Caroline, born September 29, 1839, were followed by James Marshall, Junior, on March 9, 1841. Not unexpectedly, Caroline’s love and attention turned to them. She found her children “interesting,” and after four months, she noted, “During this period I have enjoyed the delicious sweets of maternal love and felt myself more than repaid for the pains and privations my sweet babes have caused me.”<sup>18</sup> She considered her duty to “train them up in discipline and admonition of the Lord,”<sup>19</sup> but unlike her pupils and boarders, “they...contribute no small share to happiness to our little domestic

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<sup>15</sup> April 16, 1839, Lilly Diary.

<sup>16</sup> June 27, 1839, Lilly Diary.

<sup>17</sup> June 5, 1839, Lilly Diary.

<sup>18</sup> January 29, 1840, Lilly Diary.

<sup>19</sup> November 29, 1840, Lilly Diary.

circle.”<sup>20</sup> Caroline’s domestic circle, never before articulated, previously included (probably), her husband, her boarders, and her slaves. Becoming a mother, however, caused Caroline to narrow this vision to include only her husband and her own babies. The tug of “domestic felicity” did not cease.<sup>21</sup> The birth of six children—one of whom died—reoriented Caroline’s “domestic vision” in more ways than simply her household composition. As a wife, Caroline’s duties had vastly increased after marriage. She oversaw the household of boarders and slaves, performed physical tasks alongside her slaves, planted and cultivated a large garden and nurtured flocks of fowl, and maintained her participation in services and camp meetings in the Methodist community. She loved teaching—females in particular—and continued it, even when her family began to lean on it for financial support. But as early as 1840 she had come to despise the forced absences teaching had caused her to take from her own children. She added an ironic twist to her resentment:

I find my small school but little calculated to advance my pecuniary interest or enhance the pleasures of my sweet domestic circles as the price of tuition is low and I am compelled to be absent from my dear babes several hours in every day. The servants also perform less labors than if under the eye of a director. But secular concerns of my family require that I should do what I can for its livelihood and I feel it my duty to use my best exertions to provide for the welfare of those who are dependent on me.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> November 14, 1840, Lilly Diary.

<sup>21</sup> January 1, 1845, Lilly Diary.

<sup>22</sup> May 22, 1840, Lilly Diary.



Domestic concerns had caused Caroline to become dependent on teaching as an economic activity, a motivation she herself had condemned but three years before. But she continued, finishing her last term in school in June 1845. Economic need had trumped idealism, but domestic felicity overpowered both.

Motherhood alone did not push Caroline toward “domestic felicity”; that process had begun with her unexpected marriage. Earlier in life she had been infatuated with the Reverend Archibald McGilvray, the minister who oversaw her conversion, but he did not return the affection. She resigned herself to singlehood and did not once, at least to her diary, divulge any interest in marriage. As a single woman with experience raising children in a community largely untouched by the population turnover of urban areas (though not the outmigration to the southwest), Caroline likely represented a fine catch to the older bachelors—fathers among them—of Cabarrus and Montgomery. Five men proposed marriage, or indicated an intention to do so. Caroline rejected four of them and accepted one. In the deliberations in her journal, Caroline revealed a strong and modern vision of the conjugal relationship. She rejected all appeals to economic dependency and comfort and determined that should she marry, she would do so for love alone. Her first (known) suitor in 1836, a “C.H.L.,” did convince her “that he is devotedly attached to me and beside this question of mind & heart was such as entitle him to universal respect,” which she considered a fair foundation for marriage. “[B]ut for several

reasons I feel my duty to discard him.”<sup>23</sup> She did not state the reasons. Caroline expressed distaste with the idea of stepping into another woman’s place when she noted of another perceived suitor, “I do hope he [‘Mr. C’] is not looking out for another wife.”<sup>24</sup> Her contempt for desperate bachelors and unfamiliar mates is apparent with her snub of one man, “Rumor says that L.S. a widower with five children is resolved on addressing me on the subject of matrimony. I am not acquainted with the gentleman and am very much astonished that he should speak so freely on the subject. He must either feel very certain of success or dread a disappointment but little.”<sup>25</sup> This man’s subsequent proposal absolutely stunned her:

To my utter astonishment Mr. L. Simmons came here on last evening and actually proposed marriage. Nothing could be further from my thoughts than the idea of acceding to the proposition even if he were possessed of the wealth of the Indies. He takes a great deal of pains to have known that he is rich and goes so far as to say he is independent. Be it so. he is welcome to enjoy it. I want it not. I would rather work for \_\_\_ a cottage than to possess princely honors with him.<sup>26</sup>

Lockey Simmons, indeed, had reason to boast. A landowner, cotton planter, and Baptist patron in the eastern portion of Montgomery, the widower Simmons

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<sup>23</sup> October 13, 1836, Lilly Diary.

<sup>24</sup> April 22, 1838, Lilly Diary.

<sup>25</sup> May 29, 1838, Lilly Diary.

<sup>26</sup> November 21, 1838, Lilly Diary.

claimed a farm valued at \$4,000 in 1850, with thirty-three slaves.<sup>27</sup> A match with Simmons would have provided as much economic stability and social status as could have been hoped for in Montgomery County. Apparent in Caroline's rejections are a number of assumptions. She could not countenance the idea of marrying a man solely for the economic security he offered, nor a man for whom she did not feel an affectionate attachment. What economic independence Caroline had achieved as a teacher in Concord appeared tenuous at best, and having grown up in poverty, she did not romanticize or desire its dispossessions. Poverty haunted her. In April 1837, upon seeing an "old maid," she faltered then righted herself, "I am almost tempted to accept M.D.'s proffer, but no, that will not do. The marriage state must be truly miserable without reciprocity of affection, similarity of tastes & congeniality of Soul."<sup>28</sup> Caroline's desires matched the growing national sentiment regarding marriage. In short, Caroline prioritized an affectionate marriage over an economically or socially advantageous one. Historians have noted this characteristic—the advent of affection—among courting planters.<sup>29</sup> Caroline—not a planter—expected it. James practiced it, as his choice of a poor, dependent, school teacher—as she recognized—would not raise his status in any way. When Caroline

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<sup>27</sup> On Simmons, see William Cathcart, ed., *The Baptist Encyclopedia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1833), Sixth Census of the United States, 1840, Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: Montgomery County, North Carolina.

<sup>28</sup> April, n.d., 1837, Lilly Diary.

<sup>29</sup> Jan Lewis, *The Pursuit of Happiness: Family Values in Jefferson's Virginia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), Chapter 5; Jane Turner Censer, *North Carolina Planters and Their Children, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 72; Anya Jabour, *Marriage in the Early Republic: Elizabeth and William Wirt and the Companionate Ideal* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), and Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South*, 50-51 and 88-89.

finally accepted an offer, she did so because the suitor had captured her heart.

Fortunately for her, James Lilly also offered a final step into the world of the middle-class South.

The Lillys were among the first settlers of what would become Montgomery County. The patriarch of the Lilly family, Edmund, had arrived in the Piedmont in the early 1750s from Fluvanna County, Virginia. Edmund acquired a considerable competency on the Pee Dee River. He purchased “thousands of acres,” owned slaves, operated a mill, and served as juror on Anson County’s Court of Oyer. Edmund Lilly’s wealth did not preclude him from piety; he served, in the 1790s, as the preacher of the Rocky River Baptist Church. Edmund sired ten children from three wives. Edmund, Junior, the fourth child, inherited the Lilly seat, Scuffleton, at the confluence of Little Richland Creek and the Pee Dee River. Edmund, Junior’s brood included eight children. The most prominent of these, Edmund, became a wealthy merchant in Fayetteville, while James Marshall Lilly took over Scuffleton. James Marshall’s early career is difficult to determine. James’ brother Edmund, even from Fayetteville, appeared to manage the family resources in Montgomery. James participated in county politics at nearby Lawrenceville, where he socialized with the Cochrans, Christians, Gaineses and other prominent families, and even represented Montgomery in the House of Commons from 1827 to 1830 and the State Senate in

1832.<sup>30</sup> At forty years of age in 1838, James found himself still unmarried. When James' sister Mary married A. Cochran in May 1838, Caroline found herself in attendance (as part of the wedding party.) Though more interested in the dress and fashion of the bride, Caroline did note that she "had a tete a tete with James M. Lilly. Somewhat agreeable."<sup>31</sup> It was an inconspicuous beginning, but paired with Caroline in the wedding party and seated next to her in a carriage on a two-day jaunt with the bride and groom, James built up a modest rapport with her. Caroline noted, "the agreeable conversation of Mr. L. rendered the trip quite pleasant."<sup>32</sup> James escorted Caroline home from church that Sunday, but nothing about him made her think of him as more than a friend of a friend.<sup>33</sup> James, however, had designs he developed over the summer. His widowed mother hosted Caroline for supper at her house, and sent Caroline a basket of peaches from Scuffleton.<sup>34</sup> While she may have suspected James' interest, Caroline became fully aware when James visited the Martin household in August.<sup>35</sup> "The world will say he has some particular motive in visiting Mrs. M.'s," she said before noting in a cool tone, "I care not."<sup>36</sup> But her practiced

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<sup>30</sup> Genealogical information is taken from a 1952 profile of the Lilly family, delivered at the dedication of the family burying ground, in the Genealogy Vertical File in the N.C. State Government and Heritage Library, Raleigh, North Carolina.

<sup>31</sup> May 10, 1838, Lilly Diary.

<sup>32</sup> May 11, 1838, Lilly Diary.

<sup>33</sup> May 13, 1838, Lilly Diary.

<sup>34</sup> July 3, 1838, August 16, 1838, Lilly Diary.

<sup>35</sup> July 30, 1838, August 4, 1838, Lilly Diary.

<sup>36</sup> August 19, 1838, Lilly Diary.

indifference could not suppress her growing feelings, for the next day she wrote, “I see myself exposed to dangers which of my own strength I cannot avert.”<sup>37</sup>

Much to Caroline’s surprise, she had grown accustomed to her own autonomy and resented the unexpected feelings growing in her heart. In this respect, she processed through a common courtship practice—an almost ritual defense of her independence expressed through fear of marriage and a studied indifference to her suitor. Scott Stephan detailed the reasons for women’s hesitation in the face of courtship as fear of both sexually impulsive (and deceptive) men, and of the potential for a mismatch that threatened piety.<sup>38</sup> “Felt that my heart was in danger,” Caroline wrote in September, “but prayed for aid to guard it carefully.”<sup>39</sup> Caroline did not specify the reasons she feared for her heart. Interestingly, she made no mention of the fact that James was not a professed Christian. She based her assessment of him entirely on his affections. She could not contain her feelings and wrote with barely concealed resentment and sarcasm at a perceived lack of attention from him: “A friend told me that the gentleman whom Dame Rumor has long since given me as a beau is too much immersed in business to pay me a visit. Be it so!”<sup>40</sup> On November 12, James proposed marriage to Caroline. She noted, “nothing

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<sup>37</sup> August 20, 1838, Lilly Diary.

