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Actions and Attitudes of Southern Baptists Toward Blacks, 1845-1895

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To my Prime Rib, the apple of my eye, my loving wife, Sandra, who has endured many hours of my absence while I have attended classes, travelled for research, and missed days together while I wrote instead of spending time with her. She believed in me every step of the way and has encouraged me constantly. She has been patient and understanding beyond words. She is absolutely the love of my life.
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ABSTRACT

The Southern Baptist Convention began in 1845 as a result of tensions between Baptists in the North and in the South. Several issues were factors in the division, including differing views on organization and denominational structure. Baptists in the North preferred the societal system of operation, while Baptists in the South preferred the associational structure. But these were not the only factors that contributed to the schism among Baptists. One issue that was at the heart of the division was slavery.

Baptists in the South shifted in their views over the peculiar institution from the late eighteenth century through the first three decades of the nineteenth century. In the South, slavery was first railed against, then accepted, and then later defended by Baptists. The appointment of slave owners as missionaries and the assignment of missionaries to work among slave owners were major factors when Baptists in the South made the decision to form their own denomination.

While slavery was involved in the formation of the denomination, what were the attitudes of Southern Baptists toward blacks in the South? The most effective way to determine with any degree of certainty how Southern Baptists viewed blacks was to examine what the white Baptists wrote and how they acted toward blacks. This dissertation examines church and denominational minutes and records, as well as the writings of Southern Baptists from this era to discover the underlying feelings of the white Baptists toward blacks. The dissertation explores the factors leading up to the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention, examines the writings and records from the slave years, then explores how Southern Baptists treated blacks during the years after the Civil War. The study concludes with the formation of the National Baptist Convention and the role Southern Baptists played in the formation of that denomination.
INTRODUCTION

As a young graduate student at a Southern Baptist seminary in the 1970s, I was introduced to the history of the Southern Baptist Convention. In those days, the conventional teaching by Southern Baptists was that the Southern Baptist Convention was formed over a differing view and practice of missionary work from Baptists in the North.\textsuperscript{1} The notion that another possibility existed did not come to me until nearly three decades later while I was conducting research in various primary source documents. In order to ensure that this was consistent with what was being taught in the various colleges and seminaries, several histories on Baptists were consulted. This study deals specifically with the Southern Baptist Convention, but few histories that narrow in focus have been written. Instead, it is taught in institutions as a part of Baptist history in general.

One of the books that has been used as a text in Baptist institutions for many years is \textit{A History of the Baptists} by Robert G. Torbet. This book was first published in 1950 and in 1980 was in its eleventh printing and has influenced the thinking of Baptist ministers for several decades. In dealing with the split of Southern Baptists from Baptists in the North, Torbet lists several struggles between the two groups. Specifically, he attributes the split to the Anti-Mission controversy (commonly referred to as Campbellism) the Anti-Masonry controversy, disagreement over Bible societies, Landmarkism, and slavery. On the subject of slavery, Torbet devotes sixteen pages, but he primarily deals with it from the perspective of contributing to sectionalism, rather than directly leading to the formation of the new denomination. He outlines the positions various prominent Baptists took with regard to slavery and even mentions the test case put forth by Georgia Baptists and the questioning of the Foreign Mission Board by Alabama Baptists, but he downplays the place this played in causing the schism. Torbet makes reference to the ways other denominations dealt with the slavery issue, but shies away from making a direct connection between slavery and the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention.\textsuperscript{2}

\textsuperscript{1} Claude V. Howe, Lecture notes from the course on the History of the Baptists, 1978.

The first book written in the twentieth century that dealt specifically with the history of Southern Baptists was Robert A. Baker’s *The Southern Baptist Convention and Its People, 1607-1972*. It was published in 1974, but was never widely used and eventually Broadman Press ceased publication. It is still used by many researchers, however, because of the tremendous volume of statistical information Baker included in his work. As he related the controversies leading to the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention, he lists three major controversies: Campbellism, Antimissionism, and Sectionalism. Slavery is covered under the section dealing with sectionalism. He asserts that sectionalism was probably the greatest contributor to the formation of the denomination than the other factors, with slavery only fostering a greater sense of belonging to a distinct section of the country.  

The book that has become the standard among Baptists in teaching Baptist history is *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness*, by H. Leon McBeth, published in 1987. McBeth was a student of Baker’s at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and later joined him on the faculty at that institution. Not surprisingly, McBeth used Baker’s work extensively in sections dealing with Southern Baptists. McBeth’s study has enjoyed wide acceptance at most schools, primarily because it is relatively up to date, and because it has a companion work, *A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage*. This latter book is a collection of primary source documents, reproduced with a brief introduction to each work. In discussing the tensions that eventually split Baptists across regional, McBeth names the Antimissions Movement, the Campbell controversy, and slavery. McBeth is unique in that he states that slavery was actually the main issue that led to the 1845 split. Interestingly, he devotes eight pages to discussion of the Antimissions Movement and only a total of three pages to slavery and its aftermath. Considering he attributes this to being the main issue, he gives little space to the subject.

The most recent work dealing with the history of Southern Baptists is *The Southern Baptist Convention, a Sesquicentennial History*, (1994) by Jesse C. Fletcher, President Emeritus of Hardin-Simmons University. Fletcher covers the issue of slavery in a page and a half and

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agrees with Baker that slavery contributed to the rising feelings of sectionalism, and minimizes the role slavery played in the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention.  

Other scholars have explored the issue of slavery and religion, but none of them deals specifically with Southern Baptists. Paul Harvey, in his book *Redeeming the South: Religious Cultures and Racial Identities Among Southern Baptists, 1865-1925*, explores the issue of racism and Southern Baptists, but he focuses his study after the Civil War and does not deal with the formation of Southern Baptists or the role slavery and racism played in that.

It is evident to this researcher however, that slavery was, in fact, central to the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention, but a void exists in scholarship pertaining to this subject. If Southern Baptists have a desire to truly make a difference in race relations and evangelism, it is first necessary to acknowledge the part those attitudes and events played in the formation of the denomination. This study explores the attitudes and actions of Southern Baptists toward blacks.

The dates of 1845 to 1895 were chosen because the Southern Baptist Convention began on May 10, 1845. While this was the actual beginning date of the denomination under study, it will also be necessary to look at the events which led to the formation of this distinct group. The ending date was selected because that was the last year that Southern Baptists carried blacks on their membership rolls as a distinct group. Also, the National Baptist Convention had formed two years prior and most black members had moved to the new Baptist organization by that time. The selection of these dates also has the benefit of covering three distinct periods of time: slavery (including the Civil War), Reconstruction, and the period after Reconstruction during which blacks formed their own denomination.

A word of explanation of terms used in this treatise is appropriate at this point. The word *black* will be used without capitalization throughout this research project, unless it is used in an official title or name, or if it was capitalized in a quotation from another document. This usage will be consistent with the manner in which other ethnic groups are designated, as well. The term *African-American* will not be used because some blacks were, in fact, Africans. Also, none of them, even the freedmen, had gained American citizenship during a majority of the period with which this dissertation is concerned.

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The word *missions* is a term preferred by Southern Baptists to refer to missionary efforts in a collective manner. It may refer to domestic missionary work, international missionary efforts, a combination of the two or a portion of either. It simply refers to any or all missionaries and the work they undertake.

While there were differing methodologies for missions and church administration preferred by Baptists in the North and in the South, these were not the primary causes of the separation, but they at least contributed to the schism. Baptists in the northern area of the United States seemed to prefer the societal form of administration in which individual churches contribute to various educational and missionary efforts, while those in the southern area preferred the associational centralized model in which churches send funds to denominational boards. This disagreement became one of several issues over which Baptists in the North and in the South could not and do not agree.

For the most part, this dissertation will not attempt to address the attitudes and actions of blacks toward the white Southern Baptists. In this researcher’s opinion, that is an entirely different subject to be explored. It is recognized, however, that there is always interaction at some level between the two groups, and so it will be impossible to ignore the responses of the blacks to the whites, but these actions are not the specific topic to be studied. They will be cited only as they pertain to the views or actions of the white Southern Baptists.

In order to conduct this research, it was necessary to visit the Southern Baptist Convention archives, located at the Baptist Building in Nashville, Tennessee. The archives staff provided either in microfilm or original documents, many of the writings of prominent Southern Baptists ministers, spokespersons and leaders, as well as the official records of denominational meetings. These primary source documents enable the reader more easily to understand the mindset of Baptists of that era. From these sources conclusions can be drawn as to the attitudes and resulting policies of Southern Baptists toward blacks of the same period.

Denominational records and papers from prominent Baptists were utilized in the study, but extensive use was also made of the minutes of local churches and associations as they pertained to black members or black congregations. Some of these indicated an amicable relationship between the groups, while others seem to indicate a growing hostility between the two. This is particularly important due to the polity of the Southern Baptist Convention. The Convention has no authority over local churches or associations. Rather, individual churches
send representatives from their churches, called *messengers*, to the associational and national business meetings. As a result, the denominational positions are adopted according to the will of the churches, not the other way around.

Additionally, several histories of the Southern Baptist Convention have been consulted, comparing accounts written soon after the events, as well as later works. These enable the researcher to see how Southern Baptist actions and attitudes have been interpreted, both during the first one hundred years of the denomination’s life, as well as after further research and the passage of time. At the same time, theology books of this period were utilized, because attitudes not only influence theology, but theology influences attitudes. It will be important to understand the theological positions of the day because many theological points directly affected the way white Baptists viewed and behaved toward blacks, both believers and non-believers. Also, many white Baptist ministers used the scriptures to justify their positions on slavery, whether they were in favor of it or against it.

This dissertation begins with the premise that people’s actions, both individually and collectively, are influenced by their attitudes. It will be argued that the attitudes of Southern Baptists shifted during the period studied. Unfortunately, there are no clear records of what people’s attitudes were during that day, but they did leave a record of their actions. This will be used extensively to show that Southern Baptists attitudes toward blacks began as somewhat paternalistic. Later, the feelings seemed to swing toward resentment, then outright anger. However, there was also a difference between the denominational positions and the specific actions by local churches. The only records available as to actions by specific Southern Baptists are those preserved in the minutes of the various religious bodies. The differences between the local churches and the denomination will be studied and the reasons for the differences explored.

In this study, the topic is developed under the following outline. Chapter 1 will focus on events leading to the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention. This will include the differing views of slavery between Baptists in the North and in the South, and disagreements over the appointment of missionaries. Chapter 2 will explore Southern Baptists and blacks during the slave era. This will examine Southern Baptists and black church members and education of blacks by Southern Baptists. Chapter 3 will examine Southern Baptists and blacks after the Civil War, including efforts at maintaining black church members, Southern Baptist efforts in assisting Freedmen and Southern Baptists and black missionary efforts. Chapter 4 will
look at Southern Baptists and the formation of black churches. This chapter will cover both of the periods dealt with in chapters one and two, but will focus completely in the formation and development of black churches. Chapter 5 deals with Southern Baptists and the formation of black Baptist organizations. Specifically, this will inquire into the formations of black Baptist associations and the formation of the National Baptist Convention. Chapter 6 looks at cause and effect: reasons for the lack of positive actions by Southern Baptists toward black Baptists. Included in this chapter will be a scrutiny of the anti-hierarchical denominational feelings by Southern Baptists, the Landmark movement, paternalistic attitudes of white Southern Baptists toward blacks, and with the changing attitudes of toward blacks.
CHAPTER 1

EVENTS LEADING TO THE FORMATION OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

Establishment and Growth of Baptists in America

Most historians today believe that Baptists grew out of the English separatist movement in England in the 1600s. John Smyth and his followers, fleeing persecution in England, established a church in Amsterdam in 1609. Smyth, who had been educated at Cambridge and was an ordained Anglican priest, embraced Puritan ideals and withdrew from the Anglican Church in much the same way the Anglicans separated themselves from Roman Catholicism. Smyth, Thomas Helwys, and others had become disillusioned with the Anglican Church and had encouraged King James I to reform it. The king, however, tried to stop these nonconformists and these people fled to the Netherlands where they enjoyed religious freedom.¹

Others who embraced the ideas and teachings of the Baptists in England fled to America. Among them were Roger Williams and John Clarke, who founded the settlements that subsequently united to form the Providence Plantations with a charter that granted democratic government and religious liberty. Other Baptist settlements grew up in Massachusetts, Maine, and Pennsylvania. However, no record of Baptists appearing in the South exists until after the restoration of King Charles II to the throne in 1660.²

Baptists who fled to America did not always enjoy the religious freedom they hoped for. Many of the colonies had adopted official state religions and had little patience with the Baptists or other dissenters. Roger Williams and John Clarke had both published tracts which described the treatment of the Baptists in the New England colonies. However, in spite of the difficulties, Baptists gradually expanded into the South.³

After Charles II gave a grant for the establishment of Carolina in 1663, one of the proprietors wrote that it would be difficult to attract people to the colony without the promise of

¹ Fletcher, Southern Baptists: A Sesquicentennial History, 21-22.
³ Ibid., 23-24.
religious liberty. Charles granted this request in 1665. Soon, religious dissenters from the New England colonies began flocking to the South. According to Robert Baker, families who were known to be Baptists were in the colony of South Carolina as early as 1681 and 1682.4

Since the colony of Carolina had been divided into two separate colonies, North and South Carolina, many of the Baptists who settled in South Carolina undoubtedly traveled through the northern colony. There is evidence that Baptists had settled in North Carolina shortly after 1701. While Virginia, the first of the southern colonies, was established in 1607, Baptists did not take root in that colony for nearly a century. From its earliest days, Virginia did not allow dissent from the Church of England.5 The first Baptist church in Virginia was not constituted until 1715.6

Baptists were among the first settlers in Georgia. However, this colony did not prosper until after the war with Spain ended in 1744. In spite of this, some of the Baptists, particularly around Savannah, worked among the Indians there and began establishing places of worship, but significant growth would not take place until the latter half of the eighteenth century.7

The real growth of Baptists in the colonies is linked to the Great Awakening. It was during this period that Baptists formed two associations, the Charleston Association and the Sandy Creek Association.8 While the Philadelphia Association had been formed in 1707,9 the latter two associations became more influential in the South.

4 Ibid., 24.
5 Ibid., 26.
6 Ibid., 38.
7 Ibid., 27.
8 Fletcher, Southern Baptists: A Sesquicentennial History, 32. Associations are the affiliation of local Baptist churches within a geographical area for the purpose of local evangelism and mission efforts. An association cannot direct the affairs of the churches within the association, but they may adopt requirements for continued membership. Some associations have removed a church from its membership (disfellowshipping) for embracing beliefs or practices that are not consistent with what is believed by Baptists in the area. A convention is either a state-wide or national organization of Baptist churches. A church may belong to either the national body without being a member of a state convention or a local association. Membership with the state convention is not contingent upon membership in an association or national convention.
9 Torbet, A History of the Baptists, 211.
As Baptists had begun to spread throughout the colonies, it was this same independent spirit that spurred Baptists to participate in the Revolutionary War. Baptists resonated with the idea of political and religious freedom, especially since the Church of England was headed by the King. In rejecting the authority of the King, they were able to divest themselves of a government that also had the potential to control their worship and beliefs. As a result, Baptists became committed to the concept of religious liberty.\(^\text{10}\)

Because Baptists believed that no civil authority should have power to regulate worship, and because they had been persecuted at the hands of a church that had a strong, centralized form of church polity, Baptists adopted an organizational structure that was very loose, associating with churches who were similar in belief, but having no authority to impose a set of beliefs or practices upon any other congregation. The organization of the convention and the way it conducted its business, in part, determined the lack of action of Southern Baptists with regard to many of the social issues of the day. As Baptists in America developed as a denomination, they were shaped by the events during which they were formed. As a result, Baptists had a weak denominational structure, which limited their ability to speak with a strong, unified voice.\(^\text{11}\)

**Differing Views of Slavery between Baptists in the North and in the South**

In the same year that Florida was admitted to the Union as a slave state, a group of Baptists met in Augusta, Georgia, and voted to have a denominational secession. Where previously Baptists in the United States had been united for missions and evangelism, the issue of slavery precipitated a crisis among Baptists so great that it created a fracture that has never completely healed. Yet, while the Southern Baptist Convention was actually formed in 1845, the division between them and their northern brethren actually began more than a decade prior.\(^\text{12}\)

Division over the issue of slavery was not peculiar to Baptists. Presbyterians and Methodists each split over the same issue. The original organization of Baptists as a denomination in America was the *General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination*.

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in the United States for Foreign Missions, which was formed in 1814.\textsuperscript{13} At the time of its organization, slavery was not a pressing issue for the young denomination. The practice of slavery was initially common to all of the colonies, but did not prove to be as economically feasible in the North and the institution declined in those states after the American Revolutionary War.\textsuperscript{14}

Nevertheless, while slavery continued to exist within the United States, an anti-slavery sentiment was growing in the North. Among Baptists, however, the controversy began more ideological than geographical, with both opponents and defenders in the North and South. According to W. W. Barnes, slavery was not a divisive issue among Baptists until the 1830s. A manumission society had been formed in Tennessee in the 1810s and in 1817 had presented a statement on slavery to the legislature. Baptists in the southern states had contributed their part to the opposition of slavery. They gained their first supporters among those in the lower economic brackets. As a result, most of their members were found among the non-slaveholding population of the South. In this regard, most of the opposition appears to be due to economic differences between the Baptists and the more affluent elements of society, but this was never explicitly stated. Rather, Baptists tended to use moral arguments in opposing the institution. In the upper South, where plantation life was not as extensive, this was especially true. In Virginia, Kentucky, and other states, associations passed resolutions against slavery. In 1828, the Cherokee church sent a remonstrance to the Holston Association, Tennessee, against the traffic of slaves. The association unanimously approved the statement.\textsuperscript{15}

The issue was far from settled in the northern states. The Philadelphia Association, the first Baptist association to be formed in the colonies, adopted a policy of conciliation when it was confronted in 1820 with a query from the Vincent Baptist Church in Chester Springs, Pennsylvania, concerning the advisability of the association’s calling a national meeting to plan for the emancipation of slaves among the Baptists. After some deliberation, the association

\textsuperscript{13} McBeth, The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness, 344. Because the organization was also known as the Triennial Convention, it will be referred to by this name throughout this dissertation.


decided it was “inexpedient to enter on such business at this time.”\textsuperscript{16} When the church asked in the following year whether it was wise to fellowship with slaveholding Baptists, the answer was the same. Obviously the Baptists of the Philadelphia area were attempting to keep the slavery issue in the background for the sake of unity. It is also possible that the Baptists in Pennsylvania had been influenced by the Quakers in that state. Robert Torbet, however, contends that it was equally likely that this was indicative of the general attitude of Philadelphians, gauged so as not to disrupt their profitable trade with the South.\textsuperscript{17}

In 1789, the Ketockton Association in Virginia expressed strong feelings that hereditary slavery was a breach of the divine law and appointed a committee to bring in a plan of gradual emancipation. After they did so, however, they were so sharply criticized by some of the churches that the association later resolved to take no further action on the subject.\textsuperscript{18} Two years later, Rev. John Leland, a highly respected leader at the time, prepared a statement which was adopted by the Virginia General Committee that advised Baptists to “make every use of every legal measure to extricate this horrid evil from the land.”\textsuperscript{19}

Anti-slavery agitation also arose in Kentucky in the 1790s, but many associations tried to plead non-involvement. Baptist leaders in the southern states who opposed slavery were John Sutton, Joshua Carmen, Josiah Dodge, David Barrow, and William Hickman. Barrow and Carter Tarrant even went so far as to organize an antislavery association in 1807 called “Friends of Humanity.” The association thrived in Kentucky until sometime after 1820.\textsuperscript{20} Many of the Baptists in Kentucky left that state for Missouri, thus strengthening its antislavery sentiment.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{16} Philadelphia Baptist Association, \textit{Minutes} (1820), 7-9.

\textsuperscript{17} Torbet, \textit{A History of the Baptists}, 285.


\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.

In South Carolina, where approximately one-third of the Baptist laymen and two-fifths of
the ministers owned slaves, there was a hesitancy on the part of associations to make
pronouncements on the question of slavery. For example, in 1799, the Bethel Association,
located in Spartanburg, suppressed an inquiry from the Cedar Spring Church concerning the
right of a Christian to own slaves. Yet, the churches of the state generally included blacks in their
membership and imposed on their slaveholding membership a strict code to regulate the religious
care and treatment of their slaves.\(^2\) A similar policy was followed in other states, including
North Carolina and Maryland.\(^3\) It appears that slave members were provided with a certain
space in the meeting house for worship, but were not permitted to vote in business sessions,
although they might be heard in cases related to their race. Among Maryland Baptists the
slavery issue was a disturbing factor to the churches until about 1830 when the matter was
dropped in the interest of harmony. The Sandy Creek Association in North Carolina took a stand
against the “selling and buying of slaves,” as late as 1835, although they were not united in their
opposition to slaveholding.\(^4\)

However, there were others in positions of leadership among Baptists in the South who
were very vocal in favor of slavery. Richard Furman, one of the early leaders who helped forge
Baptists into a denomination, was a staunch defender of slavery. This South Carolina pastor was
recognized as the spokesperson for Baptists in South Carolina on most matters. In 1823, he wrote
a treatise to the governor of that state which was seen as one of the most important Baptist
defenses of slavery. While he took a relatively moderate tone, it was written in response to an
attempted slave uprising in 1822. The uprising occurred under the leadership of Denmark
Vesey, a former slave who had purchased his own freedom and was a Baptist who made his

\(^{22}\) Leah Townsend, *History of South Carolina Baptists, 1670-1805* (Florence, SC: Florence

\(^{23}\) John S. Bassett, *Slavery in the State of North Carolina* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press,
1899), 42-52, 61.

\(^{24}\) George W. Purefoy, *History of Sandy Creek Baptist Association, 1758-1858* (New York:
Sheldon & Co., 1859), 163-164.
living in Charleston as a carpenter. Furman, who was later President of the South Carolina State Convention of Baptists, expressed to the governor,

…because certain writers on politics, morals and religion, and some of them highly respectable, have advanced positions, and inculcated sentiments, very unfriendly to the principle and practice of holding slaves;…These sentiments, the Convention, on whose behalf I address your Excellency, cannot think just, or well founded; for the right of holding slaves is clearly established in the Holy Scriptures, both by precept and example.

David Benedict, in writing a history of Baptists, reported on the shifting attitudes of Baptists in the South. He recorded that in his journeys through the South in the 1830s, ministers saw themselves as the spiritual equals of their northern counterparts, but were defensive toward slavery. They seemed to have felt that slavery had been thrust upon them and they were powerless to abolish it, even though they would have been glad to have it taken away from them. Many felt that, while slavery was not a sin in and of itself, it was at least an evil which was injurious to all parties. In his travels in the years just prior to the Civil War, he noted that Baptists in the South had adopted a different tone. By this time, they had fallen victim to the strong emotions surrounding the issue. They had come to feel that they were seen as inferior to their northern brethren and forced to defend themselves. In harboring a defense, they turned to the Bible to justify their position.

When people are engaged in a deeply emotional disagreement, the more opposition there is, the more those on the defensive are inclined to become more entrenched in their position. They desperately search for any defense of the ideas to which they have attached themselves. In the case of slavery, ministers found themselves in the position of either siding against their


kinsmen, and most likely against parishioners, as well, or having to justify a system that they may have believed wrong.

In using the Bible as a defense, Furman cited Leviticus 25:44-46 which stated that under Mosaic Law the descendants of Abraham could enslave people from other nations of non-believers. Based upon this line of reasoning, it was permissible to capture and enslave blacks against their will. In fact, this was seen as an opportunity to evangelize them, bringing them under the influence of the gospel message. It was easy for the apologists to convince themselves that since they were introducing the gospel to people whom they considered to be pagans, they were actually doing a service to the black people who otherwise would never have had an opportunity to receive salvation.29

One issue that was not addressed was that under Mosaic Law, after someone converted to Judaism, that person was to be treated in all respects as an Israelite. If the same principle were applied to blacks who were enslaved by Christians, they should have been freed as Christian brothers and sisters. While Furman did not address this issue specifically, he did appeal to some New Testaments passages to further his argument. He made reference to the fact that at the time of the New Testament writings, slavery was a common practice by the Greeks and the Romans. He argued that this was the natural order. He even pointed out that this situation occurred under the very teachings of the Christian church. As slaves became converted to Christianity, they were treated as equals on a spiritual level, but remained in their states as slaves and masters. The institution of slavery even took place under the inspired ministry of the Apostles. Since they voiced no objection to the practice it should be assumed that the institution was not wrong.30

Furman continued in his argument that if slavery was morally wrong, the Apostles, who were prepared to give their lives for the gospel, certainly would not have tolerated it in the Christian church. Since they voiced no objection to it, in fact they did not command Christian masters to free their Christian slaves, it must be assumed to be an accepted practice. He pointed out that the Apostles were willing to voice opposition to practices that were allowed by the government which were immoral, yet the issue of slavery was not addressed by them.31

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30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.
Furman’s letter to the governor, he acknowledged the evils and problems associated with slavery, but argued that the enslavement of blacks was actually done with their consent and was actually to their benefit.32

Another reason for the changing attitudes toward slavery may have been the rise of sectionalism in the United States. This increase in sectionalism was linked to the acquisition of and expansion into territories in the West. As the United States obtained additional lands west of the Mississippi River, questions arose as to whether these territories would allow slavery or not. As the debate took shape in the national government, it also became rather heated in newspapers and other writings in both slave and free states.33 In fact, there are many instances of sectional differences between northern and southern Baptists during the period after 1830.

The annuals of the Home Mission Society printed complaints from different parts of the West and the South to the effect that their sections were being neglected in the appointment of missionaries and that a mission society in the remote Northeast could not understand the needs of the other sections. For example, in 1837 the Kentucky Baptist paper, The Western Recorder, alleged that the southern states were being neglected in the appointment of missionaries and urged the formation of a southern home mission society.34 This will be dealt with later in this chapter as differing views over the appointment of missionaries are discussed.

By the 1830s, the issue of slavery had become a divisive issue among Baptists in America, but mainly in the North. While there was an earnest desire to maintain unity among Baptists, it became very apparent that this would be increasingly difficult. In 1833, English Baptists had written a treatise to their American counterparts describing the victory of the English emancipation movement. The letter concluded by asking:

Is it [slavery] not an awful breach of the divine law, a manifest infraction of that social compact which is always and everywhere binding? And if it be so,

32 Ibid.


are you not, as Christians, and especially as Christian ministers, bound to protest against it, and to seek, by all legitimate means, its speedy and entire destruction?\textsuperscript{35}

While this letter was divisive among American Baptists, it was not yet clearly between the North and South. On September 1, 1834, Corresponding Secretary Lucius Bolles replied for the General Missionary Convention, enclosing official resolutions by the Boston board. In summary, these resolutions stated that the constitution of the General convention precluded any discussion on the subject.

