

**The Gospel Horse in the Valley:
Evangelical Slavery and Freedom in the Chattahoochee Valley, 1821-1877**

by

Stephen Presley Barber

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Approved by

Charles A. Israel, Chair, Associate Professor of History
Kenneth W. Noe, Draughton Professor of History
Anthony G. Carey, Associate Professor of History

Abstract

This dissertation examines the introduction of evangelical religion into the Chattahoochee Valley of Georgia during the frontier era, the formation and characteristics of biracial churches during the antebellum period, and the post-bellum racial separation and organization of independent black churches. It will document the attitudes, ideas, and actions of evangelicals as they formed, organized, and maintained biracial churches in the Chattahoochee Valley. In these churches, black and white evangelicals practiced “evangelical slavery,” defined as the manifestation of chattel slavery in the context of evangelical Christianity as practiced by slaveholders and slaves. This study also discloses the complexities of interactions of blacks and whites and their experiences as they grappled with the uncertainties and conflict brought about by emancipation. This dissertation is the first narrative of the religious history of the Chattahoochee Valley from the beginnings of white settlement to the end of Reconstruction. It is a subset of larger works on southern religion, but uniquely examines the continuity of southern evangelical religion between the time of the invasion of the Chattahoochee Valley by Methodist missionaries in 1821 and the practically complete institutional religious separation by 1877, thus augmenting and challenging previous interpretations of processes and chronology by revealing local patterns of behavior by black and white southern evangelicals.

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Introduction

In 1880, Andrew Brown, a prominent minister in the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), reflected on the establishment of his denomination in Georgia during the later years of the Civil War. Speaking at the AME Georgia Conference in 1880, he recalled:

I am not so superstitious as to claim to be a prophet, nor the son of a prophet, but I saw the AME Church in 1844 as bright as I see her tonight. I then prayed that I might outlive the surrounding circumstances, and see the church in reality as I then saw it in my mind. The day the ME Church, South split from the ME Church, while in the woods upon my knees, God showed me this church. The day was dark, but, thank God, we waited on and on. God's horse was tied to the iron stake. For a long time he failed to prance in Georgia and South Carolina. The day the first fire was made at Sumter, I saw the Gospel Horse begin to paw. He continued to paw until he finally broke loose and came tearing through Georgia. The colored man mounted him and intends to ride him. He is not particular where he goes, for he has practiced until he can and does ride him in the white man's pulpit.¹

No overt slave rebellions or any demonstrative escape of slaves from the religious control of whites precipitated his vision. Rather, the event that spawned his vision was the separation of southern Methodists from their northern brethren in 1844. Brown used the term “Gospel Horse” as a metaphor for what he believed to be the manifestation of true Christianity, in which blacks could freely, independently, and equally practice their faith, unencumbered by the social, political, and religious inequity of white hegemony in the South. Eventually, black evangelicals rode the metaphorical Gospel Horse as it left the stable at the end of slavery and facilitated the creation of independent black churches.

¹ Andrew Brown quoted in Wesley J. Gaines, *African Methodism in the South -or- Twenty-Five Years of Freedom* (Atlanta: Franklin Publishing House, 1890), 18.

Brown's Gospel Horse existed within the realm of "evangelical slavery," defined as the manifestation of chattel slavery in the context of evangelical Christianity as practiced by slaveholders and slaves. It was based on a rigid proslavery theology that saw slavery as an institution ordained by God as part of a plan for the fulfillment of his purposes for humankind. While some evangelical slaveholders genuinely saw slaves as humans needing redemption of sins and inclusion into the body of believers, secular forces embraced the tenets of evangelical Christianity as an addition to their arsenal of strategic mechanisms used to defend slavery from abolitionist attacks. Slaves embraced evangelical Christianity for many of the same reasons as whites, but the repressive nature of slavery did not preclude unilateral individual acceptances and appropriation by slaves who sought a plenary spiritual experience outside the jurisdiction of whites. Slaves also shaped evangelical slavery by crafting a Christian experience that appeared much differently than that of whites. Both races believed in the role of God in human history, but blacks drew on the Exodus story to view their condition in slavery as that of the Israelites. Central to the experience of slaves was the hope and belief that God would one day liberate them into a Promised Land. To white evangelicals, adherence to the laws and commands of God represented the essence of their Christian belief. Black evangelicals, however, saw their deliverance from bondage as the zenith of God's intervention in their lives. African traditions influenced the form of slave worship away from white eyes and the content of their worship reflected perhaps more than anything the divergence of white and black Christianity because slaves knew that, as Albert J. Raboteau states, "[white] Christianity was compatible with slavery, and theirs was not."²