<sup>38</sup> Scott Stephan, *Redeeming the Southern Family: Evangelical Women and Domestic Devotion in the Antebellum South* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2008), 62-67.

<sup>39</sup> September 24, 1838, Lilly Diary.

<sup>40</sup> October 7, 1838, Lilly Diary.

in the history of my past life had appeared half so much like romance and so little like reality as the events of this day." Feelings overcame her: "But I do not dream. I cannot doubt the evidence of my senses..." James had confirmed what she had already learned from their brief courtship, that the pair truly loved one another, and James possessed no other motive. Caroline claimed that "no mercenary motives could prompt him to make such a choice. I am destitute of wealth of beauty of honorable connections and yet he declares he only wishes fortune for my sake."<sup>41</sup> She deliberated for the customary length of time and notified him by letter three weeks later that "I have consented to become his companion for life fully believing that mutual affection is the only solid basis of conjugal felicity, and being persuaded that no other motive has induced \_\_\_ to so important engagement."<sup>42</sup> She reassured herself, "No prince or potentate on earth could rival him in my affection."<sup>43</sup> Caroline married James at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Martin on January 1, 1839.

Clearly, Caroline articulated a yearning for a companionate marriage but the exact sources of her firm idealism are unknown. Her evangelical faith fostered companionate relationships across the social spectrum. Her elevation from poverty

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<sup>41</sup> November 12, 1838, Lilly Diary.

<sup>42</sup> December 8, 1838, Lilly Diary. Caroline and James' courtship contained elements of epistolary ritual that Steven M. Stowe described, particularly in James' actual proposal and in Caroline's affirmative reply. Unfortunately, the letters they exchanged do not survive. Their courtship also included quite a number of face-to-face visits that apparently included unguarded emotional expression—not elemental to Stowe's description of planter ritual. Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), Chapter 2.

<sup>43</sup> December 17, 1838, Lilly Diary.

to the upper classes exposed her to ideas and practices of modern marriages then in vogue. The literature Caroline consumed tended toward the religious, the classical, and the scientific. Nothing about her reading habits suggest a particular interest in contemporary social relations. The best explanation is that affectionate marriage was easily blended with the religious, literary, and social worlds embraced by this poor girl from Moore County. Caroline's physical travels had been limited. As far as one can tell, she never left the confines of Moore, Cabarrus, Rowan, and Montgomery Counties. Charlotte, probably; Chesterfield, perhaps; but Caroline never made it as far as Columbia, Raleigh, or even Greensboro. Concord, where she lived for a time, and Salisbury, where she visited, were nodes of contemporary culture. But by and large, Caroline's modern sentiments about teaching, marriage, and family were nurtured in out of the way places. From Allenton and Scuffleton on the banks of the Pee Dee, Caroline had access to the latest educational theory from Switzerland, she knew the details of Emma Willard's visits in London, and maintained her robust curriculum of reading. She was never particularly isolated by rural life and had complete access to the news of the world. This flow of information and ideas continued after her marriage, even when her vision of "domestic felicity" became her primary experience.

Caroline's aspiration for an affectionate marriage proved out. She repeatedly noted tender moments, indulgences, and protective solicitations James provided. The two occasionally went fishing for pleasure, strolled in the waters of Little



Richland Creek, and toured the fields of the farm. Caroline treasured these moments. James and Caroline comforted one another in times of trial. In fact, Caroline frequently revealed episodes of irritation and anger, for which James provided relief: "the morning found me quite ill in body and mind. My indisposition so excited my nervous system that I lost all command of myself and scolded not a little. Felt ashamed and made some apology to my dear husband who witnessed my perturbed state of mind. He replied mildly that he attributed it all to my bad health and did not blame me."<sup>44</sup> She did not fear his judgment but rather was anxious about upholding her end of tender reciprocity: "The kind attentions of my husband are not all diminished but rather increase as my bodily afflictions accumulate."<sup>45</sup> His attentions soothed her anxieties and her physical ailments. James not only fretted over her when she succumbed to illness but frequently substituted at her school when she could not attend.<sup>46</sup> She returned the favors when he was ill, or just ill-tempered. At one point, Caroline recorded that "my husband is perplexed with many cares and requires the soothing attentions of a prudent and affectionate wife. Let me not forget the vows of 1839."<sup>47</sup> During her first pregnancy, Caroline wrote an extraordinary and revealing statement; "A sweet calm resignation to the will of Heaven and the assiduous attention of my beloved James have greatly tended to

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<sup>44</sup> September 7, 1839, Lilly Diary.

<sup>45</sup> September 9, 1839, Lilly Diary.

<sup>46</sup> July 25, 1839, Lilly Diary.

<sup>47</sup> October 28, 1840, Lilly Diary.

alleviate my bodily affliction.”<sup>48</sup> She had placed James on an equal footing with God in relation to her own well being. But her positioning is critical. She reserved submission as an act for God, not her husband. She had not learned to subsume her own happiness to her husband. That still remained for God. No, from James she had learned to expect “assiduous attention.”

James never behaved as the domineering patriarch, anxious about status and honor, so often described by historians. On only one occasion did Caroline suggest that James even possessed such qualities: “~~Mr. L indisposed, aggrieved from an incident that occurred at the Gaines on yesterday. He possesses high sense of honor that will not readily book an insult.~~” The insult had apparently regarded James’ compromised financial situation. It should be repeated that this mention is the only time Caroline referred to James’ sense of honor, and this prickly honor did not have a domestic face. James did not parade his honor within the household and did not exhibit the dominance of his family as a performance of his honor in public. He thought nothing of being a substitute teacher in his wife’s school or a nurse at her sickbed, and he tried to allay her anxieties by returning directly from Lawrenceville court instead of carousing with male friends.<sup>49</sup> Nor did James act the patriarch in matters of religion. The Lilly family was Baptist, but James and Caroline attended a Methodist church because she adhered to that faith. He facilitated her ability to attend Sunday worship, Quarterly Meetings, and camp meetings. James never

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<sup>48</sup> August 1, 1838, Lilly Diary.

<sup>49</sup> February 5, 1839, Lilly Diary.

wielded spiritual authority in the household. Caroline was the undisputed head of family devotion at Scuffleton. He struggled with his faith. He never had a conversion experience, even though he prayed for one. This shortcoming concerned Caroline: “my beloved husband has not yet obtained a hope of regeneration though he has daily sought it for many months.”<sup>50</sup> James was not a Christian, but his married life conformed to the expected behaviors of a Christian man and husband.

In 1844, Caroline’s daughter, four year old Mary Caroline, suddenly died. The circumstances of her passing are unknown, “but all, all in one sad hour were snuffed out by the cruel hand of relentless death!” Caroline never fully recovered. The final three years of her diary express deep anxiety and melancholy, lack her usual wit, and drip with the language of sentimentality: “O how severe was the stroke which severed one of the golden chains that bound me to human existence and entwined in its cords the brightest and loveliest sweet that cheered my pathway through this thorn clad vale of tears.”<sup>51</sup> While Caroline’s earlier prayers mimicked the language of tracts and sermons, her expressions of love for her family reflected the contemporary languid affection for “domestic felicity.” Her children “contribute no small share of happiness to our little domestic circle.”<sup>52</sup> Her twins caused her to enjoy “the delicious sweets of maternal love...more than repaid for the pains and

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<sup>50</sup> August 16, 1840, Lilly Diary.

<sup>51</sup> August 23, 1845, Lilly Diary.

<sup>52</sup> November 14, 1840, Lilly Diary.

privations my sweet babes have caused me to realize.”<sup>53</sup> On her sixth anniversary, Caroline envisioned “four lovely children smil[ing] all round me contributing much to my domestic felicity, while a lovelier than all has escaped to the \_\_\_\_ of unending bliss.”<sup>54</sup> As might be expected of a Christian, Caroline dedicated herself to raising her children, who she “look[ed] upon...as a loan from the Lord,” for God.<sup>55</sup> She prayed that God allow her to “train them up in the discipline and admonition of the Lord.”<sup>56</sup> This desire flowed, of course, from the prescriptions of her faith, but she also entwined lessons from her teaching philosophy into her parental behavior. Particularly, Caroline struggled to correct her feisty toddlers without physical punishment. When James, Jr. mistreated his little brother, Caroline “represented to him the wickedness of his conduct and told him that God was angry with him and would punish him if he did not repent and do better.”<sup>57</sup> Soon after, however, James again misbehaved, and “I felt it my duty to punish him with the rod. he promised amendment but was he convinced of his error?” She regretted her steps, “Have been too harsh and too frequently resorted to rough means. Must endeavor to improve.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> January 29, 1840, Lilly Diary.

<sup>54</sup> January 1, 1845, Lilly Diary.

<sup>55</sup> January 29, 1840, Lilly Diary.

<sup>56</sup> January 10, 1840, Lilly Diary.

<sup>57</sup> January 4, 1846, Lilly Diary.

<sup>58</sup> January 9, 1846, Lilly Diary.

Reading and literature informed Caroline's parenting style. She turned to the brother of Jacob Abbott, who wrote *The Mother at Home* in 1833.<sup>59</sup> Caroline read the book in 1840, after the birth of her twins, "for the sake of properly gaining instruction on the important subject of training my sweet babes," and immediately recognized the central premise: "parents should have deep devotional feelings themselves, should present religion in a cheerful aspect."<sup>60</sup> Indeed, Abbott claimed that parents should not only pass moral lessons to their children, but should actually *be* moral themselves. The reason for this fine distinction was that children absorbed the example of their parents and that learning took place with every interaction between parents and their offspring. The point of education being the conveyance of morals and the development of character, the actual acquisition of intelligence and civic knowledge would naturally follow. Whereas Charles Force Deems envisioned a household governed by a father, twenty years earlier, in the tract read by Caroline, Abbott placed that responsibility solely in the hands of the mother. Caroline explained Abbott's ideas:

If the mother is unaccustomed to govern her children, if she look to the father to enforce obedience, and to control;--when *he* is absent all family government is absent, and the children are left to run wild; to learn lessons of disobedience; to practice arts of deception; to build, upon the foundation of contempt for a mother, a character of insubordination and iniquity.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> John S.C. Abbott, *The Mother At Home* (New York: The American Tract Society, 1833).

<sup>60</sup> November 29, 1840, Lilly Diary.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

Abbott advocated patience and tolerance in teaching morals, but he made clear the foundation of good education—authority. He described a fine line between forbearance and indulgence. The well-meaning but misguided child would come around to the lessons of a patient mother, but a spoiled child risked becoming “self-willed, turbulent, and revengeful” and spending a lifetime disappointing his mother. Abbott’s choice of adverbs marking undesirable behavior is interesting. Considered in a more favorable light, they might describe an impulsive man of honor: willful, violent, and primed for vengeance. To prevent this unfortunate outcome, Abbott insisted that mothers must exert total authority to achieve the obedience of their children. They must not be accustomed to defying authority, so when a punishment is called for, it must be unhesitatingly delivered. And by punishment Abbott presumably meant spanking. Such punishment was necessary because children often could not be *reasoned* with in the manner of an adult and would respond better to correction. It is not “enough that a child should yield to your *arguments* and *persuasions*. It is essential that he should submit to your authority.” But punishment must be delivered with the correct tone. “*Guard against too much severity,*” he advised,

by pursuing a steady course of efficient government, severity will very seldom be found necessary. If, when punishment is inflicted, it is done with composure and with solemnity, occasions for punishment will be very unfrequent. Let a mother ever be affectionate and mild with her children... And let her feel, when they have done wrong, not irritated, but sad, and punish them in sorrow, but not in anger.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 24, 30, 60-61.