We have the best evidence that our slaveholding brethren are Christians, sincere followers of the Lord Jesus. In every other part of their conduct, they adorn the doctrine of God our Savior. We cannot, therefore, feel that it is right to use language or adopt measures which might tend to break the ties that unite them to us in our General Convention, and in numerous other benevolent societies; and to array brother against brother, church against church, and association against association in a contest about slavery.\textsuperscript{36}

However, soon after the response was published, about fifty Baptist ministers met in Boston. On May 26-27, 1835, they voted their approval of another reply, which was subsequently signed by about 130 Baptist ministers before it was mailed. This letter acknowledged the guilt of slaveholding and pledged all efforts “to labor in the use of weapons not carnal but mighty through God to the overthrow of this as well as every other work of wickedness.”\textsuperscript{37} About the same time, the Sandy Creek Association in North Carolina took a stand against the “selling and buying of slaves,” although they were not united against slaveholding.\textsuperscript{38} Baptists in the South as late as 1835 were still not speaking with a unified voice on the issue of slavery.

To add to the agitation among Baptists in America, in 1836 English Baptists published numerous strong abolitionist resolutions. These, combined with the slave uprisings in the South, tended to polarize American Baptists on both sides of the issue. An example of the shift toward

\begin{footnotes}
\item[35] Ibid., 87-88.
\item[36] Ibid., 89-89.
\item[37] Ibid., 90.
\item[38] Purefoy, \textit{Minutes of the Sandy Creek Association}, 163-164.
\end{footnotes}
dominant abolitionist sympathies is Baron Stow, one of the leaders in the General Convention. In 1837, Stow answered another letter from the English Abolitionists for the Triennial Convention. His reply stated that since “the constitution of the Board limits them to the business of Foreign Missions, they will not, under existing conditions, intermeddle in any way the question of slavery.” In the following year, Stow replied to still another letter from the English Baptists. This time he urged the brethren in England to be patient and “not think us tardy in accomplishing an objective which we, as well as they, are anxious to see immediately effected [sic].” By this time he had become an avowed abolitionist proponent.\(^39\)

Abolitionist sentiments grew in the North with the organization of the American Baptist Anti-Slavery Convention. The initial meeting took place in New York on April 28-30, 1840, with about 100 in attendance. Two addresses were prepared, one to northern Baptists and one to southern Baptists. The address to the South was vigorously written and was widely circulated throughout the South. Recognizing that most states had made it illegal for individuals to free their slaves as a result of slave uprisings, the address urged the Baptists to “forsake like Abraham, your father-land, and carry your children and your households to the vast asylum of our prairies and our wilderness.”\(^40\) There was no offer of assistance to Baptists who were willing to relocate, only the expectations that they would leave all in order to flee from the presence of the evil around them. This caused anger and bitterness on the part of Baptists in the South. As a result of the agitation and the bitterness it engendered among them, many of the societies felt it necessary to issue circulars affirming their neutrality. Both the General Convention for Foreign Missions and the Home Mission Society based their neutrality upon their constitutions. The Home Mission Society published their disclaimer on February 16, 1841.\(^41\)

When the Triennial Convention met in Baltimore in 1841 for its session, a determined effort was made by northern and southern leaders to maintain the unity of the body. At a caucus in mid-April just before the opening of the convention, a group of northern and southern leaders prepared a Compromise Article which in effect condemned abolitionists as introducing a new

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40 Ibid., 32-34.

41 Ibid., 55ff.
test for Christian benevolent work. This was signed by seventy-four of the principal northern and southern leaders.\textsuperscript{42} This probably delayed the separation for a few years.

The slavery-abolitionism controversy continued in the newspapers during 1842 and 1843. This virtually assured that the meeting of the Triennial Convention meeting of 1844 would be a volatile one. Controversy began in full force in 1843, when an anonymous writer inquired in the Baptist paper of New Hampshire as to whether or not it was true that James Huckins and William Tryon, Home Missionary Society missionaries in Texas, were slaveholders. Baptist papers in North Carolina, Boston, Maine, Georgia, and others quickly entered the debate. Upon investigation it was learned that James Huckins of Vermont had purchased a slave after beginning his work in Texas, while William Tryon had married a Georgia woman who owned slaves. In 1844, the Home Missionary Society appointed a committee to work out an amicable solution.\textsuperscript{43}

An exception to the abusive language of the time was provided by the literary debate between President Francis Wayland of Brown University and Richard Fuller, pastor in South Carolina. Although they represented opposite sides of the issue, the two men were courteous, logical, and explicit.\textsuperscript{44}

**Disagreements over the Appointment of Missionaries**

The focal point for the disagreement among Baptists was in the missionary enterprise. From the earliest days, Baptists felt deeply about the need to be involved in missionary efforts. William Carey is credited with being the “Father of Modern Missions.”\textsuperscript{45} His efforts inspired other Baptists to carry the gospel to groups other than people like themselves. Missionary zeal resulted in the formation in 1814 of the *General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination of the United States of America for Foreign Missions*, commonly known as the

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 100.


\textsuperscript{44} Richard Fuller and Francis Wayland, *Domestic Slavery Considered As a Scriptural Institution* (New York: Lewis Colby, 1845), pp. 101-104.

Triennial Convention for its meeting every three years, or more simply, the Foreign Mission Board.\textsuperscript{46} The Home Mission Society was not formed until 1832.\textsuperscript{47}

From the time of the formation of the Triennial Convention, there were two points of view concerning the structure of the organization. The associational method of organization stressed denominationalism, while the society type highlighted church independence and benevolence. The result was a compromise which had elements of both views. The organization was given a denominational name and its constituency included only Baptists organizations – societies, churches, and other groups, but no individuals.\textsuperscript{48} On the other hand, there were elements suggesting the society idea of the constitution, as it specified only one benevolence (foreign missions) as its object. Also, it had a modified money basis rather than the associational idea that allowed all churches to associate themselves together regardless of financial contributions.\textsuperscript{49}

How the organization would be administered was not clear. Luther Rice favored a strong denominational structure. Rice had been raised in a Congregational family in Massachusetts, but had become a Baptist after beginning missionary work in India with William Carey, a Baptist from England. Rice had travelled in the South and had developed strong feelings in favor of denominationalism. He seems to have been influenced by the views of Baptists in that region who favored a more centralized organization than Baptists in the North.\textsuperscript{50} The irony of this is that southerners generally favored a decentralized government, while the stronger national seat of power was preferred in the northern states. However, when it came to denominational structure among Baptists, the reverse was true. Regardless, Rice, while traveling from Richmond to Petersburg, noted in his diary:

\begin{quote}
…an enlarged view of the business opened upon my contemplations. The plan which suggested itself to my mind, that of forming one principal society in each
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{46} Baker, \textit{The Southern Baptist Convention and Its People, 1607-1972}, 108.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 114.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 108.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 114.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 109.
state, bearing the name of the state, and others in the same state, auxiliary to that; and by these large, or state societies, delegates be appointed to form one general society.  

It appeared that Rice would get his wish, because at the 1817 meeting of the Triennial Convention, the organization voted “That the powers of this Convention be extended so as to embrace home missions and plans for the encouragement of education.”  

It is possible that Richard Furman of South Carolina was involved in this carefully worded statement. Furman was elected as president of the convention that year, and said in his presidential address, “The same gracious direction which it becomes all Missionary Societies earnestly to solicit, and conscientiously to obey, is opening other spheres on our own continent.”  He continued by noting the need for home missions in New Orleans and in the West, as well as the need for education. Furman was not highly educated in a formal setting, but had done much with that which he had been given. After only one year of school, his father instructed him in mathematics and the other sciences. He had learned to read the family Bible and soon learned Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French, and German. He also studied metaphysics, logic, history, and philosophy. He possessed an exceptional memory, able to memorize poetry by simply reading it one time. He had committed Homer’s *Iliad* to memory by the time he was eleven years old. Later, Rhode Island College (now Brown University) granted him an honorary Master’s degree. He also had the Doctor of Divinity conferred upon him by that institution, as well as South Carolina College (now the University of South Carolina).  

He understood the value of education and was a lifelong advocate for higher education among Baptists.

The work of the Triennial Convention between 1814 and 1845 falls into two distinct periods. From 1814 until 1832, the principal fields were Burma and Africa. After 1832, work was begun in Siam. During the former period, the African Baptist Mission Society began missionary involvement in Africa. Black Baptists in Richmond, Virginia, formed this organization in 1814. In 1819, the Triennial Convention assisted financially by sending Lott

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52 Ibid., 67.

Carey and Collin Teague to what became Liberia. Calvin Holton was the first white missionary to be sent by Baptists to Africa, arriving in 1824. However, since whites seemed to be more susceptible to the diseases and fevers in Liberia, they began to withdraw white missionaries temporarily.55

When the American Baptist Home Mission Society was formed in 1832, there were fourteen different Baptist organizations in the various states carrying on home mission work. As was previously mentioned, in 1817 the Triennial Convention decided to enlarge its task by including home missions and Christian education. Two home missionaries, James Welch and John Mason Peck were appointed in 1817. Peck was twenty-eight years old and traveled with his wife and three small children in a single covered wagon to St. Louis. He and his family lived for 128 days in the wagon while he began work in Missouri. He eventually formed a small group in the St. Louis area and by the following year, the Missouri Association was formed. This organization approved his plan to spread the gospel in 1819, working in cooperation with the association in Illinois.56

The lack of funds and international opposition, however, led the Triennial Convention to eliminate home missions from its support in 1820. Peck supported himself for two years until the Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Society voted to support his work. In 1826, Peck met Jonathan Going, the pastor of the church at Worcester, Massachusetts. They corresponded regularly until Going travelled journeyed west to travel with Peck, preaching in Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, and Kentucky. When they parted company, they had formed the plan for the American Baptist Home Mission Society. The organization was formed in 1832 with Jonathan Going as its first secretary and its headquarters in New York City.57


55 Board of Foreign Missions. Minutes of the Board of Foreign Missions of the General Missionary Convention, May 18, 1814, to May 3, 1847. Microfilm at Southern Baptist Convention Archives, Nashville, TN.


57 Ibid., 115.
Baptists had begun missionary work in the West at the same time that slavery was moving into the territories. As early as 1835, Baptists in the South began calling for a southern convention to conduct missionary work in the South and Southwest. Robert T. Daniel left his native state of North Carolina to preach in Tennessee and northern Mississippi. He recognized the great need in both of those states. Baptists had been working in the western states among the Native Americans for nearly two decades, but little work was being done in the southern states. Some Baptists in Kentucky and Tennessee were reluctant to form a southern convention. In spite of the apprehensions of some, however, a Southern Baptist Home Mission Society was organized in Columbus, Mississippi, with Daniel assuming leadership of the new organization. When Daniel died three years later, the young society perished with him.58 Plans for a general convention of western Baptists were also explored in Louisville, Kentucky, as Baptists in that state discussed the possible venture in the home of Dr. William C. Buck, a renowned temperance preacher.59

Much of the difficulty seemed to lie in the fact that northern Baptists were focusing their work in the West, giving the impression that northerners did not wish to work among Baptists in the South who were slave owners. While it would be one thing to serve as a missionary in a foreign country where Christianity had not spread, it was another thing entirely to serve among fellow citizens who claimed to be Christian brothers, yet they enslaved other human beings. It was easy to accept those who had not been enlightened to practice barbaric behaviors, but more was expected from those professing to be Christians. So, they simply did not serve in the southern states. It is unclear why the society did not make greater attempts to recruit missionaries from the Southern states who would continue to work in that same region.60

By 1840, the issue had become so controversial that many churches had ceased funding the foreign mission work. To try to encourage continued financial support, the acting board of the General Convention (the foreign mission agency), adopted a statement of neutrality with regard to slavery. Their statement reminded the churches that each congregation was completely


60 Ibid., 289.
autonomous and that no body, whether civil or ecclesiastical, had authority over it. As independent bodies, they had agreed to cooperate with each other to “send the glad tidings of salvation to the heathen, and to nations destitute of pure gospel light.”61 However, the Board members were also members of Baptist churches and as such, they could act as individuals. At the same time, as a Board of Convention for Foreign Missions, they were bound to neutrality and were not to say or do anything in that regard. It was hoped that such a neutral position would serve as sufficient reassurance to the churches so as to allow them to resume their support of the missions effort.

When the Triennial Convention met in Philadelphia in April, 1844, only eighty of the four hundred and sixty delegates present were from slave states. Part of the reason the southern states were poorly represented was because of the distance and the delegates volunteered to come at their own expense. In contrast, Pennsylvania alone had forty six delegates to represent just over twenty-eight thousand Baptists in that state.62

On April 25, Rev. Richard Fuller of South Carolina, a slave owner, presented a resolution calling for the Convention to restrict itself solely to its missionary enterprise. Since the Convention had been led by a southerner for twenty-one of its thirty years and they had just elected Dr. Francis Wayland, an abolitionist, as President, it was feared that the denomination would take an anti-slavery stance. Rev. Spencer Cone, a New York City minister, favored the attempt to isolate slavery from the Convention’s policies. Rev. Nathaniel Colver, Pastor of Tremont Temple in Boston, spoke strongly against the resolution, since all it did was allow the body to avoid the issue at hand. After heated debate, the motion was withdrawn and Dr. George Ide, Pastor of First Baptist Church in Philadelphia, introduced a new one. His new resolution urged a noncommittal policy on slavery in an attempt to maintain denominational unity.63

Dr. Ide’s resolution passed unanimously. It urged members of the denomination to continue to cooperate in foreign missions endeavors, and as a body, to adopt a neutral stance on the issue of slavery. As individuals, however, they should be free to express their views

61 Board of Foreign Missions. “Policy of Neutrality,” Address of the Board, adopted Nov. 2, 1840.


63 Ibid., 37-38.
openly. This allowance appeared to be satisfactory to the delegates present, but was later seen with some apprehension.

Many southerners were skeptical of the statement by the Board and the Baptists of Georgia decided to test the practice. They nominated James Reeve, a slave owner, as a missionary and raised money for his salary. The Georgians were open about this being a test case, not trying to deceive anyone. The whole event was designed to end the rumors of non-neutrality. However, the Home Mission Society felt that in order to remain neutral, they could neither appoint him nor reject him without violating neutrality. It, therefore, simply declined to receive the nomination. The statement clearly said that the Board felt that the Georgia Baptists were not trying to appoint a missionary as much as they were trying to appoint a slave-owner. This, the members felt, was not so much an attempt to send a missionary as it was an attempt to “disturb the deliberations of the Board.” While this may have been a sincere position, the Georgia Baptists interpreted this as proof that no slaveholder could be appointed as missionary.

Word soon spread among Baptists in the southern states about the Georgia test case. Baptists in Alabama issued a stern statement, called the “Alabama Resolutions.” Instead of offering another test case as Georgia had done, they posed hypothetical questions to the foreign mission organization and demanded that they be answered. Responses that the Alabama Baptists deemed less than satisfactory would result in Alabama Baptists withholding their missionary offerings. Unlike their domestic missions counterpart, the Foreign Mission Board made no pretense at neutrality. It bluntly stated that it would not appoint a slave owner. Further, response stated that in the thirty-year history of the missionary board, a slave-owner had not ever knowingly been appointed as a missionary.

The Board’s statement was not intended to cause division among the North and South brethren, but to make clear the policy under which it had always operated. The members did not desire to see Baptists in the southern states withhold financial aid to foreign missions, but they

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64 Barnes, “Why the Southern Baptist Convention Was Formed,” 16.


would not be held hostage to violate principles they felt were immoral. Nevertheless, the decision was a painful one to make. One member of the Board, Reverend Solomon Peck, withdrew an amendment that he had proposed as part of the response to the Alabama Resolutions because he was fearful that it would precipitate a split among Baptists and they would

…retire, the most if not all, from their present relations to the Board and the General Convention; and the Acting Board, itself reduced perhaps to a minority of its present members, will be left with a minority of its present members, will be left with a minority of northern supporters and contributors to cooperate with southern contributors in sustaining our missionary operations.67

His greatest concern was that, as a result of the fissure between northern and southern contributors, the cause of missions would be hindered.

There was just cause for his fears. In April 1840, the American Baptist Anti-Slavery Convention met in New York City. The meeting was the result of radical anti-slavery feelings among northern Baptists. Some Baptist missionaries in Burma had severed their connection with the Triennial Convention and had formed a Foreign Provisional Missionary Committee under whose direction they might work without association with slave-owners.68

Regardless of the Board’s intentions, it looked to be a direct violation of the Convention’s instructions. It appeared that abolitionists had gained stronger support on the two mission boards and they wielded a greater influence than the combined voices of the national body. This should not be a surprise since the major societies of the denomination had begun in the North. Since they had been formed in Philadelphia, New York and Boston and retained their headquarters in the North, it would have been unusual if they had not reflected the sentiments of other people in those areas.

The element that is surprising is that, while the boards were located in northern states and the decisions were made by ministers and laymen in those cities, there were more Baptists in the southern states than in the North and West combined. The statistics for 1840 show that there were about 322,985 Baptists in the southern states of Delaware, Georgia, Maryland, North

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Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia, compared to 248,306 in the remaining twenty states.\textsuperscript{69} Population aside, the distance from urban centers of Baptist work prevented the southern states from being proportionally represented at the meetings of the societies.

Both sides resorted to the Scriptures to defend their positions. Southerners did not try to defend the evils in the slavery system, but described the institution as an inherited disease that had to be cured slowly. Further, they argued, the slaves’ contacts with their white masters brought them in touch with the gospel. Northern abolitionists also used the Scriptures, holding that they taught the inherent worth and dignity of each person in the sight of God and the moral wrong of the enslavement of their fellow men. At the same time, others were trying to assist the two groups in reconciling their differences.\textsuperscript{70}

All efforts at reconciliation were in vain. In April 1845, The American Baptist Home Mission Society decided at their meeting that it would be more expedient if its members carry on their work in separate organizations in the North and South. As a result, the Virginia Foreign Mission Society called for a convention to be held in May. This effectively ended the period of cooperation among Baptists in the United States. Where they had originally organized to cooperate among churches to conduct missions, the appointment of those missionaries caused an irreparable rift among Christian brothers. Three hundred twenty-eight delegates from the South met at Augusta, Georgia, May 1845, to organize the Southern Baptist Convention.\textsuperscript{71}

While this was intended to be a consultative convention, not all Baptists agreed what it was to do. Some advocated for immediate secession from the national mission societies, while others urged delay and caution. Not surprisingly, most of the opposition to immediate separation would come from the same states that in 1860 would urge caution in seceding from the Union.\textsuperscript{72} Some of the strongest arguments against immediate separation came from Kentucky. In fact, the sentiment expressed in Kentucky’s denominational paper, was the call for unity among the

\textsuperscript{69} William Cathcart, \textit{The Baptist Encyclopedia}, II, (Louis H. Evertts, 1881), 1324.

\textsuperscript{70} \textit{The Baptist Record}, (Philadelphia weekly), Nov. 20, 1844.

\textsuperscript{71} Torbet, \textit{A History of the Baptists}, 293.

\textsuperscript{72} McBeth, \textit{A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage}, 260.
brethren. If the abolitionists could not tolerate the union, let them withdraw. In the end, the delegates voted to withdraw and the Southern Baptist Convention was formed.

Many members of the new Baptist denomination owned slaves. Chapter 2 will examine how Southern Baptists viewed blacks, beginning with an examination of Southern Baptists as slave owners. This will be followed by a discussion of blacks as members of Southern Baptist churches, and concluding with the education of blacks by Southern Baptists.

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73 John L. Waller, ed., *Banner and Pioneer*, May 1, 1845, 2-3.
CHAPTER 2

SOUTHERN BAPTISTS AND BLACKS DURING THE SLAVE ERA

Many members of the new Baptist denomination owned slaves. When the Southern Baptist Convention was formed, Baptist churches in the South already had a significant number of blacks attending. But how could white owners, who held to the concept of equality before God, hold human beings as personal property, while at the same time, worshippng with them, and calling them Christian brothers and sisters? This chapter will first discuss Southern Baptists as slave owners and how blacks were treated as church members during the slave era and conclude by examining the efforts of Southern Baptists to educate blacks.

Southern Baptists as Slave Owners

John A. Broadus, a Baptist historian and professor during the nineteenth century wrote a biography of James P. Boyce. Boyce was born on January 11, 1827, to Amanda and Ker Boyce of South Carolina. Ker Boyce was one of the wealthiest men in that state and wielded great influence. Amanda Boyce was raised in a strict Presbyterian family, but became a Christian under the preaching of Basil Manly, Sr., and joined the Baptist church a year before James was born.¹ James studied at The College of Charleston, then Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island. While a student at Brown, James was greatly influenced by one of his professors, Francis Wayland, one of the architects of the Triennial Convention.² Boyce became a Christian in 1846 and in 1849 went to Princeton University, where he studied until 1851. After leaving Princeton, he served as the pastor of First Baptist Church, Columbia, South Carolina, for two years, resigning his pastorate to become a professor of theology at Furman University.³ Boyce had a vision for better theological education among Southern Baptist pastors, and encouraged the

2 Ibid., 250.
3 Ibid., 252-253.
establishment of a seminary to accomplish that purpose. Under his efforts, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary was established in Greenville, South Carolina, holding its first classes in 1859. James P. Boyce served as the first president, holding that position until 1888.⁴

According to Broadus, Boyce was moderate in tone in supporting the institution of slavery, but was opposed to secession when that became an issue in the southern states.⁵ In fact, after Abraham Lincoln’s election in 1860, Boyce and Major B. F. Perry were anti-secession candidates to the Convention, but were not elected. Other Baptist leaders were more extreme in their views, including James C. Furman, president of Furman University, who was an advocate of secession.

Boyce, however, in letters to family members, expressed his desires for the Union to remain, while maintaining slavery in the southern states. He believed that the reason for the discord over slavery was because slave owners had not fulfilled their responsibilities. He felt that it was a justifiable institution, but owners had not adequately cared for the religion and morals of their slaves. As a result, it would be torn from them and before long God would show them how they should have behaved toward their slaves.⁶ He expressed similar feelings the next month in a letter to his sister. He told her that as a pro-slavery man he would preserve the Union. He even went so far as to predict that the South would present an ultimatum to the North, which would be accepted. If it was not, he ventured, the South would be forced into a long and bloody war which would not end before slavery was absolutely abolished.⁷ In this he was correct.

While many Southern Baptists had been in favor of maintaining the institution of slavery, it is important to remember that relatively few slaves were owned by Southern Baptists. This is not to say that not many Southern Baptists owned slaves; rather the ones who were slave owners generally did not own many. Robert Baker concludes that Baptists in the South were mainly of

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⁶ Boyce, in a letter to H. A. Tupper, his brother-in-law, December 1860, quoted in Broadus, 1927, 222.

⁷ Ibid., 222-223.
the lower economic class. Historically, that has been the case. Baptists had descended from the English Separatists in England in the seventeenth century. Because they placed themselves outside of the sanctioned state religion, they were not treated favorably by the Crown. Those who were given large land grants in the colonies were closely aligned with the Church of England. These people, who eventually formed the Episcopal Church in the United States, made up the majority of plantation owners in the South. According to Baker’s statistical research, in 1850, two thirds of the white families in Virginia and South Carolina owned no slaves; three fourths of the white families in North Carolina and Georgia owned no slaves. At the time of the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention, about two thirds of the white families in the South Central States were not slave owners. Those Southern Baptists who did own slaves seemed to have owned no more than one or two. Yet, as noted earlier, even though they did not own large numbers of slaves, they supported the institution of slavery.

The fact that they supported the institution of slavery was in itself contradictory, for as Anne Loveland points out, evangelicals as a whole supported the institution of slavery, not in theory, but as it existed in the South. Their feeling was that slavery was not a good thing, but was at least the best thing for blacks in this country. In other words, slavery in was not necessarily evil, but it was not really a good institution. However, they felt, as it existed in the South, it had a great benefit to the blacks who were enslaved.

Basil Manly, Sr., a Southern Baptist minister who served as the President of the University of Alabama for eighteen years, was a slave owner and supported the concept of

9 Ibid., 18.
10 Ibid., 178.
11 As an illustration of the economic status of many Baptist ministers, one Missionary reported to the Board of Domestic Missions in 1846 that many of the ministers in the state in which he served did not even own a Bible. According to the report of the Board to the Convention, destitution was common throughout the states without fail. “Second Annual Report of the Board of Domestic Missions,” Proceedings of the Southern Baptist Convention (1846), 29.
12 Loveland, Southern Evangelicals in the Social Order, 208.
slavery. His own feeling was that slavery had been useful to introduce Christianity to blacks.\textsuperscript{13} According to Loveland, Manly’s son, Basil Manly, Jr., believed that while it was not in itself a sin to own a slave, it was an evil, primarily because of the tendency toward abuse. He felt it would be a good thing to abolish slavery by peaceable means.\textsuperscript{14} J. B. Jeter, another Baptist pastor in the South, tended to agree with the elder Manly. Jeter’s life was chronicled by William E. Hatcher, who recorded after the emancipation of the slaves that

…I can say in truth that when the shackles of bondage were broken and the slaves were suddenly transformed into freedmen, they were a Christianized race. When they came to the American shores they were heathen of the lowest type — superstitious and besotted; but when by the violence of the way they were suddenly emancipated, very many of them were Christians. They may have carried out with them the many marks of servility, but they took with them also their religious knowledge and faith the unmistakable evidences of the fidelity and zeal of the Christian people of the South. Many of them were church members, and not a few of them well versed in the doctrines of Christ and able to teach others.\textsuperscript{15}

J. B. Gambrell, whose family had owned slaves prior to the Civil War, also had a favorable view of the way Southern Baptists had impacted the souls of the slaves. Gambrell was born on August 21, 1841, in Anderson County, South Carolina. He had served in the Civil War as a scout for Robert E. Lee and had served in Gettysburg. After the war, he served as a pastor and then as editor of the paper, The Baptist Record. In 1893 Gambrell was elected President of Mercer University. Near the beginning of the twentieth century, he looked back in reflection at the Civil War years and the treatment of slaves. He expressed that “slavery on the whole had not degraded the Negroes, but elevated them.” He indicated that blacks had been in tutelage as minor


\textsuperscript{14} Loveland, Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 212.

children were. “The Negroes in the tutelage of slavery learned the language, the religion and arts of the foremost people on earth.”\textsuperscript{16}

Such feelings were not universal, however. Many slave owners in the south had resisted attempts to evangelize the slaves. As early as 1660, the British Crown issued a mandate to Christianize the slaves. Contrary to the king’s wishes, many planters were reluctant to do so for a variety of reasons. Many feared that baptism would emancipate the slaves. Others were unwilling to invest the time necessary for the catechism of the slaves. Still others felt blacks were incapable of receiving religious instruction.\textsuperscript{17}

**Southern Baptists and Black Church Members**

Even prior to the beginning of the denomination, Baptists in the South expressed a desire to introduce blacks to Christianity. In 1801, the Charleston Association petitioned the legislature for an amendment of the law passed the previous year, which imposed a restriction on blacks conducting religious meetings. The petition was renewed again the next year, as well.\textsuperscript{18} The law had been passed in response to a planned slave insurrection in Richmond, Virginia. This event, referred to as Gabriel’s Rebellion, was orchestrated in part by a preacher known as Martin, a brother of Gabriel. Martin used the Bible to encourage others in the planned rebellion, claiming that their plan would succeed even against superior numbers. He contended that their cause was similar to that of the Israelites and that they would be victorious.\textsuperscript{19} In spite of this, there was an earnest desire on the part of some whites to allow black Baptists to worship.