² Albert J. Raboteau, *A Fire in the Bones: Reflections on African-American Religious History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 27.

Several historians have examined the institution of slavery in the context of its existence within evangelical Christianity. Anne C. Loveland found that many southern evangelicals felt anguish toward the institution of slavery, because the harshness of slavery, yet deemed manumission as untenable in light of the perceived dependency of slaves on paternalistic whites. The emergence of a strong abolitionist movement in the north in the 1830s and the religious connotation inherent in the insurrections of Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner also affected the actions, practices and policies of southern evangelicals. Charles Irons argues that in response to black initiative and the Nat Turner insurrection, southern evangelicals sought to mitigate the liberating power of Christianity by bringing more slaves under the control of the white church through increased missions to slaves and accommodations for separate buildings and separate services for slaves. In these structures, black developed models for post-slavery churches, a theme echoed by Janet Duitsman Cornelius. Slave missions, posits Cornelius, gave slaves a small space in the oppression of slavery, gave them a chance for literacy, and allowed black leaders to develop.³

Donald G. Mathews puts the religious experience of slaves in the context of the effort of white evangelical leaders in biracial churches to establish orderly communities through strict inquiry into behavior of individuals, both black and white, whose misbehavior threatened to disrupt the evangelical community. Randy Sparks also placed the religious experience of slaves in biracial churches as he observes that whites referred to blacks as “brother” and “sister” and granted to blacks the same spiritual dispensation

³ Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 186-194; Charles F. Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 12, 20; Janet Duitsman Cornelius, *Slave Missions and the Black Churches in the Antebellum South* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 2-3.

and the same procedural rights in disciplinary matters as whites. Continued white control and the constant reference to black members being the property of whites, however, diluted the equality felt by blacks. Sparks also notes that blacks in evangelical churches enjoyed the same procedural rights in disciplinary matters and finds differing patterns of disciplinary measures based on race and gender, a conclusion also drawn by Jean Friedman in her study of women in North Carolina and Georgia and by Gregory Wills in his study of Baptist church discipline and democracy.⁴

While Mathews, Sparks, and Wills focused on biracial churches, Albert J. Raboteau examines the dual nature of slave Christianity and explains that slaves were part of both institutional evangelical biracial churches and their own manifestation of Christianity. Slaves met apart and away from whites, in “hush-harbors” where slaves engaged in their “invisible institution” and developed their own brand of Christian worship. Slave theology differed from whites, both in thought and practice. While southern white evangelicals defended slavery as a scripturally based, God-ordained institution, blacks focused on the role of God acting in human history and looked to God to liberate them from slavery as he had done for the Israelites enslaved in Egypt. Building on the theme of Christian slaves outside of biracial churches, Larry E. Rivers argues that historians have underestimated the number of organized, independent black congregations and licensed or ordained black preachers, and have failed to see that

⁴ Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 43, 46; Randy J. Sparks, “Religion in Amite County, Mississippi, 1800-1861,” in *Masters and Slaves in the House of the Lord: Race and Relations in the American South, 1740-1870* (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 1988), 71; Randy J. Sparks in *On Jordan’s Stormy Banks: Evangelicalism in Mississippi 1773-1876* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 153-154, 160-161; Jean E. Friedman, in *The Enclosed Garden: Women and Community in the American South, 1830-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 14-15; Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1785-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 51-52, 61, 66-67.

