

**JOHN L GIRARDEAU (1825-1898)
AND SOUTHERN PRESBYTERIAN EVANGELICALISM**

T. Murray Garrott

Thesis submitted to the University of Edinburgh
in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

August, 2003



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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I certify that the following thesis is my original work. It is the work of research carried out through the Divinity Faculty at the University of Edinburgh from January 1995 to August 2003.

T. Murray Garrott, IV

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Caroliniana Library at the University of South Carolina in Columbia, the Library Society and the Historical Society in Charleston, and the South Carolina Room at the Charleston County Public Library were all productive because of the willing staff members who helped me exhaust their resources for anything even remotely related to Girardeau. I am especially thankful to James Island resident and historian, Doug Bostick, for the marvelous tour of James Island during my stay in Charleston.

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Any errors, either in fact or interpretation, are of course my own.

ABSTRACT

The central thesis of this work is that John Lafayette Girardeau's commitment to the religious instruction of the slaves of Charleston was the most consistent volitional response to the theological views of his denomination. At the most critical period in history for the Southern Presbyterian Church to demonstrate that its actions among the slaves were consistent with their collective ideology to evangelize and minister to them, Girardeau attempted to make their religious and spiritual well being a priority. Perhaps the most tragic feature that will be disclosed in this study of Girardeau is the extent to which the Southern Presbyterian Church failed to mirror the efforts of the one whom they so quickly praised. Girardeau's life provides a picture of a true nineteenth century Southern Presbyterian Evangelical by highlighting what was missing among his colleagues.

Girardeau's multifaceted ministry to the South Carolina slaves, Charleston elite, Confederate soldiers, and seminary students is presented in a biographical study, chronologically examining the pivotal stages of his life. This biography traces the intellectual, social, cultural, emotional, volitional, and spiritual development of Girardeau, incorporating historical context in the opening and closing chapters to present a more balanced work.

An examination of a significant portion of the primary material, including articles, essays, reports, eulogies, and editorials written by colleagues, friends, reporters, close friends, students, and Presbyterian ministers and churchmen suggests that Girardeau is portrayed as a symbol of Southern righteousness. His popularity tends to accentuate the inclination of many of those affiliated with the Southern Presbyterian Church to live vicariously through the 'success' of one of their own. Further, the emphasis that is given to Girardeau's exemplary work among the sea-board slaves tends to underscore

the collective failure of the Southern Presbyterian Church to do the same.

The first chapter is intended to highlight the American, Presbyterian, and Southern dimensions of Evangelicalism in order to demonstrate that this wing of the American reformed tradition, which Girardeau embraced, was thoroughly Evangelical. Chapter two describes the impressionable years of Girardeau and examines the considerable effect of immediate context, social and religious influence, unforeseen circumstances, and family in the shaping of his mind and will. Chapter three traces the social, emotional, spiritual, and academic developments early in the life of Girardeau that were central to his transition from an impressionable boy to a mature young man. Chapter four explores the Southern Presbyterian 'separate' campaign in Charleston to evangelize the slave population and Girardeau's contribution at Zion Presbyterian Church. Chapter five confirms Girardeau's commitment to the religious instruction of the Charleston slaves in the wake of the American Civil War and underscores the collective tragedy of the Southern Presbyterian denomination: that their ideological rhetoric never found similar expression through their actions. His final years as a seminary professor in Columbia, S.C., highlights the transformation that Girardeau underwent during the closing period of his life: the gradual realization that his life-long vision to minister to the Charleston slaves within the context of a Southern Evangelical paternalism failed. The final chapter details the impact of the bible, theology, and race as it relates to the Southern Evangelical initiative toward slave missions.

Introduction

John Lafayette Girardeau was a true Southern Presbyterian Evangelical. Intellectually, he was theologically and philosophically conservative. Socially, he was thoroughly paternalistic. Culturally, he was deeply committed to the state of South Carolina, the institution of slavery, and the Confederacy. Emotionally, he was naturally affectionate and intensely expressive in his method of communication. Volitionally, he applied the substance of the Southern Presbyterian Evangelical ideology more consistently than any other nineteenth century churchmen. In short, he was a Southern Presbyterian Evangelical at its best and worst.

My usage of the term 'true' is not intended to imply that Girardeau was 'ideal,' exemplifying a 'standard of perfection, beauty, or excellence' that others should emulate. Nor is it intended to convey any other value-driven judgment. Rather, my reference to Girardeau as 'true' is to be understood primarily as 'consistent.'¹ Girardeau was a true Southern Presbyterian Evangelical because his commitment to the religious instruction of the slaves of Charleston was the most 'consistent' volitional response to the theological views of his denomination concerning slavery. In short, Girardeau was the most authentic ideological representative of his antebellum denomination. His conservative theological framework was more fully carried to its logical conclusion through his actions over the course of his entire life than any of his nineteenth century colleagues and peers.

¹ For definitions of ideal and true, see *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, Ma.: Merriam-Webster Inc., Publishers, 1986).

Girardeau descended from French Huguenot ancestry. He was born in the deep South three decades before the American Civil War. He was raised on James Island, a coastal sea island community just across the Ashley River and visible to downtown Charleston. He learned to relate to the slaves within the highly paternalistic culture of a Southern cotton plantation. He attended the James Island Presbyterian Church and weekly prayer meetings ‘which were held at night from house to house.’² His mother died when he was seven, leaving him to care for his younger siblings as well as the Girardeau household slaves. He received his primary education on James Island, his secondary education at the German Friendly Society, a boarding school in the ‘city,’ and graduated from the College of Charleston at seventeen with highest honors. He experienced conversion during college and was persuaded that God had called him to preach to those who were ‘brought in God’s mysterious providence from a foreign land, and placed under our care, and made members of our households.’³ Following graduation, he attended Columbia Theological Seminary. His theological mentor while attending seminary was Southern Presbyterian theologian, James Henley Thornwell. His oratorical mentor during that same impressionable period was First Presbyterian minister, Benjamin Morgan Palmer. He married Penelope Sarah Hamlin, daughter of wealthy plantation owner, Thomas Hamlin. He was widely recognized as a ‘sui generis’ preacher and a ‘coming man in the Southern Presbyterian Church’ before his twenty-fifth birthday.⁴

² Girardeau, *Notes on Childhood*, in *Life, Work, and Sermons of John L. Girardeau*, ed., George A. Blackburn, D.D. (Columbia, S.C.: The State Company, 1916) p. 10.

³ John B. Adger, *My Life and Times* (Richmond, Va.: The Presbyterian Committee of Publications, 1899) p. 167.

⁴ Editorial, *The Charleston News and Courier* (June, 1898).

He was a classic scholastic Calvinist, but he constantly prayed for revival. He believed that the relation between master and slave was 'beautiful' and 'eminently patriarchal.'⁵ He owned slaves until the outbreak of the Civil War, and he longed to preach to them and pastor them. He was uncompromising in his position that the Negro churches should be under the direct supervision of a white minister. He became the minister of the largest nineteenth century Negro congregation in the union. He refused to accept pastoral or academic positions outside the state of South Carolina and served as a chaplain during the American Civil War. He was a professor at Columbia Theological Seminary during the final season of his life.

Scholars of American church history will immediately recognize many of the intellectual, social, cultural, and emotional themes of a nineteenth century Southern Presbyterian Evangelical in the previous cataloging of John L. Girardeau. Like most ministers within the antebellum Southern Presbyterian Church, Girardeau was intellectually and theologically conservative, socially paternalistic, culturally 'Southern,' and emotionally expressive. Like many of them, he rigorously defended the institution of slavery. And like the majority of Southern Presbyterian ministers and churchmen, he was persuaded that a permissible ecclesiastical defense of slavery was dependent upon the effectiveness of the Church to provide the slaves with pastoral care and religious instruction. Girardeau believed that there was no compelling ecclesiastical argument for the continuance of the South's 'peculiar institution' apart from a collective effort to oversee the spiritual and social welfare of those whom God had 'providentially'⁶ assigned

⁵ Girardeau, 'Report to the Charleston Presbytery' concerning the status of the Anson Street Mission to the slaves. *Minutes of the Charleston Presbytery, 1857*. See also, *Life, Work, and Sermons*, p. 43.

⁶ Nineteenth century Presbyterian Evangelicals believed in the doctrine of divine providence. Expounded in the Westminster Standards, the official confession of the nineteenth century

to their oversight. Unlike most Southern Presbyterian ministers and churchmen, Girardeau's ministry to the slaves equaled his ideological rhetoric. What is more, his individual influence among them may have exceeded the collective influence of the entire nineteenth century Southern Presbyterian denomination. At the most critical point in history for the Southern Presbyterian Church to demonstrate that their actions among the slaves were 'consistent' with their collective ideology to evangelize and minister to them, Girardeau attempted to make the religious and spiritual well being of the slaves a priority.

Of course, Girardeau's effectiveness as a minister to the slaves at the Anson Street Mission and Zion Presbyterian Church in Charleston during the final decade before the American Civil War was not enough to persuade Evangelical abolitionists and Northern politicians that a paternalistic view of slavery was justifiable. In that respect, the entire Southern Presbyterian mission to provide religious instruction to the slaves, including Girardeau's work among them, was unsuccessful.⁷ But the destruction of the South and her most prized earthly institution does not diminish Girardeau's effort to fulfill his 'duty' and his 'calling' as a Southern Presbyterian minister.⁸ In fact, for better and worse, it was his contribution to the welfare of the

Southern Presbyterian Church, 'God's work of providence are, his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions.' Southern Presbyterians quickly applied this doctrine to their justification of slavery as well as their collective responsibility to provide for their religious instruction and oversight. According to southern historian, Anne Loveland, 'Religious instruction was a providential task assigned to the South.' See Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order: 1800-1860* (Louisiana State University Press, 1980) p. 224.

⁷ Despite Girardeau's persistent efforts, Zion Presbyterian Church never recovered from the debilitating effects of the American Civil War and was, in 1869, removed from the Southern Presbyterian denomination by an act of the Presbyterian General Assembly.

⁸ For a comprehensive explanation of the terms, 'calling,' and 'duty,' see Loveland, 'Conversion and Calling,' and 'Religious Instruction of the Negroes,' in *Southern Evangelicals*, pp. 1-29 and 219-256.

Charleston slaves that enables the historian to capture the most comprehensive expression of Southern Presbyterian ideology.

John L. Girardeau was revered by a relatively diverse group of people. He possessed an ‘indescribable something’ that tended to attract others to him.⁹ Whether in the city, in the country, in the pulpit, on the battlefield, in the classroom, or along the road, people gathered around him and followed his lead. The sophisticated Charleston elite, the slaves, the Confederate and Union soldiers, and the students at Columbia Theological Seminary naturally endeared themselves to Girardeau. This diversity must be viewed within the rather isolated culture of the antebellum South, but his popularity among such a wide range of people was uncommon for a minister in the Southern Presbyterian Church.

His life has largely eluded late twentieth century scholarship. What was said by one of his former students at Columbia Seminary following Girardeau’s death in 1898, ‘the world never came to know him,’ was true then and remains true today.¹⁰ The reasons for this neglect are quite easily detected, but not as easily excused, given his impact in the state of South Carolina, the Southern Presbyterian Church, and the Evangelical community.

Only one twentieth century source exclusively details the life of John L. Girardeau: George A. Blackburn, D.D., ed. *The Life Work of John L. Girardeau, D.D., LL.D.* (S.C.: The State Company, 1916). This volume is not strictly a biography of Girardeau. Rather, it is largely a published compilation of articles, essays, reports, eulogies, and editorials written by colleagues, friends, reporters, close relatives, students, and Presbyterian ministers and

⁹ Douglas Kelly, *Preachers With Power: Four Stalwarts of the South* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust) p. 146.

¹⁰ Dr. T.A. Hoyt, *The Christian Observer* (June, 1898).

churchmen. It also contains all of Girardeau's remaining hand-written notes related to his childhood, letters, and many of his printed sermons. The majority of the original materials that are published in Blackburn's 'biography,' along with Girardeau's original theological documents, are located in the Blackburn Collection at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi.¹¹

The most striking feature of *Life Work and Sermons* is its complete dismissal of anything adversely critical in the life or work of Girardeau. Girardeau is virtually deified throughout the book. On the one hand, such a biased interpretation of Girardeau's life from those who knew him well reinforces his popularity within the Southern Presbyterian Church. On the other hand, his almost martyr-like attraction tends to highlight the inclination of many affiliated within the Southern Presbyterian Church to live vicariously through the success of one of their own. Further, the emphasis that is given to Girardeau's exemplary 'work among the Negroes' tends to accentuate the collective failure of the Southern Presbyterian Church to do the same.

In recent years, Douglas Kelly has reintroduced Girardeau, along with Daniel Baker, James Henley Thornwell, and Benjamin Morgan Palmer, in his book, *Preachers With Power: Four Stalwarts of the South*. Kelly alludes to a number of important themes in the life of Girardeau, but as the title suggests, he concentrates specifically on Girardeau the preacher.

¹¹ In addition to the original items published in *Life Work and Sermons*, the Blackburn Collection includes the majority of the sources that were part of Girardeau's original library; the original copies of his two theological works: *Discussions of Theological Questions* and *Calvinism and Evangelical Arminianism*; the Girardeau family Bible; the Girardeau genealogy; and his hand written notes on various theological subjects such as Calvinism, Christology, anthropology, eschatology, pastoral theology, practical theology, the doctrine of adoption, and the diaconate. The collection is relatively small and is not organized by folio numbers, box numbers, or any other formal identification arrangement.

Various aspects of Girardeau's life, particularly his work among the Charleston slaves, are cited in a number of books, articles and doctoral dissertations, including E. Brooks Holifield, *The Gentlemen Theologians: American Theology in Southern Culture: 1795-1860* (Duke University Press, 1978); Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order: 1800-1860* (Louisiana State University Press, 1980); Morton Smith, *Studies in Southern Presbyterian Theology* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962); Haven P. Perkins, 'Religion For Slaves: Difficulties And Methods,' *Church History* (1941); John Akers, 'Southern Presbyterians and Slave Missions: Conflict and Accommodation in the Old South,' in Boyd and Godfrey, ed. *Through Christ's Word* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1985); John Akers, *Slavery and Sectionalism: Some Aspects of Church and Society Among Presbyterians in the American South, 1789-1861* (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Edinburgh University, 1973).

The reasons why Girardeau has received such scant scholarly attention are threefold. First, Girardeau's relatively unexplored, and thus historically unfamiliar life, can be attributed to his desire to escape public recognition. The idea that Girardeau preferred anonymity to notoriety is further reinforced by the fact that he destroyed much of his personal correspondence before his death.¹² His preference to remain on the periphery of the Charleston high society and his refusal to communicate his social and political views from the pulpit, believing issues related to those subjects to be outside the purview of his role as a minister, have caused many historians to overlook Girardeau.

¹² See Blackburn, *Life Work*, 'Preface.'

Secondly, Girardeau was unusually committed to the Palmetto State of South Carolina. He refused every opportunity that would have removed him from his native state, 'resolving to live in no other state, to labor among no other people, and to sleep after death under no other soil.'¹³ Girardeau was offered ministerial and academic posts in New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, St. Louis, Louisville, Nashville, Atlanta, Memphis, and New Orleans. He declined every one of them. This hindered those from outside the state of South Carolina from ever taking notice of or interest in him. Consequently, not only did the world outside the antebellum South never come to know him, neither did the majority of Southern American church historians. In response to an invitation to pastor a large church in Atlanta that would have more than doubled his salary and enhanced his reputation, Girardeau commented to a close friend why he chose not to accept the position.

I will tell you now why I cannot accept that call, though I never expected to tell anyone. By the grace of God I was born in this state, through the mercy of God my home all my life has been in this state, and it is my heart's desire and prayer that my lifeless body shall sleep beneath its sod until the resurrection morn [sic]. I would rather accept \$400.00 and a cabin in a country church of South Carolina than the \$4,000.00 and the splendid manse in the magnificent city of Atlanta.¹⁴

Finally, nineteenth century Southern Presbyterians, such as James Henley Thornwell and Robert Lewis Dabney, whose lives have received considerable attention from Southern church historians, have now been largely dismissed, or at the very least, reduced to the periphery of Southern religious scholarship. Their zeal for theological orthodoxy, coupled with their views of slavery are two subjects of historical exploration that many twentieth century Southern American scholars have laid to rest, along with those who defended similar

¹³ Joseph Mack, in *Life Work*, 'Work Among the Negroes,' p. 60.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

perspectives. As Southern historian, Theodore Bozeman concluded, 'this wing of the American Reformed tradition more often than not has been castigated than investigated.'¹⁵

Southern Evangelical scholarship continues to receive serious attention as historians assess the impact of Southern religion on southern political, intellectual, economic, and social history.¹⁶ Historian, Mark Noll, spoke indirectly of advancements in Southern Evangelical scholarship when he commented that the 'study of Evangelical movements in the North Atlantic region has reached unprecedented levels of sophistication.'¹⁷ But, the majority of these Southern studies tends to focus on the broad similarities among Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists in the context of nineteenth century Evangelical history and the cumulative effect of these denominations in the shaping of the Southern Evangelical mind.

A few nineteenth century Southern Presbyterians have been brought to the forefront of Evangelical scholarship in an attempt to purge a popular historical stereotype that Southern

¹⁵ Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *Protestants in the Age of Science: The Baconian Idea and Antebellum Religious Thought* (Chapel Hill: UNC. Press, 1977) p. 33.

¹⁶ Though there is an increasingly diversified and sophisticated field of southern religious scholarship analyzing the reciprocal influence of Evangelicalism and southern history, the works of Donald G. Mathews, Samuel S. Hill Jr., and John Boles remain at the forefront of the list. See Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977); Hill, *Religion in the Solid South* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972); Hill, *The South and the North in American Religion* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1980); Hill, 'Northern and Southern Varieties of American Evangelicalism in the Nineteenth Century,' in *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, The British Isles, and Beyond, 1700 1990*, ed. Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington, and George A. Rawlyk (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Boles, *The Great Revival, 1787-1805* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1972); Boles, *The Irony of Southern Religion: The Rockwell Lecture Series* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1994). See also *Religion in the South*, ed. Charles Reagan Wilson (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985); *Varieties of Southern Evangelicalism*, ed. David E. Harrell, Jr. (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1981).

¹⁷ Mark Noll, 'Revolution and the Rise of Evangelical Social Influence in North American Societies, in *Evangelicalism*, p. 113.

Evangelicals were primarily anti-intellectual and thus largely unconcerned with the use and improvement of the mind.¹⁸ And to be sure, this study will support the thesis that a true Southern Presbyterian was intellectually minded. In an unpublished paper entitled 'The Theological Stance of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, Union Theological Seminary professor, Dr. John Leith, expressed his view that Girardeau was more philosophically oriented than any nineteenth century Southern Presbyterian.¹⁹ But there has never been a scholarly attempt to explore the most consistent ideological volitional response to an intellectually, socially, culturally, and emotionally minded antebellum Southern Presbyterian Evangelical during the decade that preceded the American Civil War. This study of Girardeau's life will suggest that his ministry to the Charleston slaves was the most logical response to the collective ideology of an antebellum Southern Presbyterian. Perhaps the most tragic feature that will be disclosed in this study of Girardeau is the extent to which the Southern Presbyterian Church failed to mirror the efforts of the one whom they so quickly praised.

¹⁷ These works include James Oscar Farmer, Jr. *The Metaphysical Confederacy: James Henley Thornwell and the Synthesis of Southern Values* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1986); E. Brooks Holifield, *The Gentlemen Theologians: American Theology in Southern Culture, 1795-1860* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1978); Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *Protestants in an Age of Science: The Baconian Ideal and Ante-bellum American Religious Thought* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), Jerry Robbins, *R.L. Dabney, Old Princeton And Fundamentalism* (Unpublished Ph.D Dissertation, Florida State University, 1991); Frank Smith, *The Philosophy of Science In Late Nineteenth-Century Southern Presbyterianism* (Unpublished Ph.D Dissertation, City University of New York, 1992); Kinney Garth, *The Influence of Scottish Common Sense Philosophy On the Theology of James Henley Thornwell and Robert Lewis Dabney* (Unpublished Ph.D Dissertation, Union Theological Seminary, 1979); Merrill Matthews, *Robert Lewis Dabney And Conservative Thought In The Nineteenth-Century South: A Study In The History Of Ideas* (Unpublished Ph.D Dissertation, The University Of Texas At Dallas, 1989).

¹⁹ See John H. Leith, 'The Theological Stance of the Presbyterian Church in the United States,' (unpublished paper), Union Theological Seminary, p. 3.

Girardeau's life provides a picture of a true Southern Presbyterian by highlighting what was missing among his colleagues.

John L. Girardeau was a Southern Presbyterian, but he was also an Evangelical. There remains a degree of hesitancy, almost indecisiveness, on behalf of some Southern historians to assert that nineteenth century Southern Presbyterians were Evangelical. For instance, Southern historian, Samuel Hill, writes, 'The two largest denominations [Methodists and Baptists] were definitely Evangelical, the third [Presbyterians] somewhat Evangelical, and the others [Episcopalians, Lutherans, Friends, Mennonites, Moravians] not Evangelical.' Yet one is left grappling with what Hill means by 'somewhat Evangelical.'²⁰ Does this mean that Presbyterians were less Evangelical than Baptists and Methodists? Consequently, the first chapter of this study is intended to highlight the American, Presbyterian, and Southern dimensions of Evangelicalism in order to demonstrate that this wing of the American reformed tradition, of which Girardeau embraced, was thoroughly Evangelical.

British church historian, David Bebbington, has succinctly and clearly articulated four defining features or impulses of Evangelicalism that have existed from the inception of this movement in the mid eighteenth century and have remained part of the movement ever since. *Conversionism* ['the belief that lives need to be changed'], *Activism* ['the expression of the gospel in effort'], *Biblicism*, ['a particular regard for the Bible'], and *Crucicentrism* ['a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross']. 'Together they form a quadrilateral of priorities that is the basis of Evangelicalism.' The substance of these four impulses will be expressed

²⁰ Samuel Hill, 'Northern and Southern Varieties of American Evangelicalism in the Nineteenth Century,' in *Evangelicalism*, p. 277.

throughout the first chapter to develop the thesis that John L. Girardeau was a true Southern Presbyterian *Evangelical*.²¹

Chapters two through five detail the life of Girardeau and will be presented chronologically. Each of these chapters is intended to develop the central thesis that Girardeau was a true or 'consistent' Southern Presbyterian figure. Chapter two describes the impressionable years of Girardeau and examines the considerable effect of immediate context, social and religious influence, unforeseen circumstances, and family in the shaping of his mind and will. Chapter three highlights the social, emotional, spiritual, and academic developments early in the life of Girardeau that were central to his transition from an impressionable boy to a mature young man. Chapter four explores the results of the Southern Presbyterian 'separate' campaign in Charleston to evangelize the slave population and Girardeau's contribution at Zion Presbyterian Church. Chapter five confirms Girardeau's commitment to the religious instruction of the Charleston slaves in the wake of the Civil War and underscores the collective tragedy of the Southern Presbyterian denomination: that their ideological rhetoric never found authentic expression through their actions. His final years as a seminary professor in Columbia, S. C., highlights the transformation that Girardeau underwent during the final period of his life: the gradual realization that his life-long vision to minister to the Charleston slaves within the context of a Southern Evangelical paternalism failed.

The concluding chapter details the impact of the bible, theology and race as it relates to the Southern Evangelical initiative toward slave missions. In response to allegations of gross

²¹ See David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History From the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989) pp. 1-19.

inhumanity issuing from anti-slavery propagandists during the three decades prior to the American Civil war, Girardeau clung to the dominant Southern worldview of his day in his ministry to the Charleston slaves.

Chapter 1: The American, Presbyterian, and Southern Dimensions of Evangelicalism

Commenting on his tour of America in 1835, Alexis de Tocqueville asserted in his book, *Democracy in America*, that ‘there is no country in the world where the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America.’ Given the frenzy of religious activity from the beginning of the nineteenth century, this assertion was not exceptionally noteworthy. However, Tocqueville continued upon this same theme a few pages later. ‘In France, I had almost always seen the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom marching in opposite directions. But in America, I found that they were intimately united and that they reigned in common over the same country.’¹ Given its historical context, this additional perception warrants recognition. Tocqueville demonstrated his awareness, though with perhaps less technical insight than we have at present, of the reciprocal cultural influence of Evangelical Christianity and American political and social ideology. In short, Tocqueville perceived the creation of what Mark Noll has identified as a ‘Christian--cultural synthesis.’²

Immediately following the American Revolution, ‘Alexander Hamilton could quip that there was no reference to God in the Constitution simply because the framers forgot to put one in.’³ It would

¹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. Thomas Bender (New York: Modern Library, 1981) pp. 182, 185.

² For a discussion of the various factors and events that contributed to this synthesis, see Mark Noll, *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994) pp. 67-76.

³ Mark Noll, ‘Revolution and the Rise of Evangelical Social Influence in North Atlantic Societies,’ in *Evangelicalism*, pp. 118-119.

have been little surprise to Tocqueville, however, that nearly seventy years later, ‘Abraham Lincoln would soon be quoting Scripture in a way [that would have been] unimaginable from the nation’s earliest presidents- as a means of drawing the nation back together after the Civil War.’⁴ That which transpired during those intervening years, that is, between the American Revolution and the American Civil War, whether religious, political, social, economic, intellectual, or philosophical, cannot be analyzed fully, understood, or explained apart from a thorough examination and integration of American Evangelicalism.

As mentioned, Mark Noll echoed that sentiment of Tocqueville over one-hundred fifty years later: ‘Ante-bellum America was a distinctly religious land, but it was religious in a distinctly American way.’⁵ Perry Miller and William G. McLoughlin narrow the scope of these statements respectively by defining the type of religion that was so prevalent in ante-bellum America: ‘The “dominant mentality” of America from the Revolution to the Civil War was evangelical,’ and the story of American Evangelicalism is the story of America itself in the years 1800 to 1900.’⁶ In short, an Americanized version of Evangelical Christianity ‘filled the social vacuum’⁷ that had been created in the wake of the revolutionary period, shaping the social structure, religious climate, and political thought of the United States leading up to the American Civil War.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 118-119.

⁵ Mark Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) p. 163.

⁶ Perry Miller, *The Life of the Mind in America: From the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York: 1965) p. 67; William G. McLoughlin, ed., *The American Evangelicals, 1800-1900* (New York: 1968) p. 1. Both quotations were used by George Marsden in *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Experience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970) p. x.

⁷ Mark Noll, ‘Revolution and the Rise,’ in *Evangelicalism*, p. 118.

Immediately following the revolutionary period, the United States achieved a degree of political and social stability due to the unifying attributes of the American Constitution. Even so, America remained, in the telling phrase of John Murrin, 'a roof without walls,' and had therefore merely established for itself 'a more successful version of what the Halfway Covenant had once been to the Puritans, a way of buying time.'⁸ Perhaps even more noteworthy was the statement of the nineteenth century Congregational churchman, Lyman Beecher, that 'the culture was not yet formed and thus up for grabs.'⁹ Either way, throughout the last few decades of the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth century, the social and moral structure upon which that roof was secured and those walls erected lay in what British historian, David Bebbington, identified as 'four qualities that have been the special marks of Evangelical religion:'

conversionism, the belief that lives need to be changed; *activism*, the expression of the gospel in effort; *biblicism*, a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be called *crucicentrism*, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Together they form a quadrilateral of priorities that is the basis of Evangelicalism.¹⁰

⁸ John M. Murrin, 'A Roof Without Walls: The Dilemma of American National Identity,' in *Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American National Identity*, ed. Richard Beeman et al. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987) p. 344; Noll, 'Revolution and the Rise,' p. 118.

⁹ Lyman Beecher, *A Plea for the West* (Cincinnati: Truman and Smith, 1835) pp. 9-23. This quote was used by Samuel Hill in 'Northern and Southern Varieties of American Evangelicalism in the Nineteenth Century,' in *Evangelicalism*, p. 276.

¹⁰ My usage of the terms 'evangelical,' 'Evangelical,' and 'Evangelicalism' throughout this chapter will be applied using the models and definitions set forth by David Bebbington in his book, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History From the 1730s to the 1980s*, pp. 1-19. The use of the term 'evangelical' will simply mean 'of the gospel,' which is used to denote 'the churches arising from the Reformation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.' p. 1; my use of the term 'Evangelical' or 'Evangelicalism,' in the upper case, is 'applied to any aspect of the movement beginning in the 1730s,' p. 1. Mark Noll draws on Bebbington's use of these definitions and applies them specifically for American usage. Noll asserts, 'Evangelicalism has always been made up of shifting movements, temporary alliances, and the lengthened shadows of individuals. All discussions of evangelicalism, therefore, are always both descriptions of the way things really are as well as efforts within our own minds to provide some order for a multifaceted, complex set of impulses and organizations.' Noll, *Scandal*, pp. 7-8.

The moral, social, and political structure of America was shaped significantly by these Evangelical impulses in the wake of the revolution. But these impulses were not unique to colonial America. The origins of Evangelicalism as a transatlantic movement, in which colonial America was but one participant, were being established nearly fifty years earlier. In its initial phase in colonial America, Evangelicalism was not simply or even primarily a distinctly American phenomenon. It gradually became that as these impulses were integrated, often disproportionately, into a socially, ethically, and economically diverse American culture. In short, the integration of these impulses within the diverse regions of the American social structure would gradually elicit unique forms of Evangelicalism, all of which would contribute to the making of a distinctly American Evangelicalism. Thus, the period following the American revolution was merely the first stage, among many, of a distinctly *American* or national Evangelicalism.

Of course, the fragile social conditions in colonial America may have been conducive to the vast integration of these Evangelical impulses. But to understand more clearly why Evangelicalism penetrated the heart of colonial America by the middle of the eighteenth century, from which it evolved into the first phase of a distinctly American form by the first decade of the nineteenth century, one must survey the plurality of Evangelical origins in its broader transatlantic dimension, particularly Great Britain.

Definitions:

Modern church historians have labored to provide helpful working definitions of 'Evangelical' and 'Evangelicalism.' Of course, historians have always faced the arduous task of defining these terms, and any attempt to do so requires a degree of qualification. The most general and simplistic, but perhaps the most useful, would be to describe Evangelicalism as a 'movement emphasizing the need to pass on the gospel.' 'Evangelical,' a term that was often used interchangeably with 'Protestant' in the sixteenth

century to describe any person who endeavored to communicate or 'pass on the gospel,' became by the end of the eighteenth century, 'restricted to the groups within English-speaking Protestantism that continued to uphold orthodoxy and promote Evangelicalism.'¹¹ For the purposes of the subject matter at present, that is, eighteenth and nineteenth century British and American religious history, it is within this latter context that the term will be used.

To assign a more specific definition to the term, 'Evangelical,' one needs to establish a distinction between the discipline of exploring Evangelicalism primarily as a social process *and* the common set of impulses, as mentioned above, that would generally accompany these movements. With this in mind, there have been at least two philosophical approaches to this task over the last half century, both of which have been beneficial to comprehending the seemingly abstract nature of Evangelical movements as well as the concrete/foundational components of Evangelicalism.

Evangelicalism, explored primarily as a social process, highlights the abstract nature of Evangelical movement(s). To attach an exhaustive definition to the term 'Evangelicalism,' has been viewed by some social historians, such as Donald Matthews, to emphasize one aspect of the extended and diverse movement at the expense of another. What may have been a common characteristic or 'impulse' of Evangelicals during one period or region or nation may be altogether different from that of another. Therefore, there has been the tendency to attribute to 'Evangelicalism' an 'imprecise and abstract quality' that, both positively and negatively, leaves much to the creativity and individual emphasis of the local or regional historian.¹² Moreover, categorical definitions of Evangelicalism, though

¹¹ David Bebbington, *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron, David F. Wright, David C. Lachman, and Donald Meek (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993) p. 306.

¹² Donald Matthews, *Religion in the Old South*, Preface, xvii.

helpful, often neglect the regional integration of Evangelical 'impulses' and traditional practices. Thus, the uniqueness of Evangelicalism in a given region is apt to go unnoticed.

Regional historians are less apt to apply succinct and comprehensive definitions of Evangelical movements, for they recognize the extent to which Evangelical movements were marked and influenced by the regionally distinct social processes already at work. Southern historian Donald Matthews obviously had this in mind when he stated that 'Evangelicalism was a social process as well as a religious perception, and as such can be understood only in historical, as opposed to definitional, terms.'¹³ In one respect, this general reluctance to attribute a comprehensive working definition of 'Evangelical' or 'Evangelicalism' could be viewed as a positive response, for it has restrained historians from using sweeping generalizations for what was and still is a complex and rarely understood transatlantic social influence.

Nevertheless, as church historians have become increasingly more cognizant of the importance and, indeed, the necessity of exploring Evangelical movements from the mid eighteenth century as a part of comparative history, there have arisen in recent years more precise and concrete definitions of 'Evangelical' and 'Evangelicalism.' As alluded to above, David Bebbington has captured and incorporated the diversity as well as the unity of transatlantic Evangelicalism in his description of the movement as containing what Mark Noll has echoed as four 'key ingredients.'¹⁴ These 'ingredients' or 'impulses' 'have been the special marks of Evangelical religion since the mid eighteenth century.' That is, wherever and whenever the Evangelical movement was most noticeably visible and influential, these impulses could be seen proportionally.

¹³ Ibid, xvii.

¹⁴ Noll, *Scandal*, p. 8

It is true that these impulses were rarely equally influential, either regionally, nationally, or from a transatlantic perspective. Due to the diverse social conditions in a given region, one impulse may have never fully permeated that geographical location. For instance, nineteenth century Evangelicals in the American South were never preoccupied with the social reform movements that had, at times, almost defined American Evangelicals in the North and much of Britain. Hence, they were less socially 'active.' Certainly, massive differences in regional social structures existed between Northern and Southern American Evangelicals, which were often manifested in one Evangelical impulse being more pervasive than another. For this reason, Mark Noll's assessment that 'evangelical impulses have never by themselves yielded cohesive, institutionally compact, easily definable, well-coordinated, or clearly demarcated groups of Christians' is particularly noteworthy.¹⁵ Even so, Evangelicals from the mid eighteenth century, though diverse theologically, socially, politically, philosophically, economically, and culturally, would hold in common, though disproportionately, these four impulses that characterized Evangelical movements. Perhaps Mark Noll captured both the complex, seemingly abstract nature of the movement as well its cohesive thread when he asserted:

Evangelicalism has always been made up of shifting movements, temporary alliances, and the lengthened shadows of individuals. All discussions of evangelicalism, therefore, are always both descriptions of the way things really are as well as efforts within our own minds to provide some order for a multifaceted, complex set of impulses and organizations.¹⁶

Transatlantic Evangelicalism:

It is a rather futile exercise, though perhaps a natural tendency amongst historians of transatlantic Evangelical movements, to attribute the primary origins of Evangelicalism during the first half of the eighteenth century to one or two transatlantic figures, the transatlantic influence and success

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 8.

of a particular Evangelical denomination, the transatlantic correspondence amongst Calvinists, various transatlantic publications expressing an evolving Evangelical ethos, or similar transatlantic expressions of religious despondency in the prevailing attitudes amongst aspiring Evangelicals. But the degree of specialization and concentration within this field in recent years, as the aforementioned particulars suggest, is only fully realized, understood, and utilized when subjected to and compared with the conclusions derived by other viable interpretations. That is, unless the historian acknowledges the relevance of numerous factors [including an abased and, therefore, highly impressionable religious climate in both Britain and America,¹⁷ the rise of John Wesley and Methodism during the Evangelical Revival in England,¹⁸ the international popularity and democratic influence of the preaching of George Whitefield, particularly in America,¹⁹ the highly effective modes of transatlantic communication through Evangelical publishing networks,²⁰ the widespread appeal of an activist spirit of ‘doing good’ as sparked by works such as Cotton Mather’s *Bonifacius*,²¹ and the obvious transatlantic effects of the Enlightenment] in relation to one another, neither American Evangelicalism nor its diverse local and regional Evangelical movements can be fully explained.

At the most fundamental level, one might appeal to what some perceived to be bleak religious

¹⁷ John Walsh, ‘Methodism and the Origins of English Speaking Evangelicalism,’ in *Evangelicalism*, pp. 23-24.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 19-34.

¹⁹ Harry S. Stout, ‘George Whitefield in Three Countries,’ in *Evangelicalism*, pp. 58-69. For a more comprehensive account of Whitefield in transatlantic perspective, see Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991).

²⁰ Susan O’Brien, ‘Eighteenth-Century Publishing Networks in the First Years of Transatlantic Evangelicalism,’ in *Evangelicalism*, pp. 38-52.

²¹ David A. Currie, ‘Cotton Mather’s *Bonifacius* in Britain and America,’ in *Evangelicalism*, pp. 73-86.

conditions on both sides of the Atlantic as the single most effective impetus through which thoroughgoing Evangelicals could and would unite. Perhaps William Cooper diagnosed the problem most succinctly in 1741, when he offered his Calvinistic assessment of the rather listless Protestant social influence that had existed from the beginning of the century: ‘The Golden showers have been restrained; the influences of the Spirit suspended; and the consequence has been that the Gospel has not had any eminent success.’²² From this perspective, it was the coming together of like minded Evangelicals, many of whom were Calvinists, to express their frustration with what they believed to be a deteriorating and apathetic transatlantic religious climate. What made their collective voice so effective, however, was its far-reaching transatlantic expression. According to John Walsh,

On either side of the Atlantic ministers felt similar anxieties. They fretted at the spiritual deadness of their people, the decay of clerical authority, the spread of rationalism, the prevalence of luxury, and the frivolity and indifference of the young... By the 1720s, (Crawford suggests) a “*transatlantic consensus*” had been reached among renewal minded Calvinist ministers on both sides of the Atlantic--English Nonconformists like Watts and Jennings; the Mathers, Danforth, and Stoddard in New England; Wodrow and the Erskine brothers in Scotland. All agreed that no reformation could be lasting until God poured out his Spirit.²³

It was within this less than favorable transatlantic religious context and amongst a world of networking Calvinists that, rather ironically, the recently converted high church Anglican, Arminian, and semi-perfectionist John Wesley and the moderate Calvinist George Whitefield, who claimed to have never read Calvin, sparked the ‘Evangelical Revival’ in Britain and the ‘Great Awakening’ in colonial America, inaugurating a ‘fairly discrete network of Protestant Christian movements arising during the eighteenth century in Great Britain and its colonies.’²⁴ Perhaps more extraordinary and even a bit more

²² Walsh, ‘Methodism,’ pp. 20-21.

²³ Ibid., p. 21.

²⁴ ‘Introduction,’ in *Evangelicalism*, p. 6.

unexpected than the seemingly unparalleled influence that these two men displayed in Britain and America was the diversification of people that ignited these awakenings, sustained and nurtured their development, and were affected by its message. Not all of the leaders or participants of the Evangelical Revival or Great Awakening were theological Calvinists. In fact, many in England who were soon to be transformed by Methodism would never even hear of Calvin. Astonished at the lack of things spiritual in 1733 near Bristol, where Whitefield and Wesley would shortly visit, Lord Egmont quipped with some of the locals, 'Why... I believe you know nothing of the Commandments. To this they all replied they knew such a family living in their parts, but they did not know them personally.'²⁵

The people in England and colonial America who contributed to the initial success of the revivals were, to a large extent, divided by the Atlantic, and thus by background, class, and culture; but, the central, simplistic, and somewhat experiential nature of the Evangelical 'impulses' linked them together. That is, they held in common the view that the Bible was the inspired word of God [biblicism]. They believed that the atonement of Christ was necessary, essential, and sufficient unto the salvation of all who professed faith [crucicentrism]. They shared the conviction that spiritual regeneration or transformation was often accompanied by a radical experience known as conversion [conversionism]. And they were, at least in theory, compelled to communicate the substantive nature of this message with others and live out its ethical and moral implications [activism].

The singular message to which those on both sides of the Atlantic gravitated was complemented, defined, and furthered by their social and cultural diversity. While Wesley and the 'Evangelical Revival' in England tended to rouse the 'marginalized' community, that is, those who

²⁵ Walsh, 'Methodism,' p. 25.

existed on the ‘fringes of social and religious life,’²⁶ Whitefield’s audience in America, though strikingly more Calvinistic than in England, ‘transcended class and encompassed all levels of society.’²⁷ Nevertheless, the people of both nations held in common what John Walsh simply yet accurately described as a ‘new mode of religious thinking and experience’²⁸ that marked the beginning of colonial American Evangelicalism and supplanted the ‘holy living’ tradition of seventeenth century Anglicanism in England. Phrases such as, ‘I was weary of cold contemplative truths which cannot warm nor amend the heart... I feel myself... lost and miserable: I experience such a healthful change in my whole moral system...and...One thing I know: I was blind, but now I see,’ were the sorts of comments that typified this shared, transatlantic Evangelical experience.²⁹

It is a fairly straightforward task to describe the significant transatlantic influence of George Whitefield and John Wesley, as well as those whom they inspired in Great Britain and the American colonies, as historians such as Harry Stout, John Walsh, and others have done. Furthermore, it is not particularly difficult to argue that shared similarities of experience were the common thread that stretched across the Atlantic through an increasingly sophisticated Evangelical network, as has been researched and described by Susan O’Brien. What is a bit more arduous to assess, however, is the source(s), occasion(s), event(s), or basis from which colonial America responded to leaders such as Whitefield and Wesley, and with such enthusiasm. In other words, what transatlantic social process provided the context through which the eighteenth century Evangelical Revival, Great Awakening, and forthcoming Evangelical movements would flourish? More specifically, what transpired among late

²⁶ Ibid., p. 32.

²⁷ Stout, ‘George Whitefield,’ p. 64.

²⁸ Walsh, ‘Methodism,’ p. 26.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 26.

seventeenth and early eighteenth century colonial America that created the social climate which John Wesley, George Whitefield, and other Evangelicals soon capitalized upon?

In an essay arranged under 'origins' in *Evangelicalism*, along with essays authored by those previously mentioned, David Currie provided invaluable insight into some these questions as he called attention to the important transatlantic significance of *Bonifacius*, the work of the New England Puritan, Cotton Mather, that was widely read during the early nineteenth century.³⁰ *Bonifacius* received sparse attention at the time of its first publication in 1710, which remained the prevailing trend throughout the rest of the eighteenth century. Though making its first transatlantic crossing in 1710, *Bonifacius* only reemerged in England in 1807, after which 'sixteen additional editions quickly followed on both sides of the Atlantic.' Furthermore, Currie 'uncovered no record of any prominent early Evangelical leaders citing it.'³¹ From this perspective, Mather's masterpiece could hardly be viewed as overtly influential in the lives of John Wesley, George Whitefield, and other eighteenth century

³⁰ See David A. Currie, 'Cotton Mather's *Bonifacius* in Britain and America,' in *Evangelicalism*, pp. 73-89. It is not my primary intent to exhaust the reasons that were involved in the social processes that contributed to the making of transatlantic Evangelicalism. My primary objective is simply to demonstrate that the origins, strictly speaking, of transatlantic Evangelicalism in the mid eighteenth century were not merely the result of what I described above, namely the influence of John Wesley, George Whitefield, Methodism, Evangelical networks, etc. Rather, Evangelicalism must also be viewed as the continuation of evangelical (notice the lower case e) Christianity, whose roots were established, as historian, Eric Schmidt, has suggested, even prior to the Reformation. What is more, the transition from Puritanism to Evangelicalism, in the context of an increasingly 'enlightened' society, depicts one major development within this larger transition. Finally, it was within this early eighteenth century context that we can best identify, relative to the other periods, the emergence of one of the essential Evangelical impulses that David Bebbington identified as 'activism.' For more recent and descriptive accounts of this transatlantic process, particularly from Great Britain to America, see Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scottish Communion and American Revivals in the Early Modern Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Schmidt, 'Time, Celebration, and the Christian Year in Eighteenth-Century Evangelicalism,' in *Evangelicalism*, pp. 90-104; see also, Marilyn J. Westerkamp, *Triumph of the Laity: Scots-Irish Presbyterianism and the Great Awakening, 1625-1760* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

³¹ Currie, 'Cotton Mather's, *Bonifacius*,' pp. 73, 76.

Evangelicals.

But, it was the seemingly unexpected, almost impulsive, activist, and to some degree, ecumenical thesis of 'doing good' within the pages of *Bonifacius* that reflected a subtle transition in the life of Mather, which was, more importantly, suggestive of a greater development within the New England Puritan community. In a word, the central theme within *Bonifacius* was indicative of the reality that the transition or the process from late seventeenth century Puritanism to early eighteenth century Evangelicalism had already begun. The seeds of Evangelicalism, as it were, though not necessarily recognizable within late seventeenth century religious thought and certainly not a reflection of what would mature into a transatlantic movement of colossal social influence a few decades later, were being planted by Mather as illustrated through his illuminating work *Bonifacius*. Whitefield, Wesley, and other burgeoning Evangelicals would water those seeds and build upon this emerging religious and social process soon thereafter in colonial America. What is more, 'activism' was beginning to emerge alongside the other, more established, Evangelical impulses. Currie elaborates:

Although his death in 1728 antedates by a couple of years the commonly designated starting point for evangelicalism as a discernible movement, Cotton Mather's enduring influence through *Bonifacius* makes him one of its fathers. His traditional role in Puritanism and his work's transitional role in his own life marks [*sic*] Mather as a proto-evangelical and reveals [*sic*] the movement's diverse origins in Puritan and Enlightenment thought and practice.³²

The fundamental changes in the life of Mather that were most vividly revealed in the pages of his diary 'from recording the details of his inner spiritual struggles to describing his weekly cycle of "Good Devices"' were obviously not contrived in isolation but were the consequence of broader transatlantic developments within 'Puritanism and Enlightenment thought and practice.'³³ As a

³² Ibid., p. 74.

³³ Ibid., p. 74.

transitional figure from Puritanism to Evangelicalism, Mather's life dictated and reflected these changes. First, philosophical adjustments in Mather's diary from an introspective or reflective spirituality to a more activist, benevolent emphasis mirrored his correspondence with the German pietist Hermann Francke. Moreover, this was suggestive that German Pietism's organized approach to benevolence was a catalyst upon Mather's thinking.' This more 'activistic' mind set, however, was not a new concept either to Mather or to Puritan thought. Rather, 'this new continental model reinforced activist tendencies within his own family and Puritanism in general...'³⁴ Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, Mather's personal transition as revealed through his correspondence with Francke and displayed in his work, *Bonifacius*, suggested that New England Puritanism had to adapt itself to an increasingly enlightened culture and was thus 'in need of a fresh strategy.'³⁵

Specifically, 'traditional theocratic' ideals among Puritans such as Mather were no longer a viable option, nor were they staunchly upheld within the community. '*Bonifacius* sketched out a more voluntary approach that, while allowing for the Christian magistrate's participation in efforts to reform and convert society, did not make legal coercion a cornerstone of its plan as preceding generations of Puritans had done.'³⁶ This departure from the conventional structure of seventeenth century Puritan ideology demonstrated, somewhat ironically, the enlightenment influence in late Puritan thought that would shortly manifest itself in the transition from Puritanism to Evangelicalism. Most notably, 'the Enlightenment ideal of progress,' motivated by an 'enlightened morality' and characterized by principles such as 'good people lead to a good society,' reminded and challenged Puritans such as Mather of the

³⁴ Ibid., p. 74.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 74.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 74.

'basic tenet of Reformed piety, 'namely, true faith produces good works.'³⁷ Of course, from the perspective of Mather and future Evangelicals, this tenet was simply a response to glorify God or, as Mather asserts, 'to Answer the Great End of Life.'³⁸ Throughout the remainder of the late eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth century, Mather's response or 'Answer to the Great End of Life' was crowned as one of the principal Evangelical impulses, a term that David Bebbington has simply labeled 'activism.' Sadly, as a nineteenth century history of American Evangelical denominations would confirm, and particularly in the American South, this impulse was not always corporately demonstrated 'to Answer the Great End of Life.'

The importance of the eighteenth and nineteenth century 'rise of Evangelical influence' as a 'culture-shaping force in North Atlantic societies' has been stressed in relatively recent scholarship.³⁹ Of course, studies of eighteenth and nineteenth century movements have received considerable attention throughout the last half of the twentieth century.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, scholars of Evangelicalism in Britain and America have redirected or broadened the methods from which Evangelical movements should be analyzed, creating a wider spectrum from which Evangelical social influence can be ascertained. There has arisen in increased measure over the last three decades a degree of specialization that has

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 75, 84, 76, 73.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 75.

³⁹ Noll, 'Revolution and the Rise of Evangelical Social Influence,' p. 113.

⁴⁰ These studies include Charles I. Foster, *An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1960); Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind: From the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966); William Warren Sweet, *The Story of Religion in America* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1930); Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York, 1966); and Sidney E. Mead, *The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America* (New York, 1963).

dominated this field of research and taken it to new heights.⁴¹ Mark Noll was not exaggerating when he confirmed that the ‘study of evangelical movements in the North Atlantic region has reached unprecedented levels of sophistication.’⁴² To gain a healthier perspective within this burgeoning field of discourse, one needs to be familiar with the shift in methodological emphasis from singular, relatively unconnected accounts of Evangelical movements towards a more unified, transatlantic, comparative explanation.

This more specialized, comparative approach to Evangelicalism exposes, to a greater degree than before, the diversity and uniqueness of local, regional, and even national Evangelical movements by focusing on transatlantic comparative features. Summed up best in the introduction of *Evangelicalism*, he ‘who knows any region’s particular form of evangelicalism knows only that form of evangelicalism.’⁴³ Studies in transatlantic Evangelicalism have affirmed what many denominational and regional historians have said for years but have been unable to express due to the methodological emphasis of their research-- ‘...that evangelical experiences were always part of larger social, intellectual, and cultural frameworks.’ By addressing Evangelical ‘convictions and behavior as irreducible realities in their own right’ as opposed to merely a ‘function, say, of personal or social psychology,’ a growing number of professional historians ‘practice connected but not reductionist history.’⁴⁴

American Evangelicalism:

⁴¹ ‘Introduction,’ *Evangelicalism*, pp. 6-7.

⁴² Noll, ‘Revolution,’ p. 113.

⁴³ ‘Introduction,’ in *Evangelicalism*, p. 7.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

Noll's claim that religion in ante-bellum America was 'religious in a distinctly American way' is only a partial acknowledgment of Tocqueville's earlier assessment. Noll's evaluation of late eighteenth and nineteenth century American Evangelicalism as becoming 'distinctly American' is based largely on three historical developments that must be explored in relation to the others in order to understand the impact of subsequent ante-bellum religious thought. These eighteenth and nineteenth century developments include revivalism, a Christian-cultural synthesis following the American revolution, and the Scottish Enlightenment.⁴⁵ Of course, from one perspective, these are three singular processes in early American history. By their extended and multifaceted influence throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, they are also three simultaneously overlapping systems, reinforcing the principles that strengthen, define, and activate the others. Consequently, Evangelicalism in colonial and early America from the mid eighteenth century must be evaluated in light of the relations among these three developments that broadly characterize and define a distinctly American Evangelicalism.

First, in its broadest sense, nineteenth century American Evangelicalism was shaped by religious revivals and awakenings that originated in the old world, were transplanted throughout the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries to colonial America by way of the English Puritans and Scots-Irish Presbyterians, and evolved and matured into the first phase of a distinctly American Evangelicalism during the Great Awakening.⁴⁶ This series of revivals in colonial America known as The Great

⁴⁵ For a more detailed discussion of the effects that eighteenth and nineteenth century historical developments had on the life of the Evangelical mind in subsequent American history, see Noll, *Scandal*, pp. 59-107.

⁴⁶ For discussions of the earliest Scottish revivals, see W.J. Couper, *Scottish Revivals* (Dundee: James P. Matthew and Co., 1918); *The Revivals of the 18th Century, Particularly at Cambuslang* (London: John Johnstone, n.d.); Ian A. Muirhead, 'The Revival as a Dimension of Scottish Church History,' *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, (1980) pp. 179-195; John MacInnes, *The Evangelical Movement in the Highlands of Scotland, 1688-1800* (Aberdeen: University Press, 1951); Arthur Fawcett, *The Cambuslang Revival: The Scottish Evangelical Revival of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Banner of Truth, 1971). For recent discussions on transatlantic

Awakening was a defining characteristic in the formation of nineteenth century American Evangelicalism. Specifically, the type of preaching initiated by George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards, beginning in the late 1730s, emphasized the 'conversion experience.' This emphasis on the experience of the individual gradually uprooted and replaced the traditional Reformation and Puritan emphases on the conversion of the covenant community and would characterize, for better or worse, one major dimension of American Evangelicalism. Additionally, this emphasis on the conversion of the individual spawned by the Great Awakening would gradually affect the process of social and political formulation in the events leading up to the American Revolution and, even more so, in its aftermath.

This direct and more personally invasive form of preaching, which was intended to elicit a conscious response within the individual and which became increasingly promoted during the Great Awakening, was adapted, extended, and reproduced throughout the latter half of the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth in New England and along the western frontier. In one sense, this unprecedented style of preaching became the prototype for later nineteenth century Evangelical preachers. Perhaps more importantly, such preaching also had a profound effect on the breakdown of traditional ecclesiastical structures, and in the wake of the American Revolution, inherited social and

revivalism, see Richard Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism: Popular Evangelicalism in Britain and America, 1790-1865* (Greenwood, 1978). For general discussions on various aspects of The Great Awakening and the Second Great Awakening, see Daniel L. Pals, 'Several Christologies of the Great Awakening,' *Anglican Theological Review* 72 (1990); Iain H. Murray, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism, 1750-1858* (The Banner of Truth, 1994); *The Works of Jonathan Edwards: The Great Awakening*, ed. C.C. Goen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972); Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979); Terry D. Bilhartz, *Urban Religion and the Second Great Awakening* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1986). According to Noll in *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, this 'Colonial revival was called a great awakening, because it touched so many regions and so many aspects of colonial life. Although the Great Awakening represented a more general upsurge of revivalistic piety than a distinct event, it was vastly important for both the churches and American society,' p. 91.

political constructions. Authority that was once inherent within the structures of the local church, particularly the clergy and vestry, was gradually being reassigned to well-speaking and winsome evangelists who communicated a simple message, stressing the need for individual conversion.

To be sure, such a shift from traditional authority intrinsic in the organizational structure of the church to a more 'anti-institutional moralism, populist intuition, and democratic biblicism,'⁴⁷ initiated by enthusiastic preachers during the Great Awakening, was, as alluded to above, expanded in the early nineteenth century Awakenings, commonly dubbed the Second Great Awakening, as the Revolution created a vacuum for Evangelicals to form and express their individual convictions and ideals in a rapidly expanding and socially diverse marketplace of ideas.⁴⁸ This gradual transformation from traditional ecclesiastical structures and institutions to a more individualistic American marketplace, whereby Evangelical denominations were gradually forced to compete with each other throughout the nineteenth century, reflected the growing individualism of American culture and, indeed, of American Evangelicalism as well.

Secondly, Evangelicalism in ante-bellum America was the product of a widespread cultural synthesis that arose in the wake of the Great Awakening, matured throughout the revolutionary period, and was embraced wholeheartedly by American Evangelicals throughout the nineteenth century. Increasingly, popular political concepts such as freedom, liberty, restraint, virtue, and tyranny began to

⁴⁷ Mark Noll, *Scandal*, pp. 61, 62.

⁴⁸ According to Noll in *A History of Christianity*, 'The Second Great Awakening was the most influential revival of Christianity in the history of the United States,' p. 166. Again, like the 'Great Awakening,' this revival represented a 'more general upsurge of revivalistic piety than a distinct event and cannot be limited to one particular event or geographical location.' As the Second Great Awakening developed, debates over theological issues emerged across denominational lines, which would be one factor in the major denominational splits throughout the 1830s and 1840s. The revivals associated with the Second Great Awakening began at the end of the eighteenth century and had a lingering effect in both the eastern and western parts of the United States that would play a significant role in shaping American religious life after 1830. See pp. 166-174.

emerge as tensions with Great Britain escalated in the latter half of the eighteenth century. These ideas began to take on multi-faceted meanings due to the more individually oriented atmosphere incurred throughout the Great Awakening. Specifically, language and ideas used to express religious convictions spawned by the Great Awakening found common ground and similar expression with rapidly evolving American ideals in other spheres of life, including the political (i.e., republican) and economic realms. This intermingling of religious and political language before, during, and after the Revolution not only became the means by which populist American ideals were established and communicated but also provided the building blocks through which a distinctly republican Evangelical America took form.⁴⁹ In short, expressions such as freedom from 'sin' and freedom from British Parliament found massive political and religious acceptance and began to be used somewhat interchangeably among enlightened Americans. As mentioned at the onset, Tocqueville observed this cultural synthesis by 1835 when he made reference to what he had perceived as impossible: the 'spirit of freedom and spirit of religion

⁴⁹ For a discussion of the synthesis itself, see Noll, *The Scandal*, pp. 67-76. For more general studies surrounding various elements of this synthesis and its effect on nineteenth century American Evangelicalism both before and after the American Revolution, see George Marsden, Mark Noll and Nathan O. Hatch, *The Search For a Christian America* (Westchester: Crossway Books, 1983); Mark Noll, 'The American Revolution and Protestant Evangelicalism,' *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 23 (Winter, 1993) pp. 615-638; Mark Noll, *One Nation Under God? Christian Faith and Political Action in America* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988); Nathan Hatch, 'The Christian Movement and the Demand For a Theology of the People,' *The Journal of American History* 67 (December, 1980) pp. 545-567; Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Nathan Hatch, 'Sola Scriptura and Novus Ordo Seclorum,' in *The Bible in America*, ed. Nathan Hatch and Mark Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Michael Gauvreau, *The Evangelical Century* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991); David F. Wells, *No Place For Truth; or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); Richard Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984); Joyce Appleby, *Capitalism and a New Social Order* (New York: New York University Press, 1984); and Charles G. Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1856* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

marching in the same direction.⁵⁰

In addition to the synthesis of emerging American ideals such as those bound up in the republican theories of politics and the more expressive religious convictions that were increasingly articulated in the wake of the Great Awakening, there included ‘a democratic understanding of society’ and ‘a liberal view of the economy.’⁵¹ This budding cultural synthesis among American Evangelicals would evolve throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, leaving its most permanent stain on subsequent Evangelical denominations. Evangelicals stressed different strands and ideals of the synthesis in order more actively to advance their own particular social, ecclesiastical or theological perspectives, often engendering more isolation than unification throughout the nineteenth century. Ironically, this cultural synthesis, which was gradually endorsed and promoted by colonial Americans prior to the Revolution to achieve a spirit of unity in the face of British opposition, would, in a relatively short period of time, yield more diversity and divisiveness, particularly among newly established Evangelical denominations.

Finally, Scottish common sense philosophy⁵² gradually emerged in the latter half of the

⁵⁰ Tocqueville, *Democracy*, p. 185.

⁵¹ Noll, *The Scandal*, pp. 172-76.

⁵² Of all of the various strands of enlightenment influence on America throughout the eighteenth century, Scottish common sense philosophy had by far the most lasting effect on nineteenth century Americans. In his book, *The Enlightenment in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), Henry May defines four categories of enlightenment thought throughout the eighteenth century: moderate enlightenment (Isaac Newton and John Locke); skeptical enlightenment (Voltaire and David Hume); revolutionary enlightenment (Rousseau, William Godwin, and Thomas Paine); and didactic enlightenment (Francis Hutcheson, Thomas Reid, Adam Smith, and Dugald Stewart). It was the Scottish dimension of the enlightenment that was thoroughly unpacked throughout the nineteenth century by educated Americans who wished to substantiate or justify sundry beliefs and attitudes. According to Noll in *Scandal*, these Americans ‘struggled to restore intellectual confidence and social cohesion to the Enlightenment ideal,’ p. 84. It has also been argued by Nicholas Wolterstorff ‘that the way Americans used the Scottish philosophy may have seriously altered the work of Thomas Reid, Dugald Stewart, and their colleagues, who cannot possibly be held responsible for how their ideas were popularized in America.’ See Noll, *Scandal*, p. 87. For discussions on the didactic enlightenment

eighteenth century as the primary intellectual resource through which future university professors, clergy, and laymen alike would defend what they considered the fundamental precepts of traditional religious beliefs in a nation that was radically loosening and eradicating its traditional structures. The result for religion was a plethora of diverse theological systems appearing throughout the nineteenth century, all finding their justification under the banner of 'common sense.'⁵³ Whether it was the likes of Nathaniel Taylor, who sought to advance the 'New School' theological and social persuasion, Charles Hodge and the Old School Calvinists, James Thornwell and other Southern Presbyterians who carefully developed arguments to justify the 'peculiar' institution, or those espousing other religious perspectives, the means through which these men and their respective ecclesiastical denominations erected their defense lay in the tenets of Scottish common sense realism.⁵⁴

In the formative stages of a nation that was busily striving to define itself as one that existed by the people and for the people, many Americans sought to renounce traditional conventions and establishments with the hope that greater religious liberty and more democratic freedom could be

or the Scottish branch of enlightenment thought, see S.A. Grave, *The Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960); Richard B. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); and Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff, eds., *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

⁵³ For discussions concerning the influence of Scottish common sense philosophy on American religious thought, see Sydney E. Ahlstrom, 'The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology,' *Church History* 24 (1955) pp. 257-272; Mark Noll, 'Common Sense Traditions and American Evangelical Thought,' *American Evangelical Quarterly* 37 (Summer, 1985) pp. 216-238; Mark Noll, *Princeton and the Republic, 1768-1822: The Search for a Christian Enlightenment in the Era of Samuel Stanhope Smith* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); George Marsden, 'Scotland and Philadelphia: Common Sense Philosophy From Jefferson to Westminster,' *The Reformed Journal* 29 (March, 1979) pp. 8-12; and D.H. Meyer, *The Instructed Conscience: The Shaping of the American National Ethic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972).

⁵⁴ Ahlstrom, *The Scottish Philosophy*, pp. 263-269.

secured. Early American Evangelicals thought that the breakdown of these conventions could be accomplished without having to compromise the traditionally recognized ideals or virtues upon which that freedom had been fortified. The problem, however, arose in the absence of a proper intellectual framework to allow for such major changes. American Evangelicals found their answer in the principles of Scottish common sense realism, the appeal to an individual's intuitive perception of right and wrong. According to Noll, 'the intuitive philosophy provided by the Scots offered an intellectually respectable way to establish public virtue in a society that was busily repudiating the props upon which virtue had traditionally rested -- tradition itself, divine revelation, history, social hierarchy, an inherited government, and the authority of religious denominations.'⁵⁵

Transplanted in part to colonial America by John Witherspoon in 1767,⁵⁶ Scottish common sense philosophy offered an intuitive, introspective appeal to 'truth' that fit well into the context of the time. Searching for ways to establish their religion as the dominant force in America, Evangelicals, perhaps uncritically, 'adjusted their religion to the humanism of republicanism and common sense reasoning. By doing so they helped the republican founding fathers win the war, but also put themselves in a position to offer the new republican nation their religion as a competitor to the rational, moralistic faith of the fathers.'⁵⁷ This explains at least one reason why Evangelicals, on the whole, united in support of the Revolution.⁵⁸ Further, this appeal to objective 'truth' provided an array of answers not only with

⁵⁵ Noll, *Scandal*, p. 87.

⁵⁶ E. Brooks Holifield, *The Gentlemen Theologians*, pp. 118-119. Holifield notes that Witherspoon's students 'flooded the South' with common sense philosophy throughout the late eighteenth century, thus providing the most useful intellectual resource in the budding universities and seminaries.

⁵⁷ Noll, 'The American Revolution and Protestant Evangelicalism,' *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23 (1993) p. 637.

⁵⁸ Nathan Hatch, George Marsden, and Mark Noll, *The Search For Christian America*, pp. 48-125.

respect to the justification of the American Revolution but also for a variety of nineteenth century ecclesiastical differences and social persuasions, not the least of which included the justification of slavery. Throughout the nineteenth century, Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists all embraced Scottish common sense philosophy to defend their respective ecclesiastical establishments and theological beliefs.

These three historical developments of eighteenth and nineteenth century America, which were largely responsible for the shaping of Evangelical thought and action in the four decades prior to the Civil War, can never be fully understood except in relation to one another. That is, the motivations accompanying Evangelical involvement in the American Revolution can hardly be interpreted apart from the impact of the Great Awakening on individualistic expression and the zeal embedded in a determined American spirit. Nor can this religious/cultural synthesis, particularly the use and abuse of language in order to justify Evangelical persuasions in forums of discourse outside the domain of religion, be excluded from an understanding of the formation of Evangelical Christianity at any stage in its development. Finally, the nineteenth century transition from traditional theological Calvinism to the New Haven theological framework and even a more pervasive Arminian theology taking place on the American frontier, cannot be understood apart from the Enlightenment ideals of the Scottish common sense philosophy.⁵⁹

Conclusion:

As 'evangelicals made the enlightenment their own' throughout the mid-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the merger between Evangelicalism and various dimensions of an increasingly

⁵⁹ Noll, *A History of Christianity*, p. 154. See also Noll, *Scandal*, p. 88.

heterogeneous and formative American culture produced a distinctly *American* Evangelicalism.⁶⁰ According to Noll, 'Protestant traditions from the Reformation ... had stressed human incapacities more than natural human abilities, and both had stressed the evil effects of sin on the mind more than confidence in human reason.'⁶¹ As mainstream American Evangelicals gradually synthesized their own religious ideals and convictions with an increasingly 'enlightened' American culture, they uncritically embraced many Enlightenment ideals, much of the theology and philosophy of which was incompatible with traditional Protestantism. Noll asserts that this massive transformation began during the lifetime of Jonathan Edwards, generally considered to be the last authentic puritan.

Edwards lived through a period of rapidly changing conceptions of the world, God and humanity. The famous changes in scientific theories were only the most obvious signs of great alterations in general attitudes. By his day, the conventions of the Enlightenment had come to prevail widely on the Continent, in Great Britain, and also in America. In keeping with the spirit of the enlightenment, almost all thinkers in Edwards's age, Christian or not, had come to assume that the fundamental reality was matter in motion. *Almost all had concluded that the pursuit of happiness was the loftiest human goal. Almost all were agreed that the ability to understand the world depended ultimately on the activities of the human mind.*⁶²

In many respects, this transition from Puritanism to Evangelicalism throughout the early-eighteenth century was 'subtle, and it occurred in different areas in different ways.'⁶³ Nevertheless, the heightened degree of importance placed on the conversion experience of the individual marked one of the most noticeable transformations during this period. 'Conversionism,' popularized by Whitefield in the Southern and middle colonies and Edwards in New England throughout the late 1730s and early

⁶⁰ Noll, *Scandal*, p. 86.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁶³ Noll, *A History of Christianity*, p. 104.

1740s, gradually became the fundamental prerequisite in the life of the Evangelical.⁶⁴ But this was not all. As Evangelicals gradually ‘made the enlightenment their own’ throughout the latter half of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the conversion experience gradually began to acquire additional meanings and take new forms. Freedom from Great Britain and freedom from the tyranny of sin were, indeed, emerging as part of the same conversion experience by the time of the Revolutionary War. This synthesis between one major component of Evangelicalism and American culture was but one example of the transcendent influence of the Enlightenment upon religious thought and American social and political ideology.

‘Conversionism,’ from an Evangelical perspective, would undergo additional adaptations theologically, politically, and socially throughout the nineteenth century. Evangelicals presumed, almost unknowingly, that if they were to remain both a fixture as well as a relevant and integral component within American culture, mapping out the future course and ideals of an evolving nation, they would have to accommodate, and thus adapt themselves and their beliefs, to address the immediate problems and concerns that were rapidly facing a new nation. As noted by Noll, ‘Evangelicals were successful in the early United States because they successfully adapted their Christian convictions to American ideals.’⁶⁵

In the process, however, ‘conversion in Puritanism and Revivalism differed sufficiently, so that the nature of the conversion experience itself was slowly transformed in American culture.’⁶⁶ What had

⁶⁴ For a discussion concerning the integral part of the conversion experience in the life of Evangelicals, see Anne Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order: 1800-1860*, p. 2-29.

⁶⁵ Noll, *Scandal*, p. 67.

⁶⁶ Jerald C. Brauer, *Conversion: From Puritanism to Revivalism* (University of Chicago Press, 1978) p. 232.

initially been intended by Whitefield and Edwards as a simple yet personal encounter and an acceptance of Christ became exceedingly more complicated and convoluted as Evangelicals failed to discover throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that they had embraced many basic principles of the Enlightenment. Whereas Enlightenment expressions such as ‘the pursuit of happiness’ were initially foreign and inconsistent with the world view of burgeoning Evangelicals prior to the Revolution, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, they had become prevalent. Initially, Evangelical joined forces with mainstream Americans to create a stronger coalition against Great Britain. In the aftermath of the Revolution, however, and certainly by the turn of the century, Evangelicals gathered their forces to claim what they now perceived to be their ultimate goal: the conversion of America itself. At first glance, it appeared that there would be few obstacles in the way to prevent them from achieving this lofty goal. As the nineteenth century progressed, however, the obstacles that diverted Evangelicals from achieving this shared vision were themselves, witnessed most visibly, in the form of emerging Evangelical denominations.

Evangelicals who emerged from the Great Awakening took it upon themselves to create their own communities; at first they sought to remake the churches, *but then (in the United States) they set their sights on creating a Christian nation*⁶⁷ (italics added).

Perhaps the foundational point of disagreement among Evangelicals resided, once again, in the nature of conversion. Of course, the conversion, or ‘born-again’ experience remained the pinnacle or apex of Evangelicalism. But the Evangelical ‘conversion experience’ gradually began to take additional expressions. As Evangelicals made the Enlightenment their own throughout the nineteenth century, placing less emphasis on the depravity of man and the pre-eminent need for conversion from self to God, the essence of the ‘conversion experience’ was evolved as well.

⁶⁷ Noll, *A History of Christianity*, pp. 104-105.

Specifically, Evangelicals gradually began to emphasize the Evangelical impulse, ‘activism,’ often to the neglect or expense of ‘conversionism.’ Thus, for some Evangelicals, ‘activism’ and ‘conversionism’ became part of the same religious experience. For instance, Charles Grandison Finney, who epitomized American Evangelicalism by 1830, described it best when he noted that the best form of conversion was one ‘where the sinner is brought to see what he has to do, and he takes his stand at once, And Does It.’⁶⁸ The emphasis on what the sinner ‘has to do,’ as opposed to who he is in relation to God, highlighted the increasingly amorphous, activist nature of conversion. By the mid 1830s, many Evangelicals, including Finney, stressed ‘activism’ as an Evangelical impulse less as the response to conversion but more as part of the conversion experience itself.

David Bebbington identified four impulses that were unique to Evangelicalism. Of course, conversion or the ‘born-again’ experience was the central Evangelical impulse. That is, it was ‘the content of the gospel, the goal of personal effort, the collective aim of churches, the theme of Evangelical literature.’⁶⁹ However, he also suggested that ‘activism’ was an equally significant characteristic of Evangelicalism that ‘flows from the first.’ Bebbington listed a number of ways that ‘activism’ was manifested in the life of the Evangelical, not the least of which was its attempt ‘to enforce the ethics of the gospel.’ But, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, Evangelicalism was becoming in some places a movement that sought to elevate and empower the individual to do ‘good works’ apart from what earlier Evangelicals believed was a necessary first step; a conversion experience that stressed the sacrifice of ‘Christ on the cross.’ At the root of these changes was an incompatible

⁶⁸ *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, ed. William G. McLoughlin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960; orig. 1835) p. 380.

⁶⁹ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p. 5.

synthesis of enlightenment optimism and traditional Protestantism.

Finally, as Evangelicals accumulated more strength, both numerically as well as geographically, particularly at the turn of the nineteenth century, minimal attention was given to assess the movement critically. According to Noll, 'evangelical impulses have never by themselves yielded cohesive, institutionally compact, easily definable, well-coordinated, or clearly demarcated groups of Christians.'⁷⁰ Growth, dominance, and mass conversions gave little reason or time for critical assessment. Not surprisingly, irreconcilable problems began to arise among factions of American Evangelicals, as traditional wings of the Evangelical movement refused to endorse without question what they believed to be flawed social and theological presuppositions of mainstream Evangelicals.⁷¹ Old School Presbyterians in the American South were leading the attack.

The Presbyterian Dimension of American Evangelicalism

Evangelicalism in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century America was 'distinctly American' or distinctly American Evangelical, but it also became fractured and markedly denominational throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century. That is, the thread of solidarity that had been achieved by American Evangelicals leading up to the American Revolution, expressed most distinctively at the beginning of the nineteenth century in the drive for ecumenicalism, inter-denominationalism, and the advent of benevolent societies arising in New England and on the American united front,⁷² became

⁷⁰ Noll, *Scandal*, p. 8.

⁷¹ See Sidney Mead, 'Professor Sweet's Religion and Culture in America: A Review Article,' *Church History* 22, (1953) pp. 42-44. Mead notes that, by the early nineteenth century, Methodist Arminianism was becoming increasingly the theology of the frontier revivalists and represented the status quo of American Protestantism and Evangelicalism.

⁷² For a detailed discussion concerning the emergence of the Evangelical united front, see Charles Foster, *An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front 1790-1837*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1960).

frayed and tattered, particularly in the Presbyterian church around 1820. Presbyterian ministers and laymen in the North and South reacted diversely to the developments that had occurred in the camp meeting revivals on the American frontier and the emerging New Haven theology gaining broader acceptance in the North. The perceived emotional excesses associated with the camp meeting revivals on the frontier, particularly in Kentucky and Tennessee,⁷³ combined with a more suitable, progressive Arminian theology being developed and promoted by Evangelical itinerants, proved to be too unconventional for the traditional wing of the Presbyterian church, many of whom resided in the American South. Similarly, the advancement of an increasingly popular, but clearly less Calvinistic, New Haven theology within the Congregational wing of the Presbyterian Church,⁷⁴ led to further disintegration within American Presbyterianism at large.

In short, insurmountable differences and inevitably a less definable and unified American Evangelicalism arose, expressed in the formation of new Presbyterian denominations both during and in the wake of the Second Great Awakening. Though factions and formal schisms had occurred in one form or another from the beginning of the Presbyterian Church in 1705, greater differences and more complex problems arose within Presbyterianism, as the most traditional wing of the growing but increasingly progressive Presbyterian Church rejected what they thought was a 'spirit of evangelical pragmatism'⁷⁵ or compromise depicted in frontier Arminian theology and Congregational New Haven theology.

⁷³ Samuel Hill, *The South and the North in American Religion* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1986) pp. 23-24.

⁷⁴ The 'plan of union' between Presbyterians and New England Congregationalists was formally established at the General Assembly in 1801 and was part of a growing ecumenical, interdenominational spirit that occurred at the turn of the nineteenth century.

⁷⁵ Mark Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, p. 99.

The prevailing Arminian and New Haven theologies grew in their appeal, because they achieved the shared goals of nineteenth century American Evangelicals. Both were more conducive to 'conversion.' Put best by George Marsden, 'New School partisans were willing to indulge in doctrinal innovations if men's eternal salvation could be effected more readily. The theology of New Haven men, Hopkins and Taylor, were developed with this primary concern in mind.'⁷⁶ The same was true on the American frontier. Traditional Calvinistic orthodoxy was viewed by unconventional Presbyterians, many of whom would soon abandon the Presbyterian Church to form the 'Disciples' and 'Christian' movements,⁷⁷ as outdated and no longer practical. The use of highly charged principles such as 'freedom' and 'liberty' by many Evangelicals, some of whom were Presbyterians, were often viewed as inconsistent with traditional, Calvinistic orthodoxy. Similarly, New Haven Congregationalists were perceived by traditional Calvinistic Presbyterians to misuse the basic tenets of common sense realism in order to justify their own theological persuasions.⁷⁸ In a word, less importance was placed on orthodox theology within the ranks of mainstream Evangelicalism, because it was not perceived to be conducive to 'conversion.' This was expressed best on the frontier by two former Presbyterian Kentucky revivalists early in the nineteenth century. When giving their opinion on orthodox theology,

⁷⁶ George Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Experience*, preface.

⁷⁷ Two spin-off denominations from the Second Great Awakening in Kentucky were the 'Christian' and 'Disciples of Christ.' For an excellent discussion of these movements, see Nathan Hatch, 'The Christian Movement and the Demand for a Theology of the People,' *The Journal of American History* 67 (December, 1980) pp. 545-567.