Thus, Caroline's despair about correcting James, Jr., with the rod is an example of her enacting the behavior Abbott prescribed. Physical correction did not betray a maternal, Christian code. Caroline did not fear that a beating delivered was the wrong approach. She feared because the correction was inflicted in a moment of passion, not solemnity and sadness. Caroline approved of Abbott's treatise, but not without a bit of criticism: "I find many excellent remarks on the government of children though a little too theoretical." She particularly approved of Abbott's prescriptions for religious instruction, including the charges to "imprint pleasing ideas and such as the scriptures hold forth of the happiness of Heaven that thereby excite the most intense desire to enter that happy world." Her summary perfectly described the modern approach to religious nurturing—"We should not only pray for our children but pray with them and teach them to pray."<sup>63</sup>

In the life experiences of Caroline and James Lilly, we see an imperfectly articulated middle-class family. She did not describe herself as such but learned from and performed the routines of middle class domesticity. Caroline drew in ideas from a full spectrum of evangelical, classical, and contemporary literature. She maintained an interest in educational theory through books and nurtured her teaching philosophy through communication with the foremost educators of her day. Caroline insisted on a companionate marriage and thereby rejected any "pre-

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<sup>63</sup> November 29, 1840, Lilly Diary.

modern” considerations. Thus, she married James Lilly and had a successfully affectionate relationship with him.

### **Strong and Mollie Thomasson**

Strong Thomasson was possessed by periodicals. He read more voraciously than Caroline in her singlehood. He read so many magazines that he mimicked their style in his own diary entries and once imagined himself the editor of a newspaper. Strong read on weekends, nights, and even read while driving his wagon. Newspapers and magazines interested Strong the most, but he also read works of pious fiction and more traditional religious matter. Strong’s diary reflected his literary interests, but more importantly, the ways he integrated the lessons of reading into his daily life are apparent.<sup>64</sup>

Strong took local and regional newspapers including the Salem *People’s Press*, The Greensboro *Message*, *Old Rip’s Pop Gun* from Shelby, and for a time he took Charles Force Deems’ temperance newspaper, *The Ballot Box*.<sup>65</sup> Thomasson enthused about the *North Carolina Planter*.<sup>66</sup> He subscribed to papers from other places in the United States. He enjoyed the *Dollar Times* from Cincinnati but disliked

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<sup>64</sup> Paul D. Escott, *North Carolina Yeoman: The Diary of Basil Armstrong Thomasson, 1853-1862* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1996).

<sup>65</sup> Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman*, 11, 50, 56, 24.

<sup>66</sup> Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman*, 192-193, 201.



the *Georgia Blister & Critic*, a medical review.<sup>67</sup> The *United States Intelligencer* graced his post office, as did the *Independent* from New York.<sup>68</sup> Strong's absolute favorite paper was *The Spirit of the Age*, the organ of the Sons of Temperance in North Carolina. The *Age* began publishing in 1849 and carried not only temperance advocacy but also works of fiction and nonfiction designed to improve Christian morals in general.<sup>69</sup> "The *Age* is," Strong wrote, "one of the best papers in North Carolina."<sup>70</sup>

Strong enjoyed magazines and compendiums perhaps more than newspapers, and he subscribed to dozens. Among them were the *Youth's Cabinet*, *Arthur's Home Magazine*, the *Lady's Wreath*, *The Water Cure Journal*, *Life Illustrated*, *The Country Gentleman*, *The Cultivator*, *The U.S. Magazine*, *The Criterion*, *Mother's Magazine*, and *Merry's Museum*.<sup>71</sup> His familiarity with magazines allowed him room to criticize them. Of the *Waverly Magazine* from Boston he noted,

The paper is good, print fine and *tolerbly* clear. Don't see how Dow can afford to publish it at \$2 a year, nor I don't see how any one who has anything else to do can afford to read it. Who could stand such a weekly, literary gorge for a whole year? Mr. Dow, 'That cant be did in these parts.'

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<sup>67</sup> Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman*, 26, 46.

<sup>68</sup> Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman*, 16.

<sup>69</sup> *Encyclopedia of North Carolina*, s.v. "Spirit of the Age."

<sup>70</sup> Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman*, 3.

<sup>71</sup> Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman*, 7, 11, 38, and 60.

Your *Magazine* is to[o] large, and published to[o] far from home—the south.<sup>72</sup>

Strong read it anyhow.

American history, geography, and science also interested the young Thomasson. He read Thomas Low Nichols' *Esoteric Anthropology*, a book about hydrotherapy, the "N.C. edition of Mitchell's *Geography*," *Phelps' 100 Cities and Large Towns of America*, *Hitchcock's Geology*, *Captain R. B. Marcy's Exploration of the Red River*, and the *Illuminated History of North America*. From the last of these, Strong learned "that North America instead of having been first discovered by Christopher Columbus, is supposed to have been visited by a band of Northmen about the year 1000." And, as typical of most improvement-minded American boys of the nineteenth century, he read Ben Franklin and littered Franklin's proverbs all over his diary.<sup>73</sup>

As an evangelical Christian, Strong did read the classics of religious literature, Protestant standards in general and reading important to American evangelicals in particular. He held a long fascination with *Paradise Lost*. He copied favorite passages into his diary, some of which moved him to pray: "Oh God, forbid that I, the most unworthy of all created beings, should ever be found in the ranks of the Archenemy of Thee, and of fallen man, whom to save, Thou has given thine only Son. For thy

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<sup>72</sup> Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman*, 195.

<sup>73</sup> Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman*, 30, 31, 50, 67, 139, 191-192.

Son's sake have mercy upon me; guide me by thy Holy Spirit thro' life, and at last save me in Heaven." This passage was unusual for Strong, being one of the very few times he reverted to the emotional language of revival religion. He steeped himself in the sermons of John Wesley, the hymns of Charles Wesley, Fox's *History of the Martyrs*, and Adam Clark's *Commentaries on the New Testament*. He, of course, also read *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Dow's Works*. In 1858, after his marriage, Strong began an intense self-directed reading of the Bible, as if he needed to reassert his commitment to the sacred script. He claimed "the Bible is the book of books, and should be read through by every person, after they have learned to read well, at least once a year."<sup>74</sup>

Strong also pursued contemporary Christian literature. He purchased morality tales from the American Tract Society. (In fact, one Tract Society agent, Rev. Samuel Caliway, occasionally stayed at Thomasson's house.<sup>75</sup>) Tract titles included *Elizabeth Davidson*, *Emily Maria*, *Golden Treasury*, *Comandments Explained*, *The Excellent Narrative*, *The Little One's Ladder*, and *Wouldst Know Thyself*.<sup>76</sup> Strong's favorite religious reading, aside from the Bible and *Paradise Lost*, was a book called *The Sacred Chain of Wonders*. Strong had good reason to favor the author with a telling name—Samuel Arminius Latta. A Methodist minister, a

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<sup>74</sup> Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman*, 72, 119, 130, 188, and 189.

<sup>75</sup> Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman*, 39.

<sup>76</sup> Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman*, 26, 77, 220.

temperance advocate, and a physician in Ohio, (and incidently, a friend of Charles Deems), Latta turned to medicine after pursuing a ministerial career and advocated homeopathic medicine before his death in 1852.<sup>77</sup> Strong may have discovered Latta's work by way of his interest in hydrotherapy. *The Chain of Sacred Wonders* attempted, in florid prose, to link Biblical history to contemporary findings in geology, geography, and natural history. The publishers, Appleton & Co. of Cincinnati, advertised Latta's work as a valuable material possession: "It is illustrated with beautiful engravings, and is gotten up in the best style," or, "It is beautifully executed on fine white paper, the printing is the neatest style of art."<sup>78</sup> By making appeals to the elevated quality of production, Appleton, in the words of Candy Brown, had "sanctifie[d] the worldly domain of high fashion," thus "unif[ying] diverse members of the church universal." The key here is that material value had not replaced spiritual value, but that it "augment[ed], even as essential to achieving, it spiritual value."<sup>79</sup> If the appeals by way of fine engravings and quality paper did not hint at the intended market, the publisher made it clear by noting "[i]t is well adapted to the Christian family circle, to Sabbath School and religious libraries." In

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<sup>77</sup> Latta biography in William B. Sprague, ed., *Annals of the American Methodist Pulpit...* Vol. 7 (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1861), 756-758. Interestingly, though a resident of Ohio, Latta apparently sided with the Southern Methodists after 1847. See also John Harley Warner, "Power, Conflict, and Identity in Mid-Nineteenth-Century American Medicine: Therapeutic Change at the Commercial Hospital in Cincinnati," *Journal of American History* 73 (March, 1987): 934-956.

<sup>78</sup> Advertisements appeared in a variety of Appleton publications, including Rev. Reuben Hatch, A.M., *Bible Servitude Re-examined: with special reference to pro-slavery interpretations and infidel objections* (Cincinnati: Applegate & Co., 1862), and Rev. R. Abbey, *Diuturnity: or the Comparative Age of the World* (Cincinnati: Applegate & Co, 1866)

<sup>79</sup> Brown, *The Word in the World*, 27-33.

short, *The Chain of Sacred Wonders* was not meant to supplement revival religion but to be a storehouse of religious knowledge in the new domesticity of evangelicalism.