There were some black churches in the antebellum South. However, during this same time, there were many black members in white churches, with the earliest references being 1787. When the Old Waterlick Church was organized in Virginia, two of the nineteen charter members


\textsuperscript{18} Wood Furman, *A History of the Charleston Association of Baptist Churches in the State of South Carolina: With an appendices containing the principal circular letters to the churches* (Charleston: J. Hoff, 1811), 29.

\textsuperscript{19} Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 147.
were “Negro Joseph and Negro Jenny.” That number had increased to four the following month.\textsuperscript{20}

Since black and white members attended church together, it presented questions with which other organizations did not have to deal. For instance, at the Providence Church in Boone’s Creek Association in Kentucky, the question was raised in May 1802, as to whether black members “shall preach without the approbation of the church.” In July of that year, the answer was given, “We are of the opinion that the church has no right to approbate a slave as a preacher without the consent of their owner.”\textsuperscript{21} It is not clear whether the owner of the slave in question was a member of the church.

As Baptists in the South struggled to identify themselves as separate from the Baptists in the North, they also dealt with difficult social issues. As many of the local churches encountered situations that were new to them, they turned to other Baptists for counsel and guidance. While the ruling of an association would not have been binding on any local church, some apparently found it comforting to have someone else at whose feet they could lay a potentially unpopular answer. In 1806, the Broad River Baptist Association (South Carolina) received a question from Smyrna Church as to whether “it is expedient to retain in fellowship, persons of color, (such as negroes, &c.) though free, who shall marry with the whites? Answered in the negative.”\textsuperscript{22}

Most of the accounts in church and associational minutes simply record the reception of new members, including blacks. In the period prior to the Civil War, many churches recorded the addition of black members. The two primary ways by which one could be received as a member of a Baptist church was either by professing to have a conversion experience, referred in minutes during the 1800s as being by “experience,” meaning that they had experienced salvation, or upon receipt of a letter from another Baptist church indicating that they were a member in

\textsuperscript{20} Old Waterlick Church Minute Book (Shenandoah County, Virginia, organized April 15, 1787), 5, 8.


\textsuperscript{22} Minutes of Broad River Baptist Association (South Carolina, 1806), 2.
good standing at that church. Rarely was there controversy surrounding the admission of a new member, but a few incidents do stand out in the records.  

The Providence Church in March 1821, received a black man into its membership by experience against the judgment of the pastor, Elder Robert Elkin. The question was brought before the church again in August and Elder Elkin gave the church his reasons for not receiving the man, whose name was Warrick. Whatever reasons the pastor gave, the church did not feel they were sufficient to exclude Warrick from membership. Even though Elkin had served as pastor of the church for forty-two years, he was not mentioned in the records again. He died a few months after this. While it is possible that the heartbreak he felt over the church failing to follow his leadership may have contributed to his death, it is equally possible that he had been in failing health and it contributed to a lapse in judgment. Probably due to an oversight, his death was not noted by the church in its records until December 1889.

It was common practice that when a slave joined, they were referred to as “Brother—” or “Sister—” followed by their owner’s name. For example, the Enon Baptist Church of Christ (now the First Baptist Church of Huntsville, Alabama) dismissed “Br. and Sister Ben and Peg belonging to William Hannaday” on May 1, 1816. On February 3, 1830, they “received a black woman (Franky) a servant of E. Eastland by Experience. Received by Experience a black man (Charles) a servant of Major Joseph Eastland.” After the Mt. Moriah Fellowship Baptist Church was constituted in Wilcox County, Alabama, it “opened the doors of the church for the reception of members and Received by Experience Sister Phebe [sic] a colored woman the property of Garland Burt.” This church followed this system until 1840, at which time a couple of entries add “property of…” A few entries have the name followed by “a colored boy” or “a colored girl.” These apparently referred to children. Listed among the charter membership of

23 Torbet, A History of the Baptists, 222.
25 Minutes of the Enon Baptist Church of Christ (the present First Baptist Church), Huntsville, Alabama.
this church were two black members, listed ninth and tenth. They were simply listed as “Sawney a col. man” and “Phebe a col. woman.”

In addition to joining the church by experience, a member could transfer their membership from one church to another. This was normally done by coming before the church and requesting to affiliate with the new church. The church clerk would be furnished with the name of the church that currently held the person’s membership and that church would be written, asking if the person was a member in good standing and, if so, to furnish a letter in that regard. While this is currently done using preprinted form letters and is a matter of routine, in the 1800s it was taken very seriously. This was not just an administrative matter; it was a doctrinal issue, also. Most Baptist churches had adopted the practice of closed communion by the early 1800s and it was necessary to insure that only those in good fellowship with a like-minded church were accepted for membership.

In 1841, a black man named Adam applied for membership in the Antioch Baptist Church in Lafayette, Alabama. His initial application was impressive: he knew the name of the pastor who baptized him, as well as all of the deacons, naming them all. However, he stated that he was sold into Georgia and did not get a letter of dismissal and professed not to know why subsequent appeals for a letter were not granted. The church then moved to write the church in North Carolina to learn the full story. The results of the inquiry were not favorable:

1st, it is believed he was excluded some years before he was removed; 2nd he passed as a conjurer among other negroes for which he was tried, found guilty, and publicly whipped. 3rd, he was charged of giving poison to some of his fellow servants, which terminated in their death. 4th he was sold and removed from the country in consequences of his wicked and dangerous habits. The church after

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26 Minutes of the Mt. Moriah Fellowship Baptist Church (Wilcox County, Alabama, May 3, 1828).

27 W. Wiley Richards, Winds of Doctrines: The Origin and Development of Southern Baptist Theology (New York: University Press of America, 1991), 65-71. Closed communion is the practice that only members of that local church congregation would be allowed to participate in the Lord’s Supper, one of the ordinances of the Baptist church.
hearing the letter determined to have nothing to do with [Adam] in a Religious point of view.\textsuperscript{28}

In addition to receiving members, the church also had the task of disciplining its members. Christine Heyrman concludes that white men were more likely than others to be cited for breaches of church discipline, and that they were least likely to submit to the public repentance that might restore them to church fellowship.\textsuperscript{29} She seems to presume that this is because, as masters, it would be perceived as exhibiting weakness before the slaves who might be present at a worship service. On the other hand, slaves and women would have willingly submitted in subservience to maintain their status which had been dictated to them by a white, male-dominated society. At the Mt. Moriah Fellowship Baptist Church, one of the black members, Sawney, was eventually excluded for adultery. The issue first came before the church on June 6, 1829. He was charged with “casual communication with a [sic] other woman not his wife.” It was held in abeyance until the next conference. When the next church conference\textsuperscript{30} was held on July 4 of that same year, Brother Sawney was not present and it was held over for another month. They excluded him from the fellowship of the church on August 1, but voted to reconsider his case in September. Apparently, Sawney was unable to be present for some time, as it was “laid over” each month until December. On March 6, 1830, however, he was restored to full fellowship.\textsuperscript{31}

The Baptist Church at Springhill, Moreengo County, Alabama, dealt with its white members for immoral behavior, as well. In June 1841, the church considered the case of Brother John M. Lanear. A committee appointed to examine the case reported that Lanear had been

\textsuperscript{28} Minutes of the Antioch Baptist Church, Lafayette, Alabama. November 27, 1841.


\textsuperscript{30} A church conference was the regular monthly business meeting during which the men of the church conducted the business of the congregation. They voted on any issues which needed to be brought to the attention of the church, including matters of church discipline, administration, as well as the reception and dismissing of members.

\textsuperscript{31} Minutes of the Mt. Moriah Fellowship Church, Wilcox County, Alabama. 1829-1830.
involved with “Mr. William Chaney’s black woman,” the church was convinced of the facts of the accusation and unanimously excommunicated Lanear from the fellowship of the church.\(^{32}\)

By 1845, the church at Springhill had a regular conference for black members. It is not clear whether this was a conference which dealt with matters pertaining to black members, but overseen by the white members, or whether it was simply supervised by the white leadership, but allowing the black members to administer their own church discipline. In all probability, the former was the case, especially in light of how many of the whites in that day perceived blacks.

During the June 1845 conference, the addition of new members led to a revision of the list of black members. One of the additions that month was Julius, servant of Dr. G. G. Griffin. Apparently, Julius conveyed information that two of Dr. Griffin’s other servants, Toby and Lavinia, were “living in gross violation of the laws of God.”\(^{33}\) Brother Palmer was requested to inquire into the matter and report to the next Conference for Coloured Brethren. The conference took up several other disciplinary matters, as well. Specifically, Andres, another servant of Dr. Griffin, was excluded for committing a theft, and “Sam, a servant of H. A. Taylor was excluded for running away from his God and Master.” Also, a servant of William A. Glover was said to be living a disorderly lifestyle. Brother Rud was appointed to inquire into this case and report back to the next Conference for Coloured Members.\(^{34}\)

According to church records, it does not appear that blacks were punished more harshly than whites in administering church discipline, except in the case mentioned before, where the slave named Adam was whipped after being tried for being a conjurer. In all probability, he was

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\(^{32}\) *Minutes of the Baptist Church at Springhill, Morengo County, Alabama. June 1841.* Having been removed from the fellowship of the Church, Lanear essentially lost his membership in the church. If he decided to join another church, he would have either presented himself as an unbeliever and join the church by “experience,” or he could have stated that he was a member of good standing at another church. The clerk of the church he was joining would have written a letter to his previous church to verify this. His former church would have voted on whether or not he should be granted a letter stating that he was in proper fellowship with them. In his case, the letter would probably have stated that he had been excommunicated. However, if he desired to reunite with his former congregation, he would have presented himself before the church and confessed his sins and asked the church’s forgiveness. Upon doing so, the members of the church would have voted on whether or not to restore him to membership of the church.

\(^{33}\) The interesting thing about this case is that slave marriages were not legal at the time. In spite of this, it appears that the church held them to a high moral code, regardless.

\(^{34}\) *Minutes of the Baptist Church at Springhill, Morengo County, Alabama. June 1845.*
not whipped by the church, but would have been tried and whipped by his owner. Most churches simply excluded a member from the fellowship of the church for violation of Christian standards.

In matters of church discipline, sometimes black members sought redress against their masters for behavior against them. Religion Professor Albert Raboteau recounts an instance where a slave, Nancy, charged her master and his wife for mistreatment. This was done by utilizing a white spokesperson to present her case before the Baptist church. In all likelihood, this member would have been sympathetic to the cause of the woman for him to be willing to bring her case before the church. While the church did not dismiss her accusations out of hand, all parties were given an opportunity to present their arguments. The church ultimately dismissed the charges against the white slave owners and dismissed Nancy from membership in the church, but it is interesting to note that she was at least willing to bring her cause before the church. She would have been aware that the church had no authority to take legal action against them, but she no doubt hoped that the membership could exert enough pressure on the white members to change their behavior.\(^\text{35}\)

Not all that was conducted by the conference for blacks dealt with church discipline. Other administrative matters were handled, as well. In May 1846, the Conference for the Coloured Brethren opened at the Springhill Church for the reception of members. It was reported that Louisa, a servant of B. N. Glover, presented herself for church membership, but was unable to procure a letter from her former church. She reported that she was a member of a church in Sumter County, but was taken by the Sheriff and sold under circumstances that prevented her from obtaining a letter. The conference determined to make an effort to get a letter of dismissal for her. It is not mentioned later, so we cannot know the outcome of this case.\(^\text{36}\)

Another item that came before the church at Springhill was a request from some of the black members for permission to preach. Credentials would have been necessary for this. While no formal education was required, much attention was given to moral character of the applicants. In December 1853, the motion was made by one member to postpone the request until a later date. Two other members were requested to inquire into the Christian character and influence of

\(^{35}\text{Raboteau, Slave Religion, 182.}\)

\(^{36}\text{Minutes of the Baptist Church at Springhill (Marengo County, Alabama) December 31, 1853 and June 3, 1854.}\)
Related to the black conferences in the churches was the subject of blacks worshipping, whether with whites or in a separate service. In the June 1845 meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, a report from the Committee on the Instruction of the Colored Population noted that most churches had begun conducting “one sermon for Colored each Sunday. Oral Sabbath Schools were being held in many places with happy effect.” Also, black deacons were appointed to oversee their own.38

In 1828, the Alabama Association actually became a slave owner. Caesar McLemore, a slave, was recognized as a preacher with great ability. The association wished to employ him as a preacher to preach and work among blacks. State laws would not permit this, so the association purchased him and a committee was formed to supervise his work and ministry. McLemore served as a missionary of the association. According to associational minutes, his preaching was well-received by both blacks and whites.39

The church at Springhill began having a separate service for blacks in 1846. In their June conference, it was “considered expedient and proper that the sermon to the Black’s [sic] be delivered within a short time after the morning service.”40 Not every church followed this practice, however. Several churches had blacks join the white service but sit in a separate place. Many sat in the back of the church; some churches even had a separate balcony for blacks. In fact, it was not uncommon to find a church with three distinct sections: the white men sat in one area, white women sat in another, and blacks sat in still another.41 During the Civil War, the Antioch Baptist Church in Lafayette, Alabama, voted to “reserve five benches across the front

37 Ibid.

38 Proceedings of the First Triennial Meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention (Richmond, June 12-15, 1845), 16.


40 Minutes of the Baptist Church at Springhill, Marengo County, Alabama, June 6, 1846.

for the use of the black people and the Deacons to attend to it and see that they are properly seated.”

Though many blacks joined Baptist churches, did they also completely accept the teachings of the white religion? The answer seems to be varied according to several factors. Many blacks recognized the hypocrisy of many whites and the inconsistency of teachings of Christianity and the institution of slavery. Many hoped for a reversal of circumstances in the afterlife, while others believed their masters would never experience the same eternal bliss of which the ministers spoke. Some of the slaves felt that the guilt of the masters was far greater than that of the slaves. Others, however, fully embraced the teachings of Christianity and used this as an opportunity to rise above their own mistreatment and forgive those who abused or mistreated them. Others inwardly rejected the religion of white people and demonstrated this by joining churches other than that of their masters. The response of blacks to the gospel message was as diverse as the experiences of the people themselves.

Evangelization among blacks was something that was always of great concern to the denomination, not just in the established churches, but in pioneer areas, as well. At the time of its organization, blacks accounted for approximately one third of the membership. By 1849, it was estimated that half of the 400,000 Southern Baptists were black. Because the evangelization of blacks was delegated to the Board of Domestic Missions, there were reports from missionaries in the field.

In 1846, one missionary from East Florida indicated that “the Baptists in this part of the state are very poor—most of them are blacks. The section of country that trusts to my labors as a Baptist minister is 81 miles long and 20 wide.” There was not only a tremendous amount of territory to be covered, there were millions of people to be reached, as well. In 1849, the Board of Domestic Missions reported that the population in the southern states was nearly ten million,

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42 Minutes of the Antioch Baptist Church (Lafayette, Alabama, November 15, 1862).

43 Raboteau, Slave Religion, 290-297.


“more than three million of whom are slaves, who are wholly dependent upon those within the field for the means of grace.”

Each year following, there was the usual report of concern and attempts to find the best way to evangelize the slaves. However, a change occurred in 1857.

In that year, the report stated that a few missionaries devoted a greater part of their time to reaching blacks, but there were “a number of very large plantations, with thousands of slaves upon them, who are inclined to follow Christ in his ordinances as he has appointed.” The missionaries then made an appeal for a missionary to work in the area around the Combahee River. This was approved and was actually the first Baptist work in this area of South Carolina. The first baptisms performed by this missionary were black converts who were baptized in the river.

The 1859 report on the work among blacks indicated that there was far greater work to be done with meager resources. There simply were too few missionaries to evangelize the largely unreached slave population. According to the 1860 report, several congregations had been formed and were led by a black preacher. These congregations were allowed to meet as long as they had the presence of at least one white man who oversaw the meeting. In 1861, the Board indicated that it had secured the means to send a man to Louisiana to begin new work. “Application is now before the Board to furnish a man to preach to the families of three wealthy planters, on the shore of Louisiana—the proprietors offering to pay $1000 per annum for his services, furnishing him a house to live in, a horse to ride on, and other conveniences.” This individual was to begin his work on the plantations with his efforts given to the plantation owners’ families, as well as the slaves on their plantations.

One other effort of Southern Baptists with regard to blacks involved foreign mission work. When the convention formed in 1845, a plea was made for blacks who would be willing to support missionary work in Africa. Missionary work had begun in Africa in 1821 under the

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46 Ibid., 39.

47 Ibid., 355.


efforts of a former slave, Lott Carey. Carey had been born into slavery in 1780 in Virginia to devout Baptists. He converted to Christianity in 1807 and joined the white First Baptist Church of Richmond. He developed a strong missionary zeal and a desire to bring spiritual freedom to the land of his ancestors. A young white man taught him to read the New Testament and he was soon licensed to preach. Working hard for several years, Carey was allowed to gather up bits of tobacco from the floor of the warehouse where he worked. He was eventually able to save the $850 necessary to purchase his own freedom, as well as that of his children. His wife had already died, but in 1813, Carey found himself a free man. In 1815, he helped found the African Missionary Society in Richmond.

Liberia, literally “land of the free,” was formed in 1820 by free blacks from the United States. Initially, a group of eighty six immigrants established a settlement in Christopolis, now Monrovia, named in honor of U. S. President James Monroe. This effort was undertaken by the American Colonization Society (ACS), an organization of white clergymen, abolitionists, and slave owners. The ACS resettled approximately 10,000 free blacks from the United States and many thousands of Africans who were rescued from slave ships. Many felt the ACS was a racist organization, trying to rid North America of free blacks. Some southerners who were fearful of a revolt by free blacks supported the ACS. Northerners also supported the ACS, afraid that the influx of blacks into the North would hurt the economic opportunities of indigent whites. Others pointed to the organization’s benevolent origins and its later takeover by men who had

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50 Lott Carey’s name has been spelled “Carey” in most books, but is occasionally found as “Cary.” For the same of simplicity, the spelling contained in this dissertation will be “Carey.”


visions of an American empire in Africa. The ACS closely controlled the development of Liberia until 1847 when it was declared an independent republic.\(^{53}\)

The back-to-Africa movement instilled in Lott Carey and others a desire to conduct missionary work among those in the new African colony. Carey established the First Baptist Church in Monrovia, the capital of Liberia.\(^{54}\) His contributions were acknowledged by the Southern Baptist Convention, along with a recognition that in the two and a half decades since, hundreds of blacks had returned to Africa and permanently settled there. It was stated at the first meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention that if Southern Baptists would engage in supporting the Christianization of that region that the blacks who had journeyed there:

…will gladly cooperate with the Board of this Convention, and particularly with the fast members of their colored brethren in the southern States, in spreading the gospel over that benighted country. And whether we view this great subject in the light of simply sending the gospel to the heathen, or in the light of repairing the wrongs of oppressed Africa, or in the light of employing and benefiting in our own country the piety and zeal of probably one hundred and fifty thousand cold-hearted Baptists in our own country, your committee cannot but earnestly urge that our enquiries, our prayers, and our efforts, may be energetically employed in this behalf. Experience has demonstrated, that missionaries from the North cannot hope to be permanently useful in a sultry African climate, while such men as Lott Carey have settled and labored there without even suffering from an acclimating sickness, and your committee deem it of the first importance that colored missionaries should be sought and called out from our southern churches to be employed in our African Mission.\(^{55}\)

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\(^{55}\) *Proceedings of the 1st Triennial meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention held in Richmond, Virginia* (June 11-15, 1845), 11.
White missionaries from the North had undertaken missionary work in Liberia, but found the fevers too rigorous for their health. Calvin Holton joined the black missionaries in Liberia in 1824 and there were good relations between the Negro Baptist Mission and the white Baptists, but the white missionaries were susceptible to fevers and were unable to remain in the field very long.\textsuperscript{56}

Southern Baptists were prone to support the back to Africa movement, as they, like other evangelicals in the South, saw this as a feasible means of eliminating slavery. Many of the prominent Southern Baptists already cited in this work had expressed their reluctance to simply free blacks in this country. Their feeling was that it was unlikely that the two races could learn to live together as free peoples.\textsuperscript{57} Others simply felt this was an opportunity for blacks who desired to return to Africa to do so. This would allow them an opportunity to escape the restrictions imposed upon them by whites, as well as improve their own condition by enjoying the rights of free men.\textsuperscript{58}

**Education of Blacks by Southern Baptists**

Part of Christian development was training new Christians as to how its members should live their lives. The white churches would have been very interested in the education of its black members for several reasons. First, if they were going to be part of the fellowship of the church, they needed to understand the church’s expectations of their conduct. They needed to be aware of which moral behaviors were acceptable and which were not allowed.

Second, it was believed that if they learned Christian values, they would function better as slaves. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul wrote the letter to Philemon to deal with the specific issue of a runaway slave. Onesimus was a slave who had run away from his Christian owner, Philemon. Onesimus had come in contact with Paul and had been converted at some point. Paul was able to convince Onesimus to return to his master, even though under Roman law, Philemon could have him put to death. Paul wrote the epistle to try to convince Philemon to

\textsuperscript{56} Torbet, *A History of the Baptists*, 332 ff.

\textsuperscript{57} Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order*, 213.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 214.
receive Onesimus back without punishment. Paul hoped that Philemon would receive him as a brother, even if he retained the slave/owner relationship.⁵⁹

This epistle had been regularly used to demonstrate the New Testament’s support for the institution of slavery. It was argued that since Paul did not direct Philemon to free Onesimus since he was now a Christian that Paul was in favor of maintaining the practice of slavery. White Christians would have argued that freeing slaves upon their conversion would have prompted mass “conversions” among the slaves in order to secure their freedom without the experience being a genuine change of heart.

If white members were going to instruct black members, some sort of curriculum needed to be designed. The earliest seems to be one written by Elder Edmund Botsford, an early Baptist pioneer. Botsford was born in England in 1745 and after a troubled early life, travelled to Charleston, South Carolina. At the age of twenty, influenced by the preaching of a Reverend Hart, Botsford was converted and soon after began to preach. He travelled to Georgia in 1771 and began preaching there. He left Georgia in 1779 during the Revolutionary War and wandered with his wife and family until finally settling in Georgetown, South Carolina, as pastor of a church there.⁶⁰ In 1808, he published a tract called “Sambo and Toney.” It was a small work written in dialogue form for the instruction of blacks. This was the earliest tract produced by Baptists for this purpose.

Even though by the 1840s it had become illegal to educate slaves in the South, many southerners not only allowed the practice to occur, some educated enslaved blacks openly. Others were more discreet. Some schools for free blacks existed, though these were not widespread. Other blacks attended white schools. Even more blacks were educated by their owners.⁶¹ Southern Baptists made the conscious decision to engage in the education of blacks, as well. It would certainly have been overseen by the white leadership of the church, and it would technically be for their religious instruction. In fact, the religious instruction of blacks


⁶¹ Franklin and Moss, From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans, 137.
was one of the first items taken up after the formation of the denomination. This task was given specifically to the Board of Domestic Missions.\textsuperscript{62}

In 1846, the convention modified the instruction to comply with the laws of the various states. Many states had made it illegal to teach blacks to read, so the convention voted to conduct oral Sabbath schools, with “instruction adapted to the capacity of their minds. For this purpose the simpler the course the better. A series of cards for the instruction of colored persons, published by the Southern Baptist Publication Society, are highly recommended by those that have used them.”\textsuperscript{63} One such tool that was used for oral instruction was produced by E. T. Winkler. It was a three-fold flier and covered many of the basics of instruction, such as the Ten Commandments, some of the basic tenets of Christianity and also contained songs and Scripture texts.\textsuperscript{64}

The issue of the instruction of enslaved blacks was not only addressed at the national level; some churches noted the need for the spiritual development of their black members, as well. In 1847, the Springhill Church adopted a resolution in favor of a catechism for black members.

The following Preamble and Resolution were offered by Brother L. Norwood and unanimously adopted viz. Whereas this Church has seen with regret the great want of a better state of morals amongst our Blacks; and the importance of some steps for the improvement of the same, and whereas; the Baptist Convention of this State has made arrangements for the publication of a catechism to be used orally in instructing the Blacks in the Doctrines and truths of the Christian Religion, and whereas; it is believed that if proper measures are adopted by the Churches to carry out the objects of the Convention, that great gain will result therefrom [sic], both to the servant and master; therefore be it resolved, that this Church will (owners consenting and making suitable preparations) either on their

\textsuperscript{62} Proceedings of the Southern Baptist Convention, Held in August, Georgia, May 8-12, 1845 (Richmond: H. K. Ellyon, Printers, 1845), 15.

\textsuperscript{63} Proceedings, Second Annual Meeting, (1846), 39.

\textsuperscript{64} E. T. Winkler, Notes and Questions for the Oral Instruction of Colored People with Appropriate Texts and Hymns (1857).
farms or elsewhere) take such steps as will carry out the objects of the Convention, by appointing one or more of its members to meet the Blacks at such places as shall have been provided for them and instruct them in the great fundamental truths and principles of the Gospel.\textsuperscript{65}

The resolution reflected several realities. First, whites had an obligation to instruct all of its members, regardless of color or gender. Second, it was an endeavor that needed to be overseen by the church. Third, even though the church voted to undertake such an enterprise, it could not be done without the consent and cooperation of the owners. In fact, it placed a responsibility on the owners to make a suitable place to conduct this instruction.

It would have been necessary for the owners to provide a suitable location for several reasons. First, it is assumed that this instruction would need to be conducted after the end of the work day. It is unlikely that most people would have looked with favor on slaves traveling after dark to assemble in the church building, even for the purpose of instruction. Further, it is unlikely that slaves would have been willing to give up any of their leisure time, limited as it was, to travel to the church building for instruction. If the facilities were on the farm, however, they would be more likely to attend. Also, there were usually restrictions against large numbers of slaves gathering together. However, since there would have been fewer numbers present on the farms, the gathering would not be a problem. In addition, if they met at a meeting house, there would have been fewer whites involved in teaching blacks. On the other hand, if the individual owners were involved, they would have been well aware of the progress made by their slaves, as well as actively involved in supervising their gatherings. White Southern Baptists deemed the Christian development of blacks essential.