⁷⁸ For discussions of Scottish common sense philosophy intended to justify progressive theological developments, see Sydney Ahlstrom, 'The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology,' *Church History* 24 (1955) pp. 257-272; Mark Noll, 'The American Revolution and Protestant Evangelicalism,' *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23 (Winter, 1993) pp. 615-638.

they proclaimed, 'we are not personally acquainted with the writings of John Calvin, nor are we certain how nearly we agree with his views of divine truth: neither do we care.'⁷⁹

In 1837, a Presbyterian denomination would surface that would seek to reclaim what they considered the foundational principles and theology that once undergirded and characterized the founding of the colonial Presbyterian Church. This was not all that they sought to uphold. Southern Old School Presbyterianism, arguably the most conventional Evangelical denomination of the nineteenth century, and not surprisingly, the denomination least willing to adapt or accommodate to an evolving American Evangelical ethos, would play a vital role not only in theological debate but also in the social life of America itself in the last three decades before the American Civil War.

The essential attitudes, beliefs, and actions of Old School Presbyterianism in the 1830s, up to the civil war and beyond, can hardly be understood apart from a broader Presbyterian historical context. As previously mentioned, by the mid 1830s there was more than one denomination that claimed authentic Presbyterianism. Therefore, a brief survey of certain important features and events in colonial Presbyterianism, will provide a proper context for the emergence of Old School Presbyterianism in 1837.

Colonial Ethnicity:

Presbyterians began arriving on the shores of colonial America in the seventeenth century, though no official Presbyterian Church was established until 1705. Before landing on American soil, many of these Christians from varying countries were already committed to a thoroughly Calvinistic theology, the essential tenets of which had been established in the Protestant reformation. As B. R. Lacy

⁷⁹ Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) p. 174.

states, 'The preparation for the Presbyterian Church in America was laid in Switzerland and Holland, in France and Germany, in England and Wales, in Scotland and Ireland.'⁸⁰

Staunch Calvinists, many of whom would be instrumental in the formation of the colonial Presbyterian Church in 1705, emigrated to colonial America. Initially, English Puritans migrated to New England, some of whom soon scattered southward to South Carolina and Georgia. The Dutch settled predominantly in New York and other middle colonies such as Delaware and Maryland. South Carolina was also settled by a large number of Swiss, Dutch, and Germans between 1730 and 1750. French Calvinists or French Huguenots inhabited certain sections of Pennsylvania and Maryland but largely settled in the southern sections of the country, particularly Virginia and the Carolinas. According to Morton Smith, however, 'by far the largest body of Presbyterians to come to these shores were those of Scottish blood.'⁸¹ Though some Scots came to the American colonies in the seventeenth century, including many Scottish highlanders, who settled in parts of North Carolina, the majority came through Ireland after 1714. Persecuted by Charles II, the Scots remained determined to uphold the theological commitment of the solemn league and covenant established by their forefathers, and did so, by fleeing to America. These Ulster Scots, arguably the most influential body in the founding of the colonial Presbyterian Church, settled initially in the middle colonies. Many would migrate to the South throughout the remainder of the eighteenth century.⁸²

After the year 1714, their ships began to cross the sea from Ulster in a long unbroken line. For more than sixty years they continued to come. It was the most extensive

⁸⁰ B.R. Lacy, Jr., 'The Presbyterian Church in the United States in Colonial Days,' *Union Seminary Review* (October, 1938) p. 2.

⁸¹ Morton H. Smith, *Studies in Southern Presbyterian Theology* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1987) p. 18.

⁸² Smith, *Studies*, pp. 18-20. See also, Walter L. Lingle, *Presbyterians: Their History and Beliefs* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1944) pp. 64-65.

movement ever made from Europe to America before the modern days of steamships. Often as many as 12,000 came in a single year. A body of about 600,000 Scots was thus brought from Ulster and from Scotland to the American colonies, making about one-fourth of our population at the time of the Revolution.⁸³

Francis Makemie: The ‘Father of American Presbyterianism:’

It is impossible to report the exact date that American colonial Presbyterianism was established because ‘the first page of the record is missing, and thus the exact date of the first presbytery is not known. It is believed to have been in either 1705 or 1706.’⁸⁴ Francis Makemie,⁸⁵ described by Southern historian E. T. Thompson as a ‘blue-eyed, brown-haired, fair complexioned youth, with an intellectual forehead and the dignified mien of a true Irish gentleman,’⁸⁶ and commonly referred to as the ‘Father of American Presbyterianism,’ came to America in 1683 with the ambitious vision of organizing an official American Presbyterian Church. A ‘genius for leadership and organization,’⁸⁷ Makemie spent his time initially traveling up and down the eastern shore of Maryland trying to foster unity and build consensus among the few independent Presbyterian congregations that were already in existence.

Makemie’s attempt to establish Presbyterianism in colonial America did not, of course, arise without opposition from the Church of England. Ironically, the objection from the Crown only seemed to infuriate and motivate Makemie and others to persist all the more. Living in Scotland during the ‘killing times’ and having already experienced the ridicule and scorn of the Crown as a dissenter from

⁸³ H.A. White, *Southern Presbyterian Leaders* (New York: Neale Publishing Co., 1911) p. 30.

⁸⁴ Smith, *Studies*, p. 20.

⁸⁵ For more comprehensive accounts on the life of Francis Makemie, see B. Schlenther ed. *The Life and Writings of Francis Makemie* (Philadelphia, 1971); I. M. Page, *Life of Francis Makemie* (Grand Rapids, 1938); L. P. Bowman, *The Days of Makemie, or the Vine Planted A. D. 1680-1708* (Philadelphia, 1885).

⁸⁶ E. T. Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1963) p. 21.

⁸⁷ Lingle and Kuykendall, *Presbyterians*, p. 66.

the Church of England, Makemie's vision to establish Presbyterianism in the American colonies was only further refined and reinforced. In 1680, Makemie listened to 'Colonel Stevens of Maryland'⁸⁸ read a letter 'describing the religious destitution of the Presbyterian colonists and requesting that a missionary be sent to the people in Maryland beside Virginia.' And so, he devoted his life's work to fighting the cause for Presbyterianism in America.

In 1681, Makemie was licensed as a missionary by Laggan Presbytery in Scotland and then sailed for America, after of course, professing his aversion to 'popery, Arminianism, prelacy, Erastianism, independency and whatever else is [was] contrary to sound doctrine and the power of godliness.'⁸⁹ Arriving in America, Makemie did not stay permanently in any one location but traveled as an itinerant throughout the southern and middle colonies planting new churches and providing leadership and direction to existing ones. Makemie did not receive any salary while in America but received financial support through voluntary contributions from individuals in Britain and America who were thoroughly committed to the advancement of Presbyterianism.

Makemie returned to Britain in 1704 to receive additional assistance. Though his efforts had achieved some success, 'increased Episcopalian activity endangered the budding Presbyterian Church in the middle colonies, as it had long hindered its growth in the colonies farther south.'⁹⁰ Makemie's journey back to Britain to receive additional finances soon proved to be time very well spent and a huge victory for the cause of American Presbyterianism. He was able to persuade Presbyterians and Congregational leaders in Britain to contribute some of the money that was held in the 'common fund'

⁸⁸ Smith, *Studies*, p. 19.

⁸⁹ Thompson, *Presbyterians*, p. 21.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

to be used for missionary service in America. Two salaries were approved for the Presbyterian work in America, and two Glasgow graduates, John Hampton and George McNish, accompanied Makemie back to America to complete this mission. Consequently, the relationship that soon flourished between American Presbyterians and American Congregationalists at the beginning of the eighteenth century culminated in these two denominations joining together in 1801 under the 'plan of union.' Sadly for future Presbyterians and Congregationalists, this amiable relationship would not endure forever. Unforeseen social, theological, methodological, and philosophical differences made reconciliation an impossibility by 1837.

By 1705 or 1706, Makemie, Hampton, and McNish, along with four other Presbyterian ministers, convened together in 'A meeting of Ministers' to form the first American Presbytery. It is believed that Makemie was elected the first moderator: Makemie noted:

Our design is to meet yearly, and oftener, if necessary, to consult the most proper measures, for advancing religion, and propagating Christianity, in our Various Stations, and to mentain such a correspondence as may conduce to the improvement of Ministeriall ability.⁹¹

E. T. Thompson concludes,

Thus was formed under Makemie's leadership a rallying point for Presbyterianism in the Middle colonies, enabling them to license and ordain their ministers and furnishing them a means of co-operation with the Calvinists of New England and with the Presbyterians of England, Scotland, and Ireland.⁹²

The establishment of the first Presbytery in America was indeed a victory for Makemie and colonial Presbyterianism. According to Morton Smith, 'this body continued to meet regularly until 1717, when the number of ministers had grown from the original seven to seventeen. It was then decided to

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 23.

⁹² Ibid., p. 24.

form the Synod of Philadelphia with three Presbyteries, namely, Philadelphia, New Castle, and Long Island.⁹³

The battle for Presbyterianism on American soil was initially a battle between Presbyterian enthusiasts such as Makemie and the established Church of England. Subsequent struggles and conflicts among American Presbyterians were to be encountered internally. The first such dispute that was waged from within that would remain a divisive issue throughout the history of the American Presbyterian Church concerned the place and importance of the Westminster Confession.

The Westminster Confession: Beginnings of Presbyterian Polarization:

Scottish and Scots-Irish Calvinists played a significant role in the formation of Presbyterianism in colonial America. What is more, strict subscription to the Westminster Confession would have been the standard practice for any ordained Scottish or Irish minister who emigrated to colonial America early in the eighteenth century to bolster American Presbyterianism. But strict subscription to the Westminster Confession of faith may not have been a prerequisite for the delegates of the first American Presbytery prior to the adopting act of 1729.⁹⁴ John Thompson, a member of New Castle Presbytery in 1715, who argued in favor of the adopting act of 1729, conceded this point when he said: 'As far as I know, ... we have not any particular system of doctrines, composed by ourselves or others,

⁹³ Ibid., p. 20.

⁹⁴ The adopting act of 1729 was a compromise between Scots-Irish Presbyterians and New England Presbyterians over the importance of the Westminster Confession. The Scots-Irish lobbied for strict subscription with no exceptions among any Presbyterian who wished to be ordained in the Presbyterian Church, while New Englander Presbyterians, though generally in agreement with the content of the Confession, were less willing to accept strict subscription as a necessary qualification for ordination. By 1729, both sides agreed that the Westminster Confession 'as being in all the essential and necessary articles, good forms of sound words and systems of Christian doctrine.' The Confession was adopted in 1729, but there remained many discrepancies as to what was considered 'essential and necessary.' For further discussion surrounding the debate of the adopting act of 1729, see George Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind*, pp. 39-40, 68.

which we, by any judicial act of our Church, have adopted to be the articles or Confession of our church.⁹⁵

Historians have debated this wrenching issue from roughly 1715, through the Old school/New School schism of 1837, and well into the twentieth century. Marilyn Westerkamp summed up the lack of closure to this issue when she concluded that ‘the structure of the original presbytery and the authority granted to the presbytery by its members have continued to puzzle church historians.’⁹⁶ Twentieth century Southern Presbyterian historian, Morton Smith, argued that there was no mention of the Confession in the first Presbytery because ‘the very testimonials which they brought with them, if they came from Scotland or Ireland, stated explicitly that they had adopted the Westminster Confession of Faith.’⁹⁷ Smith rightly points out that Scottish and Scots-Irish Presbyterians were required to submit to the Confession in former Presbyteries. But, Smith fails to note that those who immigrated to America from Scotland and Ireland were not the only ones who were actively responsible for the formation of the colonial Presbyterian Church. New England Presbyterians contributed significantly to the establishment of the colonial Presbyterian Church as well.

Not only were there Presbyterian tendencies among New Englanders, but also there was a strong New England element in the Presbyterian church, ere ever the Plan of Union (1801) was heard of. The importance of this element is constantly neglected by historical writers, for whom it is more convenient to label colonial Presbyterians as mostly Scotch-Irish; but it is impossible to understand Presbyterian history of the eighteenth century on this basis. It was symbolic that of the seven ministers who formed the first presbytery in 1705 or 1706 certainly two and probably three were New Englanders.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ M. D. Hoge in G. P. Hays, *Presbyterians, A Popular Narrative of their Origin, Progress, and Achievements* (New York, 1892) p. 139.

⁹⁶ Marilyn J. Westerkamp, *Triumph of the Laity*, p. 144.

⁹⁷ Smith, *Studies*, p. 21.

⁹⁸ Robert H. Nichols, ‘The Plan of Union in New York,’ *Church History* 5 (1936) p. 32.

According to Smith, strict subscription to the Westminster Confession was such an obvious reality among the Scots-Irish members of the first presbytery that there was no need to inscribe it into their record. Given, however, the reluctance of New England Presbyterians to subscribe to the Westminster Confession in 1729, one is left with some doubt as to Smith's original assumption. Smith also failed to acknowledge that prior to the Scottish and Scots-Irish infiltration and eventual numerical dominance of American Presbyterianism beginning in the 1720s, there existed previously a large group of New England Presbyterians who relocated to the middle colonies due to their dissatisfaction with Congregational New England. In fact, before Makemie had even founded the first presbytery in the American colonies, New England Presbyterians had already established a prominent Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia on their own, the clergy and members of which would have had a significant influence in the formation of American Presbyterianism.⁹⁹

Of course, the Westminster Confession did become, by the adopting act of 1729, the official confession of the Presbyterian Church in America. Reasons, however, for ministerial subscription to this confession 'as being in all the essential and necessary articles good forms of sound words and systems of Christian doctrine'¹⁰⁰ cannot be traced to the records of the first Presbytery; for there is no mention of it. That it may have been included in the first page of the Presbytery minutes that was subsequently lost, as Morton Smith has suggested, lacks some credence because there is no definitive or tangible evidence to support it. His view that the Westminster Confession was the adopted creed of Presbyterianism in Scotland and Ireland does strengthen his assumption that silence on the issue necessarily lends credibility to its original acceptance. But, it is more probable that the formal dispute

⁹⁹ Westerkamp, *Triumph of the Laity*, pp. 142-148.

¹⁰⁰ *Records of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (Philadelphia, 1904) p. 94.

over subscription to the Westminster Confession simply did not arise within the Presbyterian Church until 1721, and was, as Marilyn Westerkamp proposed, primarily the by-product of social and cultural diversity.¹⁰¹ In fact, the first indication that the root of this issue was largely a social and cultural incongruity was posed in 1729 by Jedidiah Andrews, a mediator throughout the debate. 'I think all the Scots are on one side, and all the English and Welsh on the other, to a man.'¹⁰²

During the formative years of the American Presbyterian Church, Scottish and Scots-Irish immigrants in the middle colonies joined with dissatisfied English Presbyterians, transplanted from Congregational New England to Connecticut, New Jersey, and Philadelphia, to construct what they genuinely believed would represent the closest representation of a Presbyterian Church. Their respective union 'does not in any way imply that these New Englanders were in complete sympathy with the Scots, for the Puritans refused to accept the primacy of the Church of Scotland.'¹⁰³ Neither did New England Presbyterians endorse all of the Scots-Irish forms of church government and polity. Besides these differences, however, there remained strong similarities such as 'a shared concept of church membership, a similar Calvinistic understanding of salvation, and a common sacramental theology.'¹⁰⁴ With the ultimate hope and purpose of constructing an American Presbyterian Church, non essentials were set aside and certain ecclesiastical compromises were made in order to accommodate both traditions. The adopting act of 1729, specifically subscription to those 'essential and necessary articles' was the first such compromise, the consequences of which would continue to

¹⁰¹ Westerkamp, *Triumph*, p. 155.

¹⁰² Letter from Jedidiah Andrews to Benjamin Coleman, April 7, 1729. Copy of letter located in the Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia.

¹⁰³ Westerkamp, *Triumph*, p. 145.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

surface throughout Presbyterian history. New School leader Lyman Beecher's comment, documented by Samuel Baird, reflected the lack of closure on this issue over one hundred years later in the wake of the Presbyterian schism of 1837.

Beecher could accept the Westminster Confession in general, but had reservations as to some specifics. At the time of his call to Cincinnati, he reportedly quipped to an Old School visitor that his answer to the standard doctrinal question for Presbyterian ordination ("Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith of this church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?") would be, "Yes, but I will not say how much more it contains." His guest, a Mississippian, told him that no such Yankee answer would do!¹⁰⁵

The relative diversity of background and beliefs proved to be a blessing and a curse. On one hand, diversity within the emerging church served, for a time, as a check on unlimited control or movement in a direction that might have threatened the essentials of historic Presbyterianism. On the other hand, inherited and established world-views from both of these traditions were not easily unraveled nor freely cast aside. Internal schism was brewing almost from the very beginning.

The 1720s saw a wave of Scots-Irish immigration to the middle colonies, a small percentage of which traveled down into the Southern colonies, particularly South Carolina. According to Westerkamp, these immigrants 'owned very little wealth, but they did bring their unique culture and religious system.'¹⁰⁶ This influx of Scots-Irish Presbyterians in the 1720s to the middle colonies and the steady stream of Scottish and Scots-Irish to the Southern sections throughout the eighteenth century, eventually absorbed New England Presbyterians and shaped American Presbyterianism more noticeably in a Scots-Irish direction. The adoption act of 1729 was the first tangible expression of this reality. Expressed by Marilyn Westerkamp,

¹⁰⁵ Samuel Baird, *A History of the New School* (Philadelphia, 1868) p. 468.

¹⁰⁶ Westerkamp, *Triumph of the Laity*, p. 137.

As the numbers increased and proportion of Irish Presbyterians increased, the church, initially English in tone, would gradually conform to the Irish religious experience. Almost immediately after they arrived, the dogmatic Scots-Irish clashed with the infant Presbyterian church dominated by English and New England Calvinists.¹⁰⁷

After the adopting act in 1729, Scottish and Scots-Irish Presbyterian ministers maintained that all ministers must subscribe to everything in the Confession as containing the closest and most truthful interpretation of sound doctrine found in the Bible. Those opposing this act were transplanted New England Presbyterians who, on the whole, believed that the Confession was the closest interpretation of sound doctrine available but were unwilling to affirm that ministers should be forced to subscribe to it. To do so would, in their opinion, be the equivalent of placing the confession on par with the Bible. Nor, they suggested, would strict subscription to the Confession prevent heresy from entering the church. This general reluctance to subscribe to the Westminster confession, according to Westerkamp, was 'doubtless in response to the requirements of the Anglican church that demanded open subscription to several statements of beliefs and loyalties.'¹⁰⁸ Jedidiah Andrews summed it up the best when he declared 'the difference is in words, for I can't find any real difference...'¹⁰⁹ Morton Smith concluded similarly on this point when he asserted,

The opposition that was offered to the Adopting act was not against the orthodoxy of the Westminster Standards. Rather, it was a question of methodology. The objectors questioned whether it was right to require subscription to a man-made document. It was further questioned whether subscription would really guard the orthodoxy of the church.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 137.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 146.

¹⁰⁹ Letter from Jedidiah Andrews to Benjamin Coleman, April 30, 1722. Copy of letter located in the Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia.

¹¹⁰ Smith, *Studies*, p. 22.

The subscription controversy was the first of many differences that would arise within the Colonial Presbyterian Church that highlighted the unyielding nature of Scottish Presbyterianism. Further, this was the first major issue that disclosed the reality that the American Presbyterianism was, from the beginning, composed of two traditions that did not readily yield to the other, even if the disagreements were relatively minute and insignificant. Fortunately for American Presbyterianism, there always consisted of those on both sides of the platform who, for the sake of lasting unity, refused to squabble over what they believed to be secondary issues. In the case of the Westminster Confession, there were those of English as well as Scots-Irish descent who were willing to mediate these irreconcilable differences. Summarized by Westerkamp,

At least one New Englander, Jedidiah Andrews, though clearly opposed to required subscription, devoted all his efforts to reconciling the extreme factions. More important, a large number of Irish ministers, notably William Tennent and his four sons, did not involve themselves in the dispute.¹¹¹

Schism and Reunion 1741-1758: The Making of a Colonial American Evangelical Presbyterianism:

The first disagreement in the colonial American Presbyterian Church to divide the recently created denomination occurred in the wake of the dispute over the importance of clerical subscription to the Westminster Confession. To interpret the reasons for the schism of 1741 in the same manner as the previous controversy would oversimplify the issue. It is true that Presbyterians were divided on this issue along regional, social and cultural backgrounds. Scots-Irish Presbyterians settled in Philadelphia and the surrounding middle colony communities, while the English Presbyterians, transplanted from New England to New York, New Jersey and Connecticut were more often than not, on opposing sides of the schism. But, there were additional philosophical differences that exposed the social and cultural discrepancies that existed between these two competing factions.

¹¹¹ Westerkamp, *Triumph*, p. 155.

Throughout the 1720s, Scots-Irish immigration was not the only factor that profoundly affected the future direction of American Evangelicalism and Presbyterianism. According to Patricia Bonomi, ‘two major streams of thought shaping western religious belief in the eighteenth century, Enlightenment rationalism and Continental pietism, were by the 1720s reaching increasing numbers of Americans through the world of print...’¹¹² American Presbyterian clergy, arguably the most educated group of people during this period, were perhaps the first theological denomination to interact with these two emerging philosophical world-views. ‘Old Side’ clergy were immediately skeptical of both streams of thought, while ‘New Side’ ministers tended to examine and adopt, though critically, both ‘Enlightenment rationalism and Continental pietism.’ In a word, ‘Old Side’ Presbyterians were reluctant to adapt to anything that was not firmly established in their old world traditions. The more progressive ‘New Side’ Presbyterians were convinced that it was necessary to explore and interact with these emerging schools of thought, if they were to successfully reach the unconverted. Sadly for all American Presbyterians, there remained little common ground for constructive discussions.

The pivotal event commonly referred to by church historians as the Great Awakening revealed and exacerbated these fundamental differences among Presbyterian clergy that eventually led to a schism within the newly formed American Presbyterian Church of 1741. The schism began when the synod of Philadelphia, a bulwark for ‘Old Side’ Presbyterianism, refused to accept New Brunswick, a ‘New Side’ Presbytery into the existing synod. As to the primary cause of this series of religious revivals that exposed the philosophical differences between ‘Old Side’ and ‘New Side’ Presbyterians, ‘The Great Awakening began not as a popular uprising but as a contest between clerical factions.’¹¹³

¹¹² Patricia U. Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) p. 131.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

'New Side' and 'Old Side' clergy were perhaps the two principal participants in that contest. Strictly speaking, it was the emergence of revivalist preaching, popularized by George Whitefield and embraced by 'New Side' Presbyterians, that baffled and in some measure, infuriated 'Old Side' Presbyterians. 'New Side' or pro-revivalist clergy, enamored with the emotionally charged preaching of George Whitefield, the number of conversions, and the pietistic mentality that these conversions seemed to procure, endorsed the revivals and gradually guided the Presbyterian Church in a different direction. In one respect, these revivals marked the beginning of Evangelicalism within the colonial American Presbyterian Church. It was of little surprise that George Whitefield referred to leading 'New Side' minister William Tennent as 'one of the ancient patriarchs. His wife seemed to me like Elizabeth, and he like Zackarias; both, as far as I can find walk in all the ordinances and commandments of the Lord blameless.'¹¹⁴ Like Whitefield, 'New Side' enthusiast, Gilbert Tennent, the eldest son of William Tennent, 'was an outspoken advocate of the centrality of Evangelical piety rather than intellectual learning.'¹¹⁵ This represented something that was foreign to the minds and experiences of the 'Old Side' clergy.

It was not simply the revivals that the 'Old Side' Presbyterians protested, though they were bothered by the emotional excesses that these religious awakenings seemed to produce. Nor was it the common belief that conversion was essential to the Christian life, which was at the heart of revivalistic preaching. Likewise, both schools shared a similar theological framework. Rather, the schism of 1741, not altogether dissimilar to the controversies concerning the Westminster Confession, was rooted in a dissimilar use of methods. Further, methodological differences stemmed from social and cultural biases.

¹¹⁴ George Whitefield, Journal, November 22 1739, printed in *Journals: 1738-1747* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1960) p. 354.

¹¹⁵ Westerkamp, *Triumph*, p. 168.

'New Side' clergy were willing and eager to integrate traditional protocol with new methods of evangelism as long as conversions resulted. 'Old side' clergy, on the whole, were not. These methodological persuasions were largely driven and shaped by the background, customs, and cultures of the diversified Presbyterian clergy.

By declaring for or against the revival, a minister was owning an entirely different philosophy of religiosity. The differences lay in the *manifestations* (italics added) of their beliefs in religious ritual and the church's institutional structure... Old Lights favored a highly skilled, academically trained ministry. Endorsing the formal, hierarchical structure of Presbyterian government, the Old Lights felt the future of the church was safest in the hands of recognized authorities, in this case the clergy... The pro-revival ministers, or New Lights, called for an active laity with an entirely different focus for their religiosity. While none denied the necessity of an educated ministry, the new lights emphasized personal piety as the central consideration.¹¹⁶

It is instructive to note the distribution of 'Old Side' and 'New Side' clergy in 1741. Of the twelve 'Old Side' clergy who initiated the schism, nine were born in Northern Ireland. Not one of them was educated in America but all received their education in Scotland or Ireland. The average age of the 'Old Side' minister in 1744 was forty-two years. 'New Side' clergy, who formed the Synod of New York in 1745, were of a noticeably different background from the 'Old Side' men. Ten of the twenty-two 'New Side' clergy were born in New England, Long Island, Newark, or New Jersey. The majority of those who were not born in America immigrated to the colonies during their middle teens, thus 'not so likely to be imbued within Old World sense of prerogative and order.'¹¹⁷ Twenty one of the 'New Side' clergy received their education either at Yale, Harvard or the Log College, instituted by William Tennent. Only one had received his University training in England. Finally, 'New Side' ministers were, on average ten years younger than their 'Old Side' counterparts.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 184.

¹¹⁷ Bonomi, *Under the Cope*, pp. 146-147.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 145-149.

'Old Side' and 'New Side' clergy consisted of those from different backgrounds and ages which manifested itself in contrasting methodological orientations. 'Old Side' clergy were committed to the establishment of a Presbyterian Church that would appear similar to their old world experience. 'New Side' clergy hardly knew how to construct such a Church nor were they too terribly interested in trying. Further, the infiltration of continental pietism, expressed through the revivalist preaching of Whitefield gave them a more tangible and meaningful perspective to construct their American Church and meet the needs of a rapidly changing American Presbyterian and Evangelical community. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, 'New Side' clergy had the laity on their side.¹¹⁹ Traditional roles and institutional structures that found their acceptance in the old world were being exchanged by many Americans, Christian and non Christian alike, for a more 'enlightened' method of political and religious expression. Modifications within ecclesiastical spheres proved no different. For the sake of survival, 'Old Side' Presbyterians gradually realized that they had no choice but to adapt to the desires and initiatives of the laity. The alternative was extinction and 'Old Side' ministers adjusted accordingly.

Perhaps the best method for evaluating the significance of the schism, one fair to both retrospective and contemporary analysis, would be to approach the schism as a symptom of eighteenth-century religiosity, rather than as a causal factor in the church's development.¹²⁰

Between 1741 and 1758, the vision and objectives of the Presbyterian Church rapidly changed to comply with the needs of an unsettled American population. Retaining in theory its theological framework, 'New Side' Presbyterians 'left their opponents behind and watched awestruck as the Spirit moved.'¹²¹ Fanning the flames of the revival 'spirit' in the middle colonies with unprecedented success

¹¹⁹ For a detailed discussion concerning the role of the laity in American Presbyterianism throughout the Presbyterian schism of 1741 and its reunion in 1758, see Westerkamp, *Triumph*, pp. 195-213.

¹²⁰ Westerkamp, *Triumph*, p. 196.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

that tended to generate additional revivals in other parts of the country, particularly Virginia and North Carolina, 'New Side' clergy created a Presbyterian Church that helped form and define an emerging American Evangelicalism. Of course, old world remnants remained, but even traditional methods were transformed in the wake of the revivals to suit and adapt to a strictly American culture. Gradually, diversity of background and culture from the old world was cast aside as arriving immigrants quickly adapted themselves to new world prerogatives. Put best by Noll, 'The process that would lead to European immigrants identifying themselves as "Americans" had begun.'¹²² Moreover, 'Presbyterianism of the Scotch-Irish was often more a lingering memory than an active faith.'¹²³

Distinguished 'New Side' clergy William Robinson, John Blair, Gilbert and William Tennent, Samuel Blair, and Samuel Davies, were the primary spokesmen for the 'New Side' contingent in Virginia, and were particularly influential for weakening the Church of England influence that, until the mid eighteenth century, dominated the American South. Through the efforts of these men and other 'New Side' itinerants, the first presbytery in the American South was established in Virginia and North Carolina in 1755. Hanover presbytery, generally considered to be the mother presbytery of the South, consisted in its entirety of 'New Side' clergy who would soon spread their message and methods to other parts of the South.¹²⁴

More importantly, however, for the future of Presbyterianism in colonial America, was the contagious spirit of Evangelicalism that captured the Presbyterian Church throughout the 1750s and 1760s. In fact, this growing and infectious spirit of Evangelicalism in colonial America made plausible

¹²² Noll, *A History of Christianity*, p. 111.

¹²³ Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, p. 7.

¹²⁴ John B. Boles, *The Great Revival, 1787-1805: The Origins of the Southern Evangelical Mind* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1972) p. 2.

the reunion of the Presbyterian Church in 1758. Of course, there remained a general reluctance towards emotional excesses associated with the revivals among the more traditionally minded Presbyterians. Nevertheless, 'while the 'Old Side' ministers struggled to hang on to their pastorates,' the 'New Side' had more than they could handle.'¹²⁵ As the 'Old Side' men saw themselves losing ground, they quickly realized that anything less than reconciliation and adaptation to the aspiring 'New Side' agenda was futile. So they did. Commenting on the extent to which 'Old Side' and 'New Side' Presbyterians adapted to the new conditions in colonial America, Noll asserts:

Having surmounted the schisms, both denominations retained a strong sense of their European traditions, but both had also come far along the path to more egalitarian, more pietistic, less formal conceptions of the church.¹²⁶

The 'Old Side'/'New Side' Presbyterian reunion in 1758 was exceedingly more significant than would appear at first glance. The reunion within the Presbyterian Church proved something that many would have never thought possible, particularly from a twentieth century perspective; Presbyterians reuniting. But it was symbolic of something that was far more enduring than the Presbyterian Church of 1758. It marked the beginning of the Evangelical movement within the core of American Presbyterianism, the emerging colonial American Southern states not excluded. Of course, this picture of the eighteenth century Presbyterian Church as altogether unified was never a completely accurate portrayal of reality. But it was, for a relatively brief period of time, what nineteenth century Presbyterians were constantly trying to achieve. Of course, ultimately, they never did.

Perhaps most importantly was the relationship that was formed during the colonial period between American Presbyterianism and American Evangelicalism. This relationship was not always a congenial one. But during the colonial period, it looked as if Presbyterians would lead Evangelicals of

¹²⁵ Westerkamp, *Triumph*, p. 202.

¹²⁶ Noll, *A History of Christianity*, pp. 98-99.

all denominational and theological perspectives into the nineteenth century and beyond. To some extent they did. Sadly, however, the ecumenical spirit that characterized both Presbyterianism and Evangelicalism at the beginning of the nineteenth century gradually waned throughout the next three decades. Further, the more traditionally-minded, theologically sensitive wing of American Presbyterianism and Evangelicalism, 'Old School' Southern Presbyterians, began to distance themselves from an increasingly progressive Evangelicalism ideology. On the whole, mainstream Evangelicals outside of the American South did not object, particularly in light of emerging 'Old School' views relating to their 'peculiar institution.'

The Making of Old School Presbyterianism:

Incessant quarreling among Presbyterian clergy over theological precision was the catalyst that prompted President Jackson to comment, 'Political opponents don't bother me half as much as do the dissensions in the Presbyterian Church.'¹²⁷ Similarly, *The New York Transcript* overstated that same point by remarking that saint Peter would reject the Old School wing of the Presbyterian Church upon entrance into heaven on the grounds that they would 'turn all heaven upside down with their doctrinal disputations.'¹²⁸ Schisms and controversies were one of the prevalent traits of American Presbyterianism throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Old School Presbyterianism¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Robert Ellis Thompson, *A History of the Presbyterian Churches in the United States* (New York, 1985) p. 109; quoted in George M. Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind*, p. 59.

¹²⁸ *The New York Transcript*, November 26, 1835, quoted in Earl M. Pope, *New England Calvinism and the Disruption of the Presbyterian Church* (Ph.D. dissertation, Brown University, 1962) pp. 336-337. Also quoted in Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind*, p. 59.

¹²⁹ My use of the term 'Old School,' until otherwise noted, will not be limited to describe the official wing of the Presbyterian Church after the schism of 1837. Nor will it be geographically sensitive (i.e. solely limited to the southern wing of the Old School Presbyterian church, unless, of course, prefaced with 'southern'). Rather, my use of the term, Old School, is intended to convey a theological tradition whose roots were established in the Protestant Reformation and whose theological beliefs and doctrines remained virtually unchanged throughout the eighteenth century despite its associations with a dynamic Evangelicalism. Because theological disputes were not especially significant in the 'Old Side'/'New Side' schism of 1741, the emergence of a predominantly 'New Side' Presbyterian church

formally arose out of one of those schisms, though the theological beliefs of this nineteenth century Presbyterian denomination were compatible with much of Colonial Presbyterianism, particularly those Presbyterians of the Scots-Irish tradition.

The Old School party, officially recognized as such in 1837, and primarily distinguished for its traditional Calvinistic rigidity with respect to theological doctrine, biblical supremacy, and of course, defense of slavery, has, according to Southern historian, Theodore Bozeman, 'been generally neglected by historians.' Furthermore, 'as a representative of a conservative and often doctrinaire version of Calvinism, this wing of the American Reformed tradition more often has been castigated than investigated.'¹³⁰ Rightly or wrongly, this 'castigation' cannot be solely 'limited to the organized church of the period after 1837' but should also, according to Bozeman, be ascribed 'to those conservatives of preceding decades whose thought afforded essential background for its development.'¹³¹ In fact, a thorough examination of what it meant to be designated an Old School Presbyterian after 1837 must not only commence a few decades prior to the Old School/New School schism, but should also be explored in light of the evolution of nineteenth century American Evangelicalism.

Old School Presbyterianism was, in essence, a tradition whose theological and ecclesiastical roots were reestablished during the Protestant Reformation and subsequently adapted and defined throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By the beginning of the nineteenth century,

after the reunion of 1758 is still considered to be, at least theologically, part of this thoroughly Calvinistic theological tradition. It was not until the Plan of Union in 1801 between Presbyterians in the southern and middle states and Congregationalists in the North that a 'New School' theology began to emerge in the Presbyterian Church, thus highlighting the formal beginnings of departure from traditional Presbyterian reformed theology.

¹³⁰ Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *Protestants in an Age of Science: The Baconian Ideal and Antebellum Religious Thought*, p. 33.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

particularly in the Southern states, Old School Presbyterians comprised a leading intellectual force which proved to be instrumental in the construction of a culturally unique and 'socially influential evangelicalism.' To what extent Northern Evangelical influences penetrated the American South following the revolutionary period is currently one of the major topics of discussion among Southern historians, for it has been persuasively argued that 'a cult of honor in the American South' was in direct competition with the more democratic, socially conscious, and egalitarian tendencies unique to Evangelicalism in the North.¹³² David Bebbington's remark that, 'it (Evangelicalism) has always been affected by its surroundings at the same time as influencing those surroundings,'¹³³ may be of particular significance when tracing and comparing the regional components of Evangelicalism in the North and South.

Primarily the product, at least biblically and theologically, of the Protestant Reformation in Scotland, Geneva, Ireland, England France, Holland, and Germany, early American Presbyterianism would gradually mature, shape, and eventually converge with a malleable American Evangelicalism beginning in the mid eighteenth century. Likewise, social, political, economic, and philosophical

¹³² Mark Noll, 'Revolution and the Rise of Evangelical Social Influence in North Atlantic Societies,' p. 114; To explore fairly recent studies of white Southern Evangelicals achieving 'cultural dominance' during the Second Great Awakening and beyond, see Samuel S. Hill, Jr., *The South and the North in American Religion* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980); John B. Boles, 'Evangelical Protestantism in the Old South: From Religious Dissent to Cultural Dominance,' in *Religion in the South*, ed. Charles Reagan Wilson (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985) pp. 13-34; Donald G. Matthews, *Religion in the Old South*; to explore recent studies concerning the notion of a 'cult of honor' in the American South existing in competition with the liberating tendencies generally associated with American Evangelicalism, see T. H. Breen, *Essays on the South in Puritans and Adventures: Change and Resistance in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); and Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); to explore studies that contend that a thorough Evangelicalism of southern culture did not occur until after the American Civil War,' see Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980); Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1860-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

¹³³ David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, Preface.

aspirations in American culture arose alongside Evangelical convictions and ideals that had surfaced in the Great Awakening. Thus, an eighteenth and nineteenth century synthesis of Protestant religious beliefs and emerging American social ideals as constructed both prior to and following the American Revolution, characterized the beginnings of an adaptable, yet distinctly American Evangelicalism which American Presbyterianism was largely composed of and affirmed. To be sure, the conscious expansion of Evangelical influence, both socially as well as geographically, into the fabric of American society was relatively insignificant before the Revolution in comparison to what would ensue beginning in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the inception of this cultural synthesis had commenced long before as Americans consolidated their respective goals, objectives and convictions to create the climate for Revolution. Mark Noll affirms,

In almost all North Atlantic regions, evangelicalism was already present as a religious impulse before the onset of political revolution. Perhaps with only one or two exceptions, however, evangelicalism did not exert a broad, culture-shaping influence in these societies until after the experience of revolution.¹³⁴

To use the phrase, American Evangelical, is almost by default to cause an array of problems at any point in American religious history, and especially if it is used to denote the first half of the nineteenth century. For virtually every sketch or comparison of American Evangelicals seems to prove that they had everything in common, and yet nothing in common simultaneously. For instance, what did the Kentucky Evangelical revivalist of the early nineteenth century, Barton Stone, share in common with the nineteenth century Old School Southern Presbyterian Evangelical traditionalist, James Henley Thornwell? On the surface, nothing, and yet upon closer examination, very much. Both men had at one point even described themselves as American Presbyterians. But Stone was 'an evangelical populist

¹³⁴ Mark Noll, 'Revolution and the Rise of Evangelical Social Influence in North Atlantic Societies,' in *Evangelicalism*, p. 114.

who promoted dissenting conceptions of freedom' while Thornwell was an 'evangelical establishmentarian [who] provided persuasive theories about the sources of order.'¹³⁵

Both men and their respective Evangelical factions 'distrusted each other intensely, but together they created a social juggernaut.' An even closer comparison would disclose that the disparity of theological and social world-views that existed between these two men in general and the 'bifurcated character' of the Evangelical movement that they represented in particular, was woven together by their mutual commitment to the 'essentials' of Evangelicalism: an 'attachment to scripture' and 'the conviction that true religion required the active experience of God.'¹³⁶ The effect of these impulses that naturally followed was that American Evangelicals of all persuasions were 'able to offer, when other props gave way, meaning for persons, order for society, and hope for the future.' Further, what both men, their followings, and the Evangelical movement achieved in the wake of the revolutionary period was 'enduring personal stability in the face of disorder, long-lasting eagerness for discipline, and a nearly inexhaustible hope that the personal dignity affirmed by the gospel could be communicated to the community as a whole.'¹³⁷

An integral, but more often than not, peripheral wing of this Evangelical heritage, Old School Presbyterianism, reacted negatively to the general direction that Evangelicals of other denominations were moving, even surging, in the wake of the revolutionary period and well into the nineteenth century. More specifically, Old School Presbyterians became increasingly suspicious of what they perceived to be progressive, liberalizing tendencies, particularly of a theological nature, within the minds of

¹³⁵ Ibid., pp. 117-118.

¹³⁶ Ibid., pp. 129-130.

¹³⁷ Ibid., pp. 115, 117-118.

mainstream Evangelicals and even from members within their own Church. They believed that egalitarian principles increasingly reflected an enlightened fixation with human ability and achievement that was beginning to manifest itself in the reconstruction of Calvinist theology. This trend was repudiated among traditional Old School Presbyterians, many of whom resided in the American South. According to Southern historian Donald Matthews, however, this was not altogether uncommon. That which may have been a common characteristic or impulse of Evangelicals in one region of the country may be altogether different from that of another region. Mark Noll suggested that principle as well when he commented that ‘institutions may emphasize Evangelical distinctives at one point in time may not do so at another.’¹³⁸

By 1837, Old School Presbyterians were dissatisfied with the robust popularity within the Congregational wing of their denomination of an enlightened version of New England Calvinism as originally formulated by two colleagues of Jonathan Edwards, Samuel Hopkins and Joseph Bellamy, and then fully developed by the nineteenth century New Haven Congregational stalwarts, William Taylor and Timothy Dwight.¹³⁹ The plan of Union¹⁴⁰ had united Presbyterians and Congregationalists in 1801 in order to reduce ecclesiastical competition and provide the most effective means of cooperative evangelism on the western frontier. By 1837, Old School Presbyterians, mainly in the

¹³⁸ Mark Noll, *The Scandal*, p. 8.

¹³⁹ For the best general discussion concerning the rise of ‘New School’ theology, see George Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind*, pp. 31-58.

¹⁴⁰ The best discussions with regard to the Presbyterian-Congregational Plan of Union in 1801 are found in Robert H. Nichols, ‘The Plan of Union in New York,’ *Church History* (1936); William W. Sweet, *The Story of Religion in America* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1930) pp. 208-215; Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind*, pp. 10-12; Earnest T. Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, Vol. I., pp. 182, 351-405; Morton H. Smith, *Studies in Southern Presbyterian Theology*, pp. 31-35.

South, demanded a return to what they had long considered to be the historical, theological position of the Presbyterian Church: traditional orthodox Calvinism.

This was not their only request. Arguably the leading intellectual force in Evangelical circles,¹⁴¹ Old School Presbyterians had, by the 1830s, accepted and mastered the Scottish brand of the Enlightenment that provided them with the necessary tools for a defense of slavery.¹⁴² They argued that ecclesiastical mandates concerning slavery exceeded the proper limits of the visible church, since the Bible had not explicitly condemned the 'peculiar institution.' Further, they demanded that the subject be blocked from any debate during future General Assembly forums. Ironically, Old School Presbyterians adopted certain principles of Scottish common sense realism in order to provide a rational justification for the moral and economic advantages of chattel slavery, yet they rejected various Enlightenment assumptions composed by New Haven Congregationalists expressing the urgency of cooperative efforts to effect conversions on the western frontier. Not surprisingly, Old School Presbyterians soon found themselves in a very difficult situation. It would not be long before American Evangelical denominations would begin to break fellowship with them. In 1837, Old School Presbyterians formed their own denomination.¹⁴³ Following the emergence of the Free Church of

¹⁴¹ See 'The Gentlemen Preachers, and specifically 'An Elite Hundred,' in E Brooks Holifield, *The Gentlemen Theologians*, pp. 24-49.

¹⁴² For a detailed discussion of the southern Old School use of Scottish common sense realism, see Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993) pp. 78-109.

¹⁴³ For the best general discussions concerning the Old School/New School split in 1837, see Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind*, pp. 59-103. Historians have debated the central cause of this division for years and have arrived at different conclusions. For studies that conclude that theological differences were at the root of the split, see Earl M. Pope, 'New England Calvinism and the Disruption of the Presbyterian Church,' (Ph.D. dissertation, Brown University, 1962); Robert H. Nichols, *Presbyterianism in New York State* (Philadelphia: 1963); Earl R. MacCormac, 'Missions and the Presbyterian Schism of 1837,' *Church History* 32 (March, 1963) pp. 32-45; Elwyn A. Smith, 'The Role of the South in the Presbyterian Schism of 1837-1838,' *Church History* 29 (March, 1960) pp. 44-63; Slavery has also been cited as the decisive issue in the split. See C. Bruce Staiger, 'Abolition

Scotland in 1843, Old School Presbyterians began to receive counsel and admonition from their closest Evangelical ally. Even their friends across the Atlantic would distance themselves from Old School Presbyterians in the final two decades that preceded the American Civil War.

Old School insistence on strict subscription to the Westminster Confession of faith, their staunch views of traditional Calvinism, and their position concerning slavery has often tainted or obscured the reality that they were ‘full participants in the Protestant evangelical front that was aggressively extending the reach of religion in American life.’¹⁴⁴ To be sure, the Old School party remained less willing to compromise theological orthodoxy despite Baptist and Methodist advancement and eventual numerical dominance of American Evangelicalism, particularly after the turn of the nineteenth century. ‘Quality, not quantity was the reiterated principle guiding Old School leaders.’¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, with little effort toward theological bargaining in order to appeal to the anti-intellectualism¹⁴⁶ that permeated the mentality of American Evangelicals along the western frontier or the New Haven theology gaining massive appeal in the North, Old School Presbyterians participated in the shaping of a diverse and highly flexible American Evangelicalism. Effectively summarized by Theodore Bozeman, ‘conservative Presbyterianism was a part of conquering Protestantism, on the march, militant, and expanding.’¹⁴⁷

and the Presbyterian Schism, 1837-38,’ *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 36 (December, 1949) pp. 391-414.

¹⁴⁴ Theodore Bozeman, *Protestants in the Age of Science*, p. 34.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹⁴⁶ According to Marsden in *The Evangelical Mind*, ‘Much of the revivalists’ program had a markedly anti-intellectual tone. This was particularly true in the West, where Methodists, Baptists, sectarians, and sensationalists of the Charles G. Finney variety flourished. It was undeniably a tendency among some Evangelicals in the East as well.’ p. 4; see Mark Noll, *Scandal*, pp. 10-12; also Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Vintage, 1962).

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

Old School/New School Schism of 1837:

There are several ways to analyze the motivations and causes behind the Presbyterian Old School/New School split of 1837. Either one can explore the immediate or direct causes of the split as most historians have done, focusing on the two or three years prior to the schism itself. Or a more extended historiographical approach may be used to examine the broader contexts of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century American Presbyterianism and Evangelicalism, thus exploring the prevailing and countervailing trends within both traditions which may provide an auxiliary perspective. The former method attempts to divulge the facts that are relevant to the schism itself. The latter method provides the historical framework or structure in which to evaluate and hopefully explain those facts. Neither strategy is necessarily more useful than the other and the combined approach will yield the most comprehensive interpretation.¹⁴⁸

Immediate Causes of Split: Theology or Slavery:

Most historians have been inclined to conclude that the 1837 Old School/New School Presbyterian schism was primarily the result of irreconcilable differences in theology.¹⁴⁹ George Marsden and others base this conclusion on the grounds that Old School Presbyterians initiated the split in 1837. 'Since the division was engineered by the Old School, the declarations of that party that the doctrinal questions were primary should be accepted unless it can be demonstrated that there was some other more basic underlying cause.'¹⁵⁰ Old School Presbyterians were emphatically opposed to the New Haven theology that had been increasingly popularized within the Congregational wing of the

¹⁴⁸ See David Bebbington, *Patterns in History: A Christian Perspective on Historical Thought* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979) pp. 1-21.

¹⁴⁹ See Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind*, pp. 250-251.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

northern Presbyterian Church by ministers and teachers such as Albert Barnes, Nathaniel Taylor, and Timothy Dwight. Southern Old School Presbyterians also presumed that an enlightened, New School version of Calvinism was rampant throughout the Northern wing of Presbyterianism, particularly within the Congregational church.

Marsden favored the interpretation that theology was the central cause of the split, but noted that there were additional differences between Old and New School proponents that heightened the intensity within both parties and complicated the dispute. According to Marsden, these differences should be highlighted and analyzed as secondary criteria that arose alongside the theological controversy, thus aggravating and quite possibly providing the stimulus that exacerbated the theological discrepancies between Old School and New School Presbyterians. These secondary criteria included philosophical and methodological disagreements on issues such as the importance of the Westminster Confession, the Evangelical united front, church polity, revivalism, and of course, slavery.¹⁵¹

Old School and New School theological persuasions, though different, were held in both camps for identical reasons. Both schools were primarily interested in the broader Evangelical concern of 'men's eternal destiny'¹⁵² or the salvation of souls, which incidentally, was the catalyst that inspired Presbyterian and Congregational leaders to unite under one denomination in 1801. By 1837, however, this Plan of Union had proved to be a mistake of catastrophic proportions from virtually every perspective. The Old School men argued that a compromise in traditional theology for the purpose of achieving a greater numbers of conversions would jeopardize the cardinal beliefs of the Church and lead

¹⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 66-82.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 82.

to fewer conversions. The New School men did not assume that theological innovations were necessarily a compromise of orthodoxy as long as the salvation of souls was still achieved.

As tension escalated in 1837, Old School men drafted a 'Testimony and Memorial'¹⁵³ that identified what they believed were sixteen theological or biblical infractions by New School leaders, including Albert Barnes.¹⁵⁴ Old School Presbyterians were persuaded that the New Haven men had departed from the bare 'essentials' of the faith as expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith. Their theological departure from the Confession concerning the federal headship of Adam compelled Old School Presbyterians to conclude that their theological differences were too great to remain connected to one another any longer. Specifically, the New School view that Adam's 'sin' was not imputed to the entire human race was, for the Old School, the most obvious implication of this departure, because it created the potential for man to be free of 'sin.' More importantly, such a view affected their view of conversion or regeneration. Old School proponents believed that New Haven men had even surpassed Wesley's understanding of prevenient grace, which at the very least, acknowledged that after the fall of humanity into 'sin,' God provided man with the ability either to choose or reject Christ. New Haven theologians, relying on common sense realism, asserted that man was, of his own volition, free from birth either to embrace salvation or to reject it. They did, of course,

¹⁵³ For specific details of the 'Testimony and Memorial' compiled by the Old School General Assembly, see Issac V. Brown, *A Historical Vindication of the Abrogation of the Plan of Union by the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (Philadelphia, 1855) pp. 149-156, 216-226; *Minutes of the Presbyterian Church General Assembly, 1837*, p. 422; *Minutes of the Auburn Declaration, Held August 17, 1837, to Deliberate Upon the Doings of the Last General Assembly, etc.* (Auburn, New York, 1837).

¹⁵⁴ Old School men were particularly outraged with the work of Albert Barnes on the Epistle to the Romans. See Albert Barnes, *Notes Explanatory and Practical, on the Epistle to the Romans* (New York: 1846).

acknowledge that the Holy Spirit was an ‘influence on the mind in conversion.’ But ‘the Holy Spirit did not change the heart but only helped to influence the free agent to change.’¹⁵⁵ Explained best by Yale theologian William Taylor, ‘whatever that influence may be, the sinner, under its operation, chooses and acts just as voluntarily, as when he yields in any case to the solicitations of a friend.’¹⁵⁶

What Old School men failed to prove, however, was their assumption that the majority of the New School men had moved beyond the New England theology as developed by Hopkins and embraced uncritically the more progressive, New Haven theology as constructed by Taylor and Dwight. In fact, Princeton theologian, Samuel Miller, estimated that ‘nineteen-twentieths of our ministry and eldership are not liable, in any considerable degree to the charge in question.’¹⁵⁷ Marsden notes,

The Old School never did establish that the alleged errors were widely prevalent in the New School areas. The available evidence indicates rather that many in the New School party had not ventured beyond moderate Edwardsean or Hopkinsian positions, and others had never departed from strict Presbyterian orthodoxy.¹⁵⁸

Rightly or wrongly, Old School Presbyterians, mainly in the South, believed that the New Haven theology was corrupting their Church and compromising traditional practices. Historian Bruce Staiger argued that the New Haven theology, though bothersome for Old School Presbyterians, was symbolic of something that was perhaps just as or more annoying to them than theological innovations.

¹⁵⁵ For an excellent discussion on New Haven theology, particularly its departure from traditional Calvinism, see Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind*, pp. 45-58.

¹⁵⁶ Nathaniel W. Taylor, ‘Application of the Principles of Common Sense to Certain Disputed Doctrines,’ (September, 1831) p. 475.

¹⁵⁷ Samuel Miller, *A Letter of the Rev. Samuel Miller... on the Present Crisis in... Religious and Theological Concerns* (Hartford, 1833) p. 5.

¹⁵⁸ Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind*, p. 83.

Those endorsing New Haven beliefs were, on the whole, also the ones who vehemently opposed slavery. Deeply rooted in the New Haven theological construction was the prevailing emphasis concerning the 'rights of man and his moral obligations. Both seemed to the orthodox to place rationalistic theories concerning man's nature above biblical precedent.'¹⁵⁹

As early as 1835, strains of immediate abolition had begun to infiltrate a small but noticeably vocal group of New School men. Theodore Weld, an avid Evangelical abolitionist, attended the 1835 General Assembly with the hope that he might convert more New School men to the cause of abolition. To the surprise of the Old School men, Weld claimed to have succeeded in increasing the number of abolitionists to forty-seven, 'nearly one fourth part of the Assembly.'¹⁶⁰ The abolitionist campaign overseen by Weld had come a long way since the 1834 Assembly, when they could only boast two commissioners in the entire Presbyterian Church. Succinctly stated by Marsden, 'Southern delegates were becoming uneasy.'¹⁶¹

It became evident to the Southern Old School men during the 1836 General Assembly that a burgeoning abolitionist wing within the New School had succeeded in expanding their delegation, when at least two-thirds of the New School party were willing to take a strong position against slavery. That the New Haven theology was also receiving added recognition and acceptance was no small

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 97.

¹⁶⁰ Lyman Beecher, *Autobiography, Correspondence, etc., of Lyman Beecher*. Edited by Charles Beecher. 2 vols. (New York, 1864-1865) Vol.II., p. 260.

¹⁶¹ Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind*, p. 96.

coincidence. According to Marsden, 'in the year until the next Assembly the fears of Presbyterians in the South concerning the New School grew to alarm.'¹⁶²

Between 1836 and 1837, the Old School party prepared for division. What is more, the Southern wing of the Old School contingent gathered in droves to obtain a majority in the 1837 Assembly to abrogate the Plan of Union and oust New School men from the denomination. It is difficult, however, to ascertain exactly why Old School Southerners united so easily throughout the year to eliminate the New School from the Presbyterian Church. On the one hand, during the Assembly of 1836, the Southern section of the Presbyterian Church were theologically less unified. Of the sixty-two Southern delegates who voted to sustain the appeal of Albert Barnes, twenty-six sided with the New School. But, the following year, the Southern men appeared overwhelmingly unified, as a vote of fifty to nine to abrogate the Plan of Union suggested. Had the South actually become decidedly more orthodox throughout the year as the fears of New Haven theology mounted? Or did Old School and New School Southern Presbyterians unite 'theologically' to advance their 'peculiar institution?'

In the final analysis, there are persuasive arguments to suggest that it was both theology and slavery that contributed to the Old School/New School schism of 1837. What is more, theology and slavery should not always be analyzed as two distinct or unrelated issues, for there was, according to Staiger, often a discernible link between one's theological beliefs and their corresponding views on slavery.

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 96.

1837 Old School/New School Split in Historiographical Context:

Following the two decades of the American Revolution, a wave of religious cynicism or skepticism swept across most of America, though this was considerably less prevalent in the South. Patricia Bonomi and Peter Eisenstadt have argued that there was a gradual decline of religious interest in the wake of the Great Awakening that continued until the last decade of the century.¹⁶³ In short, a strong distrust of traditionally recognized religious beliefs swept the nation during the revolutionary period. Of course, there were many reasons for this, not the least of which was a response to the widespread sentiment that Americans had finally been delivered or set free from the old world. A sense of freedom and liberty from old world prerogatives was now not merely wishful thinking but a reality that was going to be implemented in virtually every sphere of American life.

Suspensions of the Church at large, particularly her traditional beliefs that had at one point been at least nominally affirmed, would prove to be no exception. It was not solely those on the outside of the Church who questioned traditional protocol but Evangelicals from within the Church as well. Many American Evangelicals had been eager and willing, though perhaps uncritically, to endorse the Revolution with the hope that they too would have more freedom to create their own ecclesiastical establishments and pursue their goals in whatever fashion they desired.¹⁶⁴ A synthesis of similar goals

¹⁶³ See Patricia Bonomi and Peter Eisenstadt, 'Church Adherence in the Eighteenth-Century British American Colonies, *William and Mary Quarterly* 39 (1982) pp. 245-286.

¹⁶⁴ For an excellent discussion of American Evangelical involvement and support of the American Revolution, see Mark Noll, Nathan Hatch, and George Marsden, *The Search For Christian America*, pp. 48-106. Also, Noll, *A History of Christianity*, pp. 114-142.

and ideals had indeed occurred between American Evangelicals and the American public. Succinctly stated by Noll, 'what was true for America at large was no less true for its Christian churches.'¹⁶⁵

This distrust in anything vaguely representative of old world practice in the wake of the Revolution was directly related to Church membership being at an all time low of between five and ten percent in the 1790s.¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, the unified spirit of optimism associated with idealistic notions of liberty and freedom in the wake of the Revolution provided a window into an influx of deistic thought by the end of the eighteenth century.¹⁶⁷ No longer did it seem necessary or practical for a personal and transcendent God to be intimately involved in all human activity. Many Americans were convinced that they could manage quite well on their own, as they had proved in the Revolutionary war. Early Americans, Evangelical and otherwise, believed they could now argue, as many did, that God had been on their side, thus inferring that what had been God's will had been their own as well.

By the 1790s, American Evangelicals, though relatively few in number, realized that they had a different battle to fight than had previously been envisioned. The synthesis of democratic ideals that had emerged between Evangelicals and revolutionary patriots before, during, and in the wake of the Revolutionary war had not paid the dividends that Evangelicals had hoped. Prior to the turn of the century, their battle was not so much against Britain as it was against American infidels and deists who had not only abandoned their nominal Christianity but were rapidly becoming scoffers of Christianity. By 1798, Yale President Timothy Dwight was outraged with 'the sins of these enemies of Christ' and warned that a national calamity might ensue if nothing was done to combat it.

¹⁶⁵ Noll, *A History of Christianity*, p. 148.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 163,164.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.166.

Shall we my brethren become partakers in these sins? Shall we introduce them into our government, our schools, our families? Shall our sons become the disciples of Voltaire, and the dragoons of Marat, or our daughters the concubines of the Illuminati?¹⁶⁸

This bleak and apathetic religious malaise soon provided an excellent opportunity for the Evangelical movement to surge. In short, the period of Revolution and quite possibly the two decades prior to revolution gradually created what Mark Noll called a 'social crisis' in America. This social crisis had been forming from the time that Americans united in their hope of achieving independence from Britain until that independence was declared. In fact, the vacuum that was created by this social crisis had widened during the Revolutionary period as Americans cast aside the social constructs that had, up to this point, been useful in providing 'meanings for persons, order for society, and hope for the future.' In a word, the traditional 'props' had given way and a social vacuum emerged.¹⁶⁹ Evangelicals saw the opening and rushed in. What ensued in America was the Second Great Awakening, 'the most influential revival of Christianity in the history of the United States.'¹⁷⁰ But it did not last. Nor did the spirit of unity within American Evangelicalism or American Presbyterianism. By 1837, Old School southern Presbyterians, though retaining in principle the four Evangelical impulses as defined by Bebbington, added one more. Their views of slavery tended to overshadow them all.

¹⁶⁸ Timothy Dwight, 'The Duty of Americans at the Present Crisis,' quoted in Charles Roy Keller, *The Second Great Awakening in Connecticut* (New Haven, Conn., 1942) pp. 19-29. Also quoted in George Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind*, p. 7.

¹⁶⁹ Mark Noll, 'Revolution and the Rise,' in *Evangelicalism*, pp. 113-114.

¹⁷⁰ Mark Noll, *A History of Christianity*, p. 166.

The Southern Dimension of American Evangelicalism

Ironically, historian Henry May did much for the advancement of Southern American religious historiography when, in 1964, he failed to mention in his article, 'The Recovery of American Religious History,' even one significant contribution to Southern religious thought during the preceding thirty year period.¹⁷¹ Of course, religion viewed as a central component in the interpretation of historical thought, had only been established, as it were, thirty years prior to May's silent yet scathing criticism of Southern religious scholarship. Historian John Boles justified this absence of Southern religious scholarship during this period, citing poor graduate schools within the region and, therefore, inadequate facilities and resources for such an undertaking, specifically with respect to religious archives. Further, a fascination with political and economic history nationwide proved to be a more popular course of exploration than the 'politics of secession and the economics of slavery and then sharecropping.' By the early 1960's, however, Boles believed that 'the major impediments to the development of southern religious history had largely disappeared.'¹⁷² Thus, in 1964 with Kenneth K. Bailey's *Southern White Protestantism in the Twentieth Century*, followed by Samuel Hill's *Southern Churches in Crisis*, 'the modern field of southern religious history was launched.'¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ See Henry F. May, 'The Recovery of American Religious History,' *American Historical Review* 70 (October, 1964) pp. 79-92.

¹⁷² John B. Boles, 'Religion in the South: A Tradition Recovered,' *Maryland Historical Magazine* 77 (1982) pp. 388-389.

¹⁷³ John Boles, 'Evangelical Protestantism in the Old South: From Religious Dissent to Cultural Dominance,' in *Religion in the South*, p. 13.

Over the past three decades, there has arisen a myriad of specialized works pertaining to religion in the South, much of it giving considerable attention to its most culturally influential and historically significant religious form, Evangelicalism.¹⁷⁴ But, many of the first American colonists and the first Southern colonies were not originally Evangelical. That is not to say that they were irreligious or even disinterested in spreading Christendom to the New World. Many of them were. In fact, 'in colonial Virginia, religion and community were very nearly synonymous.'¹⁷⁵ It was, however, of a more conventional form.

Nor was 'the South' as opposed to 'the North' consciously referred to or perceived as a distinct geographical location until perhaps the second decade of the eighteenth century. Of course, as Carl Degler maintained, 'the South, it would seem clearly existed in the minds of some southerners... by the early years of the nineteenth century. Yet it does not seem to have been more than an idea, a sense of difference rather than a deeply felt perceived distinction or identification.'¹⁷⁶ Hence, any discussion of either the religious preference or the geographical area that would during the

¹⁷⁴ These resources include R.M. Weaver, 'The Older Religiousness in the South,' *Sewanee Review* 51 (1943) pp. 237-249; Dickson D. Bruce, Jr., 'Religion, Society, and Culture in the Old South: A Comparative View,' *American Quarterly* 26 (1974) pp. 399-416; James M. Dabbs, *Haunted by God: The Cultural and Religious Experience of the South* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1972); Earnest Kurtz, 'The Tragedy of Southern Religion,' *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 66 (1982) pp. 217-247; Joseph H. Fichter and George L. Maddox, 'Religion in the South, Old and New,' in *The South in Continuity and Change*, John C. McKinney and Edgar T. Thompson, eds., (Durham: Duke University Press, 1965); Samuel S. Hill, ed. *On Jordan's Stormy Banks* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1983); Samuel Hill, ed. *Religion in the Solid South* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972); Samuel Hill, *Southern Churches in Crisis* (New York: Hold, Rinehart and Winston, 1967); David E. Harrell, Jr. ed. *Varieties of Southern Evangelicalism* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1981); For the most comprehensive bibliography of religion in the South, see Charles H. Lippy, *Bibliography of Religion in the South* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1985).

¹⁷⁵ Donald G. Matthews, *Religion in the Old South* p. 2.

¹⁷⁶ Carl N. Degler, *Place Over Time: The Continuity of Southern Distinctiveness* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977) pp. 31-32.

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries become increasingly identified as overwhelmingly 'Evangelical' and 'Southern,' must begin with a brief overview of the South's nascent religious establishment: the Church of England. For it is only in light of the emerging social ideology of the seventeenth and eighteenth century colonial 'South,' embedded into the social conscience of early Southern colonists by way of the Church of England, that one can begin to comprehend the lasting impact of its religious offspring, Southern Evangelicalism, beginning in the mid eighteenth century.

Methodology:

The heightened degree of sophistication in Southern religious scholarship has highlighted the necessity that serious attention to methodology be considered for subsequent research. One of the most controversial topics in this burgeoning field concerns the tension among Southern historians, including church historians and social historians. On the one hand, there are those who believe that 'the historical profession has produced too much fractured work,' and consequently, failed to combine the mosaic pieces that are needed to paint a complete picture or story of history. On the other hand, there are those who are persuaded that the reader must be satisfied with the 'nodal events,' that he can never have the whole.¹⁷⁷ Perhaps there is still a need for both approaches, even an integration of the two, as has been successfully achieved by Bertram Wyatt-Brown in his book, *Southern Honor*.¹⁷⁸ Wyatt-Brown details and describes one consistent theme or idea, Southern

¹⁷⁷ George C. Rogers, Jr. 'The South Before 1800,' in *Interpreting Southern History: Historiographical Essays in Honor of Sanford W. Higginbotham*, John B. Boles and Evelyn Thomas Nolen, ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987) p. 6.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6. See also Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*.

honor, throughout a large portion of history, creating a story within a much larger story. Related 'nodal events' are brought together to establish a 'whole.'

The subject of Evangelicalism is but one story among many in Southern history, religious or otherwise. At the same time, it is, as has become more apparent over the last three decades, one significant piece in the whole story of Southern history. Similarly, Southern Evangelicalism is a part or one piece of American or Transatlantic Evangelicalism and, at the same time, distinct from Evangelicalism in other geographic regions. Like Evangelicalism in the North, for example, Southern Evangelicalism is composed of many fractured parts, mosaic pieces, or 'nodal events' that provide the Southern historian with a surplus of material from which concentrated and focused analysis within its larger Southern context can be explored. This micro-applied method amplifies the significance of these events within their various contexts from which greater illumination and precision into the most accurate, complete, or 'whole' story of Southern Evangelicalism, American Evangelicalism, or Transatlantic Evangelicalism can be ascertained. The accumulation of fractured parts or 'nodal events' throughout Southern Evangelical history, such as the preaching of Samuel Davies in Virginia and George Whitefield in Georgia, the revivals in Kentucky and Tennessee during the first decade of the nineteenth century, or the Evangelical drive for the religious instruction of the slaves after 1830, provides the data from which the historian compiles related themes or ideas, such as 'Southern honor,' that either cause or undergird those events.

Of course, many ideas or related themes may suggest the causes behind the events. Even so, the historian examines the 'nodal events,' relative to other related events, and does so with the concerted effort to incorporate them from the beginning of the story to the end, that is, over a large

portion of history. In relation to Southern Evangelical history, it becomes clear that the root cause or inducement behind the 'nodal events' as well as the responses to those events, often reflect the cumulative course of history in a given region up to the period being explored. Thus, the historian is provided with social behavioral patterns which may be repeated in subsequent periods of history and may, in fact, be suggestive of 'a spirit or an ethos... that begins to give a sense of order to disparate facts and developments.'¹⁷⁹

It is this 'spirit or ethos' that 'gives a sense of order to disparate facts and developments' in colonial Southern history, that will furnish the primary, causal material in much of the subject matter under scrutiny. More specifically, the 'spirit or ethos' of authority, power, influence, and respectability as witnessed and affirmed in the colonial hierarchical social structure and, incidentally reinforced through the Southern colonial Church of England, provided a 'sense of order' and rank in the Southern colonies. This process set the stage for three pivotal Southern developments, all of which are closely related. First, well defined and acknowledged colonial social orders created the ideal setting throughout the latter half of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for the motivation, preparation, organization, and eventual emergence and dominance of Evangelicalism in the Southern states by 1800. In a word, '...developments in the Church of England helped break the soil from which the Evangelical churches could spring forth.'¹⁸⁰

Secondly, the harsh conditions of early colonial life combined with the subsequent suppressive measures common to a purposefully disparate Southern social order provided the emerging,

¹⁷⁹ Rogers, 'The South Before 1800,' p. 7.

¹⁸⁰ Samuel Hill, *The South and the North in American Religion*, p. 18.

perpetuating, and somewhat ‘otherworldly’¹⁸¹ mind-set or world-view from which dissenting classes and early Evangelical denominations embraced and applied their conversion experience, the central Evangelical impulse. What is more, the ‘otherworldly’ dimension of the conversion experience was unique to Evangelicalism in the South.

Drawing on the arduous background and experiences of the earlier colonists, and to some degree their own experiences as well, early nineteenth century Southern Evangelicals were prone to adopt a similar, hyper-spiritualized world-view that was manifested most clearly in the pervasive Evangelical need to find a sense of peace and contentment. For eighteenth and early nineteenth century Southern Evangelicals, the conversion experience provided the means through which they had been delivered from what they perceived to be the oppressive circumstances and experiences of living in a sinful, corrupt, self-centered, and dying world. This ‘otherworldly’ realm, where many Southern colonists and early Evangelicals tended to dwell, was made accessible to them, they believed, through the atoning work of Christ. To be sure, Southern Evangelicals who participated in the Second Great Awakening over the course of the first two decades of the nineteenth century, did not experience the hardships that earlier colonial Southerners had encountered, but they did, perhaps only vicariously, pattern an identical world-view that manifested itself in a similar type of conversion experience.¹⁸² Of course, the enemy was no longer representatives and officials of the Crown, nor was it the planter aristocracy whose stifling administrations drove dissenters to the verge of the conversion experience.

¹⁸¹ Concerning the ‘otherworldly-ness’ of Southern Evangelicals, see Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, pp. 63-64.

¹⁸² For an excellent discourse on conversion within southern Evangelicalism, see Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order*, pp. 1-29.

Rather, for Southern Evangelicals of the early nineteenth century, the enemy encompassed anyone who did not fervently rely on Christ for the forgiveness of their sins; in short, those who had not abandoned the world at present for the world to come. In the mind of the Southern Evangelical, 'anyone who chose to be a friend of the world became an enemy of God.'¹⁸³

Finally, the hierarchical social order that had been predominant from the beginning of colonial life in the 'South,' and which was the central, causal determinant in the shaping of the Southern Evangelical world-view, was not only the essential component that led eighteenth and early nineteenth century Evangelicals to embrace the spiritual or otherworldly dimension that the conversion experience afforded them, but it remained a defining and lasting characteristic of nineteenth century Southern Evangelicalism as well.

By 1830, Southern Evangelicals acknowledged and affirmed a purposefully orchestrated and well defined hierarchical social order that was historically unique to the Southern region of America from its first settlement at Jamestown. They had created their own version as well in sanctioning the South's 'peculiar institution.' As a result, in the three decades prior to the Civil War, white Southern Evangelicals became less qualified to 'create(d) the measure by which southern Evangelicalism itself could be judged...' Rather, as Mathews suggests:

... blacks created the measure by which southern Evangelicalism itself could be judged, and through their appropriation of Evangelical Christianity expressed a religious social ethos that could best convey its significance in the Evangelical promise to 'preach liberty to the captives.'¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, preface.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, preface (xv).

The methodology that has been selected to derive the picture of the South's most influential religious form beginning in the mid eighteenth century models that of Donald Mathews as utilized in 'Religion in the Old South: Speculation on Methodology' and applied in his book, *Religion in the South*.¹⁸⁵ This methodology is based on Mathews' assumption that Evangelicalism in the South should be understood as a 'social process as well as a religious perception, and as such can be fully understood only in historical, as opposed to definitional terms.' That is, Southern Evangelicalism cannot be best digested by subjecting it merely to definitional terms, for the simple fact that the same factors that contributed to the evolution of Evangelicalism in one region or in one emerging social order were different from those in another. Samuel Hill's assertion that 'any serious treatment of Southern religious history must consider how religion is related to developments in other aspects of *Southern* life, intellectual, moral, political, social, and economic, *as time passes*' (italics added) is case in point.¹⁸⁶ Consequently, a serious exploration of Southern Evangelicalism, as Mathews has argued, must recognize and integrate the reciprocal social, political, and economic impact of African-American slavery upon white religion.

The South's Social Ethic:

According to Samuel Hill, 'no direct link existed in the South between the conversion experience and a systematic understanding of a social ethic.'¹⁸⁷ Donald Mathews concurred when

¹⁸⁵ Donald G. Mathews, 'Religion in the Old South: Speculation on Methodology,' *South Atlantic Quarterly* 73 (1974) pp. 34-52.

¹⁸⁶ Samuel Hill, 'A Survey of Southern Religious History,' in *Religion in the Southern States: A Historical Study*, ed. Samuel Hill (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1983) p. 384

¹⁸⁷ Samuel Hill, 'Northern and Southern Varieties of American Evangelicalism,' in *Evangelicalism*, p. 281.

he suggested that 'evangelicals failed to develop a mature social ethic, that is, a social ethic which could effect institutions and power relationships.'¹⁸⁸ Why were Southern Evangelicals unable to achieve a 'systematic understanding' or a 'mature' social ethic before the American Civil war? The simplistic response to that question is best summarized by historian, Carl Degler.

The antebellum years constituted a veritable ferment of reform in the United States, in which, during the first two decades of the nineteenth century, the South participated. But under the impact of the need to defend slavery against the increasingly hostile northern and world opinion, Southerners found advocacy of reform potentially threatening. To open up to challenge any facet of the social order might well cause slavery itself to be brought into question or placed under attack. Nor was the reasoning wholly paranoid. If a southern eye were cast northward it was plain that many reformers who were active in behalf of women's rights, the peace movement, or new community organizations, were generally also anti-slavery in their outlook.¹⁸⁹

The more complex explanation encompasses much of the material to follow. Drawing on two of the four Evangelical impulses as set forth by David Bebbington, 'conversionism' and 'activism,' it should become clear that the social conditions that fostered the Southern Evangelical conversion experience from the mid eighteenth century to approximately 1820, were unlike the social conditions that Southern Evangelicals had created in the South by 1830. Consequently, 'conversionism' and 'activism' were perceived and thus applied differently in the South during these two periods.

According to David Bebbington, there are at least two central components of 'activism,' one being 'an exceedingly great desire for the conversion of others,' the other an 'attempt to enforce the

¹⁸⁸ Donald Mathews, *Religion*, p. 65; quote first discovered in Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order*, p 161.

¹⁸⁹ Carl N. Degler, *Place Over Time: The Continuity of Southern Distinctiveness*, pp. 61-62. Quote first discovered in Samuel Hill, *The South and the North in American Religion*, p. 65.

ethics of the gospel.¹⁹⁰ Both of these characteristics of 'activism' theoretically 'flows(ed) from the first,' that being conversion.¹⁹¹ Throughout the second half of the eighteenth century and the first two decades of the nineteenth century, Southern Evangelicals proved Bebbington's thesis correct; that conversion would lead not only to 'an exceedingly great desire for the conversion of others' but also an 'attempt(s) to enforce the ethics of the gospel.' From this perspective, Southern Evangelicals had developed a social ethic by 1820, though it was far from 'systematic' or 'mature' in its scope.¹⁹² 'But that was early in the nineteenth century. The compulsion to defend slavery changed all that.'¹⁹³

As Degler concluded, the issue of slavery posed a serious threat to Southern Evangelicals, particularly in the three decades prior to the American civil war, and it destroyed the possibility of Southern Evangelicals achieving a 'mature' or 'systematic' social ethic. Yet, it was not primarily the institution of slavery that posed the central road block for the making of a 'mature' or 'systematic' Southern Evangelical social ethic. Rather, the transformation of thought in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Southern Evangelical views on the South's peculiar institution from 'a violent

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 10-12.

¹⁹¹ The three remaining Evangelical impulses were Conversionism, Biblicism, and Crucicentrism. For further treatment of these impulses, see David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History From the 1730s to the 1980s*, pp. 1-19.

¹⁹² According to Samuel Hill, 'the South had played an impressive role in the social reform movement earlier on, especially in the first two decades of the nineteenth century. Together with the northern United States, it had participated in a variety of reform movements, such as the "abolition of imprisonment for debt, temperance, and the expansion of suffrage."' Hill, *The South and the North*, p. 65; Loveland also mentioned that 'efforts on behalf of prisoners, the insane, those who were deaf, dumb, and blind, seamen, the urban poor, and young men,' were part of the South's 'benevolent empire.' Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, p. 162.

¹⁹³ Samuel Hill, *The South and the North in American Religion*, p. 65.

deprivation of the rights of nature,' and 'a gross violation of the most precious and sacred rights of human nature'¹⁹⁴ to an ardent defense by 1830, pointed to a much larger, however related, metamorphosis in the evolution of Southern Evangelicalism.

Specifically, Evangelicals were gradually transformed in the Southern hierarchical social order from an 'alienated' people of 'low social standing' in 1750 to 'an enlightened and refined people' who 'aspired to become preceptors for a whole society' by 1820. This radical change in their social positioning altered the world-view or mind-set from which Southern Evangelicals interpreted and experienced conversion.¹⁹⁵ As Southern Evangelicals faced less adversity from the outside community, their need to dwell in the 'otherworldly' dimension that the conversion experience afforded them gradually diminished. Further, the social conditions that provided Southern Evangelicals with a 'desire for the conversion of others' and the 'attempt to enforce the ethics of the gospel'¹⁹⁶ no longer existed after 1820.