Strong Thomasson probably read more widely than most ordinary North Carolinians, but his selection of topics was far from esoteric or unusual. Pre-Darwinian geological theories were common in the south. Sarah Davidson had encountered them. Various scientific pursuits enraptured many ordinary North Carolinians. Nearly everyone attempted poetic verses. Strong's exploration of hydropathy is the most unique of his interests. The depth of his devotion to "the water cure" is not known, but he did practice it. He read the *Water Cure Journal* and a hydropathy promotional book called *Esoteric Anthropology*. In 1854, Strong "bought...1 ½ oz. of sponge *on purpose* to use in bathing. I have great faith in cold water." Hydropathy did not consist entirely of cold water applied as medical remedy but claimed a holistic view of human health including prescriptions for diet and exercise. Indeed, in 1855, Strong Thomasson lamented the eating of meat and cried "O! that we had a few Casper Housers and Luthers to reform our taste, and thus bring about, or establis[h] a purely vegetable diet throughout the world." Though not destined to become part of the medical orthodoxy, hydropathy and associated therapies were completely conventional in the mid-1850s.<sup>80</sup> Strong himself had

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<sup>80</sup> On hydropathy and *The Water-Cure Journal*, see Susan E. Cayleff, *Wash and Be Healed: The Water-Cure Movement and Women's Health* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 24-27. On the proto-orthodox medical landscape of the south, see Steven M. Stowe, *Doctoring the South: Southern Physicians and Everyday Medicine in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: The University of North

trouble maintaining his commitment, however, as by 1858 he was again eating swine.<sup>81</sup>

Thomasson mined contemporary literature most deeply for guidance on how to construct a modern family. Most of the magazines and newspapers he subscribed to contained articles and columns devoted to describing ideal gender relationships. For instance, Strong took notice of an article entitled “Coming Down” in his favorite newspaper, the *Spirit of the Age*. The author, Alice Cary—who Strong considered “a good writer”—described the rapid social descent of a wealthy young couple due to the loss of their fortune. The tragedy threatened their marriage, but they discover the virtues and joys of love derived from companionship in hard times. The clear lesson was that social status and wealth were hollow markers of a successful relationship, while companionship and tenderness made truly virtuous marriages.<sup>82</sup> Strong even copied poetic advice he found in a “Lottery paper” he received.

Treat ladies' favor with respect,  
Good will of woman ne'er neglect,  
No man ever slighted woman yet,  
But found good cause for sharp regret.

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Carolina Press, 2004). At this time, I do not understand Strong's reference to Kasper Hauser, a young German who allegedly spent his childhood in a closet deprived of light and sound. There is some suggestion that Hauser may have been a totem for homeopaths and other “alternative” medical practitioners.

<sup>81</sup> Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman*, 30, 50, 101, and 191.

<sup>82</sup> Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman*, 92.

Here, Strong had taken a vision from the cultural stream and adopted it for his own use. In this case, the advice bade men to be respectful of women. From a poem by Thomas MaCeller, Strong derived advice that “should be laid away and frequently remembered by all husband seekers.”

Beware of him whose speech is smooth  
The mother spake her daughter  
The deepest depths are ever found  
Where flows the smoothest water.  
Be advised, young ladies, and ‘look before you leap.’

In this extended metaphor, a male poet has a woman narrator enjoin her daughter to find a mate not in a “smooth talking man,” one likely to be domineering, prideful, or wealthy, but one who exhibited the most calm. Strong adopted this advice from mother to daughter and turned it into advice from a recently married man to other young men still in search of a wife. The reciprocity of tenderness critical to formation of both masculinity and femininity is apparent in the advice itself and the use to which the advice was adapted by Thomasson. Strong found similar guidance in contemporary fiction. In the magazine story “the happy Typo,” Strong took note of the main character, “a Mr. Gettyphat Take, who said “The happiest day I ever spent was one time when I had not but one shirt and a pair of pants to put on, had spent all my money and gone hungry for forty hours.”” This vision of manhood, as modest, unassuming, restrained, calm, and above all, cheerful, moved Strong to scratch out a verse of his own.

A happy man is he,  
Who thus can fast and be  
Always in good temper.

Strong's courtship of Mary (Mollie) Bell was already underway when the diary opened in 1853, and there never seems to have been any question that the two would not be engaged and married. Therefore, when Strong read *Arthur's Home Magazine* or the *Young Bride's Book*, he had specific applications in mind. Of the former, he remarked that he must subscribe, "if not now, as soon as I get possession of, 'a pretty little wife, and a big plantation.' Since 'There's no place like *home*' I intend to have a *home* if I live." In fact, when he received the *Young Bride's Book*, eighteen months before his marriage, Strong noted that he would present the book to Mollie on their wedding day.<sup>83</sup> Strong did not have a commanding tone; rather, he conducted himself in genial ways. Giving Mollie the *Young Bride's Book*, subtitled *An epitome of the domestic duties and social enjoyments of woman, as wife and mother*, was not a command, but an express wish and encouragement that Mollie be a certain kind of Christian wife. It too was an implicit statement that Strong, the husband, would behave as a Christian man. The preface to the 1839 edition of *The Young Bride's Book* established its vision of a Christian marriage:

That conjugal felicity may be at once reciprocal and lasting, there must not only be equal virtue on each part, but virtue of the same kind; not only the same end must be proposed, but the same means must be approved by both.

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<sup>83</sup> Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman*, 12, 27-28.



The critical distinction here is the prescription for the balance of power in a marriage. It does not allow separate standards for behavior for husbands and wives but “equal virtue...virtue of the same kind.” Public displays of political dominance and private acts of sexual control were not sanctioned. The “same end” and “the same means must be approved by both.” Again, the standard of behavior for husbands and wives—for men and women—depended in part not on independent sexualized variables but on the unity of virtues practiced by one another.

Though the Bell and Thomasson families were likely socially and economically acquainted in their rural community, the courtship between Strong and Mollie took place around church and the home. Strong saw Mollie regularly on Sundays, when he escorted her to church. Following the service, Strong went home with Mollie to the Bell home and quite often spent the night. This time spent together confirmed to each other—and to Mollie’s family as well—that the couple would have a relationship based not on economic advantage but on the strength of their cooperative personalities. It is unlikely that Strong and Mollie had sexual contact on his overnight stays. He neither mentions it nor alludes to it. But they likely slept side by side in a small house under the watchful eyes and ears of Mollie’s father and mother. The late nights often left Strong exhausted on Mondays, but his enthusiasm for Mollie only grew. Strong drew on a variety of poetic sources to express his love: “As I came home I saw Miss M.A.B., the prettiest girl in all the country. ‘May the Rule of heaven look down, And *my* Mary from evil defend.’ Amen.”

Here, he quoted Lord Byron. On another occasion he drew from local folklore and the tale of Naomi Wise, when he referred to Mollie as “the fairest of earth’s daughters, A gem to deck the sky.” No matter the source, his adoration of Mollie was fully sentimental.<sup>84</sup>

Strong and his family—his whole family—exemplify the unique nature of middle-class ideas applied in a rural agricultural region. Paul Escott noted that Strong and Mollie remained fully in the economic orbit of—even submission to—Strong’s father Andrew. Strong looked to Andrew for advice on the purchase of land. Strong and his brothers Clark and Caleb worked each other’s land as much as their own. Important family meetings and events took place at Andrew’s house; Clark went there for his deathbed. Yet *inside* Strong and Mollie’s household, the picture vastly changes. Strong consciously constructed the setting for middle-class domesticity not only in the physical settings of the household, but in the relationship he cultivated with Mollie. Strong, like James Lilly, cared for his wife when she was sick and assumed her duties in the house. “Found Mary in bed with the sick head ache,” he noted a week after their marriage. “Bathed her feet in warm water, and gave her some Ditney tea, and a warm rock for her feet, covering her up nicely in bed.” When Mollie fell ill in 1859, Strong undertook a task few southern men admitted to: he cooked and washed dishes. “It is well enough for a man to know how to cook, wash dishes, etc.,” he concluded. “Had I been ignorant of these things, I

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<sup>84</sup> Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman*, 26, 27, and 28-29.

would have been likely to have gone to bed to-night minus my supper.” No doubt, Mollie would have too. He confessed, “I’d make a great cook if I had enough of two things:--viz. practice and something to cook.” Strong stepped in to aid in other tasks such as quilt making and washing. Strong not only aided Mollie with physical labor, but he also taught her to read. “Gave Mollie her first lesson in Grammar,” he noted six months after their wedding. “She learned and recited three lesson[s]! They were of course not very long, but I am well pleased with her start. Think she’ll be a grammarian some day.”<sup>85</sup> With such acts, Strong enthusiastically performed the role of a modern Christian husband. In these cases, he occupied a patriarchal position, being the possessor of power. But he did not perform these tasks because exerting power was his duty or that performance bestowed reputation upon him. He did so because he aimed, as he had read in the *Young Bride’s Book*, to have “reciprocal” relationship with “equal virtue” achieved through the “same means.”

The Thomasson domestic felicity exerted itself in a subtle and more profound manner in the way Strong utilized his Sundays. After the Thomasson’s marriage, and particularly after the birth of their son, Strong and Mollie more and more frequently stayed home from church. Though due in part to the difficulty of coordinating a family of three’s attendance with frequent sickness and poor weather, Strong’s decision to stay home Sundays grew into a conscientious effort to construct a sacred domestic sphere. Strong had expressed Sabbatarian sentiments before his marriage.

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<sup>85</sup> Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman*, 90, 225, 231, 229, and 124.

He noted that “Sunday visiting is not in accordance with the Divine Law, unless its to do good; this way of neighbors getting together, and spending the day that should be kept holy, in worldly conversation is nothing short of robbery.” Robbery, that is, of God’s time, the caveat suggested that visiting, if devoted to worship, may have been acceptable.

Strong’s acquisition of his own home and family facilitated enactment of domesticity: “This is a pleasant day, indeed, and while I write Mary is sitting near with the *Bible & Sunday Book*, and at my right elbow is a white pitcher of red and white Winter Roses—emblems of love and purity, and just before me lies that great ‘Store house of the English language’—*Webster’s American Dictionary*.” It is a perfect scene of domestic happiness, including a content wife in devotion and a symbolic flower arrangement. *Webster’s* suggests a secular component, as do the pitcher and flowers, in a blend of sacred and worldly. Mollie’s reading choice, however, reflected Strong’s preference for sacred consumption on Sundays. Strong explained,

staid at home and read, among other things, two of Wesley’s sermons. One on family religion, from the text... and the other on redeeming time, from the text...We stay at home on Sunday and read our good books—the Bible—*Chain of Sacred Wonders—Prince of the House of David—etc., etc.*

Strong did not quit church; his family continued to attend services regularly, but his replacement of congregation with family is obvious. The arrival of his son Jody only increased Strong’s domestic felicity: “Staid at home *all* day. I always loved home, and was never satisfied any where else long at a time, and now that the *home chain* has

another and a strong *link* (my boy) attached to it, and it binds closer in proportion as it increases in length guess I shall have to stay *about*.” The July after Jodie’s birth, Strong wrote,

I & Mollie are sitting in the south end of our cabin; the window is up to admit the pleasant south wind which comes in gently through the green leaves of the peach-tree that stands just in front of the window. Our boy is sleeping on a pillow in a chair just at my left hand, and the dogie is also quite [quiet] just now. I’ve been reading this morning, in the *Testament*, and I can’t see, for the life of me, how the Baptists can conceive that Baptism is essential to Salvation.<sup>86</sup>

Strong did not indicate that he engaged in the practice of family religion as advocated by Abbot or Deems. But he did practice religion with his family. His contemplation of Baptist theology only highlights an important aspect of Strong’s felicity: domestic life may have supplanted church, but home life was no less sacred than church. This is a slight distinction, and a major one. It is slight because Strong still prioritized salvation and moral behavior among all other things. But that barely conceals that a tectonic shift had occurred. Scholars of religion have long noted the theological and material changes to the American household as a result of market expansion and industrialization. Few however have described this process in southern households, let alone non-slaveowning ones. Yet Strong Thomasson exemplifies—in theology more than materialism—that shift. He stayed at home on Sundays in reveries of quietude, made possible by a home, a wife, and a child. Strong turned his domestic scene into a sacred scene. As Strong put it, “the man that loves

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<sup>86</sup> Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman*, 215, 225, 25, 103, 203, 222, 141, and 142.

not, and so neglects his home, if he has one, must be looking out for happiness in the wrong direction." Perfect happiness, that of a confident Christian, could only be found in the context of marriage and parental relations, in a household setting. Strong, like many others, turned their eyes from a heaven in a supernatural world, to a literal heaven on earth: "Home. There is music in the word. O that we may always have a good home; --a home on earth."<sup>87</sup> The shift to domestic felicity is emblematic of a theological shift from salvation-focused religion to a focus on secular morality. Over a long period, this broader shift is certainly true, but Strong did not leap so far. Salvation remained the goal of household happiness. Strong reflected,

how much more pleasant it is to spend the Sabbath at home reading good books and papers, than it is to spend it gad[d]ing about over the neighborhood. And to say nothing of the agreeableness, how much more profitable it is. Since the Lord is so good as to let us live, we should not spend our time in idleness, nor in frivolous conversation, but we should be all the time laying up for ourselves 'treasures in heaven.'<sup>88</sup>

The act of "laying up for ourselves 'treasures in heaven'" thus included staying at home. Not at a revival, not in communal singing, and not in the listening to a sermon, but in staying at home.