As the southern states were discussing secession from the Union, one Southern Baptist pastor, John A. Broadus, reflected upon the treatment that southerners had given the slaves. He recorded his thoughts in a letter to a friend two days before the Secession Convention met in 1860,

Moreover, I believe I see in all this the end of slavery. I believe we are cutting its throat, curtailing its domain. And I have been, and am, an ultra pro-slavery man.

Yet I bow to what God will do. I feel that our sins as to this institution have

\textsuperscript{65} Minutes of the Baptist Church at Springhill, Morengo County, Alabama (May 1, 1847).
cursed us – that the negroes have not been cared for in their marital and religious
relations as they should be; and I fear God is going to sweep it away, after having
left it thus long to show us how great we might be, were we to act as we ought in
this matter.\textsuperscript{66}

\textsuperscript{66} John A. Broadus, \textit{Memoirs}, 185.
CHAPTER 3
SOUTHERN BAPTISTS AND BLACKS AFTER THE CIVIL WAR

After the Civil War ended, the entire denomination of Southern Baptists underwent a transformation. Southerners found themselves without a nation and uncertainty lay in the days ahead. During the war, as Union troops moved through the southlands, they destroyed numerous Baptist churches. All of the churches were destroyed in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, Knoxville, Tennessee, and Fredericksburg, Maryland. At least twenty-six Baptist churches were destroyed in Virginia. Other church buildings were commandeered by Federal troops to be used as hospitals, barracks, and even stables. The congregations who met in these buildings were displaced or scattered. Also, as Union forces moved through an area, blacks were liberated. While many white Baptists fled the areas, many freed blacks moved to areas such as Nashville, Tennessee. R. B. C. Howell had been the most senior Baptist clergyman in Nashville and was jailed for two months for refusing to take the required loyalty oath. The black portion of his congregation continued to meet in an independent building and this population soon doubled in numbers. After the fighting ended, the former slaves finished a new building and quickly grew a congregation of nearly 1,500 members, while the white congregation experienced financial difficulty.¹

Baptists all over the South experienced similar struggles. Even if they still had a building in which to worship, many of them faced financial hardships. They also had the challenge of relating to their black counterparts. After the slaves had been freed, many white Baptists were unprepared to deal with the new relationship with their church brethren. Did this mean that freed blacks had a new status within the church, or would business continue as it had before? This was something to be decided by each local congregation.

As the slaves were emancipated, some slave owners felt a sense of relief. J. B. Gambrell recalled his mother’s reaction when the war ended and the slaves were freed. Her feelings were

that the whites were free, as well. He remembered his mother sitting serenely with her hands
folded saying, “Thank God I am free at last!” He stated that no Negro on the place had worked
harder than she, and that her entire life had been given to planning for them, overseeing them,
training them, caring for their sick and carrying a burden for their souls. She felt that all of the
weight of responsibility for them had now been lifted from her shoulders. Many whites felt that
the responsibility they had toward their slaves had now been taken from them. However, they
failed to accept that while they no longer served as their masters, they still, for a time, had
responsibility for their well-being.

Gambrell felt that the changes in the South after emancipation were softened by a sense
of spiritual revival in the southern states. He recorded that his own church in Mississippi had
been destroyed during the war and that, even though the people were in poverty, the first thing
they did was to rebuild the church. He indicated that this was commonly done throughout the
South and that the revivals which swept through had softened his own heart toward the war and
those who “had acted unworthily after the war.”

Some white members simply wished to maintain the status quo, while others were
actually hostile to blacks. The treatment of blacks in the churches reflected their treatment in the
secular world. In some instances blacks were treated decently by their Christian brothers, but in
others, whites seemed to find the church one more place where they could express their anger
against blacks and even spiritualize it.

**Retaining Black Church Members**

After the war was over and blacks emancipated, it became evident that churches would
have to identify them differently. Previously, as it has already been noted, slaves had been
identified by a first name and then described as either “the property of…” or a “servant” of a
specific individual. Since they were no longer personal property, churches needed to find a new
description.

The earliest change in description came from the Antioch Baptist Church in Lafayette,
Alabama. The last record of someone being referred to as property was in August 26, 1865. On
that date, the church opened the doors for the reception of members and received by experience,

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2 Routh, *The Life Story of Dr. J. B. Gambrell*, 16.

3 Ibid., 24.
Frances, the property of Benjamin Blasingame. The next record in the minutes is on November 25, 1865, when “a letter of dismission was granted to Easter a couloured [sic] sister formerly the property of Br. Wm. S. Johnson. Also to Eliza formerly the property of Bro. Thos. L. Christian.” On January 27 of the following year, a “letter of dismission was granted Martha former slave 4 of Sister Mary J. Hale.” 5 The Mt. Moriah Fellowship Baptist Church began substituting either “colored person” or “colored member” for the term “property of” which had been formerly used.6

Black members continued to attend the Baptist Church at Springhill for some time after the Civil War. In 1867, Coloured Brother Nicholas Emerson (commonly called “Nick Curtis”) came before the church, and was examined in reference to his ordination to the ministry as to his Christian Experience, call to the ministry and doctrinal view on which examination proving satisfactory to the Presbytery & Church Elders E. G. Baptist and W. G. Parker proceeded to ordain the brother to the work of the Gospel Ministry by the laying on of their hands & prayer in which ordaining prayer Elder W. G. Parker led the Presbytery.7

After his ordination, the newly ordained minister was tasked with visiting “Charles Horton (colored)” and instructing him to present himself before the church at their next meeting and “give an account of his irregular & unauthorized course in preaching & baptizing without credentials.” 8 Horton did apparently appear and was excluded at the November 1867 meeting.9

By this time, blacks in many of the churches had assumed last names, since both of these brethren were referred to by first and last names. At the Antioch Baptist Church, members were referred to by first and last names, followed by “colored” in parenthesis to distinguish them as

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4 In all of the church minutes consulted, this is the only use of the word “slave.”

5 Minutes of the Antioch Baptist Church, 1865.

6 Minutes of the Mt. Moriah Fellowship Baptist Church, September 2, 1865 and May 19, 1866.

7 Minutes of the Baptist Church at Springhill (Marengo County, Alabama) October 1867.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid., November 1867.
black members. “Conference for the blacks opened the door of the church for the reception of members and received by experience Mary Spratlin (colored)…Brother Tom Callaway (colored) stated that Harriette Wilkerson (colored) was guilty of fornication. After investigation the church unanimously withdrew from said Harriette.”

It was not long before Southern Baptist churches began experiencing difficulty keeping their black membership. In the Georgia Baptist Convention, churches reported their membership numbers to the associations and the associations forwarded the total numbers of white members and black members to the state convention. In the first few years immediately following the Civil War, membership numbers remained steady. However, by 1870, numbers of black members began to steadily decline. By 1895, the number of black members in Georgia Baptist churches had reached zero. Much of this is the result of blacks forming their own churches and associations.

At their annual meeting a year after the war was over the Alabama Baptist State Convention decided to address the issue of the relationship that whites were to have with blacks. The tone taken indicates a genuine concern for their brethren, while still taking a condescending view of them.

The anomalous condition of the colored people presents questions, as to their future history, of the most serious importance. Suddenly released from the bonds of slavery, they were as suddenly deprived of its blessings…. And now, that the institution of slavery has been abolished, the question of duty to them, as freedmen, naturally presents itself. Shall we abandon them to the inevitable fate of the masses, if uncared for by the white man—indolence, superstition, and the rapid return to barbarism—or shall [we] leave them to the teachings of others?

In all probability, the “others” to whom they referred were missionaries from the American Baptist Home Mission Society. The society had sent missionaries even prior to the war to work and had remained in the South throughout the fighting. Their presence was not desired by

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10 Minutes of the Antioch Baptist Church, 1867.

11 Minutes, Georgia Baptist Convention, 1866-1895 (Atlanta: Franklin Steam Printing House).

12 Minutes of the Forty-fourth Annual Session of the Alabama Baptist State Convention, November 9-12, 1866 (Atlanta: Franklin Steam Printing House, 1866), 28.
southerners, as it implied that they were not fulfilling their religious obligations with regard to the former slaves. In fact, some southerners found their presence so detestable that some of the missionaries were targeted by members of the Ku Klux Klan.\textsuperscript{13}

The actions the Alabama Baptists proposed were to (1) increase Sabbath School instruction, especially for the young, (2) conduct day and night schools for general instruction, (3) enlist young ministers to work among them, (4) increase efforts in evangelism, and (5) train and ordain black evangelists.\textsuperscript{14} However well-intentioned these proposals were, apparently many of the black Baptists were not eager to accept the assistance of the white Baptists. Two years later at the Alabama Baptist State Convention, the report of the work with blacks was not encouraging.

Naturally superstitious and credulous, no delusions are too absurd to find entrance into their minds. Indeed, the more absurd and unreasonable the delusion, the more ready the passport to their credulity. In some places the Bible is practically repudiated and denounced as the “white man’s book,” and they have surrendered themselves to the guidance of “prophets” and “prophetesses,” who are leading them into every abominable and revolting idolatry. These deluded “prophets” and “prophetesses” have been known to mock the process of death for particular “sinners,” and then pronounce the sins of the party forgiven, on which they are taken and baptized, and persuaded that they surely will be saved.\textsuperscript{15}

Baptists in Alabama seemed to feel that without adequate white leadership, blacks would be led into every form of deception, including those concerning their salvation. The implication is that it was important to maintain at least some sort of spiritual authority over people who have diminished capacity to find truth for themselves. It was this same year, 1868, that the Damascus Baptist Church in Butler County, Alabama, voted that the “Collored [sic] members of this

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\textsuperscript{13} Harvey, \textit{Redeeming the South}, 49.
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\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Minutes Alabama Baptist State Convention}, 28.
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\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Proceedings of the Forty-sixth Annual Session of the Alabama Baptist State Convention, Held at Marion, Alabama in the Siloam House of Worship, November 6-9, 1868} (Atlanta: Franklin Steam Printing House, 1869), 21.
\end{flushright}
Church…shall continue in the same position and shall never be allowed a vote only on the reception or exclusion of a Colored member.”

Not all churches experienced bitterness between the two groups, but it appears to have been a growing sentiment during the reconstruction years. Several state conventions had attempted to maintain some sort of influence within the black community, but the states met with varied success. In 1877, the Alabama Baptist State Convention reported:

> We are gratified to note some recent changes in the relations of the white and colored races, which once more bring the colored people within our religious influence. The alienation which sundry influences had affected, soon after their emancipation, as we believe is passing away, and the obligation on our part to supply them with religious instruction is asserting itself with some of its wonted power. While they were slaves it was a gratifying fact that a larger proportion of them were professors of Christianity than of any other people to whom we have ever sent the Gospel, so that whatever may be said of the right or wrong of slavery, in itself considered, the final word of history cannot be otherwise than this: that brightest page in the history of the Negro race which has ever been written will be furnished from these Southern States.”

While the various states were trying to identify the best course of action, the convention at the national level was working, as well. In 1869, the Southern Baptist Convention heard a recommendation by the Home Mission Board to attempt to supply theological education to the growing number of black preachers. These efforts were apparently well received, as in the report given in 1870, progress was noted by “churches and individuals who instituted education programs for coloreds.” They also saw a need for biblical materials, especially for black children.

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16 Damascus Baptist Church. *Minutes*, Damascus Baptist Church, Butler County, Alabama, June 20, 1868.


18 *Proceedings of the Southern Baptist Convention* (1869), 20.

One of the challenges associated with Southern Baptist denominational structure was that contributions by churches and individuals were completely voluntary. Thus, when people experienced financial difficulties, contributions dropped. Since most of the South struggled financially during the war years and following, contributions to the denomination were low. This explains the reason for the report in 1871 that stated that the board could not fund the education program and it should be left to individuals and churches. This is a prime example of the old maxim, “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” The denomination may have a desire to be involved in a program, but if it cannot be funded, it does not matter what position the denomination takes.

Even though many black members had begun to form their own churches and conventions at this point, white Southern Baptists wanted to maintain some sort of a relationship with those who had previously worshipped within their walls. That influence, however, appeared to be slipping slowly away. Why would white Southern Baptists have wanted so desperately to maintain a close tie to blacks? There are three possibilities. One is that their motives were pure and they simply wanted to ensure the spiritual health of the people who had been such a vital part of their history. The second possibility is that they wanted to maintain some link with the past. To see the former slaves pass out of their lives permanently was to admit that the South that they knew was gone forever. The third is a desire to control blacks out of anger and resentment. While the white Baptists at the time probably did not even clearly understand their own thoughts and feelings on this issue, in all likelihood, the truth is probably a combination of all three. No person’s motives are always pure, but neither are they completely malicious. Both of those feelings are at opposite ends of the spectrum, with the passing of one’s lifestyle somewhere in the middle.

**Southern Baptist Efforts in Assisting Freedmen**

After the war, Southern Baptist efforts in assisting the freedmen were sorely lacking. This was probably the result of a combination of things. First, a lack of financial stability among Southern Baptists made monetary assistance difficult. Second, Southern Baptists were resistant to cooperative efforts with northern Baptists. Third, Southern Baptists were unsure of whether

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20 *Proceedings*, (1871), 23.
efforts should be undertaken by the state conventions and churches or by the national convention.

Even though Southern Baptists were not among the financial elite in the southern states prior to the Civil War, the financial devastation of the war still had a great impact upon them. The war left the South with a worthless currency, a devastated economy, and a labor system in disarray. The Southern Baptist Convention did not have many foreign missionaries remaining in the mission fields, but there were some. Most of the financial resources that were available to the national headquarters were expended there. This made fewer dollars available to be spent at home. Also, much of the domestic work had been suspended during the war and there was a desire to resume it. The Home Mission Board had retained only thirty-two missionaries, even dropping its work in California.21 Most colleges had closed for the duration and everyone was doing their best simply to survive. This made it virtually impossible to undertake any new work.

At the same time the South was trying to organize its work, the Home Mission Society of New York assigned about one-third of its total mission force to the South and began an aggressive evangelistic, educational work among both black and whites in the South. The Home Mission Board was vocal in resisting their work, but it was powerless to do anything else. The northern society gradually gained some support among the churches and associations in the South, especially being well-received by the black churches. Eventually, the entire convention voted to dismiss the secretary of the Home Mission Board and all of its trustees and reorganize the entity in Atlanta, Georgia, under new leadership.22

The Southern Baptist Convention acknowledged what was being done by the northern missionary society and decided to capitalize on it. In 1867 they resolved:

That this Convention having learned, though informally and unofficially, that the American Baptist Home Mission Society is desirous of aiding the religious instruction of this class of our population (the Negroes), the Domestic Mission Board be directed to make known to that Society our willingness to receive aid in this work, by appropriations made to the Boards of this Convention.23

22 Ibid., 428.
23 Annual, Southern Baptist Convention (1867), 79.
The Convention could not argue with the good work that was being done, especially among blacks in the South. They were willing to oversee the work and allow the society in New York to fund it. The following year, a committee from the Society met with the Convention and offered what was intended to be a resolution of cooperation, friendship, and fellowship. The Convention welcomed the committee and said:

Could the Home Mission Board (the Society), while conforming to its constitutional obligations, render us assistance here, we are sure that much good might be effected so far as this class is concerned…. Conscious of the risk of being misunderstood, and restricted in utterance by the great interests at stake to renew the suggestion made in the concluding report of the Minutes of 1867. The Domestic Mission Board have peculiar advantages for prosecuting this work—experience, proximity to the field, interest in the people, and they are willing to receive aid in its conduct.24

As far as the Southern Baptist Convention was concerned, if northern Baptists would fund the work, Baptists in the South were in a far better position to accomplish the task.

Joint discussions were held over the possibility of cooperating to accomplish these efforts, but eventually they reached an impasse. The Southern Baptist Convention wanted to either appoint the missionaries who would work among blacks, or if not appoint them, at least approve those appointed by the northern society. The society officially replied that they were unwilling to cooperate in this manner. They had an obligation to Christ to send their missionaries to any point without endorsement by the South. Further, if they cooperated in the manner which had been proposed by the Convention, they were afraid that their own financial resources would come to an end, as their supporters would be unwilling to fund the work done in this fashion.25

Since negotiations with the northern society broke off the cooperative effort ended, as well as the opportunity for financial support from Baptists in the North. The Convention decided that since they did not have the financial resources to conduct the work which certainly needed to be done it must fall to the state conventions.26 The state conventions were in agreement that the

24 Ibid., (1868), 20ff.


26 Annual, Southern Baptist Convention, (1871), 23.
work needed to be done, but believed that they did not have the financial resources to pursue it. Most of their efforts were devoted to the restoration of church buildings and felt that such a large undertaking was better done by the national convention. It became a question of whose job it was to work specifically with blacks.

There was some positive work being conducted in the South, especially in the area of education and training. This could be done at the local level and required very little financial investment. A number of “institutes” were established all over the South with the purpose of providing training for black ministers. Some “normal schools” were established in the South, but others focused more on ministerial education and training. At other times, individuals were supported financially as they attended schools across the South.27

Education, which had long been forbidden to blacks in the South, now became a treasured opportunity. Raboteau notes that many slaves had come to view education and the ability to read with a sense of awe that bordered on religious reverence.28 They had resented slaveholders’ bans on reading and now took advantage of the opportunities to seize whatever educational endeavors available to them. William Montgomery points out in Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree: The African-American Church in the South, 1865-1900, that many blacks were reluctant to accept instruction, either religious or otherwise, from white teachers. They saw education as a community institution. They preferred to be taught by people from their own community. As a result, most of the educational efforts were to train primarily ministers.29 These efforts seem to have begun with the training of individuals for the ministry. In 1875 the Southern Baptist Convention reported that:

Appropriations for the board of Emanuel Love at the “Augusta Institute” was continued to the close of the academic year, June 30, 1874 and to Taylor Frierson, at “Leland University, New Orleans, Louisiana, to the same period. Total amount expended, $43.30. These funds had been donated for this special project, and we regret the amount was so small. It is to be hoped that this worthy objet [sic] will

27 Southern Baptist Convention, Proceedings, (1875), 31.
28 Raboteau, Slave Religion, 239.
29 William E. Montgomery, Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree: The African-American Church in the South, 1865-1900 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 147.
claim, as it deserves, a larger share in the liberality of our brethren. These young
and promising men have been able, however, to prosecute their studies with
commendable results, through means secured from other sources.\footnote{30}

Emmanuel Love eventually became pastor of a large congregation in Savannah and president of
the Missionary and Educational Baptist Convention of Georgia. He later became instrumental in
the establishment of the National Baptist Publishing Board.\footnote{31}

In 1876, the Southern Baptist Convention heard a report concerning the work of the
ministerial institutes that were being conducted by the various states:

The Board is not indifferent to the claims of these people upon us, to whom they
are drawn by “the simplicity of that is in Christ.” Dr. E. W. Warren proposed
during the past year, to take the charge of the work of ministerial instruction
among them in Georgia, by holding Ministers’ Institutes at convenient seasons
and accessible points. We do not know what, if anything, has been accomplished,
but we are fully persuaded that in their present condition this is the most effective
mode of reaching a large number, and affording the aid which they so much need.
We would respectfully urge upon the ministry of our denomination, throughout
the South, the adoption of this, or some like plan, wherever it is possible.\footnote{32}

The following year, the convention again urged churches to take up this worthy cause,
but no funds were appropriated.\footnote{33} The appeal was even more strongly worded in 1878, with
continued statements each year along the same lines. In 1883, the Home Mission Board was in
danger of collapsing financially, and there was no call for action on their part, but the
information was noted by the convention that of the approximately 6.5 million blacks in the
United States, 5 million of them were in the area encompassed by the Southern Baptist
Convention. An earnest call was made for churches to become involved.\footnote{34} In 1886, the

\footnote{30} Annual, Southern Baptist Convention (1875), 31.

\footnote{31} Harvey, Redeeming the South, 72.

\footnote{32} Annual, Southern Baptist Convention (1876), 48.

\footnote{33} Annual, Southern Baptist Convention (1877), 58.

\footnote{34} Annual, Southern Baptist Convention (1883), 37.
suggestion was made to send black preachers as missionaries among blacks and challenged white churches to give $10,000 to this project. It also complimented the “northern brethren” for financial help. The next year, the record states that this money never materialized.\textsuperscript{35}

Simply because the denomination was unable to coordinate work at the national level does not mean that no work was being done. In the area of Ministerial Institutes for Colored Ministers, a few states were actively involved. Work in Georgia was initiated by Dr. W.H. McIntosh, who served actively from 1883 until 1887 when he resigned to assume the pastorate of the church in Cedartown, Georgia.\textsuperscript{36} He was replaced by Bro. G. R. McCall. McCall held six institutes, taught ninety-eight preachers and eighty-one “deacons and others, and of this number nine-tenths of them can read.” The Southern Baptist Convention actively encouraged other states to get involved. In fact, in 1884, Dr. W. H. Parks of Texas was conducting similar work there. Specifically noted was Dr. S. Landrum of New Orleans who “has, voluntarily and without compensation, taught a large class of colored preachers and others; meeting them every Monday morning and giving them instruction in the doctrines and practices of the New Testament Churches….” In 1885, South Carolina agreed to undertake this work, but later withdrew because of a lack of money. In 1887, the report listed Ministerial Institutes being conducted in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, and Texas. Worthy of note was Texas, which employed A. R. Griggs as the Superintendent of Missions in Dallas, as well as twenty-three other missionaries, although it is not clear whether all of these were working with blacks or were general missionaries within that state. It does mention, however, that there were “twenty colored preachers in the joint employ of the Board and the State Board of Texas.”\textsuperscript{37}

The 1890 report contained the usual compliments to the workers, but also contained the unusual note that “oral instructions among the negroes is more effective than written words.”\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{35} Annual, Southern Baptist Convention (1886), 15-16; Annual, Southern Baptist Convention (1887), xxxix.

\textsuperscript{36} Annual, Southern Baptist Convention (1887), xxxii.

\textsuperscript{37} Annual, Southern Baptist Convention (1885), vii; Annual, Southern Baptist Convention (1884), xiv. Annual, Southern Baptist Convention (1885), vii; Annual, Southern Baptist Convention (1887), xxxix.

\textsuperscript{38} Annual, Southern Baptist Convention (1890), iii.
No amplification or further comments were made on the subject. It is not clear whether they had new students who had a lower literacy rate than the ninety percent who had previously been reported by Georgia, or whether they had moved into territories where the literacy rate was lower.\footnote{Annual, Southern Baptist Convention, (1890), iii.}

**Southern Baptists and Black Missionary Efforts**

As noted earlier, black Baptists began involvement in missionary work as early as 1815 when Lott Carey joined with Collin Teague to form the African Baptist Missionary Society. Carey and Teague moved with their families to work in Africa. In 1840, black Baptists in the North formed the American Baptist Missionary Convention, sharing information among the churches and promoting missions. The Western and Southern Missionary Baptist Convention was established in 1864, with the regional conventions merging in 1866 into the Consolidated American Baptist Convention, but that organization collapsed in 1877. The African Mission Convention also existed for a short period, but little is known of this group.\footnote{McBeth, The Baptist Heritage, 782.}

After the Civil War, black Baptists had as deep a desire to engage in missionary work as white Baptists did, but they lacked two things: organization and financial support. Some black Baptists had served in foreign missions under appointment by the Southern Baptist Convention. Most of these had served in Liberia, but a majority of them lost financial support during the Civil War, as the Southern Baptist Convention struggled financially. The Foreign Mission Board had difficulty getting what money was raised to the mission field. Once the war was over, the Board resumed work in China and Liberia, but the primary focus was China. In 1870, new work began in Rome, Italy. Later, work was resumed in Brazil. Interest in African missions had begun to wane, the reasons being unclear.\footnote{Baker, The Southern Baptist Convention and Its People, 246.}

Black Baptists tried to generate interest in resuming mission work in Liberia, but most of their efforts were directed toward black churches. The American Baptist Foreign Mission Board began to direct efforts toward the African continent, so black churches began looking to that direction for assistance. Soon, many black Baptist churches were cooperating with the northern
Baptists. This was the extent of foreign missions work by black Baptists until the 1890s when an emerging organization brought black Baptists together into a unified group.

Foreign mission work is not the extent of missions. As the nation tried to rebuild itself, people searched for security and answers. Black Baptists found an abundance of work around them, helping other blacks. Freedmen now struggled for survival. Where the Peculiar Institution had not been good or moral, it did at least provide a sort of security. Even though the slaves had worked the land and harvested the crops, there was someone to ensure that they were clothed and fed, at least to a minimal degree. However, after emancipation, they did not necessarily have a place to work or have meals that were provided. In many instances, the freedmen were at the mercy of the landowners to enter into either a share-cropper relationship, or find employment. Freedom now meant that survival was dependent upon oneself, not someone else. Certainly, the ability to read would be beneficial in seeking employment.

One thing black ministers tapped into was the sense of community in the black churches. Pastors and deacons provided the necessary structure of leadership in those communities. Many did this with the assistance of the white Baptists. As was previously mentioned, some of the states had begun Ministerial Institutes for black ministers. They taught various subjects, but primarily focused on the “doctrines and practices of New Testament Churches.” Whites also focused on training the students to share the gospel message. This seems to have been the primary interest of the white instructors, to communicate the message of salvation to all. As they studied at the Ministerial Institutes, they essentially were trained in the white understanding of converting the unsaved.

Obviously the Southern Baptist Convention was interested in building religious communities. As the 1867 report on colored missions indicated “thirty churches have been constituted by our Missionaries, twenty-four meeting-houses commenced and eleven furnished, mostly for the benefit of this people.” The Home Mission Board also reported 611 baptisms among blacks. The report stated that:

42 McBeth, The Baptist Heritage, 780.

43 Annual, Southern Baptist Convention (1884), xiv.

44 Annual, Southern Baptist Convention (1867), 62.
A large number of intelligent and pious missionaries have been employed to preach specially to Freedmen in the South. The colored people generally prefer white missionaries to those of their own color. They are usually withdrawing from the white churches and organizing churches of their own, and this course is applauded by the brethren, and promises to increase their efficiency.\textsuperscript{45}

The report indicated that the primary reason that white missionaries were preferred by blacks was because the white missionaries had more education and training. It stands to reason that they would report that white missionaries were preferred. They assumed that since blacks had lived under the master/slave relationship for generations, it would only be natural for them to tend to defer to the former masters. In fact, it would have been surprising if they had suddenly disavowed any association with the white Baptists. Scarcely twenty years later, the Southern Baptist Convention attempted to enlist black ministers in order to reach the black community more effectively.\textsuperscript{46} This was a generation later than those previously enlisted to evangelize freedmen.