By 1830, the Southern social order had been gradually yet massively reordered. Southern Evangelicals were no longer confined to the periphery of society but had become the preceptors of society. Instead of pursuing spiritual peace, rest, and joy by dwelling on the eternal home to which they were soon going, they sought worldly respectability and refined social status. Instead of remaining as 'aliens and strangers' in the world at hand and therefore, a part of another kingdom that would

¹⁹⁴ H. Shelton Smith, *In His Image, But... Racism in Southern Religion, 1780-1910* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1972) pp. 38-39; W. Harrison Daniel, 'Virginia Baptists and the Negro in the Early Republic,' *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, LXXX (January, 1972) pp. 65-67.

¹⁹⁵ Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, pp. 41, 81-82.

¹⁹⁶ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, pp. 10-12.

never fade, they were establishing themselves as the elite of Southern society. They had exchanged their low position for one with the possibility of higher social standing. It was almost as if the kingdom of God had come without anybody realizing it. Yet the kingdom that Southern Evangelicals had erected in their own backyard was a revised version of what had resided in the mind of their Evangelical ancestors. Further, the adversarial conditions and circumstances that had accompanied and spurred the conversion experience as well its otherworldly mind-set in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century no longer existed. Southern Evangelicals had by their own doing throughout the early nineteenth century, deprived themselves of exactly what had been their former means to spiritual freedom. For it was precisely in their physical weakness, circumstantial distress, and extended periods of suffering, that the conversion experience was so appealing and contagious.

Southern Evangelicals continued to stress the need for conversion after 1830, but their improved social conditions and possibilities for worldly status and respectability made it increasingly difficult to embrace an 'otherworldly' perspective. This contributed to a widening gulf between their actions and their Christian ideal. The resulting guilt, exacerbated by ceaseless external and internal anguish concerning slavery, provided the context from which they endeavored to call the 'lost' to Christ after 1830. By this point, the possibility of achieving a 'mature' or 'systematic' Southern Evangelical social ethic had largely passed.

The Church of England in the Colonial South:

Soon after the settlement of Jamestown in 1607, the governors of Virginia recognized the immediate need for religion in order to impose the supremacy of the Crown in the New world. Not that the governors were too terribly interested in the spiritual well being of its first colonists. Most of

them were not. But they were cognizant of its controlling influence and thus the necessity of religion 'to create the moral rigor and social solidarity so desperately needed to guarantee the survival of the fragile community.' 'To whip Virginians into shape,' civil authorities applied force to its nascent and, at times, recalcitrant community¹⁹⁷ in order to assure 'a cohesive community with rituals of divine service.'¹⁹⁸ 'As one of the orders of the crown indicated, the "savage and heathen people" were to be treated kindly and persuaded by all good means... to the true service and knowledge of God.'¹⁹⁹ This was not exactly the religion of intense spiritual devotion. Rather, this was the religion of 'civil utility.'²⁰⁰

Southern historian Randolph Campbell's claim that 'those who would interpret the ante-bellum South have generally held strong views concerning the region's social structure' is a reasonable one, given the vision of the South's earliest leaders to create a society whose social order would reflect old world customs. Social, political, and religious institutions in colonial America were created by the crown to reflect similar old world establishments. Indeed, one of the underlying assumptions of English rule was based on the fact that the first emigrants had 'fixed conceptions of what a social

¹⁹⁷ Bernard Bailyn described much of seventeenth century colonial Virginia in the following way. 'Indeed, a veritable anarchy seems to have prevailed at the center of colonial society, erupting in a series of insurrections as early as 1635...' p. 90. For a more detailed account of the political and social climate in Virginia, see 'Politics and Social Structure in Virginia,' in *Seventeenth-Century America: Essays in Colonial History*, ed. James Morton Smith (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959) pp. 90-115.

¹⁹⁸ Mathews, *Religion*, p. 1.

¹⁹⁹ William H. Seiler, 'The Church of England as the Established Church in Seventeenth-Century Virginia,' *Journal of Southern History* 15 (1949) p. 478.

²⁰⁰ S. Charles Bolton, *Southern Anglicanism: The Church of England in Colonial South Carolina* (Westport, Ct.: Greenwood Press, 1982) p. 9.

order should be like.²⁰¹ Of course, most of the earliest settlers were only aware of the social and political norms in their previous home. And there would remain throughout the colonial days and even into the nineteenth century South and beyond, many similarities between old and new world social structures, not the least of which was the endorsement of the continuation of a hierarchically based society. Yet, an emerging social order, one without precedent, would gradually replace and dictate how power, influence, and status would be obtained and secured. It would change again by 1820.

As the seventeenth century progressed and the eighteenth century ensued, no longer would it be necessary to have the title 'Laird,' 'Earl,' or 'Knight,' to gain respectable social status in the new world. Neither was it merely the 'gentlemen,' their heirs, or those referred to as 'Sir' or 'Mr' who, without question, were unequivocally recognized by the lesser classes as the apex of political, religious, or social society. As conditions in the new world 'diverge(d) from the experience of the European society from which the newcomers emigrated,' movement along the social spectrum began to change accordingly.²⁰² The established Church of England in the Southern colonies would remain the central institution in this transition.

To uncover the data necessary to explain this divergence from European society to the making of a Southern colonial American social structure is an exceedingly complex, though necessary task, because it provides the first case study or framework from which subsequent southern religious history

²⁰¹ Randolph B. Campbell, 'Planters and Plain Folks: The Social Structure of the Antebellum South,' in *Interpreting Southern History: Historiographical Essays in Honor of Sanford W. Higginbotham*, p. 48.

²⁰² Oscar Handlin, 'The Significance of the Seventeenth Century' in *Seventeenth-Century America*, p. 4.

often reflects. It would be perilous to view this first period of acculturation as having occurred overnight or as the result of a specific individual(s) or event(s). Rather, beginning with the divergence from European society at Jamestown, and from the vantage point of retrospective history, one gleans the most comprehensive guide to the importance of religion in the creation of Southern society and the Southern mind. Reiterated by historical theologian, Douglas Kelly, 'The South is both a place and a state of mind.'²⁰³ Yet this Southern 'state of mind' is most vividly portrayed in light of many years of 'identification with and commitment to the class system' as evidenced by perpetual battles of class resistance and eventual triumph over political and religious 'authorities' beginning in early seventeenth century Virginia and continuing in varying forms throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Ingrained into the minds of the first Southern colonists was the authority of the crown and to a lesser degree, that of the bishop. In fact, the 'most prominent men' to settle the first Southern colonies 'were surprisingly legalistic and had no inclination to dispute the authority under which their government functioned.' The first emigrants 'had fixed conceptions of what the social order should be like' and the centrality of the crown and the derivation of power that was channeled by her was central to their 'conception of the social order.'²⁰⁴ Yet this initial, rigid, even inflexible mind-set began to erode as a different set of circumstances in the new world provided conditions that necessitated the adoption of survival technique over and beyond submission to anything, even the Crown. Subservience to the Crown and her officials had less meaning when placed alongside the 'disease-

²⁰³ Douglas F. Kelly, *Preachers With Power: Four Stalwarts of The South* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1992) p. x1.

²⁰⁴ Seiler, 'The Church of England,' p. 479.

infested, famine-weakened, Indian threatened settlement on the James River.²⁰⁵ In short, order and consistency in the old world was soon replaced with disorder and confusion in the new, which severely disturbed the traditional social order and created the vacuum that gave rise to the making of another.

The gradual death of old world loyalties and the creation of a Southern colonial society was, of course, inevitable given the 'abnormality' of so many new world conditions. Everything from the wilderness-like environment, Indian confrontations, the perceived as well as the real physical distance from the rule of the Crown, the absence of a resident bishop, an enlarged social class structure [witnessed in the development of a growing number of yeomen and artisans], a steady stream of additional immigrants, and high mortality rates, led to the gradual breakdown of the centralized source of power as embodied by the Crown and exercised by her colonial officials. Consequently, 'power tended to devolve to its local sources... Whatever acknowledgment might be given to the authority of the Crown, political institutions were decisively shaped by the necessity of defining connections to local power.'²⁰⁶

The established Church of England in the Southern colonies would also gradually reflect this de-centralization of power throughout the seventeenth century as the 'abnormal' conditions in the new world gradually became normative. This distribution of power in the Church was initially manifested in the absence of a bishop. No longer would the supreme authority in the new world Church, as appointed by the Crown, reside in the office bishop, simply because there was no bishop. Nor would

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 479.

²⁰⁶ Handlin, 'The Significance of the Seventeenth Century,' pp. 5-6.

the physical presence of a bishop in the colonial South ever become a reality.²⁰⁷ But, the absence of the bishop in colonial America should not be interpreted that the Church was no longer viewed as significant in the eyes of the crown. Rather, 'church affairs in the colony was diverted by more important matters back home.'²⁰⁸ Moreover, authority had now been granted to the royal governor to execute many of the responsibilities that were previously given to the bishop. This redistribution of power and exchange of authority from bishop to governor did not engender massive popular acceptance, particularly from those who viewed the Church as a divinely ordained institution. Nor would that power easily dissolve as long as the Church remained even theoretically important in the daily lives of the people. It would become, however, clear during the latter half of the seventeenth century that the Church was relevant in different ways to different people. For some, the Church was a place of worship and fellowship. For others, it was the means to and the symbol of power. For others, it was a bit of both.

Initially, the governor was called to oversee the affairs of the Church through the designation of local churchwardens. He would also appoint the clergy to their respective parish. '... But the colonists fought against this executive prerogative and here, as elsewhere, they were successful.'²⁰⁹ For a brief period, it looked as though the established Church in the Southern colonies would favor a more congregational ecclesiastical structure as each parish tended to reflect the beliefs and desires

²⁰⁷ Bolton, *Southern Anglicanism*, p. 4

²⁰⁸ Seiler, 'The Anglican Parish in Virginia,' p. 126. For more discussion concerning the absence of a resident bishop in the southern colonies, see Seiler, pp. 135,136.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

of the laity within each local community. For the Puritans, whose initial hope was to purify and not disestablish the existing established Church of England in the Southern colonies, this ecclesiastical structure seemed to provide the perfect opportunity for purification. According to Seiler, 'the Puritan movement found expression in the institutional organization of the Church, where parishes and vestries effectively developed local, political, and social control.'²¹⁰

Ironically, this gradual development of 'local, political, and social control' within the jurisdiction of the Church simply became the irresistible opportunity of an emerging social class to impose their authority in the local affairs of both the Church and the State. But this rising class was not made of the sons of English 'Earls,' 'Lairds,' and 'Knights.' Most of the original nobles had either died or returned to England. Nor were they the rabble rousers, that is, 'the toughest and most fortunate of the surviving planters...' who had survived the wilderness-like environment in the early years of settlement and prospered through the blossoming tobacco economy.²¹¹ Rather, these emigrants had reached the colonies between 1640 and 1670 and were the 'ambitious sons of middle-class families who knew well enough what gentility was and sought it as a specific objective.'²¹² They did not rest until they had achieved this objective.

On one hand, their inherited privileges upon entrance into the Southern colonies were instrumental in substantiating themselves 'the progenitors of the eighteenth century aristocracy.'²¹³

²¹⁰ Ibid., p. 124.

²¹¹ Bernard Bailyn, 'Politics and Social Structure in Virginia,' p. 94.

²¹² Ibid., p. 100.

²¹³ Ibid., p. 98.

Most of them had the advantages in training, whether it be that of a social or educational orientation. Many of the families had 'claims to land in the colony or inherited shares of the original Company stock.'²¹⁴ Thus, titles to the finest tracts of land upon arrival were significant to their adjustments into a still rather primitive new world. Perhaps most importantly, however, were the unspoken, but acutely felt pressures to uphold the banners of honor and dignity that had been sketched into their family tombstones.

On the other hand, these emigrants had a rigorous task before them, for they had yet to achieve the full status of gentility. They had yet to experience and taste all of its privileges. In fact, they were 'just close enough to establishment in gentility to feel the pangs of deprivation most acutely.'²¹⁵ Therefore, they pursued their objectives with unyielding vigor and endurance, and in that process, perfected 'keen striving for status and titles and economic rewards.'²¹⁶ Nothing short of a modified hierarchical chain of respectability and power was in the making in the Southern colonies, 'forming the basis of the most celebrated oligarchy in American history.'²¹⁷ The Church of England in the Southern colonies was becoming, both symbolically and functionally, the ideal institution from which the 'perpetuation of a hierarchical social system'²¹⁸ was further entrenched into the Southern conscience. The making of the 'ruling landed gentry' during the second half of the seventeenth century

²¹⁴ Ibid., p. 98.

²¹⁵ Ibid., p. 100.

²¹⁶ Seiler, p. 128.

²¹⁷ Bailyn, p. 100.

²¹⁸ Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, p. 9.

coincided with two extremely important and related developments within the colonial South. The representative body of the parish, known as the vestry, became one of the most powerful governing bodies within and outside the local parish. Further, the prestige associated with the vestry paralleled the burgeoning success of the Southern agricultural economy.

The character of Virginia society in these tidewater parishes of the seventeenth century was determined primarily by the tobacco economy, which had fostered a diversified population. Increasing from about 8000 in 1640 to more than 40,000 in 1671, the population included influential planters, small planters, indentured servants, and Negro slaves, whose number had increased from 150 in the earlier year to 2000 in the latter.²¹⁹

In the absence of a bishop, the vestry assumed responsibility for the appointment of the clergy.

As long as the church-state connection was to remain intact, the vestry 'served as the local unit for the administration of certain civil affairs.'²²⁰ In a word, the absence of a bishop in the Southern colonies and the 'abnormal' conditions and circumstances in the new world which made inevitable a more local form of government, found a willing replacement in the members of the vestry. Not surprisingly, it did not take too long to detect that this representative body of the parish did not always speak for the concerns of their parish. Then again, the vestry did not reflect the average social or political views of the parish. Rather, those on the vestry tended to best represent the gentry, the ruling elite, the rising aristocracy, those who 'diligently searched the Scriptures... wrote James Reid... but the Scriptures which they search(ed) [were] the laws of Virginia.'²²¹ Consequently, churchmen as well

²¹⁹ Seiler, p. 128.

²²⁰ Ibid., p. 126.

²²¹ Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia: 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1982) p. 133.

as 'colonial clergymen found themselves dependent on the colonial gentry for financial aid and political support... and they became divided in their loyalty.'²²²

The divided loyalty of the clergyman and many of his parishioners, however, was merely indicative of what was occurring on a much deeper level. In short, a new hierarchical social structure had re-emerged. Of course, it 'may have been bereft of nobility but it was not lacking an aristocracy, which... was by the eighteenth century sure of the rightfulness of its high position.'²²³ Instead of coping with the tension derived by a divided loyalty to the Crown or governor, the clergymen were now facing a similar situation in the rule of the vestry. After all, the vestry not only appointed the clergy, but they were also the key to privileged acceptance and respectability, a fact that was difficult for most of the clergy to ignore. Consequently, the established Church in the Southern colonies became increasingly nominal. Once allegiance, discipline, and order had been achieved in the early years of settlement, the presence and role of the Church became more symbolic of power and influence than actively ritualistic or overtly aggressive in ministering to its own. Indeed, 'the Church of England provided an ideal model of stability,' which was reinvented in the form of the vestry. But rarely did it cultivate the religious or spiritual dimension of American colonists. John Boles acknowledged the collective agreement on this point when he asserted that 'all contemporary witnesses agree that

²²² Bolton, p. 6.

²²³ Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, p. 9.

although religious belief and practice were not totally absent from the seventeenth century South, neither were they vital to most people's lives.'²²⁴

The Church of England 'steadily declined almost to the point of oblivion. '... Overbearing and independent vestries, niggardly and reluctant support, immense and sparsely populated parishes, and insolent dissenters' were just a few of the problems that pointed to the more concrete 'ecclesiastical limitations' of the Southern Church.²²⁵ Yet excessive emphasis on these 'problems' prevents the historian from evaluating the effects of other social processes at work that provide an auxiliary perspective to these micro-sized 'problems.' Summarized best by Mathews,

Efficiency and increased communication, however, would have done little more than agitate the primary problem of the establishment: *its identification with and commitment to the class system...* From the pulpit, a careful, lifeless preaching informed parishioners about proper behavior, appropriate attitudes, and a comely deference to social convention. Such a style conveyed the sense of the lower orders as unruly and disobedient persons, or even worse, as the enemy to be subdued and domesticated.... *The result was an adversary relationship between churchmen and lower-class people that was impossible to overcome.*²²⁶

The Otherworldly Dimension of Early Southern Evangelicalism:

'Conversionism,'²²⁷ the central Evangelical impulse, gradually provided blacks, white dissenters, and frustrated Anglicans, meaning and self worth that the Southern Church of England was often unable to provide. For the less powerful who were the means through which the large planters

²²⁴ John B. Boles, *The Irony of Southern Religion: The Rockwell Lecture Series* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1994) p. 4.

²²⁵ Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, pp. 6-8.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²²⁷ For a good treatment of Conversionism, one of the four Evangelical impulses, see Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, pp. 5-10.

and aristocrats were able to accrue social, political, and economic power and influence, and in doing so, define their own sense of meaning and self worth, the conversion experience was often the most common measure through which early Evangelicals defined themselves. What is more, the conversion experience reinforced the spiritual or 'otherworldly' realm in which many Southern Evangelicals tended to dwell. The 'world' that they perceived to await them was at least one constant reality in their lives that was not subject to external manipulation.

The conversion experience, largely introduced in the mid eighteenth century by Whitefield and others who followed and popularized his style of preaching, did not initially absolve the 'converted' society from the lower status on the social pendulum that many of them tended to occupy. Neither did it alter their limited degree of power and respectability. But it did provide the necessary refreshment from the social constraints of colonial Southern society. Perhaps more importantly, the opportunity to become 'pilgrims and strangers'²²⁸ in the physical 'world,' yet inhabitants of an idyllic 'world' to come, provided the basis throughout the remainder of the eighteenth century from which a relatively small, localized and scattered Evangelical community began to organize their own community, 'a community within a community,'²²⁹ a community that was not limited by physical or material circumstances or realities; a community whose social order was nonexistent because all of such like-minded faith were of equal value and worth; a community of intense spirituality. Expressed best by

²²⁸ Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order*, p. 93.

²²⁹ Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, xvii.

Mathews, 'by far the most significant aspect of Evangelical ideology was its demand for a radical conversion experience to set Evangelicals off as a separate community.'²³⁰

As relatively small Evangelical communities blossomed throughout the latter half of the eighteenth century within the Presbyterian (1740s-50s), Baptist (1750s-60s), and Methodist (early 1770s-80s) denominations,²³¹ the emerging ideals of Evangelicalism, manifested most comprehensively in the Evangelical conversion experience, began to compete, often unsuccessfully, with the traditional social ideals of order, rank, and stability associated with the Church of England and to a much lesser extent, with deistic influences spurred by the Enlightenment. Finding very little, if any, identification with traditional protocol, the scattered, disorganized, undefined but inspired Evangelical communities naturally bonded together under the denominational leadership of individuals such as Samuel Davies, Shubal Stearns, Devereaux Jarratt, and Francis Asbury to create social upheaval, motivated by religious dissatisfaction against the status quo in general and the Church of England in particular.²³² The evolution of this complex social process continued throughout the revolutionary period and well into the nineteenth century, even though the majority of Evangelicals and traditionalists united together for a brief period in favor of political Revolution.²³³ Of more lasting

²³⁰ Ibid., p. 34.

²³¹ Boles, *The Great Revival*, p. 7. See also Boles, *The Irony of Southern Religion*, p. 14 and Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, pp. 14-38.

²³² For further comment on how these and other men led Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodist to popularity against the expressed wishes of the Church of England in the colonial south, see Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, pp. 14-38.

²³³ See Mark Noll, *The Search For a Christian America*. See also Boles, *The Irony of Southern Religion*, pp. 10-11. Commenting on the state of the southern mind at the time of the American Revolution, Boles noted that '... the religious mind of Virginia - and much of the South - was divided

importance for the future of Evangelicalism in the South, however, it became clear by 1770 that ‘...the prerequisite conditions for an awakening were met in the South.’²³⁴ According to John Boles, religious revivals or awakenings occur,

‘ ...only in areas where there is a network of churches and a community of believers, where there exists a widely accepted set of beliefs about how God works in history to effect the redemption of humankind, and where there is a strong sense of social and cultural crisis that can easily be interpreted by contemporaries as susceptible solely to a religious resolution.’²³⁵

By 1770, Southern Evangelicals had met the above criteria and were ‘expecting a season of growth.’²³⁶ But, the unstable conditions in the wake of the American Revolution temporarily squelched any expectations that Southern Evangelicals had in experiencing a widespread religious renewal or awakening. What transpired throughout the revolutionary period, however, reinforced and strengthened the pervasive ‘sense of social and cultural crisis’ and thus the need for a ‘religious resolution.’ Social, economic, and political appeal and enthusiasm flowing from what seemed to be new found opportunities affected by the Revolution momentarily deterred attention away from the Church.

Not giving up in their quest for the many opportunities that were assumed would alleviate colonial discontentment, restlessness, revolutionary disarray and confusion, many Southerners migrated from the eastern seaboard states to Kentucky, Tennessee, even further westward, to pursue

between an almost dormant Episcopal church and pockets of evangelical fervor.’ p. 11.

²³⁴ Boles, *The Irony of Southern Religion*, p. 6.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

their long awaited fortune. Yet again, this movement westward only seemed to amplify feelings of crisis in both regions. In the seaboard states, there were notions of being left behind for greater opportunities westward, while in Tennessee and Kentucky, a crisis of supply and management created unsettling surroundings.²³⁷ By the end of the eighteenth century, Evangelicals could not have requested a more conducive atmosphere for religious awakenings had they orchestrated the events in colonial Southern history themselves. Interpreted from a religious standpoint, 'the Episcopal Church's misery was its competitors' boon.'²³⁸

From this epochal point in Southern religious history, commonly dubbed the Second Great Awakening, Southern Evangelicals steadily gained a degree of influence, respectability, and ascendancy in the making of a new or, perhaps more accurately, modified Southern social order. Traditional ways, methods, and practices common to the Southern Church of England, as well as deistic interests that tended to be more popular within aristocratic circles, would either be dispelled or absorbed, and hence, redefined by Evangelical impulses.²³⁹ In the previous century, most Southern Evangelicals were fairly content knowing that despite their lot in the present age and the difficulties that had and would continue to experience, no one could deprive them of the religious freedom that they

²³⁷ Ibid., p. 6. For further mention of political and social development during the Revolutionary period, see Boles, pp. 14-20.

²³⁸ John Boles, *The Great Revival: 1787-1805* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1972) p. 1.

²³⁹ Clement Eaton suggested that 'it (deism) was not suited to the romantic spirit that conquered the South. Deism was too cold, too philosophic and reasonable to satisfy the emotional needs of the people. When the colonial-bred aristocracy died out, deism faded imperceptibly from Southern society.' See Eaton, *The Freedom-of-Thought Struggle in the Old South*, rev. ed. (New York, 1964) pp. 303-304; quote cited by Boles, *The Great Revival*, pp. 188, 189.

experienced in the wake of their conversion. For the first two decades of the nineteenth century, Southern Evangelicals would pattern a similar world-view. As long as they perceived that they were on the defensive, outnumbered, fighting an uphill battle, or confined to the periphery of society, Southern Evangelicals adopted an 'otherworldly' mind-set by erecting the kingdom of heaven in their own minds and convincing and converting others to do the same.

Southern Evangelicals of the nineteenth century soon realized that the colonial barriers that had previously hindered them from achieving respectability, refinement, meaning, and worth began to disappear in the wake of the revolutionary period. Recognizing that the culture was now 'up for grabs,'²⁴⁰ Southern Evangelicals began to make their physical presence known, and they did so rather successfully. In the process, however, the 'spiritual' world that Southern Evangelicals erected in their own minds through the conversion experience, was now free to be physically established in the Southern region of the United States. And this Southern kingdom continued to increase until 'the Union armies had smashed a southern way of life almost as decisively as the Duke of Cumberland's troops had smashed the Highland way of life at Culloden in 1746.'²⁴¹

Throughout the nineteenth century, Southern Evangelicals continued to build upon the culture that they had established at the beginning of the century, yet everything was fashioned either to produce more conversions, provide assemblies to discuss the changes wrought by their conversion experience, or for the few Evangelical intellectuals, simply discuss the theology of conversion.

²⁴⁰ Samuel S. Hill, 'Northern and Southern Varieties of American Evangelicalism in the Nineteenth Century' in *Evangelicalism*, p. 276.

²⁴¹ Mark Noll, 'Evangelical Social Influence in North Atlantic Societies,' in *Evangelicalism*, p. 128.

Southern Evangelicals instituted universities and seminaries,²⁴² they resurrected the camp meetings,²⁴³ they sent missionaries to unreached peoples, they established benevolent societies,²⁴⁴ they even united with Northern Evangelicals to promote Evangelicalism on the western frontier, all with the hope that more people might gain entrance into the new and living way opened up through conversion. Hence, the physical world or culture in the Southern region of the United States was gradually beginning to mirror or reflect what Southern Evangelicals perceived was the kingdom of God, because they were, spiritually speaking, either living within this kingdom or withdrawing from it only long enough to convert the outside community to do the same. 'By 1830, the southern people had become thoroughly converted to orthodoxy in religion.' Illustrated best by Samuel Hill, The 'Southerners' domicile was His domain.²⁴⁵ Or, using Richard Niebuhr's words, Southern society could be best explained as the 'Christ of culture.'²⁴⁶

Of course, 'Southerners viewed their new habitat as a paradise'²⁴⁷ not because they had reformed or even hoped to improve societal conditions based on a commonly shared and

²⁴² Brooks Holifield noted that there 'were over a hundred colleges' in the South by 1850. See E. Brooks Holifield, *The Gentlemen Theologians*, pp. 45-46.

²⁴³ See Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scottish Communion and American Revivals in the Early Modern Period*, pp. 59-68.

²⁴⁴ See Anne Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order*, the chapter specifically entitled 'Benevolence and Reform,' pp. 159-185.

²⁴⁵ Samuel S. Hill, *The South and the North in American Religion*, p. 5.

²⁴⁶ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951) quote first discovered in Samuel Hill, *The South and the North in American Religion*, p. 5.

²⁴⁷ Samuel Hill, *The South and the North in American Religion*, p. 4.

systematically applied social ethic, for they did not have one, but simply because they had converted the 'lost' from their sinful condition, and relatively speaking, disadvantaged circumstances. The conversion experience had released them from what they perceived to be the injustices of the world that were created by a universal sinful disposition and ushered them into a new community that, around 1830, existed somewhere between Virginia and Mississippi. Before 1800, there was less religious consensus and thus more religious diversity in the colonial period and early republic that served to buffer any one belief system from gaining absolute ascendancy. From 1800 to the American Civil war, these differences gradually faded and orthodoxy prevailed. At the end of the era, Clement Eaton concluded,

There was little disagreement between the fundamental beliefs of the lower and upper classes of the South, in contrast with the dichotomy that had existed in the early American Republic and in many creative periods of history; all classes in the South adhered to a conservative faith, a common orthodoxy...In the beliefs that mattered... there was virtually no disagreement.²⁴⁸

As Southern Evangelicals fortified their community throughout the nineteenth century, they were less inclined to dwell in the spiritual or otherworldly realm that they had to this point occupied. No longer did Southern Evangelicals have to anticipate the world to come, because they had created the next best thing on earth. Ironically, as soon as Southern Evangelicals perceived that they had been delivered from those who they suggested oppressed their forefathers or themselves, it became apparent that the society that Southern Evangelicals had established largely mirrored the type of society that had appeared in the colonial South. But the Negro slaves were to nineteenth century

²⁴⁸ Clement Eaton, *The Growth of Southern Civilization: 1790-1860*, rev. ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana Press, 1967) pp. 222-223; quote cited in Boles, *The Great Revival*, p. 193.

Evangelicals what eighteenth century Evangelicals had been to the planter aristocracy. Much like the Anglican vestry in the previous century, Southern Evangelicals sought to ‘enhance the status, strengthen the power, and secure the role of churches in southern society.’ That which their Evangelical predecessors had fought so hard to conquer, and in fact did, if only in the recesses of their own mind and spirit, had in time come to defeat Southern Evangelicals, particularly after 1830. In a word, their notions of depravity associated with the world had subdued them too. Summarized by Mathews,

Evangelical aspirations had once been to define the boundaries between the faithful and the world so that the values of God’s people would not be confused with those of the ruling elites; but social and economic change had encouraged Evangelicals to assimilate rather than repudiate the world.²⁴⁹

The gradual effect that this transitional social process had on the mindset, aspirations, and ideals of white Southern Evangelicals and eventually the rest of the nineteenth century Southern society was enormous yet relatively subtle. It was enormous in that the entirety of Southern society was permeated by Evangelical impulses and subtle to the degree that Southern Evangelicals were hardly, if at all, conscious that these impulses had become for many, merely external and ritualistic. Consequently their ‘otherworldly’ or spiritual mindset gradually withered away. To the degree that it faded in the life of the white Southern Evangelical, it proportionally became more firmly rooted in the mind of the Evangelical slave. A new social order was being established throughout the first sixty years of the nineteenth century, yet its hierarchial foundation was hardly an historical precedent.

²⁴⁹ Mathews, *Religion in the South*, p. 95.

The Making of a Modified Southern Social Order:

As Southern Evangelicals continued their campaign throughout the first three decades of the nineteenth century to convert the 'lost' from what they believed was their sinful and, therefore, debased personal conditions and circumstances on earth, to the perfect and everlasting kingdom of heaven, they accentuated the 'otherworldly' dimension of their conversion experience. Southern Evangelicals were also inclined to apply this spiritualized mindset to other aspects of ante-bellum society as well, not the least of which was the institution of slavery. Believing that all of those who were converted were, if only from an eschatological perspective, neither slave nor free, Southern Evangelicals could more easily overlook what they considered to be the 'necessary evils'²⁵⁰ in the world at present, including slavery.

In the mind of the Southern Evangelical, it was not simply the Negroes who represented the 'slave' population but anyone who had not been freed from the slavery of the 'world' to live under the domain of Christ. By 1830, however, it became clear that there were many Northern Evangelical abolitionists who did not share this spiritualized defense of Negro slavery. Evangelical abolitionists consisted of those who, broadly speaking, were of the same religious persuasion as Southern Evangelicals. But their title, 'Evangelical abolitionists,' was not only perceived by Southern Evangelicals as a contradiction in terms, but also symbolized their greatest threat to the making of a modified Southern social order.

It did not take Southern Evangelicals too terribly long to find themselves in a rather awkward, precarious, but above all, annoying, situation, that forced them to pay more attention to the present

²⁵⁰ Bernard Bailyn et al., *The Great Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1977) p. 566. Quote first discovered in Samuel Hill, *The South and the North*, p. 48.

realities of the world around them. During the first three decades of the nineteenth century, Southern Evangelicals did not explicitly approve or disapprove of slavery. In their own minds, they did not have time to debate the ethics of slaveholding, nor were concerns in this world uppermost in their minds. Approving or disapproving of the institution of slavery was a secondary matter when placed next to the conversion of lost sinner, slave or free. Expressed best by an early nineteenth century Baptist minister Jeremiah Jeter, 'Whether slavery was right or wrong, was a question which I did not consider.'²⁵¹ Rather, 'the ultimate worldly allegiance of southern ministers was seeking out and converting those that were lost.'²⁵² Further, this allegiance was not merely the goal of ministers but of the converted community as well. Of course, some Southern Evangelicals gave more attention to the ethics of slaveholding, but these were generally those who had not been reared in the South or been fully acculturated into southern way of life. Fed up with not making much progress, many of them fled the region.

What is important to remember, however, is that Southern Evangelicals were, in their own minds, too busy converting the lost, too caught up in the world to come, too absorbed into the eschatological 'already,' to give serious attention to the ethics of slaveholding. 'The ethical code that Southerners endorsed was "personally oriented," driven by their own conversion experience... The only way to cure society, it was believed, was to cure souls.'²⁵³

²⁵¹ Anne Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order*, p. 186.

²⁵² Boles, *The Great Revival*, p. 194.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

Of course, all of the major denominations, Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists, had officially condemned the institution of slavery in one way or another by the first decade of the nineteenth century. But no serious measures were ever taken within any of these denominations to enforce it, because freeing the 'lost,' whether black or free, in the present, corrupt, and dying world was exceedingly more important than alleviating certain unavoidable ills such as slavery. Further, since most Southern Evangelicals had been brought up alongside the institution, they were not naturally prone to analyze the institution in the abstract or in a theoretical sense. It was not an issue that was generally perceived of as either right or wrong, sinless or sinful. In fact, many Southerners believed that the responsibility of owning and nurturing slaves was as much of a curse to the masters as it was to the slaves. Benjamin Mosby Smith obviously felt this way when he complained, 'Oh what trouble,- running sore, constant pressing weight, perpetual wearing, dripping, is this patriarchal system... what a sore evil holding these people.'²⁵⁴

In the three decades before 1830, Southern Evangelicals were, to a large degree, able to suppress, prolong, or ignore dialogue concerning issues such as the ethics of slavery, because Southern and Northern Evangelicals were too caught up in their own regional affairs. Southern Evangelicals were absorbed in their own efforts to convert the entire Southern region to their 'otherworldly' community of faith while Northern Evangelicals were administering their own revivals, too busy challenging the more liberal Transcendentalists, Universalists, and Unitarians, or too engaged integrating Enlightenment ideals with scholastic Calvinism to create a more agreeable, and therefore, practically applied theology of conversion.

²⁵⁴ Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, p. 189.

Beginning around 1830, however, Northern Evangelical abolitionists forced Southern Evangelicals to respond to the allegations that slaveholding was sinful and that the Church could never condone such a barbaric institution. Initially caught off guard and clearly unprepared for such a direct assault, Southern Evangelicals were forced to descend to the world long enough to integrate and develop their defense of slavery on a more theoretical, abstract, or rationally conceived basis. Essentially, Southern Evangelicals stated two points. First, as to the legitimacy of the institution from a legal perspective, slavery was a civil matter to be considered by the civil authorities, and therefore, existed outside the sphere or jurisdiction of the church. The church was bound to submit to the authority of the state. Secondly, the church was not at liberty to 'speculate or give her opinion' on subjects that the Bible had not sufficiently addressed. Expressed by the Southern Presbyterian churchman and theologian James Henley Thornwell,

The power of the Church, accordingly, is only ministerial and declarative. The Bible, and the Bible alone, is her rule of faith and practice... Beyond the Bible she can never go, and apart from the Bible she can never speak... When she speaks, it must be in the name of the Lord, and her only argument is, thus it is written²⁵⁵

Ironically, it was the Evangelical abolitionist accusation that slaveholding was sinful, a declaration that threatened the legitimacy and purity of the Southern Church and the economic existence of Southern culture; that wedded Southern Evangelicals and Southern traditionalists by 1835. This bond would soon reveal that 'the South had come under the rule of an evangelical

²⁵⁵ James H. Thornwell, 'Report on the Subject of Slavery Presented at the Synod of South Carolina,' (Columbia: Steam-power Press of A.S. Johnston, 1852) p. 5.

hegemony.' Summarized by Samuel Hill, 'the interweaving of society's attitude toward slavery and the popular religious perceptions made for a strong social fabric. By now religion was entrenched.'²⁵⁶

In the process of responding to the allegations of Northern Evangelical abolitionists, three related developments became clear in the three decades prior to the American civil war. First, as Southern Evangelicals continued to create their own community and institutions, and as that community expanded both numerically and geographically throughout the first three decades of the nineteenth century, the social and religious variance between Southern Evangelicals and the traditional Southern establishment began to narrow, indicating that Evangelicalism had permeated the entire Southern region. More importantly, it also became exceedingly clear that the defining characteristics of Southern Evangelical impulses were not composed or applied in a vacuum, that is, apart from the traditional social biases unique to the history of the Old South.

Secondly, after 1830, the Southern Evangelical community existed less on the periphery or the fringe of Southern society but, much like the seventeenth and eighteenth century ruling elite, whatever form it may have previously taken, gradually became the standard by which other aspects of Southern life would be measured and revered. Southern Evangelicals were less opposed and oppressed by the 'world' around them, because the 'world' around them had conformed unto their liking. No longer were Southern Evangelicals forced to look outside their earthly circumstances to experience heavenly peace and rest. They had created heaven on earth. Again, 'it was almost as if the Kingdom of God had come without anyone realizing it, for Evangelicals themselves boasted of the

²⁵⁶ Samuel Hill, *The South and the North in American Religion*, pp. 52-53.

wonderful change that had taken place before their eyes by the 1850s.²⁵⁷ Consequently, throughout this nineteenth century making of a modified Southern social process, Southern Evangelicals gradually became less inclined to apply their ‘otherworldly’ mind-set or world-view, which had from the mid eighteenth century, defined them, even freed them from the suffering that was once common to their everyday experience. Yet, this ‘otherworldly’ mind-set did not cease to exist within the Evangelical community. It was simply yielded to the Evangelical slave community.

Finally, it became clear that northern and Southern Evangelicals were living in two different worlds that tended to focus on opposing objectives and priorities. From the perspective of those who saw it as their primary responsibility to reform and ‘transform’ society, Northern Evangelical abolitionists viewed slavery as the central road block to the making of a more ideal society. In light of their conversion experience, Northerner Evangelicals were inclined to push for the creation of the perfect world on earth, some believing that this was theoretically possible, while Southern Evangelicals had, in their own minds, already been ushered into a kingdom that existed somewhere between Virginia and Mississippi.

Of course, most Northern Evangelicals had been sympathetic to the eagerness of Southerners to convert the ‘lost.’ In fact, ‘the patterns of personal evangelical experience looked remarkably similar until 1825 or so.’²⁵⁸ However, by 1830, Northern and Southern varieties of Evangelicalism tended to part company. Specifically, ‘conversionism,’ as understood in the North became a means

²⁵⁷ Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, p. 96.

²⁵⁸ Samuel Hill, ‘Northern and Southern Varieties of American Evangelicalism’, in *Evangelicalism*, p. 278.

to an end, the end being the perfection of the physical world around them. 'In sum, northern revivals revived society as much as they converted individuals.'²⁵⁹ Accordingly, Northern Evangelicals were neither willing, able, nor interested to embrace the world-view that Southern Evangelicals had created. The history of the region and the experiences of Northern Evangelicals did not lend itself to this end. To be sure, Northern Evangelicals recognized the importance of integrating 'Christ' and 'culture' but they did so in a radically different way than Southern Evangelicals. Instead of Jesus being the 'Christ of culture,' he was, 'Christ the transformer of culture.'²⁶⁰

On the whole, Northern Evangelicals stressed the importance of reforming and aligning the physical world and its institutions by subjecting it to a social ethic. As the world around them continued to progress politically, intellectually and socially, Northern Evangelicals progressed accordingly, adapting and applying their evolving social ethic to the institutions that needed to be reformed. Meanwhile, as the world changed around them, Southern Evangelicals stayed their course which simply meant continuing their campaign to convert the lost. As John Boles rightly concluded, 'resistance to change' was a predominant southern characteristic.'²⁶¹ But this 'resistance to change' was not due to Southern Evangelicals' belief that their institutions were perfect and in no need of

²⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 280.

²⁶⁰ Samuel Hill, *The South and the North*, p. 5.

²⁶¹ John Boles, *The Great Revival*, p. 196. Boles noted that 'it has been one of the tragedies of southern religion that it never progressed intellectually or in social awareness past the orthodoxy which solidified several decades before the civil war.' In the same vein, W.J. Cash lamented that 'it was the total effect of southern conditions, primary and secondary, to preserve the southerner's original simplicity of character as it were in perpetual suspension.' See W.J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York, 1941) p. 99.

change, but precisely because any changes that needed to be made were secondary to the changes wrought within by the Spirit of God.

Chapter 2: The Making of a True Southern Presbyterian Evangelical

In 1825, there was little reason to believe that John Lafayette Girardeau (1825-1898)¹ would rise to prominence in the Southern Presbyterian Church. Girardeau became a noteworthy Southern Presbyterian figure primarily because of his work among the seaboard slaves of Charleston, South Carolina both prior to and following the American Civil War. As an antebellum churchman, Girardeau joined his denomination in their ardent defense of slavery, but he acted virtually alone in his attempt to provide a ministry to them. In short, his theological rhetoric and his social response were ‘consistent.’

Like most antebellum Southern Presbyterians, Girardeau was born and raised in the deep South. He was a member of the Southern Presbyterian Church from childhood. And he claimed a typical conversion experience at the age of fourteen.²

Like many other nineteenth century Southern Presbyterian churchmen, Girardeau flourished academically, was committed to the Confederacy, and combined his service in the

¹ John Lafayette Girardeau was originally named Lafayette Girardeau. It was not until he was ordained in the Charleston Presbytery at the age of twenty-five that he added ‘John’ to the beginning of his name. According to his son-in-law, George Blackburn, Girardeau did not like the name, ‘Lafayette.’ Before changing his name, however, Girardeau requested approval from his father, John Bohun Girardeau, and approval was granted to him. See George A. Blackburn, D.D. editor, *The Life Work of John L. Girardeau, D.D., LL.D.*, (Columbia, SC: The State Company, 1916) p. 28.

² Anne C. Loveland develops and documents the typical process of conversion in the life of a nineteenth century Southern Evangelical. She notes that it was a process that consisted of a ‘series of convictions, emotions and conflict intervening between the time of the awakening and the conversion of the sinner.’ Not surprisingly, she briefly notes the conversion experience of Girardeau in her chapter entitled ‘Conversion and Calling.’ See Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order: 1800-1860*, pp. 6-7.

pulpit and the classroom. He completed high school at the age of fourteen. He completed his degree at the College of Charleston at the age of eighteen. He entered Columbia Theological Seminary before his twentieth birthday. He was awarded a Doctorate of Divinity from Columbia Theological Seminary. He served as chaplain of the twenty-third regiment of the South Carolina Volunteers. He returned to Columbia as Professor of Systematic Theology within a decade following the American Civil War.

Girardeau was also very much unlike many of his nineteenth century Southern Presbyterian peers. He was more paternalistic than most antebellum Southern Presbyterian churchmen. His highly paternalistic sentiments fostered his preference or 'calling' to minister to the South Carolina slaves. He regarded the slaves to be equal in their worth before God but inferior to their white brethren with respect to their intellectual capacity. Consequently, 'he believed that association with the white man was essential to the uplift of the Negro.' Joseph B. Mack summed up well one of the reasons why Girardeau committed the majority of his life to the religious instruction of the slaves of Charleston.

Hence he always desired the Negro churches to be connected with and under the supervision of the white churches.... he believed that when left to themselves they could not resist the temptation to dishonesty and adultery.³

My reference to Girardeau as a true nineteenth century churchman should only be construed as commendable to the extent that an analysis of his life suggests that his commitment to the religious instruction of the slaves of Charleston was the most consistent response to the theological views of his denomination concerning slavery. Girardeau was a true Southern Presbyterian figure, because he was the most authentic ideological representative of the

³ Joseph B. Mack, in *Life Work and Sermons*, p. 70.

antebellum denomination. An account of Girardeau's life will expose the best and the worst features of nineteenth century Southern Presbyterians.

Girardeau was a Southern Presbyterian Evangelical whose conservative theological and social framework was more clearly and fully carried to its logical conclusion through his actions over the course of his life and to a wider range of people than the majority of his nineteenth century colleagues and peers. Not only did Girardeau find 'success' among the slaves, but the Charleston elite was also receptive to his ministerial leadership. Girardeau was able to acquire the support of those from both ends of the socioeconomic and racial spectrum. In a paternalistic, slave based culture, biracial receptivity to the white religious leadership was crucial for its long-term survival. No other antebellum Southern Presbyterian in Charleston was able to achieve the overwhelming degree of approval that Girardeau fostered among his black and white parishioners.

Girardeau demonstrated throughout his entire life a unique ability to adapt to the social and religious conditions of his day and to minister effectively⁴ to the diverse spectrum of humanity that existed alongside him. He ministered effectively to the white Charleston elite. He ministered effectively to the black plantation slave. He ministered effectively to the soldiers in the twenty-third regiment during the Civil War. And he ministered effectively to the students at Columbia Theological Seminary. Certainly there were many nineteenth century Southern Presbyterian Evangelicals who were exceptional teachers, preachers or pastors to very specific

⁴ To assert that Girardeau was an 'effective minister' could be construed as a bit vague. It is an assertion that could potentially be difficult to measure. Throughout this thesis, I will attempt to measure the effectiveness of Girardeau as a minister to the diverse range of people whom he served over the course of his life primarily from an assortment of published 'testimonies.' Other measurements will also be utilized such as the growth rate and size of the churches that he served within the Southern Presbyterian denomination.

portions of Southern antebellum society and culture. There are none who have been documented to have been as consistently effective as a teacher, preacher, and pastor to such a heterogeneous sphere of people.

Girardeau was radically influenced by his religious and social heritage. The integrated social, cultural and religious influence of growing up in and personally experiencing the simple, relatively quiet, highly paternalistic, agriculturally based economy of James Island and the elitist, class driven, academic, ‘social and cultural capital of the plantation’⁵ community, the city of Charleston, were significant in preparing Girardeau to minister effectively to both communities and beyond.

The Antebellum City: Charleston

Just a decade before the turn of the nineteenth century, the city of Charleston was beginning to recover from the postwar depression that had spread across the new nation. The population within the city limits of Charleston included 8,089 whites and 8,831 blacks, while Charleston County population included 11,801 whites and 34,846 blacks. Charleston was ranked fourth nationally in urban population and had a greater proportion of African-Americans ‘than the other three combined—New York, Philadelphia, and Boston.’⁶ The market for rice and indigo exportation was gradually strengthening. The sale of short staple or ‘upland cotton’ and long staple, sea-island cotton was on the verge of explosion as new ginning technology for seed extraction had recently been introduced by Eli Whitney. The economy was gaining momentum and the prevailing optimistic outlook tended to create a surge of hope among the

⁵ Walter J. Fraser, Jr. *Charleston! Charleston! The History of a Southern City* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989) p. 195.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

small but powerful group of Charleston aristocrats and low country planters. 'The city was standing on what appeared to be the brink of a bright future.'⁷ Or so it was thought.

In 1791, South Carolina grew 1,500,000 pounds of cotton, a decade later, 20 million, and production doubled again within the next ten years. The pulse of the city beat regularly again to the rhythms of the agricultural seasons: with the harvest peaking in October, boats and schooners came down the rivers and along the coast carrying bales of cotton and rough rice for milling and shipment, commercial life boomed along the wharves, and country shoppers flocked into King street...⁸

Perhaps the most historically significant social effect of the highly anticipated agricultural revolution that would soon exceed even the expectations of those in the city and the country was the reopening of the slave trade in 1803. In 1764, wealthy slave-holders had recognized the 'dangerous consequences' of 'too great a disproportion of slaves to white inhabitants' and had taken subtle measures to ensure that the slaves were not 'interfering with poor, honest white people.'⁹ In 1787, the new South Carolina state legislature passed an act that prohibited the slave trade. In the wake of the Revolutionary War and the post-war depression, there was no immediate economic need, nor were the resources readily available, to launch a full scale importation of slaves. There is little evidence to suggest that there was a consensus among the low country delegation to the assembly in 1787 to abolish the slave trade for ethical reasons.

During the course of the hot debate on the issue, Dr. Ramsay joked that on the Sunday preceding the vote "every man who went to church... and said his prayers was bound by spiritual obligation to refuse the importation of slaves. They had devoutly prayed not to be led into temptation, and Negroes were a temptation too great to be resisted."¹⁰

⁷ Robert Rosen, *A Short History of Charleston* (San Francisco, California: Lexikos, 1982) p. 75.

⁸ Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!* p. 182.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 176. Fraser also notes that even though the slave trade was officially suspended in 1787, 'there were apparently violations of the act.'

As the economy of low country South Carolina increasingly flourished at the turn of the nineteenth century, it became clear that the city and country aristocrats¹¹ were no longer unduly concerned that too great a disparity between whites and blacks would develop if the slave trade were reopened. Nor did their conscience appear overly plagued by the ethical implications of reopening the importation and exportation of slaves. Rather, they were all the more determined to sustain the pace of the agricultural revolution that was taking place around them. They understood that 'slave trading was big business,'¹² and that there would be no agricultural revolution nor would the economy continue to thrive without the assistance of slave labor. They were well aware that an expanded economy was an impossible dream apart from an enlarged work force.

The South Carolina legislature 'demanded that the state reopen the slave trade' and voted to reestablish the 'foreign traffic in slaves, which resumed on December 17, 1803, and continued until prohibited by the United States Constitution on January 1, 1808.' A Charleston businessman commented, 'Overnight, [as] fast as they returned, their cargoes were bought up with avidity.'¹³

Over the next several years nearly 40,000 slaves were brought into Charleston. Planters became so absorbed in buying slaves that they had neither time nor money for anything else. And while opposition to slavery was rising in England and France and was

¹¹ According to Fraser, 'control of the city government remained in the hands of the lawyer-planter-merchant, usually Episcopalian, oligarchy until after the Civil War.' See pp. 169-177.

¹² Rosen, p. 79.

¹³ Alfred G. Smith, Jr., *Economic Readjustment of an Old Cotton State; South Carolina 1820-1860* (Columbia, SC., 1958) pp. 1-6.

beginning to be heard in New England, the influx of new Africans made Charlestonians increasingly sensitive to any criticism of the institution.¹⁴

The agricultural revolution in the low country of South Carolina did more than boost the slave population in Charleston and the surrounding plantation communities. The economic prosperity fostered a 'unique pluralism,' otherwise unknown to the Charleston community. New institutions began to emerge, including the College of Charleston and the Charleston orphan house. The Charleston theater was reconstructed and 'a branch of the First Bank of the United States opened in Charleston.'¹⁵ The economic boom provided the Charleston elite and the country planters with an array of social activities to keep themselves occupied. There were horse races, balls, concerts and theatrical performances to attend.¹⁶ There were clubs to join.¹⁷ There were gardens to observe.¹⁸ These pleasures and more provided the venues through which the city and country aristocrats would join together, mingle and boast of their economic fortunes. And their fortunes continued to increase.¹⁹ In fact, many of the wealthiest planters built homes in Charleston and spent the summer months in their 'mansions and summer

¹⁴ Fraser p. 188.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 179. According to Fraser, 'the unique pluralism of Charleston was reflected in the continuing growth in the numbers of various religious groups, especially Lutherans, Jews, and Catholics.'

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 195.

¹⁷ Rosen, p. 81.

¹⁸ Fraser, pp 177-178.

¹⁹ According to Fraser, 'On February 20, 1817, the Courier reported that exports from South Carolina in 1816, valued at \$10,849,409, mainly cotton, were second only to the exports of New York.' p. 194.

homes in the city' ascending the social ladder and hoping that they might escape the 'sickly season on the plantations.'

Here too the planters and their families could escape the isolation of their plantations, socialize with the wealthy professional and merchant families, and through their offspring continue the pattern of intermarriages or alliances established in the eighteenth century.²⁰

By 1820, 'this once flourishing city' began to experience the adverse effects of an economy completely dependent on slave labor. 'After nearly twenty-five years of prosperity, a long period of economic stagnation and a mood close to despair were setting in.'²¹ Economically, as the cotton industry continued to spread westward, there was less demand for South Carolina cotton. By the spring of 1819, an 'overproduction led to a worldwide collapse of cotton prices, which lasted for years.'²² Politically, upper class Charlestonians, whose financial power had previously created a virtual oligarchy, were beginning to face the first of many substantial challenges from political opponents within the state and those officials on a national and international level. 'Fewer and fewer governors would hail from Charleston.'²³ Morally, the hedonist-type lifestyle that had become normative among the well-to-do fostered 'wild behavior' and 'encouraged idleness.'²⁴

Hedonism and love of pleasure, so prevalent in the colonial era, remained the accepted way of life, a social ideal for antebellum Charlestonians.... Visitors found antebellum Charleston in many ways the same as colonial Charleston: The men are of idle

²⁰ Ibid., p. 195.

²¹ Ibid., p. 198.

²² Ibid., p. 197.

²³ Ibid., p. 198.

²⁴ Ibid, pp. 196-197.

disposition, fond of pleasures.... Their principal amusement in the city in the morning is billiards and in the evening cards and segars [sic].²⁵

Socially, an increased paranoia concerning insurrections mounted in the wake of the Denmark Vesey plot.²⁶ In a city where the population was 60 percent black, these fears were becoming increasingly justified. Britain and the Northeast portions of the United States were intensifying their abolition campaigns to eliminate slavery, and these campaigns were beginning to have a considerable impact, even in certain sections of the South. Charlestonians, low country planters, and Southern Presbyterians would only become more defensive of their 'peculiar institution' throughout the 1830s. City officials rightly perceived that national and international opinion was gradually turning against them. Their immediate response was to institute measures that would ensure the 'maintenance of public order.'²⁷ These measures only exacerbated the issue and exposed the ethical implications of the institution itself.

The state legislature passed a law on December 1, 1822, requiring all free black males over fifteen years of age to either take a white guardian or to be sold into slavery.... On December 21 Charleston's City Council established a municipal force of 150 men and petitioned the legislature for an arsenal or "a Citadel" to protect and preserve the public property and safety.²⁸

²⁵ Rosen, pp. 80-81.

²⁶ There were three major slave revolts in the early nineteenth century. One of those revolts, the Denmark Vesey plot, took place in Charleston in 1822. All of these revolts 'led to increased resistance to the preaching activity of the free Negroes, the separate assembly of black congregations, and the spread of literacy among the slaves.' See Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972) p. 702; Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, p. 205.

²⁷ Rosen, pp. 197-203.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 202-203.

The Antebellum Country: James Island

Just across the Charleston Harbor, where the Ashley River and the Cooper River come together to begin 'a chain of flat-lying bodies of land, known as the Sea Islands,' is James Island, the birthplace of Girardeau. James Island parallels the east coast for roughly nine miles and stretches about three miles deep from the Southern edge of the Charleston Harbor to the Atlantic shore. James Island is 'approximately thirty-five square miles and is the first of many Sea Islands that extend along the Atlantic coast from South Carolina to Florida.'²⁹ Many of the Sea Islands that stretch across the east coast 'are the sites for many of the low country plantations and were the home of the once highly prized and valuable sea-island cotton.'³⁰

The Sea Islands are separated from the mainland and one another by networks of rivers, tidal creeks and inlets, marshes and coastal lagoons. The Sea Islands are noted for their natural beauty, and their romantic vistas of marshlands, waterways, ocean, cultivated fields, pine and mixed hardwood forests, and live oaks draped with Spanish moss.³¹

The Sea Island that would officially become James Island in 1670 was originally inhabited as early as 1609, by 'wandering tribes of Native Americans who made their living by hunting.'³² As they gradually depleted the wild game in any given coastal area, these Native Americans would leave that habitat and occupy the Sea Island to the west that had previously been undisturbed by the throngs of a robust humanity. The Spanish were the first European

²⁹ 'James Island and John's Island Historical and Architectural Inventory: A Report Carried out for the South Carolina Department of Archives and History:' *Survey Report* (Charleston: Preservation Consultants, Inc., Summer, 1989) p. 4.

³⁰ Alexander Sprunt, Jr., *Carolina Low Country Impressions* (New York: The Devin-Adair Company, 1964) p. 35.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 4.

settlers to come into contact with the Native Americans as early as 1609, and to the benefit of both people groups, they enjoyed good relations with one another for a relatively lengthy period. In fact, the Stono Indians and the first European settlers together founded Charles Town in 1670, the first permanent settlement in South Carolina.

Relations between the Native Americans and the English did not fare as well as those between the Spanish immigrants and the Indians almost seventy years earlier. 'Trouble arose because the Stono, apparently not understanding the concept of domesticated animals, treated the settlers' hogs, turkeys and geese as fair game and the planters retaliated by killing some of the Indians.' The Native Americans 'rebelled against the English in 1674.' Of course, the Indians were defeated, and some were 'shipped to the West Indies to be sold as slaves.'³³

Charles Town was established at the mouth of the Ashley River, less than a mile from the fertile Sea Island soil that would officially be recognized as James Island the following year. Only the Ashley River separated the formal establishment of Charles Town from James Island. 'In December 1671, the Council of the Province ordered a town to be established on James Island, "in a Creeke Southward from Stonoe Creek."³⁴ These two early settlements in the low country of South Carolina would become increasingly dependent on each other over the course of the next two centuries. They would thrive together during seasons of economic prosperity, and they would despair alongside the other during seasons of distress and hardship. Ultimately, 'this once flourishing city,' and the nearby paternalistic, plantation community that fostered

³³ Ibid., p. 5.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 6.

Charleston's antebellum reputation as the 'Queen City of the South,' would be crushed under the weight of war.

The new town was named for James, Duke of York, brother and heir of Charles II. James Town was designated a "colony" of 12,000 acres. Settlers were granted half-acre town lots, and drew lots of ten-acre "planting lots," adjacent to the town. No plan of James Town has survived in the public records. William J. Rivers, a nineteenth century historian, stated that James Town was settled by New Yorkers who, disgruntled by high taxes and hard winters in the Northern colony, came in ships with their cows and mares. A list of forty New Yorkers who received permission to immigrate to Carolina included seventeen black servants.³⁵

Growing up on a James Island plantation in the early nineteenth century was a substantially different experience than being raised in the social and cultural capital of Charleston. Even though the two communities were separated by only a small body of water, were easily visible to the human eye from one another, and were easily accessible to the other by a short boat journey, there was the outward effect of living in two entirely different cultures. The child who was raised in the city often knew very little of the social economy of the country, as there was very little reason to spend time outside the city. But the child who was raised on a South Carolina Low Country plantation tended to be more familiar with the pace and the culture of the city. In order to become involved in the social affairs and gatherings of the city elite, to receive a respectable education, and to learn the proper etiquette of the Charleston upper class, one had to spend a fair amount of time there. Most of the larger planter families who lived on the Sea Island plantations were financially secure and socially accepted among the affluent in the city. After all, 'the rapid expansion of rice- and cotton-growing and the fabulous prices commanded by these commodities fueled Charleston's longest boom.'³⁶

³⁵ Ibid., p. 6.

³⁶ Walter J. Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!* p. 187.

Many planters had town houses as well as plantation houses, in a “town and country” residential pattern which prevailed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The dual residency was motivated by the fear of “country fever” as well as a desire for the social and cultural amenities of the town.³⁷

The antebellum city of Charleston and the surrounding plantation communities were both undergirded by a well-established and efficient slave economy. Neither economy could have ‘succeeded’ without a very defined class system, with the affluent planters, professional lawyers, and merchants representing the aristocratic class and the slaves representing the labor force. The city dwellers and the country planters agreed that a well-defined hierarchy of status and power was essential for collective prosperity. But, unlike many other plantation communities in the low country of South Carolina that often accumulated a work force of one hundred slaves or more, James Island and other Sea-Island plantation communities fostered a smaller, more intimate, even paternalistic, society between whites and blacks. This familial phenomenon tended to have a powerful, transforming effect on all of those who were reared on Sea Island plantations. Summed up well by James Island historian, Robert Mellichamp, ‘all were as one family.’³⁸

The cash crop for James Island planters throughout the antebellum period was long staple cotton.³⁹ Certainly, there were other fruits and vegetables grown on the island such as ‘water and musk melons, tomatoes, okra, groundnuts, Irish potatoes, green peas, beans,

³⁷ Richard N. Cote, ‘Jewel of the Cotton Fields: A History of Secessionville Manor, a Nineteenth century Raised Plantation Cottage on James Island, Charleston County, South Carolina,’ (Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina: Richard N. Cote & Associates, 1995) p. 8. Original article held in the Charleston County Public Library.

³⁸ Robert Elliott Mellichamp, ‘Sketch of James Island, South Carolina’ *The Mellichamp Journal* (Charleston: spring, 1988) pp. 16-17.

³⁹ Mellichamp, p. 16. See also Sprunt, p.35.

squashes, cabbages, turnips and sweet potatoes,' but the production of cotton was the commodity that fueled Charleston's longest antebellum boom. According to historian, Doug Bostick, Willie McLeod, a third generation owner of the McLeod estate, and one of the largest plantations on James Island during the early nineteenth century, likened the Sea Island terrain to a 'blanket of snow' that extended from one end of the island to the other.⁴⁰

The production of rice and cotton required an entirely different agricultural base and work force. A thriving rice economy required the crops to be irrigated by fresh water alone. Even a slight blending of salt water and fresh water tended to destroy the rice crop. Naturally, the fusion of these two elements would have been impossible to prevent on the barrier and Sea Islands. These cotton driven communities were literally surrounded by salt water. Not surprisingly, a survey report for James Island concluded that 'rice was not grown on the islands because of the difficulty of providing fresh water, necessary for lowland rice cultivation.'⁴¹

The particular agricultural base was not the only factor that was unique to low country rice farms. Rice plantations tended to be significantly larger than cotton plantations and required masses of slaves to keep up with the demand of rice production. A typical cotton plantation on James Island rarely exceeded two-hundred acres, whereas low country rice plantations often exceeded two-thousand acres. The social effect of an agricultural economy that was based solely on the production of cotton is summed up best by Doug Bostick.

⁴⁰ The description of nineteenth century James Island as 'a blanket of snow,' was communicated to me by James Island historian, Doug Bostick. Bostick is currently a resident on James Island and is in the final stages of researching and writing the first comprehensive history of James Island, South Carolina.

⁴¹ James Island and Johns Island Historical And Architectural Inventory,' *Survey Report*, p. 11.

James Island was the perfect example of the slave economy in the South. The plantations on James Island were not the grand displays one might envision at Tara in 'Gone with the Wind.' These were working plantations that cultivated an integrated society between whites and blacks. Rarely did a James Island plantation employ an overseer. Thus the plantation owner was in daily contact with his slave workforce. Unlike other southern plantations, the slave quarters on James Island were in close proximity to the 'big house,' allowing for a much closer interaction.⁴²

From the colonial period through the nineteenth century, the vast majority of James Island was populated by black slaves. According to the records of the Presbyterian Church on James Island in 1853, there were thirty-four white members and two hundred thirty-four members registered as slaves.⁴³ The first Sea Island slaves were brought involuntarily from the 'British colonies in the West Indies and North America, and directly from West Africa.'⁴⁴ Most of the South Carolina low country slaves originated predominantly from West Africa.

Upon their arrival to the low country of South Carolina, the James Island slaves retained their African heritage much longer than those slaves who were immediately transported to the city of Charleston. James Island was relatively isolated from Charleston and the slaves were rarely exposed to the city. Consequently, they were able to preserve a relatively similar African culture and dialect among themselves on the plantations. The black dialect that was most represented on James Island in the nineteenth century was 'Gullah,' a mixture of West African linguistics and English.⁴⁵

⁴² Doug Bostick, *Unpublished History of James Island*.

⁴³ There is no census report available that details the population of James Island in the nineteenth century. However, the membership records for the James Island Presbyterian Church in 1853 suggest that there were approximately eight blacks for every white individual.

⁴⁴ 'Survey Report,' p. 13.

⁴⁵ 'Survey Report,' p. 13.

On the whole, the slaves were used predominantly for agricultural purposes, though many of the women and children served as house servants and cooks in the 'big house.' Of course, the James Island slaves offered many other auxiliary services to their masters. For instance, the only serviceable route to Charleston was by water, and so a few of the more skilled slaves built boats and regularly navigated the waters between the city and the country. Others served as 'carpenters, bricklayers and blacksmiths' throughout the rather isolated agricultural community. Finally, the West Africans also brought with them a 'tradition of oral recitation of folk tales, and a spirited musical heritage' that gradually took one of the forms of an evolving American Evangelicalism.⁴⁶ In a letter to a Rev. Dr. Mallard, Girardeau recalled the unique blend of the African 'spirited musical heritage' and the nineteenth century Southern Evangelicalism.

I remember that before I became a preacher, I used to hold meetings on my father's plantation, the cotton house affording a convenient place of assemblage. Previously, the plantation resounded with the sounds of jollity-- the merry strains of the fiddle, the measured beat of the "quaw sticks," and the rhythmical shuffling of the feet in the African juba.... I can never forget with what enthusiasm they used to sing their own improvised "spiritual": My brother, you promised Jesus, My brother, you promised Jesus, My brother you promised Jesus, to either fight or die. Oh, I wish I was there, To hear my Jesus' orders, Oh, I wish I was there, Lord, to wear my starry crown.⁴⁷

The James Island planter and his family resided in a number of places over the course of the year. At the very least, each family occupied a modest summer home on the island in one of the 'Pineland Villages.' About the twentieth of May each year, and with few exceptions, every white family on the Island would relocate from their plantation to the village or to their

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 14.

⁴⁷ This letter from Girardeau to Dr. Mallard is published in a paper written by Dr. Mallard entitled 'The Southwestern Presbyterian' and also in his unpublished book, *Plantation Life Before Emancipation*. See also, Blackburn, in *Life Work*, pp. 72-81.

home in the city in order to escape malaria and yellow fever. Some of the slaves relocated with their masters, especially when the family returned to their summer home in Charleston. The majority of the slaves, however, remained in their 'wooden cabins near the cotton fields they worked rather than in the village.'⁴⁸ At the time, the islanders were unaware that the 'summer fever' was caused by infectious mosquitos, but they were mindful that 'certain areas of well drained ground, where pine trees abounded, or seashore areas where there was a prevailing breeze from the ocean' tended to shelter them from these deadly illnesses. ⁴⁹

James Island planters would move their families to one of four 'villages' during the summer months. Some would move to Fort Johnson, the village at the most eastern edge of James Island and less than a quarter mile from Fort Sumter. Others would spend the summer months at Centerville, the village in the middle of James island, and a few would move to the western village, commonly referred to as Secessionville. A handful of James Island planters of considerable wealth would often relocate to their third home in Charleston as well.

The Episcopal Church and the Presbyterian Church were established on James Island during the colonial period and were both largely attended by whites and blacks during the antebellum years, due to a 'revival of interest' on the island. The Presbyterian Church was originally established in 1706 and the Episcopal church was built 'at an early date,' presumably before the turn of the eighteenth century. The facilities of both churches were destroyed and

⁴⁸ Cote, 'Jewel of the Cotton Fields,' Introduction.

⁴⁹ 'Survey Report,' pp. 21-22.

rebuilt many times by fires, hurricanes and wars throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁵⁰

The major source of religious expression and social influence on James Island during the antebellum years was the church. Slaves generally accompanied their masters to church and were subject to the same standards for church membership. Unlike many of the other churches in the city and on the larger rice plantations in the upper ranges of South Carolina, where the slaves and their masters attended different services or were separated by a gallery during the same service, the slaves on James Island generally attended the same worship service, sang the same hymns, and often sat alongside the families to whom they belonged. This fostered an antebellum paternalism unique to the inhabitants of James Island and the surrounding barrier islands.

Huguenot Ancestry and Girardeau Family Background:

John Lafayette Girardeau descended from French Huguenot ancestry, and those who knew him well and who were also familiar with the Huguenot religious history were inclined to attribute his most attractive personal traits to his French heritage.⁵¹ In a memorial service held by the Charleston presbytery, the Rev. F. L. Leeper mentioned that Girardeau 'inherited all the warmth, and quick, strong passions of his Huguenot ancestors.' Girardeau's son in law, George Blackburn, agreed.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 15,16.

⁵¹ It is certainly not my intent to suggest that there was a direct correlation between Girardeau's 'French blood' or 'Huguenot ancestry' and any personal characteristic or trait that he may have possessed. Indeed, such correlations, as noted above, were assumed by many of his nineteenth century Southern Evangelicals peers and colleagues. With that said, Girardeau was commonly described by those who knew him well as one who possessed a 'warm,' 'passionate,' and 'emotionally' driven disposition.

His French blood strongly manifested itself in his treatment of his children, he delighted to pet and play with them, and his method of dealing with them drew out and cultivated their emotional natures.⁵²

Huguenot History:

Beginning in the early 1680s and extending through the 1690s, the majority of French Huguenots fled to the British colonies and to other Protestant-receptive localities such as the Netherlands, Geneva, and Berlin.⁵³ According to George Blackburn, the persecution that the Huguenots endured leading up their departure from France, in addition to the determination that was necessary to persevere and survive in the face of the unknown, brought out 'an unusual number of splendid qualities in that remarkable people.'

There came forth a people strong of mind and heart, intense in their Calvinism, rigid in their discipline, pure in their lives, unbending in their loyalty, ardent in their zeal, tender in their sympathies, and magnetic in their personalities.⁵⁴

Jean Girardeau, along with '160,000 French adults and children,'⁵⁵ illegally fled the town of Talmont, a neighboring town near the Saint coast near La Chaume on the coast of Poitou, during the 1680s. The reasons for their departure are relatively clear though far from

⁵² In an address to the Charleston Presbytery following the death of Girardeau, the Rev. F.L. Leeper read a paper that highlighted the unique ancestry of Girardeau. The address is published in Blackburn, *Life Work*, pp. 379-386.

⁵³ Jon Butler, *The Huguenots in America: A Refuge People in New World Society* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983) pp. 1-3.

⁵⁴ Blackburn, p. 7. Once again, Blackburn draws, by inference, a direct correlation between Huguenot religious persecution in the late seventeenth century and robust Calvinism among Huguenot descended nineteenth century Southern Presbyterians, including Girardeau, but he does not offer any tangible evidence to support his claim. His correlation between seventeenth century Huguenot persecution and nineteenth century 'purity,' 'loyalty,' and 'tenderness,' words that were commonly used to describe Girardeau, further suggests that those who knew Girardeau, as we will continue to observe, were naturally endeared to him.

⁵⁵ Butler, p. 1. The belief that Jean Girardeau was one of the 160,000 emigrants to flee from France was proposed by Ronald Girardeau Crowe and Elizabeth Lee Girardeau in 'The Girardeau Family of the United States,' *Huguenot Society of South Carolina* 94 (1989) pp. 65-66.

pleasant. The staunch Catholic monarch, Louis XIV, revoked the Edict of Nantes, which had been established by his grandfather Henry IV in 1598 to allow for a certain degree of religious freedom among a relatively small yet burgeoning French Protestant population. Louis XIV had begun taking steps to retract his grandfather's injunction as early as 1660 when he prohibited the Huguenots from 'building or enlarging any new Protestant schools or churches,' 'restricted Protestant teachers from teaching Catholic children,' 'banned the Huguenots from practicing several crafts and professions, most notably law,' and ordered 'constant surveillance' amongst 'Protestant teachers, preachers, and booksellers.' In 1681, Louis XIV applied more compelling tactics when he 'turned loose his yellow-uniformed cavalry or "dragonnades" on a special mission--that of terrorizing Huguenots into deserting their Protestant beliefs and practices.'⁵⁶

The most frequently mentioned tactic used by the dragonnades was to 'lodge' with a Protestant family. This meant that the family had to furnish the soldiers' food and shelter, which, of course, quickly exhausted their resources. While they were forced to 'lodge' the soldiers, members of the family were often threatened, coerced, raped, tortured, and even killed.⁵⁷

The strategy of Louis XIV to drastically reduce, if not expunge, the Protestant faith in France was overwhelmingly successful. In a nation that boasted a population of approximately 20 million in 1680, about 1 million were Protestant. As Louis XIV curtailed religious freedoms throughout the 1660s and 1670s and eventually revoked the Edict of Nantes in 1685, the number of Protestants who remained in France by 1690 was less than 75,000. The majority

⁵⁶ Crowe and Girardeau, p. 66. For a more detailed description, see Butler's chapter entitled 'French Protestantism and the Revocation of 1685,' in *The Huguenots in America*, pp. 13-40.

⁵⁷ Crowe and Girardeau, p. 66.

of Protestants had converted to Catholicism 'under duress,' of course, while less than a fifth of France's entire Protestant population sought habitation elsewhere.⁵⁸ According to historian S. Hardman Moore, after 1685, 'freedom of worship was impossible until the French Revolution.'⁵⁹ On the whole, those Protestants who endured persecution during the 1660s and 1670s, but were eventually forced to flee their native country by 1690, were passionately committed to the perpetuation of the reformed doctrines and principles as previously established by Martin Luther and John Calvin.

The fervent religious commitment of the Huguenot Protestants, who risked being captured and possibly martyred upon escape from France, is difficult to dispute. Their inability to transport any belongings across the border, the disappointment of leaving their homeland, and the uncertainties of thriving, even surviving, elsewhere, assuming they arrived, constituted the martyr-like devotion of their religious faith. In a powerful understatement, Ronald Crowe and Elizabeth Girardeau declared, 'Others, like, we believe, Jean Girardeau, who were less willing to compromise their faith, fled.'⁶⁰

Jean Girardeau was among ten thousand French Huguenots who initially found refuge in southern England before crossing the Atlantic and settling along the eastern seaboard.⁶¹ Why Jean Girardeau landed at the port of Charles Town is not exactly known. It is clear, however, that 'most Huguenots who migrated immediately to South Carolina from England were young,

⁵⁸ Butler, *The Huguenots in America*, p. 13.

⁵⁹ S. Hardman Moore, 'Huguenots' in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd., 1993) pp. 415, 416.

⁶⁰ Crowe and Girardeau, p. 67.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

single, and poor,' and given the strong probability that Jean Girardeau was in his mid-twenties, single, and poor, some Girardeau family historians have speculated that these factors contributed to his arrival to the port in Charles Town.⁶² Jean Girardeau and other determined Huguenots 'became the first major Continental European refugee group to settle in the British colonies of North America since the arrival of the Puritans half a century earlier.'⁶³

The experience of Jean Girardeau in South Carolina, and of most Huguenot communities scattered up and down the eastern seaboard, was one of 'rapid assimilation into the dominant English society.'⁶⁴ Of course, much of this acclimatization should be attributed to the willingness of the Huguenot refugees to unite with English Protestants in existing Anglican parishes.⁶⁵ Immediately upon their landing in South Carolina, the majority of the Huguenots attempted to establish their own Protestant Church in Charles Town, but many low country Huguenots quickly realized the challenge involved in such an undertaking and gradually united

⁶² Ibid., p. 67. According to Crowe and Girardeau, 'they probably came to Carolina in response to French language pamphlets distributed by the colony's proprietors in London and other parts of England. These pamphlets advertized Carolina in glowing terms, stressing the positive and downplaying the hardships and dangers.' For a detailed description of the earliest Huguenot refugees in South Carolina, see Butler, *The Huguenots in America*, 'South Carolina: Refugees in Slavery's Elysium,' pp. 91-143.

⁶³ Butler, *The Huguenots in America*, p. 1

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 68.

⁶⁵ It should be noted that agricultural opportunities provided another vital dimension for Huguenot assimilation into a predominantly English occupied territory. At the early age of 16, men could receive a grant of up to 150 acres, and it appears that Jean Girardeau must have taken advantage of this legislation. By the time of his death in 1720/1721, he 'owned a plantation house in Berkeley County (now Charleston County) and over 2600 acres of land in the original Berkeley, Craven, and Colleton Counties.' Assuming that Jean Girardeau arrived in South Carolina with very few resources, which is highly probable given the nature of his departure from France, he must have adapted quite easily. See Crowe and Girardeau, pp. 68-69.

with the established church of the commonwealth, the Church of England.⁶⁶ Jean Girardeau was presumably one of the many Huguenots who, no later than 1718, transferred his membership from the French Huguenot Church in Charles Town to the St. Andrew's Parish Episcopal Church just across the Ashley River.⁶⁷ Over the next half century, many of the original Huguenot settlers, the Girardeau clan not excluded, began to permeate the entire Protestant low country community. They cultivated ecclesiastical fellowship among Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Methodists, and Baptists.

Girardeau Family Background:

After settling in South Carolina, Jean Girardeau married French Huguenot Ann Le Sade in 1703. They had five sons and no daughters.⁶⁸ The only son who carried on the Girardeau name for more than two decades was their youngest son, Isaac Girardeau, the great-grandfather of John L. Girardeau. The male descendants of the other four sons died of malaria

⁶⁶ The Act of 1706, which officially recognized the Church of England as the established Church in the British colonies, was the primary reason why the majority of Huguenots deserted their plans for a Protestant church of their own. To support two churches, one by taxation and the other with their remaining resources, was simply too heavy a burden. This collective decision, however, to join the National Anglican Church should not primarily be viewed as a religious compromise nor the result of an oppressive British mandate. Relative to the living conditions in France, persecution and oppression were non-existent. Rather, due to their relative minority status in a predominantly British-occupied commonwealth, it was an understandable course of action. For a more detailed description of the Carolina Huguenots and their entrance into the Anglican church by 1710, see Duncan D. Wallace, *South Carolina--A Short History* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1951); Louis B. Wright, *South Carolina* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1976).

⁶⁷ Crowe and Girardeau, p. 69. This Episcopal church that existed 'across the Ashley River' was most likely the James Island Episcopal church.