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<sup>87</sup> Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman*, 256.

<sup>88</sup> Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman*, 183.

Strong worked toward the nuclear family as a sacred ideal. Historians tend to suggest that it is economic change that breaks down habits of mutuality.<sup>89</sup> But Strong lived fully in a world of habits of mutuality. Historians tend to suggest that communities threatened with dissipation from economic forces cling more forcefully to religion.<sup>90</sup> But here it is religion itself that is facilitating the change. Strong certainly lost something of traditional social relationships. He did not worship with friends, neighbors, and family as much. He did not visit, or receive visitors in such a way as to reinforce social bonds. All the while he maintained communal economic relationships with his family and neighbors. Culture prevailed over economics in Strong's world. Habits of mutuality remained while religious practice directed him toward habits of domesticity. Strong never expressed regret over the transition. He embraced it.

### **Middle-Class Behavior in the Rural South**

In the Lilly and Thomasson households we see clear examples of what might be called middle class behavior. Caroline and Strong both anticipated and practiced companionate marriages, both nurtured their spouses and children with affection, and both sacralized their domestic spaces. The demands of racial and gender hierarchy did not mark Caroline and Strong's familial endeavors. Their conceptions

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<sup>89</sup> Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

<sup>90</sup> Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s-1880s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), chapters 4 and 5.

of family (including gender) relationships arose from the cultural world of their evangelical Christianity, not the Christianity of the Great Revivals, but mid-nineteenth century American Christianity that promoted an expanded view of moral behavior and instruction. This Christianity and its middle class styles filled the cultural worlds of North Carolinians. Caroline attended protracted meetings and deeply struggled with her own salvation, but she learned how to be a wife, a mother, and member of society from Christian-infused literature on female education and the advice literature circulated by national evangelical publication societies. Strong imbibed of the fictional and moralistic forms of Christian literature present in magazines and newspapers. Of interest here is the observation that these cultural changes are apparent long before economic and political challenges manifested themselves in the South. In the midst of traditional southern farmsteads of slave labor (Caroline) and extended families (Strong), both turned their families and their homes into the means of salvation. Their eyes did turn earthward, but they were no less Christians for their new methods. Indeed, instead of a decrease in the social influence of Christian behavior, the prescriptions for salvation became more deeply embedded in everyday life.

Part of the cultural change not necessarily specific to evangelicals is that of male gender roles. Strong and James Lilly enacted and represented a model of masculine behavior at odds with elite planter standards based on honor, command, or political independence. Though we do not have the interior thoughts of James, we



can read in Caroline's observations a man fully in concert with his wife's marital expectations. Their behavior was not feminized, and nothing suggests that their peers considered them less than men. When James acceded to Caroline's religious prerogatives, when Strong fed Mollie's reading habits with bridal magazines, both fulfilled standards of manly behavior promulgated by middle-class Christianity. Specifically, they regarded their wives as moral equals in the domestic sphere. Thereby, Strong and James became the men that the American Tract Society and the *Southern Christian Advocate* encouraged them to be, morally fulfilled by their wives. These two husbands acted the parts that historian Amy Greenberg recently described as "restrained manhood...practiced by men in the North and South who grounded their identities in their families [and] in the evangelical practice of their Protestant faith...Restrained men were strong proponents of domesticity or 'true womanhood,' They believed that the domestic household was the moral center of the world, and the wife and mother its moral compass." Greenberg's restrained men could be found in cities and in the country and among Democrats and Whigs, even if their cultural preferences tended them toward business and progress-oriented Whiggery.<sup>91</sup> The notably Whiggish orientation of the North Carolina Piedmont thus may be partially explained by the embrace, within households, of the new evangelical conception of family life.

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<sup>91</sup> Amy Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 11-12, and 238-258.

These findings also point to another critical relationship in southern life—that of elite planters and ordinary white people who composed the majority of the free population. Historians from Genovese to McCurry to Friend have described elite cultural power as the basis of social expectations for all others. Planters expected command relationships with subordinates, so secured that behavior in non-planters through political, religious, and social pressures. Those channels are not so apparent in this story. In fact, what is notable is the *unmediated* nature of contemporary evangelical literature and practice. Caroline and Strong learned their behaviors not by listening to elites, or aspiring to be like them, but by engaging with national evangelical publishing networks and other cultural conversations.<sup>92</sup> Implicit to this argument is the capability of evangelical social behavior to cross class lines. I am not proposing that elite planters maintained one standard of behavior and their economic inferiors another. Instead, evangelical social behavior can be seen as an alternative code of conduct available to wealthy and poor alike. In the North Carolina Piedmont, with its small number of planter elites, this “domestic felicity” settled right in the middle.

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<sup>92</sup> Friend found this aspirational behavior in one South Carolina Piedmonter in “Belles, Benefactors, and the Blacksmith’s Son: Cyrus Stuart and the Enigma of Southern Gentlemanliness,” in *Southern Manhood: Perspectives on Masculinity in the Old South*, ed. Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 92-122.

## CHAPTER VII

### EPILOGUE

#### **Evangelicals in the Secession Crisis and War**

John Flintoff did not care for the war. He thought it lamentable and unnecessary. On June 10, 1861, a fast day in the new Confederacy, he expressed trepidation—"a soluum feeling prevailed we are in war with our northern friends."<sup>1</sup> The thirty-eight year old Caswell County farmer stayed out of the army as long as possible. Yet he believed heartily in the Confederate cause. Six days after the fast day, and with no intention of actually enlisting, Flintoff expressed solidarity with the new nation's military effort. "Should we fall in defense of our property & rights as Southerners may we die Shouting the praising of God and to go home to rest with his people."<sup>2</sup> John Flintoff was neither a coward nor a hypocrite. Indeed, thousands of piedmont North Carolinians echoed Flintoff's dread and their lack of enthusiasm presaged the region's reputation for disaffection from the war effort. At the same time, thousands more North Carolinians committed themselves to the Confederacy. The contradiction requires explanation. John Flintoff couched his reservations in the language of faith and family. He prayed that the Lord relieve him

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<sup>1</sup> June 10, 1861, John F. Flintoff Diary, Office of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina (Hereafter, Flintoff Diary). See also April 12, 1861.

<sup>2</sup> June 16, 1861, Flintoff Diary.

of the distress caused by the war. "Lord make us to feel that thou are strong able & willing to deliver us from the ravages of war & hasten the day we shall have peace," he wrote, and concluded, as any evangelical would have known, that only God, not the decisions of men, could offer "consoling hope."<sup>1</sup> The war distressed Flintoff, because it represented a specific threat to all he had built in his life. "my heart is heavy my prospects in life are broken up what I have long prayed for appears to be denied me[.] If god think best to deny me what I have worked prayed yea longed for help me oh god to be submissive to be cheerful under all the circumstances or afflictions that may beset me."<sup>2</sup> After struggling for a decade in Mississippi, Flintoff had found relative success as a landowner and slaveowner in Caswell County, a husband and father, and had recently been appointed a Class Leader in his Methodist congregation. Flintoff's competency included a secure household and a serene faith. Secession threatened all that. So did Yankees.

Like Flintoff, Iredell County farmer Strong Thomasson expressed trepidation about the course of secession. "These are gloomy times, and seem to be growing darker and darker every day. Every mail brings us some bad news,--news of disunion and war."<sup>3</sup> Nor was Mary Davis Brown enthusiastic, but she considered the

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<sup>1</sup> October 1, 1861, and July 21, 1861, Flintoff Diary.

<sup>2</sup> July 28, 1861, Flintoff Diary.

<sup>3</sup> Paul D. Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman: The Diary of Basil Armstrong Thomasson, 1853-1862* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), 305.

Confederacy “oure endangered country.”<sup>4</sup> Only James Lilly, Jr., the son of Caroline Lilly did not hesitate. He enlisted in the army before North Carolina even seceded.<sup>5</sup>

John Flintoff eventually and unenthusiastically served in the Confederate military. Strong Thomasson did not serve at all. In these individuals’s dilemmas, and their interpretations of them, we see the problem that has bedeviled countless historians. Why did so many ordinary white southerners so fully commit themselves to the secessionists’ cause? Why, at the same time, did so many other ordinary people express so ambivalent an attachment to that same cause?<sup>6</sup> The evangelical ethos serves to explain the reaction of both those who supported and those who opposed the Confederacy.

When North Carolina left the Union in 1861, it chose to align itself with a new government dedicated solely to the preservation of slavery and the perpetuation of planter power. Secession had exposed the numerous paradoxes at work in the

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<sup>4</sup> The Descendants of Mary Davis Brown, eds., *Oil In Our Lamps: The Journals of Mary Davis Brown from the Beersheba Presbyterian Church Community, York, SC* (n.p.: n.p., 2010), 88.

<sup>5</sup> Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers Who Served in Organizations from the State of North Carolina, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. See also Lilly Collection, North Carolina of Office and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

<sup>6</sup> See discussions in Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, & the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 297-302, Charles C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994), 139-160, Stephen A. West, *From Yeoman to Redneck in the South Carolina Upcountry, 1850-1915* (Charlottesville, Va.: University of Virginia Press, 2008), Kenneth W. Noe, *Reluctant Rebels: The Confederates Who Joined the Army after 1861* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), and Kenneth W. Noe and Shannon H. Wilson, eds., *The Civil War in Appalachia* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997).

changing South. Planters, for instance, intent on an anti-liberal political regime, led the secessionist movement, yet they envisioned a democratic future and were joined by economic modernizers in the Confederacy.<sup>7</sup> The most eloquent, and the most inelegant, white southern voices for Unionism in late 1860, after just one year, had become officers in the Confederate army and representatives in its government.<sup>8</sup> That champions and practitioners of middle-class values snubbed the Confederacy should come as no surprise. They did. But the fact that many more gave their lives to the new Confederate nation should *also* come as no surprise. They did too. The questions are apparent. To what extent did the evangelical ethic speed, or stall, the move toward secession?