For three consecutive years beginning in 1883, the Georgia Baptist State Convention reported on the spiritual condition of blacks in that state. In 1883, they expressed concern that “while we have been sending Missionaries abroad, there has been for some time an abiding conviction within us that we have an interest at home in the colored people that demands even additional attention to what we have hitherto given in that direction.”\textsuperscript{47} The following year, the Report on the State of Religion and Amount of Destitution spoke to the large population of black people in the state, “immortal beings who have been exposed to the ‘ravages of sin and to the corrupting influences of strong superstitions.’” Georgia Baptists were encouraged to look to their enlightenment.\textsuperscript{48}

In 1885, Georgia Baptists congratulated themselves greatly for their efforts:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 49.
\textsuperscript{46} Annual, Southern Baptist Convention (1886), 15-16.
\textsuperscript{47} Minutes, Georgia Baptist State Convention, (1883), 23.
\textsuperscript{48} Minutes, Georgia Baptist State Convention (1884), 20.
\end{quote}
We would emphasize the importance of theological institutions for colored ministers and deacons, as conducted by Rev. G. R. McCall, second, in our estimation, to no work in which Southern Baptists are engaged. We also recommend our brethren in the ministry, as far as practicable, to hold such institutes in their respective neighborhoods for the benefit of our colored brethren, and to give to brother McCall their hearty co-operation.49

They were understandably proud of the work they had done and undoubtedly felt that this should be replicated by other state conventions.

In 1881, the Southern Baptist Convention urged cooperation between “Southern Baptists and Coloreds in regard to African missions.”50 Southern Baptists had finally rekindled an interest in resuming work in Africa. William W. Colley, a black minister, began his missionary career in 1875 when he was appointed by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board to serve in West Africa as assistant to W. J. David, a white missionary from Mississippi. In November 1879, Colley returned to the United States convinced that many more blacks should be involved in international missions, especially in Africa. As he traveled back and forth across the country, Colley urged black Baptists to take an independent course in mission work and form their own sending agency. Colley became the primary force in the founding of the Baptist Foreign Mission Convention (BFMC) in 1880.51 Southern Baptists were developing an interest in working with a black missions agency in evangelizing Africa. Also, this new agency would become the foreign missions arm of the organization which would become the National Baptist Convention in 1895.

49 Minutes, Georgia Baptist State Convention (1885), 35.

50 Annual, Southern Baptist Convention (1881), 43.

CHAPTER 4

SOUTHERN BAPTISTS AND THE FORMATION OF BLACK CHURCHES

Before black Baptists could form larger organizations, it was first necessary for them to form churches. This was not an instantaneous process. Rather, it was done over decades, beginning with holding separate conferences for blacks. It would be difficult at times because of slave laws forbidding slaves congregating together, but eventually these obstacles would be overcome. In addition to slave laws, it was also necessary to overcome the attitudes of white Baptists. On the one hand, Baptists not only had a desire to evangelize blacks, they felt it was a religious mandate. On the other hand, after blacks were converted, where were they to attend church? Possibly as a result of the desire to keep a watchful eye on them, the churches were integrated. This probably was less a desire to worship with and instruct the blacks and more a result of fear of their plotting rebellion in separate worship services. Even so, most states soon passed laws forbidding them to meet except under the supervision of a white member. In 1848, Georgia’s slave codes prohibited a person of color from preaching or exhorting without a written license. The requirements to obtain such a license involved

court of the county, and in counties in which the county town is incorporated, in
addition thereto the permission of the mayor, or chief officer, or commissioners of
such incorporation; such license not to be for a longer term than six months, and
to be revocable at any time by the person granting it.²

The earliest black Baptist church has generally been acknowledged as the Silver Bluff
curch, formed in Aiken, South Carolina, sometime between 1773 and 1775³, but some research
indicates that the first may have actually been the church organized on the plantation of William
Byrd III in Mecklenburg County, Virginia.⁴ However, black Baptist churches were relatively
few in number prior to the Civil War.

As early as 1780, black membership made up approximately ten percent of Baptists, but
had doubled to twenty percent by 1790.⁵ Growth was most rapid in the South, with 97 percent of
all black Baptists residing in the South by 1790.⁶ With most of the black Baptists living in the
South, and few black Baptist churches for them to attend, it follows that these members were a
part of the white Baptist churches in the South. In fact, a study of church records and
denominational reports indicate this to be true.⁷ As the subject of the formation of black
churches is explored, it will be divided into two periods: during the slave years and after the
Civil War. In the former period, the subject will be further divided into the development of
black congregations within white churches, the emergence of black preachers, and the
development of independent black churches.

² William A. Hotchkiss, “Slave Codes of the State of Georgia, 1848,” Codification of the Statute
Law of Georgia (Augusta: Charles A. Grenville, 1848), (http://academic.udayton.edu/race/
02rights/slavelaw.htm, accessed June 17, 2008).
³ McBeth, The Baptist Heritage, 777.
⁴ Sid Smith, “In Search of the First Black Baptist Church in America,” Ethnicity (Spring 1984), 8.
⁵ Robert G. Gardner, Baptists of Early America: A Statistical History, 1639-1790 (Atlanta:
⁶ Ibid., 43.
⁷ Earl Joiner, A History of Florida Baptists (Jacksonville: Convention Press, 1972), as well as the
Annuals of the Florida Baptist State Convention, The Georgia Baptist State Convention, and the
Alabama Baptist State Convention.
During the Slave Years

Early in the 19th century, black Baptists worshipped in white dominated Baptist churches. Before 1860 they usually sat in separate sections, either in the back, or often in balconies. Prior to the Civil War, black Baptists made up over half the membership of Southern Baptist churches. As the numbers of black worshippers grew, it was not long before conferences developed for the administration of black members. These served as administrative councils, primarily for the reception and exclusion of black members. These conferences also dealt with matters of church discipline among the black brethren.

This in itself is an important development because, while it would have been overseen by a white member, it allowed the black members to develop their own skills in church polity and administration. Placing black ministers and deacons in charge of these conferences allowed leaders to emerge within the black churches, just as they had developed leaders within the black communities outside of their religious practice. These emerging leaders now had a place to demonstrate their skills. In fact, as Christine Heyrman points out in *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt*, these leadership positions allowed black men who served as preachers, deacons, and exhorters, to hold posts that were even forbidden to white women. While a few women preached and served as deacons in Southern Baptist Churches, the fact that this was available to black men and not white women was largely true. In fact, Randy Sparks points out in *A Companion to the American South*, black women also played important roles in black churches, areas Heyrman fails to note.

The development of the Conference for Negroes would have had a natural attraction to blacks. This is possibly one of the reasons the Baptist church appealed to slaves. After the numbers of black congregants grew, the need arose for more space in which to worship. Since most Baptist churches were in rural settings and consisted of one-room meeting houses, blacks would have soon crowded out the white members. Only three options would have presented

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8 Harvey, *Redeeming the South*, 34; Williams and Dixie, *This Far by Faith*, 128.


11 Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 135.
themselves: either hold a separate service for black members in the same meeting house, construct a separate building in which the black worshippers could meet, or construct a new building for the white congregation and give the old edifice to the black membership.

In 1813, the Enon Baptist Church of Christ (now the First Baptist Church of Huntsville, Alabama) decided to appoint “Brethren Watkins Pruet and Hullums to superintend the building of a shed for the Black people and form a plan.”\textsuperscript{12} While this church was willing to make accommodation for a place for the black members to meet, records gave no indication of who was to conduct the services for them. It is possible that it was to be led by a black preacher, as this was prior to the tightening of many of the slave laws forbidding blacks to worship without a white to oversee the meeting. While the dates by which these laws were enacted varied from state to state, many of them had been enacted by 1848.\textsuperscript{13}

Some churches had moved to having a distinct service for blacks. At the church at Springhill, Alabama, the conference voted and considered it “expedient and proper that the sermon to the Black’s [sic] be delivered within a short time after the morning service.”\textsuperscript{14} Presumably, this service would be in the same building as was used by the white congregation, as there had been no record of the construction of a separate facility. Apparently, other churches were performing similar services. It was reported at the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Richmond, Virginia, in June 1845, that “most churches have one sermon for colored each Sunday.”\textsuperscript{15}

Not all southerners were happy to see whites giving themselves for the spiritual advancement of blacks. William E. Hatcher recounts the efforts of J. B. Jeter to build a church for blacks in 1841:

At the time he began his labors the church had a membership of 1717, of which 1384 were colored and 333 were white. It was not simply a new house for which

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{12} Minutes of the Enon Baptist Church of Christ (Huntsville, Alabama), August 1, 1813.
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\textsuperscript{13} Hotchkiss, Codification of the Statute Law of Georgia, 1848; Aiken, Digest of the Laws of the State of Alabama, 1833; Goodell, Slave Code in Theory and Practice, 1853.
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\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{14} Minutes of the Baptist Church at Springhill (Marengo County, Alabama) June 6, 1846.
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\textsuperscript{15} Proceedings of the First Triennial Meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention (Richmond, Virginia, June 11-15, 1845), 16.
\end{flushright}
he was pleading, but for the division of the church, which he considered as indispensable to its welfare. All the conviction and enthusiasm of his nature centered in this movement. It was completed in 1841, and he preached in it for eight years.\(^\text{16}\)

Hatcher explained many of the obstacles that were faced in the formation of this church. One of these was the fact that it would require the expenditure of a great deal of money, a strategy opposed by many in the church. The second obstacle arose from “racial prejudices, which were quick to resent every attempt to invest the colored brethren with any unusual privileges.”\(^\text{17}\)

Jeter’s intent was to construct the new building for the larger black congregation and organize them into a separate organization. This was opposed by white public sentiment. He was successful in building a new edifice, but it was used by the white congregation and the old building turned over to blacks.\(^\text{18}\) This would be the model that other cities would follow in later years.

As was mentioned earlier, the conferences were important in the development of leaders within the black communities. These leaders would emerge in two forms: preachers and deacons. The deacons were seen as administrative leaders within the church communities. The Southern Baptist Convention in Richmond in 1854, noted that “colored deacons to oversee their race were appointed.”\(^\text{19}\) These would have been people whom the white members deemed to be of upstanding moral character and acceptable as leaders for the black church. This approach ensured that whites controlled the leadership of the church, although this was never openly acknowledged.

Black preachers became a very important part of the emerging Baptist churches, as some were entirely black, but these mostly existed in the larger cities. Sometimes these independent black churches were under the pastoral care of a white minister, but some were led by black ministers. One such person was Reverend Andrew Bryan who served as pastor of the First

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\(^{17}\) Ibid., 184.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 190.

\(^{19}\) *Proceedings*, Southern Baptist Convention, 16.
African Baptist Church of Savannah, Georgia, for twenty-four years until his death in 1812.\textsuperscript{20} Rev. Bryan was not always well received by the white community. During one period of intense persecution, he and his brother were severely beaten and the church was forbidden to meet. Jonathan Bryan, his owner, was able to get him released from jail, thus enabling the church to resume meeting. It was reported that a turning point occurred when the white patrols, eavesdropping on a black church meeting in a barn, heard Andrew and his brother, Samson, praying earnestly for their white oppressors.\textsuperscript{21}

A significant black Florida preacher, James Page (1808-1883), was born in Virginia to a slave who was owned by John H. Parkhill. Little is known of Page’s early life, other than the fact that his father was a free man who was drowned going ashore at Liberia as part of the colonization movement. He married a woman named Elizabeth some time prior to 1828. His owner had migrated to Florida and settled in Leon County south of Tallahassee. John Parkhill had obtained land there and developed a plantation called Bel Air. Parkhill was an elder in the Presbyterian church, but at that time this church did not allow black members. After Page became a Christian, he joined a Baptist church which encouraged the call he felt to the ministry. Their congregational organization allowed Page to start a preaching ministry at Bel Air and in 1850, led the slave community there to organize one of the earliest known black Baptist churches in Florida, Bethlehem Baptist Church at Bel Air Plantation. He was ordained in 1851 with a letter of recommendation from James E. Broome, Governor-elect of Florida and a founding member of Tallahassee Baptist Church. He was the second black minister ordained in Florida.\textsuperscript{22}

Page’s work was influential in the area around Tallahassee. He would later be instrumental in the establishment and development of the Bethel Missionary Baptist Church.\textsuperscript{23} Page travelled to many of the black churches in the Tallahassee area each month, as many of the

\textsuperscript{20} Baker, \textit{The Southern Baptist Convention and Its People}, 223.

\textsuperscript{21} McBeth, \textit{The Baptist Heritage}, 780.


\textsuperscript{23} “History,” Bethel Missionary Baptist Church (http://betheltally.org/History.htm, accessed April 8, 2008).
slaves were not allowed to leave the plantations to attend church. Page did not have such a restriction. He was considered to be a highly trustworthy individual. When Parkhill died in 1854, Page was named as the “protector,” business manager, and confidant of Parkhill’s widow. He held this position until his death in 1883. Reverend Page was allowed to travel freely in response to the requests for his ministerial duties and became highly regarded by everyone, and widely known among the black churches. His popularity was extremely helpful when he organized the first black Baptist association in Florida in 1869. It consisted of at least twenty-eight churches when it began. Page continued to serve black Florida Baptist churches until the week of his death at the age of seventy-five.  

Some black churches had white pastors, such as the First Colored Baptist Church of Richmond, Virginia. Robert Ryland served as pastor of this congregation for twenty-five years beginning in 1841. During that time he baptized over 3,800 people into its membership. Also, occasionally a white church would seek out a black preacher on the grounds that they simply wanted the best pulpiteers available. In 1860, the Annual Report of the Southern Baptist Convention listed several churches that were led by a black pastor.

Most black preachers were still retained in their status as slaves. As noted earlier, the Alabama Association wished to employ Caesar McLemore to preach and work among blacks. State laws would not permit this, so he was purchased by the association and a committee was formed to supervise his work and ministry. He served as a missionary of the association. Andrew Bryan had also remained a slave, even though he served as pastor for twenty-four years. This apparently was not an uncommon practice. The Providence Church in North Carolina had


been advised by the Boone’s Creek Association that “the church has no right to approbate a slave as a preacher without the consent of their owner.”

In Florida, Austin Smith, the state’s first black Baptist preacher, was licensed to preach by the Key West Baptist Church in 1843. Charles C. Lewis was the pastor of the church at that time. During the period when that church was without a pastor, Reverend Smith served as the interim pastor of the black congregation and conducted prayer meetings each week.

This is not to say that white Baptists and black ministers were always in agreement. In his book *Slavery in Florida: Territorial Days to Emancipation*, Larry Eugene Rivers states that many slaves held secret religious meetings that threatened the slave owner’s control over the assembly of slaves. Slaves sometimes interpreted religious teachings for themselves. In some instances, this was even encouraged by whites who told the slaves that what a white minister had told them was all lies. Holding these secret meetings imperiled the lives of those blacks who chose to participate, and especially the minister who led them, but they continued to meet nonetheless.

**After the Civil War**

Churches continued to meet during the Civil War, although many of the pastors left their congregations to serve as chaplains in the Confederate army, including several who would later be very influential Southern Baptist leaders. After the war ended, however, the former slaves began to express their desires to meet apart from the whites and establish their own congregations. Many of the white churches viewed this with concern. Some felt that the “ignorant freedmen” were unprepared to govern themselves. Those who remained in white

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churches were now introduced to a new benefit to their freedom. While they were to continue to occupy segregated seating, they were now expected to contribute financially to the church.\textsuperscript{32}

By the late 1860s, most white churches saw that the separation of blacks from white churches was inevitable. Views of this pending schism were mixed. Basil Manly, Sr., stated that “we think they are not yet prepared for the responsibility of an independent church state. We have told them so, but yet shall let go our hold of them, if after our advice, they desire it.”\textsuperscript{33}

What he did not indicate was how they could have prevented the exodus or exactly what the nature of the hold on them was. Regardless, he committed himself not to oppose their leaving.

Other Baptists expressed a more optimistic view. In 1867, the Southern Baptist Convention commented that “they are usually withdrawing from the white churches and organizing churches of their own, and this course is approved by the brethren, and promises to increase their efficiency.”\textsuperscript{34}

Later on in the same meeting they reported that “thirty churches have been constituted by our Missionaries, twenty-four meeting houses commenced and eleven finished, mostly for the benefit of this people.”\textsuperscript{35}

Shortly after the war was over, people from the north came to offer assistance to the freedmen. Apparently their presence caused a certain amount of animosity between former slaves and whites. J. B. Gambrell wrote years later that,

> when the negroes were being used to oppress [whites, by the carpetbaggers] the white people of the South everywhere helped the negroes build churches and white preachers preached to their churches. I shall never cease to be thankful that my first pastorate was a negro church, and I shall full recall always to their warm

\textsuperscript{32} Harvey, \textit{Redeeming the South}, 34.

\textsuperscript{33} Basil Manly, Sr., quoted in Harvey, \textit{Redeeming the South}, 34.

\textsuperscript{34} Annual, Southern Baptist Convention (1867), 49.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 62.
heartedness in religion and their readiness to do a large part, for their simple hearts loved.  

It is unclear at exactly what point in his life Dr. Gambrell wrote these words. He was born in 1841 and died in 1921. He had served as a Confederate scout under Robert E. Lee, fought in the Battle of Gettysburg, and was commissioned a Captain. After the war, he attended the University of Mississippi. He served as president of Mercer University, later was on the faculty of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and served four terms as president of the Southern Baptist Convention. While the validity of his statements are not being questioned, they possibly reflect a romanticized view of the actions and attitudes of the white Baptists during that period.

In the late 1860s and early 1870s, more and more black Baptist churches began forming in Alabama. The First Baptist Church of Wetumpka, Alabama, formed in 1821 and then moved into a new building in 1852, a building which was constructed by the members, both whites and slaves. They continued to meet together throughout the war years, but a few years after the war was over, blacks decided to establish their own church, reportedly as a result of the tensions of Reconstruction. A Methodist layman donated land about three hundred yards from the First Baptist Church to the black congregation. The building was constructed in 1869 and what is now called the Gilfield Baptist Church became a reality.

Tensions apparently played a role in the formation of other black Baptist churches in Alabama. The Damascus Baptist Church in Butler County voted in 1868,

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38 Jeremy Dale Henderson, “Wetumpka Churches Move Past Civil War Rift,” *The Alabama Baptist* (Birmingham, Alabama, published August 25, 2005). According to the article, the name of the church was originally “Giftfield,” was later changed to “Gildfield,” then “Guilfield,” and now, “Gilfield.”
Resolved that the change brought about by the polickcal [sic] events of the past few years in condition of the Colored Race Shall not effect the relation of the Collored [sic] members of this Church But they shall continue in the Same position and Shall never be allowed a vote only on the reception or exclusion of a Colored member.\textsuperscript{39}

After this action by the church, black parishioners took about eighteen months to form their own congregation. This was the first step toward independence from the white church. In the February 1870 business meeting, “by motion the Church granted the use of the [meeting] house to the Blacks.”\textsuperscript{40} Then in November of the following year, “a request was granted to the collered [sic] members of the church to have letters of dismission [sic] to form a collered [sic] church near John Howards – Bro. McGee A. Ambrose to aid them in the constitution and report.” In February 1872 the report was given that the “collered [sic] church was constituted.”\textsuperscript{41}

Other churches in Alabama had similar experiences as new black Baptist churches were established as well. In 1868, the black congregation indicated to the white members that they desired to leave to form their own church. They apparently intended to leave under good circumstances.

\textsuperscript{39} Minutes, Damascus Baptist Church (Butler County, Alabama), June 20, 1868.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., February 1870.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., November 18, 1871, February 1872.
the church & show his or her standing fair within the next three months, March, April, & May.\footnote{Minutes of the Baptist Church at Springhill (Marengo County, Alabama) February 15, 1868.}

There is no further mention of the black members of the church. It is unclear, however, what consequences would have resulted if the black members had failed to present themselves as instructed in the resolution. The white members could have refused to let the black congregation meet in their building for the next three month period. Since the black congregation intended to leave, regardless, whether the church chose to withdraw fellowship or give letters of “dismission,” the result is the same. At the same time, it appears that the black congregation desired to leave on good terms with their white brethren.

It is possible, however, that the black members feared reprisals if they left on bad terms with the white members. Marengo County had been home to several cotton plantations prior to the Civil War and after the war was over, much of this was converted to sharecropping.\footnote{Marengo County Heritage Book Committee. The Heritage of Marengo County, Alabama, (Clanton, Alabama: Heritage Publishing Consultants, 2000), 1-4.} Many of the white church members could easily have been those who owned the land that the freedmen hoped to work as sharecroppers. If this was true, their caution was prudent.

In the next county over in Wilcox County, Mt. Moriah Fellowship Baptist Church decided that fellowship only extended so far. In May 1867, black members began asking for letters of dismission from the church, presumably for the purpose of forming their own church. On February 20, 1869, “The freedmen making application through the brethren for the use of the church was lade [sic] before the conference and lost without debate.” After blacks formed their own congregation, they requested the use of the white church’s building for services, but the white congregation was not even willing to discuss the issue; the request was flatly refused. On April 27, 1869, the notation was made, “By motion a Committee of two are appointed to recommend some course or plan to be presented toward the colored membership of the church to report to our next conference.” The next conference was held in May and “inquired for refered [sic] business when a committee at our last meeting to report upon a plan to be pursued toward
colored members. Reported & by motion the committee is discharged.”

The course of action is not mentioned, and there is no further mention of blacks in the church records. Whatever the course of action, the attitude of the white congregation toward their black counterpart seems to be one of suspicion.

Across the state in Lafayette County, the black congregation of the Antioch Baptist Church took years to separate themselves totally from the white church. The withdrawal began in 1869 with a simple request that “the black members of this Church asked permission to have their own record book. Granted.” Eighteen months later, the church reported in a letter to the association that “the blacks have withdrawn from us since last Association, for the purpose of constituting themselves into a church of their own. This will account for our number being so much smaller than it was last year.” However, even though they had removed themselves from the membership of the church, they continued to meet in the white church’s building for some time after. It appears that something occurred which caused a significant break in the relationship between the two churches. The church decided in a business meeting to allow the black church to continue using the facility until December of 1871, but some precipitating event caused the white congregation to reconsider that decision:

A move was made and seconded to reconsider a portion of the last minit [sic] in regard to the colored brethren holding meeting in the church until the first of December decided that they could not hold meeting in the church any more and Bro. Wm. Harris was appointed to see them and inform them of the decision the church had made.

However, the final break between the two churches did not occur for some time later and came down to the use of the cemetery. In 1874, the white church “appointed a committee…to see the freedmen and to investigate as to whether or not they should continue to bury their dead in the

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44 Minutes, Mt. Moriah Fellowship Baptist Church (Wilcox County, Alabama) May 1867, February, April, May, 1869.

45 Minutes, Antioch Baptist Church (Lafayette, Alabama) February 27, 1869.

46 Letter to the Association included in the church minutes, August 27, 1870.

47 Minutes, Antioch Baptist Church (Lafayette, Alabama), October 28, 1871.
burial ground belonging to the church at this place.”

Nothing more is mentioned of this inquiry until nearly two years later. It is not unusual for a church to restrict the usage of its cemetery to its church membership, but most churches do allow former members to purchase plots when they have a historical attachment to the church. However, in 1876, the church “heard the report of the committee appointed to assist the colored brethren to secure a burial ground near their church. The committee were [sic] discharged, and the business concerning the freedmen burial ground was laid over until our next meeting.”

Cemetery usage would have been a very emotional issue. Many rural churches have struggled to continue their existence simply because there is a cemetery attached to the church property. Some congregations have disbanded and allowed the community to assume responsibility for the maintenance and upkeep of the cemetery. However, if racial struggles had now become an issue, it was crucial to control who used the cemetery. But would graves already there continue to be maintained? The problem of assignment of responsibility for the cemetery upkeep remained for future generations to decide.

By the end of the 1880s, it had become apparent to Southern Baptists that a separation of most, if not all, of black churches from the Southern Baptist Convention was inevitable. In 1888 at the annual meeting of the convention, the report to the Southern Baptist Convention by the Committee to the Mission to Colored People stated:

Naturally enough the negroes prefer to have their own separate local churches, and for those to be presided over by ministers of their own race. They prefer also to have their own organizations for educational, missionary and other benevolent work. It is not likely that this condition of things will be changed, not is it desirable that it should be.

At this point, a lack of connection existed between what was actively transpiring in the churches and what was desired at the denominational level. As a denomination, Southern

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48 Ibid., August 23, 1874.

49 Ibid., June 26, 1876.

50 “Report to the SBC by the Committee on Mission to the Colored People.” Proceedings (1888), 19.
Baptists desired a cordial relationship with its black members and black churches. However, with no authority to impose anything upon its churches, the desires of the denomination had little bearing on reality. By the end of the 1880s, most blacks had formed their own churches and had begun to organize themselves into associations and other agencies. This subject will be explored in Chapter Five.
CHAPTER 5

SOUTHERN BAPTISTS AND THE FORMATION OF BLACK BAPTIST ORGANIZATIONS

For years conventional wisdom has advocated that there is relative strength in numbers. Churches are no exception. From the earliest days, Baptists formed associations for the purposes of encouragement and edification. Also, associations issue general statements as to the general doctrinal beliefs which are held by the churches in those associations. While these statements are not binding upon the member churches, they are a reflection of the beliefs of the membership. Churches and associations even experienced the benefits of standing together to exert influence as a block of like-minded people. As black churches formed, they quickly adopted the methods that they had observed while a part of the Southern Baptist churches. They had witnessed the denomination organizing as a larger body of believers and, with the formation of black conferences in the white churches, had taken the first steps in the organizational process.

John Eighmy points out that there were several reasons why the Baptist church appealed to blacks, especially during the slave years. With the emphasis on personal conversion, blacks had control over the destiny of their own souls, even if not over their bodies. Also, the enslaved would have been attracted to a church that emphasized participation in church life, especially when offered the opportunities for leadership among black members. This would have been a welcome change from the norm, where the actions of blacks had been controlled by whites.¹

Most of the black Baptist churches that formed in the South affiliated with the white associations there. The First African Baptist Church of Savannah joined the Georgia Association in 1790. When the Savannah River Association was formed in 1802, it was one of the founding members. Both of these associations were predominantly white.² A few years later, when the Savannah River Association divided it created the Sunbury Association, made up mostly of black churches. Of the eleven churches in the association, five were black and the remaining six had a

¹ Eighmy, Churches in Cultural Captivity, 25.
² McBeth, The Baptist Heritage, 780.
racially mixed membership.\textsuperscript{3} Even though the association was predominantly black, the white churches eventually came to control the association. By the 1830s, black members noted, “We had a vote, and at most times timidly used it, but never had a voice in the body unless [to] answer some question [that] was asked.”\textsuperscript{4} However, this church also played a key role in the establishment of black churches and guided them as they formed new associations and state conventions. It also sent missionaries to evangelize freedmen in the period after the Civil War. The First African Baptist Church of Savannah established nearly a dozen mission churches with ministerial leadership that reported back to the mother church.\textsuperscript{5}

As had been mentioned previously, a black organization formed in Richmond in 1815 for the purpose of conducting missionary work in Africa. While this was not an association of churches per se, its formation was vital. It established an early record of enthusiasm and organization for missions within the black worship experience. With the formation of the African Baptist Missionary Society, blacks demonstrated to their white counterparts their ability to carry on work in an organized manner.