⁶⁸ It is highly probable that Ann Le Sade first met Jean Girardeau just before the turn of the eighteenth century. A colony of Huguenots migrated to South Carolina from Connecticut via Dorchester, England and Massachusetts around 1695. See Erskine Clarke, *Wrestlin' Jacob: A Portrait of Religion in the Old South* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979) p. 4.

or other related diseases in the infested swamps of the South Carolina low country. In 1755, Isaac Girardeau and his wife, Ann Chamberlain, left the low country of South Carolina and relocated to Liberty County, Georgia, to join with the Dorchester, South Carolina, Puritans at Midway, Georgia.⁶⁹ The motives that contributed to this move were economically and religiously based.

The rich soil and the tidal rivers offered ample opportunity for the cultivation of rice and sea-island cotton. Yet as God-fearing Calvinists, they were aware of the seductions of such a rich wilderness, and they immediately set about establishing an organized community.... At the center of this community stood the church.⁷⁰

Isaac and Ann Girardeau's third surviving son, John Girardeau, was the first Girardeau born in Georgia. He 'grew up on his father's rice plantation on the south shore of the North Newport River.'⁷¹ Along with his older brother, William, John Girardeau served during the Revolutionary war and in various military posts in Georgia, North and South Carolina, and Virginia. For reasons not completely known, he returned to the 'Charleston vicinity' in the aftermath of the war, where he remained as a cotton planter until his death in 1837. His older brother, William, returned to Georgia to settle the estate of his father, Isaac Girardeau, and remained there until his death in 1822.⁷²

⁶⁹ Ronald Crowe and Elizabeth Girardeau, 'French Huguenot Descendants Share Children of Pride Heritage,' *Huguenot Society of South Carolina* 91 (1986) p. 141. Isaac Girardeau, along with his older brother, Richard, signed the earliest Articles of Incorporation of Midway Presbyterian Church. See James Stacy, *History of the Midway Congregational Church: Liberty County, Georgia* (Newnan, Ga.: S.W. Murray, 1951) pp. 105-114.

⁷⁰ Clarke, *Wrestlin' Jacob*, p. 5.

⁷¹ Crowe and Girardeau, p. 144.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 141. Crowe and Girardeau rightly document John Girardeau's residence after the war as the 'Charleston vicinity.' In all likelihood, the more specific location would be that he resided on James Island until his death in 1837.

Relatively little is known of John Girardeau, the paternal grandfather of John L. Girardeau. He was awarded the title of sergeant for his service in the Revolutionary war. He was totally blind for some years before his death at the age of eighty-one. And he was a 'devout member of the Presbyterian Church.' In the family Bible, John L Girardeau scribbled some notes that provide his only surviving impression of his paternal grandfather. [He] 'was a devoted member of the Presbyterian church-- [he] died as he had lived, 'in the faith'--[he was] buried in the Presbyterian church yard, James Island-- inscribed on his tombstone, I know that my Redeemer liveth.'⁷³

John L. Girardeau's paternal grandmother, Eleanor Dashwood Girardeau, also received sparse recognition from the pen of her grandson. Even so, her denominational affiliation, her commitment to the authority of scripture, his perception of her high intelligence and pleasant disposition, and her view of and dependence upon Jesus left an indelible impression on young Girardeau. He recorded four brief, but poignant statements that pertained directly to his paternal grandmother. [She] 'was a member of the Presbyterian church-- [she] read the Bible constantly-- [she was] intelligent and cheerful- just before she died the hymn commencing, Jesus, lover of my soul was sung at her bedside. She exclaimed, "I am safe"-- [she was] buried in the Presbyterian church-yard, James Island.'⁷⁴

⁷³ Blackburn, *Life Work*, p. 8. Girardeau's original notes concerning his immediate and extended family are found in the Girardeau family Bible. The family Bible is located in the Blackburn Room at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi. John L. Girardeau left his library, along with his notes, letters and other relevant resources, to his son-in-law, George Blackburn. At his death, Blackburn willed a large portion of that same library to Reformed Theological Seminary.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

John Girardeau and Eleanor Dashwood Girardeau had six children, of whom only two survived childhood. Their eldest son, John Bohun Girardeau, was the father of John L. Girardeau. Like his own father, John Bohun was also primarily a cotton planter in the South Carolina low country. According to James Island historian, Doug Bostick, he would have been a small scale planter, relative to many of the other planters' on the island. He only owned seventeen slaves and, therefore, had a limited amount of resources.⁷⁵ Given this economic position, Bostick concluded that he could have handled up to seventy-five acres of land. 'Even by James Island standards, this was a pretty small farming operation. But, with seventeen slaves, he was obviously actively planting.'⁷⁶

Early Years of John L. Girardeau:

John L. Girardeau did not provide a detailed account of his childhood years. Nor did anyone else who grew up alongside him see fit to leave behind a comprehensive testimony to his earliest years.⁷⁷ The first words that were documented and remain in existence from

⁷⁵ In his incomplete history of James Island, Doug Bostick concluded that 'the rule of thumb for that era was to count your slaves' ability to contribute in measures of full-hand, half hand, and quarter-hand. If you had a good, healthy field hand, thirty years old, he would be a full hand. If you had a ten year old child you put in the field, and he was capable of producing one-half the work of a man, he would be counted as a half hand. Therefore, Girardeau's seventeen slaves might only have been twelve full hands, once one has accounted for young children and house slaves. One full-hand could handle about six acres of cotton.'

⁷⁶ Bostick, From the 1820s to the 1860s, a James Island planter could expect to yield about one hundred thirty- five pounds of ginned cotton to the acre. On the expense side, it cost about \$11.52 annually to feed a slave in this era. The clothing cost for each slave was approximately \$6.12 per year. After adding housing and medical expenses, the cost to adequately provide for a slave was \$50.00 per year. For additional figures, see Guion Griffis, *A Social History of the Sea Islands* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 1985).

⁷⁷ The only resources that are still in existence today that relate directly to the childhood of Girardeau, come from his own pen. The material is not a lengthy account of his childhood. Rather, it consists of short, choppy phrases or notes that appear to have surfaced in his mind as he reflected upon his upbringing on James Island and Charleston. It is difficult to say when Girardeau wrote these notes, but it is likely that they were written as he was nearing the end

Girardeau's own pen, as they related specifically to his early years, incorporated the larger themes from which his entire life should be understood. He begins,

I was born on James Island, near Charleston, on the 14th of November, 1825. I was baptized by Rev. Dr. A. W. Leland, the pastor of the Presbyterian Church. My earliest recollections are connected with my mother. I had just learned to read—about five years old—she called me to her, and, holding the Bible in her lap, bade me to lean on her knees and read the nineteenth chapter of John's Gospel, commencing, "Then Pilate therefore took Jesus and scourged Him." I was very much affected by the account of the Savior's sufferings and cried.⁷⁸

The themes that Girardeau documented as he briefly recounted his formative years consisted of the 'town and country' influence of James Island and Charleston, the James Island Presbyterian Church, the Bible, his relationship to his mother and her particular influence upon him, and his recollection of learning how to read. These impressions, influences, and themes that were gradually etched into the mind of Girardeau throughout his childhood and adolescence would, for better and worse, develop and mature over the course of his life. The combined effect of all of these interrelated influences upon Girardeau, over the course of his formative years, were significant to his becoming an ideal Southern Presbyterian Evangelical.

Parental Influence:

Young Girardeau formed a deep commitment and attachment to his mother and his father. Because his mother died when he was only seven, however, he envisioned his parents in completely different ways. His mother emphasized his religious or spiritual development while

of his life, and was pondering his earliest memories. These notes were first published by Blackburn, pp.10-21. Original documents remain in Blackburn Room at Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi.

⁷⁸ Girardeau, *Notes on Childhood*, in Blackburn, p. 10.

his father tended to channel his academic abilities. Both of them, however, held a prominent place in his life and played an important role in his childhood development.

Claudia Hearne Freer (1801-1833), was the daughter of an established and successful James Island planter.⁷⁹ Though she died at the age of thirty-one and young Girardeau was only able to enjoy the benefit of his mother for seven years, he was persuaded in his later years that she was the primary figure whose life and death had a considerable religious impact on him. Indeed, it was no strange coincidence that when Girardeau reflected upon his childhood years, in light of his professional course as a Presbyterian minister, he was immediately reminded of his mother. 'My earliest recollections are connected with my mother.'⁸⁰

In the few scribbled notes that Girardeau disclosed concerning his relation to his mother, he did not mention his affiliations with her apart from some religious connection, very often in the form of a particular story or lesson that he was later persuaded had the extended effect of shaping his spiritual disposition in a specific way. On one occasion, he recalled the enjoyment that he experienced simply sitting next to her at one of the many Presbyterian prayer meetings that the Girardeau family attended on the island. 'I used to sit on a bench near my grandmother or mother.' He was also reminded of a childhood story involving his mother that he believed was instrumental to his spiritual development.⁸¹

⁷⁹ For a detailed account of the James Island Freer household, see Richard N. Cote, *Jewel of the Cotton Fields*, pp. 41-53.

⁸⁰ Girardeau, *Notes on Childhood Experience*, in Blackburn, p. 10.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10. These reminiscences or reflections that Girardeau noted concerning the religious influence that his mother had upon him before she died must be analyzed in the context of retrospective history. These reflections about his mother toward the end of his life should not be evaluated as evidence of how he perceived her as a child.

When about seven years old, swore dreadfully at a playmate; so loudly that I was heard at a distance. Mother dispatched Lem for me, who carried me, fighting and screaming, to her. She took me into her room, and corrected me soundly. Remember it with gratitude. It did me good. Thank God for a mother who was fond and tender but would not suffer sin in her children.⁸²

Girardeau's mother also demonstrated a profound concern for the Sea Island slaves.

More importantly, Girardeau observed his mother's interest in them from an early age and developed a similar sense of obligation or duty to provide for their most basic physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. Additionally, the recurring visual display of affection that Girardeau witnessed as his mother interacted with the low country plantation slaves fostered his own commitment to do the same. Finally, these childhood experiences provided young Girardeau with an opportunity, unique to those who lived on the smaller cotton plantations, to observe and learn the language and culture of the African slaves. Once again, Girardeau recounted a series of stories concerning his mother that were relayed to him by many of the slaves on James Island.

Often have I been asked by the poor Negroes on the island, "Are you Miss Claudy's child?" "Yes." "Bless you. Your mudder was a good woman!" She was kind to everybody, especially to sick and needy Negroes.⁸³

But it was also the death of Girardeau's mother that had a striking long-term effect on his religious interest and development. His writings suggest he was most naturally inclined to respect, admire and emulate the one who was abruptly taken from him at the young age of

⁸² Ibid., p. 13.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 14.

seven.⁸⁴ Girardeau had a very clear recollection of her death, and he described the event in exquisitely moving detail.

When I was seven years old dear mother died. We were playing on the grass-plot in front of Aunt Elizabeth's, when some one came and told us she was dying. Strange sound! Tommy and I went into the house and stood in the passage-way by the door of her chamber. The room was full of people. It was an afternoon in June, about 4:00 o'clock. There she lay, pale and speechless. Father was at the head of the bed, ill himself, too weak to succeed in getting on the bed; she beckoned to uncle Edward and pointed to her children, who were standing near the bed, as much as to say, 'Let nothing harm them when I am gone.' She then gave her hand in a last farewell which she could not speak, but which she tenderly looked, to father, and, afterwards, to her children and relatives successively, and having thus bidden them all good-bye, she quickly closed her eyes and fell asleep in Jesus' arms. I think I see it all now.⁸⁵

The death of his mother created an entirely different familial environment in the Girardeau household. At the age of seven, young Girardeau was now the oldest son of five children and was thrust into the position of having to provide an element of oversight and care to his younger siblings. Effectively, the death of his mother marked the transition in his life from one who would receive and observe care to the one now primarily responsible for dispensing that care to his younger brothers and sisters. Perhaps more directly related to Girardeau's social and religious development, he was also forced to assume a leadership role among those whom he would have naturally considered to be a part of his extended family; the Sea Island slaves. Consequently, from the age of seven, Girardeau actively began the process of fostering

⁸⁴ It is impossible to quantify my view that Girardeau's mother had the most significant spiritual or religious effect upon him, and one that was best expressed later in his life through his ministry to the South Carolina slave. Further, the historian does not possess the liberty to project his own feelings, opinions, or intuitions apart from the historical record. To be sure, Girardeau never explicitly stated, as a child or as an adult, that his mother, whether alive or dead, was primarily responsible for his future professional course as a Presbyterian minister. But it is extremely relevant that every piece of documentation from Girardeau's pen that includes a description of his mother does not take place apart from some religious overtone or reference to the Sea Island slaves.

⁸⁵ Girardeau, *Notes*, in Blackburn, pp. 13-14.

a more paternalistic mind-set toward the James Island slaves that would soon extend toward his ministry to the slaves in Charleston. Girardeau elaborates,

In the death of our dear mother I recognize one of the most marked dealings of Providence with me, as with the other members of the family. After her death our relations changed. A new complexion was imparted to our whole subsequent life. With her life terminated one distinct section of my own. There a monument was raised which designated the end of one period and the commencement of another.⁸⁶

In one of the final passages that Girardeau revealed about his relation to his mother, it appears that Girardeau battled the pain associated with her death for an extended period of time. He had established an intimate bond with her, even within the relatively short period that they spent together leaving little doubt that her death was an immense blow to him as a child and a source of confusion for the remainder of his life.

And now, in looking back upon it, and reviewing the part of my life intervening between her death and the present time, I think I can distinctly see how it has worked for ultimate good. I humbly believe the Lord intended it so. We lost the benefit of her motherly care and instruction, but we gained the benefit of tuition in the school of affliction; and eternity alone will reveal how important that discipline was.⁸⁷

Girardeau did not record much information that would make it easy to interpret his relationship to his father. Certainly, he never cultivated the same spiritual connection with his father that he found with his mother, but he indicated throughout his life that he had immense respect and gratitude for him. Perhaps the thoughts and feelings that Girardeau had acquired for his father were summed up best in the family Bible.

He had a clear strong mind. It was one of my sweetest privileges, my dear and honored father, to hold communion with thee on earth; it is one of my fondest hopes to renew it in heaven. Said in his last bed that his preparations for eternity had already been made--

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 15.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 15.

funeral services performed by the Rev. John Douglass-- Hymn-- "O For the death of those who slumber in the Lord."⁸⁸

Girardeau recalled another significant memory of his father that occurred immediately following his mother's death, when he deliberately accompanied his father into one of the bedrooms in the house and 'lay beside him on the bed. Rev. Mr. Edward Buist was with him and offered prayer, kneeling by his bed.' This scene underscores the affection that young Girardeau had for his father. It is further illustrative of young Girardeau's nurturing demeanor. But perhaps this scene should be identified most supremely for the irony that it conveys in light of Girardeau's words, 'After her death, our relations changed.' Within moments of his mother's death, young Girardeau was inclined to provide consolation for his grieving father.⁸⁹

Girardeau was most inclined to recall the value that his father placed on education. Of the three references that Girardeau documented concerning his father's influence upon him, each of them emphasized the importance of education. What is more, Girardeau's father had grand expectations for his son academically, an awareness that became clear to young Girardeau at a very early age. His stellar results in school and his academic aspirations were likely motivated by his father's demand for high levels of academic achievement.

When about five years old, was sent to school to Mr. Rawlins Rivers, who taught the only school on the Island. Head and foot plan. Used to stimulate the ambition of the

⁸⁸ Girardeau Family Bible, Blackburn Collection.

⁸⁹ To be sure, Girardeau's father may also have provided comfort to his son in the wake of her death. But my analysis of Girardeau and his father, and even at this very early stage in young Girardeau's life, suggests that the son was more naturally empathetic and, therefore inclined to extend these consoling gestures. This evaluation is not based primarily on my interpretation of the scene above. Rather, it is an assessment that takes into an account the totality of their individual lives.

scholars. Remember being required by my father to give account of my standing in the classes. Great tribulation to be taken down, and obliged to report to him.⁹⁰

At another time, while attending Mr. Rivers school on James Island, young Girardeau vividly recalled his father inquiring into the nature of his academic performance. Girardeau's father kept a consistent, even daily watch over the academic achievements of his son.

At James Island I was very ambitious. Nearly always at the head of the class. Mr. Rivers adopted the plan of incentive to study by appeals to emulation. This was encouraged by father, who uniformly inquired concerning my daily stand at school and praised or condemned accordingly.⁹¹

And then finally, Girardeau recalled what had been a somewhat disturbing incident that occurred at a very significant point in his youth. It does, however, confirm and reinforce the suggestion that young Girardeau's father was committed to the best education that was available to his son. This incident also marked the formal end of his academic education on cotton plantations of James Island and the beginning of higher education in the 'town' of Charleston.

When I was ten years old I was sent to Charleston and placed at the school of the German Friendly Society in Archdale Street.... Here commenced a new and important era in my life. My associations were all changed. I was elated at first at the prospect of going to live in "Town." But one or two days sufficed to cool my ardor, and soon the home of my childhood haunted me by night and day. Begged father to take me back into the country, did not wish to live in town. He refused; bitter, bitter disappointment. I was now almost left to take care of myself in every respect.⁹²

Young Girardeau remained at the German school in Charleston for four years before he entered the College of Charleston. His father's insistence that his son remain in Charleston and receive the best education available to him appeared to pay off. While at the German

⁹⁰ Girardeau, *Notes*, in Blackburn, p. 12.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

school in Charleston, young Girardeau was exposed to a degree of academic breadth and vigor that he simply would not have received on James Island. What is more, Girardeau was thrust into a completely different culture, where he gradually learned the social skills that equipped him to interact with the Charleston elite. This enlightened city culture also provided young Girardeau with an introduction to the moral erosion that was becoming widespread within the city limits of nineteenth century Charleston.

Commenced Latin: Gould's Adam Grammar. Jacob's Latin Reader. Caesar. Virgil. Greek: Tables of conjugations, declensions, &c. Jacob's Greek Reader. Graeca Majora. Xenophon's Cyropaedia... Morals of the school generally excessively low. Lying considered almost a virtue, it practiced for the purpose of avoiding a flogging. One virtue at a premium, refusal to inform. A grand, martyr-like quality.⁹³

In summary, both of young Girardeau parents were influential in shaping his spiritual interests and academic achievements. It is more difficult to explain the immediate and long term influence that Girardeau's mother had upon him apart from an analysis of his entire life. His deep affections for her and his spiritual connections with her are not easily measured, yet her religious impact upon him in life and death was considerable and cannot be dismissed. The effects of her death affected the entire family structure and served to commission young Girardeau to a host of nurturing responsibilities. What is more, from the age of seven, he would increasingly assume a posture toward the free and the enslaved that reflected his mother's consistent gestures of kindness and concern for the welfare of the Sea Island slave. In large measure, Girardeau's mother was the model for his developing paternalism.

Girardeau's father was most responsible for ensuring and demanding the best environment for the academic advancement of his son. His persistent efforts to oversee young Girardeau's education in Charleston prepared him to relate socially and academically to the city

⁹³ Ibid., p. 20.

culture. Apart from his father's insistence to send his son to Charleston at the age of ten, young Girardeau would not have been exposed to the two diametrically opposed social cultures from his youth. Unlike his intimate associations with his mother and the strong bond that naturally existed between the two of them, Girardeau's relationship to his father was primarily driven by performance. Their complementary influence upon him, however, went a long way in making Girardeau a consistent Southern Presbyterian Evangelical.

James Island Presbyterian Church:

One important component of Girardeau's recollection of his parents and their influence upon him was their Calvinistic piety. This piety cannot be understood without reference to the Girardeau family's experiences in the James Island Presbyterian Church. When he recollected his early years, he cited the 'church' more than anything else. But his references to the church should not be viewed as an isolated part of his life. Indeed, for young Girardeau, it was the grid through which all other associations were to be understood and evaluated.

According to the notes that he drafted before he died, there 'had been a revival of religion on the Island and many had made a profession of religion.' Commenting on the period of this 'revival of religion,' Girardeau concluded, 'I must have been about three or four years old.'⁹⁴ This wave of religious interest on James Island made a considerable impression on young Girardeau, an impact that would influence him for the remainder of his life. Many years later, he was able to recall precisely the effects that this early religious activity had upon him.

This 'revival of religion' tended to manifest itself in the daily lives of James Island Presbyterians in at least three particular ways. First, there was a significant increase in the

⁹⁴ Girardeau, *Notes*, in Blackburn, p. 10.

number of people who attended prayer meetings that 'were held at night from house to house.' Secondly, individual households, and often their slaves as well, gathered together each morning for family devotions. And finally, the Sabbath was more widely recognized as a full day of rest and worship. Though preaching was the focal point of the Sabbath, there was a greater emphasis on the importance of community and fellowship throughout the entire day.

Young Girardeau and his family were major participants in all three of these religious expressions. He later recalled that as a child he did not need to be persuaded to attend these prayer meetings. 'One evening [I] cried to go to prayer meeting with father and mother.' On another occasion, Girardeau commented on the frequency and popularity of the prayer meetings.

Remember the prayer meetings which were held at night from house to house. Remember Dr. Leland standing in a corner near a table and speaking to the people. The room used to be filled. The yards filled with horses and gigs.⁹⁵

Another observable effect of this 'revival of religion' that Girardeau remembered was the family worship that took place daily within the home. Family worship generally consisted of a reading from a chapter in the Bible, a fairly brief devotional explanation of the readings from the head of the household, and a season of prayer. Girardeau briefly recalled this ritual within his own home. 'The big bible covered with cloth is opened, the chapter read, then we kneel down.'⁹⁶

In many of the families, the slaves were also requested to attend family worship. Perhaps it was through his intimate daily associations with the slaves that young Girardeau

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp, 10-11.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 16.

began to identify with the religious culture of the plantation slave, develop his affections for them, and learn to communicate and minister to them. Girardeau remembered one of the daily prayer meetings that was held by his 'Uncle Jackey.' Not surprisingly, immediately following his recollection of family worship 'in his family,' Girardeau listed the slaves of that household and then briefly highlighted one of his fond experiences with them.

Remember well his holding family worship early every morning. The servants, whom I remember as being in his family, were Sally, Maria, Chloe, Philip and 'Driver Isaac.' Remember his early horn! How many associations cluster around the sound of that horn! Seldom hear a horn at daylight now without thinking of the sweet sound of 'Driver Isaac's' morning call.⁹⁷

In addition to the evening prayer meetings and the daily family devotions, young Girardeau was also exposed to the social and religious ritual of Southern Presbyterian Sunday worship. Young Girardeau was raised on a small cotton plantation on the furthest east side of James Island, right near Fort Johnson. The Presbyterian church on the island was about three miles to the west of their residence, which meant that it was a considerable distance to travel to church on Sunday morning. Young Girardeau delightfully recounted one of those Sunday morning journeys.

Remember Uncle Isaac riding 'old Scott,' grandfather's old sorrel, to church, and the exquisite satisfaction with which I would ride him home with crossed stirrups to suit my length. One day the old fellow went off with me in a canter and frightened me dreadfully.⁹⁸

The Sabbath day ritual was a particularly common scenario in the agricultural and plantation communities. The Sunday ritual for the members of the James Island Presbyterian church began when they awakened on the 'Sabbath' day, and it did not end until the evening

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 16.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 11.

worship service had concluded. It was a day that was devoted to the worship of God. But worship was not merely to be understood as consisting of morning and evening services alone. To be sure, the worship services were the two pivotal events, around which the other activities of the day were arranged. But there was also an emphasis on children's instruction, fellowship, and community life. 'Remember going to the Sabbath school held at the church.' Girardeau also fondly recalled the lengthy seasons of Sunday morning fellowship before and after the worship service.

Remember well the church; the pew where father and mother sat. Sat sometimes with them and sometimes with Uncle Freer in his square corner pew next the side door. And that holly tree, whose bright red berries used to hang near the little square window on the side of the pulpit. I think I see them gleaming there now. The gentlemen used to stand under two large red-oak trees and talk before the service and make curious figures on the ground with their sticks. The boys used to ramble about the churchyard, pulling sassafras roots to chew and wild violets to 'fight cows' with their crooked necks; then stroll down the road and drink water from the ditch, out of bay-leaves.⁹⁹

The ultimate focus of the Sabbath day ritual was preaching. Everything in the worship service culminated in the exposition of a specific passage from the Bible. Preaching was believed to be exercised by those who were especially called by God to that vocation. They were believed to have been given a special gift to be utilized in the pulpit. The preacher was also recognized as the one who had been given authority by God to explain the Bible. Young Girardeau was confronted with this 'high calling' from his earliest connection with the Presbyterian church.

In addition to his exposure to the criteria of a preacher, young Girardeau was also uniquely endowed with affections that were particularly susceptible to highly charged and emotional sermons. In his early years, the sermons that he heard tended to have an acute and

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 11.

powerful effect on him. No doubt, the distinguished office of a preacher was etched in him during his early years while in attendance at the James Island Presbyterian church.

Remember him (Dr. Leland) walking up the path through the churchyard to the church; and in the pulpit. Wondered why he did not strike his hand against the sounding-board when he gesticulated... One afternoon Mr. Osborn preached and spoke solemnly of eternity. The evening shadows were lengthening, the woods grew browner, and the sermon, connected with the solemn look of the woods, affected me very much.¹⁰⁰

The 'revival of religion' on James Island in the late 1820s and early 1830s had a measurable effect on young Girardeau's philosophy of ministry. Girardeau would place a high premium on prayer meetings, family devotions and Sabbath day worship for the remainder of his life. But it was his daily and intimate exposure to the slaves in each of these religious contexts that enabled him to understand them, care for them, and learn how to communicate to them. Further, his early exposure to a style of preaching that was intended to arouse the intellect and the affections would greatly shape his philosophy of preaching for future years.

Conversion Experience:

George Blackburn, the son-in-law of Girardeau and editor of *The Life Work and Sermons of John L. Girardeau*, claimed that the spiritual or religious life of Girardeau began around his fifteenth birthday. '... That fall he entered the Charleston College. Here begins his spiritual life.'¹⁰¹ It can be inferred from Blackburn that the 'spiritual life' of Girardeau began with his conversion experience. And to be sure, Girardeau underwent a conversion experience between his fourteenth and fifteenth birthday. Despite Girardeau's Blackburn's phraseology, Girardeau's conversion experience should not be understood as the advent of his 'spiritual life,'

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 10-11.

¹⁰¹ Blackburn, 'Conversion and Early Ministry,' in *Life Work*, p. 22.

nor should his 'spiritual life' be explained apart from the social and religious influences of his preceding years.

Young Girardeau's 'spiritual life' did not begin between his fourteenth and fifteenth birthday. As we observed in the previous section, his religious and social development began when he was born on James Island in 1825. In the eleventh month of his fifteenth year, young Girardeau personally embraced the religious views of his extended ancestry, his mother and father, and the James Island Presbyterian Church. This was not uncommon in the nineteenth century Southern Presbyterian Church. According to Loveland, 'In most cases such religious [conversion] experience was the outgrowth of Christian nurture, of a cultural context in which religious values and exercises were accepted and practiced.'¹⁰²

In the fall of 1840, at the age of fourteen, young Girardeau entered the College of Charleston. Girardeau had spent the four previous years in Charleston, where he attended the academically sound German school and the socially respectable Second Presbyterian Church. Consequently, young Girardeau was already becoming familiar with the social, cultural, academic and religious mores of Charleston. His entrance into the College of Charleston should not be viewed as an abrupt life transition that would naturally necessitate a momentous spiritual or psychological change. Yet, according to Girardeau, he underwent a radical religious experience upon his arrival at the College of Charleston.

Over and over again have I read this remarkable dying experience. Lord, help me in my last hour! Calvin, Owen, Witsius, Halyburton and Thornwell have been among the chief of my instructors. The account of Wilberforce Richmond's dying experience in Grimshaw's 'Leigh Richmond's Domestic Portraiture,' was the proximate instrument in the hands of the ever blessed Spirit of leading me to believe in Jesus. It was at the north corner of King Street and Price's Alley in Charleston. Oh, the unutterable rapture

¹⁰² Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, p. 4.

of that hour when I found him, after a month's conflict with sin and hell! The heavens and the earth seemed to be singing psalms of praise for redeeming love.¹⁰³

George Blackburn further recounted his conversations with Girardeau concerning this subject and offered his interpretation as well.

Dr. Girardeau's account of that awful month of conviction was enough to send terror to any unconverted soul. He had just entered college when a gloom like that of eternal night fell upon his soul. His conscience pointed to his sinful nature, the unbearable holiness of God, and the flaming bar of judgment. In everything about him he saw the warnings of coming vengeance, while the lurid glare of an eternal hell was ever before his fervid imagination. His case seemed hopeless. He could not see how any one would want to laugh; he could not see how any one could enjoy a life that was nothing more than a vestibule to the dungeon of eternal woe. He was afraid to put out his light at night lest the darkness should never end. He was afraid to go to sleep lest he should awake in the company of the damned. He had no appetite for food. He could not study. No earthly thing interested him. He spent his time reading the Bible, calling on God for mercy and bemoaning his lost estate. In vain did he strive to make peace with God; he wept over the consequences of his sins, but there was no sense of pardon; he strove to make covenants and agreements with God, but the earth was iron and the heavens were brass. One beautiful morning while on his knees begging for mercy, it occurred to him that he had already done everything that it was possible for him to do, and that all of these things had availed him nothing. He would, therefore, just surrender himself to Jesus and leave the case in his hands. That was faith. Instantly the Holy Spirit assured him that he was accepted in Christ, that his sins were forgiven, and that God loved him with an everlasting love. He sprang to his feet, clapped his hands and poured out the overflowing joy of his soul in praise. All nature had changed. In the feelings of his descriptions, he said that the sun shone brighter, the birds sang sweeter, and the breezes blew softer than he had ever known them to do. His flesh as well as his heart felt the delight of the presence of a reconciled heart. He could see no reason why any intelligent creature could care to do anything in this world but love and praise God. This experience left its stamp on his whole life.¹⁰⁴

According to Loveland, 'nineteenth century Evangelicals maintained that conversion occurred through the agency of the Holy Spirit.' Certainly this was Girardeau's belief. 'The account of Grimshaw... was the proximate instrument in the hands of the ever blessed Spirit of leading me to believe in Jesus.' Blackburn had a similar interpretation. 'Instantly, the Holy Spirit

¹⁰³ Girardeau, in *Life Work*, p. 22.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

assured him that he was accepted in Christ...' Loveland concluded, however, that the 'historian looks for a more mundane explanation.'¹⁰⁵

The intellectual, volitional, and emotional processes that Girardeau claimed to have experienced through his own conversion were quite similar to those of most nineteenth century Presbyterian, Baptist and Methodist Evangelicals who also experienced conversion. It was an intellectual process in that Girardeau was drawn to read the conversion accounts of his 'chief instructors.' And he explored more than one source. In fact, it was a combination of a number of resources that he utilized over an extended period of time that enabled him to conclude why he believed himself to be in a helpless and desperate situation. It was, therefore, an intellectual process of identification. His mind was fully engaged in an attempt to comprehend what he considered to be his 'lost estate.'

It was a volitional process in that his will was completely involved and determined to discover the reason for this acute sense of agony and despair. 'Over and over again, I have read....' And then, upon discovering the solution to his overwhelming sense of isolation and his burden being lifted, Girardeau exclaimed, 'I found him.' Young Girardeau was committed to doing whatever was in his power to find relief. 'One beautiful morning while on his knees begging for mercy, it occurred to him that he had already done everything that was possible for him to do....' And it was an emotional process in that for an entire month Girardeau bemoaned his helpless condition. The trauma of experiencing 'sin and death appeared to be at the forefront of his mind. His conversion experience began with feelings of helplessness, anxiety and guilt.' 'Lord, help me in my last hour!' And it culminated with feelings of euphoric

¹⁰⁵ Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, p. 10.

joy and pardon. 'Oh, the unutterable rapture of that hour when I found him, after a month's conflict with sin and hell!' Girardeau fully utilized his mind, will, and emotions throughout this religious experience.

In an attempt to explain the factors that often accompanied the nineteenth century Evangelical conversion experience, Loveland noted that it 'generally occurred between the mid-teens and early twenties.' Girardeau did fit into this category. But she also concluded that conversion 'frequently came at a time of unsettlement for the youth-- not merely the emotional unsettlement accompanying puberty or young adulthood, but unsettlement in the conditions of life which also produced emotional upheaval and sensitiveness.'¹⁰⁶

There is no concrete evidence to suggest Girardeau was confronted with an unusual degree of unsettlement in the conditions of his life. Certainly, the transition from the German school to the College of Charleston was a considerable change in his immediate circumstances. But, in light of all of the other circumstances that he had faced prior to his entrance into the College of Charleston, this singular life transition for Girardeau would not necessarily warrant such an extreme manifestation of his mind, will and emotions.

A careful investigation into the life of young Girardeau does not reveal any immediate or natural circumstance that would lend itself to the heightened psychological or religious experience that confronted Girardeau. Certainly, there are reasons to assume that young Girardeau would naturally grow up and embrace the religious faith that consumed his experience as a child. But Girardeau's 'conversion experience,' should not be analyzed primarily as an isolated event. Rather, it should be explored in light of the broader context

¹⁰⁶ Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, p. 6.

consisting of his early years and those years that followed. And it is precisely that subject to which we now turn.

Chapter 3: John L. Girardeau: Transitional Years

According to Southern historian, Anne Loveland, it took a 'special kind of a man and a special type of preaching to win the respect, confidence, and affection of the blacks.'¹ Nineteenth century Southern Evangelicals were agreed that not all of those who were 'called' to the ministry were also equipped with the natural gifts necessary to provide an effective ministry to the slaves. According to the editor of the nineteenth century Presbyterian publication, *Watchman and Observer*, only a man who was especially selected and gifted by God for such a demanding work could find lasting success among 'our poor despised fellow creatures who are too little attended too [sic] by all of us.'² What is more, 'there can be no more corrupt notion abroad than that any sort of man can succeed with slaves.' He must be 'accessible to all.' He must be 'their friend, neither ashamed of them or their service.' He must have 'a thorough knowledge of the doctrines and duties of Christianity' as well as 'the ability to present them plainly and simply, in such a way that the blacks could understand them.' His preaching must be 'full of unction.' He must 'preserve a measure of independence and dignity.'³ Beyond all else, he must win their favor by consistently demonstrating his unfailing commitment to them.

Such was the general tide of feeling among nineteenth century Southern Evangelicals, and especially Presbyterian Evangelicals. Throughout the late 1840s and 1850s, John L. Girardeau 'won

¹ Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order*, p. 236.

² *The Watchman and Observer* (June 29, 1848). See Loveland, p. 236.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

the respect, confidence and affection of the black' population in the low country of South Carolina. He was viewed as a 'special kind of a man' among antebellum Presbyterians, because he was committed to the religious instruction and spiritual edification of the sea-board slave in the Palmetto state of South Carolina. He acquired a unique position among Southern Presbyterian Evangelicals in that he understood, appreciated, identified with, and was received by the African-American culture. He possessed a 'special type of preaching' that was unequalled in the nineteenth century Southern Presbyterian Church; preaching that won the acceptance of the 'Gentlemen theologians,'⁴ the 'most cultivated men in the State,'⁵ as well as the city and plantation slave.

Few nineteenth century Southern Presbyterian Evangelicals were as committed to the religious instruction and pastoral care of their black brethren. Fewer Southern Presbyterian Evangelicals were endowed with the inherent ability, the social and cultural background, the religious and theological training, and the raw determination to serve the city and plantation slave. Even fewer Southern Presbyterian Evangelicals won the 'respect, confidence and affection of the black' inhabitants on the coast of South Carolina. No other nineteenth century Southern Presbyterian Evangelical was as favorably received by people from such a diverse range of ethnic and social backgrounds as John L. Girardeau. Consequently, Girardeau had a profound impact on the South Carolina sea-board slaves. Summarized best in 1898 by an editor for *The Charleston News and Courier*:

Other ministers have faithfully, eloquently and successfully preached the gospel. There have been other reputable theologians and teachers of philosophy. Not a few ministers have been zealous, tender-hearted, earnest and useful chaplains in the army. But not many ministers of any denomination have given so large a part of their life and labors exclusively to missionary work

⁴ See Brooks Holifield, *The Gentlemen Theologians: American Theology in Southern Culture, 1795-1860* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1978).

⁵ Letter from Girardeau to the Rev. Dr. Mallard (Columbia, S.C.: November 10, 1890). Original letter located in Blackburn Collection, Reformed Theological Seminary See also, *Life Work*. 77.

among the Negroes. But John L. Girardeau served them exclusively long before the war and very largely also long after the war.⁶

It was a rather special combination of factors that led to the creation of an individual whose ministry to the slaves was destined to 'succeed.' Southern Evangelicals focused on those personal attributes and gifts that an individual was expected to possess in order to substantiate his 'call' to minister to his black brethren. He must be 'accessible,' a friend,' schooled in 'a thorough knowledge of the doctrines,' 'dignified,' and 'full of unction.' They accentuated the importance of an individual possessing traits they believed were imparted by the sovereign hand of God and apart from which the white minister to the slaves was doomed to failure.⁷ What Southern Evangelicals emphasized in terms of their rhetoric but less in terms of their practice among [their] 'poor fellow creatures' was the candidate's sense of 'duty' or obligation to pastor a race 'that when left to themselves could not resist the temptation to dishonesty and adultery.'⁸ Girardeau embodied the former, more appealing features of a man called to minister to the slaves, which was confirmed by the slaves' receptivity to him. But Girardeau also 'believed that association with the white man was essential to the uplift of the Negro.'⁹ Consequently, his motivation to pastor the slaves was also driven by his belief that the slaves needed him and would gradually self destruct apart from the pastoral assistance of their white brethren. Girardeau commented, 'I only refrained from going on a foreign mission, because I felt it to be my duty to preach to the mass of slaves on the sea-board of South Carolina.'¹⁰

⁶ *The News and Courier* (Charleston, S.C.: June, 1898).

⁷ Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, pp. 231-238.

⁸ Mack, in *Life Work*, p. 70.

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 70.

¹⁰ Letter from Girardeau to the Rev. Dr. Mallard. See also, *Life Work*, p. 76.

Perhaps even more than most nineteenth century Southern Presbyterians, and certainly more than Baptist and Methodist Southern Evangelicals, Girardeau was persuaded that the economic and spiritual well-being of the slaves was dependant upon an intellectually superior race. Therefore, it was the collective 'duty' of the Southern Presbyterian denomination and his individual 'duty' to provide religious instruction to those whom they believed were 'providentially' placed among them.

Calling to the Ministry:

An examination of the multiple set of social and religious influences upon young Girardeau from birth¹¹ suggests that his conversion experience, though profoundly significant, was hardly the genesis of his religious life. Nor should his conversion be viewed as the only factor contributing to his calling to the pastoral ministry. This experience must be evaluated in light of larger religious and social processes at work throughout his life. As the Rev. R. Dudley Jones observed:

It is perfectly clear from all sources that Dr. Girardeau in childhood, in his youth and in his whole life lived consciously and moved spontaneously and simply amidst the realities of the soul and God. Religion to him seemed a natural, an unpainful, an unsurprising verity.¹²

According to Loveland, 'the conversion experience was probably the most important factor influencing the decision to enter the ministry.'¹³ And no doubt, Girardeau's conversion experience was one very important factor in confirming and validating his social and religious heritage. Further, young Girardeau's conversion experience enabled him to begin the process of seriously considering full-time pastoral ministry as a professional vocation. But the evidence of his childhood suggests that it would

¹¹ For a detailed examination of the social and religious circumstances and influences that radically shaped Girardeau from his birth on James Island, see chapter 2, *The Making of a True Southern Presbyterian Evangelical*.

¹² Rev. F. Dudley Jones, D.D., 'A Great South Carolinian.' Unpublished paper: Blackburn Collection.

¹³ Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, p. 16.

be incorrect to assume that Girardeau had never entertained the idea of pastoral ministry prior to his conversion experience. The religious experiences of his earlier years were powerful, and it is likely that he entertained the idea of ministry from his earliest recollection. Experiential religion, as suggested by the Reverend R. Dudley Jones, was virtually etched into the person of Girardeau before he was even aware of it.

Unlike many nineteenth century Evangelical ministers, however, young Girardeau did not undergo a resistance to the ministry following his conversion. The tendency of many Evangelical ministers to resist their internal call to the ministry,¹⁴ only to discover that such a protest would ultimately prove to be a futile exercise, was far from Girardeau's personal experience.¹⁵ Nor did Girardeau's conversion experience 'distract him from the world.... and cause him to look almost exclusively to religion as the focus of his life,' as it did with many Evangelical ministers.¹⁶ Young Girardeau had been

¹⁴ Nineteenth century Southern Evangelicals tended to determine the validity of their entrance into the ministry based on the strength of what they termed an internal and external call. The internal call was believed to be an internal sense that was either known or felt by the candidate for ministry. The candidate for the ministry would not describe his internal calling as a revelation sent to him from God, but he would be comfortable expressing his belief that God had 'illuminated' him from within. The external call was a more objective measurement and was evaluated by those who had observed the candidate while he was pursuing his call to the ministry. If the candidate demonstrated that he possessed the gifts that were necessary for ministry during his ordination trials, then his fellow presbyters would affirm his calling by assigning him to serve as pulpit supply until a call to a particular church was extended to him.

¹⁵ Loveland concluded that 'most Evangelicals described their decision to enter the ministry as the response to a providential call. According to Evangelical theology, the ministry differed from other professions, which an individual might choose according to his talents or taste, in being "a vocation from Heaven, such as lays a necessity upon the man to preach the gospel."' See *Southern Evangelicals*, p. 19. Girardeau's experience was similar to other nineteenth century Evangelicals in that he believed his decision to enter the ministry was a 'response to a providential call,' but unlike other Evangelicals, Girardeau consciously determined his vocational direction with his 'talents or tastes' in mind.

¹⁶ Loveland also concluded that 'most ministers claimed to have resisted the call at first, much as the sinner resisted the claims of the gospel.' See *Southern Evangelicals*, p. 21. Following his conversion, Girardeau never seriously considered pursuing a vocational direction other than the ministry.

trained from his earliest days to interpret ‘the world’ from a particular social and religious perspective. His conversion experience did not introduce him to a religious perspective that was previously unknown to him. It simply served to affirm the perspective that he had cultivated from birth.

Consequently, young Girardeau was not as inclined to dismiss the ministry as a professional vocation following his conversion. Rather, the ministerial skills that he had observed from his childhood, and the natural bent of his disposition, drew him irresistibly to that calling. Further, unlike many nineteenth century Southern Evangelicals, Girardeau did not view his decision to pursue the ministry as an abandonment of all of his worldly aspirations in order that he might finally surrender to the higher calling of God. For Girardeau, God’s wishes were his own as well, and had been so from childhood.

The beginning stages of young Girardeau’s aspirations to become a preacher to the slaves surfaced even prior to his conversion experience and his formal theological education. Summed up best in an editorial from *The Charleston News and Courier* following his death in 1898, ‘Southern white boys ordinarily grew up, especially in country places, to love their Negro playmates. But here was one who, in his very childhood, longed to become a preacher to our slaves.’¹⁷ This unusual phenomenon must be understood in light of the powerful influences upon him from birth. Girardeau explains:

I remember that before I became a preacher I used to hold meetings on my father’s plantation, the cotton house affording a convenient place of assemblage.¹⁸

Nineteenth century Southern Evangelicals were inclined to over-spiritualize their reasons for pursuing the pastoral ministry. They assumed that there was a significant difference in the type of process that would direct a candidate to the ministry from one who would pursue a secular vocation. In short, they accepted a sacred/secular distinction. For them, the candidate for the ministry did not so

¹⁷ *The News and Courier* (Charleston, S.C.: June, 1898).

¹⁸ Letter from Girardeau to Mallard. See also, *Life Work*, p. 75.

much choose the ministry as receive it from the hand of God. The emphasis was not suitability, gifts, or skills when determining one's vocational direction, as much as an internal impression or sense of calling, 'a vocation from Heaven such as lays a necessity upon the man to preach the gospel.'¹⁹ Many nineteenth century Southern Evangelical ministers felt compelled to pursue the ministry even against their own natural wishes or prior training. After all, to resist the call to the ministry would ultimately mean a losing battle against God.

Further, many nineteenth century Southern Evangelicals who pursued the ministry following their conversion were inclined to adopt the unspoken assumption that the life of a minister was a higher, more dignified and important calling than the 'worldly' professions. In fact, many new converts left their secular careers to pursue a life of ministry, because they wanted to give 'all [their] thoughts, all [their] actions, & all [their] words to the cause of His glory,'²⁰ as did Richard McIlwaine who left his legal training and his 'worldly ambition' behind in order to pursue the ministry. He commented that he 'must not lead a life of self-satisfaction and indulgence, or work in a sphere devoted to self-gratification and aggrandizement, but must give my life to the service of God and my fellow-men.'²¹

Young Girardeau apparently did not experience the inner turmoil that characterized the majority of Southern Evangelicals as they contemplated their calling to the ministry. To pursue the ministry was not a drastic or novel idea for him that necessitated a paradigm shift in his former way of thinking. Rather, it was the continuation of a 'duty' that had been constantly, though perhaps subconsciously,

¹⁹ Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, p. 19.

²⁰ James C. Furman, MS dated June 1, 1828, in James Clement Furman Papers: Special Collections, Furman University Library.

²¹ Richard McIlwaine, *Memories of Three Score Years and Ten* (New York, 1908). See also, Loveland, p. 17.

explored and reinforced as a child while attending the weekly prayer meetings on James Island, 'which were held at night from house to house;' or attending the morning and evening worship services at the James Island Presbyterian Church; or listening to 'Mr. Osborn preach solemnly of eternity;' or by observing his mother demonstrate consistent pastoral care to the seaboard slaves. 'Often did she send me with a plate of breakfast to old "Daddy Prince."' For Girardeau, recognizing his call to the ministry and responding to it seemed to be just as natural as awakening each day to the 'sweet sound of "Driver Isaac's" morning call.'²²

From James Island to Charleston:

In 1844, at the age of nineteen, Girardeau graduated from the College of Charleston with first honors.²³ Only two years prior to his acceptance, the College of Charleston was building a reputation as one of the leading academic institutions in the South. According to Charleston historian, Robert Rhett, 'in 1838, the College of Charleston took on new life and gathered together a faculty remarkable for scientific attainments and achievements.'²⁴ The strong academic emphasis that Girardeau's father had placed upon him from childhood was beginning to pay off. He had become an exceptional student at a relatively early age. He was now prepared academically to enter Columbia Theological Seminary in Columbia, South Carolina, for his formal theological training and preparation for ministry.

²² Girardeau, *Notes on Childhood*, in *Life Work*, pp. 10-21.

²³ Rev G.A. Trenholm, D.D., 'Rev. John L. Girardeau, D.D., LL.D,' *St. Louis Presbyterian* (St. Louis, date unknown). See Girardeau, John Lafayette (1825-1898), microfilm #200 MSS (R), 1844-1936: South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina. In this essay, the Rev. Trenholm outlined the major accolades and events of Girardeau's life. In 1865, Trenhold attended Girardeau's church in Charleston, was 'converted' under his ministry, and then studied under his tutelage for one year before entering Union Theological Seminary.

²⁴ Robert Goodwyn Rhett, *Charleston: An Epic of Carolina* (Richmond, VA.: Garrett & Massie Inc., 1940) p. 198.

But Girardeau had also matured emotionally, socially and spiritually. In fact, by the time that he graduated from the College of Charleston, Girardeau had spent almost eight years away from the familiar and comfortable surroundings that he had grown accustomed to while residing on James Island. These years in Charleston proved important for his emotional, social, and religious development as well as his preparation for ministry. A brief examination of his academic, emotional, social, and religious life before he entered Columbia Seminary will shed additional light on his emergence as an antebellum Presbyterian minister among the Charleston slaves.

By the age of nineteen, young Girardeau had received a sound elementary, secondary, and college education. He had been expected to take full advantage of this privileged opportunity afforded to him by his father; and he did. While at the elementary school on James Island, Girardeau recalled that he was 'nearly always at the head of the class.' More importantly, Girardeau commented, 'I was very ambitious.' Girardeau recalled that as a boy on James Island, he 'studied lessons along the road from school home.'²⁵ Before relocating to Charleston at the age ten to attend the German Friendly Society, young Girardeau had exceeded even the academic expectations that his father had placed upon him.

The academic advancement that young Girardeau achieved on James Island continued throughout his four year tenure as a boarding student at the German Friendly Society in Charleston. Young Girardeau was exposed to and took advantage of a rigorous academic curriculum that would prove invaluable to him in later years to think critically. The classical training that he received at the German Friendly Society prepared him in the years that would follow to 'read Hebrew, Greek, Latin

²⁵ Girardeau, *Notes*, in *Life Work*, p. 20.

and French with ease.²⁶ Girardeau recalled:

Commenced Latin: Gould's Adam's Grammar. Jacob's Latin Reader. Caesar. Virgil. Greek: Tables of conjugations, declensions, &c. Jacob's Greek Reader. Graeca Majora. Xenophon's Cyropaedia: Tables of conjugations.²⁷

Recalling the strong mental capabilities that Girardeau acquired early in his academic life, the Rev. F.L. Leeper mentioned the implications of that learning on his secondary and college education in the years to follow.

In his work he had no need of pen or paper, but so thoroughly had he trained his mind to do its work, that fixing his eye upon a certain spot on the floor, he could hold it steadily upon one subject for hours, until he had thoroughly thought through it. He had also a vivid and carefully trained imagination, which enabled him to take the subject which he had torn to pieces by his analysis and rebuild it into a living theme.²⁸

Despite the classical education that he acquired at the German Friendly Society and his continued academic success, young Girardeau encountered a very difficult transition from James Island to Charleston that lingered throughout the four years of his secondary education and even into his freshmen year at the College of Charleston. Girardeau alluded to the degree to which this relocation affected him when he commented, 'Here commenced a new and important era in my life. My associations were all changed.'²⁹ This 'new and important era' marked the beginning phase of a painful but necessary emotional, social, and religious evolution that would manifest itself by the end of his tenure from the College of Charleston with a broadened and enlightened social awareness, a personalized religious interest, and a hearty emotional disposition; a social appreciation that included the city and

²⁶ Blackburn in *Life Work*, p. 369.

²⁷ Girardeau, *Notes*, p. 19.

²⁸ Rev. F.L. Leeper, 'Speech At the Memorial Services of the Late Rev. John L. Girardeau,' Blackburn Collection. See also, *Life Work*, p. 382.

²⁹ Girardeau, *Notes*, p. 18.

plantation culture of James Island and Charleston, a spiritual commitment that surpassed mere external or ritualistic observance, and an emotional maturity that far exceeded his nineteen years of age.

What was missing for the reflective, sensitive and philosophically minded³⁰ boy upon his arrival in Charleston was the familiar environment to which he had grown accustomed while living on James Island. The environment that had defined him and provided him with a sense of identity, self worth, and purpose from birth was immediately removed from him. The relocation to Charleston at the age of ten ended all of the former associations he had experienced with this tight knit plantation community that was held together by the production of cotton and the James Island Presbyterian Church.

No longer would he enjoy the level of security that was afforded to him by his father, his siblings, and his many close friends and relatives. No longer was there anything or anyone around him to remind him of the deep affection that he had known with his mother. No longer would he live with Aunt Elizabeth and Uncle Freer and attend Mr. Rivers day school on James Island. No longer would he gather together with young white and black boys and girls and play 'Shinny' at the pond. No longer would he listen to the Reverend Buist preach 'solemnly of eternity' or attend the weekly prayer meeting at Fort Johnson. No longer would he experience first hand the unique sea-island cotton plantation culture that promoted the paternalistic relationships that were fostered through early morning 'family worship.' No longer would young Girardeau have the opportunity to preach to the black children on

³⁰ A former president of Columbia seminary, Thornton Whaling, wrote a chapter in Blackburn's biography of Girardeau entitled, 'Girardeau: The Philosopher.' Whaling suggested that Girardeau would 'receive the crown which is his due as the Philosopher of the Southern Presbyterian Church.' See *Life Work*, p. 303. John Leith, Professor of theology at Union Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, 'expressed regret at the twentieth century neglect of Girardeau, whom he suggested, had the greatest philosophical interest of any Southern Presbyterian thinker.' See Douglas Kelly, *Preachers With Power: Four Stalwarts of the South*, p. 127. For further comment on the philosophical mind of Girardeau and the Presbyterian Church, see Leith, 'The Theological Stance of the Presbyterian Church in the United States' (unpublished paper: Union Theological Seminary).

his father's plantation, 'the cotton house affording a convenient place of assemblage.'³¹

This transition symbolized a radical departure from an old way of life and the beginning of a new one. Young Girardeau expressed the acute impact that this transition had upon him when he recalled its effect near the end of his life, 'I was now almost left to take care of myself in every respect.'³² Girardeau captured the extent to which he was deeply rooted in the academic, emotional, social, and religious life of James Island before his relocation to Charleston in the following stream-of-thought that he documented in his final years.

Remember the sand hills on the back beach. The swims, the rolls, the gloomy looking tower. Soldiers used to be flogged there. Old Nich'las and the jersey-wagon, the ride to grand-father's at Wappoo. The tenderness of mother for the horse, her getting out and walking in order to relieve him. Old "Daddy Saturday," Mr. Royall's driver, coming along the woodside, whip tied on his shoulder. Dread of him, scampering. Rides to [the Rev] Mr. Buist's on Saturday—Shorter Catechism. Whoop and Hide' at night: One's all, two's all, zig-zole-zam; bob-tail, tickle 'um, tan; ha-rum, scarum, mujum, marum, France.... 'head and foot' plan. Used to stimulate the ambition of the scholars.³³

It did not take long for the young boy to realize that life in the city of Charleston differed greatly from that in the country. Within weeks of his arrival in Charleston, Girardeau begged his father to allow him to return home.

I was elated at first at the prospect of going to live in town. But one or two days sufficed to cool my ardor, and soon the home of my childhood haunted me by night and day, and I shed many a tear after I lay down at night. Begged father to take me back into the country. He refused; bitter, bitter disappointment.³⁴

The initial sign that suggested that the beginnings of a profound shift were underway in the emotional, social, and religious development of Girardeau was found in the abnormal approach that he

³¹ Girardeau, *Notes*, pp. 10-21.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

demonstrated toward his academics. Young Girardeau lost all motivation to study. Of course, his natural aptitude for academics enabled him to excel rather easily. But he ‘engendered very soon a reckless disregard for the teacher and for study.’ He expounds:

Remember setting my teeth and resolving not to study; however, did study to some extent. Dread of the school with the exception of the play ground. In, sometimes, from eight or nine in the morning, excepting a brief interval for dinner, until the ringing of the seven o’clock bell. No love for study the consequence.³⁵

Young Girardeau was forced to remain at the German Friendly Society in Charleston. His father refused to compromise on the education of his son. But the education that young Girardeau received in Charleston over the course of the next eight years far exceeded the intellectual training that he would have received on James Island.

Emotionally, young Girardeau experienced acute loneliness, isolation and anxiety upon his arrival in Charleston. The fact that he was now almost left to ‘take care of [himself] in every respect,’ was an entirely new and daunting prospect for the ten-year old boy. One of the phrases that he used to describe his restless condition while in Charleston was that of a ‘palpitating heart.’³⁶ And yet, rather ironically, the despair and anxiety that initially appeared to impair his emotional maturity while in Charleston soon proved to be an invaluable benefit to him in the days to come. In short, there appeared to be a direct link between the emotional hardship that he endured while in Charleston and the emotional maturity that soon followed.

Summarized by Southern Presbyterian theologian and historian, Douglas Kelly, ‘at this early age, young Girardeau was already experiencing, and would continue to experience throughout his life, the inner brokenness and personal loss which so paradoxically issues forth streams of resurrection

³⁵ Ibid., p. 20.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 19.

influence from the life of the broken one to others.' The emotional stress of these transitional years in Charleston, similar to the emotional trauma that he sustained at the age of seven in the death of his mother, tended to cultivate his 'compassionate heart for the slaves of his region.'³⁷

Socially, young Girardeau quickly realized that the safe and relatively innocent existence that he had come to know on James Island was far different from what was commonplace in Charleston. He learned that his social survival at the German Friendly Society required him to begin the process of discovering another attribute of human behavior that he had yet to identify fully. Unlike his experience on James Island, it became painfully clear to him that no one else intended to look out for him. Further, he was exposed to a different set of ethical principles than had shaped his former years on James Island. Recalling the values of the socially elite German Society boarding school, Girardeau noted:

Morals of the school generally excessively low. Lying considered almost a virtue, if practiced for the purpose of avoiding a flogging. Only virtue at a premium, refusal to inform. A grand, martyr-like quality. Any amount of scourgin taken before this virtue was allowed to fail. Non-compliance with this standard ensured excommunication from the fellowship of the school.³⁸

Perhaps the most valuable social component of his education at the German Friendly Society was his exposure to the Charleston elite. Prior to his relocation to Charleston, young Girardeau had experienced virtually no social interaction with the sons and daughters of the Charleston upper class. He was one of the country 'boys [who] used to ramble about the churchyard, pulling sassafras roots to chew and wild violets to 'fight cows with their crooked necks.'³⁹ On arriving at the German Friendly Society, he was thrust into a completely different social environment. Historian Henry Adams described the city of Charleston during the 1840s in the following way.

³⁷ Douglas Kelly, *Preachers With Power: Four Stalwarts of the South*, p. 122.

³⁸ Girardeau, *Notes*, p. 19.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

No where in the Union was intelligence, wealth, and education greater in proportion to numbers than in the little society of cotton and rice planters, who ruled South Carolina.... Not even New York seemed more clearly marked for prosperity than this solitary southern city. The society of Charleston compared well in refinement with that of any city of its size in the world.⁴⁰

Finally, the emotional and social turmoil that burdened young Girardeau in Charleston forced him to re-evaluate his religious heritage. No longer was it the case that those with whom he lived blindly accepted the religious assumptions that were instilled in him from birth. For the first time, he was forced to think through the implications of the religious heritage bequeathed to him from the James Island Presbyterian Church. The emotional and social strain that accompanied his present circumstances demanded some philosophical understanding or religious explanation.

Girardeau began to attend Second Presbyterian Church in Charleston where he heard the 'faithful and eloquent Calvinist preacher, Dr. Thomas Smyth.' Smyth's preaching style was geared toward the intellectually astute and was primarily intended to instruct. One of the few surviving comments that Girardeau made concerning his religious development during this period emphasized learning. 'Attended the Sabbath School of the Second Presbyterian Church, where I gained religious *knowledge* [italics added].'⁴¹

In light of the profound shift that was evolving emotionally and socially within the mind of young Girardeau, his interest to gain 'religious knowledge' must be understood as an effort to answer for himself the fundamental questions that typified his religious upbringing. Girardeau's conversion experience at the beginning of his freshman year at the College of Charleston suggested that this particular process was now complete. No longer did young Girardeau simply acknowledge his religious heritage. It was one that he now consciously embraced as his own.

⁴⁰ Henry Adams, in *Charleston: An Epic of Carolina*, p. 186.

⁴¹ Girardeau, *Notes*, p. 19.

The years that he spent in Charleston as a student at the German Friendly Society and the College of Charleston forced Girardeau to grow up in a number of ways. He had now successfully survived the academic curriculums, the emotional distress, the social transformation and the spiritual reformation that accompanied these transitional years.

From Charleston Back to James Island:

Following his graduation from the College of Charleston in 1844, Girardeau was eager to relocate again. This time, he would leave the low country of Charleston and travel north to Columbia, S.C., where he would begin his formal theological training and preparation for ministry. Although Girardeau was excited about his future prospects, some of his former college professors were less enthusiastic about the vocational direction that he had chosen. They had observed his scholarly aptitude and would have preferred to see Girardeau pursue a different career path. Professor William Hawsworth commented, 'There goes a fine Greek scholar to make a poor Presbyterian preacher.'⁴²

But Girardeau was convinced that he had been called to the pastoral ministry, and he was determined to begin the process of developing his theological knowledge. Additionally, he relished the opportunity to avail himself regularly of the exceptional preaching of Benjamin Morgan Palmer at First Presbyterian Church and James Henley Thornwell at the University of South Carolina College Chapel. According to Thomas Hoyt, ever since the day that Girardeau was converted while reading the account of Wilberforce Richmond's, 'Leigh Richmond's Domestic Portraiture,' 'he sought a doctrinal basis for his religious life, for his mind was so constituted that he could not be happy unless he felt himself resting

⁴² *Transactions of the Huguenot Society of South Carolina*, 'Chapter 5, Part 2: John Girardeau and Descendants,' (Columbia, S.C.: The R.L. Bryan Company, 1986) p. 4.

upon what he regarded as ultimately truth.⁴³ In an address later delivered before the Presbyterian General Assembly in Savannah, Georgia, Girardeau recalled the particular influence that Palmer and Thornwell had upon him:

At the same time it was my happiness, with my fellow students, to listen to the eloquent and powerful preaching of James H. Thornwell and Benjamin M. Palmer, whose pulpits were additional professorships of theology to the favored pupils of the Seminary.⁴⁴

Hoyt also noted, however, that Girardeau believed that it was a futile exercise to ponder the nature of truth without any practical consideration as to its personal implications. Consequently, he made it a point never to assent intellectually to a doctrine without purposely applying it to his own life.

Hoyt elaborates:

His first theologizing was for the sake of his piety, and he a thousand times taught me that a doctrine of theology that was not a conviction of life was valueless. He despised the theologian who did not build his theology into his experience. He spent his private life trying to translate Calvinism into his own experience. He was, consequently, a man of intense, terrible religious conviction.⁴⁵

Even though Girardeau was ready to pursue his seminary training, financial considerations caused him to delay his own wishes for one year so that he might be better prepared to attend seminary without incurring significant debt. Following his graduation from the College of Charleston in the spring of 1844, he accepted a tutorial position for the summer months at the Copahee Plantation home of a wealthy planter in Christ Church Parish, just eight miles outside of Charleston. The affluent low country planter, Thomas Hamlin, had four children, all of whom he placed under the educational direction of

⁴³ Thomas A. Hoyt, D.D., 'Reminiscences of Dr. Girardeau,' *The Presbyterian Journal*, (Charleston, December 22, 1898).

⁴⁴ Girardeau, Inaugural Address to the Presbyterian General Assembly entitled, '*Theology as a Science, Involving an Infinite Element.*' (Savannah, Ga., May 23, 1876). See also, *Life Work*, p. 395.

⁴⁵ Hoyt, 'Reminiscences of Dr. Girardeau.'

Girardeau. By the end of the summer, however, Girardeau had managed to accomplish a bit more than providing the summer academic curriculum for the Hamlin children. He had also developed a romantic interest with one of the Hamlin daughters. And by the time that the summer session had come to a close, Girardeau and the fifteen year old, Penelope Sarah, were engaged to be married.⁴⁶

The three month tutorial for the Hamlin children provided Girardeau with some financial stability, but he would need additional employment before he could move to Columbia. Consequently, in the fall of 1844, he returned to James Island where he taught school for the children on the Island. However, Girardeau had additional plans for the year as well. While the recent college graduate was employed to educate the young boys and girls on James Island, he spent the remaining hours of each day ministering to the seaboard slaves in the low country of South Carolina. It was becoming increasingly clear that the relational and cultural experiences of the preceding years on James Island and Charleston were instrumental in uniquely preparing Girardeau to identify with the plantation slaves, gain their favor and approval, and successfully communicate the message that he confidently believed was relevant to them. Girardeau recalled his daily ministerial routine while on the Island.

While teaching school in another place, it was my custom to visit plantations, in rotation, on certain afternoons of the week, and catechize and exhort the slaves....On Sabbaths, after the regular services of the sanctuary had been held, and the white congregation had dispersed, the Negroes would crowd the church building, and standing on the pulpit steps, I would address them. There feelings sometimes were irrepressible. This was with the sanction of the minister and elders.⁴⁷

Girardeau was equally committed to mingling among and ministering to the affluent white slaveholders during that year, and in later years, because he knew that the patriarchs of cotton plantation were endowed with a considerable religious influence over their slaves. No doubt, the social clout that

⁴⁶ Blackburn, in *Life Work*, p. 24.

⁴⁷ Letter from Girardeau to the Rev. Dr. Mallard: See also, *Life Work*, pp. 75-76.

he attained while in Charleston gave him an inroad into the lives of the plantation elite. The religious activity that Girardeau promoted among the influential white population on James Island foreshadowed his later ministerial success among them in Wappetaw, Wilton and Charleston. Girardeau recalled:

On another plantation which I was in the habit of visiting, a prayer meeting was commenced by one or two young [white] men, which became more and more solemn, until the religious interest grew intense, and a powerful revival took place which involved the white family and their neighbors. The results of that meeting were marked, and some of its fruits remain to this day. If ever I witnessed an outpouring of the Spirit, I did then.⁴⁸

The ministerial accomplishments and the social acceptance that Girardeau attained among the white and black community of James Island during the year before he enrolled in seminary were illustrative of two important facts that characterized him then and would increasingly define him throughout the remainder of his life.

First, while teaching school on James Island during the year before he was to enroll in seminary, Girardeau began to direct his ministerial efforts specifically toward the low country slave. In the mind of Girardeau, the events that transpired over the course of that year confirmed what was needed to administer an effective and flourishing ministry among the city and plantation slaves; to quickly ‘win the respect, confidence and affection of the blacks’ in a pastoral relationship with them.⁴⁹ Failure to accomplish this would have been a clear indication to him that his ministry should be directed elsewhere. By the time that he entered Columbia Seminary in the fall of 1845, Girardeau was confident that he would serve the majority, if not the remainder of his life, as a missionary to the slaves in the low country of South Carolina.

Secondly, Girardeau did not make it his first priority to direct his ministerial relations to the

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 75.

⁴⁹ Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, p. 236.

white families on the Island, nor would he ever consider this to be his primary objective. But he was aware that any success that he might have with the slaves, whether on James Island or in Charleston, was largely dependant upon the relationship that he was able to develop with their masters. Girardeau understood that the success or failure of his ministry to the slaves would be directly proportional to his ability to communicate his vision to the slave-holders and alleviate their fears. Girardeau was persuaded that a flourishing alliance with the plantation elite was dependant upon his ability to gain social acceptance among them.

Recalling the relationships that he acquired with the planters on the Island the year before he was to attend seminary, Girardeau noted, 'I knew of but one planter in that community who objected to [my] practice, and he was a very irreligious man.'⁵⁰ His ability to adjust to the social circumstances that were set before him, whether it be among rich or poor, white or black, or among city or country dwellers, Girardeau was able to hold his own and adapt very quickly to a diverse range of social situations very early in life. This invaluable quality would characterize him for the remainder of his life and was perhaps the centerpiece to the success of his ministry. In a testimonial published by *The News and Courier of Charleston*, one writer alluded to this characteristic of Girardeau when he commented, 'Personally, he was a most attractive gentleman, and in his social relations, he was the center of a charmed circle.'⁵¹

From James Island to Columbia:

In January of 1846, at the age of twenty-one, Girardeau left the secure surroundings of James Island, once again. This time, his travel included more than a short boat ride across the Ashley River

⁵⁰ Letter from Girardeau to Mallard.

⁵¹ Editorial, *The News and Courier*, (Charleston, S.C.: June, 1898). Blackburn, p. 305

to Charleston. His one-hundred mile journey north to the academic halls of Columbia Theological Seminary was a full day journey. Girardeau had always found it relatively easy to thrive in academic circles, and his three years in seminary would prove to be no different. What would be distinctive about this academic phase of his life was the degree to which he was influenced by two Southern Presbyterian preachers and theologians: James Henley Thornwell and Benjamin Morgan Palmer. As a seminary student, Girardeau regularly attended the worship services at First Presbyterian Church and South Carolina College Chapel, where Palmer and Thornwell preached to their respective congregations. According to the son-in-law of Girardeau, George A. Blackburn, 'he gave these college sermons credit for giving shape and form to his theology.'⁵² Thornton Whaling expounded on the particular influence that Thornwell had on Girardeau:

While widely read in both ancient and modern theology, Calvin and Thornwell influenced him more largely than any others. As a student at Charleston College and Columbia Theological Seminary, he came under the spell of the great Dr. James Henley Thornwell, then at the zenith of his career as a preacher and teacher. Though never a student in the classroom of Thornwell, either at the South Carolina College or Theological Seminary, the impress of his fellow-Carolinian was deeply scored upon the heart and mind of the young minister who finally came to fill so worthily the same chair of theology in the Columbia school.⁵³

In addition to the impact that Palmer and Thornwell had on the formation of Girardeau's theology, their combined hermeneutical influence from the pulpit was equally, if not more, influential on his style and method of preaching. In short, when Girardeau was formulating his theological and ecclesiastical views at the seminary, he was also being regularly exposed to two men who packaged that material and presented it in two completely different ways. Girardeau would model the style and methods of both of these men in the years to come.

⁵² Blackburn, in *Life Work* p. 25.

⁵³ Thornton Whaling, D.D., LL. D. 'The Theologian,' in *Life Work*, Blackburn, p. 305.

Thornwell tended to appeal to the intellectually minded who were well versed in the doctrines of religion and who had a great interest in theology. His style was clearly more academic than Palmer, and his sermons emphasized content at the expense of what some considered sound principles of oration. The design of his sermons was perfectly suited to the student of theology who was not so much interested in delivery or style as he was in substantive material. Thomas H. Law, a regular observer of both men, described Thornwell in the following way.

His bodily presence was not imposing, his voice was not strong or sweet, his gestures were not specially graceful; and his language was decidedly scholastic— too much so for the ordinary hearer. But his clear and sweeping logic, his profound and masterly unfolding of the truth out of a rich experience of it, and his overpowering earnestness in presenting it, impressed me as no other preacher has ever done.⁵⁴

Palmer was a far more gifted speaker than Thornwell, and he attracted a different audience. As minister of the highly affluent and socially conscious First Presbyterian Church in Columbia, Palmer knew that he had to be more emotive and relevant in his presentation. To a greater degree than Thornwell, Palmer was forced to answer the questions, how should the subject matter being presented make the parishioner feel; and what should the content of the sermon cause him to do. Failure to captivate the emotional and volitional constitution of his hearers would quickly result in their loss of interest.

The congregation at First Presbyterian, unlike the College Chapel, was not as interested in theological discourse as they were its practical application. Palmer knew that it was incumbent upon him to charm his parishioners, and he did so by appealing more to their experiential sensibilities than their intellectual faculties. What is more, Palmer understood the principles of oration, and he seized the opportunity to grip his congregation with effective use of language, voice inflection, and personal

⁵⁴ Thomas H. Law, D.D., 'Pastorate After the War,' in *Life Work*, p. 139.

anecdotes. Like Thornwell, Palmer designed his sermons with a particular audience in mind. Just as Thornwell constructed his sermons to appeal to the intellectually astute, Palmer composed his sermons to reach the affluent and socially advantaged. Thomas H. Law described Palmer in the following way.

Dr. Palmer I regard as the most magnificent pulpit orator I have ever heard. With perfect mastery of himself in the pulpit, with a rich, deep melodious voice that appealed at once to the ear, with graceful and appropriate action delightful to behold, and with profound treatment of the great doctrines of religion in a practical and experiential way, he was superb.⁵⁵

Thornwell and Palmer exercised the most significant theological and ministerial influence upon Girardeau while he was a student in Columbia. Both of these men had a far reaching impact on his later method, style, and philosophy of preaching and in at least three different ways. First, Girardeau witnessed the importance of seeking to engage the mind. His observation of Thornwell enabled him to grasp that an effective preacher was in large part a persuasive teacher. Without substantive material with which to inform and instruct the intellect, there was no reason to expect a constructive change in the volitional and emotional constitution of the hearer.

Secondly, Girardeau learned that sermon delivery did matter. The doctrines of religion intended to arouse the intellect must also be applied to the emotional, volitional and experiential nature of the hearer. Many years later, the Rev. G.A. Trenholm noted the effective balance of the mind, the will, and the emotions in Girardeau's preaching.

I have now to say that, having heard Thomas Guthrie of Edinburgh, James Hamilton of London, and Mr. Spurgeon six or eight times, it has never fallen to my lot to hear a more absorbing, spiritual, eloquent and moving sermon on an ordinary occasion [than Girardeau's]. It was worthy of William Wirt's Blind Preacher. It made all the preaching I have ever done, and nearly all that I have ever heard seem like mere sermonizing. Looking around to catch the eye of my friend, I saw that two-thirds of all the men in the audience were in tears. It was no rant or artificial excitement or mere pathos, but *thought burning and glowing*. None but a man of equal

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 139.

intellect, learning, piety and eloquence could preach such a discourse without notes.⁵⁶

Finally, Girardeau learned that it was not necessarily unspiritual to direct his message to a particular audience. Girardeau discovered from the success of Thornwell and Palmer the importance of addressing the intellectual resourcefulness, social background, cultural conventions, and emotional maturity of the congregation. That which would separate Girardeau from Thornwell and Palmer in the years to come was not merely his ability to digest and regurgitate substantive content. Nor was it his ability to engage and satisfy the emotional and volitional disposition of his audience. Rather, Girardeau, unlike most nineteenth century Southern Presbyterians understood and respected the unique social culture of the low country plantation slaves and directed his intellectual, emotional and volitional energies specifically toward them. Joseph B. Mack explains how Girardeau was able successfully to preach to both whites and slaves.

Sometimes when both races were present he would preach a profound sermon, and there would be witnessed a strange anomaly. The minds of the cultured whites would be strained to keep up with the train of thought, while the Negroes seemed to clearly understand and fully appreciate the whole sermon. Hence, the remark was frequently made, 'How can those ignorant Negroes understand such a sermon'? Being myself much perplexed, I asked him [Girardeau] to explain the problem. He replied, 'The Negroes understand my sermon as clearly but not as fully as you do. I have acquired the power to put key-words in my sentences, and to emphasize them both in tone and by manner, and as they are vividly impressed by those words, they secure the current of my thought.'⁵⁷

The three years that Girardeau spent in Columbia as a student at the Seminary, the College Chapel and the First Presbyterian Church were pivotal to his ministerial, theological, and hermeneutical training. There he was formally exposed to a form of American Evangelicalism that had a distinctly

⁵⁶ G.A. Trenholm quoting the editor of the New York, *Christian Advocate*, J.N. Buckley, in 'Rev. John L. Girardeau' (*St. Louis Presbyterian*, 1898).

⁵⁷ Mack, 'Work Among the Negroes,' in *Life Work*, p. 71.

Southern Presbyterian flavor.⁵⁸ But for Girardeau, seminary training also included practical experience. While he could have easily occupied himself with academic pursuits like most of his fellow seminary students, he instead demonstrated ‘compassion for the poor and socially disadvantaged,’⁵⁹ a trait that was relatively unusual for nineteenth century Southern Presbyterians. George Blackburn expounds:

As a student he was zealous in mission work in and near Columbia....He also held meetings in an old shed or deserted warehouse in the lower part of the city. Here prostitutes and persons of the lowest classes attended his services. Some of them professed conversion.⁶⁰

Girardeau believed that individuals of every class or ethnic origin were subject from birth to the same condition that necessitated a conversion experience. In this respect, he did not deviate from classic nineteenth century Southern Presbyterian Evangelicalism. His religious heritage on James Island, his conversion experience in Charleston, and his seminary training in Columbia, affirmed his commitment to the Southern Presbyterian Church and linked him to the burgeoning American Evangelical movement.

That which distanced Girardeau from the Southern Presbyterian Church throughout his ministry and even exposed its greatest weakness was his devotion toward the classes of people that the majority of the Southern Presbyterian Church largely ignored. According to Loveland, the Methodist denomination had a total black membership of 188,041 by the eve of the Civil War, while in 1860, ‘Southern Old School presbyteries reported fewer than 8000.’ In a powerful understatement, Loveland concluded that ‘Presbyterians were much less successful among the blacks.’⁶¹ Girardeau’s ministry

⁵⁸ See ‘Northern and Southern Varieties of American Evangelicalism in the Nineteenth Century,’ by Samuel S Hill, in *Evangelicalism*, pp. 275-289. See also, Bradley J. Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

⁵⁹ Douglas Kelly, *Preachers With Power*, p. 124.

⁶⁰ Blackburn, in *Life Work*, p. 25.

⁶¹ Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, p. 228.

to the slaves on James Island and the prostitutes and persons of the lowest classes' in Columbia, were the beginnings of an unusual ministry among Southern Presbyterian Evangelicals.