### **Churches at War**

Denominations and their churches remained largely quiet as North Carolina voters went to the polls in February and April 1861 to decide on removing the state from the Union.<sup>9</sup> They demurred from official commentary or endorsement of political action.<sup>10</sup> Yet individual clergy and laypeople freely expressed opinions and

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<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, John Majewski, *Modernizing a Slave Economy: The Economic Vision of the Confederate Nation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> See the examples of Zebulon B. Vance, John Adams Gilmer, and Jonathan Worth in Daniel W. Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates: Upper South Unionists in the Secession Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

<sup>9</sup> Marc W. Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina, 1836-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 180-221.

<sup>10</sup> George C. Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), and Mark A. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

acted in a similar fashion to the oblique way churches approached the temperance reform. Both Mark Noll and George Rable have noticed this phenomenon of silence. Beyond the sermons of theologians who enthusiastically supported secession or those who bitterly opposed it, the less visible operation of denominations points to the more ambivalent stance churches adopted in the crisis of 1860 and 1861. Denominations experienced three notable responses to the outbreak of war. Churches initially considered disunion with a sense of trepidation. The leading denominations did eventually embrace the necessity of war in a more strident fashion than others, but all responded with prayers, grief, and condemnation. Second, denominational institutions began a rapid attenuation, even in early 1861, as the “distracted” nature of the country sapped resources, particularly from schools. And finally, at the outbreak of the war, denominations turned their benevolent resources toward a new pool of needy Christians: Confederate soldiers. These responses are closer to the experiences of ordinary lay people.

Attendees at the Moravians’ “monthly missionary prayer meeting,” coinciding with the November presidential election, took time from their regular schedule to “remember[ed] and commend to the Lord: *our Country.*” Naturally, they desired a peaceful resolution of the contest, but succeeding events boded unwell. Their 1861 retrospective noted “the apprehensions of public danger, which rested like a gloomy cloud upon the minds of the thoughtful and observant at the beginning of the year, the nature and extent of our national troubles have probably exceeded

our worst anticipations.”<sup>11</sup> Minister Jacob Siewers in Bethania also deployed the metaphor of stormy horizons: “Thus closed this eventful year, with heavy clouds lowering around the destiny of our Beloved Country.” He commenced a prayer that “God, our God in Mercy spare us from the fearful results of Disunion and Civil War, and cement us again in the peaceful Brotherhood, and Christian Bonds as a nation.”<sup>12</sup> Religious people cringed with apprehension in the last months of 1860 as the reality of war loomed. The Presbytery of Concord, for instance, declared a Presbytery-wide day of fasting, prayer, and humiliation “in behalf of our country.”<sup>13</sup> After the shocking reality of the Battle of Manassas in July, 1861, the Moravians established a daily prayer meeting in Salem.<sup>14</sup>

Religious people quickly connected their apprehension about the national situation to a declension in faith. They had, after all, spent six decades diagnosing public dissipation as failures of religious feeling. The Calvinists among the Piedmont’s evangelicals particularly tied the political troubles to lack of faith. The Presbyterians in Concord, for instance, declared election day (November 5) 1860 to be a day of “solemn fasting, humiliation and prayer, in behalf of our country.” They not coincidentally declared the same day as “a day of fasting and humiliation on

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<sup>11</sup> C. Daniel Crews and Lisa D. Bailey, eds., *Records of the Moravians in North Carolina*, Vol. 12 (Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, 2000), 6354, 6393.

<sup>12</sup> Crews and Bailey, *Records of the Moravians*, 6382.

<sup>13</sup> Neill Roderick McGeachy, *Confronted By Challenge: A History of the Presbytery of Concord, 1795-1973* (n.p.: The Delmar Company, by order of the Presbytery of Concord, n.d.), 222.

<sup>14</sup> Crews and Bailey, *Records of the Moravians*, 6399.



account of the low condition of vital piety among our churches.”<sup>15</sup> The two problems were one in the same. The State Baptist Convention pleaded with its churches to increase prayer “that they cease not to cry unto the Lord for His help in this our time of need.”<sup>16</sup> No problem that had as its foundation a lack of faith could be solved with political or military acumen, but only by direct appeal to God.

The chief problem with political excitement and war was that, like any other public passion, it *distracted* the Christian and his or her community from the true path of God. Ministers could detect, even when their pews and school desks swelled with people, when their congregations failed to focus on salvation. Secession distracted even the Lutherans. Minister D.I Dreher reported to his Synod in May 1861 that “public worship...is well attended. We have a good Sunday School.” But he still considered “religion in my charge...not very flattering,” because “the excitement of war seemingly interferes with the spiritual improvement of my people.” The Reverend J.A. Linn noted a similar phenomenon: “the ordinances of God’s house have been well attended.” But “spirituality in the several churches in my charge was very favorable up to a recent date, owing to the present distracted state of the country.”<sup>17</sup> The Baptists of the Pee Dee Association fully diagnosed the problem in a circular letter. Their five-point observation included charges that congregants

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<sup>15</sup> McGeachy, *Confronted By Challenge*, 222.

<sup>16</sup> *Proceedings of the Thirty-Second Annual Session of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, 1861* (Raleigh: Printed at the Biblical Recorder Office, 1861).

<sup>17</sup> *Minutes of the Fifty-Eighth Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod & Ministerium of North Carolina, 1861* (Salisbury: J.J. Bruner, 1861).

showed too much concern for politics in church rather than preaching the Word, and, they failed to adhere to the duties of prayer.<sup>18</sup>

Denominations did not welcome war, but opposition to warfare did not mean automatic opposition to the Confederacy. The largest and most vocal denominations found in the events of the first years of the conflict enough evidence to compel them to embrace a strident defense of the new Confederate nation. The Presbyterians in particular were stunned by their national General Assembly's May 1861 "Spring Resolutions" asking all Presbyterians to pledge fealty to the United States government. North Carolina Presbyterians indignantly and promptly withdrew from the General Assembly and joined in the new Presbyterian Church of the Confederate States of America. Lest anyone think their reaction rash, the Concord Presbytery issued a statement in September, undiluted in its outrage, that the General Assembly's insistence in demanding

of all Ministers & Churches in the Confederate States to encourage Strengthen & Support a Government at present waging a most unnatural cruel & unjust War upon all that we hold dear on Earth is in fact what no ecclesiastical Court has right to enforce [sic.], as is to expect Law abiding Subjects & Christians Churches to be guilty of treason against the government of their own choice.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Minutes of the Pee Dee Association, Baptist Historical Collection, Z. Smith Reynolds Library, Wake Forest University.

<sup>19</sup> McGeachy, *Confronted by Challenge*, 232-233.

The Baptists, in November 1861, similarly characterized the actions of the United States during the previous twelve months,

Since the last session of this body a war has been waged by the United States, upon the Confederate States of America...in the spirit of the barbarous ages, the United States have declared our citizens outlawed, and with an avowed determination to subjugate the whole country, even to the entire destruction of its citizens and their property... to this end they have imprisoned and murdered many of our citizens, stolen their property, pillaged their homes, burnt their houses and driven the rightful owners away from them, trampling under their wicked feet the *written constitution*, which for twenty years they have been toiling to undermine.<sup>20</sup>

It was a thoroughly decisive feeling likely shared by the majority of Baptist laypeople. Even among the more demure congregations, a sense of military necessity prevailed. It betokened the terrible decision most southerners faced: to advocate for peace, or prepare for war. Jacob Siewers, the Moravian minister, ceased his condemnation of conflict only long enough to serve as a drillmaster to a volunteer company mustering in his neighborhood.<sup>21</sup>

Denominations attempted to carry on operations as usual but found that secession and war necessitated changes in their ordinary patterns. In May 1861, just before North Carolina's withdrawal from the Union, the Lutheran Synod decided that sending a delegation to the General Synod in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, might prove too dangerous and impractical. They instead chose to invite other southern

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<sup>20</sup> *Proceedings of the Thirty-Second Annual Session of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, 1861.*

<sup>21</sup> Crews and Bailey, *Records of the Moravians*, 6423.

Lutherans to a meeting at Salisbury “for the purpose of endorsing the proceedings of the next meeting of the General Synod.”<sup>22</sup> The Moravians noticed an immediate effect of war anxiety. Their annual widow’s festival was “kept in the[ir] usual order,” but many people, widows included, did not attend, “some by family circumstances, others, it is said, by anxiety and apprehension on account of the present disturbed and distracted state of the country and the fear that their sons will soon have to leave them and take up arms in defense of the state.” Before the war was even three weeks old, and before North Carolina officially seceded, church activity contracted. More ominously, the war forced the Moravians to consider cancelling their lovefeasts because of the already high prices of coffee and sugar.<sup>23</sup> The shortage, in May 1861, only hinted at the deprivation to come. Baptist missionary R.H. Griffith, working in Charlotte, noted a more dire loss, “Five of our brethren are in the army. Some others have had to leave for the country to support their families. The sisters and a few brethren remain.”<sup>24</sup>

The contraction of denominational schools most visibly indicated the effect of war on laypeople and their churches. In May, the Lutherans observed the effect of secession on classes at their college in Mount Pleasant: “The political excitement of our country has caused some students to leave our College and has no doubt kept

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<sup>22</sup> *Minutes of the Fifty-Eighth Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod & Ministerium of North Carolina, 1861.*

<sup>23</sup> Crews and Bailey, eds., *The Records of the Moravians*, 6397.

<sup>24</sup> *Proceedings of the Thirty-Second Annual Session of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, 1861.*

many others away.” Current enrollment encouraged the trustees to be optimistic, but the Synod resolved that they “act with extreme caution ... and discontinue the exercises of the College, if in their judgment it be deemed advisable.” The college shuttered in [year?]<sup>25</sup> Davidson College twice closed temporarily for lack of students.<sup>26</sup> Female schools too felt the pressure. The Salem Female Academy restricted its yearly matriculation to one day, as “the present unsettled and alarming condition of the country having caused many persons living at a distance to prefer having their daughters at home.” Tedium and anxiety gave way to a resignation that faith could not forestall the bloodletting.<sup>27</sup>

Despite the attenuation of denominational activity, churches adapted their missions to new realities. Specifically, they enthusiastically pursued benevolent enterprises in service to the Confederate army. The birth of a new nation energized the Presbyterians, at least, to redouble efforts to raise money for foreign and domestic missions. The Concord Presbytery resolved in July 1861 that despite the separation from the General Assembly and the onset of war, “our churches be urged to continue to contribute more liberally to the Board of Domestic Missions and Education before the next meeting.” They needed the money, as the Presbytery’s domestic missionaries spent the first summer of the war erecting new church

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<sup>25</sup> *Minutes of the Fifty-Eighth Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod & Ministerium of North Carolina, 1861.*

<sup>26</sup> Mary D. Beaty, *A History of Davidson College* (Davidson, N.C.: Briarpatch Press, 1988), 106.