The reason the African Baptist Missionary Society was so significant is not just that it demonstrated that blacks could do missionary work effectively. This organization was the first venture of black Baptists into organized foreign missions. It also established Africa as the primary object of black Baptist foreign mission interest.\textsuperscript{6} This chapter will examine the part Southern Baptists played in the formation of black religious organizations. The first subject to be discussed is the formation of black Baptist associations, followed by the development and formation of the National Baptist Convention, the first national black Baptist denomination.

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\textsuperscript{3} Samuel Boykin. \textit{History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia: with Biographical Compendium \& Portrait Gallery of Baptist Ministers and Other Georgia Baptists} (Atlanta: James P. Harrison \& Co, 1881), 93.


\textsuperscript{5} Harvey, \textit{Redeeming the South}, 49.

\textsuperscript{6} McBeth, \textit{The Baptist Heritage}, 782.
\end{flushright}
The Formation of Black Baptist Associations

As blacks formed their own associations, they did it seemingly with varying assistance from whites. Some white Baptists had begun expressing feelings of anger toward blacks. According to Eighmy, an editor of a Virginia church newspaper expressed his feelings that if biracial churches continued to exist, they would give opportunities for social equality that would lead to the “mongrelization of the noble Anglo-Saxon race.”7 This was not the universal feeling, as many whites attempted to assist blacks in forming their own organizations. However, most of the assistance came, not from Southern Baptists, but Baptists in the North.

Prior to the Civil War, the American Baptist Home Missionary Society had abandoned its work in the slave states. During the war, the society began working with freed blacks in the Upper South. After the end of the war, federal officials granted them permission to take over churches in the areas served by ministers who were loyal to the Union. In practice, they did not take over churches, but began new work among the freedmen. This reintroduction of the Northern Baptists into the South caused anxiety among southern whites. Their greatest fear was that the Northern society would turn black people against whites by preaching politics, and not focusing on religious instruction. Men such as I. T. Tichenor, who later headed the Southern Baptist Convention’s Home Mission Board, shared such fears and felt that the work with blacks in the south should only be conducted by Southern men. Northern Baptists were willing to carry on this work with the assistance of Southern Baptists, but the race issue seemed to make cooperation impossible.8 Not until 1875 were the two groups were able to come to an agreement on the cooperative efforts with blacks.9

Many of the black Baptist organizations that formed were established for specific purposes. Aside from the state conventions and associations, many churches united in order to conduct mission work, such as the American Baptist Missionary Convention, which has been previously discussed. Some of the earliest black associational movements, however, developed out of the independent church movement of the Ohio black Baptists.10

7 Eighmy, Churches in Cultural Captivity, 31.
8 Eighmy, Churches in Cultural Captivity, 33.
9 Ibid., 35.
The cooperative movement among Ohio’s black Baptists met with opposition from the beginning. Blacks were not particularly welcome in Ohio. Yet, in spite of opposition, black preachers were successful in beginning a cooperative movement among the churches and in organizing church associations. The first black association in America was the Providence Baptist Association, which was organized at the Providence Baptist Church in Berlin Cross Roads, Ohio. In addition to concerning themselves with the missionary and educational efforts of the churches, they also incorporated the sociopolitical development of blacks. Following the lead of black Baptists in Ohio, black Baptists in Illinois organized the Wood River Baptist Association of Illinois in 1838. Other associations did not form until after the Civil War, beginning with Louisiana in 1865.\textsuperscript{11} These associations led to the state conventions which developed later.

Before black Baptists formed a general convention, there were several other regional conventions and organizations which had developed. These groups were attempts to cross state lines, while involving more black churches in the cooperative church movement. While some sprung up in the South, many of these were outside of the area in which Southern Baptists were located.

The first of these regional conventions began in New York in 1840 as the American Baptist Missionary Society.\textsuperscript{12} This was actually the first recorded effort by black Baptists to form a general body, and its primary concern was overseas missions. By law, this organization could not work in the South, but many southern churches did affiliate with them. This society contributed to a great awareness among black churches and solidified their identity as a distinct religious group. It was more outspoken on the issue of slavery than the Triennial Convention. The white denomination continued to tread lightly on the issue in an attempt to keep from offending the churches in the South. While churches affiliated with the American Baptist Missionary Society on the national level, they maintained membership in the local white associations and state conventions. Regardless, they received no assistance from their white counterparts in the development of this group. Churches which had previously been engaged in

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 65.

\textsuperscript{12} This organization is referred to in some writings as a society, and as a convention in others. The term society will be used here for simplicity’s sake, and because it will be distinguished from actual state conventions and the later National Baptist Convention.
evangelizing the slaves seemed to be far less enthusiastic about developing religious leaders among the freedmen.\footnote{Mitchell, \textit{Black Church Beginnings}, 119; Fitts, \textit{A History of Black Baptists}, 68; Eighmy, \textit{Churches in Cultural Captivity}, 30.}

The American Baptist Missionary Society did experience some internal conflicts. Pastors and local churches became concerned that the organization was trying to make missionaries out of too many pastors. While this was the primary concern of the society, some of the ministers felt that there was too much emphasis placed on missions and not enough given to the local church. This, combined with the strong anti-slavery position it advocated, probably kept it from gaining a greater influence.\footnote{Fitts, \textit{A History of Black Baptists}, 68.}

In 1864, the Northwestern and Southern Missionary Baptist Convention was formed in Richmond to work in conjunction with the northern body.\footnote{McBeth, \textit{The Baptist Heritage}, 782.} After the Civil War ended, there was no longer a need for the two separate groups and in 1866 they merged to form the Consolidated American Baptist Missionary Convention. In September of that year, noted evangelist Reverend Edmund Kelley published an article in \textit{The National Baptist} that discussed the nature, object, and structure of the new convention. Specifically, the convention was an attempt to unite black Baptists and discourage sectionalism. In order to accomplish this, they organized four district auxiliary conventions, state conventions, and associations, but with the stipulation that these were parts of the whole, with the focal point being the national convention. This group ceased to exist in 1879.\footnote{Fitts, \textit{A History of Black Baptists}, 68.}

Its thirteen years of existence were troubled ones. They experienced in-fighting, primarily due to cultural differences between black Baptists in the North and South. The northern black clergy were direct and confrontational and seemed to have little respect for their southern black brethren. Those in the South had been forced to adapt to the harsh reality of existence in the context of slavery. But whereas they saw themselves as adaptive, the
Northernners seemed to see them as handicapped. They quickly adopted a black-on-black paternalism.\textsuperscript{17}

In addition to this, some outspoken black ministers in the North began criticizing popular but uneducated Southern black ministers. They arrived in the South as missionaries and soon took to task those who had previously labored under slavery. Even though many of the Northern ministers had formerly been fugitives from slavery, they presented themselves as superior to those who had not left. This insult to Southern black ministers was not taken lightly and bred resentment greater than the resentment toward the white missionaries who had believed themselves to be superior to blacks.\textsuperscript{18}

Another reason for the demise of the consolidated convention was the growth of state conventions which soon stole the focus from the district and national organizations. In spite of attempts to counter the tendency to sectionalism, this feeling was strong enough in the Western states and in New England to contribute to the demise of the convention. Another contributor may have been the decision to hold meetings triennially instead of annually. Meeting so infrequently was detrimental to communication and resolving differences. The rationale for meeting every three years was to allow the meetings to be more largely attended. It was thought that if fewer dollars were spent on travel costs, more funds would be available for missionary endeavors. With the national meeting only held triennially, they reasoned, it would give the state and local boards greater influence.\textsuperscript{19}

Added to the bitterness of these struggles, many of the churches in the South felt more comfortable with the style of missions of the American Baptist Home Missionary Society. They began withdrawing support from the Consolidated Convention and showed even less support for the officers and administrative staff. In 1874, the Consolidated Board tried to overcome the differences of geographic distribution and appointed a system of regional bodies. This was done without consulting with the Southern churches and the new regional bodies were staffed by former colleagues from the North. Eventually, even the Baptists in the Northeast became discontented with the ineffectiveness of the organization and withdrew, forming the New

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 69.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 70

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 71.
England Baptist Missionary Convention. The Consolidated American Baptist Missionary Convention was officially dissolved in 1877, but this was not the end of a dream for an organization of black Baptist churches.²⁰

Some very able men led the New England Baptist Missionary Convention for nearly two decades. It experienced a rapid growth in membership and organized many independent churches. One of the strengths of this organization was its ability to reflect a broad and progressive scope of ministry. It encouraged both home and foreign missionary work, while establishing and maintaining educational institutions and other convention agencies.²¹

Many local and state associations of black Baptists began emerging after the Civil War. North Carolina had established a black state convention by 1866. In 1868, black Baptists in Virginia joined their associations to form the Baptist State Convention of Virginia. That same year, black Alabama Baptists organized the Colored Baptist State Convention, headquartered in Montgomery. Mississippi followed suit a year later with the formation of a state convention which was led by Henry Jacobs, a black minister in Natchez, Mississippi. Jesse Boulden formed a rival convention, but the two groups merged in 1890.²² In 1874, black Texas Baptists had twenty-three associations with nearly fifty thousand individual members.²³ By 1880, the Florida Baptist State Convention had four black associations: Bethlehem No. 1, Bethlehem No. 2, Jerusalem, and Nazarene. This number had increased to eight by 1884.²⁴ In 1895, South Carolina’s black Baptists unified under the leadership of the influential minister, E. M. Brawley. Their state convention was made up of nearly 124,000 members.²⁵

²⁰ Mitchell, Black Church Beginnings, 125-127.
²¹ Fitts, A History of Black Baptists, 72-73.
²⁴ Joiner, History of Florida Baptists, 87.
²⁵ George Tindall, South Carolina Negroes (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1952), 186-189.
As the formation of black associations took place, many of the white associations initially advised against separation. When it became apparent that this counsel would not be heeded by the black churches, they encouraged them to form their own associations and accept white instruction.\(^{26}\) While there were some instances of white churches disavowing any responsibility for blacks, most white Baptists made declarations that they were ready to assist blacks in their religious beliefs. Harvey notes that some of this eagerness to see blacks grow spiritually was purely for their own sense of safety and security. They felt that the more blacks were elevated morally, the safer their families and property would be.\(^{27}\)

The attitudes of the white state conventions followed the same pattern that the associations had taken. Initially, they were against separation, insisting that blacks needed whites to direct them. When it became clear that blacks were going to withdraw, southern whites offered whatever assistance they could. Texas Baptists offered assistance so effectively that black Baptists in Texas later led national black religious organizations.\(^{28}\)

At the meeting of the Georgia Baptist Convention in 1888, J. L. Lyons gave an eloquent and impassioned plea on behalf of the Colored Baptist Convention of the State of Georgia. His appeal resulted in a resolution which was unanimously adopted, “Resolved, That this Convention Authorize the Board of Missions to Co-operate with the home [sic] Mission Board of the S. B. Convention in adopting and operating a scheme to sustain not less than ten missionaries to labor among the negroes of Georgia.”\(^{29}\)

Many of the black Baptists, however, had difficulty accepting assistance as friends and brothers when prior to the Civil War, these same people had been staunch defenders of slavery.\(^{30}\) Many of the new black organizations looked with suspicion on the motives of the white Baptists who were attempting to aid them. However, they could not deny the fact that many times the assistance of white Baptists in obtaining legal deeds to property and in constituting black

\(^{26}\) Harvey, *Redeeming the South*, 36.

\(^{27}\) Ibid., 37.

\(^{28}\) Ibid., 37.

\(^{29}\) Georgia Baptist Convention, *Minutes*, 1888, 23.

\(^{30}\) Harvey, *Redeeming the South*, 47.
churches was indispensable. However, black religious leaders were faced with the dilemma of whether or not accepting white money meant bowing to white dominance of efforts toward education and independence. The struggles over black separatism and the cooperative movement came to a head in the 1890s, resulting in the formation of the National Baptist Convention.

**The Formation of the National Baptist Convention**

Black Baptists understood the value of a national organization. Prior to the Civil War, such an entity could not have existed. While black Baptists in the North might have formed a denominational structure, black churches in the South would not have been allowed to affiliate with them. Certainly, whites would have been concerned that such association would have stirred southern blacks up with the ideas of emancipation and freedom. However, after emancipation, the opportunities began to present themselves. It would take several years before this dream could be realized, but they could finally begin moving forward.

One obstacle black Baptists faced in the development of a national organization was the polity they adopted from their white counterparts. White Baptists utilized a system that was based upon localism, not a strong central headquarters. Even after Southern Baptists formed, no denominational headquarters existed for more than seventy years. Since black Baptists developed out of the Southern Baptists, they naturally adopted the same loose denominational structure.

After the dissolution of the Consolidated American Baptist Missionary Convention, a re-evaluation of the cooperative movement was necessary to sustain the African missionary efforts. The African mission had been the primary cause for the cooperative movement. Rev. William W. Colley, a Southern Baptist missionary to Africa, returned to the United States with a strong desire to rekindle in black Baptists a concern for the need for missionary work in Africa. He was employed by the black Baptists of Virginia to travel throughout the United States to garner support for a national black Baptist convention. He travelled extensively and wrote numerous letters, encouraging black Baptist leaders to meet in Montgomery, Alabama. Colley was particularly interested in a national organization to conduct foreign mission work.

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Colley met with about 150 Baptist leaders, mostly pastors, at the First Baptist Church in Montgomery on November 24, 1880. On that date, the Baptist Foreign Mission Convention was formed, electing Rev. W. H. McAlpine of Alabama as president. Eleven vice-Presidents were elected, one from each state represented at the meeting. The convention set up a Foreign Mission Board, with Rev. A. Binga, Jr., of South Richmond, as the Chairman and Rev. W. W. Colley, as the corresponding secretary.\textsuperscript{32}

The formation of this new convention united black Baptists across the United States with a cohesive purpose and identity. The group moved quickly to define the organization’s essential principles which were to extend the influence of black Baptists in advancing Christianity around the world. The leaders were especially encouraged by the strides made by white American Baptists and Southern Baptists and were eager to plant churches of their own on the foreign mission field. They desired to continue and advance the African mission, in particular, but did not want to limit themselves to this area alone. Even though the New England Baptist Missionary Convention and the Baptist African Mission Convention declined to join with the Baptist Foreign Mission Convention, Colley was successful in uniting most black Baptists in foreign missions endeavors.\textsuperscript{33} Colley returned to Africa a few years later as the Convention’s missionary.\textsuperscript{34}

A second group met in Saint Louis in 1886, led by W. J. Simmons,\textsuperscript{35} the first black Baptist preacher from Kentucky to graduate from a standard college.\textsuperscript{36} It was called the American National Baptist Convention. Simmons strongly opposed the Baptist Foreign Mission Convention. He felt it was important to form a convention that would cooperate with white American Baptists in conducting foreign missions. On August 25, 1886, Simmons met with black representatives from twenty-six states and the District of Columbia.\textsuperscript{37} The organizational

\textsuperscript{32}Fitts, \textit{A History of Black Baptists}, 74-75.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 75.

\textsuperscript{34}McBeth, \textit{The Baptist Heritage}, 783.

\textsuperscript{35}Ibid., 783.

\textsuperscript{36}Fitts, \textit{A History of Black Churches}, 76.

\textsuperscript{37}Ibid., 76.
meeting held at the First Baptist Church of Saint Louis included some of the best trained and most highly educated black Baptists in the nation.\textsuperscript{38} At their first meeting, Rev. T. L. Johnson, the vice-president of the convention, proclaimed, “Knox lifted Scotland, Luther lifted Germany, and it remains for us to lift up the heathen in the land of our fathers—Africa.”\textsuperscript{39} The hope of all at the convention was the unification of all black Baptists in the United States for the cause of Christian Missions.\textsuperscript{40} However, it is ironic that the group whose desire was the unification of all black Baptists in the cause of missions would not unite with the Baptist Foreign Mission Convention. Instead, the American National Baptist Convention concentrated more on home missions.\textsuperscript{41}

A third group formed in 1893 in Washington, D. C., under the name of National Baptist Education Convention. It was another attempt to be national in scope, but whose main objective was to provide educated ministers in leadership of black Baptist churches. This was the first attempt of black Baptists to direct in a unified manner the educational policy for all churches of the denomination, giving guidance to black colleges and schools, primarily in the south.\textsuperscript{42} The organization was the brain-child of Rev. W. Bishop Johnson, pastor of the Second Baptist Church, Washington, D. C. Rev. Johnson had been involved in the educational movement for several years, organizing the Sunday School Lyceum movement in 1885. Combining his efforts with those of Rev. P. F. Morris of Virginia, the National Baptist Educational Convention organized all of the schools owned or controlled by black Baptists into a confederation under the auspices of the denomination. Johnson compiled educational statistics and data from the various schools, showing their locations and property value. This gave local churches information about


\textsuperscript{40} Fitts, \textit{A History of Black Baptists}, 77.

\textsuperscript{41} McBeth, \textit{The Baptist Heritage}, 783.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 783.
the relative strength of the denomination, but also enabled the convention to raise large sums of money for the support of the black Baptist schools.\footnote{Fitts, \textit{A History of Black Baptists}, 77-78.}

The three groups were both competitive and complementary. They competed for financial backing, with each trying to become a national body. But they were complementary in that each focused on a single mission. To be a true national denomination, the three groups were going to have to form some sort of unified consortium.

The first effort at accomplishing this was the Tripartite Union. Several preachers met in Washington, D.C., to discuss a united Baptist organization with national scope and purpose. It was suggested that what was called the Tripartite Union be formed, consisting of the New England Baptist Missionary Union, The African Foreign Missionary Convention and the Foreign Mission Convention of America. The consolidation effort failed.\footnote{Ibid., 78.} In all likelihood, the effort failed because the three organizations that the pastors were trying to unify were in reality, very similar in scope and in direct competition with each other. For a true denomination to come together, they needed the combined emphases of foreign missions, home missions, and education. That was exactly what took place in 1895.

Reverends S. E. Griggs, L. M. Luke, and A. W. Pegues, led a meeting in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1894 to unite black Baptists.\footnote{Ibid., 78.} At that meeting, Pegues, a noted scholar and graduate of Bucknell University, offered the following resolution:

\begin{quote}
Whereas, The interests and purposes of the three National bodies, namely, the Foreign Mission, the National, and Educational conventions, can be conserved and fostered under the auspices of one body; and whereas, the consolidation of the above-named bodies will economize both time and money; Therefore, be it resolved, that the Foreign Mission Convention appoint a committee of nine, who shall enter immediately into consultation with the executive boards of the National and Educational conventions for the purpose of effecting a consolidation of the three bodies upon the following plan:
\end{quote}
1. That there shall be one national organization of American Baptists.
2. Under this, there shall be a Foreign Mission Board, with authority to plan and execute the foreign mission work according to the spirit and purpose set forth by the Foreign Mission Convention of the United States of America.
3. That there shall be a Board of Education and a Board of Missions to carry into effect the spirit and purpose of the National and Educational conventions, respectively.46

The resolution received overwhelming support and the committee was appointed to report back the next year in Atlanta, Georgia.

When the three groups met in Atlanta, on September 24, 1895, the Foreign Mission Convention of America had already absorbed remnants of the Tripartite Union. At Friendship Baptist Church, the committee made its report, which was adopted. Subsequently, the Foreign Mission Convention, the National Baptist Educational Convention, and the American National Baptist Convention consolidated to form the National Baptist Convention of the United States of America with E. C. Morris of Arkansas elected as the first President. Though the three groups merged in 1895, the convention claims a founding date of 1880 since that is the date of the oldest group in the merger.47

What was the response of Southern Baptists to the formation of the new black denomination? As early as 1866, the Charleston Association had noted that the relationship with the black membership was changing. J. C. Furman had offered a resolution at the State Convention meeting concerning ministry to the black population. That resolution was adopted by the Charleston Association. Furman’s statement drew a parallel between the gradual emancipation of slaves and the final emancipation of slaves in the United States.48 He stated,

…in our land the fearful experiment of emancipation has been made on the broadest scale, and with the suddenness and violence of an earthquake. The work

47 McBeth, The Baptist Heritage, 784.
48 McBeth, A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage, 283.
thus done, whether just or unjust, whether wise or foolish, is finally done. No Southern man now dreams of a reversal of this act of the Government. To us, as good citizens and Christians, the only questions left, are: WHAT ARE THE DUTIES WHICH ARISE OUT OF OUR CHANGED RELATIONS? and HOW MAY WE BEST PERFORM THEM?  

Furman continued his resolution that, with the removal of legal restrictions on educating blacks, South Carolina Baptist had the responsibility to educate them using all means available. He also addressed the future of church relations with the freedmen. Furman recognized that blacks might desire to form churches of their own and suggested that the white congregations accommodate them in doing so. He suggested that white churches offer to share their facilities with newly formed black congregations, or if blacks desired a building of their own, to aid in constructing one. He also indicated that blacks would probably welcome assistance from white leadership in instructing them in the proper keeping of records and transacting business. Furman also cautioned that while many black congregations might welcome sharing a pastor with a white congregation,

Unless some such arrangement as this can be made, it is to be apprehended that the colored people with suffer greatly; for there are very few of the colored men who are received as preachers, from whom any but very meager religious instruction can be obtained. Should any of these become infected with a fanatical and disorganizing spirit, it is easy to see how much they might mislead their class, and of what wide-spread mischief they might become the authors.

For almost two decades, Southern Baptist churches and associations had been hemorrhaging black members as they began forming their own churches and organizations. The exit was listed among the statistics in the state and national convention reports, but no

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accompanying statement or explanation was offered by any agency until 1888. In that year, a report was given to the Southern Baptist Convention by the Committee on the Mission to the Colored People. After the initial statements of concern for the condition of blacks and a note on the weakness in theological instructions, they recognized that,

Naturally enough the negroes prefer to have their own separate local churches, and for those to be presided over by ministers of their own race. They prefer also to have their own organizations for educational, missionary, and other benevolent work. It is not likely that this condition of things will be changed, nor is it desirable that it should be.\(^5^2\)

They suggested a policy of encouraging them, offering sympathies and prayers, as well as the counsel of men and money as long as blacks were willing to accept it.\(^5^3\) There were regular calls to continue the work among blacks by the states and by the Home Mission Board.\(^5^4\)

As black Baptists were organizing on a national level, the Southern Baptist Convention passed a resolution which suggested sending black missionaries among southern blacks and challenged white churches to give $10,000 to this project. However, this passed as a non-binding resolution and no money was put forward by the Home Mission Board, or any other Southern Baptist Convention agency to accomplish this task. This resolution amounted to taking a public position on an issue and telling the churches what should be done in this regard, but it failed to take any real action.\(^5^5\) However, by 1878, the Home Mission Board was suffering from a regular lack of receipts and was in danger of shutting down all operations. The board was reorganized, moved from Marion, Alabama, to Atlanta, Georgia, with I. T. Tichenor appointed as

\(^{52}\) Southern Baptist Convention, *Proceedings*, 1888, 19.

\(^{53}\) Ibid., 19.

\(^{54}\) Southern Baptist Convention, *Proceedings*, 1875, 1876, 1877, 1881, 1883, 1884, 1885, 1886, 1887, 1888, and 1890; Georgia Baptist Convention, *Minutes*, 1866-1895.

the new president of that agency. The Home Mission Board continued to struggle into the 1890s.\textsuperscript{56}

At the meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1891, a report was given on the plight of blacks. It issued a continued call for work among blacks and appointment of additional missionaries. In a tone of condescension, the report stated that,

The Negro is lamentably superstitious because of his ignorance, and is mainly controlled through that chief characteristic. By reason of this fact the average negro preacher is almost wholly unfit for leadership which the high functions of his exalted office demand. The blind leading the blind find a ditch at every step. The Christian people of the South have not the full confidence of the Negro. When he became a freeman, Christian people left him to work out his own destiny. While wandering like lost children in a forest, designedly political demagoguery laid its polluted, scourging hand upon the race and led it away from the truth, happiness and prosperity. Christian people looked upon the scene, but refused to enter a contest with politicians that they might retain the confidence of those who had watched and waited in their own homes.\textsuperscript{57}

That same year, the Home Mission Board issued a statement on race relations.\textsuperscript{58} While more moderate in tone than the quotation above, the proclamation was nevertheless a combination of paternalism, genuine concern, racism, and misunderstanding. It stated plainly that it was evident to all whites that blacks preferred nothing more than to accept their natural place of subordination, provided it was tempered by justice and kindness. Further, “Whenever it shall understandably and cheerfully accept this condition, the race problem is settled forever.”\textsuperscript{59} The Board then encouraged Southern Baptists to treat blacks with justice and kindness, not just with


\textsuperscript{57} Southern Baptist Convention, \textit{Proceedings}, 1891, 26-27.

\textsuperscript{58} For the complete statement, see Appendix 2.

\textsuperscript{59} Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, “A Statement on Race Relations,” \textit{Annual} (Southern Baptist Convention, 1891), xxxvi.
resolutions and encouraging words, but with Christian conduct. The report by the Board called on the membership of the churches to open their eyes to the opportunities before them.

We do not hesitate to affirm our confident belief that an expenditure under the best conditions by our Home Mission and State Boards of fifty thousand dollars a year for the next ten years will settle this race question forever….
What greater good could come to our country, or what grander triumph to Christianity than so easy and perfect a solution of a question which has been and is now the despair of the statesmanship of the world?\(^\text{60}\)

The Southern Baptist Convention ceased to list blacks at a separate group with the 1894 minutes.\(^\text{61}\) In the years through 1893, the minutes listed the numbers of black members by association. In 1894, the numbers were no longer given. An examination of the Georgia Baptist Convention minutes indicated only a few associations with numbers of black members in double digits in 1894. The numbers in Georgia had dropped to zero in 1895 and blacks were not listed as a distinct category any longer.\(^\text{62}\)

\(^{60}\) Ibid., xxxvi.


\(^{62}\) Georgia Baptist Convention, *Minutes*, 1893, 1894, 1895.
CHAPTER 6

CAUSE AND EFFECT: REASONS FOR THE LACK OF POSITIVE ACTIONS BY SOUTHERN BAPTISTS

As the chapter title suggests, the preliminary conclusion has been drawn that there were far too few positive actions by Southern Baptists toward blacks during the fifty years studied. Actions are the result of the attitudes and beliefs of individuals. In the case of a denomination, it is also a reflection of the corporate beliefs of the people. Eighmy suggests three major forces that restricted Southern Baptist thought and action: (1) an ecclesiastical system of independent churches discouraged denominational activities other than mission work; (2) revivalism kept the local churches preoccupied with the spiritual and moral welfare of individuals, rather than the social problems of society; and (3) the pressure of the social environment usually produced the silence, if not sanction, of the local churches relative to the basic attitudes of the secular world.¹

It appears that Eighmy’s first reason is supported by the evidence, but there were other factors that were more influential than the latter two. The reasons that will be examined in this chapter will be church polity, giving emphasis to the historical events that shaped the denominational structure; the influence of the Landmark Movement on Southern Baptists; and the lack of formal training by Southern Baptist ministers. The chapter will conclude with an examination of the shifting attitudes of Southern Baptists toward blacks. While these appear to be clear major headings, many of the areas actually overlap.