From Columbia to Wappetaw:

Girardeau completed his divinity training in the summer of 1848 and accepted his first full-time position in the ministry that fall. However, before he could officially perform his duties as a minister within the Southern Presbyterian Church, he was required to go through the lengthy process of ordination. On October 9, 1848, he completed the first phase of his ordination trials when he was licenced and appointed by the Charleston Presbytery to preach at the Graniteville Presbyterian Church on the fourth Sunday in November. In the minutes of Charleston Presbytery, the following is recorded:

These candidates, after a careful and satisfactory examination, and having submitted all of the pieces assigned them, it was resolved that all of their parts of trial be sustained and Presbytery do now proceed to their licensure. Therefore the Presbytery of Charleston, being in session October 9, 1848, did proceed to the licensure of Messrs. Walker, Girardeau and Miller. They having severally adopted the confession of faith of this Church, and satisfactorily answered the questions appointed to be put to candidates to be licensed.⁶²

Following a successful licensure exam, he began to develop a reputation as an exceptionally gifted young preacher within the Southern Presbyterian Church, and he was immediately faced with a decision that would challenge the integrity of his vision to direct his ministry primarily to the South Carolina slaves. In a letter that Girardeau wrote recalling the early years of his ministry, he noted: 'Having rejected, after licensure, a call to a large and important church which had very few Negroes connected with it, I accepted an invitation to preach temporarily to a small church which was surrounded by a dense body of slaves.'⁶³

⁶² *Minutes of the Presbytery of Charleston, Southern Presbyterian Church*, (Montreat, N.C.: Presbyterian Historical Foundation, October 9, 1848).

⁶³ Letter from Girardeau to Mallard.

Girardeau would not regret his decision to pass over a 'large and important church' for the smaller church in the low country of South Carolina. Not only was the Wappetaw Church the same church that his fiancée, Sarah Hamlin, attended, allowing him to foster his relationship with his future bride as well as her family, but Girardeau's service at the Wappetaw Church was also successful, and especially among the slaves. Girardeau recalled some of the scenes of his early ministry with delight.

The scenes on Sabbath were affecting. The Negroes came in crowds from two parishes. Often have I seen (a sight, I reckon, not often witnessed) groups of them "double-quicking" in the roads, in order to reach the church in time—trotting to church! The white service, as many Negroes as could attending, being over, the slaves would pour in and throng the seats vacated by their masters— yes, cram the building up to the pulpit. I have seen them rock to and fro, under the influence of their feelings, like a wood in a storm. What singing! What hearty hand-shaking after the service! I have had my finger joints stripped of the scarf-skin in consequence of them.⁶⁴

Girardeau's effectiveness at Wappetaw among the slaves and their masters was similar to his experience on James Island prior to his enrollment at Columbia Seminary. And yet, his success at Wappetaw occurred on a much larger scale. At the age of twenty-three, Girardeau was beginning to demonstrate within the bounds of the Southern Presbyterian Church that which was virtually unprecedented: ministerial success among the slaves and the slave-holders. Both races of people flocked to the church on Sunday morning to hear this relatively young and inexperienced preacher expound the scriptures to them. Blackburn recalled Girardeau's Sunday routine while at Wappetaw.

Here, gathered every Sabbath morning, large number of both whites and blacks to hear him preach, some of them coming from as far as twenty miles away. He preached first to the white congregation, which always filled the building. As soon as it withdrew the Negroes filled every available foot of space and he immediately began another service, preaching according to many witnesses, his best sermon to them. On his way back to Charleston, where he lived, he would ordinarily stop at some plantation and preach again to the Negroes.⁶⁵

The primary reason that Girardeau accepted this position was to minister to the low country

⁶⁴ Letter from Girardeau to Rev. Dr. Mallard.

⁶⁵ Blackburn, in *Life Work*, 26-27.

slaves in the state of South Carolina. This was not only his passion in life but also his 'duty,' and his reason for entering the ministry. He gave up the opportunity to serve a 'large and influential church;' he preached his 'best sermon' to the slaves; on his way home, he even managed to stop at various plantations near Charleston to 'preach again to the Negroes.' Clearly, Girardeau did not conceal his affinity for the South Carolina slaves. It was his 'chosen field of labor.'⁶⁶ Not surprisingly, however, the unusual nature of his ministry in Wappetaw and his unconcealed rapport with the slaves did occasionally cause friction among the white ruling class.

Rarely did a minister in the Southern Presbyterian Church actually prefer to preach to the slaves rather than to their white masters. Of course, it was common for the Southern Presbyterian minister to hold services for the slaves and to visit them on occasion, but this was more often viewed by the minister and the slave-holders as their 'duty,' and not their preference.⁶⁷ 'Who among our clergy is willing to condescend to the ignorance of the Negro hearers, by addressing them in a language from the pulpit, which they understand?'⁶⁸ From the very beginning of his formal ministry, Girardeau sent a clear message to the leadership of the denomination that he was not only willing, but also compelled to ascend to the mental, emotional and volitional faculties of his black brethren. Sadly, the success that he achieved among both races was often accompanied by abuse. Mack elaborates:

He [Girardeau] completely won the hearts of the Negroes to whom he preached. They [Negroes] heard him reviled by some whites as a religious crank and a bigoted fool, who was wasting his magnificent talents and throwing away his life on a low, dirty and degraded lot of

⁶⁶ Mack, p. 58.

⁶⁷ For a brief commentary on the 'duty' that nineteenth century Evangelical ministers and slave-holders believed that they owed to their slaves, in relation to their spiritual development, see Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, pp. 219-226.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

beings who were only a little better than brutes.⁶⁹

It was evident to the white slave-holders that Girardeau preferred to preach to the slave population, and he viewed his ministry to the slaves as his first and primary calling. Though the effect of this awkward scenario among the slaveholders was unfortunate, the effect among the slaves appeared to be a positive one. They 'esteemed him as a martyr, sacrificing himself and suffering for their sakes. In his preaching they listened as a messenger sent to them from heaven, and in his prayers they heard their representative at God's throne of grace.'⁷⁰ This was further confirmed the day that Girardeau left the church at Wappetaw for another pastorate in a different part of the state. As soon as Girardeau had completed the morning services and was preparing to leave for his next destination in another part of the South Carolina sea-board, the entire slave population under his care outwardly demonstrated their unreserved allegiance and affection for their minister. They could hardly part with Girardeau.

When he left Wappetaw Church to go to Wilton he preached his last sermon to a large congregation. The entire crowd were convulsed with grief and the church became a real Bochim. As he left the house on his way home the whole congregation, weeping and wailing, followed him for some distance. When at last they stopped, some were with heads bowed upon the ground, and some with outstretched arms looking heavenward, but all were sobbing and crying out, 'O Lord, O my God, what mek our preacher lef us!'⁷¹

In every respect, the slaves at the Wappetaw Church cherished their white minister. But this sense of gratitude and appreciation was reciprocal. Girardeau thus summed up his two years in Christ Parish in Wappetaw in the following manner.

Upon leaving the church after the last, mournful service with them, and going to my vehicle, which was some hundred yards distant, a poor little native African woman followed me weeping

⁶⁹ Mack, pp. 65-66.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 66.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 66.

and crying out, 'O, Massa, you goin' to leave us? O, Massa, for Jesus' sake, don't leave us!' I made an engagement with another church, or the poor little African's plea might have prevailed. When next I visited that people, I asked after my little African friend. 'She crossed over, sir,' was the answer. May we meet where parting will be no more, the song to Jesus never cease!⁷²

From Wappetaw to Wilton:

While at Wappetaw, Girardeau married his fiancée, Sarah Hamlin. According to Blackburn, the two of them complemented each other well. Unlike her husband, she was raised on a large Southern rice plantation and was afforded from the outset of her life many of the social privileges of plantation life that were unavailable to Girardeau as a boy. As a child, she was exposed to the luxuries of old Southern plantation culture in a way that Girardeau had only witnessed from a distance and learned vicariously as a student at the German Friendly Society. Ironically, 'he was naturally a spendthrift. Money had little value to him, and business was an intolerable burden.' On the other hand, 'Mrs. Girardeau was careful, economical, saving. She looked after the expenses and the business side of life.' Over the course of their marriage, they had ten children.⁷³

On April 11, 1850, while in Wappetaw, Girardeau received a call from a Presbyterian Church at Wilton, located in another part of the seaboard of South Carolina. By the age of twenty-four, he had demonstrated to the Charleston Presbytery that he was a gifted preacher with a genuine 'call' to the pastoral ministry. The Presbytery was therefore prepared to allow him to complete his ordination exams and become ordained by the Southern Presbyterian Church as a minister. On June 6, 1850, Girardeau appeared before the Charleston Presbytery at the church in Wilton to complete the final stage of his ordination exams. Three days later, he was ordained in the Southern Presbyterian Church and formally called to be the minister of the Wilton Church. In the words of Girardeau, 'here my work began in

⁷² Letter from Girardeau to the Rev. Dr. Mallard.

⁷³ Blackburn, p. 27.

earnest.⁷⁴

Girardeau's parishioners at the Wilton Church were very similar to those at the Church in Wappetaw, the one exception being that 'the congregation [at Wilton] included some of the most cultivated men in the State.' On the whole, however, 'they were cordially in favor of the religious instruction of their slaves.... the family and the servants would worship together' According to Girardeau, 'this was common, and the fact deserves to be signaled.'⁷⁵ Similar to his experiences on James Island and at Wappetaw, Girardeau's responsibilities and his ministerial routine among the congregation at Wilton was similar as well.

The work among them consisted of preaching to them on Sabbath noons in the church building in which their masters had just worshiped, preaching to them again in the afternoons on the plantations, and preaching at night to mixed congregations of whites and blacks. This in the summer. In the winter, I preached at night on plantations, often reaching home after midnight. Many a time have I seen the slaves gathered in their master's piazzas for worship, and when it was very cold in their dining rooms and their sitting rooms.⁷⁶

The three years that Girardeau spent in Wilton were significant in his development. As an impressionable young man of twenty-four years, he was not only further exposed to many of the most socially elite and culturally refined men and women of South Carolina, but he was also assigned to be their religious leader. Certainly, his former experiences in life, his educational training, and his early ministry, had afforded Girardeau an advanced level of social and cultural maturity. But the pressure for him to conform to the wishes of some of the 'cultivated men' must have been overwhelming. Nevertheless, his desire to serve the slaves was unhindered.

Upon leaving the Wilton Church to begin his work in Charleston, Girardeau recalled his last

⁷⁴ Letter from Girardeau to Dr. Mallard.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

service. Not surprisingly, his final recollection consisted of the effect that his ministry had on the sea-board slaves.

My last service with the Negroes at this church I will never forget. The final words had been spoken to the white congregation, and they had retired. While a tempest of emotion was shaking me behind the desk, the tramp of a great multitude was heard as the Negroes poured into the building, and occupied all available space up to the little old wine-glass shaped pulpit. When approaching the conclusion of the sermon, I turn to the unconverted, asked what I should say to them, and called on them to come to Jesus. At this moment the great mass of this congregation simultaneously broke down, dropped their heads to their knees, and uttered a wail which seemed to prelude the judgment. Poor people! They had deeply appreciated the preaching of the Gospel to them.⁷⁷

In 1853, Girardeau received two calls for his service; one in Charleston and the other in Columbus, Georgia. He visited the Presbyterian Church in Georgia, but he immediately became disinterested in that opportunity when one of the elders in that church, upon hearing his sermon and ‘thinking that it was too good a sermon for so young a man, asked him if it was entirely original.’ The other position before him in Charleston provided him with an opportunity to serve in a way that was a far more consistent with the previous course of his life and ministry. George Blackburn noted that ‘he had already had great success in his work with the Negroes. His heart went out to them, and he determined to accept the call.’⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 78.

⁷⁸ Blackburn, p. 30.

Chapter 4: Girardeau in Charleston

And undoubtedly the grandest work of his public ministry was that among the Negroes of Charleston, to whom he preached the Gospel with great simplicity, clearness, earnestness and power, before the vast congregations which constantly thronged his public services. While yet a young man, Dr. Girardeau was called from his first and happy pastorate in a country charge, to undertake this work in the city. And so rapidly did it grow in his hands, that one house after another was overcrowded, until in a few years, the white supporters of the work erected the largest church building of the city which still stands, as a monument of their zeal for the religious instruction and salvation of their slaves.

The Charleston Evening Press, July 28, 1927

The Charleston Evening Press, in concert with all of the available resources that speak to the life and work of John L. Girardeau, agreed that ‘the grandest work of his public ministry was that among the Negroes of Charleston.’ From 1854 to 1869, with the exception of a few years that Girardeau served as chaplain of the Twenty-Third Regiment of the South Carolina Volunteers, he labored among those who were assumed by many in his day and within his denomination, including himself, to be of an inferior race than his own. Girardeau recalled his work among the slaves of Charleston while living out the final season of his life:

But the labor was not in vain, I trust. Besides Sabbath preaching, most of the nights in the week were spent at the church in the discharge of various duties—holding prayer meetings, catechizing classes, administering discipline, settling difficulties, and performing marriage ceremonies. Often have I sat for over an hour in a cold room instructing individual inquirers and candidates for membership; often have I risen in the night to visit the sick and dying or to administer baptism to ill children. I made it a duty to attend all their funerals and conduct them.¹

The Southern Presbyterian Church aggressively defended the South’s ‘peculiar institution’² but

¹ Letter from Girardeau to the Rev. Dr. Mallard (November 10, 1890). Blackburn, in *Life Work*, pp. 78-89.

² See Donald Matthews, *Religion in the Old South*. Matthews uses the phrase, ‘peculiar institution’ throughout this book as a brief description of slavery in the antebellum South.

made very little effort, relative to the other Southern Evangelical denominations, to implement their own rhetoric to provide religious instruction to their black brethren. John L. Girardeau, however, gave a substantial portion of his life to them. And he did so often wondering if he invested too much of his time and energy in this work. 'I have sometimes thought that I devoted too much time to it. I was absorbed in it.'³ In an article prepared by the Tombeckbee Presbytery for Southern Presbyterian churchmen on the subject of their ministerial duty to exercise a 'watchful care over that part of His fold which the Great Shepherd hath committed to us,' they conclude:

The religious instruction of our servants is a matter of such importance, and uniformly excites so much interest among Christians in the South, that we feel sure we shall obtain ready and solemn attention to what we now feel constrained to say on that momentous subject. From their peculiar relation to our colored population, the churches of Jesus Christ in the Southern States have the duty devolving on them of attending to this interest.⁴

Girardeau's mission among the slaves in Charleston exposed by contrast the negligence of those within his own denomination to do the same and tended to highlight the distinctiveness of his individual mission. But, as many Southern historians have already determined, those who labored within this antebellum denomination have been in the words of Theodore Bozeman, more often 'castigated' than 'investigated.'⁵

While 'castigating' the classic Southern Presbyterian position in general and Girardeau in

³ Letter From Girardeau to the Rev. Dr. Mallard.

⁴ *Pastoral Letter of the Presbytery of Tombeckbee to the Churches and People Under its Care, but of General Interest to all Members of the Presbyterian Church, Especially Those Whose Lot is Cast in the Southern States*, 'The Religious Instruction Of Our Colored Population,' *Southern Presbyterian Review*, 6 (1848).

⁵ Historian Theodore Bozeman concluded that nineteenth century Southern Presbyterians have 'been generally neglected by historians.' More importantly, Bozeman notes that 'as a representative of a conservative and often doctrinaire version of Calvinism, this wing of the American reformed tradition has been castigated more than investigated.' See Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *Protestants in the Age of Science: The Baconian Ideal and Antebellum Religious Thought* (Chapel Hill: UNC. Press, 1977) p. 33.

particular for the view that the relation between master and slave was ‘beautiful’ and ‘eminently patriarchal,’⁶ the historian should not dismiss a denomination or an individual who defended such a view. Rather, the imperfections of Girardeau, and particularly his paternalistic view of slavery must be analyzed within the context of the nineteenth century South.

Along with many of his colleagues, Girardeau was a staunch defender of the institution of slavery. What is more, he was a slave-holder from early in his life until the conclusion of the American Civil War. Like many nineteenth century Southerners, Girardeau never became convinced that the existence of slavery was ‘sinful.’ Nor did he believe that Northern Evangelical abolitionists had the constitutional right to demand that the South’s ‘peculiar institution’ be eliminated. Such a matter was outside the legal purview of the church. According to Girardeau, the existence of slavery was a legislative issue that was to be decided within the jurisdiction of the state.⁷

For Girardeau, the perpetuation of slavery was not morally objectionable. To the contrary, it was ‘eminently patriarchal.’ Slavery was a vital part of Southern culture; a way of life; a ‘state of mind.’ Girardeau was not reared to view slavery as either good or bad. It simply was. And in large measure, slavery defined his existence and his understanding of what constituted a functional Southern family. Like many nineteenth century Southern Evangelicals, Girardeau had never known or experienced the life of the family apart from this Southern institution. In the mind of Girardeau, any effort to abolish slavery would also be an attempt to dismantle the Southern family.

⁶ See John L. Girardeau, ‘Report to the Charleston Presbytery,’ *Minutes of Charleston Presbytery* (1857).

⁷ For the most comprehensive representation of the Southern Presbyterian view on slavery, and particularly the final authority of the state to rule in such matters, see Rev. J.H. Thornwell, D.D., ‘Report on the Subject of Slavery, Presented to the Synod of South Carolina, At Their Sessions in Winnsborough, November 6, 1851’ (Columbia, S.C.: Steam-Power Press of A.S. Johnston) 1852.

As Girardeau considered his ecclesiastical responsibility to the slaves, he was persuaded that he was morally bound to oversee their spiritual care. Just as the patriarch of the Southern family understood that it was ultimately his responsibility to meet the physical and material needs of those within his family, including his slaves, so also did Girardeau view his responsibility to include the spiritual or religious well being of his slave congregation, and even to a lesser degree, those slaves who were not connected to the Church but who 'were born in Africa and venerated the religion of the dark continent.'⁸ Girardeau also vigorously argued that the best ecclesiastical scenario for the slaves was one that was 'connected with and under the supervision of the white churches.'⁹ Southern Presbyterian churchmen, James H. Thornwell spoke on behalf of the entire denomination when he concluded:

At the same time, they could not but feel that as a Christian Church situated in the midst of thousands of ignorant and irreligious blacks, they were bound to exert themselves, not only on behalf of their own colored members, but of the whole Negro population, so far as they were not provided with religious instruction.¹⁰

But, unlike the majority of those within this antebellum denomination, Girardeau committed his life to that segment of the population of the Southern 'family' that most ministers in the Southern Presbyterian Church preferred to casually overlook. Of course, Southern Presbyterian ministers and churchmen freely acknowledged that no legitimate justification for slavery could ever be maintained if the denomination was not collectively involved in providing for the spiritual needs of their black 'brothers and sisters in Christ.' But that rhetoric never found true expression among their slaves. What is more, in an effort to divert the attention from the ecclesiastical to the political spheres, they argued

⁸ Mack, in *Life Work*, 'Work Among the Negroes,' p. 63.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

¹⁰ James H. Thornwell, 'Slavery And The Religious Instruction Of The Colored Population,' *Southern Presbyterian Review* (July, 1850).

that the institution of slavery was fundamentally a civil issue and not an ecclesiastical one.

Girardeau refused to compromise what he perceived to be his 'calling,' 'resolving to live in no other State, to labor among no other people, and to sleep, after death, under no other soil.'¹¹ Stated differently, '....In Charleston, the seat of Southern Culture, this popular preacher consecrated his high talents to the salvation of the slave.'¹² However, the majority of the Southern Presbyterian Church did not immediately respond to their collective, 'providential call' to minister to the slave portion of their city. They wanted to continue to enjoy the benefits of the extra hands within their Southern 'family,' but most were unwilling to do what was necessary to provide for their religious edification. A writer with the *Presbyterian Journal* summed up best Girardeau's unique ministry among the Charleston slaves in the antebellum South.

That Girardeau, the most gifted young minister of his day, a Southerner, a South Carolinian, a Sea Islander, should turn from great churches, North and South, and devote himself to the spiritual welfare of the Negro slaves, was an uncommon event.¹³

The Separatist Proposal of Charleston Presbytery in the 1840s and 1850s

The Southern Presbyterian initiative to provide a 'separate'¹⁴ ministry to the slaves in

¹¹ Mack, in *Life Work*, p. 60.

¹² Rev. C.R. Hemphill, D.D. LL.D. *Personal Notes on the Person of John L. Girardeau*: Blackburn Collection.

¹³ Thomas A. Hoyt, D.D. 'Reminiscences of Dr. John L. Girardeau,' *The Presbyterian Journal* (December, 1898).

¹⁴ By the mid 1840s, Southern Evangelicals were generally in support of the separatist movement, that is, the idea that whites and blacks should remain part of the same ecclesiastical oversight (i.e. church) but enjoy the benefits of a different pastor and even a separate building when possible. As the nineteenth century progressed, white Southern Evangelicals favored separate worship services for their slaves, placing an increased emphasis on what one of them termed the "strong social feeling" of the blacks, that is, the preference of their slaves to worship in congregations of their own color, according to their own traditions, and even to perform some part of the worship service by themselves. Throughout the 1820s and 1830s, and even to some extent the 1840s and 1850s, Southern Evangelicals, including many Presbyterians, argued that "the master and the slave should worship together, have the same preacher, and be under the same pastoral oversight.... The intelligence and

Charleston did not commence under Girardeau's recommendation or even his direct leadership. Nor was it a work that he had ever envisioned becoming a part of in Charleston. In 1847, when the Charleston Presbytery, consisting under the leadership of the Second Presbyterian Church, organized an effort to provide a separate mission to the 'twelve- thousand Negroes'¹⁵ who were not affiliated with any Evangelical denomination, Girardeau was still serving the mixed congregations of Wappetaw and Wilton. Little did he know that his 'separate' mission to the slaves would soon represent one of the few redeeming highlights of this disappointing Southern Presbyterian movement that peaked in the final decade before the American Civil War.

By the mid 1840s, the Charleston Presbytery and particularly the leadership at Second Presbyterian Church, under the ministrations of Thomas Smyth¹⁶ were well aware that 'of the eight thousand colored communicants' connected with the various congregations scattered throughout the city, only a minority were members of one of the Presbyterian churches affiliated with the Charleston Presbytery. The majority of black membership, 'say, five thousand in number,' resided in the Methodist Church, while 'not more than one thousand of these [were] in any way connected with our six Episcopal churches.' The majority of the remaining two-thousand were aligned with the

sobriety of the whites may serve to keep in check the wild and excitement to which the Negro has a sort of constitutional tendency.' As the abolitionist campaigns gained momentum, Southern Presbyterians, following on the heels of the Baptists and Methodists, gradually became more willing to establish 'separate' churches in order to demonstrate their commitment to the spiritual well being of their slaves. While the separatist movement became increasingly popular within the Southern Presbyterian Church during the last decade before the Civil War, the movement never enticed a significant portion of the slave population to unite with the Southern Presbyterian Church.

¹⁵ Adger, *My Life and Times*, p. 137.

¹⁶ Girardeau attended Second Presbyterian Church in Charleston while he was a student at the College of Charleston and was 'converted' under the preaching and teaching of Thomas Smyth.

Baptist church.¹⁷

Beginning in the late 1840s, with a renewed emphasis among Southern Evangelicals to create 'separate' worship services for their black and white membership, and even separate facilities for the two races when possible, Southern Presbyterians in Charleston had hope that this trend could be reversed and that a noticeable portion of the twelve-thousand slaves who remained outside of the Evangelical community would naturally gravitate toward their denomination. The optimistic tone of the Charleston Presbytery was reflected in the title of the sermon that Adger preached on the eve of the Anson Street Mission: 'The Poor have the Gospel Preached to them.'¹⁸

Southern Presbyterians were also aware that the abolition campaigns in the North were gaining momentum, both domestically and internationally, and that the most basic argument for the justification of their 'peculiar institution' was dependant upon their ability to properly oversee the spiritual well being of those whom God had 'providentially brought under their control and care.'¹⁹ By 1847, Southern Presbyterians had already lost considerable credibility among the Evangelical community outside of Southern Zion. Even their most trusted theological ally, the Free Church of Scotland, was pressured by American and English abolitionists to break fellowship with the Southern Presbyterian Church. Without doubt, the sentiment among their brethren in the Evangelical community was gradually turning against them.

One of the most persuasive arguments that critics of the institution of slavery used to gain popular support, and particularly among the Northern Evangelical community, focused on the

¹⁷ Adger, *My Life and Times*, p. 164.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

deficient systemized effort of Southern Evangelicals to provide religious instruction to the slaves. If Southern Presbyterians were unwilling to properly care for the spiritual needs of their slaves, how could they possibly argue a defense of slavery on Biblical grounds? James Adger summed up the intensified feeling of responsibility that most Southern Presbyterian ministers began to detect by the middle of the 1840s when he concluded, 'As a Southern Christian minister of the white race, and indirectly a slaveholder myself, the Negro had a claim on me which I was bound to consider.'²⁰ In the final two decades prior to the American Civil war, Southern Presbyterians in Charleston attempted to answer the claim of the abolitionist through their collective effort to dispense a more substantive program to instruct and pastor their slaves. The means through which they hoped to accomplish this was the 'separate' church.

Methodist and Baptist Evangelicals had been far more successful than Southern Presbyterians to enfold the slaves into their respective ecclesiastical denominations during the 1830s and 1840s, and not only in Charleston, but throughout the Southern states well. Loveland stated the raw fact of the matter when she concluded that 'the results of the Methodist effort among the blacks were impressive,' but 'Presbyterians were much less successful among the blacks.'²¹

Loveland also concluded that even by 1860, the entire Southern Presbyterian Church 'reported fewer than 8,000 Negro church members,' as compared to a 'total black membership among Methodists of 188,041.'²² Even with the aggressive drive among Southern Presbyterians and the strategic design afforded by the 'separate' plan to accommodate the 'strong social feelings'

²⁰ Adger, p. 139.

²¹ Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, p. 228.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 228.

of the slaves and incorporate them into the Southern Presbyterian church, there was very little collective success.

The movement among Southern Presbyterians in Charleston to begin a 'separate' mission uniquely designed to reach the 'twelve thousand Negroes' who were not formally aligned with any Evangelical denomination was largely the result of recurrent abolitionist campaigns condemning the institution of slavery and accusing the Southern slave-holder and the Southern Church of sin. Of course, Southern Evangelicals responded that 'since it [slavery] was established and protected by civil law, the church had no right to interfere with it.'²³ Nevertheless, Southern Presbyterians ministers and churchmen realized that an effective response to the abolitionists must not only include a sound and persuasive use of rhetoric, but must also include tangible evidence that their rhetoric could be defended through their actions. This meant that adjustments, and perhaps even compromises needed to be made in their ecclesiastical structure, if their 'peculiar institution' was to be preserved. Loveland notes:

In the 1830s an additional impulse was provided by the rise of abolitionism. Evangelicals as well as laymen recognized the utility of the program of religious instruction in answering the critics of slavery. They offered it as evidence that, contrary to the claims of abolitionists, white southerners did not deny the humanity of the Negro, and as a refutation of the slanderous charge that the slaves in the South were denied the Gospel.²⁴

By the mid 1840s, Southern Presbyterians were more aware that 'the preaching offered in the existing churches was not as well suited to the circumstances of the blacks as it might be.'²⁵ Further, they were the most rigid among all Evangelical denominations in their view that pastoral oversight of the 'flock' should be administered exclusively by the white male. After all, 'there was

²³ Ibid., p. 202.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 227.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 242.

good reason to believe that, among the colored leaders, many were both incompetent and unfaithful.²⁶ However, if they intended to attract the Charleston slave population and gather them into their ecclesiastical community, Southern Presbyterians knew that they would have to define and execute a strategy that would provide an attractive opportunity for the slaves not only to attend their church but also claim it as their own. Southern Presbyterians believed that a modified form of the 'separate' plan, one that would uphold the central theological tenets of Presbyterianism, yet appeal to the 'strong social feelings' of the slaves was their best chance.

Prior to the 1840s, the slaves had preferred the other Evangelical denominations to the Presbyterian tradition, because they were afforded more opportunities for instructional leadership and self expression particularly within the context of the worship services. Slaves were even granted permission to preach in many of the Baptist and Methodist churches. They were given a considerable amount of liberty to exercise leadership in the church, which often translated into a level of ownership and control that Presbyterians simply would not grant. The Methodist and Baptist churches were even so bold as to allow the slaves the privilege of leadership positions among the other slaves apart from any white oversight. According to Adger, 'It [the church] was divided out more or less thoroughly into classes, under the leadership of chosen colored men of good repute.... the same system was, more or less, fully carried out in all the other churches.'²⁷

The Presbyterian Church could hardly fathom such a progressive ecclesiastical system of church government, much less adopt such an arrangement. What Southern Presbyterian churchman, John Holt Rice, argued in 1820 concerning the religious instruction of the slaves would remain a

²⁶ Adger, *My Life and Times*, p. 137.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

common point of agreement among most Southern Presbyterians throughout the 1850s. Thornwell summed up their general tide of feeling in his speech to the Synod of South Carolina in 1852.

Of one thing we are satisfied. Their religious teachers should never be taken from among themselves. There is too great a proneness to superstition and extravagance among the most enlightened of them, to entrust them with the care of souls.... They would soon degrade piety into fanaticism, and the Church into bedlam.²⁸

Southern Presbyterians had strong convictions in their belief that leadership in all spheres of church government, and particularly those positions that were explicitly instructional, such as teaching and preaching, should be overseen by only those who were qualified to fill those positions. Adger noted, 'The duty of public worship cannot be discharged by them [Negroes].' To compromise the quality of leadership by assigning leadership posts to those who were incapable of meeting those demands would inevitably promote instability and fail to 'provide instruction adapted to the condition and capacity of the Negro.'²⁹

However, Southern Presbyterians in Charleston were cognizant of all of the charges that were being leveled against them, and they recognized that they defended slavery more vigorously than any of the other Evangelical denominations in the city. More importantly, the membership numbers throughout the city suggested that they were accomplishing the very least among Evangelicals in terms of caring for the souls of this 'unfortunate race of men.'³⁰ Their own survival, not to mention the survival of their Confederacy, demanded that changes be made in order to meet their greatest challenge. For Southern Presbyterians, they were never willing to go far enough.

There was one notable accomplishment among Southern Presbyterians in Charleston during

²⁸ James H. Thornwell, 'Report on Slavery,' p.16.

²⁹ Adger, *My Life and Times*, pp. 168; 167.

³⁰ Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, p. 220.

the second half of the 1850s, under the leadership of Girardeau, that suggested a more positive outcome to the 'separate' movement. Of those eight-thousand black members who were formally connected to the Southern Presbyterian Church in 1860, approximately a quarter were affiliated with 'the largest Negro congregation in the country,' Zion Presbyterian Church.³¹ The success that Girardeau was able to accomplish at Zion in Charleston was an anomaly. What the Charleston Presbytery and even the Southern Presbyterian Church at large did not know was that such a method of religious instruction and pastoral care, as defined and enforced by antebellum Southern Presbyterians, was unlikely to succeed apart from the leadership of Girardeau.

John B. Adger: A Proposal:

Southern Presbyterians in Charleston, under the leadership of John B. Adger, proposed a conservative modification of the 'separate' plan that was designed to minister to the colored population of Charleston, particularly the slaves, and one that he thought would close the gap between the religious and the irreligious, further the paternalistic relationship that existed between slave and free, and spiritually edify those who were 'brought in God's mysterious providence from a foreign land, and placed under our care, and made members of our households.'³² In a service that was intended to arouse optimism and zeal among the citizens of Charleston for the proposed Southern Presbyterian 'separate' plan, Adger preached a sermon at Second Presbyterian Church, setting forth his views on the subject of a 'separate' mission.

Nowhere are the poor more distinctly marked out than our poor; and yet, strange to say, no where are the poor so closely and intimately connected with the higher classes as are our poor with us. They belong to us. We also belong to them. They are divided out among us and mingled up with us, and we with them in a thousand ways.... Our mothers confide us, when

³¹ Rev. C.K. Chichester, 'Reminiscences of the Late Rev. John L. Girardeau, D.D., LL.D., *Christian Observer* (1898).

³² Adger, p. 169.

infants, to their arms, and sometimes to the very milk of their breasts. Their children are, to some extent, unavoidably the playmates of our children.... Such, my friends, are those whom we consider the poor of the city. There they are— behold them.³³

The 'separate plan' as proposed by Adger and approved by the leadership of Second Presbyterian Church was favorably received by the congregation and recognized by the majority as a necessary enterprise. But a large portion of the 'Charleston community' did not as readily or submissively endorse the proposal for fear that such an undertaking would inevitably lead to further insurrection attempts.³⁴

Adger was compelled to press forward with his plan, however, after 'Dr. Smythe, pastor of the Second Church, seconded me very earnestly,' and assured those who were opposed to the plan that ample consideration had been given to the 'interest both of black people and white ones.'³⁵ Adger, along with an energized Southern Presbyterian contingent, prevailed against the opposition on the strength of a 'separate' plan that consisted of two important factors.

First, the plan was intended to provide the slaves with their own worship assembly, and eventually, their own church building. The purchase of a new facility, intended to be used exclusively for the blacks, would be an incentive to the unchurched slave community to attend worship services and might also communicate the impression that Southern Presbyterians were genuinely interested in the religious condition of the Charleston slaves. An additional facility would also provide room for

³³ John B. Adger, 'The Religious Instruction of the Colored Population.' A Sermon, Preached by the Rev. John B. Adger, in the Second Presbyterian Church, Charleston, S.C., May 9th, 1847 (Charleston, 1847).

³⁴ Most of the apprehension that the Charleston community felt with respect to the Southern Presbyterian proposal for the 'separate plan' was in relation to the Denmark Vesey plot that occurred twenty-five years earlier. Some feared that if the slaves were afforded their own 'separate' church without sufficient white oversight, further insurrection attempts would be inevitable.

³⁵ Adger, p. 165.

future growth. Finally, a worship service that was primarily intended to accommodate to the needs of the slave population of Charleston would promote an expression in worship that was unique to the African culture, and one that was impossible to reproduce when combined with white members.

By the late 1840s, the Charleston Presbytery began to recognize the need for the slaves and free blacks to worship in a way that would be structured to adapt to the traditions of their former culture. But, unlike many of the Baptist and Methodist churches that offered 'separate' congregations for the blacks, with relatively little or no white oversight, Southern Presbyterians assumed that their 'separate' mission would always exist under the white leadership and oversight of the Charleston Presbytery as well as the Second Presbyterian Church. In so doing, Southern Presbyterians intended to preserve the purity of sound doctrine.

Secondly, the success of the 'separate plan' was dependant upon the ability and competence of the white minister to adapt to the social, spiritual and cultural level of the black congregation. Presbyterians believed that an accurate ministerial selection was vital to ensure a positive outcome for the mission. The white minister who was called to oversee the Negro congregation must not only be properly educated and theologically trained, but he must also be endowed with a 'peculiar gift'³⁶ to accommodate to the educational level of the slaves and easily adjust to their language and customs. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the ministerial candidate must possess the charisma to endear himself to the slaves. If the minister was to have any hope of winning their approval, he had to demonstrate quickly that he understood the plight of the slave and cared for them.

In short, Southern Presbyterians believed that such an ecclesiastical arrangement, under the

³⁶ Mack, in *Life Work*, p. 70.

supervision of a competent and uniquely gifted white minister, would foster a unified front between the slave and free, a healthy environment among the slaves to cultivate dignity and self expression that was unique to the African culture, and a method of religious instruction that remained doctrinally sound. In a word, the 'separate' mission to the slaves was a 'larger program which aimed at the regeneration of the entire southern social order.'³⁷ Little did Adger and the leadership of Second Presbyterian Church know that they were in the process of creating a context for one such as Girardeau, one who 'felt from a child a desire to preach to them.'³⁸

John B. Adger: A Forerunner to John L. Girardeau:

It was no surprise to anyone within the Southern Presbyterian Church of Charleston that John B. Adger was the first person called to minister exclusively to the Charleston slaves under his recently proposed 'separate' plan. Adger was the obvious candidate for this position, and he received the complete support and endorsement of Second Presbyterian Church and the Presbytery of Charleston. 'None can know him without loving him, and loving him for his master's sake.'³⁹ Adger was overwhelmingly approved as the candidate to launch this work, because he was thought to be far more experienced and well qualified to minister among the slaves than anyone else in Charleston. Of course, he met all of the fundamental qualifications of one 'called' to minister to the slaves. He was a man of 'unquestionable piety. He was humble, dedicated and self sacrificing' What is more, he was a 'southerner,' 'born and reared in the South,' and a 'slaveholder.'⁴⁰ In

³⁷ Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, p. 226.

³⁸ Adger, *My Life and Times*, p. 175.

³⁹ Preface, 'The Religious Instruction of the Colored Population,' *Southern Presbyterian Review*, I (September, 1847) p. 137.

⁴⁰ Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, pp. 231-232.

addition to these personal attributes that were necessary to ensure an effective ministry among the slaves, Adger had served previously as a missionary for twelve years among the poor in 'Smyrna, Constantinople and Asia Minor.'⁴¹

Armenia or Charleston:

While Adger served as an overseas missionary in Armenia, he had never been completely settled that his ministry was properly directed. In fact, even before he left Charleston for Armenia the very first time, Adger seriously questioned the wisdom of serving as a missionary to the poor in Armenia when the opportunity to minister to them in Charleston was right before him. He had he been surrounded by Charleston slaves from birth and knew many of them very well. Consequently, Adger wrestled with the issue of going overseas long before he set sail for Armenia, debating the merits of staying in Charleston versus traveling and serving abroad. 'Before I went abroad my thoughts had turned to this people.' That same dilemma continued to haunt him until he returned to Charleston twelve years later to begin his mission among the slaves in the city of Charleston.

Very often, however, during my missionary life, my thoughts had reverted to the Negro field at home, and sometimes I questioned whether I had done right to turn my back on it. But coming back to my native city, from missionary labors to the Armenians, who are nominally Christian people, my old interest in the Southern Negroes naturally reasserted itself.⁴²

After twelve years in Armenia, Adger was forced to return to his birthplace of Charleston due to persistent ill health. As his health improved and he contemplated his return to Armenia, Adger again questioned if he should not attend to the more desperate situation among the poor slaves in Charleston. As a slave owner, and one who forcefully defended the institution of slavery on biblical grounds, Adger became more convinced that he had an even greater obligation to minister

⁴¹ Adger, *My Life and Times*, p. 166.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 137-138.

to the poor of Charleston than the poor in Armenia. After all, as mentioned earlier, 'they belong to us. We also belong to them.' Adger recollected one particular experience that served to redirect his ministry to Charleston.

Arriving at home, my attention was soon drawn to the religious condition of the Negroes in the city. I often looked at them, as they sat in the gallery, and felt how far preaching to this white congregation went over their heads.⁴³

As Adger's health improved and the time drew near for him to return to Armenia, he was torn between the two scenarios competing for his attention. Adger was drawn to the work in Armenia and Charleston. As a missionary, Adger had been conditioned to believe that overseas ministry was a more noble 'calling' than simply remaining on the home front. While at home agonizing over the decision that was looming before him, Adger reflected positively upon his labors in Armenia.

But I myself was a missionary to the Armenians, at home only for a visit. My work amongst them was waiting for me. It was an important and encouraging one, attractive to me in the highest degree, and, as being literary work, was suited to my individual taste, shared by me with brethren in whom I had the highest confidence, and for them all undying affection. I was happy in that work. There was no position in the church at home that I would compare with it in any respect.⁴⁴

But Adger was eventually persuaded that there was an even greater need for him to remain in Charleston. He recognized the urgent state of affairs that was building in the South with respect to slavery. The abolitionist campaigns were exhibiting greater influence and inflicting more damage than ever, and the need to defend the institution was on the rise. More importantly, the rhetoric that had been espoused throughout the South since the mid 1830s, as a means to justify slavery, needed a more vigorous defense on behalf of the Presbyterian church to demonstrate improved religious

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 167;137.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 138.

instruction and pastoral care toward the slaves. In short, Adger recognized, perhaps even more quickly than his colleagues, the need of the hour in Southern Presbyterian Church. 'I thought I saw plainly that Christianity, as accepted by white masters, had not adequately impressed itself on the poor black dependants.' Adger continued,

It seemed very clear that the men of my race could not properly discharge their duty to their slaves. They could not righteously meet their religious obligations to those human beings, providentially brought under their control and care, by throwing them upon the shoulders of half-instructed men of their own color. I said to myself, it certainly is time for some white minister to make a beginning of public instruction, specially and separately, for the Negroes, in the performance of which he should be assisted by white teachers under his leadership. Such a beginning, I was convinced, with the blessing of God, must be followed by auspicious results, in more than one direction.⁴⁵

The leadership at Second Presbyterian Church agreed with Adger, and believed that he was uniquely called, unusually gifted, and providentially available to oversee this important new ministry in the Charleston Presbytery. Further, the Rev. Dr. R. Anderson, a close friend and confidant of Adger, encouraged him to remain in Charleston and assist in this very important mission. Summing up the correspondence between Adger and Anderson, Adger noted, 'there is not one consideration presented by him in favor of my return to Smyrna.'⁴⁶ Consequently, Adger acquiesced both in the internal and external influences that suggested that his usefulness in Charleston would be greater than in Armenia.

In 1847, Adger was commissioned by the session of Second Presbyterian Church and the Charleston Presbytery to redirect his missionary efforts from the poor in Armenia to the 'poor of this city.'⁴⁷ What is more, a congregational meeting was arranged to demonstrate that support for

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 138.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 139.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 166.

the mission was a collective effort of the church.⁴⁸ 'He has determined, and we believe by the motions of the Holy Spirit, to abandon the field of his former labors, in order to devote himself to the religious instruction of our colored population.'⁴⁹ The 'colored population' included an additional twelve-thousand slaves who were not affiliated with any Evangelical congregation in Charleston. Adger recounted the first days of his ministry among the slaves:

My first place for preaching to the Negroes was in the basement of the lecture -room of the Second Presbyterian Church, in Society street. We had a Sunday-school of white teachers, male and female, and a large number of Negro children attended, with some adults, and I had a good congregation, after the Sunday-school of grown people, to hear my sermons.⁵⁰

The Presbyterian Mission in Charleston: A Disappointing Beginning:

From 1847 to 1852, Adger's work as a missionary to the slaves of Charleston fell well short of expectations. In fact, this unprecedented Southern Presbyterian case study among the Charleston poor achieved very little other than the obvious conclusion that adjustments needed to be made if success might follow. Throughout the first five years of the mission, the slave membership at Second Presbyterian Church remained virtually unchanged. The only noticeable difference that could be quantified by 1852 was that the black membership of Second Presbyterian Church was no longer regularly worshiping with the white membership.

For those who had envisioned that the 'separate plan' would immediately ignite a 'revival' of black membership within the Southern Presbyterian Church in Charleston and silence the anti-slavery opposition that was gaining support throughout the union, there was even greater discouragement. Nor did it provide a spark within the Southern Presbyterian Church at large to

⁴⁸ See *Watchman and Observer*, (June 3, 1847).

⁴⁹ Preface, 'The Religious Instruction of the Colored Population,' p. 137.

⁵⁰ Adger, *My Life and Times*, p. 174.

maximize more aggressively the benefits of the 'separate plan' throughout the South as an effective ministry to the slaves.

As anti-slavery opposition gained momentum outside the Southern states and even internationally, throughout most of England and Scotland during the late 1840s and early 1850s, Southern Presbyterians in Charleston became more determined to justify the institution of slavery through their ministry to the Charleston slaves. The next step was the purchase of a separate building. Time would reveal that even the purchase of a new building for the slaves would not be sufficient to persuade Northern abolitionists outside of the South that their 'peculiar institution' could be justified under any scenario.

In 1850, with the Second Presbyterian Church, the Charleston Presbytery, and the Rev. Dr. John B. Adger still firmly committed to the 'separate plan,' as had been proposed a three years earlier, \$7500 was raised to erect a new building on Anson Street to be used exclusively for their ministry to the slaves. The purchase of an additional building did not affect the relationship that existed between Second Presbyterian Church and the 'separate' mission. Adger remained completely accountable to the session of Second Presbyterian Church for the oversight of the mission, as did the colored members of the congregation. In an essay detailing the Southern Presbyterian movement to advance religious instruction among the southern slaves, Thonrnwell mentioned the ecclesiastical arrangement in Charleston.

It is not their purpose to establish a separate ecclesiastical organization. The servants who meet with us for divine worship, and religious instruction, will not be a church, but a simple congregation. Those who may become church members will be received into the Second Presbyterian Church, by its session, after careful examination, and remain always under the ecclesiastical watch and control of that body. This congregation, therefore, will be part and

parcel of the Second Presbyterian Church.⁵¹

With the purchase of this separate church building, however, there was a renewed sense of hope and optimism among Charleston Presbyterians that a new facility might provide the spark that was necessary to lure the slaves into the mission. Even Thornwell offered his stamp of approval by addressing the 'foremost citizens of Charleston' at the dedication service for the new building in 1850.⁵²

The church in Anson was duly finished and occupied, after being fully paid for and solemnly dedicated, with a large congregation of the foremost citizens of Charleston being present. Dr. Thornwell prepared and delivered a special sermon, at my request, suitable to the occasion. It was afterwards published and distributed widely. The building was calculated to hold several hundred people, with seats for a few whites; the Negroes sat in front of the preacher from the pulpit to the door, and the seats of the white people were on the right and left side of it, with separate entrances for each class.⁵³

The dedication service for the new building on Anson Street was more than a gathering among the leadership of the Charleston Presbytery to restore hope among the members at Second Presbyterian Church and to encourage them to persevere in the 'separate' campaign. It was also, if not more, a rally among Presbyterians and the 'foremost citizens of Charleston' to express their commitment to the institution of slavery. As Loveland rightly noted, 'it was no ordinary dedication.' It was also a 'vindication of the South and slavery.'⁵⁴

The defensive sentiment that was expressed at the time of the dedication service reflected the growing fear and frustration among Southern Presbyterians that their most prized possession, the

⁵¹ James H. Thornwell, 'Slavery And The Religious Instruction Of The Colored Population,' *Southern Presbyterian Review* I (July, 1850) p. 106.

⁵² See James H. Thornwell, 'The Rights and Duties of Masters. A Sermon Preached at the Dedication of a Church Erected in Charleston, S.C., for the Benefit and Instruction of the Colored Population (Charleston, 1850).

⁵³ Adger, *My Life and Times*, p. 174.

⁵⁴ Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, p. 244.

South as they had known and experienced it, was in jeopardy. Further, it became more evident that the purpose of the dedication service included more than a brief ceremony for the purchase of a new building. According to an editor in the *Southern Presbyterian*, 'it was also a 'powerful vindication of the rights of Southern slave-holders and the duties of Southern Christians.'⁵⁵ The defensive and even exasperated tone among the participants at the gathering was expressed best by Thornwell. He began the meeting with a note of praise and thanksgiving. 'I rejoice in the solemnities of this night.... that a building has been erected, erected in the metropolis of the State, and erected at this particular time, for the special benefit of those who are emphatically the poor of our land.' But the mood and the subject matter changed considerably within minutes.

The "philanthropists" of Europe and this country can find nothing worth weeping for but the sufferings and degradation of the Southern slave, nothing worth reviling but the avarice, inhumanity and cruelty of the Southern master, and nothing worth laboring to extirpate but the system which embodies these outrages and wrongs... They pity us; they lament our lot, admit that our case is bad, desperately bad, but then we are not so much to be blamed! They curse us in their sympathies.⁵⁶

The most observable feature of the dedication service was found in the attendance. According to Loveland, 'The congregation that took part in the dedication was composed exclusively of white people.' What is more, 'it was a dedication by the masters to the slaves.' And yet, Adger exclaimed, 'Here was a church built by Christian slave holders for the religious benefit of the slaves.'⁵⁷ Even at the beginning stages of Anson Street mission in 1850, the evangelistic fervor toward the slaves in Charleston was overshadowed by the preoccupation with the preservation of

⁵⁵ *Southern Presbyterian*, (June 7, 1850) p. 162. See Loveland, p. 244.

⁵⁶ James H. Thornwell, 'The Christian Doctrine of Slavery,' an address given by the Rev. Dr. Thornwell at the dedication service for the Anson Street Mission. *Southern Presbyterian Review* (1850) p. 398.

⁵⁷ Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, p. 244; Adger, p. 178.

slavery. Southern Presbyterians in Charleston were perhaps more committed to the vindication of slavery, and in effect, preserving the South without compromise, than they were with their evangelistic mission to the slaves. Finally, the dedication service did contain an element of optimism and hope that was intended to remind Presbyterian slave-holders to uphold their 'duty' to oversee the spiritual well being of their slaves to the end that it might 'contribute somewhat to the correction of those world-wide errors which prevailed as to the true character of slavery, as it existed amongst us.'⁵⁸

Adger was determined to pave the way for Southern Presbyterians in Charleston to carry out their duty to 'our poor brethren.' And in a sense he did. He prepared the way for Girardeau. But his ministry to the Charleston slaves never yielded the results that he, or anyone else in the Southern Presbyterian Church, had assumed. In a rather blunt but accurate assessment of Adger's service to the slaves, Edward Jones noted that it was the 'hope that the African race at large would be attracted to this mission, but the work was not a success.' That hope was to be answered over the course of the next eight years.⁵⁹ Sadly, however, for antebellum Southern Presbyterians, the ultimate verdict remained the same.

Girardeau in Charleston: 1852-1861:

When the Southern Presbyterian 'separate' campaign began in 1847 under the leadership of Adger and the Second Presbyterian Church, Girardeau was only twenty-three years of age. In fact, Girardeau was still in the final stages of his theological training at Columbia Seminary when Adger and the Second Presbyterian Church launched the 'separate' campaign that was intended to

⁵⁸ Adger, *My Life and Times*, p. 178.

⁵⁹ Edward C. Jones, in *Life Work*, 'Work Among the Negroes,' p. 31.

evangelize the slave population of Charleston and demonstrate more fervently that slavery, as practiced in the South, was not a sin. When the 'separate' mission commenced among the Presbyterians in Charleston, Girardeau had no idea that five years later, having graduated from Columbia and having served two mixed congregations in Wappetaw and Wilton, he would be engulfed in the same crusade that was ultimately intended to 'save' not only the slaves in Charleston but also the South's 'peculiar institution.' Even so, the 'salvation' of the seaboard slaves and the institution of slavery were two important themes that had been etched into the person of Girardeau since his childhood. Those same objectives would continue to consume him until the American Civil War and even beyond.

Dr. Girardeau was born about the time when South Carolina stood ready to assert her sovereignty and nullify any Act of Congress that threatened her welfare or her honor. Hence, as a boy, by his environment, he was impressed with the idea that the State of South Carolina was his native land, to which his love and loyalty was due as that of a child to the mother who gave him birth. The sacred affection grew with his growth, filling every avenue of his heart and thrilling every fiber of his whole being. When a young man, he felt that his mother State needed the service of her sons, and so to her he consecrated his life, resolving to live in no other State, to labor among no other people, and to sleep, after death, under no other soil.⁶⁰

Girardeau's return to Charleston during the summer of 1852 was unlike any of his previous encounters in the city. He was no longer an impressionable boy. He was now a young man, eager and equipped to prove that his desire to become a preacher from his youth was more than a childhood fantasy. When Girardeau graduated from the College of Charleston in 1844, at the age of seventeen, he left Charleston for eight consecutive years. Prior to his return to Charleston in 1852 to serve as the minister to the Anson Street Mission, Girardeau never returned to Charleston or nearby James Island for an extended period of time. Upon his return eight years later, however, Girardeau was prepared to demonstrate that he was more than an 'ambitious' student on James Island who

⁶⁰ Blackburn, p. 60.

was ‘nearly always at the head of his class.’⁶¹ Girardeau was, as noted earlier, also a ‘coming man of the Presbyterian Church.’⁶²

During the brief eight year period that Girardeau was away from Charleston, he received his formal theological education and served as the pastor for two respectable churches, where he ministered to congregations that consisted of ‘the most cultivated gentlemen of the state.’⁶³ When Girardeau returned to Charleston In 1852, he did so in an entirely new capacity. What he had envisioned for himself as a boy on James Island would now begin to find its fulfillment in Charleston.

While Girardeau was serving as the pastor at Wilton, he was also receiving additional leadership responsibilities within the Charleston Presbytery. In 1851, Girardeau was asked to serve on the theology committee that examined potential candidates for the ministry. During the following year, at the age of twenty-six, Girardeau was elected moderator of the Charleston Presbytery and asked to preach to the entire assembly on the doctrine of Justification.⁶⁴ Throughout the eight year period that Girardeau had been away from Charleston, he had not only been elected to serve on important committees, but he was also in the process of becoming a ‘consummate pulpit orator.’⁶⁵

As the reputation of the young Southern Presbyterian spread across the state of South Carolina, Girardeau was invited to preach in the more prestigious pulpits in Charleston. During the summer of 1852, Girardeau was asked to fill the pulpit at the Circular Church in Charleston, ‘a well

⁶¹ Girardeau, *Notes*, in *Life Work*, p. 20.

⁶² Rev. Dudley Jones, ‘A Great South Carolinian,’ unpublished article, Blackburn Collection.

⁶³ Blackburn, in *Life Work*, p. 77.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁶⁵ Thomas A. Hoyt, D.D. ‘Reminiscences of Dr. John L. Girardeau,’ *The Presbyterian* (December, 1898).

known Independent Church.⁶⁶ By the end of this particular visit to Charleston, Girardeau had unknowingly made an indelible impression on the Presbyterian population of Charleston, and one that would be remembered a year later when a replacement for the Second Presbyterian Mission was needed. Edward C. Jones remembered the events that led Girardeau to return to Charleston in the following way.

In 1852 Rev. Dr. Post took a summer vacation and Rev. Dr. Girardeau was engaged to fill the Circular church pulpit. During these services quite a number were attracted to the ministrations of Dr. Girardeau, and thus opened the way for his usefulness in Charleston. Rev. Dr. Adger concluding to withdraw from his mission work, Dr. Girardeau was induced to take charge of this work, but with their Negro membership still remaining under Rev. Dr. Smyth's church.⁶⁷

Following the summer of 1852, Girardeau returned to Wappetaw. Just over a year later and at the age of twenty-eight, Girardeau returned to Charleston. He remained there until the outbreak of the American Civil War. While in Charleston, Girardeau would accomplish that which few other Southern Presbyterian Evangelical in Charleston was able to achieve during the final decade before the Civil War. In a word, 'he won the devotion of the Negroes to himself.'⁶⁸ And there was evidence to prove it. On the eve of the war, 'he was pastor of the largest Negro congregation in this country.'⁶⁹

The Anson Street Mission: Ecclesiastical Reform

When Girardeau began his work in Charleston on Anson street, the mission remained formally connected with Second Presbyterian Church. That is, when Girardeau 'was induced to

⁶⁶ Edward C. Jones, in *Life Work*, p. 31.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁶⁸ Mack, in *Life Work*, p. 65.

⁶⁹ Chichester, 'Reminiscences,' *Christian Observer* (July, 1898).

take charge of this work,' pastoral oversight of those members who affiliated with the mission was still primarily delegated to the 'the session' from Second Presbyterian. In a word, 'the Negro membership still remained under Rev. Dr. Smyth's church.' Within a year of his arrival in Charleston, Girardeau became convinced that under the present ecclesiastical arrangement, the mission would not succeed. According to Edward Jones, Girardeau's assistant during the early days of the mission, 'it soon became evident that with the Negro membership retained in the Second Church, there could be no growth.'⁷⁰ Before the first year of his ministry in Charleston had come to an end, Girardeau was determined to detach the Anson Street Mission from the ecclesiastical oversight of the Second Presbyterian session. The implications for this request were not insignificant in the minds of the Second Presbyterian leadership. After all, this 'simple congregation' was to 'remain always under the ecclesiastical watch and control of that body.'⁷¹ To divorce the Anson Street Mission from the collective oversight of Second Presbyterian was, in effect, to remove a substantial amount of ecclesiastical power and control from them and assign those powers to Girardeau.

Certainly, the Charleston Presbytery was the final authoritative ecclesiastical court, but under the proposed motion, Girardeau would acquire additional powers that would enable him to execute his vision for the mission in ways that he was not previously entitled. The leadership that Girardeau displayed in order to persuade the session of Second Presbyterian Church that this modified version of the separate plan was a more efficient ecclesiastical arrangement for the evangelization of the Charleston slaves was the first step to the 'success' of the mission. Apart from

⁷⁰ Jones, in *Life Work*, pp. 31-32.

⁷¹ Thornwell, 'Slavery and the Religious Instruction of the Colored Population,' p. 106.

this ecclesiastical reform, Girardeau's ministry to the slaves was bound for defeat. And he was cognizant of it. Within a year of his arrival, and at the age of twenty-nine, Girardeau was entrusted with a measure of freedom to devise and execute a plan that he envisioned. In the original constitution of the formation of the Anson Street Mission as a particular church, the following is written.

The Charleston Presbytery, meeting at Columbia, S.C., did, on the thirty-first day of March, in the year eighteen hundred and fifty-five, separate the congregation of colored people worshipping in the building, known as the Anson Street Church, from the Second Presbyterian Church, and did place it, with forty-eight colored persons consenting to be members of it, under the care of Rev. J.L. Girardeau, to govern the said Church and to be responsible for the same directly to the Presbytery.⁷²

It is difficult to understand how a white, slave-holding, well-educated, theologically conservative, Southern Presbyterian minister was able to establish, in such short order, the reciprocal relationship of trust that was necessary to 'win the hearts of the Negroes to whom he preached.... and for them to 'esteem him as a martyr.'⁷³ Within the first few years of his ministry in Charleston, Girardeau had not only persuaded the Second Presbyterian Church that the mission needed to be divorced from their particular oversight, but he had also begun to make substantive relational inroads into the lives of many of the slaves. Those who observed Girardeau minister to the Charleston slaves, and even the 'leading Negroes of other churches,' could not help but admit that the 'Anson Street work was "of the Lord."⁷⁴

John L. Girardeau: The Pastor, 'the very essence of sympathy'

Joseph B. Mack, in concert with a host of other nineteenth century Southern Presbyterians,

⁷² *Minutes of the Charleston Presbytery*, (March 1855). Historical Foundation: Reformed Presbyterian Church (Montreat, N.C.) Microfilm #105.

⁷³ Mack, *Life Work*, p. 65.

⁷⁴ Jones, *Life Work*, p. 32.

commented that Girardeau was ‘wonderfully gifted as a pastor.’⁷⁵ The Rev. F.L. Leeper, chairman of the Memorial Committee, observed that ‘as a pastor, Dr. Girardeau was faithful and tender.’⁷⁶ Along those same lines E.C. Bailey asserted that Girardeau was ‘pre-eminently a spiritual pastor.... His religious experience was so intense, his own temptations so varied, his great heart so affectionate, that he was brim full of the very essence of sympathy.’⁷⁷ Certainly, similar comments were bestowed on many nineteenth century Southern Evangelicals. But there were few nineteenth century Southern Presbyterians whose most significant and effective pastoral influence existed among those of a different race than their own. By the end of the 1850s, he had won at least two-thousand slaves in Charleston to affiliate with the largest black Evangelical church in the country. These slaves were more receptive to Girardeau’s pastoral care than they were to ministers of their own race. Bailey continues,

Even the Negroes, whom he did not hesitate to visit in trouble, appreciated his pastoral office to such an extent that losing sight of the one he represented, they would say in their own language, “Tank de Lawd, Jedus cum fer see we.”⁷⁸

The slaves of Charleston who, over the course of the 1850s, began to identify themselves with the Anson Street Mission, and later Zion Presbyterian Church,⁷⁹ did not all immediately

⁷⁵ Mack, *Life Work*, p. 51.

⁷⁶ Rev. F.L. Leeper, Chairman of the Memorial Committee for Rev. Dr. John L. Girardeau: ‘Memorial Service of the Late Rev. John L. Girardeau,’ *Minutes of Charleston Presbytery* (July, 1898). See also, Blackburn, pp. 379-387.

⁷⁷ E.C. Bailey, ‘The Great Preacher,’ editor for the *Charleston Observer* (January, 1898).

⁷⁸ Bailey, *Charleston Observer* (January, 1898).

⁷⁹ In 1859, the Adger family, along with some of the foremost ‘citizens of Charleston,’ agreed to erect a larger church building than the present facility on Anson Street if a small portion of the seating could be reserved for the white individuals who had decided to leave Second Presbyterian Church and affiliate with the Mission. Girardeau reluctantly agreed, and the new edifice was built on Calhoun street in Charleston for \$25,000. The seating capacity for the new building was nearly two-thousand. According to Girardeau, ‘this house was 100 feet long by 80 feet broad, and was on a basement

gravitate toward the pastoral leadership of Girardeau. In fact, there was nothing particularly extraordinary about the mission during the first three years of its existence. Anson street experienced steady growth in attendance from the outset of Girardeau's arrival, but the floodgates did not open up, as it were, until the latter part of the 1850s.

It took significant time and extended effort for Girardeau to establish credibility among the slaves as one who could rightly serve as their pastor, that is, one who was 'full of the very essence of sympathy.' But, in addition to the ambitious task that Girardeau faced to earn the respect of the slaves, he also faced the difficult challenge of proving himself to be a competent leader who possessed an attractive vision that the slaves would embrace, that is, one that employed their participation in the daily affairs of the church. The lengthy process that Girardeau faced to establish himself as a pastor who was indeed 'divinely fitted for this self-sacrificing and unique work' commenced upon his arrival.⁸⁰ By 1858, Girardeau and the members of Zion Presbyterian Church, began to witness the fruits of their attempts at mutual trust toward one another. Their reciprocal demonstration of acceptance toward one another was summed up best by a black member of Zion Presbyterian Church, whose friend initially refused to attend services with her because the minister was white. She responded, 'Yas, he face is white, but he heart is black.'⁸¹

A Competent Leader: 'Possessed with a Vision' of Accountability and Growth

Girardeau demonstrated the beginning of effective pastoral leadership when he successfully

divided into two rooms, which afforded ample conveniences for prayer meetings, catechizing of classes, and personal instruction of candidates for membership.' The new facility on Calhoun Street was filled to the brim within weeks. 'From the first the great building was filled, the blacks occupying the most of the main floor, and whites the galleries, which seated 250 persons.' See letter from Girardeau to the Rev. Dr. Mallard (1890), in Blackburn, pp. 72-81.

⁸⁰ Mack, in *Life Work*, p. 51.

⁸¹ Blackburn, in *Life Work*, p. 104.

negotiated a plan to detach the Anson Street Mission from Second Presbyterian Church. As Jones rightly concluded, 'The wisdom of this change was soon evident.'⁸² What became increasingly clear in the aftermath of this ecclesiastical restructuring was the leadership that Girardeau displayed. The ecclesiastical reorganization was simply the first step of a much broader plan that Girardeau had masterfully envisioned from the outset of his ministry in Charleston: accountability and growth.

For Girardeau, the initial benefits for the establishment of a completely separate Southern Presbyterian church, removed from the particular oversight of Second Presbyterian Church, were twofold. First, there now existed the possibility for the slaves to exercise pastoral oversight among their own that had previously been unacceptable. Secondly, the ecclesiastical re-structuring of the mission as a separate church body, distinct from and no longer subject to the immediate oversight of Second Presbyterian Church, rendered an excellent opportunity for future growth. In a report that was submitted to the Charleston Presbytery the year following the split from Second Presbyterian Church, Girardeau noted that the Anson Street Mission was now poised to 'be made a vehicle of incalculable blessing to the coloured people of Charleston.'

On the whole, the prospects of the Mission are exceedingly encouraging. The tide of popular feeling, among the coloured people generally, seems at length to be settling in its favour; the difficulties and embarrassments which have hitherto impeded its progress appear to be gradually vanishing, and I see no reason why they should not fully receive the Gospel, and if the work be faithfully prosecuted, why the Church may not, with the Divine blessing, be made a vehicle of incalculable blessing to the coloured people of Charleston, and become a joy and a praise in the community.⁸³

Girardeau had additional ideas that he would gradually unveil and execute among the congregants of the Anson Street Mission to enhance pastoral oversight, utilizing the black

⁸² Edward Jones, in *Life Work*, p. 32.

⁸³ John L. Girardeau, 'Report to the Charleston Presbytery,' *Minutes of the Charleston Presbytery* (1857). See also, Blackburn, *Life Work*, pp. 37-38.

membership among the existing members, and facilitate future growth for the mission. But, Girardeau was aware of the potential resistance within the Southern Presbyterian Church and the community at large toward these changes that he envisioned for the mission. For instance, Girardeau was persuaded that pastoral care for every member of the Anson Street Mission should be given a high priority. Of course, pastoral oversight had always been an emphasis within the Southern Presbyterian Church. Girardeau would feel no tension within the denomination along these lines. But, Girardeau was prepared to delegate the majority of the pastoral care at Anson Street to those whom the Southern Presbyterian Church had previously not seen fit to serve in that capacity: the slaves.

Girardeau also believed that it was extremely important to establish numerical growth from the outset of his ministry. In fact, Girardeau was persuaded that consistent growth was one very important quantitative measurement of the strength and vitality of the church. But the previous leadership of the Anson Street Mission had not placed an emphasis on steady growth. Certainly, they were in favor of the mission adding new members to the rolls, but they had not made the internal changes necessary to ensure that growth. In short, they were unwilling to employ the slaves in important positions of leadership.

Girardeau was convinced that numerical growth was not only necessary to the vitality of the mission, but it was also a strong indication of the health of the mission. Further, he created, imposed and managed a more progressive form of pastoral oversight among the membership of Anson Street than those before him had considered. In the same report to the Charleston Presbytery, Girardeau cites the steady growth of the mission as one significant indication of its 'prosperous condition.'

I would now, with gratitude to God, mention the fact, that the Church has received, during the past year, encouraging tokens of the Divine favour; and that it is now a more prosperous condition than at any previous stage in its history. A simple statement of the facts will justify

this opinion. Since the Spring meeting of the Presbytery last year, six persons have been received into the communion of the Church by certificate, and sixty-one on examination. At the commencement of the Presbyterial year, the number of communicants was eighty-eight. It is now one hundred and forty-five. In May, 1855, the Church was established, with a membership of forty-eight. It thus appears that, in two years, after deducting removals, the number of communicants has been trebled.... The stated attendance upon worship is good. The building is usually filled, and sometimes it is difficult for a portion of the congregation to obtain seats. ⁸⁴

Anson Street: A Plurality of Leadership

Girardeau's strategy to pastor his black congregation was not the most conventional one within the annals of the Southern Presbyterian Church. But, then again, there had been no collective, positive, historical precedent within his denomination among the slaves that would suggest that another, more progressive version of the 'separate' plan, should not be attempted. Unlike Adger and other Southern Presbyterians who were persuaded that the slaves should receive few, if any, opportunities to obtain substantive leadership positions in the church, Girardeau was convinced that the black laity must be properly trained, equipped, and utilized if the most effective, long term pastoral care for the congregation could ever be realized. In fact, Girardeau was convinced that the mission would languish apart from the assistance of black lay leadership. Kelly alluded to Girardeau's effective leadership ability to initiate change within the Southern Presbyterian Church.

Where he was so remarkably innovative, and with such stupendous results (given the paternalist, slave mentality of the ruling class at the time) was in his development of highly effective spiritual and pastoral leadership among his black, slave laity.⁸⁵

Girardeau's 'remarkably innovative' approach to pastoral care on Anson Street may not have been as innovative as one might assume.⁸⁶ Of course, his commitment to identify and apply a

⁸⁴ Girardeau, 'Report to the Charleston Presbytery.' See also, *Life Work*, p. 36.

⁸⁵ Douglas Kelly, *Preachers With Power*, p. 132.

⁸⁶ It is likely that Girardeau borrowed heavily from the pastoral model that Thomas Chalmers created for the poor relief in St. John's parish in Glasgow; See also, Kelly, *Preachers*, p. 133; John N. Akers,

system of pastoral oversight was certainly the result of his belief that every member of his congregation should 'strive for a higher Christian life through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.'⁸⁷ In other words, Girardeau believed that the daily existence of the professed Christian should reflect the profession of faith that was offered upon entrance into the church.

This 'striving' to attain a more sanctified Christian life was not merely the singular duty of every Anson Street member. To be sure, each congregant was, according to Girardeau, ultimately accountable to God for their individual actions. But Girardeau was persuaded that each member of the mission needed the assistance of others in order to ensure that the process of sanctification, that is, this 'striving for a higher Christian life,' was carried out. Of course, Girardeau was aware that it was impossible for him to oversee and hold accountable every member of the Anson Street Mission, particularly in light of his vision for church growth. He was also persuaded that the slaves would respond more favorably to the leadership of other slaves. Consequently, Girardeau executed a method of 'shepherding' from the outset of his involvement with the mission that encouraged the slaves to take ownership of the physical and spiritual well being of the other slaves.

Girardeau and "Shepherding:"

In the wake of the separation from Second Presbyterian Church, the Anson Street Mission began to attract and enfold additional regular attenders and members. The ecclesiastical split from Second Presbyterian Church was appealing to the Charleston slaves because it tended to create, or at least give the impression of a less 'connectional' form of Presbyterian church government. That is, the mission appeared, at least to the outside observer, to take the form of an independent

'Slavery and Sectionalism: Some Aspects of Church and Society Among Presbyterians in the American South, 1789-1861 (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Edinburgh University, 1973) p. 416.

⁸⁷ Mack, in *Life Work*, p. 68.

congregation. And in a very real sense, the perception of a more congregational form of church government was an accurate one. To be sure, the mission remained under the oversight of the Charleston Presbytery, and even more specifically, the pastoral leadership of Girardeau. What is more, Girardeau and the Presbytery would continue to uphold the basic principles of Presbyterian Church government. But in effect, the authoritative powers to drive the vision, and in particular, the shepherding component of the Anson Street Mission, was now largely in the hands of the pastor and those whom he appointed to assist him.

When Girardeau unveiled his method of pastoral oversight to the slaves who were already involved in the mission before his formal arrival, they seized this unique opportunity to participate more fully in the life of the church. Granted, the success of this model for pastoral care was not fully realized until 1859, when the Anson Street Mission became Zion Presbyterian Church. But, as the Charleston slaves recognized this unprecedented phenomenon at work in the Southern Presbyterian Church, they would gradually unite themselves with the Anson Street work. Of course, Girardeau was prepared not only to receive them into the mission, but he was also committed to equip them and prepare them for meaningful service. By 1857, Girardeau's vision was gradually becoming theirs as well. Commenting on the broad-minded vision of Girardeau to incorporate the slaves in the daily pastoral activities of the church, Douglas Kelly remarks:

Yet, in a certain sense, we might say that John L. Girardeau was far ahead of his time in that he was doing some things in his ministry at Zion Church [formally, Anson Street Mission] which would now be considered the latest ministerial innovation or avant-garde desideratum! The surprising thing is that this man was a conservative of conservatives in the Calvinist camp. Had you asked him why he would decide to strike out in an unusual direction, his answer would have been simple: he was merely returning to the scripture practicalities of true Presbyterian government and was following in the train of the Genevan and Scottish reformations.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Kelly, *Preachers*, p. 132.

Girardeau: A 'jure divino' Presbyterian

Girardeau's decision to detach the Anson Street mission from Second Presbyterian Church was in no way a rebellious or divisive attempt to demonstrate his dissatisfaction with Presbyterianism. Nor should his efforts to integrate the slaves into certain positions of pastoral care be understood as a purposely contentious attempt to oppose the Southern Presbyterian Church. Girardeau was as thoroughly convinced of the biblical attestation for Presbyterian church government as anyone in the Southern Presbyterian Church. The Rev. R.A. Webb commented that Girardeau was a 'jure divino Presbyterian.... He did not believe that the Scriptures were non-committal on the form of church government, leaving the whole matter to the discretion of each body of believers.'⁸⁹

Girardeau inhaled Presbyterianism from his earliest days, but he was also fraternal with other Evangelical denominations, refusing to condemn, or even belittle, those who did not adhere to a Presbyterian form of church government. For Girardeau, the primary issue in the determination of fraternal church relations with denominations other than his own centered on the 'essentials doctrines of the Christian faith.' As Webb rightly stated, 'Dr. Girardeau was first of all a *Christian*,' not a Presbyterian. Further, his liberal posture toward those who aligned themselves with other Evangelical denominations is consistent with the progressive outlook that he displayed toward the Charleston slave. In short, Girardeau was naturally predisposed to look favorably upon other people and denominations without immediately drawing adverse conclusions about their race or ecclesiastical tradition. The following interchange between Girardeau and an episcopal clergyman highlights that point.

⁸⁹ R.A. Webb, D.D., LL.D. 'The Presbyter,' in *Life Work*, p. 211.

He used to tell the story that once his beloved brother and friend, Dr. Gadsden, an Episcopal clergyman, said to him, "Girardeau, the older I get the less denominational I become." Dr. Girardeau replied, "Gadsden, the older I get the more denominational I become." Dr. Gadsden answered, "Your statement is surprising; I thought you were growing in grace." Dr. Girardeau replied, "My denominational creed teaches me that there are other sheep not of the Presbyterian fold; and the older I get the more heartily do I believe it; hence, as I grow in grace I am growing in denominationalism."⁹⁰

Even so, Girardeau was a 'loyal and devoted lover of his denomination,' and his steadfast commitment to uphold his Presbyterian heritage can be readily identified in the 'Rules For the Government Of the Coloured Members of Zion Presbyterian Church.'

Rule 1. *Denomination.* This Church shall be governed in accordance with the Constitution of the Old School Presbyterian Church in the United States.

Rule 2. *Officers.* Its officers shall be only those which the constitution of the Presbyterian Church recognizes, namely—a pastor, ruling elders and deacons.

Rule 3. *Pastor.* To preach the Gospel, to administer the Sacraments and to pronounce the Apostolic Benediction shall be the function of the ministerial office alone.

Rule 4. *Session.* The powers to govern this Church is lodged in the Session, which consists of the pastor and the other ruling elders; and no authority from within the Church shall be considered binding on the members thereof, except that of the Session.⁹¹

The essential difference that existed between Girardeau and many of his fellow Southern Presbyterians did not consist in their views of Presbyterianism. Rather, their conflict centered on the role of the slave in the context of the church. No doubt, this difference stemmed from the greater incongruity between Girardeau and the majority of nineteenth century Presbyterians concerning their perception of the inherent ability of the slaves to function in a leadership capacity. Granted, the difference was often subtle, but the implications were enormous. For instance, Girardeau, together with the Southern Presbyterian Church, 'desired the Negro churches to be connected with and

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 213.

⁹¹ Girardeau, 'Rules For the Government Of the Coloured Members of Zion Presbyterian Church,' in *Life Work*, pp. 84-98.

under the supervision of the white churches.⁹² Thus, the Anson Street Mission was connected with and accountable to the Charleston Presbytery. But Girardeau was also convinced that a church that existed primarily to enfold the slave population of Charleston, must not only permit the slaves to serve in a leadership capacity but must encourage and support such an arrangement. Like his nineteenth century Southern Presbyterian colleagues, Girardeau held firmly to the tenets of Presbyterianism. Unlike the majority of them, Girardeau was inclined to think and act more progressively within the bounds of Southern Presbyterian culture.

“Leaders of fifty:”

The responsibility that Girardeau assigned to the slaves of Anson Street was not an arbitrary one. In fact, the pastoral duties that were delegated to those slaves who demonstrated an interest and aptitude to care for the ‘flock,’ and whose daily lives suggested that they were capable of pastoral leadership within the church, required a substantial amount of time and effort. But, the opportunity that the slaves were afforded to serve in a leadership role encouraged an ownership in the vision of the church to ‘prosecute the work of evangelizing the coloured population,’⁹³ without which the mission would not survive. Girardeau was persuaded that the integration of the slaves into important pastoral positions from the outset of his ministry in Charleston was not only necessary to the uplifting of the slaves but also vital to the success of the mission.

Girardeau’s plan from the beginning was to divide the congregation into pockets of fifty members to be overseen by a group leader appointed by the session. When the class leader had received twenty people to reside under his pastoral care, Girardeau, in concert with the session of

⁹² Mack, in *Life Work*, p. 70.

⁹³ John L. Girardeau, ‘Report to the Charleston Presbytery,’ 1857.

the church, appointed an assistant leader to train alongside the group leader until the 'flock' reached fifty. At that point, the assistant leader would be promoted to class leader and take charge of an additional class. In the 'Rules for government,' the following policies were documented.

Rule 3. The members shall be distributed into divisions called classes; the distribution to be made by the session.

Rule 5. The number of regular members in each class shall not exceed fifty; but when this number shall have been reached, new members may temporarily be received into connection with it, until their number shall be sufficient to warrant, in the judgment of the Session, their being set off as a separate class.⁹⁴

The weekly class meetings that were overseen by their respective leaders were intended to foster fellowship among the members, keep the members abreast of the physical and material needs of the class, and to encourage growth in the knowledge and practice of scriptural mandates. The purpose of these class meetings was stated in Rule 7 of the bylaws:

The objects of the class meetings are— to promote mutual acquaintance and brotherly love among the members; to apprise them of one another's sickness and need; to acquaint the leaders with the same; and to further the growth of the members in Christian knowledge and experiential religion.⁹⁵

The job description of the class leader was primarily a pastoral one. Each class leader was responsible for the spiritual, physical and material well being of every individual assigned to his care. Of course, the session of the church viewed themselves as the final authority and the church court that was accountable to the Charleston Presbytery. But, in effect, the class leaders were the pastors of the church. Aside from the weekly Sunday morning preaching, the class leaders exercised leadership in the daily affairs of the members. Under 'duties' of leaders, the following is catalogued in the bylaws of the church.