<sup>27</sup> Crews and Bailey, *Records of the Moravians*, 6397.

buildings in the town of Shelby and Polk County.<sup>28</sup> Further afield, however, the Presbytery's missionary efforts dwindled as men joined the army. William Graves, missionary to Haywood and Jackson Counties dejectedly reported that after seeing off two volunteer companies, "our services were interrupted for the purpose of calling out the people to complete another volunteer Company...it seems that but little good has been accomplished."<sup>29</sup>

Later in 1861, the Baptist State Convention issued instructions to combine colportage operations with the [Baptist] General Association of Virginia, and reported on "a direction it [the Board on Colportage] has taken for the last few months. We allude to Colportage among the soldiers...a more important work could not be presented for your consideration."<sup>30</sup> The Moravians too shifted their publication efforts toward soldiers. Their Tract Society appropriated \$125 and collected a further \$240 to distribute tracts, while the Bible Society "supplied volunteers from this county with Bibles and Testaments to the extent of the supply on hand."<sup>31</sup>

One Methodist, Adolphus Mangum, enthusiastically campaigned to raise funds for Bibles for soldiers. He assembled "all the denominations in Salisbury" to

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<sup>28</sup> McGeachy, *Confronted by Challenge*, 231, 234.

<sup>29</sup> McGeachy, *Confronted by Challenge*, 235-236.

<sup>30</sup> *Proceedings of the Thirty-Second Annual Session of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, 1861*.

<sup>31</sup> Crews and Bailey, eds., *The Papers of the Moravians*, 6398, 6399.

organize the Bible Society of Rowan County. Attendees discussed “ways and means for printing the Holy Scriptures for our soldiers and others who may need them.” Mangum, and his co-chair S.H. Wiley, then made a startling pronouncement: “The ruthless invaders of our Country, not content with the countless other grievances which they have committed against us, have declared the authority of war above the authority of God by pronouncing the Bible CONTRABAND OF WAR. Now we ALL MUST have the Bible.” Whether Mangum believed this allegation or not, the vision of heretical and fanatic Yankees trampling Holy Scripture must have rung true to his audience.<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps because of a subsequent drop in donations as the first year of the war progressed, the Presbyterians looked for ways to continue to fund their missionaries and at the same time, “supply our soldiers with the means of grace.” In May 1862, a special committee recommended that Presbyterian missionaries go into the army as chaplains. There, the ministers could not only save souls, but also receive a salary estimated to be \$100 per month. Should the government not accept the paid service of the missionaries, then they should still be encouraged to volunteer for a chaplaincy. The committee recommended four missionaries for the task.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Adolphus W. Mangum, “Circular to Pastors of Methodist Congregations in Rowan County,” North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>33</sup> McGeachy, *Confronted by Challenge*, 239-240.

Altogether, in the fall of 1860 and the duration of 1861, denominations carried on routine business. Despite the dread eruption of war, they spent the bulk of their time as they always had: preaching sermons, organizing new congregations, raising up new ministers, building schools, and tending to the financial viability of benevolent enterprises. The “distraction” of the country occupied but small sections of their proceedings, if it did ultimately manifest itself as constriction, deprivation, and death of religious bodies. If we view churches as moral barometers of a community, we see that they offered more than theological and rhetorical justification for secession and war. They expressed a communal dread at the prospects of disunion. Beyond the lived experience, the evangelical ethic provided a foundation for a variety of actions, often contradictory, during the Civil War. In expressions of both “Unionism” and Confederate loyalty can be found elements of the evangelical ethic.<sup>34</sup>

### **Bryan Tyson’s Objections**

In the Unionist caution in the secession crisis of 1860-61, we may witness the prescriptions of religious discipline being applied to political behavior. Bryan Tyson

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<sup>34</sup> This is perhaps the most misunderstood category of people during the Civil War. First, the term “Unionist” is ordinarily applied to southerners who opposed secession in 1861. To a degree, the appellation is fair: unionists fervently wished to remain in the Union and opposed the secessionist option. But in a deeper fashion, the term is misleading. To be a southern Unionist in 1861 did not make one unsympathetic to southern partisanship, loyal to the Republican party or the Lincoln administration, or particularly anti-slavery, prone to abolitionist sentiments, or enlightened about race. In fact, most “unionists” harbored suspicions of the rising Republican power and fears about the potential for emancipation, soon confirmed by Lincoln’s call for 75,000 volunteers following Fort Sumter.



was not a conventional evangelical, but he did rise to represent a great number of North Carolina's disaffected Unionists. He published protests against Confederate authorities, for which he was confined in jail; he organized networks of Unionists under the Heroes of America banner; and ultimately he fled the Confederacy for the North. Before his stint as a political agitator, the thirty-two-year-old Moore County mechanic had spent the 1850s as something of a part-time prophet. Tyson, the son of a former Quaker, experienced a four-day long religious visitation from God in 1848 in which the Deity revealed to Tyson certain plans for the salvation of mankind. Tyson never joined a church but preached around Moore and Randolph Counties. His apparent religious eccentricities became political ones when he published in early 1862 his treatise on the secession crisis, entitled *A Ray of Light*.

In *A Ray of Light; or, A Treatise on the Sectional Troubles Religiously and Morally Considered*, Tyson, with no apparent editor, developed his skeptical stance on the new Confederacy.<sup>35</sup> He began in equivocal fashion, condemning both abolitionists and secessionists, but by the end of his 150 pages had developed a conclusion about the doomed Confederacy that required him to call for an immediate return to the Union. Tyson diagnosed the sectional troubles as a problem of extremes. The North, spurred by abolitionists, had enacted clearly unconstitutional personal liberty laws. The chief problem with the South, Tyson felt, was poor treatment of slaves. His "Plan of Adjustment" called for the abolition of

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<sup>35</sup> Bryan Tyson, *A Ray of Light; or, A Treatise on the Sectional Troubles Religiously and Morally Considered* (Brower's Mills, N.C.: Published by the author, 1862).

personal liberty laws and adoption of Federal laws to enforce the good treatment of slaves, thus removing the causes for resentment on each side. Tyson did not rule out separation ultimately, should the terms not be agreeable, but insisted that should it happen, that it be done peacefully and with the consent of a national referendum.

Bryan Tyson was not a particularly sophisticated or accurate thinker, often subject to the incomplete information that appeared in the Fayetteville *Observer*. But his analysis of the secession crisis and the course of the Confederacy by early 1862 is still revealing. The primary fault of both sides in the crisis, Tyson declared, was that leaders took deliberate steps to ensure a hostile, not peaceful, outcome. After John Brown's Harper's Ferry raid, for instance, he condemned southerners for hanging Brown: "As they appeared to be a party of fanatics or mad men, let us of the South, as a great and forgiving people, have shown that we could be satisfied without desiring their blood."<sup>36</sup> The slave states' humanity might have been vindicated had they pardoned Brown, thus undermining the abolitionists' core arguments about the brutality of slaveholders. Tyson condemned North Carolina's secessionist convention for not submitting its resolution to the people for a vote and argued that the decision was calculated by secessionists to ensure their ultimate goal. In both cases, extremists abandoned principles of forbearance and patience.

Tyson reserved his most damning evidence for his analysis of the situation at Fort Sumter, in Charleston harbor. He found fault with the Lincoln administration

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<sup>36</sup> Tyson, *A Ray of Light*, 10.

for its desire to not surrender Sumter, a desire that would inevitably lead to bloodshed. Worse, Confederate authorities directed the course of events with the intention of creating “a little collision” intended to induce the Upper South states to secede.<sup>37</sup> In the cyclone of events at Charleston harbor, leaders both North and South acted deliberately to ensure a state of warfare. Tyson did not foreswear secession itself; in fact, he took pains to establish his pro-slavery, pro-southern credentials. But he remained convinced that a peaceful separation might have been—and could still be—had at the negotiating table without a resort to arms.

The aspiring peacemaker articulated his disgust with secessionists and abolitionists alike with commonplace tales. In a compelling parable at the beginning of *A Ray of Light*, Tyson described walking on a crowded street in New York: “You would imagine it impossible for them all to get through, yet all pass on their way without stop of molestation.” The problem, Tyson noted, lay in the potential for chaos and confrontation should each man “to proceed exactly in the same line in which he set out.” But instead, each man “yield[ed] a little....Instead of advancing square, stiff, with arms stuck out, every one who knows how to walk the streets glides along, his arms close, flexible, his track gently winding, leaving now a few inches on this side, now a few on that, so as to pass and be passed without scarcely touching in the smallest possible space.”<sup>38</sup> Tyson regarded the abolitionists and

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<sup>37</sup> Tyson, *A Ray of Light*, 26.

secessionists that allegedly ruled each section as “men who were too stout in their natures and dispositions to yield any thing.”<sup>39</sup>

Despite the secular nature of this example, Tyson rooted his disaffection in the evangelical ethic, particularly the prescriptions of religious discipline. The disciplinary process had always encouraged men and women to yield: to yield to the authority of God, to yield to neighbors and family, and to yield for the sake of communal harmony. Religious discipline always favored peaceful resolution. Sometimes that resolution might involve separation, but that separation came last in order of a process meant to ensure peace. Men and women who rejected harmony in favor of defiance risked condemnation. In Tyson’s view, and perhaps in the view of many Piedmonters, national leaders had deliberately rejected harmony—as had Lincoln and the Confederates in Charleston Harbor, or the secessionists in Raleigh—and were thus considered to be acting outside the acceptable bounds of evangelical behavior. In essence, Tyson condemned secessionists because they had not received a proper letter of dismissal from the Union. The fact that they had not done so only confirmed to evangelical observers that the course of secession had been morally reckless.

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<sup>38</sup> Tyson, *A Ray of Light*, 6-7. Tyson did not compose this parable. He lifted it from John Aikin and Anna Laetitia Barbould, *Evenings at Home; or, The Juvenile Budget Opened* (London: Cornish & Co., 1793). This book remained in print until at least 1858.

<sup>39</sup> Tyson, *A Ray of Light*, 61.

Tyson began *A Ray of Light* attempting to forge a middle path in the sectional debate, but ended with the conclusion that the Confederate cause was hopeless and that the only solution was immediate return to the Union. His subsequent career as a noted Confederate dissident confirmed him as a historically important advocate for the Union in the slaveholding South. Many thousands like Tyson found maintaining a middle path as the war evolved to be untenable.<sup>40</sup> Some, like Tyson, did adhere to a Unionist identity. However, many more who likely had agreed with Tyson in 1861 were compelled by the circumstances of war and the rhetoric of war-making and fell into complete support of the Confederacy.<sup>41</sup>

### **Mary Bethell's Family**

Cautious evangelicals who fell toward the Confederacy are more difficult to analyze because they often did not need to articulate their progress in light of contrary public consensus. Mary Bethell, a mother, planter's wife, and Methodist from Rockingham County is illustrative. In the secession winter of 1860-61, she expressed the common trepidation about the national distraction and prayed, "God would save us from Civil war and blood guiltiness."<sup>42</sup> She, like most conditional Unionists, who found future southern participation in the nation contingent upon

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<sup>40</sup> Thanks to Robert McC. Calhoon for this observation about the impossibility of consistent moderation.