**Denominational Polity**

How Southern Baptists are organized in churches and as a denomination is a result of their origins. Baptists grew out of the English Separatists movement in the 1600s. They had resisted the concept of a State sponsored church, but also the idea of a hierarchical form of church polity where either the church or state could dictate how Christians could practice and what they must believe. These values had been fought for by Baptists since colonial days. Aside from Rhode Island, the colonies each had their state-sponsored religions; some preferred

¹ Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity*, 19.
Congregationalism, others Anglicanism. Because of their separatist beliefs, Baptists suffered persecution from groups in most of the colonies, even until the time of the American Revolution. After America’s independence was gained, Baptists continued to fight for religious liberty, not resting until a guarantee at the national level was secured in the First Amendment. Efforts were continued at the state level until the last of the state-supported churches severed their ties.\(^2\)

After Baptists in America organized churches, they soon began affiliating with other churches of like faith and order and formed associations. The earlier associations adopted statements of faith, such as the Sandy Creek Association’s Principles of Faith.\(^3\) However, after Baptists such as Adoniram Judson and Luther Rice felt called to conduct mission work overseas, William B. Johnson suggested the Philadelphia Association have a denominational meeting to sponsor these new missionaries.\(^4\) This new denomination, however, was more for the purpose of allowing churches to cooperate together to fund missions endeavors, and was not for the purpose of enforcing doctrinal positions. Certainly, there were discussions on whether or not some churches should be allowed to participate because of their beliefs, but this was true with regard to whether or not to share communion with others and recognizing the validity of one’s baptism. Both Richard Furman and William Johnson called for a much broader form of organization than the mission societies had in place. The result was the Triennial Convention, mentioned in Chapter 1. Not long after the national convention was developed, states began adopting the same model for their own conventions.\(^5\)

Montgomery points out that the associations and state conventions were unstable organizations because of Baptists’ strong commitment to congregationalism.\(^6\) He indicates that because of the denomination’s polity, they were more subject to the shifting whims and desires of the local bodies, rather than strengthened by a strong hierarchy. Any denominational structure has its strengths and weaknesses, and Baptist polity is no exception. While the local churches

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\(^3\) McBeth, *A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage*, 164-165.


\(^5\) Ibid., 37.

\(^6\) Montgomery, *Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree*, 116.
enjoy freedom from control by higher authorities, they are also vulnerable to ministers who persuade the congregation to leave the denomination or to follow unorthodox beliefs and practices. This will be explored further in the discussion on the Landmark Movement.

Aside from the doctrinal issues, the congregational polity adopted by Baptists had another drawback: the lack of a unified voice. Because there is no central authority to impose beliefs upon the churches, there is also the lack of a central headquarters that can state unequivocally to those outside of the church as to what Southern Baptists believe. With a hierarchical system of church government, the denomination could have adopted a position opposing slavery and imposed it upon the member churches. However, it would have had an equally loud voice if Baptists had stood together and stated without question that all Baptists believed the Peculiar Institution to be immoral and unchristian. In later years, Baptists learned to use this voice to communicate to those outside of the denomination, but there is no authority to impose the beliefs upon anyone. As Harvey points out in *Redeeming the South*, “the localism of Baptist polity, the ability of any group of believers to form a congregation, meant that churches were often small, weak, and schismatic, and larger organizations were difficult to support.”

While delegates from the various churches would gather for the national meetings, the denomination did not have the authority to impose its actions upon any local church body. J. B. Gambrell asserted that “I am an abolitionist by intuition and not by birth.” In other words, he had come to the belief that slavery should be abolished in spite of the environment in which he was raised. Further, he claimed, there were thousands of people in the South who were abolitionists, but they were ignorant of how to accomplish that goal. He apparently believed that abolitionists in the South lacked sufficient resources to sway others in the South to their way of thinking. This is probably true, due to the lack of a uniformity of belief among Southern Baptists toward slavery. Some denominational leaders characterized themselves as ultra pro-slavery, but others had come to believe in the abolitionist cause, making it difficult to come to an agreement on the issue as a denomination.

Another aspect of this is the lack of consistency between the statements at the national and state levels and the practice at the local church level. The denomination may make a

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7 Harvey, *Redeeming the South*, 62.

statement of position through resolutions, but those resolutions do not demand an action on the part of any church or member. If the convention votes to perform a certain act or deed, it must identify who will carry it out and appropriate funds to do so. Many of the resolutions cited in chapter five were passed, but were not binding upon any person or church. Similarly, when the Home Mission Board challenged churches to give $50,000 per year toward improving race relations, it remained only a statement by a denominational agency and was not binding. This allowed the denomination to take public stances on positions, but it also allowed the local churches to ignore the denominational policy and conduct business as they had before. Unless churches are willing to fund specific courses of actions, the statements the convention makes are hollow. Churches might give lip service to positions by the convention, but for it to be effective they must back it up with their money and actions.

**Landmark Movement**

The Landmark Movement had a profound impact upon Southern Baptists, and at least indirectly, an impact upon Southern Baptists’ lack of action toward blacks. The Landmark Movement surfaced in Nashville in the 1840s and was promoted primarily by James Robinson Graves. Graves had been running a school in Nashville when he came to the attention of R. B. C. Howell, a vice-president of the Southern Baptist convention and a prominent minister in Tennessee. When Howell took a church in Richmond, Virginia, he enabled Graves to secure the position of editor of *The Tennessee Baptist*.\(^9\)

Once Howell left Tennessee, Graves launched what was later called the Landmark Movement. Graves’ followers met with him in Cotton Grove, Tennessee, and adopted the Cotton Grove Resolutions. These were basically an ecclesiological approach to Baptist life. Graves believed that the local body was the only church, rejecting the idea that there is a universal church. He even claimed that the Baptist church was the only true church, tracing Baptist churches all the way back to the time of Christ. Since Baptists were the sole possessors of truth, he taught that only Baptist churches were authorized to baptize and to serve the Lord’s

Supper. His teaching fell on fertile ground, quickly gaining a stronghold among Southern Baptists.\textsuperscript{10}

Graves was a gifted and popular speaker, and also had many media at his disposal for the propagation of his views. His newspaper, \textit{The Tennessee Baptist}, was the most influential paper in the Southwest, with a subscribership of 12,000 by 1860.\textsuperscript{11} In addition to Graves’ persuasive manner, his views were attractive to Baptists as they were identified as the true possessors of New Testament doctrine and practices. Since sectionalism had already been a growing influence in the nation, this further gave Southern Baptists a distinction of which they could be proud, especially when compared to other denominations.

Landmark teachings would also have been especially appealing to Baptists in the South who were being attacked by Baptists in the North over the issue of slavery. Since slavery was the main point of contention between the two groups, each tried to spiritualize its position. Anything that would have portrayed Southern Baptists as true defenders of the faith would have been desirable. Southern Baptists had been criticized and maligned as unchristian because of their support of slavery. Now, they had something with which to respond. If they were able to point to a specific doctrine or practice that elevated them above Baptists in the North, it would have given them more credibility, at least in their own minds.

Graves did not hold back in attacking denominationalism. He taught that any doctrine or organization that would usurp the authority of the local church was suspect. According to Landmark teachings, true Christians must draw their authority from the local body; they were not to base their membership on larger bodies, whether associational or denominational. The authority of the local church was supreme.\textsuperscript{12}

This rejection of denominational authority had an impact on the missionary efforts of Southern Baptists. Southern Baptists had assigned responsibility for the appointment of missionaries to the Foreign Mission Board. N. M. Crawford of Mercer University, a colleague of Graves, wrote an article in \textit{The Tennessee Baptist} denying that the Foreign Mission Board had authority over autonomous Baptist churches on the mission field. Graves agreed with Crawford,

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\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 213.
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\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 214.
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writing that the practice of the Foreign Mission Board of sending missionaries was unscriptural. In short, he said, the churches send missionaries to the mission field, not a board or denomination. He believed that churches should collaborate informally to send missionaries, not give them over to such a non-scriptural plan as allowing another agency to override the authority that belonged at the local church.\textsuperscript{13} Such a challenge to the denomination would have weakened the denomination’s voice. Since each church was independent of any other authority, it would not have been able to exert any influence beyond its local community.

R. B. C. Howell returned to the pastorate at First Baptist Church, Nashville, Tennessee, in 1857. He had been elected to a fourth term as president of the Southern Baptist Convention. Howell soon realized the influence Graves was wielding in the convention. Graves had gained control of the newly created Southern Baptist Sunday School Union, which had been created by Howell. Graves had arranged for the placement of one of his close associates, A. C. Dayton, as director of the new organization. Howell successfully removed Dayton from the position, but was then openly attacked by Graves. Graves was eventually brought before First Baptist Church for discipline and the church ruled against him. He and about twenty-five others withdrew, claiming that they were the true Baptist church. He continued his unsuccessful attacks on Howell until the Civil War, when Union troops seized his publishing facilities. His influence declined, but had been strongly felt by Southern Baptists.\textsuperscript{14}

Graves’ influence is important because of the effect he had on missions efforts by Southern Baptists. He had successfully mounted an anti-missionary movement, contending that this should be done by the local church, not the denomination. This further weakened the position and voice the convention might have had. It is even more important to note that, while the convention was pre-occupied fighting wars against internal enemies, it could not be effectively engaged in focusing on evils outside of the denomination, including social evils such as slavery.

\textsuperscript{13} The Tennessee Baptist, (Nashville), September 4, 1858.

\textsuperscript{14} Fletcher, The Southern Baptist Convention, 63-66.
Lack of Formal Education among Southern Baptist Ministers

One reason Graves had been successful in influencing Southern Baptists as greatly as he had was because of the lack of formal education among Southern Baptists. This, in turn, played a role in the position Southern Baptists took toward slavery. Because Southern Baptist ministers were not as highly educated as their counterparts in many other religious groups, they were better received among laity who were also lacking in education. Baker states that, “the only distinction between ‘laity’ and ‘clergy’ existed only in the fact that the latter had fire in their bones to preach the gospel in response to a divine summons.”¹⁵

E. Brooks Holifield identified three classes of clergy in nineteenth century America. He stated,

…that the division exerted a relentless influence on their practice and self-understanding. The first group supported the ideal of the educated pastor and strove to enhance the standing of the clergy as a learned profession. A second group, scorning demands for ministerial education, called for a ministry drawn—if God willed—from the ranks of the poor and the uneducated and authorized not by learning but by the zeal flowing from a sense of divine calling. In the first four decades after the Revolution, this divide between professionals and populists reshaped the landscape of ministry. Yet for a third group of ministers, the Irish and German immigrants, other issues took precedence over disputes about professionalism and populism. For the immigrants, questions of ethnic tradition and adaptation to American culture proved more pressing than struggles over education, office, and calling.¹⁶

It was into this second group, the populists, that Baptists fell. Holifield further stated that the Baptists primarily labored among the lower classes of the people.¹⁷ Baker, in his study, indicates

¹⁵ Ibid., 87.


¹⁷ Ibid., 131.
that many Baptists left Virginia because of their dislike of the “snobbery of the aristocrats and large landowners.”

While some Southern Baptist clergymen had received a traditional education, there were far more who had not. Richard Furman had less than a year of formal training, but was tutored by his father in mathematics and other sciences. He taught himself Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French, German, metaphysics, logic, history, and theology. Furman later became a strong advocate for education among ministers. However, it would have been easy for others to point to Furman and make the case for being self-taught, instead of being educated in the conventional manner.

The lack of emphasis on education among Baptist ministers traces itself back to the middle of the eighteenth century. According to Baker, “The zeal and emotional preaching of the Separates, the use of uneducated ministers, the ‘noisy’ meetings, and even the extensive ministry of women in the services alienated the more formal older Baptists, who became known as Regular Baptists.” In spite of their neglect of ministerial education and other weaknesses, these early Baptists played an instrumental role in bringing about the Great Awakening. One reason for this was that the Baptist preachers who carried the gospel to the frontiers were little different from their parishioners. They lived no differently than those to whom they came to preach, and most of them supported themselves financially.

Yet, it was the same lack of an educational requirement that allowed black preachers to emerge in the Baptist churches in the South. Noah Davis purchased his freedom in Virginia and began a congregation in Baltimore shortly after 1847. He had no formal education, but learned to read the Bible and devoted himself to preaching. Within just a few years, his congregation had grown sufficiently enough to construct a sizeable place of worship.

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21 Ibid., 56-57.

22 Ibid., 57.

23 Holifield, *God’s Ambassadors*, 129.
One of the hazards of a lack of education of the ministers was the way in which they interpreted scripture. Furman had not exhibited good scholarship when he wrote his treatise to the governor of South Carolina in defense of slavery. When ministers are not properly trained in biblical interpretation, they tended to take verses out of context, rather than understanding them in light of the larger body of scripture in which they are contained.

In addition to the lack of scholarship in biblical interpretation, many preachers were skilled and persuasive communicators, but had developed theology that was not orthodox in its teaching. An example of this was Daniel Parker, who taught a doctrine called “Two Seeds in the Spirit.” This teaching divided the human race into the predestined children of God and the predestined children of the devil. He taught that God would claim his own, while the devil would claim his. Parker and others were not only anti-missionary, they were opposed to tract societies, formal education, and denominations. They influenced many people and churches during their lives. They even taught that if God had elected men to damnation, to tempt them with the gospel was tantamount to blasphemy.\(^\text{24}\)

Slavery became a very emotional issue. When the validity of one’s salvation is attacked because of their position on slavery, a person generally responds with an emotional defense, looking for any scriptural support in the process. As was mentioned in Chapter 1, Baptists on both sides of the debate tried to shore up their views by finding scriptural evidence to support their position. Baptists in the South became so strongly entrenched in their position that they virtually lost all ability to change their views.

An editorial in *The Confederate Baptist* stated the position very clearly. After the Southern Baptist Convention voted unanimously not to seek reunion with the United States, Reynolds said,

> Another consideration justificative [sic] of the interposition of the convention, although exclusively a religious assembly, in the affairs of the country, is found in the fact that the war which has been forced upon us by our assailants, is grounded upon opposition to an institution which is sustained by the actions of religion. They assume that slavery is a sin, and therefore to be abolished. We contend that it is a Scriptural institution. The very nature of the contest takes the point in

\(^{24}\) *Baker, The Southern Baptist Convention and Its People*, 151.
dispute out of the category of politics, and relegates it to the sphere of Christianity. We are really contending for the sphere of religion, against the devices of the wisdom of this world, and it is, therefore, not only the policy, but the duty of religious bodies to define their position in this great contest. The convention has done well in giving unanimous utterance to its sentiments on this subject.\textsuperscript{25}

Once a war had been spiritualized into a type of holy war, there is little hope of abandoning it. This is especially true since support of slavery had been characterized as a sin. While one of the tenets of Christianity is an acknowledgement that all people are sinners, Baptist believed that a converted sinner would not continue in a sinful lifestyle. Since the Baptists in the South were continuing in support of slavery, and as Graves had pointed out, they were, in fact, the true church, then it follows that slavery could not possibly be a sin.

**Changing Attitudes toward Blacks**

While Southern Baptists made some attempts to improve the lives of blacks in the Southern states, their work and efforts were severely limited. Unfortunately, their efforts were limited by their past, their lack of organization, and their attitudes. Southern Baptists’ history shaped their organization, but their history also shaped their thoughts toward blacks. In many ways, Southern Baptists were products of their times and were more influenced by their southern attitudes than their religious beliefs. They had been taught that black people had inferior intellect. They apparently viewed the well-versed blacks of their day as anomalies, not the rule. Regardless, they did not believe that blacks had the capability to care for themselves. It did not matter that an entire continent filled with civilizations had thrived for centuries without white supervision or intervention. They saw themselves as the protectors of blacks, accomplishing the will of God.\textsuperscript{26}

\ \textsuperscript{25} J. L. Reynolds, *The Confederate Baptist* (Columbia, South Carolina), May 20, 1863. *The Confederate Baptist* was a propaganda tool used during the Civil War. It was first published in October 1862, and the last issue was printed in January 1865. It was not owned or operated by any Southern Baptist entity, but was edited by J. L. Reynolds of Columbia, South Carolina.

\textsuperscript{26} Harvey, *Redeeming the South*, 9.
To their credit, Southern Baptists were concerned with spreading the gospel message among blacks, as well as other unreached groups. However, they justified the institution of slavery as being instrumental in reaching that end. Slavery was not an evil; it was seen as an instrument of God to bring about the salvation of blacks. J. B. Gambrell quoted a man named Dr. Mayo who once told him that “the Negroes in the tutelage of slavery learned the language, the religion, and arts of the foremost people on earth.” Gambrell continued, “To deny this in the light of all that has happened since the Negroes were brought to the country is to write one’s self down stupid. Slavery on the whole had not degraded the Negroes, but elevated them.”

Related to this was the belief that blacks were incapable of learning to read. In fact, it was believed, they should not even be taught to read because this would be harmful to them. It is unclear how harm would come to them, except for them acquiring the knowledge to read abolitionist literature. This was a great fear among Southerners. One reason Southern Baptists had opposed the American Baptist Home Mission Society sending missionaries to work among the slaves, was because it was feared that the missionaries would introduce abolitionist teachings.

An editorial appeared in The Confederate Baptist on October 8, 1862 which asserted that the slaves should not be taught to read. The editor, J. L. Reynolds said that “if teaching them to read is more likely to injure than to benefit them, it is our duty to abstain from it. We thus protect them against the insidious attempts of fanatics, and retain their religious instruction in our own hands.” In spite of objections from the South, missionaries from the North continued to work among blacks in the South during Reconstruction.

The condescending view that Southern Baptists seemed to take toward blacks during the slave era is usually referred to as paternalism. Henry Mitchell, author of Black Church Beginnings: The Long-Hidden Realities of the First Years, is convinced that much of the work done by Southern Baptists, even during Reconstruction, was out of this same paternalistic attitude. He states,

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29 J. L. Reynolds, The Confederate Baptist (Columbia, South Carolina), October 8, 1862.
Regardless of paternalism and hazards to African Americans’ self-esteem, it was this huge crew of volunteer and minimally paid instructors, of not just Baptist but all denominations, who laid the foundation for all the secondary and college work reported…. There may have been only a log cabin to teach in at first; it may have been by firelight, but these volunteers taught their very hearts out. There simply isn’t room to begin to cover the host of primary reading classes that were begun in churches and elsewhere soon after the Union troops took over.  

Mitchell seems to hold the view that Southern Baptist actions may have been good, but the denomination’s paternalism blinded them to how blacks felt about themselves. An attitude of paternalism, while it fails to see the capabilities in the other person or group, at least motivates someone to perform good deeds. The Alabama Baptist State Convention expressed it this way:

The anomalous condition of the colored people presents questions, as to their future history, of the most serious importance. Suddenly released from the bonds of slavery, they were as suddenly deprived of its blessings…. And now, that the institution of slavery has been abolished, the question of duty to them, as freedmen, naturally presents itself. Shall we abandon them to the inevitable fate of the masses, if uncared for by the white man—indolence, superstition, and the rapid return to barbarism—or shall [we] leave them to the teachings of others?  

When one looks at the attitudes of Southern Baptists toward blacks, however, it is important to look just beyond paternalism. It must be remembered that Baptists in the South were once opposed to the idea of slavery in the period prior to the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention. However, the feelings of southerners quickly shifted to not only accepting slavery as an acceptable institution, they even defended it as scripturally based. After the convention formed, white churches were happy to keep black members in their churches. While many churches held separate sermons for their black congregations, and many times formed

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31 *Minutes of the Forty-fourth Annual Session of the Alabama Baptist State Convention*, November 9-12, 1866 (Atlanta: Franklin Steam Printing House, 1866), 28.
black conferences, they were still affiliated with the white churches. Some churches aided blacks in forming churches of their own.

However, after the Civil War, many whites began to feel resentment, or at the very least, suspicion, toward their black brothers. It is almost as if whites blamed blacks for the situations in which they found themselves. They viewed blacks as lower beings intellectually, as well as being easily swayed by superstitions. White Baptists sometimes favored the formation of black churches, but others felt that as long as blacks remained members of white churches, as least white members had some element of control over them. This would be indicated by the vote by the Damascus Baptist Church in Butler County, Alabama,

Resolved that the change brought about by the polickal [sic] events of the past few years in condition of the Colored Race Shall not effect [sic] the relation of the Collored [sic] members of this Church But they shall continue in the Same position and Shall never be allowed a vote only on the reception or exclusion of a Colored member.32

They were willing to allow blacks to continue as members of the church, provided they understood that they would be basically under the control of the white membership.

While states may have approved of or assisted the formation of black associations and state conventions, it is difficult to express the attitudes of Southern Baptists clearly and succinctly. The reason this is the case is because most southerners were at odds over their own feelings toward blacks. Southern Baptists had primarily supported the institution of slavery prior to the war, yet were forced to accept the emancipation of the slaves. Yet, where they had allowed the slaves to worship with whites and even encouraged their spiritual conversion and growth, they were not yet willing to accept them as equals.33

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, racism replaced paternalism, as was indicated in the Home Mission Board’s Statement on Race Relations, cited in the previous chapter. During the period after emancipation, Southern Baptists had the greatest opportunity to perform their Christian duty toward blacks as they formed their own churches and denominational structures. While there were some demonstrations of this, for the most part, Southern Baptists

32 Minutes, Damascus Baptist Church (Butler County, Alabama), June 20, 1868.

33 Harvey, Redeeming the South, 38.
appeared to take a public stance of assistance and encouragement, but in reality, demonstrated that little change had taken place within the white denomination during the first fifty years of their existence.
CONCLUSIONS

Racism is defined as “a belief or doctrine that inherent differences among the various human races determine cultural or individual achievement, usually involving the idea that one’s own race is superior and has the right to rule others.”¹ Southern Baptists exhibited such attitudes. This was evident in all of the actions seen in this study. Prior to the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845, the Baptists in the South were strong defenders of slavery, even to the point of arguing that the Peculiar Institution was actually beneficial to the slaves. Defenders of slavery argued that enslaved blacks were actually elevated in status as a result of their service and association with their white masters.

Even though Baptists in the South had initially opposed slavery, they eventually accepted it, and in the end, defended it. The result was that slavery was at the heart of the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention. As the convention was formed, white Baptists made efforts to evangelize blacks, including them as part of the church. However, many of the positive acts performed toward them, including education and religious instruction, contained elements of paternalism and racism. Actions always reflect attitudes. While it is true that Baptists showed a genuine concern for the blacks under their care, they regularly treated them as an inferior people.

After the slaves were emancipated, Baptists continued with education programs, geared mainly toward black ministers and church leaders, but even this effort regarded blacks as incapable of performing without proper training by their former masters. Some of the literature examined even expressed the reservations that many whites had about the capabilities of blacks.

After black members began withdrawing from white congregations and forming congregations of their own, white Baptists often viewed the separation with suspicion. White Southern Baptists were angry and seemed to blame freed men and women for the current state of their affairs.

At the state and national levels of the denomination, there were efforts to educate black ministers, and these were encouraged. Funding for these efforts, however, was frequently in

short supply. Much of this can be attributed to the depressed economy in the South, but an element of racism existed in this, as well. This was evident in the Statement on Race Relations published by the Home Mission Board in 1891. The statement explicitly stated that blacks desired to remain in a subservient role, but wished to be treated fairly and kindly. Furthermore, according to the statement, if the Home Mission Board and state conventions would contribute the sum of $50,000 per year for ten years, the race issue would be solved forever.

The actions and statements from the state and national conventions were not always consistent with the actions that were being carried on by the local churches. The denomination encouraged many of the things that were done, but were unable to fund them because of the financial situations experienced by the state and national boards. While many whites may have wanted to improve the situation of freedmen, the denominational structure was not conducive to such actions. For the most part, Southern Baptists remained powerless as a denomination to effect a positive change.

The facts presented in this dissertation do not appear to be consistent with what has been taught in Southern Baptist colleges and seminaries. Much work remains to be done to educate those who have been training Southern Baptist ministers and teachers. Southern Baptists need to correct that record that has stood since the denomination’s formation in 1845. Once college and seminary professors learn that they have been subjected to a white bias in denominational education, they can teach a new generation wrongs done by previous generations. While nothing can be done to correct the past, it is necessary to admit to wrongs that were committed in the name of religion and ensure that those same actions are not repeated. Perhaps with the proper education and training, attitudes will change, as well.

The evidence presented in this study suggests that racism was the underlying attitude of Southern Baptists toward blacks from 1845 to 1895. These attitudes sometimes motivated Southern Baptists to perform kind and positive actions toward blacks, but these were tempered by a lack of a unified and positive stand by Southern Baptists. Much remains to be done in scholarship in this area. Certainly Paul Harvey’s book, *Redeeming the South*, was groundbreaking in identifying elements of racism in the Southern Baptist Convention’s past. Perhaps this dissertation will be another small step in the right direction. Additional study needs to be conducted with regard to Southern Baptists and racial issues from the end of the nineteenth century through the close of the twentieth century. Part of Christian teaching is the admission of
sin, then repentance for it. It is hoped that this study will confront Southern Baptists with the sins of the past so that true repentance, restoration, and growth can take place.
APPENDIX A

RICHARD FURMAN’S EXPOSITION OF THE VIEWS OF THE BAPTISTS, RELATIVE TO THE COLOURED POPULATION IN THE UNITED STATES IN A COMMUNICATION TO THE GOVERNOR OF SOUTH CAROLINA
Rev. Dr. Richard Furman's

EXPOSITION

of

*The Views of the Baptists,*

RELATIVE TO THE

*COLOURED POPULATION*

In the United States

IN

A COMMUNICATION

To the Governor of South-Carolina

[SECOND EDITION.]

CHARLESTON:
PRINTED BY A.E. MILLER
No. 4 Broad-st.
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1838.

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1South Carolina Baptist Historical Collection, Furman University, Greenville, South Carolina (http://facweb.furman.edu/~benson/docs/rcd-fmn1.htm, accessed June 20, 2008).
Charleston, May 28th, 1823.

DEAR SIR,

SEVERAL of your fellow-citizens who have perused the Rev. Dr. FURMAN'S communication, submitting the propriety of your recommending a *Day of Thanksgiving and Humiliation*, think the dissemination of it might be beneficial, and ask your sanction to have it published.

With regard, your's,

B. ELLIOTT.

*His Excellency Gov. WILSON.*

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MY DEAR SIR,

THE request made by you, in behalf of yourself and several of your fellow-citizens, is most readily granted. There can be no doubt that such doctrines, from such a source, will produce the best of consequences in our mixed population, and tend to make our servants not only more contented with their lot, but more useful to their owners. The great piety and learning of Doctor FURMAN, his long established character with the religious of every denomination throughout our State, will at once command the respectful attention of every reader.

Receive the assurances of my respect and regard.

JOHN L. WILSON.