⁹⁴ Girardeau, 'Rules For the Government of the Colored Members,' Blackburn, pp. 84-98.

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 84-98.

Rule 3. It shall be the duty of the leaders to meet with their classes weekly at the Church; to visit and look after the members, to assist in taking care of the sick and needy; and to superintend the burial of the dead.

Rule 4. It shall be the duty of the leaders to report the cases of sickness and want which require aid; and also those which call for the attention of the pastor.

Rule 5. It shall be their duty to report all cases which appear to require the exercise of discipline.

Rule 7. It shall be their duty to examine into all applications for marriage, and to report thereon to the pastor.

Rule 8. It shall be their duty—as it is their privilege—to set a good example to the members by punctual attendance upon the services of the Church.⁹⁶

Finally, the class meetings were also specifically designed by Girardeau, under the particular oversight of the class leader, to address the continual flow of physical and material needs that the slaves encountered. Edward Jones cited the case and applauded the system that was in place at the Anson Street Mission that met the financial needs of a ‘bed-ridden paralytic’ who was a recipient of the poor relief fund.

He regularly received from the charity fund of the church one dollar a week, making an annuity of fifty-two dollars. This fact exhibits the care which is taken of poor and needy members, and the result which follows from a regular weekly collection made up, though each may be, of driblets.⁹⁷

Southern historians John Akers, Erskine Clarke, and Douglass Kelly have suggested that Girardeau borrowed heavily from the model of pastoral care that Thomas Chalmers used for the poor relief fund in the St. John’ parish in Glasgow.⁹⁸ Under ‘the sick’ and ‘the poor and infirm,’ the following is catalogued in the Anson Street bylaws.

⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 84-98.

⁹⁷ Jones, in *Life Work*, p. 36.

⁹⁸ See Kelly, *Preachers With Power*, p. 133. See also John N. Akers, *Slavery and Sectionalism: Some Aspects of Church and Society Among Presbyterians in the American South, 1789-1861* (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Edinburgh University, 1973) p. 416.

Rule 8. A collection shall regularly be taken up in behalf of the sick members of the Church at the weekly prayer meeting on Monday night.

Rule 13. There shall be a special fund for the purpose of affording relief to the poor and infirm members of the Church, and at their death (if destitute) of providing for their funeral and burial expenses.⁹⁹

Girardeau was a consistent Southern Presbyterian pastor, because he was able to reverse the disappointing results of the mission to the slaves in Charleston and turn the Anson Street project into a Southern Presbyterian accomplishment. At least, that was the collective perception of the nineteenth century Southern Presbyterians who were most closely associated with this work. The assistant for the Anson Street Mission, Edward C. Jones, was so confident of the pastoral vision that Girardeau conceived and the leadership skills that he possessed, that he stated the following. 'This plan was found to work with perfect success, and had the war not closed the mission, Dr. Girardeau could have managed two thousand as easily as two hundred members.'¹⁰⁰

Girardeau-developed and maintained a vision for the mission that was based on the inclusion of the slaves in the pastoral oversight of the congregation. He emphasized the Presbyterian notion of a plurality of leadership, but he also included in that leadership team those whom many Southern Presbyterians would have not even considered. From that perspective, it was little surprise that Girardeau 'won the devotion of the Negroes to himself.'¹⁰¹ Girardeau was committed to measuring the success of the mission by its growth and made the necessary adjustments along the way that were needed to ensure that growth. And yet, he refused to compromise his high view of pastoral accountability and Presbyterian polity for the sake of that growth. Finally, Girardeau was willing to

⁹⁹ 'Rules for the Government of the Colored Members,' pp. 84-98.

¹⁰⁰ Jones, in *Life Work*, p. 33.

¹⁰¹ Mack, in *Life Work*, p. 65.

incorporate components of other effective models of pastoral care, such as a modified version of Thomas Chalmers' plan to pastor the poor and needy population of Glasgow.

The Revival of 1858: A Mixed Blessing

By the mid 1850s, the Anson Street Mission was 'well under way.' Even Girardeau was prepared to conclude that, 'on the whole, the prospects of the Mission are exceedingly encouraging.'¹⁰² Membership was on the rise. Pastoral oversight was administered by the class leaders. Girardeau had won the affection and respect not only of his 'flock,' and he was also increasingly recognized and admired by additional slaves in the Charleston community. As Southern Presbyterian historian John Akers rightly noted, the mission in Charleston was 'one of the most successful attempts to reach the slave population' throughout the entire South. What is more, the 'experiment' was hailed by Presbyterians in other parts of the South.'¹⁰³ But even Girardeau was not fully prepared, at least by way of former experience, to manage the events that occurred on Anson Street during the final years leading up to the American Civil War

Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, Southern Presbyterians, more than Methodist and Baptist Southern Evangelicals, oscillated in their views concerning the authenticity of revivals. And yet, a revival tradition, whether in the form of camp meetings, protracted meetings, prayer meetings or worship services, had been and would continue to be the hallmark of the Southern Presbyterian Church. Beginning with Edwards, Tennent, and Whitefield in the mid eighteenth century, Southern Presbyterians endorsed 'the revival of religion' as a 'work of the Holy

¹⁰² John L. Girardeau, 'Report to the Charleston Presbytery, 1857.' (*Minutes of Charleston Presbytery*, 1857). See also Girardeau, *Life, Work and Sermons*, p. 35.

¹⁰³ John N. Akers, 'Southern Presbyterians and Slave Missions: Conflict and Accommodation in the Old South,' in Boyd, Jesse L. and Godfrey, W. Robert, *Through Christ's Word* (Presbyterian & Reformed: Phillipsburg, NJ) 1985.

Spirit converting multitudes to God,' and in doing so, they linked themselves to the burgeoning Evangelical movement. Of course, from the outset of this movement, there was a minority of Southern Presbyterian Evangelicals who were inclined to distance themselves from mainstream Evangelicalism. But, as Loveland rightly concluded, on the whole, Southern Presbyterians gave revivals a 'cautious endorsement.'¹⁰⁴

At the turn of the nineteenth century, Southern Presbyterians were instrumental in what soon became known as the Great Revival of 1800-1805. This flurry of revivals that began in the Cumberland region of Kentucky among Presbyterians and eventually spread throughout many portions of the South and into the Baptist and Methodist denominations, grew out of a 'feeling of crisis in 1790s over religious coldness and infidelity.' Furthermore, the Great Revival was the 'progenitor of later Southern revivals,' including the revival of 1857.¹⁰⁵

As the nineteenth century progressed, however, the majority of Southern Presbyterians gradually began to dissociate themselves from many of their Methodist and Baptist brethren, citing among them an unfortunate tendency toward 'emotionalism, disorder and extravagance.' Southern Presbyterians had always emphasized the 'providential nature of revivals,' that is the view that God was the first cause or the divine initiator of any authentic revival. But many Southern Presbyterians observed, and even as early as 1803, that there was a growing disproportionate tendency toward 'human agency' over 'divine efficiency' in producing a revival. Such an unbalanced propensity toward human measures to spark a revival, Presbyterians believed, would always lead to

¹⁰⁴ Loveland, 'Revivalism,' in *Southern Evangelicals*, pp. 86; 69.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

hysteria.¹⁰⁶

By the 1830s, there were additional indications of an even greater reaction to the revival movement among many Southern Evangelicals. Presbyterians, in particular, were concerned that revivals in the South had become increasingly ‘calculated and contrived.’ The ‘new measures’ approach to revivalism, as designed by Charles Finney, emphasized the freedom of the human will to create and sustain revivals.¹⁰⁷ Such human measures included ‘protracted meetings, the anxious seat, sermons that appealed to the emotions, praying for individuals by name, and allowing women to testify in public meetings.’¹⁰⁸ Southern Presbyterians, including Girardeau, were not opposed to measures that were intended to facilitate what they also referred to as a ‘work of the Holy Spirit.’ More than other Southern Evangelicals, they believed that prayer and preaching were the primary human means through which God was inclined to respond to them in the form of a revival. Perhaps many Southern Presbyterians, however, including Girardeau, were also willing to institute additional measures among their congregants, such as the protracted meeting, as long as they were ‘conducted in a regular and orderly manner.’

During the year, we have held two protracted meetings, which were conducted in a regular and orderly manner, and resulted in great apparent good. One has just been concluded, having lasted for a fortnight, and at its close thirteen inquirers applied for instruction preparatory to admission.¹⁰⁹

Southern Presbyterian reluctance, even cynicism, toward revivals persisted throughout the 1840s and 1850s, though they were persuaded there were occasional pockets of genuine,

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 68.

¹⁰⁷ See Charles G. Finney, *Revival Lectures* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Fleming H. Revell, n.d.) pp. 280ff.

¹⁰⁸ Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, p. 86.

¹⁰⁹ Girardeau, ‘Report to the Charleston Presbytery, 1857.’

outpourings of the Holy Spirit. It was not until the Great Revival of 1858, however, that ‘the most remarkable revival of religion known in the history of the city or state, swept across the South.’¹¹⁰ Southern Presbyterians were convinced, including Girardeau, that such a mighty wave of religious activity was an ‘exhibition of the Spirit’s supernatural power.’¹¹¹ J.O. Lindsay described well what Southern Presbyterians tended to emphasize concerning revivals: the unilateral hand of God pouring down his favor upon his undeserving.

God is shaking his Church out of its slumbers and arresting the attention of the world in a way that he has not done heretofore. He is making himself felt as the great agent in the moral world, turning back the captivity of Zion, answering the prayers of his people, fulfilling his promises to his Church, and pushing on to consummation his cherished purposes toward our lost race in a way so striking, that those who seemed scarcely to admit his existence are now forced to acknowledge his presence and power.¹¹²

Southern Presbyterians were convinced that the unilateral ‘exhibition of the Spirit’s power,’ igniting the revival of 1858, was further evidence that extraordinary human measures were not the basis upon which revivals were triggered. They also claimed that there had been no ‘unusual agency’ that was intended to provoke this religious awakening. Rather, they were persuaded that the revival of 1858 was simply ‘a great work of the Holy Spirit.’ Granted, Southern Presbyterians did believe that the revival was tied to and even the result of their persistent prayers and ‘earnest’ preaching, those ordinary means through which God ordained these sporadic seasons of refreshment. In his essay, ‘The Religious Awakening of 1858,’ Lindsay concluded the same when he noted the ‘most noteworthy feature of this revival was the prominence given to social prayer.’¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Leeper, in *Life Work*, p. 379.

¹¹¹ Letter from Girardeau to Mallard, Nov. 10, 1890. See *Life, Work and Sermons*, p. 79.

¹¹² J.O. Lindsay, ‘The Religious Awakening of 1858,’ *Southern Presbyterian Review*, XI (July, 1858) p. 246.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

The effects of the revival of 1858 were felt in cities and towns throughout the South.

According to C.R. Hemphill, 'the great religious revival of 1858, which swept over our country in so remarkable a manner, was deeply experienced in Charleston.'¹¹⁴ But nowhere was there greater impact from this religious awakening than among the slaves at the Anson Street mission. And nowhere and at no time did Girardeau cite a more prosperous and rewarding season of his own life than during that eight week period in 1858. 'The most glorious work of grace I ever felt or witnessed was one which occurred in 1858, in connection with this missionary work in Charleston. For eight weeks, night after night, save Saturday nights, I preached to dense and deeply moved congregations.'¹¹⁵ Blackburn described the prayer meetings at the Anson Street mission that led up to the revival as well as the eight week period that was unparalleled in Girardeau's ministry.

The greatest event in his ministry was the revival in the later fifties. This began with a prayer meeting that constantly increased until the house was filled. Some of the officers of the church wanted him to commence preaching services, but he steadily refused, waiting for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Day after day he, therefore, kept his prayers addressed directly to the mediatorial throne of the Holy Spirit in mighty reviving power. One evening, while leading the people in prayer, he received a sensation as if a bolt of electricity had struck his head and diffused itself through his whole body. For a little while he stood speechless under the strange physical feeling. Then he said: "The Holy Spirit has come; we will begin preaching tomorrow evening." He closed the service with a hymn, dismissed the congregation, and came down from the pulpit; but no one left the house. The whole congregation had quietly resumed its seat. Instantly he realized the situation. The Holy Spirit had not only come to him— He had also taken possession of the hearts of the people. Immediately he began exhorting them to accept the Gospel. They began to sob, softly, like the falling of the rain; then, with deeper emotion, to weep bitterly, or to rejoice loudly, according to their circumstances. It was midnight before he could dismiss his congregation. A noted evangelist from the North, who was present said, between his sobs to an officer of the church: "I never saw it on this fashion." The meeting went on night and day for eight weeks. Large numbers of both white and black were converted and joined the various churches of the city. His own was wonderfully built up, not only in numbers, but also in an experience that remained in the church. He was accustomed to say that he could always count on those who

¹¹⁴ Rev. C.R. Hemphill, D.D. LL.D., *Notes on Girardeau*, Blackburn Collection.

¹¹⁵ Letter from Girardeau to Mallard, Nov. 10, 1890.

were converted in that meeting.¹¹⁶

The results of this 'most glorious work of grace I ever felt or witnessed' were a mixed blessing for the Anson Street Mission. The revival of 1858 inspired monumental growth among the slaves. 'On one occasion I saw some eighty colored people stand up together to profess Christ and be formally welcomed at this little church.' Further, 'it was the growth, developing out of this great revival which led to the organization of Zion Church.'¹¹⁷ The revival of 1858 also solidified Girardeau's place among nineteenth century Southern Presbyterians as one who was especially 'called' by God to serve as a minister to the slaves. They were in agreement that 'perhaps no one else ever possessed such a unique power' among them.¹¹⁸ Nineteenth century Southern Presbyterians also tended to live vicariously through Girardeau's accomplishments among the Charleston slaves. His effectiveness tended to justify the perceived wisdom of the 'separate' movement and lend credibility toward the continuance of the South's 'peculiar institution.'

Finally, Girardeau demonstrated that his impact as a preacher was not limited to the slaves of Charleston but also included the Charleston elite. Their infatuation with the preaching of Girardeau during the 'Great Revival of 1858,' caused many of them to forget that the vision of the Anson Street Mission was 'to prosecute the work of evangelizing the coloured population.'¹¹⁹ The Mission was not initially established to include the white population of Charleston. In 1859, that would change. Consequently, the transition from the Anson Street Mission to Zion Presbyterian Church was a mixed blessing.

¹¹⁶ Blackburn, in *Life Work*, pp. 99-100.

¹¹⁷ Hemphill, *Notes on Girardeau*. Blackburn Collection.

¹¹⁸ Mack, in *Life Work*, p. 70.

¹¹⁹ Girardeau, 'Report to the Charleston Presbytery, 1858.'

From Anson Street Mission to Zion Presbyterian Church:

The favorable reputation that Girardeau received as a preacher among the Charleston elite did not surface apart from their observation. By the latter part of 1858, and in the wake of the 'Revival of 1858,' the Anson Street Mission was flourishing under the leadership of Girardeau, and a growing number of members from Second Presbyterian Church and other Evangelical churches in the city had been drawn to visit the mission and participate in the worship services. The attendance among the white citizens of Charleston continued to increase until a visitor, Col. C.G. Memmenger, suggested that Girardeau adapt one of his three Sunday morning sermons to accommodate to the interested white population of Charleston. Col. Memmenger' articulated his rationale to Edward Jones as follows.

I have been very much impressed with Mr. Girardeau's intellectual power as a preacher, and while he has great and special gifts in reaching the uneducated Negro, I want to say to you, as his friend, that he is doing himself a great injury in his efforts to bring down his mental gifts to the capacity of his people, and unless he can have some suitable field, his intellectual power as a preacher will be seriously impaired.¹²⁰

During that same year, Girardeau was approached by Robert Adger, the father of John B. Adger, with a similar request. Like Memmenger, Adger proposed that Girardeau address one of the Sunday morning sermons at Anson Street to the interested white folks of Charleston. Further, Adger suggested that Girardeau receive white membership into the mission as well. But, unlike Memmenger, Adger's request also came with an offer to build a new facility that would accommodate the growing number of black members who were attending the mission. Adger was doubtful that Girardeau would consent to this request, assuming that Girardeau would fear that the inclusion of white membership would stifle the momentum that existed among the slaves and

¹²⁰ Jones, in *Life Work*, p. 34.

threaten their involvement.

But he was also unaware that Girardeau's long term vision for the mission included a substantial increase in the black population of Charleston. The building on Anson Street was no longer sufficient to welcome additional slaves into the congregation. Nor did it provide adequate space for the class leaders to pastor their groups of fifty. Girardeau did not want the mission to become stagnant, and he was concerned that this was a possibility without suitable space both to grow and pastor the congregation. Once again, Girardeau received word of Adger's proposal from Jones.

I want you to approach Mr. Girardeau on a matter that I don't know how he will receive. I am satisfied that Mr. Girardeau greatly needs a larger building, and since the revival services, I find it my duty to place my children under Mr. Girardeau's teaching; and, if possible, I want to join his Mission Church. I find that Mr. Alex Campbell, F.D. Fanning, J.S. Chambers, and my brother, Joe Adger, have made up their mind to leave Dr. Smyth's church and, if possible, unite with that of Dr. Girardeau. We want you to approach him on this subject, and if he will accede we will build him a large church building where he can give us the morning service. It is likely that Mr. Girardeau will resist our leaving Dr. Smyth's church, and he may feel that it will interfere with his Negro work.¹²¹

Adger was correct in his assessment that Girardeau refused to accept this proposal if such a request was intended to alter the current vision of the mission to evangelize the colored population of Charleston. Girardeau responded to the proposal as follows. 'If this plan proposes in any way to interfere with our Negro work, I will never agree to their proposition.' Persuaded that Adger's proposal would not 'interfere with our Negro work,' and confident that a new building would advance his vision for additional growth and substantive pastoral oversight, Girardeau 'accepted this plan, provided the Negro element was assured.' 'Mr. Adger erected at once a building on Calhoun Street.' The slaves named it Zion Presbyterian Church. Jones commented on the new ecclesiastical arrangement.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 34.

The church was now regularly organized with elders and deacons— and up to the war there was a steady growth of both whites and blacks— with all machinery for the management of the large Negro congregation, and so perfect that success was assured in every department.¹²²

The immediate effects of the transition from Anson Street to Calhoun Street were, on the surface, positive. A new and more spacious facility was constructed for the Charleston slaves by the affluent citizens of Charleston. The physical structure was now sufficiently in place for Girardeau to execute his vision. Southern Presbyterians in Charleston could now argue that their rhetoric had been followed up by their actions to provide religious instruction for their slaves. The ‘success’ of the Charleston mission was further incentive for Presbyterians in other parts of the South to evangelize slaves. Abolitionists in the North could no longer accuse Southern Presbyterians of abandoning their responsibilities: In short, the evidence at Zion Presbyterian Church in Charleston suggested that Southern Presbyterians were exercising their ‘duty’ toward those who were ‘brought in God’s mysterious providence from a foreign land and placed under our care.’¹²³

But any immediate accomplishment that Southern Presbyterians might have collectively enjoyed during this transition was simply overshadowed by their request to become part of what was supposedly a ‘separate’ mission to the slaves. Such an appeal only highlights the underlying tragedy associated with the entire Southern Presbyterian initiative to ‘evangelize the Negroes.’ That is, Southern Presbyterians in Charleston and throughout the South, were never fully prepared to sacrifice their own desires in order to fulfill their ‘duty’ toward their black brethren. For Charleston Southern Presbyterians, their own preference to sit under the ‘sui generis’ preaching of John L. Girardeau, outweighed their vision to ‘prosecute the work of evangelizing the coloured population’

¹²² Ibid., pp. 34; 35.

¹²³ Adger, *My Life*, p. 167.

of Charleston. To be sure, Zion Presbyterian Church blossomed over the next three years under the leadership of Girardeau. But even his attempt to prosecute such a work was not enough to assuage those who lived outside of Dixie that neither the 'separate' plan nor the South's 'peculiar institution' could be justified any longer. Sadly, for Southern Presbyterians, 'the Civil War broke up this great work,' and Dr. Girardeau went as chaplain of a South Carolina regiment to Virginia.' Not surprisingly, he 'was as popular among the soldiers as he had been among his colored parishioners in Charleston.'¹²⁴

¹²⁴ Staff Reporter, 'Tablet Placed at Exercises: Zion Presbyterian Church,' *Charleston Evening Press* (July 28, 1927).

Chapter 5: The Final Years of a True Southern Presbyterian Evangelical

John L. Girardeau demonstrated the marks of a true Southern Presbyterian Evangelical during three distinct seasons that spanned the final years of his life. First, Girardeau discontinued his labors among the Charleston slaves in order to serve as a chaplain in the South Carolina Volunteers. Secondly, he made a deliberate attempt to restore the 'black element' of Zion Presbyterian Church in an effort to reconstruct 'Southern Zion,' even in the face of opposition from the 'white element' of Zion Presbyterian Church, and despite the social, economic, and cultural changes that occurred in the wake of the Civil War.¹ Finally, Girardeau served as a professor of systematic theology at Columbia Theological Seminary during the closing period of his life.

All three of these decisions suggest that Girardeau was ideologically a 'consistent' Southern Presbyterian Evangelical, though none of these decisions produced the results that he originally envisioned. The South suffered a massive defeat. Despite Girardeau's persistent efforts, the 'black element' of Zion Presbyterian Church never recovered from the debilitating effects of the American Civil War and was, in 1869, removed from the Southern Presbyterian denomination by an act of the General Assembly. Finally, in 1875, Girardeau withdrew from his preferred field of service as a minister to the Charleston Negroes and settled within the walls of the academy.

¹ In 1866, Girardeau became the minister of Glebe Street Presbyterian Church in Charleston. At that time, the official name of the church was changed to Zion Presbyterian Church, Glebe Street. The original Zion Presbyterian Church, situated on Calhoun Street, formally remained in existence too, but it did not immediately reassemble until 1867 due to the complicated effects of the war. However, by 1866, Girardeau was technically the minister of two separate congregations named Zion Presbyterian Church, consisting of the 'white element' on Glebe Street and the 'black element' on Calhoun Street.

The Spirituality of the Church:

Girardeau momentarily appeared to shift his loyalties in 1862 when he was installed as the chaplain of the Twenty-Third Regiment of the South Carolina Volunteers. In the original records of Zion Presbyterian Church, Girardeau wrote, 'In July, 1862, I became chaplain of the 23rd Regiment, S.C. Volunteers.'² At the peak of his ministerial career in Charleston, Girardeau deserted his work among the slaves to join the majority of Southern Evangelicals to 'defend the cause of God and religion.'³ Girardeau's decision to support secession and actively participate in the war was perfectly 'consistent' with the Southern Presbyterian doctrine of the spirituality of the Church.

It may seem inconsistent that Girardeau would forego an effective ministry that offered the Charleston slaves religious instruction, leadership advancement, and a heightened sense of self worth, in order to preserve the institution that appeared to deny them the fullest expression of their humanity. But Girardeau, and other nineteenth century Southern Presbyterians, did not view human bondage as spiritually, economically, or emotionally oppressive. To the contrary, they were convinced that a predominantly paternalistic civil and ecclesiastical relationship existing between whites and blacks was necessary for the spiritual well being and maturity of the slaves, the steady progress of a labor intensive culture, and the general health of the collective Southern 'family.' Southern Presbyterians were also persuaded that any attempt to sever that sacred bond was an act against the hand of Divine Providence and would eventually lead to the spiritual bankruptcy of their black brethren, economic instability, and

² Girardeau, Preface: *Original Records of Zion Presbyterian Church, Glebe Street*. Historical Foundation: Reformed Presbyterian Church (Montreat, N.C., 1866-1885) Microfilm # 105.

³ Benjamin Morgan Palmer, 'The South: Her Peril, and Her Duty: A Discourse in the First Presbyterian Church, New Orleans, on Thursday, November 29, 1860.' (New Orleans: Office of the True Witness and Sentinel, 1860) p. 10.

the breakdown of the highly paternalistic culture that was unique to the antebellum South.⁴

For the previous reasons, Girardeau and other Southern Evangelicals were willing to offer their lives, if necessary, to preserve the South, her 'peculiar institution,' and nearly everything that defined her existence. Failure to uphold, protect, and sanctify the people and the institution that God 'providentially' placed under their care, signed and sealed by the legislative powers of the state, would have been viewed by them as a conscious neglect not only of their spiritual duty to oversee their black brethren and their economic responsibility to strengthen Southern commerce, but also their civil obligation to submit themselves to the political authority of the state.

Southern Presbyterians, including Girardeau, were proponents of the spiritual nature of the visible church. That is, they strongly believed that the church and the state were separate institutions, operating in two completely different spheres of society, and with independent functions. The church, they maintained, was primarily responsible for the souls of men. The state, they argued, was authorized by the Constitution to govern the civil affairs of the people. The establishment and the perpetuation of slavery was a civil issue, not an ecclesiastical one, and one that had been properly debated and settled within the legislative sphere of each slaveholding state.⁵

Southern Presbyterians never viewed their ecclesiastical defense of slavery apart from the legal endorsement of their state legislature, but rather in relation and submission to it. To be sure, Southern Presbyterians, including Girardeau, supported the verdict of the Southern states to perpetuate slavery,

⁴ For an excellent discussion of the Southern Evangelical emphasis on the doctrine of Divine Providence, see Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, 'The Sectional Controversy,' pp. 257-265.

⁵ According to Brooks Holifield, the doctrine of the 'Spirituality of the Church,' implied that the visible church 'was permitted no official involvement in the social reform of the state, an order merely of justice.' See Holifield, *The Gentlemen Theologians*, p. 154.

but they also recognized that the visible church, as an institution created by God, was bound by the Constitution to submit to the authority of the civil magistrates. Thornwell, summarized the collective Southern Presbyterian position best when he concluded that ‘in defending this institution we have really been upholding the civil interests of mankind....’⁶

Throughout the 1830s and 1840s, Southern Presbyterian ministers, including Girardeau, preferred not to voice their personal views concerning slavery from the pulpit. To do so would have been considered a violation of their primary spiritual responsibility or ‘call’ to ‘preach the kingdom of God.’ Of course, using written methods of communication, they responded in an aggressive manner to those ‘clergymen and editors of religious newspapers in the free states who were “presuming to settle the affairs of the state.”’ But prior to the eve of the Civil War, Southern Presbyterians rarely used the pulpit as a means to buttress their personal views of slavery. As Loveland noted, ‘as long as they perceived it as a political conflict, they took the position that as ministers they should not become involved.’⁷

By the late 1840s, however, Evangelical abolitionists and Northern politicians began to make considerable inroads not only within their respective ecclesiastical bodies, but also within the larger political arena. Their uncompromising theological position that slavery was a sin, in concert with their increasingly effective campaign that called for the immediate abolition of the institution of slavery, began to ignite national and international attention. Not surprisingly, their aggressive tactics to create a grassroots groundswell among clergymen and politicians caught the attention of Southern Presbyterians as well, who were ‘alarmed at the abolitionists’ entry into the political arena.’ Further, the success that

⁶ James H. Thornwell, ‘The Christian Doctrine of Slavery,’ p. 404.

⁷ Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, p. 261.

abolitionists began to achieve, both nationally and internationally, was enough to convince Southern Presbyterians that they had ‘repudiated the church, the Bible, and Christianity and were motivated by a “political radicalism” which threatened “all the sacred rights and the holy institutions of mankind.”’⁸

Southern Presbyterians concluded that the ‘political radicalism’ that was provoked by Evangelical abolitionists in the North was evidence that slavery had become just as much a religious issue as a political one. The allegation that slavery was a sin, coupled with the increasingly obscured line of demarcation between the roles of politicians and clergymen, led Southern Presbyterians to the decision, by the mid 1850s, that they must abandon their ‘position of noninvolvement.’ Almost without exception, they continued to reserve the pulpit for ‘kingdom’ or spiritual purposes. But other modes of communication were utilized to express their views that Northern politicians had lost sight of their chief responsibility to appeal to the Constitution of the United States and not to the ‘worst passions and prejudices of the people.’

.... the more Evangelicals recognized a moral and religious dimension to the sectional controversy and the more they deprecated the part played by the politicians, the more they felt justified in abandoning their position of noninvolvement. A few Evangelicals participated in state conventions or meetings called to discuss the crisis. Others prepared articles, editorials, and addresses defending the Union, the Constitution, and the South against northern encroachments. The number of such items increased dramatically in the decade preceding the Civil War.⁹

Southern Presbyterians were convinced that the ‘radical’ and ‘emotionally’ charged campaign of Northern abolitionists had so influenced and infiltrated the faculties of Northern politicians that they were ‘leading the country to disunion against the wishes of the “intelligent, reflecting, sober-minded men of all parties.”’¹⁰ Southern Presbyterians were determined to fight back. Unfortunately for Southern

⁸ Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, pp. 258-259.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

Presbyterians, their own campaign to respond to the allegations that slavery was a sin, and one that necessitated immediate abolition, was a little too late. The tide of popular opinion outside the Southern states, both nationally and internationally, had already set its course.

By 1862, Southern Presbyterians maintained that secession, and eventually war, became the only alternative for the slaveholding states. Once the Federal government demonstrated a complete unwillingness to submit to the Constitution of the United States and, in so doing, refuse to respect the rights of individual states to pronounce binding judgements concerning slavery, there was little else that could be done. Thornwell's interpretation was that the Federal government 'shall not take sides on the question of slavery. It must not attempt either to repress or spread it.' To deny the authority of the Constitution to rule in such controversial matters, Southern Presbyterians believed, would ultimately lead to the collapse of the Union. What is more, they argued that the destruction of the Constitution would lead to the downfall of the entire country.¹¹ According to Kelly, '[Girardeau] was convinced that the Southern case was right and that the basic issue was a defense of the constitutional liberties of a formerly conservative, decentralized republic.'¹²

On the eve of the Civil War, despite the political complexities and differences that existed among politicians and clergymen in the slave-holding and non-slaveholding states concerning the proper balance of state and federal powers, Southern Presbyterians, including Girardeau, came to the conclusion that they were left with only one option. Thornwell expressed the views of the entire denomination twelve days after South Carolina passed the ordinance to secede. 'I believe that we have done right. I do not see any other course that was left to us. I am heart and hand with the State in this

¹¹ Ibid., p. 257. See also, James H. Thornwell, 'Critical Notes,' *Southern Presbyterian Review*, IV (January, 1851) pp. 444-445.

¹² Douglas Kelly, *Preachers With Power*, p. 135.

move.¹³ Southern Presbyterians did not profess to understand why God had not seen fit to bring about a peaceful solution to the crisis. Rather, Southern Presbyterians held tightly to and found comfort in their belief that secession must be ‘the only way the South could carry out its providential task of preserving slavery and defending “the cause of God and religion.”’¹⁴ Girardeau was leading the way and not only on the battlefield but also as a symbol of Southern righteousness.

Girardeau: A Symbol of Southern Righteousness

Not only was Girardeau hailed as a symbol of righteousness among Southern Evangelicals leading up to the Civil War, he was also regarded as such by those who served alongside him during the war, from the first month that he served in the war until the day that he was captured and held as a prisoner of war on Johnson’s Island, South Carolina. Throughout his three year stint in the Confederate Army, Girardeau functioned most effectively as a constant reminder to his fellow soldiers that their participation in the war was a righteous, providentially ordained act of service to God that would only make sense in the years to come. Girardeau’s ‘ardent, if not bitter, advocacy of southern rights,’ combined with ‘his God-like soul’ that confirmed that he was a ‘true disciple of the Master,’ was viewed as evidence by his fellow rebel-warriors that their active involvement in the war was not only justifiable, but also an act of obedience to God.¹⁵

Many Southern Evangelicals embraced the institution of slavery, supported secession, and actively participated in the war. Other than Girardeau, however, very few of them previously committed

¹³ Benjamin Morgan Palmer, *The Life and Letters of James Henley Thornwell* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Trust Truth, 1986) p. 486.

¹⁴ Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, pp. 260, 265. See also, Palmer, ‘The South: Her Peril, and Her Duty,’ p. 10.

¹⁵ R.E. Seabrook, *News and Courier* (June, 1898). See also, D.W. McLaurin, ‘The Confederate Chaplain,’ in *Life Work*, p. 106.

their lives to the religious instruction of those whom God ‘providentially’ placed among them. And none of them had achieved the level of effectiveness among the slaves that Girardeau produced at Zion Presbyterian Church. As a result, Girardeau was perceived as one who would strengthen the legitimacy of the Southern position to defend the newly formed Confederacy. The cumulative effect of his actions leading up to the war suggested that he embodied, more than most, the essence of an antebellum Southern Evangelical and stood among them as symbol of Southern righteousness.

It is not necessary to detail every step that Girardeau made as a Confederate chaplain in order to advance the thesis that Girardeau was a true or ‘consistent’ Southern figure, and was also recognized as such by those who accompanied him into battle.¹⁶ At the same time, a selected sampling of a few events during the war that suggest that Girardeau was viewed by his Regiment as a symbol of Southern righteousness is necessary.

The Chaplaincy: 1861-1865

In the spring of 1862, four companies from the Charleston District were organized into a battalion that would soon unite with six additional companies from the Piedmont section of South Carolina to form the Twenty-Third Regiment of the South Carolina Volunteers. Upon his enlistment in the Confederate army in July of that same year, Girardeau was formally appointed to serve as the chaplain for this regiment. He remained committed to this regiment and to the ‘southern cause’ until the ‘bleeding Confederacy was tottering to its fall.’ In March, 1865, Girardeau was captured by the Union army at the battle of Petersburg. In a statement that summarized the collective sentiment of all that was written about Girardeau as a chaplain, from the beginning of his service in 1862 until the day that he was taken prisoner in 1865, D.W. McLaurin commented:

¹⁶ For an analysis of Girardeau as a chaplain of the Twenty-Third Regiment of the South Carolina Volunteers, see ‘The Confederate Chaplain,’ in *Life Work*, pp. 106-132.

In treating of the army life or our chaplain, it will be necessary to follow, in a casual way, the checkered career of our regiment, and in doing so, it will only be necessary to recall that throughout the varying vicissitudes, the hardships of the march, the bloody carnage of the camp, he [Girardeau] was ever with us, inspiring confidence by his presence, inculcating a just conception of our duty to our country and to our God.¹⁷

McLaurin served alongside Girardeau throughout the war and gleaned direct knowledge of his steps as a confederate chaplain. His chapter detailing Girardeau's involvement in the war portrays him throughout the narrative as one whose very 'presence' held the regiment together and enabled them to persevere until the end of the war. Throughout the narrative, McLaurin uses language and phrases such as 'our beloved chaplain,' 'under the magic of his eloquence,' and 'always lending cheer to all with whom he came into contact.' As a preacher, Girardeau's 'voice was a marvelous instrument, clear as a bell, sounding like a bugle, or melting into tenderest pathos.' In addition to McLaurin's commentary on Girardeau, he also compiled, organized, and republished everything that had previously been published related to Girardeau's experience as a chaplain, the substance of which is consistent with his own conclusions.¹⁸

The accounts of the massive appeal and popularity that Girardeau acquired throughout the war from those who served alongside him, and from those who published events in the wake of the war were primarily designed to cast his chaplaincy in an exemplary manner. The ministry that Girardeau created among the Charleston slaves prior to the war was a tangible piece of history that Southern Evangelicals could personally identify, embrace, and sporadically recollect as a means of further justifying their own support and involvement in the war. Even though Girardeau acted virtually alone in the establishment of Zion Presbyterian Church, his ministry among the slaves stood as a righteous symbol, a positive reinforcement, and a concrete example to all Southerners who were carrying out

¹⁷ D. W. McLaurin, 'The Confederate Chaplain,' in *Life Work*, p. 107.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 113, 118, 125.

their providential task of preserving slavery. Because of his ministry among the slaves, Girardeau represented, perhaps more than anyone else, a human apologetic for the 'southern cause.'

Many who knew Girardeau or knew of him were naturally drawn to live vicariously through him. His usefulness among the slaves in Charleston was perceived to further vindicate the South and her paternalistic view of slavery. Apart from Girardeau and Zion Presbyterian Church, Southern Evangelicals in Charleston were aware that they had very little to cite as a means of religious justification for their 'peculiar institution.' With Girardeau in the forefront of their minds, 'one of the most ardent of Southerners' and 'one, in fact, who was never reconstructed,' defending the 'cause of God and religion' was less of a challenge.¹⁹

The Battle of Secessionville:

In the summer of 1862, the Twenty-Third Regiment of the South Carolina Volunteers was forced to begin its defense of the recently formed Confederacy on James Island, the birthplace of Girardeau. James Island was a strategic barrier island situated between the Atlantic and Charleston that protected the city from Federal attack. The Union army was well aware that the relatively small body of water that separated James Island from Charleston was not wide enough to prevent direct gunfire from James Island to Charleston. In fact, the only direct line of fire from the North across the Ashley and Cooper River to the center of Charleston was through the center of James Island. The confederate soldiers built a fortress on James Island that was intended to secure the well-established city of Charleston. They named it Secessionville.

In the early stages of the war, the Twenty-Third Regiment successfully defended the South Carolina barrier island, and indirectly, the city of Charleston. The Confederate army would have less

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 108.

success three years later. In the wake of the first battle that occurred on the same soil that young Girardeau grew up attending ‘prayer meetings which were held at night from house to house,’ he was also, rather ironically, called to formally begin his duties as a chaplain.²⁰ R.E. Seabrook described the movements of Girardeau in the following way.

Immediately after the gallant repulse of the enemy, General Evans rode into the earthworks in order to make arrangements to meet a second assault, momentarily expected. As we approached the rear of the work, the first thing that attracted my attention was a large number— fifty or more— of dying Federal soldiers, who had been collected and placed in the excavation behind the magazine. In the midst of these, on his knees, was Dr. Girardeau offering up an earnest and eloquent prayer for those dying soldiers, so lately the enemies of all he loved. I was so moved I forgot war and the dangers incident thereto. In view of the fact that Dr. Girardeau was an ardent, if not bitter, advocate of Southern rights, this triumph of Christian virtue over human nature, this absolute forgiveness accorded to dying and no longer active enemies, emphasized his God-like soul and brings out in radiant light the benediction of this true disciple of the Master.²¹

Without trivializing the battle of Secessionville or the endearing act that Girardeau offered on behalf of the Union soldiers, the previous comment reflects the collective Southern Evangelical tendency to implicitly cast the ultimate cause of the war primarily in a religious or spiritual framework. Southern Evangelicals assumed that God was not only predisposed to look favorably upon the ‘virtuous’ and courageous acts of those who defended the South, but he was also displeased with those who did not. Further, the subtle, yet striking view that Girardeau had somehow reached a state in his personal and spiritual pilgrimage that he was actually prepared to offer the Union soldiers ‘absolute forgiveness,’ communicates the hypocritical mentality that Southern Evangelicals were occasionally inclined to convey. Such comments foster the impression that Southern Evangelicals assumed that even though their ‘enemy’ did not deserve the ‘absolute forgiveness’ that Girardeau or any Southern Evangelical offered to them, they were still willing to extend grace and mercy to them. In so doing, they also

²⁰ Girardeau, in *Life Work*, p. 10.

²¹ R.E. Seabrook. *News and Courier* (June, 1898). See also Blackburn, p. 109.

demonstrated that they were a 'true disciple of the Master.'

The tendency of McLaurin, Seabrook, and other Southern Evangelicals to depict Girardeau as an exceptional Civil War chaplain, one who refused to discriminate between Confederate and Federal soldiers in their final hours, also advances the notion that Girardeau stood a symbol of southern righteousness among his peers. In portraying Girardeau as a 'ardent defender of southern rights' as well as one who possessed a 'God-like soul,' Southern Evangelicals in Charleston were able to blend their constitutional and religious justification for the war through his actions. More importantly, they created someone who represented their best chance to vindicate the honor and reestablish 'Southern Zion.'

The Battle of Petersburg:

In June, 1864, the Twenty Third Regiment of the South Carolina Volunteers, was 'ordered to Petersburg to meet General Grant.'²² Of course, 'Petersburg's strategic importance had long been recognized by the Confederates.' It was no surprise, then, that for a lengthy period of time, many of the Confederate generals, including General Lee and General Beauregard, were gathered in the same location to devise a strategy to defend Petersburg from Union siege. On one occasion, the chaplain for the army of Northern Virginia, Dr. Robert Lewis Dabney asked Girardeau to conduct services for the men of both regiments. General Lee was present, and McLaurin recounted the event.

The house was crowded to the extent of its capacity, and just before the services began, Gen. Robert E. Lee and his staff came in and occupied the seats reserved on the rostrum. Although the seige was in full blast, under the magic of his eloquence we were forced away from the consideration of this mundane sphere and given a picture of the world where bloodshed is

²² D.W. McLaurin, 'The Confederate Chaplain,' in *Life Work*, p. 116. For a sophisticated account of the battle of Petersburg, see Alice Rains Trulock, *In The Hands Of Providence: Joshua L. Chamberlain And The American Civil War* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992) pp. 196-212.

unknown.²³

In three distinct ways, McLaurin appealed to the spiritual 'sphere,' 'the world where bloodshed is unknown,' in an effort, however indirectly, to justify the 'southern cause' for secession.²⁴ What is more, Girardeau was the religious vehicle that he used to minimize the usefulness of the 'mundane sphere,' that is, 'the world,' in order to rightly identify the fundamental reasons that caused the Civil war. According to McLaurin and other Southern Evangelicals, the spiritual sphere was a far more accurate sphere or realm to evaluate ultimate reality and, therefore, find a true justification for the war. Consequently, through Girardeau, McLaurin created a point of entry for Southern Evangelicals to hold firmly to their position, if only in their own minds, that God was more favorably inclined to support their cause.

First, McLaurin noted the full 'capacity' of the room where Girardeau preached to the Confederate army. Without downplaying the actual scene of the worship service, the emphasis of that particular remark, analyzed in its larger context, suggested that there was virtual unanimity among the Confederate Army concerning their view that God was somehow more intimately connected with those who defended the South. Further, this image that the room was filled to 'capacity' was also metaphorical language intended to advance the notion that the entire South was of one 'spiritual' mind. Secondly, McLaurin links the Confederate general, Robert E. Lee, to the Southern Evangelical position that a 'true disciple of the master' was one who possessed not only a 'God-like soul, but was also a fervent 'advocate of Southern rights.' By placing Lee in a submissive position to Girardeau, if only in

²³ McLaurin, in *Life Work*, p. 118.

²⁴ See Loveland, 'The Church and the World,' in *Southern Evangelicals*, for a useful discussion concerning the 'otherworldliness' of antebellum Southern Evangelicals. According to Loveland, 'Otherworldliness, along with personal piety, was a hallmark of the "eminent Christian."' See pp. 91-130.

the spiritual 'sphere,' McLaurin enhanced the credibility of Girardeau as a symbol of Southern righteousness. Finally, McLaurin authenticated the Southern Evangelical position that God must have been predisposed to support the Confederate Army by alleging that which would seem unlikely, if not impossible; that is, remaining 'under the magic of his eloquence,' while the 'seige was in full blast.'

The Battle of Vicksburg:

In a similar style as the preceding excerpt drafted by McLaurin, another chaplain of the Confederate Army detailed an incident involving Girardeau that he observed two years earlier at the battle of Vicksburg. This chaplain of the Forty-ninth Tennessee Infantry, J.H. McNeilly, used language similar to McLaurin's, Seabrook's, and others who published papers or articles on Girardeau as a chaplain, emphasizing the 'otherworldliness' of Southern Evangelicals and suggesting further that Girardeau was hailed as a symbol of Southern righteousness.

McNeilly did not come into personal contact with Girardeau until 1863, but he was familiar with his work among the slaves of Charleston prior to the war. 'I had heard a great deal of him as a preacher to the Negroes.' His prior knowledge that Girardeau had previously been an effective minister to the Charleston slaves was critical to the collective assumption among Southern Evangelicals, chaplains and soldiers alike, that Girardeau embodied the essence of Southern Presbyterianism. McNeilly recollected a particular experience with Girardeau while in Vicksburg, the substance of which was quite consistent with McLauren's observations in Petersburg.

I have heard him preach to 1,000 to 1,500 soldiers, and with all the distractions of camp about them, sometimes in expectation of immediate battle, the whole mass of men were held spellbound by his eloquence. I think not a man left the audience.²⁵

²⁵ *Excerpts from an address by Dr. J. H. McNeilly following the Civil War.* See 'The Confederate Chaplain,' in *Life Work*, pp. 124-126.

Johnson's Island:

On March twenty-five, 1865, the Union soldiers forced the Twenty Third Regiment to retreat from Petersburg. According to McLaurin, 'so ended this forlorn hope of our beleaguered army.'²⁶ During that final retreat, Girardeau was 'captured by the enemy' and taken to Johnson's Island, South Carolina, where he was held as a prisoner until the end of the war. While Girardeau remained on Johnson's Island, he continued to attract the attention of other soldiers who reinforced his heroic reputation among the South. A cousin of McNeilly, who was also held as a prisoner of war with Girardeau, detailed Girardeau's final service as a Confederate chaplain.

Dr. Girardeau was taken prisoner and carried to the island. He preached very often in the prison. His platform was the center of a great circle from which the streets radiated to the various sections of the barracks. My cousin told me that when Dr. Girardeau preached, not only the circle, but the streets as far as he could be heard, were crowded with eager listeners. Confederates and Federal guards all mingled together, held by a common interest. He said many men dated their conversion from these services.²⁷

By this point 'the bleeding confederacy was tottering to its fall.' But Girardeau was in the process of being irreversibly set apart by the men and women of 'Southern Zion.' That reputation would remain with him for the remainder of his life and prevail in the wake of his death. But Girardeau would never again fully return to that unprecedented work among the slaves in Charleston that secured his place in antebellum history.

Even the devastating effects of the American Civil War did not dampen Girardeau's desire to return to South Carolina. To be sure, he was 'keenly disappointed at the sad and unexpected result of the contest for States' rights and Southern independence.'²⁸ But his intimate attachment to the collective

²⁶ McLaurin, in *Life Work*, p. 121.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

²⁸ Thomas H. Law, 'Pastorate After the War,' in *Life Work*, pp. 133, 134.

family of South Carolina, despite the blow that she had recently suffered, was no less ardent than it was on the eve of the war. If anything, his commitment to preserve the South, and the institutions that she had embraced prior to the war and fought to protect throughout the war, only strengthened in its aftermath.

On July 1, 1865, Girardeau was released from the federal prison on Johnson's Island and was free to return to 'his native land,' where 'his love and loyalty was due as that of a child to the mother who gave him birth.' Not only was Girardeau ready to return to South Carolina, but the people of this defeated state, including many of his former parishioners from Zion Presbyterian Church, were eager to welcome him home as well. According to Thomas H. Law, 'As soon as he could procure the necessary funds for traveling expenses and decent clothing, by the sale of his watch and the aid of friends in Philadelphia, he returned to his family, at their refugee home, near Timmons ville, S.C.'²⁹ Before he arrived in Timmons ville and was reunited with his family, Girardeau demonstrated his commitment and unusual sense of loyalty to the South while making the journey home.

When they had passed the State line someone said, "We are now in South Carolina," Immediately Dr. Girardeau shouted "Stop," and then leaping out of the wagon he kneeled down and laid his head on the ground. With streaming eyes he exclaimed, "O South Carolina, my mother, dear, God be thanked that I can lay my head on your bosom once more." It was a strange scene, but characteristic of the man.'³⁰

Girardeau's allegiance to the South in general and the state of South Carolina in particular, both prior to and following the war, was the link that existed between Girardeau and the Evangelical community of Charleston. His attachment to South Carolina represented considerably more than an appreciation for the soil that supported his body when he 'laid his head on the ground.' The state of

²⁹ Ibid., p. 133.

³⁰ Joseph B. Mack, in *Life Work*, p. 61.

South Carolina, as it had existed before the outbreak of the Civil War, was for Girardeau the best expression or 'picture of the world where bloodshed is unknown.' For Southern Evangelicals, the South was perceived as the most accurate and complete 'earthly' representation of the 'heavenly country;' that place where 'strangers and pilgrims on earth' dwell until they receive their eternal reward.³¹ In a word, life in the South was perceived by Southern Evangelicals as a foreshadowing of eternity. Consequently, when Girardeau passed the 'state line,' knelt down, and then proceeded to offer thanks to God for the opportunity to rest his head on the 'bosom' of South Carolina, he was, in his own mind, leaving 'the world' behind and reentering 'Southern Zion.'

Upon his return from the war, Girardeau spent the remainder of his life in South Carolina. His resolve 'to live in no other State, to labor among no other people, and to sleep after death, under no other soil,' was further evidence that he considered the 'South' holy ground and a 'heavenly country.'³² This view of the South would only intensify within Girardeau in the years to follow, and his vision to minister to the slaves of 'Southern Zion' and sanctify the South's sacred institutions was further solidified in the wake of the war. Whether Girardeau labored within the sanctuary of a reconstructed Zion Presbyterian Church or the halls of Columbia Theological Seminary, he was determined to recreate 'Southern Zion' from the dire conditions that she had just contracted. At times, Girardeau would see a rare glimpse of 'that most glorious work of grace I ever felt or witnessed' in 1858.³³ But, on the whole, his attempts to restore the South, and particularly his beloved Zion Church in Charleston, proved futile.

³¹ Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, p. 93.

³² Mack, in *Life Work*, p. 61.

³³ Girardeau, in *Life Work*, p. 79.

Charleston, Again:

Almost immediately upon his return to South Carolina in July, 1865, Girardeau was forced to determine the course of his future pastoral ministry. After conducting a series of ten services at the Darlington Church in Timmonsville, South Carolina, where ‘veterans from all over the district, with their wives and daughters, gathered to hear the Gospel chieftain,’ Girardeau began to receive additional requests from all five of the Presbyterian churches in Charleston to fill their vacant pulpits.³⁴ Many of the inhabitants of Charleston had still not returned to their bewildered city. But the Presbyterians who had returned to Charleston were determined to secure, if only temporarily, one who was ‘at the height of his reputation as a preacher.’³⁵

The white Presbyterian population was not the only segment of Charleston society who were optimistic that Girardeau would serve as their pastor. Many of the black members of Zion Presbyterian Church who remained in the city following the war were also hopeful that Girardeau might restore his former congregation. Girardeau recalls:

One of the first invitations, in writing, which I received upon my return from imprisonment at Johnson’s Island, and while yet in the interior of the State where my family were refugees, in July, 1865, to resume labor, was from this colored membership, entreating me to come back and preach to them as of old.³⁶

According to Thomas Law, Girardeau expressed to him that this option had been his preference too. ‘His mind naturally turned to his beloved Zion Church in Charleston.’ But the conditions that surfaced in the wake of the war made such an undertaking virtually impossible.

³⁴ McLaurin, p. 122; The five Presbyterian churches that existed in Charleston following the Civil War included the First or Scotch Church, Second Presbyterian Church, Central Church, Glebe Street Church, and Zion Presbyterian Church.

³⁵ Thomas Law, ‘Pastorate After the War,’ in *Life Work*, p. 134.

³⁶ Letter from Girardeau to Mallard (Columbia, S.C.: November 10, 1890).

His heart yearned to be with that dear flock again. But it had been scattered to the four winds through the exigencies of the war.... At this date, the white citizens were only beginning to return, and the Negroes, now emancipated, were scattered all over the country. Mr Girardeau was [also] absolutely shut out of his own church building, which had been taken possession by a missionary of the Northern Presbyterian Church and held by the Freedman's Bureau, under the authority of the United States government. Thus Mr. Girardeau could hardly expect for the present to resume work with his own former charge.³⁷

In September, 1865, Girardeau accepted a temporary arrangement at the most prestigious Presbyterian Church in the city, 'occupying the pulpit of the stately and commodious old Second Church building.' Girardeau agreed to conduct services in this prominent church where, as a boy, he had sat in the 'square corner pew' and 'gained religious knowledge,' and as a young minister, teamed with the leadership of Second Presbyterian Church to form the Anson Street Mission.³⁸

Girardeau was naturally inclined to accept this position because of his long-standing relationship with the members and leadership of this congregation. But there were other reasons as well. Just prior to the war, a significant number of the parishioners from Second united with Zion Presbyterian Church. Though their reasons for joining were, on the whole, self serving and their participation tended to disrupt the long-term strategy of the church, Girardeau fostered a close pastoral association with them. In the wake of the war, the white remnant of Zion Presbyterian Church ascertained that it was unrealistic to restore Zion Presbyterian Church to its original antebellum position. In their view, there was little, if any, 'duty' driven reason to offer a ministry to the former slave population of Charleston. Consequently, the former white membership of Zion Presbyterian returned to Second Presbyterian Church.

Girardeau's return to Second was a strategic opportunity to reestablish pastoral relations with the white element of his former flock. He was well aware that he would need their support if he had any hope to restore the 'black element' of Zion Presbyterian Church. Many of them were just as eager to

³⁷ Thomas Law, p. 134.

³⁸ Girardeau, in *Life Work*, p. 19.

reinstate their pastoral relationship with Girardeau. But it would take some time to persuade the ‘white element’ of a vision that included the religious instruction and pastoral oversight of their former slaves in light of the ‘new conditions resulting from the war.’ According to Law, ‘the old arrangement of a small white element owning and controlling the church and meeting in worship with the Negroes, seemed neither desirable nor practicable.’³⁹

Upon his arrival in the city of Charleston in September, 1865, Girardeau was warmly greeted by the former white membership of Zion Presbyterian, now reconnected to Second Presbyterian Church. They were elated to see the one who had become for them a symbol of southern righteousness. But he was also ‘met at the depot by the colored members of the church, who decided to bear him on their shoulders through the streets, and could scarce be restrained in their super-abounding enthusiasm.’⁴⁰ Girardeau would soon return to his work among the Charleston Negroes, but only for a short while. Once again, the white membership of the newly established Zion Church, meeting on Glebe Street, was never completely willing to let him go.

The Creation of Zion Presbyterian Church, Glebe Street:

Girardeau remained at Second Presbyterian Church until the spring of 1866, at which point the Reverend Doctor Thomas Smyth returned to Charleston and resumed his work among that established congregation. Girardeau served as the interim minister for almost eight months, however, and the members of Second Church grew accustomed to his weekly sermons and pastoral care. In fact, the congregation did not want Girardeau to leave upon Smyth’s return. But they also did not want to appear ‘to push out the venerable, beloved and devoted pastor of Second Church [from] his long and

³⁹ Ibid., p. 136.

⁴⁰ D.W. McLaurin, in ‘The Confederate Chaplain,’ p. 123, quoting H.C. DuBose, D.D. *Christian Observer* (1898).

eminently useful pastorate.' Consequently, Girardeau was asked to serve alongside the aging and 'crippled' Smyth for a specified period of time and then replace him upon his resignation. But Girardeau was 'unwilling to adopt a measure which might appear to push out the pastor of the Second Church.'⁴¹ What is more, an opportunity to gather both 'elements' of his former flock appeared on the horizon.

In April, 1866, Girardeau accepted a position that enabled him to move further toward his vision to resume his ministry to the former slaves of Charleston. Glebe Street Church, another Presbyterian congregation in Charleston, was in need of a minister to serve them. In a powerful understatement, Law noted that 'the conditions in Charleston under which Mr. Girardeau entered upon his Glebe Street Pastorate were peculiar.'

And now, as the people returned to the city, it was to find themselves impoverished, thrown out of business, upset in their domestic arrangements, and that peculiar charm of old Charleston, its social life, well-nigh broken up.⁴²

The combined effects of the war on the Glebe Street congregation and the popular appeal that Girardeau was able to generate among the entire Presbyterian community of Charleston strengthened his capacity to create a position that would be conducive to his ecclesiastical vision for Charleston. On April 2, 1866, the white membership of Zion Presbyterian Church and the Glebe Street congregation informally agreed to form one church that would meet, 'despite its unfavorable situation on a short, narrow side-street,' at the Glebe Street facility. In the original records of Zion Presbyterian Church, worshiping on Glebe Street, this ecclesiastical union was proposed.

Thus the cause of Christ, and the spiritual welfare of the congregation of Glebe Street Presbyterian Church, induces us to form a union with Zion Presbyterian Church, under the

⁴¹ Law, in *Life Work*, p. 136.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 140.

pastoral care of the Rev. J. L. Girardeau.⁴³

The Glebe Street session was willing to accept all three conditions that Girardeau laid out in return for his service as the minister of this congregation. First, the congregation at Glebe Street Church consented to Girardeau's request that the name of the recently established church be changed from Glebe Street Church to Zion Presbyterian Church. In the 'Prefatory Note' in the original records of the church, the following was recorded to formally announce the renaming of the congregation. 'On the ninth of April, 1866, the Zion Presbyterian Church and the Glebe Street Presbyterian Church, of the city of Charleston, were united, under the name of Zion Presbyterian Church of Charleston.'⁴⁴ There were now two churches formally named Zion Presbyterian Church; one on Calhoun Street and the other on Glebe Street.

Secondly, Girardeau requested that the white membership of his former Zion congregation unite with the white parishioners of Glebe Street. More importantly, they agreed to join the sessions of these two ecclesiastical bodies into one leadership team. Girardeau knew that the effectiveness of his broader vision to minister to the former slaves of Charleston was dependant upon his ability to create a consensus and ignite a movement among the leadership of this newly formed church. This would have been difficult, if not impossible, apart from the assistance of the 'white element' of his former congregation. 'Thus this [newly constituted] session has learned with pleasure, of this action of the Presbytery, which in uniting these two churches, has consolidated their respective sessions into one and

⁴³ Law, p. 141; Original Records of Zion Presbyterian Church, Glebe Street, Minutes (April 2, 1866). See complete records of Zion Presbyterian: Glebe Street, Historical Foundation Reformed Presbyterian Church, 1866-1885 (Montreat, N.C.) Microfilm # 105.

⁴⁴ Original Records of Zion Presbyterian Church, Glebe Street. Minutes, April 9, 1866.

the same body.’⁴⁵

Finally, the leadership of this merged congregation vowed to implement a similar philosophy of ministry to that of Girardeau’s former Calhoun Street congregation, one that provided religious instruction to the former slaves of Charleston. In short, Girardeau was able to create at Zion Presbyterian, Glebe Street, that which he was able to achieve during the antebellum period among the ‘white element’ of Zion Presbyterian Church, Calhoun Street. In the original records of Zion Presbyterian Church, Glebe Street, the following was stated.

Thus this session should hereby affirm its desire to comply with the expectation of the Presbytery in carrying out, as far as is possible under the altered circumstances of the present time, the purpose for which originally the Zion Church was mainly constituted— the religious instruction of the Colored Population.⁴⁶

The Rise of Zion Presbyterian, Glebe Street:

Between April and December, 1866, Zion Presbyterian Church, Glebe Street flourished under the leadership of Girardeau. ‘Large congregations of attentive and interested hearers filled the church regularly Sabbath after Sabbath, so that soon it became necessary to enlarge the building to accommodate the attendance.’ Not only did this established church, ‘under the constant pressure of these abnormal conditions,’ add thirty seven new white members to its rolls in less than a year, but this congregation was also effective in carrying out its vision to provide ‘religious instruction of the Colored Population.’⁴⁷

According to Law, ‘Negroes and whites would not now, under the new conditions, worship together as formerly.’ But Zion Presbyterian Church, Glebe Street, made a concerted effort to ‘engage

⁴⁵ Original Records of Zion Presbyterian Church, Glebe Street. Minutes, April 15, 1866.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Law, p. 141; Between April 1, 1866 and January 17, 1867, the records of Zion Presbyterian Church, Glebe Street reveal that thirty seven new members were added to the roll.

largely in city mission work.⁴⁸ In fact, by 1869, they had started and sustained four different mission schools throughout the city of Charleston, including one that was created solely for the former slaves of Zion Presbyterian Church on Calhoun Street. An analysis of the budget, documented in the church records from the beginning of its existence in April, 1866 through the end of 1869, reveals that approximately fifty percent of the weekly offering was applied to ‘domestic missions.’⁴⁹

In less than a year, the pastor of Zion Presbyterian Church, Glebe Street, demonstrated that he was just as capable of leading a predominantly white congregation as he had been among the slaves of Charleston before the war. Law asserted that ‘the crowds came and partook of it, and were nourished; and they came again; and they continued to come throughout his ten years’ ministry in that place.’⁵⁰ But for Girardeau, that was not enough. He believed that God had called him to minister primarily to the black population of Charleston. Apart from the daily pastoral interaction with his Negro flock, Girardeau was less than satisfied that he was fulfilling his ‘duty’ as a Southern Presbyterian minister.

The strategic design of Zion Presbyterian Church, Glebe Street, to target the Negro community of Charleston without actively enrolling them into their own congregation was, for Girardeau, commendable. But such an arrangement did not provide Girardeau with direct ministerial contact among them. Girardeau was aware that the conditions following the war were not naturally conducive to mixed congregations, and he never intended for Zion Presbyterian Church, Glebe Street, to incorporate the former slaves into their congregation. In fact, Girardeau had always supported separate congregations

⁴⁸ Law, pp. 143, 147.

⁴⁹ See original Records of Zion Presbyterian Glebe Street from April, 1866 through December, 1869.

⁵⁰ Law, p. 142.

for whites and blacks. But the emphasis on 'the religious instruction of the colored population and 'domestic missions' on Glebe Street was intentional in that Girardeau was attempting to foster a strong paternal sense of pastoral responsibility that he believed the 'white element' providentially owed to their black brethren.

A significant component of his vision among this exclusively white congregation was simply to reeducate them with respect to their 'duty' to provide pastoral care to the former slaves. Even though an ecclesiastical relationship with the former slaves 'seemed neither desirable nor practicable under the new conditions resulting from the war,' Girardeau's strategic emphasis on 'the religious instruction of the colored population' was designed to create an undercurrent of activity that might translate into an eventual ecclesiastical partnership between the 'black element' and the 'white element' of the two Zion Presbyterian congregations. In a similar way that Second Presbyterian Church originally supported the early stages of the Anson Street Mission before the war, Girardeau was also determined to see the members of Zion Presbyterian Glebe Street revitalize the former slaves of Zion Presbyterian Church, Calhoun Street. In less than one year, it appeared that Girardeau had recreated an agreeable culture among the Glebe Street congregation to reestablish this ministry.

Girardeau was also aware that an attempt to revitalize the 'black element' of Zion Presbyterian Church would force him to resign from his present post and return to Calhoun Street. But Girardeau was unaware that the congregation on Glebe Street would not be as favorably predisposed to this idea as he had originally anticipated. To this point, the Glebe Street congregation had been willing to accommodate virtually every request that Girardeau submitted to them in return for his service as their minister. Other than a remnant of his antebellum congregation on Calhoun Street and the first minister of the Anson Street Mission, Robert B. Adger, no one was initially willing to endorse the next stage of

his vision. And without the support of the 'white element' on Glebe Street, it would be impossible to reconstruct 'Southern Zion.'

The Decline of Zion Presbyterian Church [Calhoun Street] and 'Southern Zion'

Girardeau was prepared to enter the next phase of his vision to revitalize Zion Presbyterian, Calhoun Street. His reputation among the congregation on Glebe Street appeared to thrive, and it seemed as though they would continue to support almost anything that Girardeau proposed. In fact, for the first year that he served the Glebe Street congregation, the relationship that existed between Girardeau and his parishioners appeared strong. He provided weekly preaching and pastoral care for them, and they responded by providing 'religious instruction to the colored population' of Charleston. In light of the effects of the war on every aspect of Southern culture, Zion Presbyterian, Glebe Street, with Girardeau at the helm, appeared to adjust remarkably well. But, the events that transpired over the course of 1867 suggested that Girardeau and the 'white element' of his flock were less like-minded than either side had previously envisioned. Girardeau's vision for the Southern Presbyterian Church included the restoration of 'Southern Zion.' That of the 'white element' of Glebe Street did not. Rather, they simply wanted to sit passively under the eloquent preaching of their pastor. Consequently, the same issue that began to divert Zion Presbyterian, Calhoun Street, from its mission to 'evangelize the colored population' in 1858, surfaced again in 1867. Once again, the 'white element' of his flock refused to let him go.

For almost three years, the Zion facility on Calhoun Street had been 'held by the Freedman's Bureau, under the authority of the United States government.' In January, 1867, 'Girardeau and the owners of the large Zion Church on Calhoun Street, succeeded in getting possession of their building.' And within weeks of reclaiming the 'immense building [that had] been erected by white Presbyterians

for the use of the large congregation of colored people,' Girardeau was determined to launch the next phase of his vision to restore the original Zion Church.⁵¹ In the records of Zion Presbyterian, Glebe Street, the recording clerk documented the January seventeenth called meeting that was requested by Girardeau to inform the session of his intent to return to the 'black element' of his flock. The first line of the minutes underscores the unilateral purpose for the gathering. 'Session met this evening at the call of the Pastor.'

The pastor informed Session, thus after the most anxious and prolonged consideration of the question of resuming his labors among the colored people in Zion Church in Calhoun Street, which continued to press itself upon his conscience, he had come to the conclusion to announce to them his determination to engage in that work as soon as proper arrangements could be made, and affectionately expressed his earnest desire that his actions might not be detrimental to the influence of the church.⁵²

An analysis of the preceding records for the January 17 minutes highlights three significant points that, when reviewed in light of the Glebe Street response, reveal the vast philosophical differences between Girardeau and the 'white element' of Zion Presbyterian Church. First, Girardeau did not call the meeting to gather the input of the session in order that he might make a more informed decision. Rather, Girardeau 'informed' the session after 'prolonged consideration.' Additionally, Girardeau 'had come to the conclusion' on the matter and was before the session to 'announce to them his determination' to return to his former flock. He was willing to remain on Glebe Street, but only until 'proper arrangements could be made.' In a word, Girardeau respectfully called the meeting to announce his intent to resign from his position as pastor of Zion Presbyterian Church, Glebe Street.

Secondly, Girardeau indicated that this decision to return to Calhoun Street was also the result

⁵¹ Law, pp. 136, 142.

⁵² Original Records of Zion Presbyterian Church, Glebe Street. Minutes, January 17, 1867.

of an internal tension that 'continued to press itself upon his conscience.' For nineteenth century Southern Evangelicals, the 'conscience' often served to affirm or deny the rational basis of a particular decision. The 'conscience' did not operate apart from reason, but rather in relation to it. When the 'conscience' and reason were in agreement, then a decision to act on a matter was viewed by Southern Evangelicals as all the more conclusive. Girardeau's process of reason in this decision, which consisted of a 'prolonged consideration of the question of resuming his labors,' was reinforced 'upon his conscience.' By informing the Glebe Street session that he was bound by his 'conscience' to take up this work among the Negroes, Girardeau was, in effect, urging them not to put him in a position that would require him to contradict his 'conscience.' Finally, Girardeau expressed his belief that this decision to attend to the pastoral oversight of the 'colored population' was in the best interest of the Southern Presbyterian Church.

The response of the Glebe Street session to Girardeau's request to be relieved of his pastoral duties on Glebe Street and resume his labors on Calhoun Street is documented in the January 17 minutes of the church records. Immediately following that portion of the meeting where Girardeau expressed his intent to resign, the session debated the issue and responded in the following way. 'After a free conversation upon the subject, the following resolutions were presented.'

Resolved. That upon calm and prolonged reflection, we are of the opinion that the withdrawal of the Rev J.L. Girardeau from the pulpit of the Church in Glebe Street, will be seriously detrimental to the interest of Presbyterianism in this community, and the cause of vital Religion.

Resolved. That we are now ready as far as the altered condition of the colored people will admit, to make an effort to procure and sustain a missionary to carry out the work of preaching the Gospel to the freedmen in the Calhoun Street Church.⁵³

The initial response of the Glebe Street session to Girardeau's decisive resolve to press forward

⁵³ Ibid., January 17 minutes.

with his vision to restore that segment of 'Southern Zion' that had been temporarily interrupted by the Civil War illustrates, once again, the difficulty of Southern Presbyterians to follow through with their providential 'duty' to provide pastoral care for their former slaves. Their actions rarely equaled their rhetoric. Their paternalistic view that God placed them in a spiritually superior role to their black brethren was, on the whole, not backed up by their practice, either prior to the war or in its aftermath. Southern Presbyterians were well prepared to defend their position on slavery, and even their ecclesiastical responsibility to the slaves. But when the time came to demonstrate that they were collectively capable and equipped to cultivate a paternalistic based culture that was rooted in experiential religion, they came up short.

The resolutions imply that the Glebe Street session was willing to cooperate with Girardeau to a point. At Girardeau's initiative, they quickly recognized an opportunity to rebuild that which they often cited prior to the war as a sufficient case for their defense of slavery. But once again, the religious instruction of the slaves' was not their highest ecclesiastical priority. Southern Presbyterians in Charleston were ready to 'make an effort to procure and sustain a missionary to carry out the work of preaching the gospel to the freedmen in the Calhoun Church,' but they were never prepared to completely release Girardeau in order to bolster that particular work.

On January 23, a 'meeting of the corporation was held in the lecture room of the Church' on Glebe Street to consider and potentially revise the former resolutions that the session previously recommended.⁵⁴ Presumably, Girardeau noted his dissatisfaction with the resolutions that were adopted

⁵⁴ A meeting of the corporation would include all members in good standing of the church. The members of the congregation would be given opportunity to speak on the issue(s) on the floor and cast their vote. Generally, the session would meet prior to the meeting of the 'corporation' to recommend a motion to the congregation. But, in Presbyterian polity, the congregation has the final power to hire and terminate a minister.

at the January 17 session meeting prior to the meeting of the corporation. The following resolutions were formally adopted six days later by the congregation.

Whereas in the providence of God the time has come when Zion Presbyterian Church can continue upon the work she has [previously] undertaken to perform her relations to the colored people; and Whereas our beloved pastor, the Rev J. L. Girardeau, D.D. has indicated his desire to enter upon that work; and Whereas his separation from the Congregation worshiping in the Glebe Street Building will in our opinion be highly prejudicial to the influence of Presbyterianism and especially detrimental to the Spiritual interests of Zion Presbyterian Church and Congregation worshiping in Glebe Street. Therefore,

Resolved. That the Corporation of Zion Presbyterian Church now assembled, do request the Session of the Church to call a Co-pastor or Assistant Minister for this church at as early a period as is consistent with providence.

Resolved. That the duties which will be incumbent upon the Pastor of the Church arriving from the two congregations be arranged and directed by themselves, in consultation with the Session, so that the Rev. D. Girardeau may give one half of his work to the colored people worshiping in Calhoun Street Building.

Resolved. That if it be found necessary previous to the settlement of a Co-pastor or Assistant Minister, for the adjustments of the concerns of the colored Congregation and Church; the Corporation of Zion Church give their hearty consent that Dr. Girardeau surrender the pulpit in Glebe Street once each Sabbath to perform services in the Calhoun Street Building

Dr. F. M. Robertson then requested the Pastor, who was present, to give an expression of his views, which he did, cordially endorsing the Resolutions just adopted.⁵⁵

It is impossible to determine exactly what transpired during the six day period that elapsed between the first set of resolutions that were adopted by the session and the final verdict that was rendered at the 'meeting of the corporation' and endorsed by Girardeau on January 23, 1857. At the very least, Girardeau must have communicated his disappointment with the initial recommendation of the Glebe Street session. At the other extreme, if no other motions were proposed, seconded, and adopted, Girardeau may have threatened to offer his resignation without the approval of the Glebe Street session. Whatever the case, Girardeau and the congregation of Glebe Street Church were able to strike a compromise, and one that appeared to potentially benefit the 'white element' as well as the

⁵⁵ Original Records of Zion Presbyterian, Glebe Street. Minutes, January 23, 1867.

'black element' of Zion Presbyterian Church.

Despite the successful negotiations between Girardeau and Zion Presbyterian, Glebe Street, the tide of popular opinion in the Southern Presbyterian Church was rapidly moving further away from Girardeau's priority to reform 'Southern Zion' to its antebellum status. In fact, the net effect of the previous resolutions was minimal. Approximately two years after the resolutions were adopted by the corporation of Zion Church Glebe Street, in which they gave their 'hearty consent that Dr. Girardeau surrender the pulpit in Glebe Street once each Sabbath to perform services in the Calhoun Street building,' the highest court of the Southern Presbyterian Church, the General Assembly, recommended that the 'black element' of the entire Southern denomination become a separate Presbyterian denomination.

By 1869, the majority of Southern Presbyterians had rescinded their view that they remained responsible for the religious instruction of their former slaves. Though Southern Presbyterians did not favor the new conditions in the South, they quickly dismissed their 'duty' to relate pastorally to their black brethren. Girardeau did not as easily surrender his position that 'separate' Presbyterian congregations for the 'black element' and the 'white element,' should exist under the ecclesiastical authority of the same church. Not surprisingly, he acted virtually alone in his formal opposition to the Independent Colored Presbyterian Church.⁵⁶ As the tide of popular opinion gradually shifted in the wake of the war, it became even clearer that Girardeau also stood alone among Southern Presbyterians.

Girardeau's two year attempt to revitalize the 'black element' of Zion Presbyterian Church was moderately successful. 'A goodly number— even more than we might have expected under the

⁵⁶ R. A. Webb, 'The Presbyter,' in *Life Work*, p. 215.

circumstances were ready to come back to their old church and remained loyal to their former faithful and devoted pastor, and sometimes large congregations attended the services.⁵⁷ According to the records of the 'black element' of Zion Presbyterian, one hundred seventy four black members joined the revitalized church on Calhoun Street between February, 1867 and June, 1869. According to Law,

It was like a first love with him to serve these children of Africa, and with all the burdens and the attractions and the encouragements of a large and influential white city congregation to minister unto, his heart ever yearned for the salvation of the Negro and his development into efficient Christian service. It is indeed pathetic to follow the struggles which he made in this direction as they appear in the records of the church. But he had finally to yield to the ordering of Providence which sundered the Negroes of the South from their former white preachers, and give his energies as pastor wholly to the Glebe Street congregation.⁵⁸

The Final Days in Charleston:

At the end of 1869, Girardeau returned to his work among the 'white element' of Zion Presbyterian, Glebe Street. He continued to serve as their pastor until 1875. But even though 'this work among the whites continued to prosper,' Girardeau quickly began to feel the effects of a ministry that did not include the people whom he had served from the beginning of his life.⁵⁹ In 1871, Girardeau abruptly submitted his formal resignation as the minister of Zion Presbyterian, Glebe Street.

To the beloved Congregation of Zion Presbyterian Church. Beloved, Brethren and Friends: With the profoundest respect, affection and regret, I hereby tender you my resignation of my pastoral charge, and ask you to unite with me in requesting the Presbytery to dissolve the relation existing between us.⁶⁰

In the letter that Girardeau sent to the congregation, he did not cite any substantive basis for his resignation, other than 'the condition of my voice and chest appears to me to necessitate a change,'

⁵⁷ Law, p. 143.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 143-144.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 144.

⁶⁰ Original Records of Zion Presbyterian, Glebe Street. Minutes, June 5, 1871.

and his view that 'a longer continuance of my pastoral relation would not tend to promote the growth of the congregation.' He reassured the congregation that he had no 'complaint' or 'fault to find with you,' and he noted that he had not come to this conclusion because he 'preferred another field of labor.' Finally, he expressed his sadness over the possibility of leaving Charleston. 'Her very dust is dear to me. And I pray God that if it is His blessed will, I may not be sent out of South Carolina, but be permitted to suffer with her present trials.'⁶¹

The primary reasons that Girardeau emphasized in his letter to his 'beloved congregation' on Glebe street for his resignation are difficult to grasp in light of the available external evidence. In fact, prior to the reference in this letter to the condition of his 'voice' and 'chest,' there does not appear to be any documented source noting a chronic association with failing health. Further, it is difficult to reconcile Law's assertion that 'his work among the whites continued to prosper' with Girardeau's conclusion that his continued 'pastoral relation would not tend to promote the growth of the congregation.'

The Glebe Street session and congregation were surprised by Girardeau's letter of resignation. Immediately after the session received the letter, they called a meeting of the congregation to act on Girardeau's intent to resign. At the request of the corporation, a committee was formed to explore the reasons why Girardeau had come to this decision and report back to the congregation as to their findings. The first paragraph of their written report sums up well the collective view of the Glebe Street congregation.