<sup>41</sup> Many southerners, evangelical or not, followed this course. Reid Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers* (New York: Viking, 1988).

<sup>42</sup> January 1, 1861, Mary Jeffreys Bethell Diary, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. (Hereafter, Bethell Diary).

northern agreements not to interfere with slavery, was alienated by Lincoln's apparent abolitionism and wrote in March that "Mr. Lincoln, I think he intends to coerce those seceding states. I fear there will be civil war, and our happy and peaceful Country laid in desolation and ruins, every Christian," she concluded, "should unite in fervent prayer to God, in behalf of our Country."<sup>43</sup> She never explained her hostility to the Republican administration, likely imagining that that fact could be taken for granted.

What preoccupied Mary Bethell in early 1861 was not the dissolution of the national state but the coming apart of her own nuclear family. Her son George headed off to school while her newly married oldest daughter, Mary, migrated with her husband to Arkansas in February. The latter struck her hardest: "I feel deserted, it was a trial to give up my child...I feel stript of one of my pleasures, but I have the comforts of religion."<sup>44</sup> Two months later the emotional bruise had not healed, and the pain tested her faith, "My soul was surrounded by darkness, doubts and gloomy fears."<sup>45</sup>

Only the outbreak of actual combat returned her thoughts to the national scene. On April 29, two weeks after Fort Sumter, Mary Bethell opined that "the slavery question is the cause of all this trouble, 8 Southern states have seceded from

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<sup>43</sup> March 1, 1861, Bethell Diary.

<sup>44</sup> February 5, 1861, Bethell Diary.

<sup>45</sup> April 2, 1861, Bethell Diary.

the Union, if the North and South can't agree, they had better separate." She continued very much in the fashion of Bryan Tyson regarding the intractable nature of certain politicians: "Abraham Lincoln the President is opposed to the institution of slavery, he don't seem disposed to make any compromise with the South."<sup>46</sup> Even before North Carolina seceded, Mary's son Willie joined a volunteer company, and six weeks after, George left school and also joined the army.<sup>47</sup> Thus, her extreme anxiety about the state of her family joined with her concern for her country, the Confederacy.<sup>48</sup> While Mary initially prayed for peace after her sons' enlistment—"the thought of a bloody war is awful to contemplate"—thereafter, their safe deliverance from the front went hand-in-hand with Confederate victory. She sought pastoral care from Brother Reid, who "sympathized with me in giving up my dear boys to go to the army, he encouraged me to trust in God, and commit them to God." God was not a neutral factor either. Mary automatically prayed that He favor the Confederacy, particularly that He "be with our armies, and be on our side."<sup>49</sup>

Mary Bethell never questioned the righteousness of the Confederacy's resistance to national reunion. It certainly had her political and ideological assent, but her truest bond was that forged by the heat of her own commitment to her children. She did not selflessly send her sons off to war in the mode of a republican

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<sup>46</sup> April 29, 1861, Bethell Diary.

<sup>47</sup> April 19, 1861, Bethell Diary.

<sup>48</sup> May 13 and June 5, 1861, Bethell Diary.

<sup>49</sup> July 12, 1861, Bethell Diary.

Mother. She did not consider her loss a necessary sacrifice to the nation-state. Instead, Mary Bethell grieved over the broken bonds, worried for her sons' safety, and fretted over the eternal souls of all three of her departed children in the manner of an evangelical, middle-class mother. The evangelical sensibility of emotional parental attachment bound her not only to her children, but to Confederate success as the guarantor of that bond.

Mary Bethell's conflation of family circle with the Confederate nation was not primarily a political expression, and it was hardly unique to wealthy mothers. Aaron Sheehan-Dean has recently explored the motivations of volunteers in Virginia and discovered the "use of family as... [a] reference point" for many of them. Sheehan-Dean notes, "although historians recognize that love and emotion played an increasingly important role in private lives, they [historians] rarely incorporate these factors into the very public narratives of war and secession."<sup>50</sup> Though Mary Bethell's diary was hardly a public narrative, the agony she expressed in its pages manifested in public support for the Confederacy.

Evangelicals interpreted the experience of secession and war through the lens of their faith. But as Bryan Tyson and Mary Bethell demonstrate, that faith and the subsequent interpretations were hardly a point of unity. Tyson imagined the South a disaffected parishioner from the national congregation and discipline dictated a certain course of action. Bethell twined together her vision of family and

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<sup>50</sup> Aaron Sheehan-Dean, *Why Confederates Fought: Family and Nation in Civil War Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 27.



nation. But the contradictory paths taken by these two were undergirded by a modern, vibrant, and essential evangelical faith.

### **Brown, Flintoff, Thomasson, and Lilly at War**

John Flintoff feared the war because it threatened his hard-won competency. Thirty-eight in 1862, he was not subject to the draft but hired a substitute anyhow. Though temporarily secure from military service, he continued to lament the bloodshed. At the same time, he readily identified with the Confederacy and scorned Lincoln's 1862 renewed call for volunteers: "this call will amount to 1.200.000 soldiers against us but may we not be discouraged may we do our duty as men & trust in God who made us."<sup>51</sup> He was even more dumbstruck at the enormous increase in the price of food and despaired at the prospects for peace and lamented that "its all War War."<sup>52</sup> But in the man-starved Confederacy, a forty year old man, even with three young children, could not escape conscription. Flintoff bitterly denounced the Confederacy for subjecting him to service. It had "denied its own contract & cheated its own citizens out of their rights."<sup>53</sup> Yet he stood ready, if unwilling, to join the ranks. His call came in August 1864 and Flintoff found himself in Captain Mitchell's Company of the 7<sup>th</sup> Regiment, N.C. Senior Reserves.<sup>54</sup> Captain

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<sup>51</sup> August 22, 1862, Flintoff Diary.

<sup>52</sup> April 20, 1863, Flintoff Diary.

<sup>53</sup> February 13, 1864, Flintoff Diary.

<sup>54</sup> Matthew M. Brown and Michael W. Coffey, eds., *North Carolina Troops, 1861-1865: A Roster* Vol. 18 (Raleigh: North Carolina Office of Archives and History, 2011), 342.

Mitchell's company drilled on horseback every Saturday morning in Yanceyville and was twice mobilized to arrest deserters in Randolph County. He survived the war.

Though Mary Davis Brown deplored the war as much as any other evangelical, the conflict had the least tangible effect on the South Carolinian as any of the families surveyed here. She learned about the Battle of Manassas while in church on a Sunday:

It was a solem day. News reached here this morning of a great battle in Richmon. the great Manasa battle. Mr Watson got up in the morning and begged the people to compose themselves and listen to the solem messenger of God, as we stood in great need of help at this time and hoped it would be a day long to bee remembered by many a one that was theire on communion occasion.<sup>55</sup>

The excitement about the first battle faded for Mary Brown as ordinary routines of life and death resumed in her neighborhood. She had no sons of military age in 1861, but her son-in-law, Rufus Whitesides, and Rufus' brother Robert enlisted. Her brief entries recorded far more deaths of old people and children, including that of her own daughter Harriet in November 1862. As the war ground on, however, it absorbed more men and resources from Mary's neighborhood. Her husband, Jackson, was conscripted in 1863 and "left his home and family at his countrys call" in September.<sup>56</sup> Jackson served in the Home Guard and was thus stationed at

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<sup>55</sup> Descendants of Mary Davis Brown, eds., *Oil In Our Lamps*, 81.

<sup>56</sup> Descendants of Mary Davis Brown, eds., *Oil In Our Lamps*, 85.

various places around South Carolina and returned home often. The Whitesides brothers served in Virginia, and Mary Brown considered Robert's death at the Battle of the Wilderness a particular blow. She recorded that she was "verry sorry to heare of it as Robert felt verry near to me." The Confederacy conscripted her sixteen-year-old son Lawson in December 1864 for which she expressed unusual bitterness: "A wonderful thing to take such boyes out."<sup>57</sup>

Mary Brown had always prayed for submission and always found solace in God's protection. In her grief at her mother's passing in 1864, she noted "I have been the chiled of many prayers." She relied on such prayers in the final cataclysm of the war in South Carolina, Sherman's march through the state. With both her husband and son in state service, Mary Brown looked on with horror as her neighborhood prepared for the expected arrival of the Federal troops: "we are looking fore the yankeyes every day. It is an awful time. Oure Husband and sons afraid to stay in there houses and the people a running and tryin to hide something to eat and some of their close." She, however, the "chiled of many prayers," consigned her farm and family not to her own protective wiles, but to God. "I have hid nothing. I will trust in God and doo the best I can," she noted.<sup>58</sup> Once again, God protected her. Sherman veered away from York County and her husband, son, and son-in-laws soon returned home, the war over.

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<sup>57</sup> Descendants of Mary Davis Brown, eds., *Oil In Our Lamps*, 87, 88.

<sup>58</sup> Descendants of Mary Davis Brown, eds., *Oil In Our Lamps*, 87, 91.

Strong Thomasson voted with a majority of North Carolinians against the secession convention in February 1861 and subsequently condemned the outbreak of war: “The South against the North! What folly!”<sup>59</sup> But where John Flintoff frequently reacted in his diary to war news, Strong rarely mentioned it at all. He, like Mary Davis Brown, resolutely stuck to the usual patterns of his rural life—church meetings, visits, family, and most importantly, farming. He did not ignore the war, but he said remarkably little about it, reflecting his disgusted opinion of the whole business. Amusingly, he noted at the first wartime Christmas the quiet in the neighborhood because all the rowdies who would normally carouse were in the army. So, too, all the gunpowder that might otherwise be used to disturb the Christmas serenity at his house. Here, he suggested his usual ironic good humor, but everywhere else his pungent disapproval oozed out. Observing the conditions for a famine in August 1862, he concluded, “There is perhaps nothing better calculated to humble a nation than famine and nothing better calculated to produce famine than war and short crops.”<sup>60</sup> Conscription never had a chance to catch up to Strong Thomasson. He died of disease in September 1862.

Caroline Lilly, of course, did not live to see the war, but her children did. Both James, Junior (“Jim”) and Edmund Julius (“Julius”) enlisted in early 1861. Jim, in fact, volunteered for service before North Carolina actually seceded. Julius enrolled in May 1861 and served in the 23<sup>rd</sup> North Carolina Troops until the Battle of

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<sup>59</sup> Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman*, 307.

<sup>60</sup> Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman*, 328.

Chancellorsville, where he was shot in the leg and had his foot amputated. Jim ended up in a cavalry regiment, but fared much worse. He was killed instantly at the Battle of Globe Tavern in 1864.

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