BENJAMIN ELLIOT, Esq.

*Charleston*
Charleston, 24th December, 1822.

SIR,

WHEN I had, lately, the honour of delivering to your Excellency an Address, from the Baptist Convention in this State, requesting that a Day of Public Humiliation and Thanksgiving might be appointed by you, as our Chief Magistrate, to be observed by the Citizens of the State at large, in reference to two important recent events, in which the interposition of Divine Providence has been conspicuous, and in which the interests and feelings of our Citizens have been greatly concerned,—viz: The protection afforded them from the horrors of an intended Insurrection; and the affliction they have suffered from the ravages of a dreadful Hurricane—I took the liberty to suggest, that I had a further communication to make on behalf of the Convention, in which their sentiments would be disclosed respecting the policy of the measure proposed; and on the lawfulness of holding slaves—the subject being considered in a moral and religious point of view.

You were pleased, sir, to signify, that it would be agreeable to you to receive such a communication. And as it is incumbent on me, in faithfulness to the trust reposed in me, to make it, I now take the liberty of laying it before you.

The Political propriety of bringing the intended Insurrection into view by publicly acknowledging its prevention to be an instance of the Divine Goodness, manifested by a providential, gracious interposition, is a subject, which has employed the serious attention of the Convention; and, if they have erred in the judgment they have formed upon it, the error is, at least, not owing to a want of consideration, or of serious concern. They cannot view the subject but as one of great magnitude, and intimately connected with the interests of the whole State. The Divine Interposition has been conspicuous; and our obligations to be thankful are unspeakably great. And, as principles of the wisest and best policy leads nations, as well as individuals, to consider and acknowledge the government of the Deity, to feel their dependency on him and trust in him, to be thankful for his mercies, and to be humbled under his chastening rod; so, not only moral and religious duty, but also a regard to the best interests of the community appear to require of us, on the present occasion, that humiliation and thanksgiving, which are proposed by the Convention in their request. For a sense of the Divine Government
has a meliorating influence on the minds of men, restraining them from crime, and disposing
them to virtuous action. To those also, who are humbled before the Heavenly Majesty for their
sins, and learn to be thankful for his mercies, the Divine Favour is manifested. From them
judgments are averted, and on them blessings are bestowed.

The Convention are aware that very respectable Citizens have been averse to the proposal
under consideration; the proposal for appointing a Day of Public Thanksgiving for our
preservation from the intended Insurrection, on account of the influence it might be supposed to
have on the Black Population--by giving publicity to the subject in their view, and by affording
them excitements to attempt something further of the same nature. These objections, however,
the Convention view as either not substantial, or over-balanced by higher considerations. As to
publicity, perhaps no fact is more generally known by the persons referred to; for the knowledge
of it has been communicated by almost every channel of information, public and private, even by
documents under the stamp of Public Authority; and has extended to every part of the State. But
with the knowledge of the conspiracy is united the knowledge of its frustration; and of that,
which Devotion and Gratitude should set in a strong light, the merciful interposition of
Providence, which produced that frustration. The more rational among that class of me, as well
as others, know also, that our preservation from the evil intended by the conspirators, is a
subject, which should induce us to render thanksgivings to the Almighty; and it is hoped and
believed, that the truly enlightened and religiously disposed among them, of which there appear
to be many, are ready to unite in those thanksgivings, from a regard to their own true interests: if
therefore it is apprehended, that an undue importance would be given to the subject in their view,
by making it the matter of public thanksgiving; that this would induce the designing and wicked
to infer our fear and sense of weakness from the fact, and thus induce them to form some other
scheme of mischief: Would not our silence, and the omission of an important religious duty,
under these circumstances, undergo, at least, as unfavorable a construction, and with more
reason?

But the Convention are persuaded, that publicity, rather than secrecy is the true policy to
be pursued on this occasion; especially, when the subject is taken into view, in connexion with
other truths, of high importance and certainty, which relate to it, and is placed in a just light; the
evidence and force of which truths, thousands of this people, when informed, can clearly discern
and estimate. It is proper, the Convention conceives, that the Negroes should know, that however
numerous they are in some parts of these Southern States, they, yet, are not, even including all descriptions, bond and free, in the United States, but little more than one sixth part of the whole number of inhabitants, estimating that number which it probably now is, at Ten Millions; and the Black and Coloured Population, according to returns made at 1,786,000: That their destitution in respect to arms, and the knowledge of using them, with other disabilities, would render their physical force, were they all united in a common effort, less than a tenth part of that, with which they would have to contend. That there are multitudes of the best informed and truly religious among them, who, from principle, as well as from prudence, would not unite with them, nor fail to disclose their machinations, when it should be in their power to do it: That, however in some parts of our Union there are Citizens, who favour the idea of general emancipation; yet, were they to see slaves in our Country, in arms, wading through blood and carnage to effect their purpose, they would do what both their duty and interest would require; unite under the government with their fellow citizens at large to suppress the rebellion, and bring the authors of it to condign punishment: That it may be expected, in every attempt to raise an insurrection (should other attempts be made) as well as it was in that defeated here, that the prime movers in such a nefarious scheme, will so form their plan, that in case of exigency, they may flee with their plunder and leave their deluded followers to suffer the punishment, which law and justice may inflict: And that therefore, there is reason to conclude, on the most rational and just principles, that whatever partial success might at any time attend such a measure at the onset, yet, in this country, it must finally result in the discomfiture and ruin of the perpetrators; and in many instances pull down on the heads of the innocent as well as the guilty, an undistinguishing ruin.

On the lawfulness of holding slaves, considering it in a moral and religious view, the Convention think it their duty to exhibit their sentiments, on the present occasion, before your Excellency, because they consider their duty to God, the peace of the State, the satisfaction of scrupulous consciences, and the welfare of the slaves themselves, as intimately connected with a right view of the subject. The rather, because certain writers on politics, morals and religion, and some of them highly respectable, have advanced positions, and inculcated sentiments, very unfriendly to the principle and practice of holding slaves; and by some these sentiments have been advanced among us, tending in their nature, directly to disturb the domestic peace of the State, to produce insubordination and rebellion among the slaves, and to infringe the rights of our
citizens; and indirectly, to deprive the slaves of religious privileges, by awakening in the minds of
their masters a fear, that acquaintance with the Scriptures, and the enjoyment of these
privileges would naturally produce the aforementioned effects; because the sentiments in
opposition to the holding of slaves have been attributed, by their advocates, to the Holy
Scriptures, and to the genius of Christianity. These sentiments, the Convention, on whose behalf
I address your Excellency, cannot think just, or well-founded: for the right of holding slaves is
clearly established by the Holy Scriptures, both by precept and example. In the Old Testament,
the Israelites were directed to purchase their bond-men and bond-maids of the Heathen nations;
except they were of the Canaanites, for these were to be destroyed. And it is declared, that the
persons purchased were to be their "bond-men forever;" and an "inheritance for them and their
children." They were not to go out free in the year of jubilee, as the Hebrews, who had been
purchased, were: the line being clearly drawn between them.*[See Leviticus XXV. 44, 45, 46,
&c.] In example, they are presented to our view as existing in the families of the Hebrews as
servants, or slaves, born in the house, or bought with money: so that the children born of slaves
are here considered slaves as well as their parents. And to this well known state of things, as to
its reason and order, as well as to special privileges, St. Paul appears to refer, when he says, "But
I was free born."

In the New-Testament, the Gospel History, or representation of facts, presents us a view
 correspondent with that, which is furnished by other authentic ancient histories of the state of the
world at the commencement of Christianity. The powerful Romans had succeeded, in empire, the
polished Greeks; and under both empires, the countries they possessed and governed were full of
slaves. Many of these with their masters, were converted to the Christian Faith, and received,
together with them into the Christian Church, while it was yet under the ministry of the inspired
Apostles. In things purely spiritual, they appear to have enjoyed equal privileges; but their
relationship, as masters and slaves, was not dissolved. Their respective duties are strictly
enjoined. The masters are not required to emancipate their slaves; but to give them the things that
are just and equal, forbearing threatening; and to remember, they also have a master in Heaven.
The "servants under the yoke" *[upo zugon Douloi: bond-servants, or slaves. Doulos, is the
proper term for slaves; it is here in the plural and rendered more expressive by being connected
with yoke---UNDER THE YOKE.] (bond-servants or slaves) mentioned by Paul to Timothy, as
having "believing masters," are not authorized by him to demand of them emancipation, or to
employ violent means to obtain it; but are directed to "account their masters worthy of all honour," and "not to despise them, because they were brethren" in religion; "but the rather to do them service, because they were faithful and beloved partakers of the Christian benefit." Similar directions are given by him in other places, and by other Apostles. And it gives great weight to the argument, that in this place, Paul follows his directions concerning servants with a charge to Timothy, as an Evangelist, to teach and exhort men to observe this doctrine.

Had the holding of slaves been a moral evil, it cannot be supposed, that the inspired Apostles, who feared not the faces of men, and were ready to lay down their lives in the cause of their God, would have tolerated it, for a moment, in the Christian Church. If they had done so on a principle of accommodation, in cases where the masters remained heathen, to avoid offences and civil commotion; yet, surely, where both master and servant were Christian, as in the case before us, they would have enforced the law of Christ, and required, that the master should liberate his slave in the first instance. But, instead of this, they let the relationship remain untouched, as being lawful and right, and insist on the relative duties.

In proving this subject justifiable by Scriptural authority, its morality is also proved; for the Divine Law never sanctions immoral actions.

The Christian golden rule, of doing to others, as we would they should do to us, has been urged as an unanswerable argument against holding slaves. But surely this rule is never to be urged against that order of things, which the Divine government has established; nor do our desires become a standard to us, under this rule, unless they have a due regard to justice, propriety and the general good.

A father may very naturally desire, that his son should be obedient to his orders: Is he, therefore, to obey the orders of his son? A man might be pleased to be exonerated from his debts by the generosity of his creditors; or that his rich neighbour should equally divide his property with him; and in certain circumstances might desire these to be done: Would the mere existence of this desire, oblige him to exonerate his debtors, and to make such a division of his property? Consistency and generosity, indeed, might require it of him, if he were in circumstances which would justify the act of generosity; but, otherwise, either action might be considered as the effect of folly and extravagance.

If the holding of slaves is lawful, or according to the Scriptures; then this Scriptural rule can be considered as requiring no more of the master, in respect of justice (whatever it may do in
point of generosity) than what he, if a slave, could consistently, wish to be done to himself, while the relationship between master and servant should still be continued.

In this argument, the advocates for emancipation blend the ideas of injustice and cruelty with those, which respect the existence of slavery, and consider them as inseparable. But, surely, they may be separated. A bond-servant may be treated with justice and humanity as a servant; and a master may, in an important sense, be the guardian and even father of his slaves.

They become a part of his family, (the whole, forming under him a little community) and the care of ordering it and providing for its welfare, devolves on him. The children, the aged, the sick, the disabled, and the unruly, as well as those, who are capable of service and orderly, are the objects of his care: The labour of these, is applied to the benefit of those, and to their own support, as well as that of the master. Thus, what is effected, and often at a great public expense, in a free community, by taxes, benevolent institutions, bettering houses, and penitentiaries, lies here on the master, to be performed by him, whatever contingencies may happen; and often occasions much expense, care and trouble, from which the servants are free. Cruelty, is, certainly, inadmissible; but servitude may be consistent with such degrees of happiness as men usually attain in this imperfect state of things.

Some difficulties arise with respect to bringing a man, or class of men, into a state of bondage. For crime, it is generally agreed, a man may be deprived of his liberty. But, may he not be divested of it by his own consent, directly, or indirectly given: And, especially, when this assent, though indirect, is connected with an attempt to take away the liberty, if not the lives of others? The Jewish law favours the former idea: And if the inquiry on the latter be taken in the affirmative, which appears to be reasonable, it will establish a principle, by which it will appear, that the Africans brought to America were, slaves, by their own consent, before they came from their own country, or fell into the hands of white men. Their law of nations, or general usage, having, by common consent the force of law, justified them, while carrying on their petty wars, in killing their prisoners or reducing them to slavery; consequently, in selling them, and these ends they appear to have proposed to themselves; the nation, therefore, or individual, which was overcome, reduced to slavery, and sold would have done the same by the enemy, had victory declared on their, or his side. Consequently, the man made slave in this manner, might be said to be made so by his own consent, and by the indulgence of barbarous principles.
That Christian nations have not done all they might, or should have done, on a principle of Christian benevolence, for the civilization and conversion of the Africans: that much cruelty has been practiced [sic] in the slave trade, as the benevolent Wilberforce, and others have shown; that much tyranny has been exercised by individuals, as masters over their slaves, and that the religious interests of the latter have been too much neglected by many cannot, will not be denied. But the fullest proof of these facts, will not also prove, that the holding men in subjection, as slaves, is a moral evil, and inconsistent with Christianity. Magistrates, husbands, and fathers, have proved tyrants. This does not prove, that magistracy, the husband's right to govern, and parental authority, are unlawful and wicked. The individual who abuses his authority, and acts with cruelty, must answer for it at the Divine tribunal; and civil authority should interpose to prevent or punish it; but neither civil nor ecclesiastical authority can consistently interfere with the possession and legitimate exercise of a right given by the Divine Law.

If the above representation of the Scriptural doctrine, and the manner of obtaining slaves from Africa is just; and if also purchasing them has been the means of saving human life, which there is great reason to believe it has; then, however the slave trade, in present circumstances, is justly censurable, yet might motives of humanity and even piety have been originally brought into operation in the purchase of slaves, when sold in the circumstances we have described. If, also, by their own confession, which has been made in manifold instances, their condition, when they have come into the hands of humane masters here, has been greatly bettered by the change; if it is, ordinarily, really better, as many assert, than that of thousands of the poorer classes in countries reputed civilized and free; and, if, in addition to all other considerations, the translation from their native country to this has been the means of their mental and religious improvement, and so of obtaining salvation, as many of themselves have joyfully and thankfully confessed--then may the just and humane master, who rules his slaves and provides for them, according to Christian principles, rest satisfied, that he is not, in holding them, chargeable with moral evil, nor with acting, in this respect, contrary to the genius of Christianity.--It appears to be equally clear, that those, who by reasoning on abstract principles, are induced to favour the scheme of general emancipation, and who ascribe their sentiments to Christianity, should be particularly careful, however benevolent their intentions may be, that they do not by a perversion of the Scriptural doctrine, through their wrong views of it, not only invade the domestic and religious peace and rights of our Citizens, on this subject; but, also by an intemperate zeal, prevent indirectly, the
religious improvement of the people they design, professedly, to benefit; and, perhaps, become, evidently, the means of producing in our country, scenes of anarchy and blood; and all this in a vain attempt to bring about a state of things, which, if arrived at, would not probably better the state of that people; which is thought, by men of observation, to be generally true of the Negroes in the Northern states, who have been liberated.

To pious minds it has given pain to hear men, respectable for intelligence and morals, sometimes say, that holding slaves is indeed indefensible, but that to us it is necessary, and must be supported. On this principle, mere politicians, unmindful of morals, may act. But surely, in a moral and religious view of the subject, this principle is inadmissible. It cannot be said, that theft, falsehood, adultery and murder, are become necessary and must be supported. Yet there is reason to believe, that some of honest and pious intentions have found their minds embarrassed if not perverted on this subject, by this plausible but unsound argument. From such embarrassment the view exhibited above affords relief.

The Convention, Sir, are far from thinking that Christianity fails to inspire the minds of its subjects with benevolent and generous sentiments; or that liberty rightly understood, or enjoyed, is a blessing of little moment. The contrary of these positions they maintain. But they also consider benevolence as consulting the truest and best interests of its objects; and view the happiness of liberty as well as of religion, as consisting not in the name or form, but in the reality. While men remain in the chains of ignorance and error, and under the domination of tyrant lusts and passions, they cannot be free. And the more freedom of action they have in this state, they are but the more qualified by it to do injury, both to themselves and others. It is, therefore, firmly believed, that general emancipation to the Negroes in this country, would not, in present circumstances, be for their own happiness, as a body; while it would be extremely injurious to the community at large in various ways: And, if so, then it is not required even by benevolence. But acts of benevolence and generosity must be free and voluntary; no man has a right to compel another to the performance of them. This is a concern, which lies between a man and his God. If a man has obtained slaves by purchase, or inheritance, and the holding of them as such is justifiable by the law of God; why should he be required to liberate them, because it would be a generous action, rather than another on the same principle, to release his debtors, or sell his lands and houses, and distribute the proceeds among the poor? These also would be generous actions: Are they, therefore, obligatory? Or, if obligatory, in certain circumstances, as
personal, voluntary acts of piety and benevolence, has any man or body of men, civil or ecclesiastic, a right to require them? Surely those, who are advocates for compulsory, or strenuous measures to bring about emancipation, should duly weigh this consideration.

Should, however, a time arrive, when the Africans in our country might be found qualified to enjoy freedom; and, when they might obtain it in a manner consistent with the interest and peace of the community at large, the Convention would be happy in seeing them free: And so they would, in seeing the state of the poor, the ignorant and the oppressed of every description, and of every country meliorated; so that the reputed free might be free indeed, and happy. But there seems to be just reason to conclude that a considerable part of the human race, whether they bear openly the character of slaves or are reputed freemen, will continue in such circumstances, with mere shades of variation, while the world continues. It is evident, that men are sinful creatures, subject to affliction and to death, as the consequences of their nature's pollution and guilt: That they are now in a state of probation; and that God as a Righteous, All-wise Sovereign, not only disposes of them as he pleases, and bestows upon them many unmerited blessings and comforts, but subjects them also to privations, afflictions and trials, with the merciful intention of making all their afflictions, as well as their blessings, work finally for their good; if they embrace his salvation, humble themselves before him, learn righteousness, and submit to his holy will. To have them brought to this happy state is the great object of Christian benevolence, and of Christian piety; for this state is not only connected with the truest happiness, which can be enjoyed at any time, but is introductory to eternal life and blessedness in the future world: And the salvation of men is intimately connected with the glory of their God and Redeemer.

And here I am brought to a part of the general subject, which, I confess to your Excellency, the Convention, from a sense of their duty, as a body of men, to whom important concerns of Religion are confided, have particularly at heart, and wish it may be seriously considered by all our Citizens: This is the religious interests of the Negroes. For though they are slaves, they are also men; and are with ourselves accountable creatures; having immortal souls, and being destined to future eternal reward. Their religious interests claim a regard from their masters of the most serious nature; and it is indispensible. Nor can the community at large, in a right estimate of their duty and happiness, be indifferent on this subject. To the truly benevolent it must be pleasing to know, that a number of masters, as well as ministers and pious individuals,
of various Christian denominations among us, do conscientiously regard this duty; but there is a great reason to believe, that it is neglected and disregarded by many.

The Convention are particularly unhappy in considering, that an idea of the Bible's teaching the doctrine of emancipation as necessary, and tending to make servants insubordinate to proper authority, has obtained access to any mind; both on account of its direct influence on those, who admit it; and the fear it excites in others, producing the effects before noticed. But it is hoped, it has been evinced, that the idea is an erroneous one; and, that it will be seen, that the influence of a right acquaintance with that Holy Book tends directly and powerfully, by promoting the fear and love of God, together with just and peaceful sentiments toward men, to produce one of the best securities to the public, for the internal and domestic peace of the State.

It is also a pleasing consideration, tending to confirm these sentiments, that in the late projected scheme for producing an insurrection among us, there were very few of those who were, as members attached to regular Churches, (even within the sphere of its operations) who appear to have taken a part in the wicked plot, or indeed to whom it was made known; of some Churches it does not appear, that there were any. It is true, that a considerable number of those who were found guilty and executed, laid claim to a religious character; yet several of these were grossly immoral, and, in general, they were members of an irregular body, which called itself the *African Church,* and had intimate connection and intercourse with a similar body of men in a Northern City, among whom the supposed right to emancipation is strenuously advocated.

The result of this inquiry and reasoning, on the subject of slavery, brings us, sir, if I mistake not, very regularly to the following conclusions:--That the holding of slaves is justifiable by the doctrine and example contained in Holy writ; and is; therefore consistent with Christian uprightness, both in sentiment and conduct. That all things considered, the Citizens of America have in general obtained the African slaves, which they possess, on principles, which can be justified; though much cruelty has indeed been exercised towards them by many, who have been concerned in the slave-trade, and by others who have held them here, as slaves in their service; for which the authors of this cruelty are accountable. That slavery, when tempered with humanity and justice, is a state of tolerable happiness; equal, if not superior, to that which many poor enjoy in countries reputed free. That a master has a scriptural right to govern his slaves so as to keep it in subjection; to demand and receive from them a reasonable service; and to correct them for the neglect of duty, for their vices and transgressions; but that to impose on them unreasonable,
rigorous services, or to inflict on them cruel punishment, he has neither a scriptural nor a moral right. At the same time it must be remembered, that, while he is receiving from them their uniform and best services, he is required by the Divine Law, to afford them protection, and such necessaries and conveniencies of life as are proper to their condition as servants; so far as he is enabled by their services to afford them these comforts, on just and rational principles. That it is the positive duty of servants to reverence their master, to be obedient, industrious, faithful to him, and careful of his interests; and without being so, they can neither be the faithful servants of God, nor be held as regular members of the Christian Church. That as clamis to freedom as a right, when that right is forfeited, or has been lost, in such a manner as has been represented, would be unjust; and as all attempts to obtain it by violence and fraud would be wicked; so all representations made to them by others, on such censurable principles, or in a manner tending to make them discontented; and finally, to produce such unhappy effects and consequences, as been before noticed, cannot be friendly to them (as they certainly are not to the community at large,) nor consistent with righteousness: Nor can the conduct be justified, however in some it may be palliated by pleading benevolence in intention, as the motive. That masters having the disposal of the persons, time and labour of their servants, and being the heads of families, are bound, on principles of moral and religious duty, to give these servants religious instruction; or at least, to afford them opportunities, under proper regulations to obtain it: And to grant religious privileges to those, who desire them, and furnish proper evidence of their sincerity and uprightness: Due care being at the same time taken, that they receive their instructions from right sources, and from their connexions, where they will not be in danger of having their minds corrupted by sentiments unfriendly to the domestic and civil peace of the community. That, where life, comfort, safety and religious interest of so large a number of human beings, as this class of persons is among us, are concerned; and, where they must necessarily, as slaves, be so much at the disposal of their masters; it appears to be a just and necessary concern of the Government, not only to provide laws to prevent or punish insurrections, and other violent and villanous conduct among them (which are indeed necessary) but, on the other hand, laws, also, to prevent their being oppressed and injured by unreasonable, cruel masters, and others; and to afford them, in respect of morality and religion, such privileges as may comport with the peace and safety of the State, and with those relative duties existing between masters and servants, which the word of God enjoins. It is, also, believed to be a just conclusion, that the interest and security of the
State would be promoted, by allowing, under proper regulations, considerable religious privileges, to such of this class, as know how to estimate them aright, and have given suitable evidence of their own good principles, uprightness and fidelity; by attaching them, from principles of gratitude and love, to the interests of their masters and the State; and thus rendering their fidelity firm and constant. While on the other hand, to lay them under an interdict, as some have supposed necessary, in a case where reason, conscience, the genius of Christianity and salvation are concerned, on account of the bad conduct of others, would be felt as oppressive, tend to sour and alienate their minds from their masters and the public, and to make them vulnerable to temptation. All which is, with deference, submitted to the consideration of your Excellency.

With high respect, I remain, personally, and on behalf of the Convention,

Sir, your very obedient and humble servant,

RICHARD FURMAN.

President of the Baptist State Convention.

His Excellency GOVERNOR WILSON.

[Transcribed by T. Lloyd Benson from the original text in the South Carolina Baptist Historical Collection, Furman University, Greenville, South Carolina.]
APPENDIX B
A STATEMENT ON RACE RELATIONS, HOME MISSION BOARD OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION
Our work among the COLORED PEOPLE

has by no means reached the proportions its importance demands. To no people are we more deeply indebted than to them. Our past as well as our present relations to them form weighty obligations which should move us to seek in every way the betterment of their condition, but especially to give them that religious culture which will fit them both for this life and that which is to come. The race problem, as it is called, has been deemed by statement the most perplexing of all questions affecting our society and our political institutions. We venture the assertion that it can and will be found of easy solution.

Nothing is plainer to any one who knows this race than its perfect willingness to accept a subordinate place, provided there be confidence that in that position of subordination it will receive justice and kindness. That is the condition it prefers above all others, and this is the condition in which it attains the highest development of every attribute of manhood. Whenever it shall understandingly and cheerfully accept this condition, the race problem is settled forever.

The only thing needed now on his part is the assurance that he may confidently rely upon the justice and kindness which such a condition always demands and should always receive.

This assurance the Christian men and women of this Southern land ought to give. Not the assurance of words, simply, nor yet of resolutions passed by political or religious conventions; nor simply the enactment of laws that are just and equal, but that higher and stronger assurance which springs from a persistent course of Christian conduct that looks with kindly eye and open hand upon his physical and mental needs, and, above all, upon his soul’s necessities. It is perfectly in the power of the Baptist people of the South to do all and give all that is needed to accomplish this end.

With the great mass of the professed Christians among them members of Baptist churches, with three-fourths of this entire population under Baptist influence, we have but to take hold of their religious interests with an earnestness becoming Christian men, and they will respond to such expressions of kindness with an alacrity and a sincerity that will surprise every beholder. If the Baptists of the South will but open their eyes to see their opportunity and open their hearts to the stimulating influences of Christian obligation to these people, they will
themselves be amazed and gratified at the ease and rapidity with which the end will be attained. We do not hesitate to affirm our confident belief that an expenditure under the best conditions by our Home Mission and State Boards of fifty thousand dollars a year for the next ten years will settle this race question forever.

What greater good could come to our country, or what grander triumph to Christianity than so easy and perfect a solution of a question which has been and is now the despair of the statesmanship of the world?¹

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Roger Richards was born in Birmingham, Alabama to Betty and Wiley Richards. He graduated from Graceville High School in Graceville, Florida, in 1975. He attended Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama, preparing to enter the ministry. While a student there, he married the former Sandra Messer of Cropwell, Alabama. After graduation, Richards attended New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, where he earned a Master of Religious Education degree. He served as Pastor of Hollins Baptist Church, Hollins, Alabama, then returned to New Orleans, where he earned a Master of Divinity degree from his alma mater. Upon completion of this degree, he entered the United States Navy, serving for twenty years as a chaplain, both with the Navy and the Marines. While on active duty, he earned the Doctor of Ministry degree from Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida.

Richards retired from the Navy in 2002 and returned to his home town of Graceville, where he began teaching at The Baptist College of Florida. It was at this time that he began his studies at Florida State University. In 2007 Richards was appointed Assistant Professor of History and Christian Studies at The Baptist College of Florida and also as Director of Student Services. He is currently serving as Chairman of the General Education Division. He and his wife, Sandra, have two grown sons and four grandchildren.