It is impossible for your committee to describe the absolutely stunning effect produced by this letter upon the congregation. Some received it with unutterable amazement, some with mute astonishment, others with tears and sobs—the outward evidence of deep anguish of soul—and all, with one accord, with the exclamation, 'No, no— this cannot be; we cannot, must not let our

⁶¹ Ibid.

beloved pastor go.' This intense feeling is not confined to this congregation alone. This announcement of the resignation of the Rev. Dr. Girardeau has sent a thrill through this community and the entire church, and with united voice they all cry, 'You must not let him go!'⁶²

The committee then proceeded to address the two reasons that Girardeau cited as the basis of his resignation. As to Girardeau's health, the committee acknowledged that Girardeau had been 'laboring beyond the limits assigned for the safe exercise of the mental and physical powers of any man' and recommended that the congregation offer Girardeau a 'protracted leave of absence, in the hope that he would return to us fully restored.' The committee even went as far as to offer Girardeau up to a year and one half in order to regain his health. 'Go and take a leave of absence for six, twelve, eighteen months, or longer if necessary, for the restoration of his physical powers; we grant it freely.' With respect to Girardeau's concern that the church could no longer expect to grow under his pastoral leadership, the committee responded by appealing to history. 'Under his ministry the church has steadily increased in numbers, and the congregation almost outgrown the capacity of the building.'⁶³

Within days of this 'unusual episode,' Girardeau 'consented to the re-establishment of the pastoral relation, took a much needed rest, and [then] continued to prosecute his pastoral duties with his accustomed zeal and efficiency.'⁶⁴ Once again, the 'white element' of his flock refused to let him go. In 1858, Second Presbyterian Church had agreed to erect an enlarged building on Calhoun Street to accommodate the growth of the Anson Street Mission on the condition that the 'separate' congregation receive white membership. In 1869, the 'white element' of Zion Presbyterian, Glebe Street, rejected Girardeau's emphatic request to return to Calhoun Street. They noted that such an abrupt change would be 'detrimental to the interests of Presbyterianism in this community and the cause of vital

⁶² Original Records of Zion Presbyterian Church, Glebe Street. Minutes, June 15. 1871.

⁶³ Original Records, June 15, 1871.

⁶⁴ Law, p. 156.

religion.' Now, in 1871, 'with a united voice,' they exclaimed, 'You must not let him go!'

In 1875, Girardeau was 'unanimously chosen' to serve as the professor of Theology at Columbia Theological Seminary. This time, it was time to leave Charleston. Sadly his relocation to Columbia did not prevent him from continuing to suffer 'with her present trials.'

The Southern Presbyterian tragedy that surfaced in each of the aforementioned disputes between Girardeau and his congregation was the failure of the 'white element' to recognize that even though they hailed Girardeau as a symbol of southern righteousness and were even inclined to live vicariously through him as he ministered to the slaves and former slaves of Charleston, their collective actions throughout the 1850s and 1860s exposed the inconsistencies between their rhetoric and their actions. What is more, their actions, in concert with the actions of the larger Southern Presbyterian Church, highlighted all the more the actions of a true or 'consistent' Southern Presbyterian Evangelical.

Columbia, again:

I entered upon the discharge of my duties here January 18th, 1876. I was, previously to my first lecture, anxious almost to sickness. I could not endure the thought of undertaking an office for which my furniture was consciously so inadequate. But the Lord helped me.⁶⁵

According to the editor of *The Christian Observer*, 'Among the last comments that Girardeau ever made about himself was, "I could preach to the Negroes. That's about all I was ever fit for."' ⁶⁶ At the age of fifty-one, Girardeau left behind that which he 'was ever fit for' and accepted a position at Columbia Theological Seminary as professor of Didactic and Polemic Theology. The contrast that Girardeau identified between his ability to preach and his inadequacy to teach was reflective of a much larger transformation that Girardeau would undergo during the final period of his life: the gradual

⁶⁵ John L. Girardeau, 'The Seminary Professor,' in *Life Work*, p. 173. See also, *Notes on First Meeting with Senior Class*, Blackburn Collection.

⁶⁶ T.A. Hoyt, in *The Christian Observer* (July, 1898). See also, *Life Work*, p. 390.

realization that his life-long vision to minister to the Charleston slaves within the context of a Southern Evangelical paternalism ultimately failed. Of course, he demonstrated more than any of his peers that a Southern Presbyterian ecclesiastical arrangement between a white minister and a Negro congregation would 'succeed' for a time. But even 'a special kind of a man [with] a special type of preaching,' could not inspire a movement within his own denomination to 'prosecute the work of evangelizing the colored population.'⁶⁷

The reality that the Anson Street Mission, Zion Presbyterian Church, and Glebe Street Presbyterian had collapsed, along with the entire nineteenth century Evangelical front to provide religious instruction to the Negroes, is observed through the stark contrasts that characterized the final phase of the life of Girardeau in Columbia from his earlier years on James Island and in Charleston. First, the primary emphasis of Girardeau's 'calling' as a minister shifted from preaching to teaching. Secondly, the primary recipients of his labors were no longer the slaves or 'prostitutes and persons of the lowest classes.' Rather, Girardeau instructed 'young people [who] were of the best sort' and preached to 'solid-looking gentlemen and ladies of striking appearance.'⁶⁸ Finally, Girardeau relocated from the 'low country' of Charleston to the 'up-country' of Columbia. Although he remained in South Carolina for the remainder of his life, his residence in Columbia represented a departure from the entrenched paternalism that characterized Charleston and the smaller, sea island cotton plantations, and reinforced the disappointment of his vision to reconstruct 'Southern Zion.'

The Professor vs. The Preacher:

Many of his friends to the last maintained that he stepped down and limited his talents in the professor's chair. Nevertheless, he was decidedly a theologian and philosopher of originality and

⁶⁷ Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, p. 236. Girardeau, in *Life Work*, p. 39.

⁶⁸ Blackburn, in *Life Work*, p. 25; See also, Mack, p. 57.

power.⁶⁹

Southern Presbyterian churchmen in South Carolina continued to elevate Girardeau and portray him as exceptional even when describing those areas of his life that were less noteworthy. Though he ‘stepped down and limited his talents’ as a professor, he maintained his ‘originality and power.’ They also found it difficult to divorce his adeptness as a teacher from what was commonly perceived to be the goal of academic pursuit. According to Hoyt, ‘[Girardeau] taught theology so that it could be preached.’⁷⁰ Finally, Southern Presbyterians revered Girardeau’s pastoral ‘heart’ as one of his most appealing assets as a seminary professor. ‘Under the influence of his opening prayer in the classroom, I remember frequently seeing the students wiping the tears from their eyes.’⁷¹ The Rev. Howerton, a student of Girardeau at Columbia, summed up the collective Southern Presbyterian view that Girardeau was an effective seminary professor primarily because he was an accomplished pastor and preacher.

[Girardeau] was not at his best when he preached in college and seminary chapels before seminary or college professors and students, or before Synods and Assemblies. He would almost always overrate such audiences and preach beyond their depth. I remember hearing him preach once in the college chapel. The sermon was about an hour and a half long. The last half hour was in itself a magnificent sermon, comparatively easy to understand, and stirring the very depths of the heart. But the first hour was a profound philosophical and theological argument. Having been enabled by his own teaching, I was able to follow the greater part of it, but I knew that it must be beyond the depth of the greater part of the college student body. Yet they seemed to be giving close attention. As we came out, I overheard this conversation between two college students: “Wasn’t that a grand sermon?” “Finest sermon I ever heard in my life! But say, did you understand it?” “Not a word. But I could have listened to him another hour if he had been preaching in Greek.”⁷²

Girardeau excelled in the classroom because he was persuaded that his purpose as a professor was to train seminary students for the Presbyterian ministry, and not because he was an exceptional

⁶⁹ Rev. F. Dudley Jones, D.D., ‘A Great South Carolinian,’ (Unpublished Paper) Blackburn Collection.

⁷⁰ D.A. Hoyt, D.D., *The Presbyterian* (December 22, 1898).

⁷¹ Rev. G.A. Trenholm, ‘Rev. John L. Girardeau, D.D., LL.D.’ *St. Louis Presbyterian* (St. Louis, date unknown).

⁷² Rev. Jas. R. Howerton, D.D., ‘Reminiscences of John L. Girardeau,’ *Presbyterian Standard* (October 15, 1916).

scholar. He perceived his 'calling' as a professor to be no less of a 'call' from God to 'show forth thy matchless beauty, loveliness and glory' than his work among the slaves at Zion Presbyterian Church. 'I commit myself and this [new] work to which I did not call myself, to the Almighty, faithful hands of the Lord Jesus. Glorious Savior! I adore, I admire, I love thee.'⁷³ As long as Girardeau was under the impression that he was serving the 'Almighty,' and 'called' by him to 'show forth thy matchless beauty,' he was confident that he was faithfully executing his 'calling.'

Girardeau's style of instruction as a seminary professor reflected his former 'calling' as a preacher. In the notes of his 'first meeting with Senior Class,' Girardeau indirectly cited what he believed to be the primary objective of a theology course: 'training extemporaneous preachers' as well as 'debaters and speakers.' He also modeled that objective. According to the Rev. Leeper, 'He was enthusiastic in his teaching.... He inspired his students in a large measure with the same elements.'⁷⁴ Hoyt agreed. 'He was never dry, never severely scholastic. The devotional fervor, the spiritual aroma was always manifest.'⁷⁵ Girardeau also demonstrated that his teaching was built on many nineteenth century Evangelical assumptions: 'the love of truth,' the 'conversion' experience, 'humble dependence upon the Holy Spirit,' 'the proportion of faith,' 'implicit submission to the dogmatic authority of God's Word,' and 'neutrality of mind.'⁷⁶ A conversation recorded by one of his students suggest that Girardeau's style as a seminary professor emphasized the skills of preaching and reflected the theological and philosophical views of nineteenth century Southern Evangelicals:

Charlie, my prayer every day before I begin any work in study or class or pulpit is that I may be spiritually enlightened and enabled to think (1) scripturally and truly (2) clearly, definitely,

⁷³ Girardeau, 'The Seminary Professor,' in *Life Work*, pp. 173-174. See also, 'First Meeting With Senior Class,' in *Notes on Columbia*. Blackburn Collection.

⁷⁴ Rev. F.L. Leeper, 'Memorial Services of the Late Rev. John L. Girardeau,' in *Life Work*, p. 382. See also, *Minutes of the Charleston Presbytery* (June, 1898).

⁷⁵ Hoyt, *The Christian Observer* (July, 1898).

⁷⁶ 'First Meeting With Senior Class,' in *Notes on Columbia*.

precisely (3) soberly, soundly, consistently (4) broadly, deeply, and originally (so far as possible) (5) freely (swiftly, without let or hindrance), powerfully (or ably) and conclusively. Thus only am I fitted to voice the thought of God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit to my fellow-men.⁷⁷

As a professor, Girardeau 'fully met the expectation of his friends.'⁷⁸ But, he was never able to recapture completely the same degree of passion, enjoyment, and confident sense of 'calling' that he knew as a preacher in Charleston. 'I could preach to the slaves.' However, there is no evidence to suggest that he ever made a similar comment about his ability to teach. In fact, Girardeau acknowledged that his 'furniture' for such an 'office' was 'consciously so inadequate.'⁷⁹

The Privileged vs The Impoverished:

The primary recipients of Girardeau's labors in Columbia were no longer the slaves or 'prostitutes and persons of the lowest classes.' Rather, he instructed 'young people [who] were of the best sort' and preached to 'solid-looking gentlemen and ladies of striking appearance.' The contrast between those who sat under Girardeau's teaching and preaching while in Columbia compared to the Charleston slaves underscores the failure of the Southern Presbyterian denomination to accomplish their vision to instruct and evangelize the Negro population. Girardeau suffered the effects of this loss for the remainder of his life in Columbia, for he had invested himself into the lives of the Charleston slaves considerably more than his peers and colleagues. His affection for the 'young people' at Columbia was never quite as strong as it had been for the Negro membership at Zion Presbyterian Church, but his commitment to them was equally uncompromising. What is more, his method of instruction with the students mirrored his method of pastoral care with the slaves.

In an article published by *The Presbyterian Standard*, the Rev. Dr. J. R. Howerton captures

⁷⁷ The Rev. C. O'N. Martindale, 'The Practice of a Thinker' (unpublished essay) Blackburn Collection.

⁷⁸ Leeper, p. 382.

⁷⁹ Letter From Girardeau to the Rev. Dr. Mallard, in *Life Work*, p. 79.

the essence of Girardeau's method of interaction with his students; one that was strikingly similar to his method of pastoral oversight in Charleston. First, Girardeau was strategically available as a professor.

My intimacy with Dr. Girardeau began very soon after I entered the seminary. His study was always open to any of his students who wished to consult him, either on their own personal problems or on their theological difficulties. I took him at his word when he extended his invitation to the class, and called on him in his study in the evening. He told me to come at any hour and stay as long as I pleased, promising that if I ever interfered with his work he would very frankly tell me so—but I do not remember that he ever did. My visits to his study became more and more frequent and were sometimes prolonged to the wee small hours.⁸⁰

Girardeau's deliberate decision to be available, 'always open to any of his students' and 'at any hour [to] stay as long as I pleased,' even to the 'wee small hours,' was completely consistent with his former method of pastoral philosophy and designed to demonstrate to his students that such a commitment was essential to becoming an effective Presbyterian minister. Recalling his work in Charleston, Girardeau concluded, 'I was absorbed in it. Most of the nights in the week were spent in the church.... often have I risen in the night to visit the sick and dying.... I made it a duty to attend all their funerals and conduct them.'⁸¹ Girardeau's conscious commitment to be available to whomever he believed God 'called' him to instruct fostered his credibility among the students, deepened their respect for him, and provided them with a model example of the Evangelical impulse that many Southern Presbyterians had difficulty upholding: activism, 'the expression of the gospel in effort.'⁸² According to Howerton, 'He was in many respects the most remarkable man I have ever known.'⁸³

Secondly, Girardeau was strategically receptive as a professor. 'He permitted the freest discussion in the class room. He would discuss a difference of opinion with a student just as if he regarded him as his own equal.' This method of instruction nurtured open, non-threatening dialogue in the classroom

⁸⁰ Howerton, 'Reminiscences of John L. Girardeau.'

⁸¹ Letter from Girardeau to Mallard, p. 78.

⁸² David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989) pp. 1-21.

⁸³ Howerton, 'Reminiscences.'

as well as the study. 'Come in, Howerton, Get a cigar from behind that lexicon. Now take a seat and let's talk philosophy or theology or both.' Once again, his consciously receptive approach to the students resembled his method of pastoral care at Zion Presbyterian Church. 'He would listen with profound respect to the humblest Negroes, and cheerfully acknowledge that from them he had often learned some of the profoundest and most important lessons of the Christian life.'⁸⁴

The results of this highly interactive method of training seminary students was effective, at least from the perspective of those who were subjected to it. 'I learned more philosophy from those conversations than I could have learned in ten years of dry university lectures. I can appreciate Socrates and his method with his students because I have known Girardeau.'⁸⁵ It also appears that Girardeau was able to identify methodological parallels between his 'calling' as a pastor and his 'calling' as a professor and adapt those principles to the classroom setting. But the absence of a pulpit eventually took its toll and Girardeau was persuaded that he needed an outlet to use 'his gifts of oratory.' Internal conflict among the faculty at Columbia seminary led to his resignation in 1885,⁸⁶ and he began to build upon his reputation 'expressed by many brethren that perhaps he never had his equal in the pulpit of the Southern Presbyterian Church.'⁸⁷

The demographic profile of his next congregation, one that consisted not only [of] intelligence but [where] the evidence of wealth was apparent,' was unlike any of his previous congregations. More importantly, the congregation was a visual reminder to Girardeau that the Southern Presbyterian mission

⁸⁴ Leeper, p. 384.

⁸⁵ Howerton, 'Reminiscences.'

⁸⁶ Girardeau opposed the views and teaching of Dr. James Woodrow, professor of 'Natural Science and Revelation,' on the subject of evolution and wanted him to resign from his position at the seminary. This controversy began in 1883 and continued through Girardeau's resignation in 1885. Wilson was forced to resign the following year and Girardeau returned to the seminary. For a detailed explanation of the controversy, See R.A. Webb, 'The Evolution Controversy,' in *Life Work*, pp. 231-284. See also, *Southern Presbyterian Review* (July, 1884).

⁸⁷ Trenholm, 'Rev. John L. Girardeau.'

to the slaves had dissolved, along with the possibility that the South would ever again return to those days when the slaves would ‘eat from the same store-houses, drink from the same fountains, dwell in the same enclosures,’ and ‘in God’s mysterious providence..... [be] made members of our same families.’⁸⁸

In 1886, Girardeau was called by the Arsenal Hill Presbyterian Church, previously the prestigious Second Presbyterian Church of Columbia, to be their new minister. As a professor, Girardeau had preached at Arsenal Hill on many earlier occasions, but they now wanted him to accept the full-time position. Girardeau retired from his academic post at the seminary, accepted this new position, and preached to ‘large congregations of all denominations [who] attended these services.’⁸⁹ Girardeau experienced immediate success among the Southern Evangelical community of Columbia, including her most ‘refined and intelligent’ citizens, as well as those Evangelicals who visited from other areas of the country. The Rev. Dr. W.A. Wood, of Statesville N.C., ‘a cultured scholar and keen critic,’ knew of Girardeau and ‘came especially to hear [him] and size him up.’ According to the Rev. Joseph Mack, Wood walked out of the service and remarked, ‘magnificent, magnificent.’ Mack also described the unusual response of the affluent Presbyterian congregation:

As he began to close, almost every hearer was either leaning forward or else was standing up, and after he ceased to speak he continued to move his hands in circles up, and up, and up, stopping for a second at the completion of each circle.... For over a minute all remained spellbound and breathless, and then came the rustling sound as they fell back to their seats like those awakening from a delightful dream. No prayer was made, no hymn was sung, only the benediction was pronounced, and then in silence the strangely impressed hearers quietly passed out of the church.⁹⁰

The collective response from those who heard Girardeau preach in Columbia was exceedingly positive. The most ‘refined and intelligent’ of Arsenal Hill, the ‘large congregations of all denominations who attended these services,’ individuals who lived outside of South Carolina, and even one who was

⁸⁸ John B. Adger, D.D., *My Life and Times*, p. 167.

⁸⁹ Blackburn, in *Life Work*, p. 377.

⁹⁰ Mack in *Life Work*, pp. 54-55.

familiar with some of the most reputable Evangelical preachers across the Atlantic, echoed the opinion of one another. What is more, the Evangelical community in Columbia mirrored the sentiments of the 'soldiers [who] say that they can still remember the sermons [Girardeau] preached to them while they were gathered round the camp fires of Virginia,' as well as those who, under Girardeau's preaching, exchanged the 'quaw-sticks,' and the 'rhythmical shuffling' of the 'Ethiopian jig' for 'psalms and hymns.'⁹¹

Girardeau's level of commitment to his congregation at Arsenal Hill, however, was different than his previous 'calling' in Charleston. After one year at Arsenal Hill, 'conditions opened the way for him to return to the seminary, and he gave up his pastorate of this church...'⁹² Though he continued preaching in the church every Sabbath afternoon,' Girardeau's resignation suggests that he was convinced that the affairs of the seminary, and particularly the training of future Presbyterian ministers, was a far greater priority to him than exhorting 'solid-looking gentlemen and ladies of striking appearance.'

His resignation in Charleston among those who were 'placed under [his] care' and who 'belong[ed] to [him]' also appeared to be a far more grueling decision than leaving Arsenal Hill. Girardeau related to the former slaves in Charleston not only as members of his congregation but as members of his extended family. Girardeau's brief pastorate at Arsenal Hill, among the most distinguished in the state, was an excellent opportunity to enhance his reputation as a preacher, but it did not satisfy that element of his 'calling' to relate to the slaves or the seminary students. Returning to the seminary where 'his study was always open to any of his students who wished to consult him, either on their own personal problems or on their theological difficulties' was more consistent with the pastoral emphasis of his work in Charleston.

⁹¹ Letter From Girardeau to Mallard, p. 75.

⁹² According to Webb, in 1886 'Dr. Woodrow was removed from his professorship in the seminary, and his views were judicially condemned by the General Assembly of the Church. See *Life Work*, p. 282.

Columbia vs. Charleston:

Finally, Girardeau's relocation to Columbia represented a departure from the entrenched paternalism that characterized Charleston and the smaller, sea island cotton plantations and reinforced the failure of his vision to reconstruct 'Southern Zion.' Throughout his life Girardeau thrived in an environment where he perceived that others were dependent upon him, and he made an effort to put himself in the path of those who were inclined to recognize their need for him. As a child on James Island and following the death of his mother, Girardeau was responsible for overseeing the care of his siblings. He also modeled the actions of his mother toward the slaves, 'especially to sick and needy Negroes.'

The deeply rooted paternalism that characterized Charleston fostered Girardeau's desire to serve the slaves. Girardeau's relocation to the up-country of Columbia, where a paternalistic dependence was less established between the slave and the free, and where 'they [even] permitted the Negroes to have churches of their own in many places,' underscored the reality that his vision to 'evangelize the colored population and his inability to restore 'Southern Zion' in the wake of the war ultimately failed.⁹³ Girardeau did establish a relationship with the students at Columbia that reflected the paternalistic alliance that he cultivated with the slaves. But such a position was never the ideal situation that Girardeau would have envisioned for himself, especially during the final stage of his life.

Girardeau remained at Columbia Seminary until the spring of 1895 when his health began to deteriorate. The following fall he suffered a stroke which left him paralyzed on the entire right side of his body. Upon hearing of his deteriorated state, one of his former students made the journey from Charlotte to Columbia to pay him a final visit. The following exchange between Girardeau and Howerton provides a moving picture of the only remaining dialogue that was documented during his last days. More importantly, the dialogue reveals something about Girardeau that made him so popular among such a diverse range of people throughout his entire life.

⁹³ Mack, pp. 70, 62.

I went to Columbia purposely to see him. I found him very weak. During the course of the conversation he said: "What brought you to Columbia, Howerton?" I came to see you Doctor.' "Yes, I know you came to see me but what else was the occasion of your coming?" Nothing else, Doctor, I came expressly to see you. "Do you mean to tell me, Howerton, that you came all the way from Charlotte just to see me?" The tears rolled down his cheeks. "I didn't know any of my old students loved me enough for that!" On that last visit, as I came in one day, he said, "Come sit down here, Howerton, and teach me some theology." Why, Doctor Girardeau, I don't know any theology except what you taught me yourself. "Well, tell me that then, for I have forgotten it all."⁹⁴

Girardeau died on June 23, 1898 and was buried in Elmwood cemetery 'near where the dust of his beloved teacher, James H. Thornwell lies.' According to Blackburn, 'his end was peaceful. In the dimly lighted room, surrounded by his weeping family, and attended by his loving physician, Dr. Benjamin F. Wyman, he quietly ceased to breathe.'⁹⁵

Girardeau's life was the most authentic expression of antebellum Southern Presbyterian ideology. Girardeau was able to accomplish for a time that which his peers were only able and willing to do vicariously through him. His 'success' among the Charleston slaves underscores the failure of the Southern Presbyterian Church to apply their rhetoric to those whom they believed were providentially 'called' into their midst. His life also suggests that Southern Presbyterian Evangelicals rarely applied the Evangelical impulse, 'activism' ['the expression of the gospel in effort'] to their unique situation among the slaves.

Perhaps more than anything else, the life of Girardeau reveals that even a consistent Southern Presbyterian Evangelical could not perpetuate the flawed ideology of the antebellum denomination. Southern Presbyterians, including Girardeau were unable to understand that the message of redemption that they theoretically offered to their black 'brothers and sisters' was compromised as long as they endorsed and even promoted the South's 'peculiar institution. Girardeau was able to find a receptive audience for a while because the slaves were generally willing to overlook the flaws of the one who

⁹⁴ Howerton, 'Reminiscences.'

⁹⁵ Blackburn, p. 377.

demonstrated that he was willing to treat them with dignity and respect. The slaves at Zion Presbyterian in Charleston embraced his message of forgiveness for themselves and they quickly applied that forgiveness to the one who ‘talked to them as an angel from the sky.’⁹⁶ But the tide was against him from the beginning.

⁹⁶ Hoyt, *The Christian Observer* (July, 1898).

Chapter 6: The Theological/Philosophical and Racial Dimensions of Girardeau's 'Mission to the Slaves'

The life of John L. Girardeau cannot be properly understood apart from the cultural context of American, Presbyterian, and Southern Evangelicalism. This includes the impact of theology and race on the Southern Evangelical initiative toward slave missions. In the final three decades leading up to the American Civil War, Evangelicalism, theology and race were inextricably linked together. To be a Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, or Episcopal Southern Evangelical was to hold a similar theological and racial worldview. It will be useful to explore these themes in order to understand the historical context of Girardeau's ministry among the Charleston slaves.

Girardeau ministered at a margin of nineteenth century Southern society. With one hand, he reached out to slaves, while with the other, he clung to the theological, philosophical, and racial ideas of the white elite to which he belonged. The reach of his ministry was limited by his refusal, or inability, to let go of the dominant Southern worldview of his day. First, Girardeau was committed to a strict interpretation of the Bible. In the final three decades before the American Civil War, abolitionist critiques caused Southern Evangelicals to build a brittle theological barricade around the institution of slavery. As anti-slavery rhetoric mounted with allegations of gross inhumanity and stern accusations of the sinfulness of slavery, Southern Evangelicals turned to chapter and verse in their Bible to defend themselves. By the early 1850s, Southern Presbyterians, including Girardeau, were so committed to the Southern Evangelical scriptural justification for slavery that they could not accept the merits of any opposing perspective. Girardeau was inside the fortress—he could not see over the walls, and he took all 'foreign' ideas for unfriendly fire. Consequently, neither he nor his contemporaries were ever able to conclude that all was not well and defensible in the Southern 'Zion.'

Secondly, Girardeau's restricted biblical hermeneutic was a significant catalyst in the development of his theological and philosophical worldview.¹ The philosophical grid through which he formulated his ideas of nature and the natural world was constructed from an American adaptation of Scottish common sense realism.² What is more, his theological and philosophical assumptions contributed to his position toward slavery, his views about the nature of the Negro race, and his beliefs regarding the nature of Negro servitude. But Girardeau's biblical hermeneutic was also influenced by his racial ideology. While Girardeau certainly attempted to derive his views of race and slavery from a literal interpretation of the Bible, his efforts were restricted by the cultural ideas of racial inequality in the antebellum South.

Thirdly, resistance from the citizens of Charleston further hampered Girardeau's mission to the slaves, though that resistance was not as fierce as might be expected. At the outset of the initiative among Southern Evangelicals to provide religious instruction to the slaves in the 1830s, slaveholders demanded civil codes and ecclesiastical policies that resembled a Southern version of religious apartheid. But as slaveholders were gradually assured that the Southern clergy shared their commitment to slavery, as they observed the impact of religion on their slaves, and as the threat of war became more imminent, such codes and policies were relaxed or eliminated altogether.

¹ The theological framework through which Girardeau interpreted the Bible emphasized the 'Reformed' tradition, often identified as 'Calvinism.'

² The Scottish brand of enlightenment thought was the most widely accepted and utilized philosophical choice among Americans, and especially Evangelical Americans, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. What was initially a philosophical alternative to the skeptical and revolutionary brands of the enlightenment, Scottish 'common sense' realism found wide acceptance among Americans because it claimed that 'all humans possessed, by nature, a common set of capacities – both epistemological and ethical - through which they could grasp the basic realities of nature and morality.' In an increasingly democratic culture where the voice of the individual reigned and was believed to be endowed from birth with the ability to discover 'the basic realities of nature for himself, 'common sense' reasoning provided the philosophical justification for just about everyone to be heard precisely because it was so intuitive, so instinctual, so much a part of second nature.' The assumption that all 'humans know intuitively some basic realities of the physical world' and 'are guided by the dictates of nature,' appealed to the Southern wing of the Presbyterian church because it provided the philosophical basis to advance an argument for slavery from a literal reading of scripture and build a case for Negro slavery upon the instinctive dictates of nature. See Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, p. 88; also Noll, 'Common sense Traditions and American Evangelical Thought,' p. 220.

Finally, Girardeau suffered from a failure of imagination. As the product of a deep tradition dependent upon Southern paternalism, Girardeau simply could not envision racial equality before the law or before God. An understanding of this limitation must inform any analysis of his character.

The Bible and Slavery in Southern Presbyterianism

In the decade prior to the American Civil War, Southern American Presbyterian divines, including Girardeau, were especially diligent to ensure that they interpreted the world through a comprehensive reading of the Bible.³ They were also persuaded that their reading of scripture was the correct one—so convinced of their interpretation that they encouraged their fellow men to enter into fierce and bloody combat for the survival of the religious, social, and political convictions of the Confederacy.⁴ So strong were the religious beliefs of those in the South on the eve of the American Civil War that John Adger, who had preceded Girardeau in conducting a ministry among the Charleston slaves, could roar, ‘There is no earthly power that can overcome a whole people when animated by such convictions!’⁵ Eugene Genovese summed up the convictions that inspired Southern Evangelicals to support the war: ‘In 1861 Southern Christians

³ Methodist, Baptist, and Episcopal Evangelicals in the South were equally committed to the Bible, but Presbyterians led all denominations in the Biblical exegesis that established the prevailing defense of slavery. Southern Presbyterian churchman James Henley Thornwell was certainly the most prolific and arguably the most influential religious defender of the Southern social order. Marilyn J. Westerkamp detailed Thornwell’s biblical and theological reasoning for the defense of slavery and argues that he was the primary spokesman for the Presbyterian Church. See Westerkamp, ‘James Henley Thornwell, Pro-Slavery Spokesman Within A Calvinist Faith,’ *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 87 (January, 1986) p. 49.

⁴ Many prominent Southern Presbyterian ministers left their congregations to serve as chaplains during the war and demonstrate their support for the Southern cause. Robert L. Dabney served as the chaplain of the eighteenth Virginia volunteers and was promoted to chief of staff under Southern general Stonewall Jackson. In 1863, Benjamin M. Palmer served ‘the Army of Tennessee,’ ‘preaching the Gospel to the soldiers.’ See Thomas Cary Johnson, *The Life and Letters of Benjamin M. Palmer* (Richmond, Va., 1906) pp. 269-270. Girardeau served as Confederate chaplain of the Twenty-Third Regiment of the South Carolina Volunteers.

⁵ John B. Adger, ‘The Revival of the Slave Trade,’ *Southern Presbyterian Review* 11 (April, 1858) p. 103.

marched to war behind their Lord of Hosts, convinced that He blessed their struggle to uphold a *scripturally* [italics added] sanctioned slavery and their right to self-determination.⁶

Nineteenth century Southern Presbyterians derived their views of their world—whether on the cotton plantations of low country South Carolina, the rice plantations of the ‘up-country,’ the slave-market in the center of the Southern city, or the expanding western frontier—from what they believed to be “special revelation,” the divinely inspired word of God that was revealed through the writings of the Old Testament prophets and New Testament Apostles. Since the Bible was considered to be in the original text ‘God-breathed,’ and to offer indispensable guidance, if not concrete answers, to all the theological and philosophical questions of life, it was incumbent upon everyone to read, study, and obey it.⁷

Southern Presbyterian clergy were also convinced that the God of the Bible would support their increasingly unpopular views regarding the black population and the institution of slavery⁸ and exonerate them from criticism by anti-slavery propagandists, ‘the philanthropists of

⁶ Eugene D. Genovese, *A Consuming Fire: The Fall of the Confederacy in the Mind of the White Christian South* (Athens, Ga.: The University of Georgia Press, 1998) p. 3.

⁷ For a brief account of Girardeau’s view of scripture, see Girardeau, *Discussions of Theological Questions* (Harrisonburg, Va.: Sprinkle Publications, 1986) pp. 385-392. See also Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 1, ‘Of the Holy Scripture,’ detailing the position adopted by the nineteenth century Southern Presbyterian denomination regarding their view of scriptural authority.

⁸ The slavery controversy vaulted to the forefront of the American consciousness at the turn of the nineteenth century and picked up steam with each decade leading up the American Civil War. Consequently, Southern American religious scholarship has detailed the relationship between religion and slavery in virtually every area of Southern life. Relative to the enlightenment influence, immigration expansion, intellectual curiosity, religious diversity, and the burgeoning economic and political activity that was evolving in the North, there was far less to report regarding any cosmic-like changes that were taking place in the antebellum cities and plantations of the South. To be sure, the South was progressing. Intellectually, academic institutions were being established. According to Eugene D. Genovese, ‘proportionately, more white southerners than northerners were attending college in 1860.’ See Eugene D. Genovese, ‘Religion in the Collapse of the American Union,’ in *Religion And the American Civil War*, ed. Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Regan Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) p. 76. Economically, the cotton revolution had appeared to secure a strong financial future, at least for the aristocracy, the city and plantation elite; politically, Southern politicians were steadily gaining notoriety and influence among their Northern counterparts; and socially, most of the inhabitants in the South, both slave and free, had settled into their social spheres and positions and accepted their good fortune or plight, whatever the case may be. Most antebellum Southerners had no reason to oppose the inherited social relations. More importantly, the Bible sanctioned such relations, and in the South, little else needed to be said. ‘To Southern proslavery

Europe and this country [who] can find nothing worth weeping for but the sufferings and degradation of the Southern slave.⁹ In a sermon delivered in 1850 at the prestigious Second Presbyterian Church in Charleston, James H. Thornwell, the leading religious spokesman for the antebellum South, ‘the most learned of the learned,’ and according to Genovese, ‘the South’s greatest theologian,’ exhorted the parishioners to lay hold of ‘the Christianity contained in the Bible, proclaimed by the Apostles and Prophets, and sealed by the blood of a goodly company of Martyrs and Confessors.’ He went on to assert what most antebellum Southerners believed but were reluctant to voice. ‘Truth must triumph. God will vindicate the appointments of His Providence—and if our institutions are indeed consistent with righteousness and truth, we can calmly afford to bide our time... trusting in Him who has all the elements at His command and can save as easily by one as a thousand.’¹⁰ Even into the late 1850s and early 1860s, Girardeau embraced the convictions of his denomination and the words of his mentor, Thornwell, as he attempted to demonstrate through his ministry to the Charleston slaves at Zion Church that

clergymen, the Bible – as God revealed Word – embodied the highest standard of moral rectitude.’ See Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separation in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge University Press, 1993) p. 59; For very helpful studies on the question of the Bible and slavery, see Caroline L. Shanks, ‘The Biblical Anti-Slavery Argument of the Decade, 1830-1840,’ *Journal of Negro History* 16 (1931) pp. 132-157; Robert Bruce Mullin, ‘Biblical Critics and the Battle over Slavery,’ *Journal of Presbyterian History* 61 (Summer, 1983) pp. 210-276; Larry E. Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1987); Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Yankee Saints and Southern Sinners* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana University Press, 1985).

⁹ Thornwell, ‘The Rights and Duties of Masters: A Sermon Preached At the Dedication Of A Church, Erected In Charleston, S.C., For the Benefit and Instruction Of the Colored Population’ (Charleston, S.C.: Steam-Power Press of Walker and James, 1850) p. 7. See also reprint of sermon in *Thornwell’s Collected Writings*, eds. John B. Adger and John L. Girardeau, vol. 4 (Richmond, Va.: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1873) pp. 398-436.

¹⁰ Benjamin M. Palmer, *The Life and Letters of James Henley Thornwell, D.D., LL.D.* (Richmond, Va.: Whittet & Shepperson, 1875) p. 537; Eugene D. Genovese, ‘Religion in the Collapse of the American Union,’ in *Religion and the American Civil War*, p. 77; Thornwell, ‘The Rights and Duties of Masters,’ pp. 6; 13-14.

slavery was ‘consistent with righteousness and truth.’ For Girardeau, such ‘convictions’ were ‘clothed with God’s authority.’¹¹

The grand rhetoric of Thornwell extended well beyond Girardeau and the relatively small but influential Presbyterian denomination and garnered support from Evangelicals of other denominations throughout the South.¹² ‘What God sanctioned in the Old Testament and permitted in the new, cannot be sin,’ declared the South Carolinian Baptist clergyman Richard Fuller. The Methodist Episcopal minister in Charleston, William Capers, was no less adamant regarding his position on the Bible and slavery. ‘We believe that the Holy Scriptures, so far from giving any countenance to this delusion, do unequivocally authorize the relation of master and slave.’ A Lutheran clergymen and scientist from South Carolina, John Bachman, revealed his position of the Bible and slavery when he commented that it contained ‘the most effective weapons’ to combat anti-slavery rhetoric. The Mississippi preacher and slaveholder James Smylie believed he spoke for all of Southern Zion when he exclaimed, ‘If slavery be a sin, then, verily, three fourths of all the Episcopalians, Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians, in eleven states in the union, are of the devil.’¹³ Historian Mitchell Snay summed up the relationship

¹¹ Girardeau, *Discussions of Theological Questions* (Harrisonburg, Va.: Sprinkle Publications, 1986) p. 385.

¹² Genovese notes that Presbyterians generated widespread influence ‘because they exercised disproportionate influence over the educational system and set an ideological line closely adhered to by the Methodists, Baptists, Episcopalians, and others.’ Genovese, ‘Religion in the Collapse of the American Union,’ p. 77. In his section entitled *An Elite Hundred*, Brooks Holifield identified those who ‘held positions of regional and not simply local leadership.’ Of those listed, thirty-seven were Presbyterian, twenty-three were Baptist, eighteen were Methodist, fourteen were Episcopalians, six were Roman Catholic, and two were Lutheran. This is particularly noteworthy since Presbyterians during the antebellum period only represented twelve percent of the Southern ‘town’ clergy. Methodism boasted thirty percent, Baptists and Episcopalians each represented sixteen percent of the Southern clergy, followed by Roman Catholicism at fourteen percent. See Brooks Holifield, *The Gentlemen Theologians: American Theology in Southern Culture 1795-1860* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1978) pp. 26-28. For a thorough recounting of the influence of Presbyterianism among Southern Evangelicals, see also Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Sacred Circle: The Dilemma of the Intellectual in the Old South, 1830-1860* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

¹³ H. Shelton Smith *In His Image, But... Racism in Southern Religion, 1780-1910* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1972) p. 133; William M. Wightman, D.D., *Life of William Capers, D.D., One of the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church South* (Nashville, Tn.: J.B. M’Ferrin, 1858) p. 296; Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and separatism in the antebellum South* (Cambridge:

between the Bible and slavery, a relationship that transcended denominational affiliation, when he declared of the Southern Evangelicals: 'The Bible was the center of their defense of slavery.'¹⁴ Antebellum Southerners and clergymen of all denominational persuasions had little doubt that God and the Bible were on their side. That the rest of the world would eventually embrace their position was for them obvious: 'If our principles are true, the world must come to them.'¹⁵

Central to Southern antebellum religious thought was the belief that the God of the Bible would vindicate those who remained faithful to his divinely inspired Word—unless, of course, his chosen representatives fell short of their Christian duty to spread the good news of the Bible among the unconverted slaves. In the face of diminishing ecclesiastical support from outside the Southern Zion throughout the 1840s and 1850s, Southern Presbyterians in Charleston, perhaps more than any other Evangelical denomination in the city, were desperate to be exonerated by the One whom they believed had spoken clearly and decisively regarding their relationship to 'the poor of this city.'¹⁶ If the white inhabitants of the South joined together to discharge their Christian duty to the unconverted slaves as specified in scripture, then there was little reason to fear the wrath of the Almighty. But failure to uphold the standard established by the Almighty was perceived as a real possibility and one that threatened to wreak havoc beyond proportion in

University Press, 1993) p. 54; James Smylie, *A Review of a Letter from the Presbytery of Chillicothe, the Presbytery of Mississippi, on the Subject of Slavery* (Wodenville, Miss., 1836) p. 13. See also H. Shelton Smith, *In His Image*, p. 129.

¹⁴ Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*, p. 12.

¹⁵ Thornwell, 'The Rights and Duties of Masters,' p. 14.

¹⁶ John Adger, 'The Religious Instruction of the Colored Population: A Sermon Preached by the Rev. John B. Adger, in the Second Presbyterian Church, Charleston, S.C., May 9, 1847' (Charleston: T.W. Haynes, 1847) p. 6.

the mind of the Southern Evangelical slaveholder. 'Should southerners neglect their duty, they could expect nothing less than divine retribution.'¹⁷

At the dedication service for the new building on Anson street in Charleston that was constructed primarily for the religious instruction of the slaves, Thornwell proclaimed that Christian slaveholders had no cause for alarm so long as they 'set an example of faithfulness and diligence in the discharge of the duties which spring from the relation of master and servant.' The promise of reward for 'faithfulness and diligence' would no doubt have brought a sigh of relief among slaveholding Christians of all denominations who would one day appear before their heavenly master. 'It will be of single proof that God has not condemned us... and we shall stand acquitted at the bar of the world.'¹⁸

Southern divines, their congregations, and slaveholders understood that Northern, and also the international tide of opinion, had turned against them over the course of the three decades leading up to the Civil War. But they did not sit quietly in their pews. As early as 1835, the Charleston Baptist Association referred to anti-slavery activists as 'deluded and mischievous fanatics.' The Episcopal bishop of Georgia, Stephen Elliot, echoed the sentiment of the Charleston Baptist Association that same decade when he described abolitionists as 'infidels – men who are clamoring for a new God, and a new Christ, and a new Bible.' Abolitionist condemnation reached its climax among Southern Episcopalians in 1862 when they referred to

¹⁷ Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, p. 224. For Southern Evangelicals, the idea of Christian duty was an essential component to their biblical argument for slavery. Snay details how Southern Evangelicals relied heavily on Scottish common sense philosophy, and especially the notion of conscience, to explain the essential place of duty in the life of the Southern slaveholder. If the slaveholder had the moral 'right' to the labor of his slave, then certain conditions had to be met in order to justify his relationship with his slave. Among the many conditions, the slaveholder was bound by duty to supply his slaves with religious instruction. 'But of all other duties, there is none so important, as that of teaching them the genuine precepts of religion.' To neglect this vital moral condition of slaveholding was also a violation of the conscience, rendering one vulnerable to the rightful punishment of God. See Samuel Dunwood, *A Sermon upon the Subject of Slavery* (Columbia, S.C.: S. Weir, 1837) p. 26. See also Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*, pp. 82-87. John Boles notes that throughout the Civil War, 'clergy feared that God was chastising the region for not sufficiently supporting the mission effort to the blacks.' See Boles, *Masters & Slaves In The House Of The Lord: Race and Religion in the American South, 1740-1870* (Lexington, KY.: The University of Kentucky Press) p. 11.

¹⁸ Thornwell, 'The Rights and Duties of Masters.' p. 12.

abolitionism as ‘that hateful infidel pestilence.’ The ‘Methodists were no less opposed to abolitionism in the 1830s than the Presbyterians.’ Methodist Southern spokesman, William Capers, condemned the abolitionist movement as a ‘false philosophy’ and ‘altogether hurtful. We denounce the principles and opinions of the abolitionists *in toto*.’ In 1851, Thornwell summed up the collective sentiment in the antebellum South. ‘We are not alarmists, but slavery is implicated in every fiber of southern society.’¹⁹

Southern clergy and churchgoers of all denominational stripes appeared undaunted by the growing anti-slavery rhetoric outside the South. Instead, they gripped their Bibles tighter and stayed the course that they believed had been providentially set before them. The ‘calm and quiet conviction,’ pondered Adger, ‘extending, as we judge it does to men of *every religious creed* [italics added] and uniting, as we judge it does, the whole body of every church in all this fair, broad Southern land.... prepares the whole people to stand as one.’ Even into the late 1850s, there were few signs among the leading religious clergy in Charleston that all was not defensible in the Southern ‘Zion.’ Under the leadership of Girardeau and with the growth of slave participation at Zion Presbyterian throughout the mid to late 1850s, Southern Evangelicals were all the more persuaded that God would ‘vindicate the appointments of his providence.’²⁰

¹⁹ H. Shelton Smith, *In His Image*, p. 116-117, Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*, p. 63; Smith, *In His Image*, p. 197; William Wightman, ‘Life of William Capers,’ pp. 295-296; Thornwell, ‘Report on the Subject of Slavery, Presented to the Synod of South Carolina, at their Sessions in Winnsborough, November 6, 1851 (Columbia, S.C.: Steam –Power Press of A.S. Johnson) p. 15. The Roman Catholic resistance to abolitionism in the South was certainly less aggressive than that of its Protestant neighbors during the three decades leading up to the war, but ‘most of them steadfastly supported the institution of Negro servitude throughout the war.’ Augustin Verot, bishop of Savannah, ‘traced the origin of secession and the war to abolitionism.’ Auguste Martin, bishop of Louisiana, was even more explicit when he affirmed that slavery ‘is an arrangement eminently Christian by which millions pass from intellectual darkness to the sweet brilliance of the Gospel.’ In 1862, Courtney Jenkins, ‘editor of the *Catholic Mirror*, argued that abolition ‘must be fatal to the Negro race in the South,’ and noted that prior to the war, ‘there was not a happier people on earth than the slaves.’ See Smith, *In His Image*, pp. 198-201. Southern Catholics and Protestants never achieved exact theological consensus prior to the war, nor were they terribly interested in trying. But their commitment to the perpetuation of slavery appeared to transcend even their greatest theological difference; for they eventually fought on the same side of the field. For further discussions of Catholicism and the American Civil War, see Jenny Franchot, *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism* (Berkeley, California: University Press, 1994).

²⁰ Adger, ‘Revival of the Slave Trade,’ p. 103.

The idea of a divinely appointed paternalistic arrangement between blacks and whites was thoroughly etched into the Southern consciousness, even if those outside the South preferred ‘sentiment over reason and truth.’²¹ In the end, believed Adger and other determined Southerners, by preserving the institution of slavery, the slaves would be saved from the voodoo religious practices of their heathenish African culture and the whites would further secure the prevailing social order that had been ‘providentially’ established and that was also supported by the Bible. Perhaps most importantly, slaveholding Christians would fulfill their duty to their heavenly master—the one to whom they would soon be called to give an account for their stewardship.

Antebellum Southern Presbyterians were persuaded that the Bible sanctioned a social economy under-girded by a stratified labor force. Slave labor, they argued, had proved itself vastly superior to the freely contracted labor of capitalism. Consequently, as Eugene Genovese has observed, ‘The replacement of slavery by the free-labor system never became a serious issue.’²² A literal reading of the Bible that sanctioned slavery, or at least some form of personal servitude, could not equally endorse a free labor system as the only basis of a Christian society.

²¹ For the most comprehensive analysis of Southern paternalism, the complex relationship that existed in the antebellum South between master and slave, see Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976) pp. 3-7. Summed up by Genovese, ‘cruel, unjust, exploitative, oppressive, slavery bound two peoples together in bitter antagonism while creating an organic relationship so complex and ambivalent that neither could express the simplest human feelings without reference to the other.’ For a more focused analysis of the religious foundations that led to a social order that was rooted in paternalism, see Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene Genovese, ‘The Divine Sanction of Social Order: Religious Foundations of the Southern Slaveholders’ World View,’ *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (Summer, 1987); for a brief analysis of Genovese and Southern paternalistic thought, see Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*, pp. 71-73; for other important works that include helpful discussion of Southern paternalism, see Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Antebellum South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956); John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); for paternalistic practices especially among Southern Presbyterians, see Erskine Clarke, *Our Southern Zion: A History of Calvinism in the South Carolina Low Country, 1690-1990* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1996) pp. 189-199; Thornwell, ‘The Rights and Duties of Masters,’ p. 8.

²² Eugene D. Genovese, *A Consuming Fire: The Fall of the Confederacy in the Mind of the White Christian South*, p. 79; see also, Eugene D. Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, ‘The Religious Ideals of Southern Slave Society,’ *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* (Spring, 1986) pp. 2-16; William S. Jenkins, *Proslavery Thought in the Old South* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1935).

Furthermore, as Southern Evangelicals read their Bibles, listened to their clergy, and drew conclusions about the state of human nature, they concluded that free labor could not be sustained in a world tainted by sin and rebellion. Not even an elite white population could prevent a free labor economy from deteriorating into a 'social system devoted to Mammon.'²³

As the primary spokesman for Southern Presbyterians, Thornwell appealed to a wide spectrum of the Southern population in his effort to justify the South's social order. His acquaintance with the writings of ancient philosophers, including Seneca, Pythagoras, Plato, Cicero, and Claudian, as well as later secular and political theorists, enabled him to buttress his argument and appeal to a cultured audience. Preaching on the text from Colossians— 'Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal knowing ye also have a master in heaven' — Thornwell used the Bible as a double-edged sword; as the biblical basis for 'regulated liberty,' as well as political persuasion, 'upholding the civil interests of mankind, resisting alike the social anarchy of communism and the political anarchy of licentiousness.'²⁴ Of course, not everyone in the South held so tenaciously to the orthodox teachings of the Bible, but few attempted to build their defense of the existing social order apart from it. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene Genovese identified the common strain that linked all white Southerners to regulated social stratification. 'For the southern slaveholders any social order worthy of the name, and therefore its appropriate social relations, had to be grounded in divine sanction.'²⁵

²³ Ibid., p. 80.

²⁴ J.H. Thornwell, 'The Rights and Duties of Masters,' p. 12.

²⁵ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, 'The Divine Sanction of Social Order: Religious Foundations of the Southern Slaveholders' World View,' p. 211. 'Southerners, led by their theologians, turned to the Bible to sanction slavery. And the Bible served them well, for it did sanction slavery. In regularly turning to and relying upon the Bible, they vigorously defended slavery as an appropriate foundation for the good of society and an appropriate model for harmonious social relations. See Genovese, 'The Religious Ideals of Southern Slave Society,' p. 4.

Southern clergy grounded their political case for 'regulated liberty,' or as Eugene Genovese termed it, 'Christian slavery,' in Scottish common sense realism.²⁶ The divines combined their philosophical ideas regarding the natural order of the world, informed by Ricardian and Malthusian theory, with their theological exposition of original sin to conclude that some form of 'regulated liberty' was essential for the long-term social relations of mankind. In order to avoid 'the social anarchy of communism and political anarchy of licentiousness,' they carefully blended political theory and common sense realism with biblical exegesis in order to create a broad antebellum South. Such a grand social and economic arrangement would 'unite the interests of capital and labor by making men [masters] responsible for those dependent upon them [slaves].'²⁷ From the perspective of the Southern master, this reciprocal relationship fostered rigorous accountability among both masters and slaves. The slaves were accountable to their earthly master while the Southern slaveholder was answerable to God.

In the view of many antebellum Southerners, especially the city and plantation elites, those in the Northern states had grown envious of the economically fruitful and socially harmonious relations that appeared to exist between the two races that God had been pleased to place in Dixie. While white Southerners benefited from the cotton boom in the early part of the nineteenth century, Northerners did not experience the same degree of economic prosperity.²⁸

²⁶ For a good discussion of the impact of Scottish common sense philosophy on the history of Evangelicalism, see Mark Noll, 'Common Sense Traditions and American Evangelical Thought,' *American Quarterly* 37 (Summer, 1985) pp. 216-238; on the Scottish influence of Southern Presbyterians, see Mitchell Snay, 'American Thought and Southern Distinctiveness: The Southern Clergy and the Sanctification of Slavery,' *Civil War History* 35 (December, 1989); on the influence of moral philosophy upon the intellectual life of the Old South, see Holifield, *Gentlemen Theologians*, pp. 127-134; for a brief analysis of how Southerners 'borrowed selectively but legitimately from the precepts of moral philosophy to construct an ideology that was explicitly sectional,' see Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*, pp. 82-87.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 12; Genovese, 'Religion in the Collapse of the American Union,' p. 80.

²⁸ For helpful resources detailing the economic life in Charleston during the antebellum period, see Walter J. Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston! The History of a Southern City* (Columbia, SC.: University of South Carolina Press, 1989); Robert G. Rhett, *Charleston: An Epic of Carolina* (Richmond, Va.: Garrett & Massie Inc, 1940).

The religious and intellectual climate of opinion remained largely unchanged when contrasted with that of the North. Enlightenment influence had spread throughout the North and led many Evangelicals to contemplate the need for social reform.²⁹ These Northern attitudes did not bode well for those in the South who were far more zealous to develop biblical arguments for the defense of human bondage than subscribe to the ‘growing popularity of the perverse doctrines of Enlightenment radicalism and the French Revolution – the doctrines of Voltaire, Rousseau, and Paine.’³⁰ The historian Henry May has called attention to the staunch resistance among antebellum Southerners toward change and progress. ‘By 1830 one can see the outlines of the Solid South—fiercely Christian, united in defense of slavery, patriotic and proud of its immunity to the cults and isms that were cropping up in the north.’³¹ Bertram Wyatt-Brown supplied a different perspective to the resistance of Southerners to those aspects of the Enlightenment that emphasized social and ethical reform. Instead of succumbing to the ‘cults and isms that were cropping up in the north,’ Southern Evangelicals were too busy defending ‘a culture of personal honor.’³² Thornwell provided a Southern perspective on the ‘cults and isms that were cropping up in the north’ when he maintained that Northern hostility toward slavery was paraded to the world ‘as a trophy to the progress of human development.’ The South was united in its belief that the goal of these Northern efforts toward social reform was the

²⁹ Henry May detailed four aspects of Enlightenment influence in American thought. While the Didactic Enlightenment permeated Evangelical thought in the South and North during the antebellum period, the Revolutionary spirit of the enlightenment, promoting social reform movements and advancing the ‘the belief in the possibility of constructing a new heaven and earth out of the destruction of the old,’ was more deeply ingrained in the North. See Henry May, *The Enlightenment in America* (Oxford: University Press, 1976) p. xvi.

³⁰ Genovese detailed many similarities between Southern conservative divines and their Northern brethren, mostly Presbyterians, even their shared views of certain negative aspects of the Enlightenment on American thought. See Eugene Genovese, *The Slaveholders’ Dilemma: Freedom and Progress in Southern Conservative Thought, 1820-1860* (Columbia, SC.: University of South Carolina Press, 1992) p. 37.

³¹ Henry May, *The Enlightenment in America*, p. 327.

³² Mark Noll, ‘Revolution and the Rise of Evangelical Social Influence in North Atlantic Societies,’ in *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, The British Isles, and Beyond*, p. 127. See also, Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

‘subversion of the cherished institutions of our fathers, and the hopes of the human race.’³³

Antebellum clergy and their parishioners opted for the status quo.

Antebellum Southern Presbyterians also believed the Bible taught that the black race originated from ‘the same stock as ourselves,’ and they had little patience with those who tried to ‘trace the Negro to any other parent but Adam.’³⁴ In his report to the General Assembly in 1867, Girardeau expressed the Southern Presbyterian position regarding the unity of the human race. ‘We have always acknowledged, and now hold in the scriptural doctrine of the specific unity of the human race. We believe that all mankind sprang from one original pair, and are involved in the consequences of Adam’s fall.’³⁵ But Southern Presbyterians also remained convinced that the social and intellectual gaps between the two races, solidified by years of cultural history, were too sizeable to be overcome and, therefore, necessitated a stratified existence between the two races.³⁶ Southerners proceeded on the biblical assumption that slavery was providentially arranged by God in order to establish an ideal Christian society that would assure economic security for the intellectually inferior African chattel and improve the spiritual condition of the African soul. Southern historian John Boles sized up what appeared to be a paradox at the core of the Southern defense of slavery. ‘It is difficult to understand today how devout whites could define blacks legally as chattel and yet show real concern for the state of their souls. Could genuine Christians so compartmentalize their charity?’³⁷ Apparently so, for this is what they did.

³³ Thornwell, ‘The Rights and Duties of Masters,’ pp. 8-9.

³⁴ Thornwell, ‘National Sins. – A Fast-Day Sermon, preached in the Presbyterian Church, Columbia, Wednesday, November 21, 1860,’ *Southern Presbyterian Review* 13 (January, 1861) p. 683. Girardeau’s Sermon, ‘The Prosperity and Efficiency of a Church,’ in *Life Work and Sermons*, p. 237.

³⁵ Girardeau, ‘Our Ecclesiastical Relations to Freedmen,’ *Southern Presbyterian Review* 18 (July, 1867) p. 2.

³⁶ For a helpful analysis detailing Girardeau’s position on the ‘social differences’ between blacks and whites that he outlined as part of his argument to the Presbyterian General Assembly for ecclesiastical separation of the white and colored races, see ‘Our Ecclesiastical Relations to Freedmen,’ pp. 4-5.

³⁷ John B. Boles, *Masters & Slaves in the House of the Lord*, p. 11.

In the end, however, not only was the Bible assumed by Southerners to support their argument, but also political and economic prudence.

Antebellum Southerners were hardly the only avid defenders of the Bible. Evangelicals in the North were just as insistent as those in the South upon an orthodox interpretation of scripture. In fact, deference to the Bible extended beyond the Southern and Northern antebellum Evangelical communities. Mark Noll notes the widespread use of the Bible among all Americans leading up to the Civil War. 'It is essential to remember that the overwhelming public attitude toward the Bible in the antebellum United States – even by those who in private neither read or heeded it – was one of reverential, implicit deference.'³⁸

The ideas that drove Girardeau and the antebellum Southern Presbyterian position regarding slavery were founded upon a literal biblical hermeneutic. However, Southern clergy and their flocks were also driven by laissez-faire economic attitudes that were more often the byproduct of intuitive, 'common sense' exegesis than of biblical exegesis. Anti-slavery rhetoric may have pushed Southern Evangelicals toward an obstinate chapter and verse defense of slavery, but it is unlikely that they would have come to a different conclusion in the absence of the abolitionist movement.³⁹ By the 1850s, Girardeau and his Southern Evangelical colleagues

³⁸ Mark Noll acknowledges the research of Robert Wiebe, Nathan Hatch, and Gordon Wood detailing the transformation of American Christianity in the wake of the Revolution 'from hereditary, deferential hierarchy to democratic, ideological anti-hierarchy.' This transformation in American culture provided the opportunity for Americans to begin reading the Bible for themselves and applying it to their unique experiences or circumstances. Noll, 'The Bible and Slavery,' p. 44. For an especially helpful analysis of the role of the Bible in America from 'Calvinist control' to the creation of a populist theology in America, see Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, pp. 179-183; Hatch, 'The Christian Movement and the Demand for a Theology of the People,' *The Journal of American History* 67 (December, 1980) pp. 545-567; for a discussion of the impact of Evangelicals in American politics in the three decades leading up the Civil War, see Richard J. Cawardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America* (New Haven, CT.: 1993); for references to the use of scripture by political leaders, including presidents, prior to the American Civil War, see Mark Noll, 'The Image of the United States as a Biblical Nation, 1776-1865,' in *The Bible in American Culture*, eds. Nathan O. Hatch and Mark Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

³⁹ Southern Presbyterian divine, Robert Dabney notes that abolitionist activity may have led the Southern clergy toward their defensive posture toward slavery. 'I do believe that if these mad fanatics had left us alone, in twenty years we should have made Virginia a free state. Does this fact arise from the perversity of our natures? I believe that it does, in part. We are less inclined to do that which we know to be our duty because persons, who have no right to interfere, demand it of us. See letter from

were so intent upon defending themselves or discrediting their opponents that they never developed a sober awareness that all was not well and defensible in Southern 'Zion.'

The Theology and Philosophy of Slavery and Race

The leading Southern Presbyterian spokesman, Thornwell, recognized the supreme authority of the Bible in tandem with common sense realism when he combined philosophy and theology to summarize his argument regarding the nature of the Negro race. 'But the instinctive impulses of our nature, combined with the plainest declarations of the word of God, lead us to recognize in his [the Negro's] form and lineaments – in his moral, religious and intellectual nature – the same humanity in which we glory as the image of God. We are not ashamed to call him our *brother*.'⁴⁰

Throughout the antebellum period, Southern Presbyterians attempted to reconcile theological views regarding the essential equality of the black and white races with a positive view of Negro slavery, using a literal interpretation of the Bible and intuitive 'common sense' they believed was part of the intellectual and moral faculties of all human beings created by God.⁴¹ The combination of these interdependent authoritative guides was sufficient to judge the institution of slavery as a natural evil if assessed apart from the theology of original sin, but the best social, political, and economic option available in a fallen world tainted by sin and rebellion.

Dabney to Mr. G. Woodson Payne in *Life and Letters of Robert Lewis Dabney*, ed., Thomas Cary Johnson (Richmond, Va., 1903) p. 67.

⁴⁰ James. H. Thornwell, 'The Rights and Duties of Masters,' p. 11.

⁴¹ Antebellum Southern Presbyterian clergy quickly distanced themselves from polygenesis, the view that denied that blacks and whites were of a single species and of a similar origin. Scientific racism had arisen during the Enlightenment and found favor especially in the North by 1830. Southern Presbyterians opposed those who, though pro-slavery, did not trace the Negro race to Adam. For the most helpful nineteenth-century Southern Evangelical refutations of scientific racism, see Thornwell, 'The Rights and Duties of Masters, pp. 10-12; 'National Sins,' *Southern Presbyterian Review* 13 (January, 1861) pp. 682-685; Robert Breckinridge, *The Knowledge of God, Objectively Considered as a Science of Positive Truth, Both Inductive and Deductive* (New York, 1858); John Bachman, D.D., 'A Discourse Delivered on the Forty-Third Anniversary of the Ministry in Charleston,' (Charleston, S.C.: J. Burks, 1858); Thomas Smyth; Critical Notices, 'Review of Ariel, The Negro: What is his Ethnological Status,' *Southern Presbyterian Review* 18 (November, 1867) pp. 579-594; for the most helpful analysis of scientific racism in the nineteenth century antebellum South, see Genovese, *A Consuming Fire*, pp. 75-85; David Brion David, *Slavery and Human Progress* (New York, 1984).

In reasoning that slavery in the antebellum South was uniquely designed for the Negro race, they used language that emphasized the mysteries of 'Divine Providence,' and was more often a matter of 'instinctive impulses' common to the population at large, than of careful biblical exegesis and common sense philosophy. In his famous 'Thanksgiving Sermon' on the eve of the Civil War, the Southern Presbyterian divine Benjamin Palmer made grand use of the ordering of 'providential guardianship,' clothed in finely tuned paternalistic rhetoric, to argue his case for 'the happy partnership which has grown up in providence between the tribes of this confederacy.' 'My servant, whether born in my house or bought with my money, stands to me in relation of a child. Though *providentially* owing me service, which, *providentially*, I am bound to exact, he is, nevertheless my brother and my friend.'⁴² As Mark Noll has argued, 'intuitive judgments on American slavery were, therefore, sanctified by the culture's intuitive Biblicism and literally *colored* by the culture's intuitive racism.'⁴³ In the antebellum South, the subtle yet powerful influence of racial superiority fueled the verbal war for sectional or cultural validation

⁴² Rev. B.M. Palmer, D.D., 'Thanksgiving Sermon: The South: Her Peril, and Her Duty, *A Discourse Delivered in the First Presbyterian Church, New Orleans, on Thursday, November 29, 1860,*' (New Orleans: Office of the True Witness and Sentinel, 1860) pp. 9-11.

⁴³ Mark Noll, 'The Bible and Slavery,' p. 63. For the best discussion of racism impacting Southern Presbyterian divines prior to the American Civil War, see William D. Carrigan, 'In Defense of the Social Order: Racial Thought among Southern White Presbyterians in the Nineteenth Century,' *American Nineteenth Century History* 1 (Summer, 2000). In this essay, Carrigan rediscovered Dabney's influence in the Southern church, especially in the area of racial thought, and argued that he 'influenced several generations of students, and his intellect and character made him an outspoken leader in the Southern Presbyterian Church.' p. 33; for the relationship between the Bible and race in antebellum religious thought, see Anne Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State Press, 1980); Larry E. Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1987); William Jenkins, *Pro-Slavery Thought in the Old South* (Chapel Hill, NC.: University of North Carolina Press, 1935); for sources with specific reference to the relationship between the Bible and racism among Presbyterians, see H. Shelton Smith, *In His Image... Racism in Southern Religion, 1780-1910*, pp. 77-94; Mitchell Snay, 'American Thought and Southern Distinctiveness: The Southern Clergy and the Sanctification of Slavery,' *Civil War History* 35 (1989) pp. 311-328; Erskine Clarke, *Our Southern Zion: A History of Calvinism in the South Carolina Low Country, 1690-1990* pp. 224-228; James H. Smylie, 'The Bible, Race, and the Changing South,' (1981) pp. 197-217.

and paved the way for the far more catastrophic war that utilized the weaponry of bayonets and cannons.⁴⁴

For Evangelicals in the South, an orthodox reading of scripture informed them that the nature of humanity was so corrupt or 'depraved'⁴⁵ that any economic, social, or political progress necessitated a hierarchal social and political structure that embodied slave labor, the family, and representative Republicanism.⁴⁶ Their instinctive, common sense intuition, informed by the instrument of Divine Providence and driven by a combination of racism, paternalism, and economic prudence, led them to identify the Negro as the most obvious class of the human race to undergo enslavement. For Evangelicals in the North, an orthodox reading of scripture informed them that while human nature was not what it should be, it was not so depraved that it necessitated a departure from the perceived movement of the nation toward an ever greater free

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 47. Of course, there were also cultural biases among Northern Evangelicals that shaped their interpretation of the Bible. For my purposes, I will detail the issue of race as the primary cultural force that tainted the philosophical and Biblical/theological arguments put forth by the most influential Evangelical denomination in the antebellum South.

⁴⁵ The doctrine of human depravity follows from the doctrine of original sin. According to Southern Presbyterian doctrine, when the first human parents, Adam and Eve, disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden, their relationship with God, along with the entire human race, was altered. No longer could they or their posterity enjoy a harmonious relationship with God. Sin entered the world and changed their physical and spiritual constitution. The physical effect of sin was death and the spiritual effect of sin was separation from God. The effects of sin did not completely wreck the image of God that was presumed to characterize all of humanity. There were vestiges of the divine image of God that remained with them, including some ability to reason, but the transformation that took place was chronic and degenerative. According to Marilyn Westerkamp, 'sin was an active corruption describing not a complete state of total evil, but a process by which man was achieving that state.' Westerkamp, 'James Henley Thornwell, Proslavery Spokesman Within A Calvinist Faith,' p. 52.

⁴⁶ Since all of humanity was viewed as corrupt, and left to themselves, would naturally lead according to their own interests and not the greater good of society, the health of the social order – whether economic, social or political - was dependent upon representative leadership. Slaveholders, as well as husbands and fathers, were at least in theory, accountable for the treatment of their slaves, wives, and children by the state. The benefit of representative government, as opposed to single party or individual rule, was its inherent ability to protect the majority from unbridled and unchecked leadership. Southern divine, Benjamin Palmer, summed up the position of his denomination regarding representative leadership. 'In the imperfect state of human society, it pleases God to allow evils which check others that are greater.' See Palmer, 'Thanksgiving Sermon,' p. 11. According to Noll, 'Christians and Christian faith had played a substantial, if not ambiguous, role in the shaping of republicanism, and American Evangelicals continued to embrace republican thought as their own in the early period of the United States.' He went on to say, 'republicanism embraced the conviction that power defined the political process and that unchecked power led to corruption, even as corruption fostered unchecked power.' See Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, pp. 69-72.

market economy, an emphasis on the rights of individual, and political democracy. Their instinctive, common sense intuition, informed by the spirit and not the letter of the Bible, as well as the ‘powerful influence of Unitarianism and Universalism in New England’⁴⁷ and driven by egalitarianism, individualism, and economic prosperity, led them to identify slavery as a sin even if they were unable to name chapter and verse from the Bible where slavery was so defined. According to Noll, ‘the issue from first to last was one of cultural hermeneutics as well as biblical exegesis.’⁴⁸

For Girardeau, as well as many other Southern Evangelicals who were raised in a culture where the Bible and African slavery were integral to their existence from birth, there was little reason to question the legitimacy of either one. Nor was even the slightest suggestion made among white antebellum Southerners that anyone not having a black skin could be naturally fit to be a slave. Only the Negro was naturally and providentially fit to assume the status of slave. Consequently, argued Thornwell on behalf of the Southern churches, ‘all they have demanded is, that their [Northern] brethren would leave it where God has left it, where it is found, as God has dealt with it.’⁴⁹

When the Southern divine, Robert L. Dabney, expressed his views regarding the Negro race following the war, he may have used more explosive language than Thornwell, but the essence of their thought was the same. ‘Now, who that knows the Negro does not know that his is a subservient race; that he is made to follow, and not to lead; that his temperament, idiosyncrasy and social relation make him untrustworthy as a depository of power? Especially will we weigh this fact now, unless we are madmen.’⁵⁰ On the one hand, Southern Presbyterians rigorously defended the humanity of the Negro and showed little tolerance toward those who did

⁴⁷ Eugene D. Genovese, ‘Religion in the Collapse of the American Union,’ p. 77.

⁴⁸ Mark Noll, ‘The Bible and Slavery,’ p. 45.

⁴⁹ Thornwell, ‘Relation of the Church to Slavery,’ in *Collected Writings*, Vol. IV, p. 387.

⁵⁰ Robert L. Dabney, ‘Ecclesiastical Equality of Negroes,’ in *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological*, vol. 2 (Carlisle, Penn.: Banner of truth Trust, 1967) pp. 203-204.

not.⁵¹ On the other, they asserted that the Negro belonged to an inferior or ‘subservient’ race that should occupy a perpetually ‘subservient’ role. Occasionally, they would cite passages from the Bible that affirmed Negro equality under God with the white race. But this would be followed by lengthy discourses emphasizing the instinctive impulses of the Negro character, which left little doubt that racism existed among these leaders of the Southern Evangelical community.

But while we believe that one “God made of one blood all nations of men to dwell under the whole heavens,” we know that the African has become, according to a well-known law of natural history, by the manifold influences of the ages, a different, fixed *species* of the race, separated from the white man by traits bodily, mental and moral, almost as rigid and permanent as those of *genus*. Hence the offspring of an amalgamation must be a hybrid race, stamped with all the feebleness of the hybrid, and incapable of the career of civilization and glory as an independent race.⁵²

There was no mistake when Thornwell and Dabney used the pronoun, ‘us’ instead of ‘me’ to articulate their views regarding slavery and the Negro race. As two of the more outspoken representatives within the Southern Presbyterian Church, Thornwell and Dabney were certain that their colleagues, including Girardeau, had read their Bibles and appealed to their intuitive senses too. On this final point, their intuition was correct.

The theological basis of the Southern Presbyterian argument for slavery began with the belief that the world was no longer what God intended for it to be. God created humanity to live harmoniously under his sovereign rule, but his ‘image bearers’ had rebelled against him and were now under the curse of Divine judgment. Of course, God provided a way of redemption, but humanity would have to bear the consequence of their rebellion until God established a ‘new heaven and a new earth.’⁵³ Such consequences included many ‘necessary evils,’ most notably a social order that parted from God’s original design but was essential to uphold order in a fallen

⁵¹ See Thornwell ‘National Sins. A Fast-Day Sermon, Preached in the Presbyterian Church, Columbia. S.C., Wednesday, November 21, 1860,’ *Southern Presbyterian Review*, 13 (Nov. 1861) pp. 682-683; Thornwell, ‘Relation of the Church to Slavery,’ pp. 389-390; Thornwell, ‘The Christian Doctrine of Slavery,’ p. 398; 402-403; 414.

⁵² Robert L. Dabney, *A Defense of Virginia and Through Her, of the South* (Harrisonburg, Va.: Sprinkle Publications, 1991) pp. 352-353.

⁵³ The book of Revelation, chapter 21:1.

world. In a report to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in 1863, the reverend James Lyon of Mississippi submitted a theological argument for the necessity of slavery.

We conclude, then, that as the race of man is in a fallen, depraved condition, and that we have every reason to believe that it is the design of the great Creator that man, by His helping grace, shall recover from this fallen state, and rise to a high degree of culture and civilization; that slavery, in some form or shape, is, in the existing state of things, essential to the attainment of this end; and will continue to be necessary, until Christianity gains such ascendancy over the minds and hearts and lives of men – all men – as to bring the entire race under the absolute and delightful control of the spirit and principles of the Gospel. Then, slavery will, as a natural result, cease.⁵⁴

The Southern Presbyterian divines Robert Dabney and Robert Adger were less verbose than Lyon but no less persuaded of the theological necessity for slavery. ‘Southern slavery was the most efficient temperance society in the world’ and an ‘element of society.’⁵⁵ Since the Bible did not explicitly condemn slavery, Southern Presbyterians believed that the perpetuation of their ‘peculiar institution’ was sanctioned in scripture.⁵⁶

Antebellum Southern Presbyterians, including Girardeau, built their theological and philosophical argument for slavery upon special revelation, or the ‘true knowledge of God’ as he revealed himself in the Bible, and secondarily upon general revelation, the knowledge of God as revealed in the ‘light of nature.’ Their argument was always primarily theological and secondarily philosophical. The question of slavery in the abstract could not be divorced from either of these ‘resources’ that God bestowed upon humanity in order to guide them along the path of truth and reason. Truth had to precede reason and the Bible always had to precede philosophy. To reason for or against slavery apart from revelation was unacceptable to

⁵⁴ James A. Lyon, ‘Slavery, and the Duties Growing out of the Relation,’ *Southern Presbyterian Review* 16 (July, 1863) p. 9.

⁵⁵ Robert L. Dabney, ‘The Ethical Argument,’ in *A Defense of Virginia*, p. 281; James Adger, *My Life and Times*, p. 180.

⁵⁶ The primary means that God used to communicate how humanity was supposed to live and interact in a fallen world was the Bible. Calvin’s *Institutes* and the Westminster Confession of Faith were the best human summaries of that divinely inspired word. Southern Presbyterians were also persuaded that God revealed himself and his laws through nature, but there was ‘no true knowledge of God from the light of nature without revelation.’ Westerkamp, ‘James Henley Thornwell, Pro-Slavery Spokesman,’ p. 50. Knowledge derived from nature was essential to unravel much about the natural world that housed all of those who were brought into existence through the unilateral activity of God, but was insufficient to redeem humanity apart from the knowledge of God revealed from scripture.

antebellum Southern Presbyterians. 'The Bible, and the Bible alone, is her rule of faith and practice. Beyond the Bible she can never go, and apart from the Bible she can never speak.'⁵⁷ As Westerkamp has observed, Southern Presbyterians 'refused to debate slavery from any other standpoint.'⁵⁸

Antebellum Southern Presbyterians, including Girardeau, were driven more by racial orientation than has been previously recognized. In a fairly recent essay entitled 'In Defense of the Social Order: Racial thought among Southern White Presbyterians in the Nineteenth Century,' William Carrigan subtly rebukes historians for their relative inattention to the subject of race within Southern Evangelical thought. 'Because of the very centrality and perseverance of race in the nineteenth century, historians have often not been sensitive enough to changes within racial thought.'⁵⁹ Carrigan then advances the thesis that racism was far more entrenched in antebellum Southern Evangelical culture than previously understood. He argues that this racism was more difficult to detect before the Civil War because Evangelicals advanced scriptural arguments as the basis for slavery and were thus able to hide their prejudices behind biblical language. In the wake of emancipation, however, scriptural arguments for slavery were no longer relevant, so white Southerners were forced to reveal their racial prejudice. According to Carrigan, for many prominent Southern Presbyterian Evangelicals in Charleston, their racial views were then brought into the light.

⁵⁷ Thornwell, 'Relation of the Church to Slavery,' p. 384.

⁵⁸ Westerkamp, 'James Henley Thornwell, Pro-Slavery Spokesman within a Calvinist Faith,' p. 50. It is impossible to understand Thornwell, Girardeau, and other like-minded Southern Presbyterians on slavery apart from the Biblical and theological worldview through which they interpreted the world around him. Their basic theological assumptions, derived from their understanding of scripture, were absolute and non negotiable. In light of their insistence that a literal reading of scripture, aided by the 'light of nature,' should serve as the logical starting and ending point for the resolution of domestic issues that transpired on American soil in the mid nineteenth century, it should be of little surprise that Westerkamp felt that it was necessary to justify the leading antebellum Southern Presbyterian spokesman as intellectually consistent. 'Thornwell was not a confused, inconsistent, irrational thinker....' Westercamp, 'Pro-Slavery Spokesman,' p. 50. But his thinking was rigid when it came to questions he believed the Bible or natural philosophy already answered.

⁵⁹ William D. Carrigan, 'In Defense of the Social Order: Racial Thought Among Southern White Presbyterians,' p. 31.

Before the Civil War, the religious leaders of the Southern Presbyterian Church did not rely upon overt appeals to white supremacy to defend slavery. Instead, they cloaked their defense in scripture. Emancipation, however, challenged this defense of the social order. While the defenders of the antebellum South had turned to the Bible in support of slavery, the postbellum defenders of segregation could not rely upon significant scriptural arguments to justify their new social relations. As Southern white Presbyterians began to construct a post-emancipation defense of black subordination, explicit and overt racial justifications vied with biblical justifications as never before.⁶⁰

Carrigan's thesis has some validity, especially among Southern Presbyterians. In an article in the *Southern Presbyterian Review*, detailing his views regarding the ecclesiastical relationship of blacks and whites following the Civil War, John B. Adger allowed his prejudices to surface. 'If any fact is demonstrable from the known annals of mankind, it is the fact that God has so constituted the two races as to make their equality forever impossible.' He carried on without any scriptural reference or theological basis. 'These are confessedly the most distinct and distant [races], the one from the other, in all the natural attributes of humanity.... [and] it is only the sovereign providence of God that can solve the problem.'⁶¹ Dabney, in his *Defense of Virginia*, left no question, whatsoever, that the black race was inferior to his own. Responding to the recent downfall of the Confederacy, Dabney refused to contain his racist rhetoric. 'Was it nothing, that this race, morally inferior, should be brought into close relations to a nobler race, so that the propensity to imitation should be stimulated by constant and intimate observation, by the powerful sentiment of allegiance and dependence?'⁶² Even two decades after the Civil War, New Orleans Presbyterian divine Benjamin Palmer remained opposed to a partnership with the Northern church because of the ecclesiastical changes that would ensue between whites and blacks. 'It cannot be denied that God has divided the human race into several distinct groups, for the sake of keeping them apart.' He goes on to explain his view of the primary differences

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 31.

⁶¹ John B. Adger, 'The Future of Freedmen,' *Southern Presbyterian Review* 19 (April, 1868) p. 279.

⁶² Robert L. Dabney, *A Defense of Virginia*, p. 281.

between the Northern and Southern church regarding the issue of fraternal ecclesiastical relations with blacks.⁶³

In his article 'Our Ecclesiastical Relations to Freedmen' Girardeau outlined his position regarding the future ecclesiastical relations between the Southern Presbyterian Church and the emancipated slaves of the South.⁶⁴ Girardeau may have been more diplomatic than many of his Southern Presbyterian colleagues, but his reasoning for the continuation of separate congregations for blacks and whites existing under the supervision of an ecclesiastical organization with exclusive white leadership, revealed his racial prejudices. After affirming the unity of the two races and appealing to the standard line of 'providential ordination' with respect to their civil functioning, Girardeau revealed what was for him the greatest barrier to an ecclesiastical organization that would delegate the powers of an ecclesiastical office to the black race. 'We are encountered by *social* differences which we are obliged to take into consideration.'

They naturally spring from the indestructible distinction of color, and are enhanced by the memory of relations but recently destroyed in opposition to the views and desires of the white people of the South. The force of this difficulty does not lie in the fact that our people are in any degree indisposed to worship together with the colored people. That they have always done. They have been accustomed to sit with them in the same buildings, and at the same communion tables. But in the past there was no tendency either to social equality, or to an equal participation of the blacks with the whites in the government and discipline of the Church. The case is now changed. The elevation of the colored people to civil equality with the whites tends to produce in them for social and ecclesiastical equality. This the whites will not be willing to concede.⁶⁵

⁶³ Thomas Cary Johnson, ed. *The Life and Letters of Benjamin Morgan Palmer*, pp. 472-473. Palmer continues to reveal his racial prejudices as he details his reasons why the Southern church should abstain from ecclesiastical relations with the Northern Presbyterian Church. 'Upon no point are the Southern people more sensitive, to no danger are they more alive, than this of the amalgamation of the two races thrown so closely together and threatening the deterioration of both. This is the peril which confronts us in the proposal to reintegrate in the Northern Church as being one of the early steps leading surely to that final result. The North is not embarrassed with the Negro problem; so few of this race are found in any of their communities, that they may be assumed into social relations without disturbance of society at large. The infusion of two or three drops of ink into a tumbler of water will not discolor it; and in Northern circles, the Negro is an inappreciable factor.'

⁶⁴ John L. Girardeau, 'Our Ecclesiastical Relations to Freedmen,' *Southern Presbyterian Review* 18 (July, 1867) pp. 2-17.

⁶⁵ Girardeau, 'Our Ecclesiastical Relations to Freedmen,' p. 4. Like Girardeau, even in 1887, Benjamin Palmer was still clinging to the social challenges that confronted post-antebellum whites with regard to ecclesiastical affiliation with blacks. 'In addition to this ecclesiastical peril, there is another which is social. How can these two races be brought together in nearly equal numbers in those confidential and sacred relations which belong to the ministry of the Word, without entailing that personal intimacy

Girardeau feared that empowering blacks to serve in positions of ecclesiastical authority would threaten the social ordering that God had providentially established between the two races. Of course, he softened his position for the perpetuation of social and ecclesiastical inequality with paternalistic rhetoric. 'These people' are 'immediately dependant upon us for religious instruction.' Later, he explained, 'we must to a great extent do their thinking for them.' Such 'dependency' was, for Girardeau, the prerequisite for further pastoral care. '[Our] duty to the great Master and to their undying souls impels us to consecrate the fruits of our past training to the promotion of their everlasting good.' Girardeau continued to patronize the former slaves when he expressed his opinion to the Presbyterian assembly that it was incumbent upon the Southern Church to make every effort to prevent the former slaves from establishing their own Presbyterian denomination. 'It is clear that they are not now prepared to organize fully for themselves.'⁶⁶

Girardeau vividly exposed his prejudice in the wake of the war and shared the bitterness of many of his Southern Presbyterian colleagues when he pondered the plight of the former slaves outside the ecclesiastical oversight of their white counterparts. 'Should they establish separate organizations, it is to be feared that they will be exposed to fanatical, licentious, and superstitious influences which will tend to ruin them' and cause them to drift 'into a condition of baptized heathenism.' Girardeau further revealed his racial bias when he commented that any ecclesiastical plan that would allow for the separation of the two races 'would cut off the colored people from immediate connection with white congregations, and deprive them of salutary and conservative influence of the white race.'⁶⁷

between ministers and people which must end in the general amalgamation of discordant races?' See Thomas Cary Johnson, *The Life and Letters of Benjamin Morgan Palmer*, p. 473.

⁶⁶ Girardeau, 'Our Ecclesiastical Relations to Freedmen, pp. 5-6, 15.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 12.

Girardeau's opposition to freed slaves organizing their own ecclesiastical organizations may have been fueled by the concern that his relationship to them would be irreversibly altered. Girardeau grew up among the Southern slaves and never experienced relations with them outside the role of master/servant or minister/congregant. These relations, he believed, were affirmed in the Bible, verified through 'common sense' reasoning, and championed for three decades by the leadership of the Southern Presbyterian Church. To sever such relations was to uproot the basis of the Southern social order, oppose the mysterious providence of God, and even call into question what he perceived to be his unique calling from God. Girardeau, perhaps even more than most of his Presbyterian colleagues, was unable to accept the possibility of a new ecclesiastical status for the freed slaves in the wake of the American Civil War. While the majority of the Southern Presbyterian Church eventually decided to sever ecclesiastical relations with the freed slaves if they remained unwilling to conform to their suppressed ecclesiastical status, Girardeau remained unwilling to let them go.

While Girardeau's racial views and paternalism should not pass unnoticed by the historian nor fail to taint his legacy, his effort to provide what he believed to be the best ecclesiastical arrangement for the blacks, both prior to the war and in its aftermath, is understandable in light of his background. But his commitment to a perpetual white oversight of the black race may have been driven more by his own felt need for them than their actual need for him. Girardeau thrived in positions of authority over his black parishioners, and he found meaning and purpose in life through their dependency upon him. On the whole, his pastoral care for them was decent. But his devotion to his Negro parishioners cannot be analyzed properly apart from his paternalistic, even racist posture toward them. Even his closest pastoral relationships with the parishioners at Zion Church were marred by his views of slavery and race, which naturally brings into question the depth of his commitment to the well being of the African-American, whether slave or free, and his ability to serve them as a pastor.

In his written address to the Southern Presbyterian Church that urged their Assembly to adopt measures that would ‘dissuade the freed people from severing their connection with our churches, and to retain them with us, as of old,’ it might be said that Girardeau’s desire to perpetuate a paternalistic relationship with the freed slaves was the driving force behind his efforts. ‘Now, as ever,’ he insisted, ‘their spiritual necessities appeal irresistibly to us for help.’ In the end, however, it may have been that his own ‘spiritual necessities appealed irresistibly’ to his former parishioners of Zion Presbyterian in order to justify his former ministry to the Charleston slaves and preserve an antebellum Southern social order that was slowly slipping away.⁶⁸

It is difficult to analyze Girardeau’s relationship with his own slaves, as there is no surviving documentation that details the specific nature or conditions of their servitude. In fact, there is only one surviving notation from Girardeau’s pen that provides some anecdotal evidence of the relationship he cultivated with his slaves and the conditions they experienced. In a letter that Girardeau wrote to a fellow Presbyterian minister, he detailed, among other things, the various pastoral duties he performed among the slaves at Zion Presbyterian Church. In this letter, Girardeau also documented examples of his ministry among two slaves during the final hour of their lives.

Another [example] was that of my own servant. He was reared by me.... Freely did my tears flow while I was uttering the last words of prayer and exhortation over his encoffined body. His mother, also my servant, died after him, during the war when I was absent in Virginia. She kept calling me till she expired. Tell me that there was not true, deep affection of masters to slaves and slaves to masters! It was often like that between near relatives.⁶⁹

For Girardeau, his relationship with slave parishioners or personal servants was fundamentally paternalistic and maintained on the shared assumption that each ‘party’ adhered to various roles or duties. As Loveland explained, ‘The Bible taught that there were certain duties growing out of the master-slave relationship. Slaves were commanded to “obey in all things your

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 16, 5.

⁶⁹ Girardeau, *Life, Work and Sermons*, p. 79.

masters,” and masters were directed to give their slaves “that which is just and equal.”⁷⁰ As a minister, Girardeau related to his black parishioners as an authorized representative of his church and expected their full ecclesiastical submission. As a slaveholder, Girardeau related to his slaves as an authorized representative of his family and demanded their full domestic submission. And yet, within this legally binding relationship between master and slave, Girardeau claimed that ‘deep affection,’ ‘like that between near relatives,’ also existed.

Girardeau was not alone among antebellum ministers who insisted that mutual devotion was at the heart of the relationship between masters and slaves. John Adger claimed that although ‘they serve us,’ and ‘give us their strength,’ even so, ‘they are not more truly ours than we are truly theirs.’⁷¹ Thornwell was equally zealous to defend the relationship between masters and slaves. In response to Adger’s proposal to the Second Presbyterian Church to provide separate congregations for the Charleston slaves, Thornwell commented that such an arrangement would ‘sweeten the intercourse betwixt the master and his slave.’ In an effort to motivate Christian masters to fulfill their duty to their slaves, Thornwell was quick to remind them of the ‘deep affections’ with which they are served. ‘From infancy to age, they attend us – they greet our introduction into the world with smiles of joy, and lament our departure with a heartfelt sorrow.’⁷² Dabney was less inclined to encourage the ‘deep affections’ between masters and slaves that many of his Presbyterian colleagues sought to cultivate among their parishioners’ slaveholders, but he was no less insistent that slaves be properly treated. ‘To whatsoever

⁷⁰ Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, pp. 206-207.

⁷¹ Adger, *My Life and Times*, p. 167.

⁷² Thornwell, Critical Notices: ‘The Religious Instruction of the Colored Population,’ *Southern Presbyterian Review* 1 (September, 1847) p. 147; Thornwell, ‘The Rights and Duties of Masters,’ pp. 47-48. According to Benjamin Palmer, Thornwell was ‘an easy and indulgent master,’ See Palmer, *The Life and Letters of James H. Thornwell* (Richmond, Va., 1875) p. 342.

treatment we should conscientiously think ourselves morally entitled, were we slaves instead of masters, all that treatment we as masters are morally bound to give our servants.’⁷³

Ministerial guidance toward their parishioners to cultivate ‘deep affections’ for their servants and principled rhetoric regarding their humane treatment did not always translate into appropriate behavior among the slaveholding ecclesiastical community. In his book entitled *The Slave Community*, John Blassingame summed up the harsh reality between masters and their slaves. ‘However kind his master, the slave had no guarantee of benevolent treatment.’⁷⁴ In his ‘ethical argument’ for the defense of slavery, Dabney boasted that over the span of eighteen years, ‘he found it necessary to administer the lash to adults in four cases; and two of these were for a flagrant adultery.’⁷⁵ While there are very few documented cases of Southern clergy exercising consistently cruel treatment toward their slaves, it must be remembered that discipline within the Southern household was a virtue that was not limited to the white children.

Religion did play a significant role in the treatment of slaves and Southern clergy did make considerable effort to remind their slaveholding parishioners of those biblical texts that spoke of the relationship between master and slave.⁷⁶ ‘Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven’ was the text most widely used. But most Southern divines knew the acceptable boundaries among the members of their congregations and were careful not to exceed them. Consequently, Southern ministers rarely moved beyond the range of the Sunday morning pulpit to address the treatment of slaves, nor did they depart from the general principles found in the biblical text.

In many respects, it is difficult to imagine that Girardeau would have exercised harsh treatment toward his slaves. Such conduct would have been inconsistent with his broader

⁷³ Dabney, *A Defense of Virginia*, p. 197.

⁷⁴ John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, p. 165.

⁷⁵ Robert Dabney, *A Defense of Virginia*, pp. 221-222.

⁷⁶ According to Blassingame, ‘One of the strongest forces operating against cruel treatment of slaves was religion.’ p. 169.

ministry to them. Having said that, Girardeau viewed his relationship with his own slaves differently than that of his slave parishioners. His relationship to the slaves at Zion Presbyterian was primarily *spiritual*—one of religious instruction and ecclesiastical oversight, while his relationship toward his slaves was primarily *familial*—more closely resembling the role of a father toward his children. As the head of his family, Girardeau took responsibility for the conduct of those within his household, including his slaves. If Girardeau applied the biblical proverb, ‘He who spares the rod hates his son’ toward his ‘children,’ it is difficult to conceive that he did not also apply this text to his slaves.⁷⁷

Charleston’s response to Slave Missions

Girardeau’s white contemporaries made few direct references to his ministry among the Charleston slaves. By the time Girardeau’s small mission on Anson Street was transformed into Zion Church in the mid 1850s, the majority of the white Charleston community was at least resigned to the Southern clergy’s decision to provide religious instruction to the slaves. In fact, the Evangelical community and much of the Charleston public had begun to view slave missions as a direct answer to the abolitionist assertion that slavery was a sin that should be ended immediately.

With this said, slave missions in Charleston and throughout the antebellum South were not originally well received. Slaveholders questioned the commitment of their clergy to the institution of slavery and needed to be persuaded that the religious instruction of the slaves would not threaten their authority or lead to slave rebellions. Throughout the thirty-year period that led up to the American Civil War, slaveholders and their clergy formed a partnership that appeased the interests and fears of both parties.

From the beginning of the eighteenth century until the middle of the nineteenth century, Southern slaveholders had rarely attempted to Christianize their slaves. Slaveholders in the Southern colonies were prone to view blacks as ‘increasingly alien and strange.’ Estrangement

⁷⁷ Proverbs 13:24.

was soon replaced with fear. As the slave trade expanded during the early eighteenth century and the slave population began to exceed the white population, Southern slaveholders began enacting slave codes to prevent rebellion and disorder. According to John Boles, this [early/mid eighteenth-century] was the ‘most harsh era of slavery in the mainland colonies of England; blacks were commonly treated with a barbarism that would be the exception in the final decades of the antebellum period.’⁷⁸

The instability that characterized life in the new world coupled with the rapid expansion of transplanted Africans to meet the demands of the agrarian economy left little time or interest for slaveholders in the Southern colonies to cultivate any aspect of their chattel other than physical endurance. Education of any sort, much less instruction from the Bible, was rare.⁷⁹ Of course, there were other less utilitarian reasons why masters did not promote religious instruction among their slaves. Some assumed the Christian message was ‘too precious’ for the ignorant brute and beyond his ability to grasp.⁸⁰ They reasoned that if religious doctrines were beyond the slaves’ intellectual competence, they were also powerless to produce any significant moral change. Ironically, however, even more prevalent was the view that education of the slaves might lead to rebellious activity that would further jeopardize a fragile society and stifle economic progress. Until the mid nineteenth century, slaveholders were far more resistant to educating the slaves than they were concerned about the alleged barbaric condition of the Negro

⁷⁸ John B. Boles, ‘Introduction,’ in *Masters & Slaves in the House of the Lord: Race and Religion in the American South, 1740-1870*, ed., John B. Boles (Lexington, KY.: The University Press of Kentucky, 1988) pp. 4-5; ‘The Negroes, declared the preamble to South Carolina’s code of 1712, were “of barbarous, wild, savage natures, and ... wholly unqualified to be governed by the laws, customs, and practices of this province.”’ See Stamp, *The Peculiar Institution*, p. 11; for helpful discussions of slave treatment during the colonial period, see Smith, *In His Image*, pp. 3-18; see also, John C. Van Horn, ed., *Religious Philanthropy and Colonial Slavery: The American Correspondence of the Associates of Dr. Bray, 1717-1777* (Urbana, 1985); Kenneth K. Bailey, ‘Protestantism and Afro-Americans in the Old South, Another Look’ *Journal of Southern History* 41 (November, 1975) pp. 451-472.

⁷⁹ According to Stamp, ‘when the first Africans were imported in the seventeenth century, some purchasers opposed converting them to Christianity lest baptism give them a claim to freedom.’ See Stamp, *The Peculiar Institution*, pp. 156-157.

⁸⁰ Boles, *Masters & Slaves in the House of the Lord*, p. 5.

race.⁸¹ Until the first blasts of the Civil War, religious instruction among the slaves was administered sporadically and with painstaking care.⁸²

Despite this lack of any systematic religious instruction among them, many slaves did begin to embrace the religion of their oppressors. By the mid 1750s, slaves in the colonial South began what would become a century-long process of making Christianity their own. According to Boles, 'a dramatic shift was occurring in the history of black Americans, most of whom before 1750 had been outside the Christian church, for within a century the majority of slaves were worshipping in one fashion or another as Christians.'⁸³ Nowhere was this more visible than in Charleston during the three decades that preceded the Civil War. And nowhere would it have been more challenging to 'make Christianity their own' than under the strict supervision of their masters, an exclusively white ecclesiastical oversight, and the paternalistic preaching of Southern Evangelicals.

⁸¹ According to Boles, 'On scattered plantations blacks were baptized as Christians, but the language barrier and the planters' lingering uncertainty about the continued slave status of a baptized bondsman minimized the Christianization of blacks.' See Boles, 'Slaves in Biracial Protestant Churches,' in *Varieties of Southern Religious Experience*, ed., Samuel Hill (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State Press, 1988) p. 97.

⁸² For the most comprehensive analysis of slave missions during the nineteenth century, see Loveland, 'Religious Instruction of the Negroes,' in *Southern Evangelicals*, pp. 219-256.

⁸³ Boles, *Masters & Slaves in the House of the Lord*, p. 5. There were a number of factors that led to the 'dramatic shift' among the slave population to adopt for themselves many of the tenets of Christianity. Throughout the second half of the eighteenth century, 'Evangelicalism and pietism swept across England and Europe' and began to make its way into the Southern colonies through the ministry of George Whitefield. The emphasis on the 'heartfelt religion' that accompanied Whitefield's message soon became an integral component of American Evangelicalism leading newly 'converted' whites to 'share their religion with the slaves in their midst.' Following in the path of Whitefield was the disproportionate emergence of Evangelical impulses among the three Protestant denominations – impulses that began to challenge the status quo of the Anglican establishment and alter the religious and political landscape of colonial America. While many late eighteenth century American Presbyterians initially had a more difficult time embracing the 'heartfelt religion' of a budding Evangelicalism, Baptists and Methodists did not. Late eighteenth century Presbyterians, many of whom lived on the 'upper rungs of society,' who were more likely to own slaves than their Evangelical friends, and would throughout the antebellum period 'supplant[ing] the erstwhile Anglican church in influence among the elite,' were less inclined to 'promote Christianity among their own and neighboring slaves.' Baptists and Methodists Evangelicals, who were less likely to own slaves and who often 'felt estranged from the wealthier whites who did,' were better situated to 'see blacks as potential fellow believers in a way that white worshippers in more elite churches seldom could.' See Boles, pp. 6-8.

The citizens of Charleston who expressed apprehension over slave missions voiced their concerns primarily during the 1820s and 1830s. These apprehensions among the Charleston public were driven by the fear that clergy were less committed to the long-term perpetuation of slavery than most of the Charleston population. And there was good reason for this apprehension. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the majority of the Southern clergy opposed slavery and favored some form of eventual emancipation. Consequently, planters and slaveholders suspected that church venues provided an ideal setting for mistreated slaves and their ministers to plot rebellions against them.

In 1822, the Charleston clergy were viewed with increased suspicion when an insurrection attempt was discovered within the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and black churchgoer Denmark Vesey was charged as the mastermind of the alleged plot.⁸⁴ According to the Southern historian Erskine Clarke, the potential for future insurrections led the Charleston magistrates to establish civil laws banning public slave gatherings altogether. 'While a clear connection was never established between the church and the intended rebellion, there was enough suspicion and near hysteria in the white community to put an end to any large gatherings of blacks for whatever purposes.'⁸⁵

The fear of insurrection was exacerbated by the Evangelical abolitionist movement that surfaced in the 1830s. Drawing upon the long history of anti-slavery movements in Britain, American Evangelical abolitionists garnered support from their Evangelical friends across the Atlantic and levied an effective international attack on the American South,⁸⁶ and especially

⁸⁴ For further elaboration of the Vesey plot, see Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 135.

⁸⁵ Erskine Clarke, *Wrestlin' Jacob: A Portrait of Religion in Antebellum Georgia and the Carolina Low Country* (Tuscaloosa and London: The University of Alabama Press, 2000) p. 127; for a helpful analysis of the history of slave codes in the antebellum South, see Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Antebellum South*, pp. 22-23 and 192-236.

⁸⁶ See Joshua Brown, 'The Send Back the Money Campaign: A Transatlantic Conflict Between The Free Church of Scotland and American Abolitionists,' an unpublished Masters Thesis (Edinburgh, 1992).

Charleston Presbyterians who were already in the early stages of constructing a defense for the South's peculiar institution. Ironically, however, anti-slavery rhetoric and abolitionist movements never found a sympathetic audience among Southern Evangelicals. Instead of further dividing planters and clergy, the burgeoning movement gradually drew clergy, parishioners, and much of the Charleston public together in defense of their cherished institutions. According to Loveland, 'Southern Evangelicals reacted to the abolitionist campaign in much the same way that their fellow Southerners did. They condemned abolitionists' efforts as interference in a matter that was the exclusive concern of the South.'⁸⁷ Antebellum Southerners reasoned that it was necessary to stand as one if they were going to foil the campaign of the abolitionists who resolved to 'deliver the land from the deadliest curse... and to secure the colored population of the United states all the rights and privileges which belong to them as men, and as Americans.'⁸⁸

By the early 1830s, Southern Evangelicals modified their earlier support for eventual emancipation and began to defend slavery as a 'necessary evil,' the inevitable consequence of human rebellion against God. When anti-slavery propaganda began to spread to the South in the 1830s, Southern Evangelicals altered their position one more time. This time Evangelical denominations in the South came together using chapter and verse from the Bible to sanction slavery not simply as a 'necessary evil,' but the best social and political option in a world characterized by sin. Loveland concludes:

Individual ministers were not the only ones who felt obliged to defend themselves during the crisis of 1835. In the late summer and fall of that year various synods, presbyteries, associations, and conferences throughout the South issued statements insisting that the Bible sanctioned slavery, condemning the interference of 'mistaken philanthropists, and deluded and mischievous fanatics,' discountenancing the circulation of incendiary literature, and deprecating the discussion of abolition in the pulpit.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, p. 193.

⁸⁸ For abolitionist demand of immediate abolitionism, see Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, p. 193; H. Shelton Smith, *In His Image*, p. 75.

⁸⁹ Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, p. 196.

This new position was too much for their Evangelical counterparts in the North to withstand and led to the Presbyterian schism of 1837.⁹⁰ Baptists and Methodists also split along geographic lines in the following decade.⁹¹ The ramifications for these denominational schisms, especially the credibility the clergy now enjoyed from slaveholders and planters, was enormous.

Thus during the 1840s virtually all southern clergymen publicly approved of slavery. And as part of this new sectional alignment, southern Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians purged their ranks of any lingering antislavery influences, attacked abolitionist heresies, and endorsed human bondage with biblical arguments. These evangelicals were proving to doubting planters that they could be trusted among slaves.⁹²

By the mid 1840s, the importance of religious instruction for the slave was conceded by most of the Charleston community. If slaveholders in the 'Capital of the South' were going to persuade Evangelical abolitionists in the North that slavery was a legitimate institution worthy of continuation by virtue of its biblical justification, then the Charleston community was under pressure to demonstrate that their slaves were not only receiving religious instruction and pastoral care but were also intended by nature to live under the dominion and rule of the white race. Even if Charleston planters and slaveholders were not particularly concerned for their own souls, the majority of them were willing to permit their slaves to participate in the life of the Church, especially if it meant the perpetuation of their livelihood. What is more, if Southerners were going to claim with any seriousness that they believed their chattel had been made in the divine image and was fully human, then it was incumbent upon them to back up their words. Their answer was slave missions.

As masters accepted this defense of their peculiar institution, they confronted its logical corollary: divinely sanctioned masters have religious obligations to their servants. Thus in defending

⁹⁰ For discussion of the Presbyterian schism of 1837, see 'Old School/New School Schism of 1837,' in chapter one, 'The American, Presbyterian, and Southern Dimensions of Evangelicalism,' pp. 71-79.

⁹¹ See John Lee Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity: A History of the Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists* (Knoxville, 1972) pp. 3-17; Donald Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality, 1780-1845* (Princeton, 1865) pp. 246-282; Lewis McCarroll Puifory, Jr., 'The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and Slavery, 1844-1865' (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1965) chapter 4.

⁹² Blake Touchstone, 'Planters and Slave Religion in the Deep South,' in *Masters & Slaves in the House of the Lord*, p. 100.

themselves against abolitionist diatribes, they reasoned that their concern for the religious well-being of their slaves overwhelmingly refuted these northern fanatics.⁹³

Slave missions, however, were 'much more easily proposed than performed,' for planters and slaveholders were insistent upon maintaining control over their slaves.⁹⁴ While many slaveholders were prepared to yield some authority to the Southern clergy, the potential for additional slave uprisings was a constant source of anxiety. Thus, laws were passed and enforced throughout Charleston and the South to avert anything that might threaten public safety.

Throughout the South, state and local laws prescribed other white controls over black religious practices. These statutes required that slaves not be taught to read, that blacks neither assemble nor preach without white supervision, and that suspicious black congregations be abolished upon the request of two or three landholders. Within the confines of their own property masters might adopt more lenient or more severe rules, but to promote the stability of society and safety of the community they generally supported the legislated restrictions.⁹⁵

Laws that prohibited the slaves from learning to read and gather without white supervision did have a calming effect on much of the white Charleston community. But there were always exceptions. For instance, the Methodist Church throughout Charleston was perceived by many slaveholding citizens throughout the antebellum period to be a constant threat to public order and it received ongoing harassment from whites. Although Charleston Methodists were committed to the perpetuation of slavery, the majority of them were also willing to permit slaves to preach to other slaves and to occupy positions of ecclesiastical authority over their own. Methodists were also less willing to enforce laws that prevented slaves from gathering without white oversight. In the early 1840s, Trinity Methodist, the largest Methodist church in the city, reflected these priorities and also had seven times as many blacks members as white. With such a disproportion of blacks to whites, it was virtually impossible to prevent the blacks from

⁹³ Touchstone, 'Planters and Slave Religion in the Deep South,' p. 107.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-112. For more detailed analysis of slave codes in the antebellum South, see also, 'Wrestlin' Jacob, p. 87; Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order*, p. 233; William Goodell, 'American Slave Code in Theory and Practice,' *Methodist Quarterly Review* 40 (July, 1858) pp. 370-380.

gathering by themselves. According to Clarke, 'so many would gather here to worship that unruly whites called it "a nigger church."'96

Throughout the remainder of the antebellum period, Methodism in Charleston continued to stretch the legal codes and patience of the Charleston elite, but they remained by far the favored denomination for the slave community.⁹⁷ By the mid 1840s, however, even the Methodist churches in Charleston relinquished their original vision for eventual emancipation and joined the city establishment and compromised Evangelical community in favor of the preservation of the status quo.

Gradually however, the white Methodists of the city had shown themselves to be friends of slavery, so that, by the time blacks came pouring into sanctuaries on a Sunday morning in 1845, the Methodist churches had become part of the city's establishment.⁹⁸

There remained pockets of disgruntled Charleston citizens who opposed slave missions. By the mid 1840s, they were no longer in the majority, but their resistance was certainly felt throughout Charleston. In response, the leading clergymen and citizens in Charleston met to discuss how they might win over those who opposed religious instruction to the slaves. They were persuaded that information about the benefits of slave missions from a broader Southern representation might strengthen their position. What is more, they realized the symbolic importance of achieving a unity that might be conveyed to those outside of Dixie.

Consequently, these Charleston leaders drafted a letter⁹⁹ to 'a number of Gentlemen, chiefly Planters and Laymen, in the States of South Carolina and Georgia,' requesting their

⁹⁶ Clarke, *Wrestlin' Jacob*, p. 114.

⁹⁷ In his discussion of slave inclusion and treatment within the Baptist and Methodist churches in the antebellum South, John Boles even goes as far as to say that 'it is still fair to say that nowhere else in southern society were they treated so nearly as equals.' Boles, *Masters & Slaves in the House of the Lord*, p. 9. See also, Kenneth K. Bailey, 'Protestantism and Afro-Americans in the Old South, Another Look,' *Journal of Southern History* 41 (November, 1975) pp. 451-472.

⁹⁸ Clarke, *Wrestlin' Jacob*, pp. 114-115.

⁹⁹ The twenty-four men who drafted the letter included Daniel Huger, United States senator from South Carolina; Barnwell Rhett, 'the "fire-eater" from James Island who was elected to the Senate after Calhoun's death and who earned the dubious distinction of being "father of Secession;"' C.G. Memminger, 'a young lawyer, who would one day serve as Secretary of the Treasury for the

views about the religious instruction of slaves within their district.¹⁰⁰ They were then invited to attend a meeting in Charleston on May 13, 1845, where they would debate the issue among themselves and the general public. According to the standing committee, forty-four letters were received ‘from *twenty* different districts and parishes of this state, all from persons of high respectability.’ Seventeen additional letters were received from individuals in eight of the remaining slave-holding States.¹⁰¹

The committee asked the clergy, planters, and laymen six questions. The questions ranged from the most basic information regarding the number of Negroes present in their parish, district, and church, to questions concerning the ‘influence of the instruction upon the discipline of plantations, and the spirit and subordination of the Negroes.’¹⁰² The data collected by the committee, presented in a written report, and subsequently made available throughout the South held few surprises.

Confederate States of America;’ and Robert Barnwell, ‘President of the South Carolina College and future Confederate Senator.’ In addition to the political elite who drafted the letter were wealthy planters who represented a few of Charleston’s social elite. Some of these distinguished gentlemen included Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, Daniel Ravenel, T. Pinckney Alston, and T. Drayton Grimke. The list was not complete without the signatures of some of the religious leaders of the city. William Capers, pastor of the leading Methodist church in the city, Cumberland Methodist, was the primary representative of his denomination. In addition to his position as minister of Cumberland Methodist, Capers ‘was editor of the *Southern Christian Advocate* and would soon be elected Bishop of the newly organized Methodist Episcopal Church.’ Representing St. John’s Lutheran Church was their minister and a Ph.D. from the University of Berlin, John Bachman. Bachman was ‘the most influential leader of the Lutheran Church in the South and a distinguished scientist.’ Richard Fuller, a Baptist minister from a neighboring town in the low country of South Carolina, was determined to make sure that his denomination was also included among those who demonstrated concern for the religious instruction of the slaves. Fuller ‘had recently completed a long scholarly argument over the nature of slavery with Francis Wayland, President of Brown College – the country’s best-known moral philosopher.’⁹⁹ Thomas Smyth, minister of the established Second Presbyterian Church, was not among the original group of twenty-four Charleston leaders who solicited information from the plantations and parishes across South Carolina and Georgia, but he did attend the circular at the depository on Chalmers Street two months later. See Clarke, *Wrestlin’ Jacob*, p. 101.

¹⁰⁰ *Proceedings of the Meeting in Charleston, S.C., May 13-15, 1845, on the Religious Instruction of the Negroes, Together with The Report of the Committee, and the Address to the Public.* (Charleston, S.C.: B. Jenkins, 1845) p. 13.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4

¹⁰² For a list of the six questions that were sent by the circular to ‘a number of Gentlemen, chiefly Planters and Laymen, in the States of South Carolina and Georgia,’ as well as the list of men who comprised the circular, see *Proceedings of the Meeting in Charleston*, pp. 14-15.

According to the findings of the report, the Methodists and Baptists were engaged in successful work among the slaves while the Presbyterians and Episcopalians were steadily improving. Thomas. P. Brockman, planter and layman in Greenville, S.C., summed up the situation in his district, but he might as well have spoken for most of the districts in South Carolina. 'I think there is quite as large a portion of the Negroes in the churches generally, as the whites, particularly of the Baptist and Methodist denominations – not so many in the Presbyterian.' Presbyterian layman James Gallam acknowledged the sentiments of Brockman when he spoke on behalf of the Abbeville district. 'There are 17 colored members in the Presbyterian Church where I worship, to 63 white. The Methodist and Baptist churches have a larger proportion.'¹⁰³

The compilation of letters also indicated that few white ministers in the state were committed to a separate venue for slave instruction. James Edward Henry, a Methodist layman in Spartanburg, S.C. offered a typical comment among those who resided outside of Charleston. 'I know of no minister *exclusively* devoted to the blacks.' In fact, there was a fairly strong consensus among those polled that the slaves benefited from attending worship with the whites. 'Provision is made for their accommodation in all our churches, and they are encouraged to attend public worship with the whites.' Many of the churches throughout the smaller districts of South Carolina did offer an additional service that was intended to accommodate the education level of the slaves. According Thomas Fuller, an Episcopal layman from the Beaufort district, 'there is great difficulty in conveying religious knowledge to the minds of adult Negroes who have grown up in ignorance.' Nicholas Ware, a Methodist planter in the rural town of Brownsville, S.C., detailed the typical protocol and opinion of all the denominations in his district. 'After the white congregation is dismissed, frequently an address is delivered to the Negroes, suited to their comprehension.'¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Ibid., pp. 20-21; 33-34.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 21-22; 33-34; 48-49; 37-38.

There was widespread agreement that the attitude and productivity among slaves who received religious instruction was far better than those who did not. N.R. Middleton, layman at the Episcopal parish St Andrews and owner of one hundred and sixteen slaves was ‘decidedly favorable to religious instruction.’ In fact, Middleton taught the catechism ‘every Sabbath afternoon’ and made himself available for further instruction ‘after family prayers on Wednesday night.’ His experience as a teacher in the parish and on the plantation led him to conclude that ‘Negroes are not what some would make them out to be: they are capable of good feelings, and being influenced by good principles, I do not hesitate to give it as my opinion that where every good motive may be wanting, a regard to *self-interest* should lead every planter to give his people religious instruction.’ J. Dyson, an Episcopal layman and planter in the Sumter district of South Carolina, was also pleasantly surprised by the effects of religious instruction. ‘The rapid progress of the Negroes under my charge, particularly the children – under the excellent system of our catechist, has surpassed every expectation I had entertained, and realized the fondest hopes I could reasonably have indulged.’ J. Wilson, a Baptist layman planter at Welsh Neck Baptist Church in Darlington, was so pleased with the results of fifteen years of religious instruction in his district that he may have offended some of his fellow planters. ‘The truth is, their nature is as susceptible of improvement as our own, and were it not for the deleterious effects of ardent spirits, we might mark the Negro character as having undergone a change as great as the white.’ Slave children were also perceived to undergo advances in religious knowledge, character, and discipline. It was thought that the earlier the children were exposed to religious instruction, the better chance there would be for significant change. ‘Negroes who have from childhood enjoyed the stated ministry of the gospel seem to assimilate themselves more to the whites, not only in their manner of speaking, but of thinking and acting.’¹⁰⁵

In the concluding section of the report, the committee summarized its views of the four leading Evangelical denominations in the antebellum South regarding slave missions. The

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 42; 29-30; 27-28.

findings could hardly have been more predictable. 'There is no Diocese more engaged – and doing more for the Negroes than that of South Carolina. The laity also of this Diocese, embracing many of the most distinguished and wealthy citizens, are supporters of the work.' The Methodist Church received the highest honors among Evangelical denominations in South Carolina for their contribution toward the slaves. 'This branch of the Church of Christ has advanced beyond all others in direct and well-sustained efforts in the colored field.' The committee was unable to furnish any conclusive findings 'of the feeling and efforts of this [Baptist] denomination.' But the committee was quick to publish the fact that '*the proportion of colored to white members* is greater in this [Baptist] Church than it is in the Methodist, although the Methodist may have in the *aggregate* a greater number.' The statistical data supplied for the Presbyterians were strangely absent from the report. But the findings were, of course, optimistic.

The movement in this Church, in favor of the religious instruction of the Negroes, for the last ten years, has been gradual, and for two years past, rapid and extensive: more so than in any previous years within our recollection: and, as a consequence, ministers and churches are doing more than ever towards the evangelization of these people.¹⁰⁶

The report of the committee may have satisfied some of the concerns of those within the white Charleston community who opposed the evangelization of the slaves, for there was no formal initiative from the Charleston public to challenge the data or request additional information. At the very least, those who opposed the report were unlikely ever to have been persuaded by the majority to change their views. At the very most, religious instruction was viewed *increasingly* among Southerners as an integral part of the Southern defense of slavery, specifically the argument that slaves were fully human, equally cherished in the sight of God, and naturally endowed with the right to receive religious instruction. Perhaps most importantly, the report suggested that there was very little divergence among the attitudes and practices of the Southern clergy and their parishioners regarding slave missions.

Those outside Charleston and the antebellum South were unfazed by the report of the committee. Though there was no formal ecclesiastical or secular response to the work of the

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 68-72.

Charleston committee outside the South, the domestic and international campaign to condemn the position of the Southern churches only continued to strengthen. And if the report was ever read outside of Dixie, it was never taken seriously. Throughout the 1830s, Evangelical abolitionists argued that the Southern churches had neglected the spiritual interests of the slave community. By the mid to late 1840s, they began to direct their offensive at the 'Christian' slaveholder and the institution itself. And they did so with considerable success. For their part, slavery was a sin and there was no legitimate argument to the contrary.

The landscape for slave missions was firmly established throughout the 1830s and 1840s. The Southern clergy clarified their position toward slavery. Slaveholders accepted the inevitability for slave missions. Civil codes were authorized to ensure public safety and ecclesiastical policies reflected the shared value of white rule. In a word, the ideal setting was shaping up for a unique individual to 'answer' the abolitionist assertion that slavery was sinful and, all the while, preserve the basis of Southern institutions and traditions. Before Girardeau returned to Charleston, two of the city's leading clergy introduced one more integral feature for slave missions: 'separate' congregations for the slaves.

The 'Separate' Experiment

The leading Southern Presbyterian Charleston divines, Thomas Smyth and John Adger, experienced unprecedented levels of hostility from British and American Evangelical abolitionists in 1846 and were persuaded that a greater Presbyterian initiative to evangelize the Southern slave population was essential for their defense of slavery. Adger was in route from Armenia to Charleston and Smyth was preparing to attend a meeting of the international missionary Evangelical alliance when they unexpectedly met in London. Smyth convinced Adger to remain in London and attend the conference with him. What followed, according to Adger, was a 'gathering of abolitionists, to denounce slaveholders for their sins' and remove

them from the alliance.¹⁰⁷ Far from gathering together to express their unity and build their strategy to evangelize the world, these Evangelical leaders from Britain and America condemned the Southern churches as ‘being an enemy of our race – of being identified with, if not yourself actually guilty of, crimes the most dreadful and heaven daring of which men on earth can be guilty.’¹⁰⁸

Smyth traveled to London in order to build unity only to find new levels of discontent among the international community who condemned slavery altogether. The ‘increased isolation’ that Smyth and Adger experienced while in London awakened them to the reality that American abolitionists had broadened their support through their identification with the past success of British abolitionism. They also recognized that all was not as well in Southern ‘Zion’ as they previously assumed, but instead of acknowledging defeat, these Southern ecclesiastical leaders chose instead to initiate a ‘a new and more comprehensive work among the blacks.’¹⁰⁹ Both men knew that a renewed effort to incorporate more slaves into the existing structures of the Southern Church required some changes that would likely cause unrest among the Charleston public. But the notion of abandoning what they believed even more fervently to be their ‘providential’ calling from God to provide religious instruction for the slaves was never seriously questioned.

Ironically, the two Evangelical denominations least likely to launch a ‘more comprehensive’ program to evangelize the slaves in Charleston were the Presbyterians and Episcopalians. Despite the favorable 1845 report, neither denomination had previously reached out to the needs of the Charleston slave population. Methodist and Baptist churches in Charleston were far more receptive to slave participation than Presbyterians and Episcopalians, but as the 1845 membership numbers suggest, well over half of the slave population in

¹⁰⁷ Adger, *My Life and Times*, p. 134.

¹⁰⁸ Thomas Smyth, *Autobiographical Notes, Letters and Reflections*, ed. Louisa Cheves Stoney (Charleston, S.C.: Walker, Evans and Cogswell Company, 1914) p. 365ff; see also Clarke, *Wrestlin’ Jacob*, p. 143.

¹⁰⁹ Clarke, *Wrestlin’ Jacob*, p. 144.

Charleston was not connected to any church in the city. Of the nearly 20,000 thousand slaves in Charleston, approximately 6,000 blacks were received into the membership of a Methodist or Baptist church.¹¹⁰ The largest Methodist church in Charleston boasted just over 1,800 slaves compared to 300 whites.¹¹¹ According to Episcopal minister Paul Trapier ‘not more than one thousand of these are in any way connected with our six Episcopal Churches.’¹¹² And the numbers of slaves within the Presbyterian churches in the city were even more modest. For example, Second Presbyterian Church, the most influential Presbyterian Church in the city, had 178 black members compared to 378 white members, most of whom were slaves of the white membership.¹¹³

As American abolitionism spread throughout the North and joined forces with the seasoned abolitionists in Britain during the late 1840s, Presbyterians and Episcopalians recognized the urgency of assisting their Methodist and Baptist friends in the evangelization of the slaves. They were convinced that slave missions were the best course to deter or subvert anti slavery rhetoric and gradually reverse the tide of public opinion in their favor. Before 1840, Presbyterians were busy defending the legitimacy of the institution and gave only nominal and sporadic support to slave missions. They now had no alternative but to combine their rhetoric with an improved effort to reach out to the slaves of Charleston and supply them with a spiritual home that could somehow be shown to complement and not undermine their slave status.

¹¹⁰ See Erskine Clarke, *Our Southern Zion: A History of Calvinism in the South Carolina Low Country, 1690-1990*, p. 337. ‘In 1815, there were 282 white Methodists in Charleston and 3,789 black Methodists. Forty years later, fewer than 700 whites and more than 5000 blacks were associated with the three Methodist churches in the city.’ In 1845, the First Baptist Church of Charleston had 293 whites and 1,543 blacks.’ The two other notable Baptists churches in Charleston, Wentworth Street and Morris Street, combined for an additional 448 black members. See also Clarke, *Wrestlin’ Jacob*, p. 115.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

¹¹² John Adger, ‘The Religious Instruction of the Black Population. The Gospel to be given to our servants: *A Sermon Preached in several of the Protestant Episcopal Churches in Charleston on Sundays in July 1847, by the Rev. Paul Trapier, Charleston, S.C. And Discussions on “the Religious Instruction of the Blacks” in the Charleston Mercury, between “Many Citizens” and the Rev. J.B. Adger, Southern Presbyterian Review, 1 (December, 1847) p 90.*

¹¹³ Clarke, *Southern Zion*, p. 126.

Unlike many of the Methodist and Baptist churches in Charleston, Presbyterians and Episcopalians had been unwilling to place slaves in positions of ecclesiastical authority. In fact, for a slave, admittance into a Presbyterian or Episcopalian church only reinforced the yoke of slavery. Presbyterians and Episcopalians were also far more inclined to direct the preaching and liturgy of their worship services to the well educated, white community. Consequently, slaves were more likely to affiliate with a larger Baptist or Methodist congregation whose size afforded them a measure of freedom. Of course, some of the slaves whose masters were Presbyterian understood that they were expected to attend church with their extended 'white' family. But for the majority of slaves in Charleston whose slaveholders did not include participation in the church as one of their weekly expectations, there was little reason for a slave to make a visit to one of the five Presbyterian or Congregational churches in the city.¹¹⁴

Second Presbyterian minister John Adger and former rector of St. Michael's Episcopal Paul Trapier were persuaded that they were uniquely fit to lead a campaign within their respective denominations that would promote slave participation. They also were optimistic that their plan, which called for 'separate' congregations for the slaves, would ignite a movement in their city that would inspire new commitment to the spiritual well being of the slaves. Both men envisioned a congregation consisting primarily of slaves meeting and worshipping in their own building, yet under the jurisdiction of their respective white session or vestry. And both men envisioned themselves as ministers over these slave congregations.

In May 1847, with future U.S. senator Francis H. Elmore presiding over the meeting, Adger presented his vision to the white membership of Second Presbyterian Church in what Clarke called 'perhaps the clearest and most eloquent expression of the paternalism that

¹¹⁴ These churches included First Scots, Circular Congregational, Glebe Street Presbyterian, Third Presbyterian, and Second Presbyterian.

characterized the Charleston churches in their work among the blacks in the city.’¹¹⁵ According to Adger, his plan was very well received.

Dr. Smyth, pastor of Second church, seconded me very earnestly; so did all my brothers, and the four of them agreed to supply my support. My father also gave me his approbation and countenance. Many leading members of the Second church strongly favored what I proposed, after hearing a discourse wherein I publicly set forth my views and desires. Charleston Presbytery also declared its approval of my plan.¹¹⁶

In a similar setting within the Diocesan Convention approximately two months later, Paul Trapier used similar arguments to request permission to initiate a separate work among the slaves.¹¹⁷ About six months later, Trapier spread his view of the ‘Church’s purposes of mercy toward the servants in the city’ through a series of sermons preached throughout the city of Charleston.’¹¹⁸ Like Adger, Trapier reminded the affluent congregations that space limitations in the Episcopal churches were alone sufficient reason to endorse the proposal, but he did not make this the cornerstone of his argument.

Indeed on closer insight into the need in question, the conviction is becoming increasingly prevalent, that to meet that need, there must be at least one of our clergy, whose main business it shall be, to aid in training up our servants in the right way, by giving to the supply of their spiritual wants his whole time and entire energies, which, were they tenfold what they are, would be too feeble to compass the doing of so weighty a work as this of searching into the depths of covert depravity, uprooting errors of ages of growth, letting in the light of Scriptural truth into benighted souls, purifying sensual hearts, reforming unholy lives, and restoring to the likeness of our blessed Savior which retain scarce a trace of His image.¹¹⁹

Both Adger and Trapier were careful to combine their presentations with a commitment to the safety and welfare of the city. Adger, for example, made the case that separate slave congregations under exclusive white leadership were far less prone to rebellious activity than congregations of slaves overseen by their own. Both men clearly conveyed their intent that only

¹¹⁵ Clarke, *Wrestlin’ Jacob*, p. 145.

¹¹⁶ John Adger, *My Life and Times*, pp. 165-166.

¹¹⁷ See The Religious Instruction of the Black Population, *The Gospel to be given to our servants. A Sermon Preached in several of the Protestant Episcopal Churches in Charleston on Sundays in July 1847, by the Rev. Paul Traylor* (Charleston, S.C.: Miller & Brown, 1847).

¹¹⁸ Paul Trapier, ‘A Sermon Preached In Several Of The Protestant Episcopal Churches In Charleston, On Sundays, In February, 1848,’ (Charleston, S.C.: Miller & Browne, 1848) p. 5.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

white persons should be permitted to provide instruction and administer discipline to the slave membership. And such instruction and discipline was never 'to intrude officiously between the servant and his owner, who, we are aware, has a perfect legal right to regulate the movements...' ¹²⁰ Finally, the plans for both church buildings included some 'first-class' seating for white observers; this also served as a symbol of control for the suspicious public. 'We would build a church which may hold about 800 persons, and would set apart some fifty seats near the chancel for white persons, distinguishing them beyond mistake from the benches which will be for servants.' ¹²¹

Both men took the necessary steps to persuade the membership within their respective churches that their plan provided the best solution to increase slave membership within their city. The response within the two ecclesiastical bodies was positive, but many citizens of Charleston were not persuaded and did not support the idea.

The consequence of all these events was that the idea of a separate church for Negroes, which was the plan proposed, could not be thought of by hundreds of people in Charleston without horror. But there were many intelligent, sober-minded Christian men and women who saw nothing in my plan but what promised to be useful in the highest degree, and gave me their earnest support. ¹²²

What followed for Adger was a public debate that took place through the *Charleston Mercury*. Writing under the pseudonym, "Many Citizens" was A.G. Magrath, a former schoolmate of Adger and a future judge and governor of South Carolina. Magrath was persuaded that even though 'separate' slave congregations would be affiliated with the respective denomination and under the scrutiny of existing white leadership, it would not be long before the 'separate' congregations broke away from the 'parent' denomination. ¹²³ Magrath was equally concerned that the slaves would cultivate an unhealthy allegiance toward one another that would

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 11.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 11.

¹²² Adger, *My Life and Times*, p. 165.

¹²³ 'Discussion on the Religious Instruction of the Blacks in the Charleston Mercury between Many Citizens and Rev J.B. Adger,' *Southern Presbyterian Review* 1, Vol. III (December, 1847) p. 99.

gradually undermine the greater allegiance owed to their masters. In short, the plan would ‘diminish the influence and authority of the master’ and vest ‘either presently or prospectively, ecclesiastical authority in the slave.’ Adger in turn, countered Magrath with assurances that his proposal actually brought ‘*the slave more immediately under white supervision.*’¹²⁴

In response to the decision of the Episcopal Diocesan Convention to move forward with the establishment of a separate building for the slaves at Calvary Church, ‘influential citizens jealous for the honor of their city,’ rallied together in 1849 in support of another public meeting to discuss separate congregations for the slaves. The citizens of Charleston were invited to assemble at the City Hall to discuss ‘the erection and organization of “Calvary church,”’ and other aspects of ‘the management of the slave population of our city.’¹²⁵

The mayor of Charleston, T. Leger Hutchinson, appointed James L. Petigru chairman of fifty city representatives who were commissioned to investigate the subject and submit an oral report to the Charleston public. The city representatives then established three sub-committees to explore areas of particular concern. These areas included the specific practice of religious instruction at Calvary church, the general question of religious instruction among the Southern slave population at large, and ‘the actual state of the law in regard to Religious Meetings.’¹²⁶

In November 1849, the Charleston public gathered at the City Hall to receive the reports of the sub-committees. Once again, the work of the most influential citizens of Charleston ‘led to a most gratifying and even unexpected degree of unanimity in the result of their deliberations.’¹²⁷ The committee called to address the issue of religious instruction to the slaves at Calvary began its report by noting that Calvary had met all the official ecclesiastical

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 100.

¹²⁵ *Public Proceedings Relating to Calvary Church And The Religious Instruction of Slaves – With An Appendix, Containing the Reports of the Sub-Committees, And The Answers Of Different Persons Interrogated* (Charleston, S.C.: Miller & Browne, 1850) pp. 3-4.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 10.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 8.

standards for the establishment of a new church within the city, was supported by voluntary contributions, and was recognized by the Protestant Episcopal Church of South Carolina. The vestry rightly called its minister and had received the approval of the Bishop. After providing the concerned citizens of Charleston with information intended to demonstrate the thoroughness of their investigation, the committee reported that the plan fully addressed the concerns of public safety.¹²⁸ The committee called to report on the general question of religious instruction to the slaves in South Carolina provided the Charleston public with an equally favorable analysis 'of the salutary influence of religion on the character of Negroes.' The committee informed the concerned citizens that the 'mass of correspondence collected by the indefatigable chairman' revealed similar attitudes among Episcopal, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Methodist clergy and laymen throughout South Carolina, Virginia, North Carolina, and Alabama. 'There is no difference of opinion on this point. All concur in confirmation of the improvement effected by religion, in the moral condition, docility and submission to authority, of those slaves, to whom it has been communicated.'¹²⁹ The committee did find, however, differences among clergy and laymen regarding the 'mode of religious teaching.' While the majority agreed that separate congregations were preferable to mixed congregations for the reason that instruction could be 'adapted to their condition,' the committee felt that mixed congregations were also acceptable and left the decision 'to the judgment of those whose pious labors are to be affected by the selection.'¹³⁰

The final topic that the committee raised concerned the law as it related to religious meetings within the district of Charleston. The committee observed that all religious meetings that included slaves 'must be attended by the presence of one white man, designated by the

¹²⁸ See p. 9.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 9. For a published account of the various responses from the southern clergy and laymen submitted to the committee, see 'Answers to Interrogatories' in the Appendix of *Public Proceedings*, pp. 28-83.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 10.

authorities of some Church, and approved by the City Council.’ It was also noted that all religious meetings were unlawful in the evening and before sunrise unless the majority of those present were white. Finally, all religious meetings held apart from the knowledge and approval of the City Council, whether mixed or not, were unlawful. ‘With these restrictions, the Legislature have been content to leave the field open to the free exercise of Missionary zeal.’ The committee concluded by applauding Calvary Church for its attention to the law, and even went so far as to identify Calvary as a church in Charleston that other ecclesiastical denominations should emulate.¹³¹

The favorable report may have quelled the fears of many who were concerned that an exclusive ministry to the slaves would jeopardize public safety in Charleston. There was no effort to challenge the findings of the committee. To be sure, heightened abolitionist pressure combined with intermittent public squabbling prevented the Charleston public from ever giving full support to ‘separate congregations.’ But the work of the committee did satisfy most of the public concerns. Further, the report allowed the Anson Street Mission and Calvary Church to press forward with their campaign to increase the number of slave adherents. The efforts of Adger and Trapier, moreover, paved the way for another work to thrive in the decade leading up to the Civil War.¹³²

Charleston’s Response to Girardeau Ministry at Zion Church

In the early to mid 1850s, there was little concern that the Presbyterian or Episcopal churches in Charleston were becoming havens for rebellious slaves. The ‘separate’ experiment attempted by Presbyterians and Episcopalians fell short of expectations, and it appeared as though a fruitful ministry uniquely designed for the slaves of Charleston was virtually impossible under the existing ecclesiastical arrangements. Presbyterians and Episcopalians on the whole proved

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 10.

¹³² Adger and Trapier resigned from their respective missions in 1852 and 1856 due to ailing health. There were never more than fifty-five black members at Calvary. Both men were able to build Sunday school programs among the black community that were mildly successful, but neither of them achieved the level of success among the slaves of Charleston that they had hoped.

unwilling to moderate their position that slaves were unfit to preach or hold meaningful positions within the church.

When Girardeau's ministry at Zion Church began to flourish during the second half of the 1850s, there were some pockets of the public that expressed unease. It appears that resistance to Girardeau was the result of fears over public safety. By the mid to late 1850s, Southerners worried far more about war than slave uprisings.

There were two reports that suggested there were some in Charleston who viewed Girardeau with increased mistrust throughout the latter part of the 1850s.¹³³ In a report communicated by his son-in-law, George Blackburn, Girardeau was nearly murdered 'a few years before the war' by an angry mob. A slave who was connected to Zion Church had been hanged after he witnessed a black man kill a white man in Charleston, and it was alleged that Girardeau planned to speak of the injustice of the hanging while preaching at his funeral. According to Blackburn, the 'Charleston Minute Men' were armed and attended the funeral, planning to murder Girardeau if he attempted to exonerate the slave who had previously been under his care. Blackburn also recalled that a few armed white parishioners of Zion Church and 'a great mass of Negroes' stood ready to protect their pastor.¹³⁴

According to Blackburn, Girardeau did not condemn the hanging but instead used the opportunity to show 'the awful consequences of sin in the struggling form of the condemned and dying form of the Son of God making an atonement for the sinner.' When Girardeau 'exhorted them to faith and repentance,' the 'audience broke down' and reconciled themselves to one another. Even 'the Minute Men stopped to apologize, and many of them became attendants of his church and were among the warmest of his admirers.' Blackburn did not consider the response of the enslaved to their 'beloved pastor' who, instead of condemning the hanging, had used the

¹³³ An exploration of the two primary public newspapers in Charleston from 1855-1860 [*Daily Courier and Charleston Mercury*] reveals only one complaint toward Girardeau's ministry.

¹³⁴ George A. Blackburn, ed. *Life Work and Sermons*, pp. 101-102.

occasion ‘as a warning to Negroes against bad company, sinful living, and delay in coming to Christ.’¹³⁵

An article written by “A Slaveholder” in the *Charleston Mercury*, titled “What are we Drifting To,” accused Girardeau and the white membership of Zion Presbyterian Church of promoting ‘many evils which are secretly undermining our institutions.’ The author did not provide an exhaustive list of the violations that Girardeau and his associates committed, but he did accuse them of collaborating with the ‘damnable schemes’ of northern abolitionists. He began by citing a few of the slave practices within the city that were perceived by some to have become destructive to the community.

What explanations can our municipal authorities give for the crowds of black children who throng our streets on their way to school, with satchels filled with books? Of the crowds who congregate at nightly “sittings?” Of the Negro visitors to northern cities, who go and come regularly every season under the *very eye* of the *law*, and who return, possibly, with the personal acquaintance of the black *Douglas* and the white Greeley?¹³⁶

The author then turned his attention to the specific practices of Zion Church, ‘the throngs who flock to “Zion” decked off in silks, satins and feathers.’ He condemned Girardeau for officiating at slave marriages and treating those in bondage as though they deserved similar treatment to the white race.

Where are we drifting to when, in a slaveholding community, the “nuptials of blacks” are celebrated in a spacious temple of the Most High – where the bridal party of a score and ten in numbers are transported to this modern centre of fashion and false philanthropy in gay equipages – and where hundreds of others, robed in extravagant costumes, witness, possibly with eye-glass in hand, this the dawn of a new fashioned sentiment?¹³⁷

The ‘slaveholder’ concluded his article by appealing to the Charleston community to denounce the practices of Zion Church and prevent Girardeau from further activity that might threaten public order. ‘We would purge our community, and punish its law-breakers, and neither *talents, social position or wealth* should screen them from public exposure and denunciation.’

¹³⁵ Ibid., pp. 101-102.

¹³⁶ *Charleston Mercury*, October 25, 1859.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

The first written response to the article was submitted by four members of the Zion Church session, among whom Robert Adger, the father of John B. Adger,¹³⁸ was the most recognizable name. Their address began by assuring the public that the minister of Zion Church was no friend of abolitionism. In fact, they were quick to note that Girardeau was ‘the son of a slaveholder and himself a slaveholder.’ They also defended Girardeau as one who ‘sympathizes with the extreme Southern Rights party,’ his congregation as ‘persons deeply interested in southern institutions,’ and the Bible as the authoritative guide to all of their views. They then attempted to make the case that illegal activity was never acceptable at Zion Church.

No meeting of the congregation is permitted without the walls of the Church, and no meeting in the Church can ever take place except in the presence and under the control of white members of the Church. It is not an African Church in any sense, although it is a Church designed chiefly for the religious instruction of our slaves. For this reason a large portion of the building is devoted to their accommodation. The only real difference, however, existing between it and other Churches is, that two of the services on the Sabbath, and the services of the week, are so conducted that they are specially sought to be brought within the comprehension of the blacks and colored people, and this is done in the presence of, and with the consent of, the white congregation.¹³⁹

The reference of ‘A Slaveholder’ to the ‘nuptials of blacks’ and their casual dress was then addressed. They defended the practice of slave weddings at Zion and claimed that such occasions ‘have been in every case conducted with the consent of, and in many instances in the presence of their owners, under the express prohibition in every case of any ostentation and display.’ After they defended the legality of slave marriages, the Zion church elders conceded the point of ‘A Slaveholder’ regarding the ‘growing tendency’ in general toward ‘ostentation and display’ during wedding services and stated that, for these reasons, ‘the Church Session have now adopted a resolution forbidding these Church weddings entirely.’

Just over a week later, November 3, 1859, Girardeau submitted a letter to the *Charleston Mercury*, stating his views and conceding to the public ‘their right to know the

¹³⁸ Robert Adger was one of the most affluent men in antebellum Charleston. He accumulated much of wealth brokering cotton but increased his fortune throughout the 1850s and 1860s by purchasing his ‘own lines of steamers to New York and important connections in European ports. According to Clarke, Adger ‘represented the shipping and commercial interests of Charleston.’ See Clarke, *Wrestlin’ Jacob*, p. 95.

¹³⁹ *Charleston Mercury*, October 26, 1859.

opinions of those who undertake the responsibility involved in the discharge of such an office.’

In the clearest and most poignant surviving written statement regarding his view of slavery prior to the Civil War, Girardeau grounded his case for slavery in a literal interpretation of the Bible and took the opportunity to condemn abolitionism.

Without any mental reservation, I state it as my belief that the relation of master and slave is the result of Providential appointment, which secures the benefit of the slave himself, and that it is sanctioned by the Word of God, which I hold to be the only sufficient rule of faith and practice. So far am I from opposing the peculiar institution of the community in which I live, that my sympathies have ever been, and now are, with those in the South who advocate practical measures of resistance to fanatical encroachments upon its constitutional rights.¹⁴⁰

Girardeau then proceeded to buttress his stance on slavery and build credibility with the Charleston public utilizing a personal testimony regarding his past associations with Southern institutions.

Descended from a grandfather who fought and suffered for South Carolina in the revolutionary struggle; born of and reared by a father who spent his whole life on her soil, which he cultivated by slaves inherited from his father; a slaveholder myself, and believing that I have a scriptural warrant for being so; how could I possibly promulgate tenets which would contradict all my past associations, and be detrimental alike to the interests of my own family and of the community with which I am identified? I love her people and her social institutions, and cease not to pray that the blessing of God may rest upon her in all her interests.¹⁴¹

Girardeau concluded his article with a brief comment about his unique calling to minister to the slaves and his belief that the teachings of the Bible would ultimately serve to strengthen the institution of slavery.

I freely confess, however, that I hold myself bound to regard the souls of the bonds as well as the free, since for them, too, the savior died; nor can I believe that it can result in aught us good to preach to them the “grace of God” which bringeth salvation to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world.

Given the scope of Girardeau’s ministry to the slaves, it is a bit surprising that there was such a minimal response among the Charleston community. This may be suggestive of at least three central developments that occurred in Charleston during the final decade leading up to the war. First, the majority of those originally opposed to slave missions were either persuaded of

¹⁴⁰ *Charleston Mercury*, November 3, 1859.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

their benefits or were resigned to accept them as part of their defense of slavery. Secondly, the legal and ecclesiastical codes that were adopted in the 1830s were, by the mid-1850s, no longer so tightly maintained. The published complaint of "A Slaveholder," clearly identified several violations that would presumably have been immediately confronted prior to the 1850s. Finally, the danger imposed by slave missions and slave rebellions was replaced by the more imminent threat of war.

Conclusion

Girardeau's ministry in Charleston among the slaves during the 1850s is both straightforward and complex. On the one hand, Girardeau was the product of his day and denomination. Raised on a small cotton plantation in the antebellum South, converted to Evangelical Christianity during college, and more the product than the pioneer of a biblical, theological, philosophical, and racial climate that characterized his day and ministry, Girardeau's work among the slaves was the final expression of Southern Presbyterian ideology during the final decade prior to the war. On the other hand, his 'separate' ministry among the slaves in Charleston, however paternalistic, was unprecedented and unequalled among his Presbyterian colleagues.¹⁴² Girardeau was able to rise above many of the prejudices of his contemporaries in order to carry out a unique ministry to the slave population around Charleston. He was neither the first nor the only Southern churchman to carry out such a ministry, but he was certainly one of the most prominent and possibly the most effective. His individual resolve to fulfill what many Southern Presbyterians acknowledged to be their moral duty among their black brethren is undeniable. While few ministers who were reared within the provincial culture of the antebellum South consistently adhered to their self-proclaimed duty to provide religious instruction to the slaves, Girardeau made his ministry to them a priority.

¹⁴² See Merrill Matthews, Jr., 'Robert Lewis Dabney and Conservative Thought in the Nineteenth Century South: A Study in the History of Ideas' (Ph.D. dissertation: The University of Texas, Dallas, 1989); and Jerry R. Robbins, 'R.L. Dabney, Old Princeton and Fundamentalism.' (Ph.D. dissertation: Florida State University, 1991).

It is not as easy to understand why Girardeau gravitated toward, associated with, and ministered to the slaves, but it is clear that this was a commitment from his childhood. Certainly his mother provided him with an exceptional model during his boyhood years. But perhaps more importantly, the smaller, more intimate sea island plantation community in which he was raised promoted a paternalistic-based relationship with the enslaved.

One possible explanation for Girardeau's decision to minister to the slaves was that he was driven by a largely unconscious desire to exercise authority over those whom he considered to be of an inferior race. At an early age and during a highly charged period in American history when Northern abolitionists threatened the perpetuation of slavery, Girardeau was committed to preserving a Southern paternalism in order to maintain the wealth and privileges of an aristocratic white planter class. His ministry to the Charleston slaves was an attempt to perpetuate the injustices of a slave economy under the pretense of religion, and perhaps to ease a guilty conscience. According to this view, Girardeau's refusal to accept the new social conditions in the wake of the American Civil War and his attempt to reestablish 'Southern Zion' from among his former Zion congregants only confirms the idea that he used religion to suppress the African-American race in order to preserve the prosperity of an agricultural society dependent upon slave labor.

A more sympathetic interpretation might conclude that Girardeau's decision to minister to the slaves was primarily an attempt to evangelize those who, through no fault of their own, were simply less equipped to provide sound religious instruction to their communities. At an impressionable age and in a sheltered environment that encouraged a 'family-style' paternalism between masters and slaves, Girardeau not only learned how to empathize with a less privileged race, but he also became in the wake of his conversion experience genuinely interested in their spiritual, religious, and moral well-being. As a minister of the Southern Presbyterian Church who was 'called' to provide religious instruction and pastoral care to those who were 'brought in God's mysterious providence from a foreign land and made members of our households,'

Girardeau gave much to their service.¹⁴³ Even in the face of opposition from those within his own denomination who advised him to split his labors among the blacks and whites, Girardeau refused to deviate from what he viewed as his providentially ordained ‘duty’ to provide religious instruction and pastoral care to the slave population of Charleston. His decision to set aside his ministerial duties and become a military chaplain during the Civil War was not a betrayal of his Negro congregation. Rather, Girardeau’s commitment to the ‘southern cause’ must be understood in light of the broader Southern Presbyterian perspective that the institution of slavery was not only an integral part of the Southern social and economic fabric, but was also essential to the well being of the disadvantaged slave. Apart from the pastoral assistance of the white clergy, even ‘the most enlightened of them would soon degrade piety into fanaticism.’¹⁴⁴

It is likely that the real reason for Girardeau’s decision to minister to the Charleston slaves falls somewhere between these two interpretations. While Girardeau was a popular minister among the Charleston slaves, and while he upheld Southern Presbyterian ideology during a traumatic period of American church history, he must also be linked to the failures of his denomination to rise above the racial attitudes and prejudices of his day. Like most of his white contemporaries in the antebellum South, Girardeau was unable to see the radical evil of a social system based on slavery, nor was he able or willing to welcome the prospect of organizing society based on social equality and free labor. Even though Girardeau gave the majority of his life to minister to the enslaved, he was never persuaded that the abolition of slavery would contribute to the overall well-being of both classes of people. He was certainly interested in taking steps, albeit small, to improve slaves’ condition within the bounds of the present system, but it appears that he was never convinced that emancipation would produce a preferable social economy.

¹⁴³ See Adger, *My Life*, p. 167.

¹⁴⁴ Thornwell, ‘Report on Slavery,’ p. 394. See also, Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, p. 246.

It is difficult to ascertain to what extent Girardeau viewed African-Americans as an inherently inferior race. While he did apparently view them as less adept intellectually and naturally prone to emotional excesses, he did not believe that God created the Negro race to be spiritually inferior. Like most Southern Presbyterians, he was persuaded that everyone was created in the 'image of God' and endowed with the same innate and eternal value before God.

We have always acknowledged, and now hold the scriptural doctrine of the specific unity of the human race. We believe that all mankind sprang from the original pair, are involved in the consequences of Adam's fall, and depend for their recovery solely upon the mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁴⁵

But Girardeau was also persuaded that the most efficient social economy was one that subjected the Negro race to the political and ecclesiastical supervision of the white race. 'Without any mental reservation, I state it as my belief that the relation of master and slave is the result of a Providential appointment which secures the benefit of the slave.'¹⁴⁶

Girardeau opposed adamantly the interference of the church in the affairs of the state and believed that the issue of slavery was outside his ministerial jurisdiction. And to be fair, he did not politicize the issue of slavery from the pulpit. There was indeed a concurrence in the views of Southern Presbyterians and Southern politicians concerning the institution of slavery. While Southern politicians were arguing that the constitution provided individual states the exclusive right to determine their own course concerning the perpetuation of slavery, Southern Presbyterians were claiming that the Bible sanctioned its existence. 'Slavery may be good, or, to speak more accurately, a condition from which, though founded in a curse, the Providence of

¹⁴⁵ John L. Girardeau, 'Our Ecclesiastical Relations to Freedmen,' *Southern Presbyterian Review* 18 (July, 1867) p. 2.

¹⁴⁶ *Charleston Mercury*, November 3, 1859.

God extracts a blessing.¹⁴⁷ As long as the ecclesiastical and political spheres were in tandem, Southern Presbyterians, including Girardeau remained relatively quiet.¹⁴⁸

Girardeau was a slaveholder and a paternalist. Although there is no written testimony detailing Girardeau's exact treatment of his own slaves, there is little reason to believe that he mistreated or abused them. Nor is there evidence that would suggest that he took inordinate advantage of the authority that was his to oversee the affairs of his black parishioners. In fact, the surviving sources suggest that Girardeau cultivated toward his black parishioners an unusual commitment and genuine devotion for their physical and spiritual welfare. What is more, those slaves who voluntarily placed themselves under his ecclesiastical oversight found a rare white minister whom they believed to be genuinely interested in them.¹⁴⁹ But the final assessment of Girardeau's devotion to his Negro parishioners cannot be analyzed properly apart from his paternalistic posture toward them. That is, his relationship to the slaves must be informed by his positive view of slavery, which naturally clouds the depth of his feelings for them. And from this perspective, it is more problematic to applaud what otherwise appears to be a flourishing antebellum ministry between a white minister and his Negro following.

Perhaps the greater tragedy that resulted from the paternalistic relationship that Girardeau cultivated with the slaves was his inability to envision and promote measures among the white membership of the Southern Presbyterian Church to begin moving towards abolition. There is no evidence to suggest that this ever entered the mind of Girardeau. At the height of his ministry in Charleston and during the most heated ecclesiastical debates concerning the perpetuation of

¹⁴⁷ Thornwell, 'Report on Slavery,' p. 421.

¹⁴⁸ During the final years that preceded the American Civil War, many Southern Presbyterians abandoned their commitment to non-involvement and began to respond to the abolitionist accusations, at times using the pulpit to argue their stance. See Benjamin M. Palmer, *The South: Her Peril, and Her Duty. A Discourse Delivered in the First Presbyterian Church, New Orleans, on Thursday, November 29, 1860* (office of the True Witness and Sentinel, 1860). There is no evidence to suggest that Girardeau ever deviated from his position of non-involvement.

¹⁴⁹ For written evidence suggesting that Girardeau displayed 'genuine interest' in his slave parishioners, see earlier chapters, pp. 187-190; 192-193.

slavery, Girardeau failed to take advantage of his influential position within his denomination to initiate change. In fact, his ability to maintain the status quo at such a critical period may have only reinforced the Southern Presbyterian position to promote 'separate' congregations for their slaves under the supervision of a white minister. From this perspective, Girardeau's commitment to give the majority of his life to the religious instruction of the Charleston slaves is less commendable.

Girardeau was deeply conservative in many ways, with a love for 'mother' South Carolina, its folk and soil. His obsession to preserve South Carolina in its original form was driven by his belief that God had established a special relationship with the inhabitants of the South. And his effort to reclaim 'Southern Zion' in the wake of the war must be understood in light of his view that God providentially sanctioned slavery in the South in order to improve the spiritual condition of the Negro race.¹⁵⁰ Girardeau's inability to rebuild his ministry to the freed slaves in the new context of the post-Civil War South proved to be an extreme disappointment for him. This eventually led to seasonal bouts of depression, his resignation in Charleston, and his return to Columbia.

In the decades that followed the Civil War, Girardeau was faced with the challenge of adapting his social and theological presuppositions to the new social order. He proved unable to reconcile the conditions of the antebellum South with the 'providential' acts of God in allowing for its downfall. From his perspective, it simply did not make sense. Sadly, Southern Presbyterians, including Girardeau, were never able to admit the possibility that perhaps God was never as favorably disposed toward the institution of slavery as they had assumed.

This study of Girardeau's life is in many respects a picture of the disappointment that Southern Presbyterians experienced throughout the antebellum and post-antebellum period. They

¹⁵⁰ Girardeau was certainly not alone in his view that God sanctioned slavery primarily as a means to Christianize the slaves. Boles suggested that by the outbreak of the Civil War, this was the commonly held perspective among Southern Evangelicals. 'Many white Evangelicals came to believe that part of their responsibility to God involved Christianizing the slave work force. It was to that end, they reasoned, that God sanctioned slavery.' See Boles, *Masters & Slaves in the House of the Lord*, p. 11.

were often more committed to perpetuating the hierarchical, slave-based social economy of the agricultural South than they were to evangelizing the slave population. They did not consider the notion that collective activism within their ecclesiastical spheres against social injustice and racial inequality might complement their evangelistic efforts. Even their prized position that the power of the Church is only ministerial and declarative and that beyond the Bible she can never go, and apart from the Bible she can never speak, did not in theory prevent them from taking gradual steps within their own jurisdiction to abolish an institution which many viewed as a 'curse' to humanity. But they did not. Girardeau did not.¹⁵¹

Girardeau's resignation and relocation to Columbia represented the harsh reality that his celebrated mission to the Charleston slaves had not been accompanied by the divine favor that he had always assumed. It is difficult to discern whether Girardeau entertained this possibility, and there is certainly no evidence to suggest that he did. His agonizing decision to leave Charleston and serve as the professor of theology in the denominational seminary during the closing period of his life should be primarily interpreted as an admission that his 'work among the Negroes' had officially come to an end. Given his determination to fulfill his life-long 'calling' as a missionary to the enslaved, it is difficult to interpret his decision to abandon that work as anything less than disappointing.

It is almost impossible to gauge the long-term impact of Girardeau's ministry to the Charleston slaves, since it was dissolved within a decade of the American Civil War. Though there is ample evidence to suggest that Girardeau and his black parishioners cultivated, at the very least, the outward appearance of a genuine relationship toward one another, there is no indication that correspondence between them continued beyond his resignation in Charleston. Consequently, it is virtually impossible to measure the long-term impact that Girardeau had on his Zion congregants.

¹⁵¹ Thornwell, 'Report on the Subject of Slavery,' p. 5

It is a bit less complicated and considerably more obvious to assess the long-term impact of the broader Southern Presbyterian mission to the slaves. In a very direct sense, the initial blasts of the American Civil War revealed the beginning of the end for slave missions. The collapse of the Confederacy that occurred about five years later marks the death-blow of Girardeau's exclusive work among the slaves. And his resignation in Charleston represents his personal acceptance of this outcome. In a word, the Southern Presbyterian 'separate' campaign must be assessed in light of the gradual death of the antebellum South. And from this perspective, the impact of the campaign was largely insignificant.

John L. Girardeau was a rare Southern Presbyterian Evangelical who demonstrated a commitment to that segment of the nineteenth century Southern population that was largely ignored by his peers and colleagues. His devotion to them and care for them was virtually unprecedented in his denomination. Sadly, Girardeau suffered from a failure of imagination and did not rise above the prejudices of his day and take advantage of the unique opportunity that was his to lead the Southern Presbyterian Church out of their acceptance of the existing social order. In fact, his ministry may have only reinforced the status quo. His life as a whole was disappointing in many respects. But for all of his human weaknesses, Girardeau's unusual commitment to the Charleston slaves did reveal that the ecclesiastical conscience of his age was not completely lost.

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