vibrant, viable black churches existed. In these churches, according to Rivers, existing black churches find their roots in pre-emancipation activities.⁵

The separation of southern evangelical denominations from their northern counterparts over missionary issues related to slavery introduced different dynamics into the realm of evangelical slavery. Clarence Mohr points out that this separation provided southern white evangelicals more freedom for unilateral actions regarding slavery. Eugene Genovese argues that southern white evangelicals sought to minimize their defensive nature regarding slavery and instead, focused on reform efforts to ameliorate conditions within the institution of slavery to avoid God's judgment against the South. Drew Gilpin Faust places reform efforts in the context of the creation and sustenance of Confederate Nationalism.⁶

Dynamics involved in the creation of independent black churches during the post-bellum period was, according to Daniel Stowell, the central issue in what he termed "religious reconstruction." His study of events in Tennessee and Georgia reveal that conflicting views about the meaning of the Civil War and the resulting freedom of blacks complicated the process of institutional racial separation. Katherine Dvorak focuses on black agency as former slaves voluntarily initiated and carried out their exodus from white denominations, while Clarence E. Walker, Reginald F. Hildebrand, William B. Gravely explore more granularly the dynamics of race, politics, and power. Walker

⁵ Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: the "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 215; Larry Rivers, "Origins of the Organized Clergy in Florida's Slave Community" Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Georgia Association of Historians at Fort Valley State University, Fort Valley, Georgia, Feb. 22-23, 2008.

⁶ Clarence L. Mohr, "Slaves and White Churches in Confederate Georgia," in *Masters and Slaves in the House of the Lord: Race and Relations in the American South, 1740-1870* (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 1988), 158-159; Eugene D. Genovese, *A Consuming Fire: The Fall of the Confederacy in the Mind of the White South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998); Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 58-60, 77-78.

explores the missionary work of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) in the South to conclude that the AME saw itself as God's instrument in uplifting the black race in America resulting in the rejection of continued white paternalism and an improvement in the economic and social position of blacks. Hildebrand looks at the action of northern and southern white Methodists as they battled over the interpretation of freedom as related to their goals of retaining and evangelizing blacks, while Gravely exposes the failure of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MECS) and the AME denominations to form a fraternal relationship due to irreconcilable differences over the ownership of church property and the disaffection of the whites over the emerging political activity of the blacks. This failure contributed to the formation of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church (CME), which was also the result of the initiative of blacks in exercising a choice in religion, even if restricted in other social and political areas ⁷

Eric Foner and Stephen S. Hill also credit black initiative and agency and cast it as the foremost characteristic in building the black community during Reconstruction. Their view, however, obscures the cooperative nature of the relationship between black and white evangelicals, a theme that connects the studies of Kenneth K. Bailey and Edward R. Crowther, who see difficulty determining the extent to which racial separation can be solely attributed to blacks. Differing interpretations also make it difficult to accurately define the chronology of the creation of independent black churches,

⁷ Daniel W. Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion: The Religious Reconstruction of the South, 1863-1877* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Katharine L. Dvorak, *An African-American Exodus: The Segregation of the Southern Churches* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1991); Daniel W. Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion: The Religious Reconstruction of the South, 1863-1877* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Clarence E. Walker, *A Rock in a Weary Land: The African Methodist Episcopal Church During the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1982); Reginald F. Hildebrand, *The Times Were Strange and Stirring* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); William B. Gravely, "The Social, Political and Religious Significance of the Formation of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church (1870)." *Methodist History* 18, no. 1 (October 1979).

especially Baptist churches, where the decentralized, autonomous nature of congregations facilitated variations in methods, processes, and chronology. Studies by Robert Praytor and Rufus Spain place the separation of black and white Baptists no later than 1870, but they emphasize increasing white apathy based on the fear of social equality facilitated by continued close contact with blacks and focus more on state and local associations rather than local Baptist congregations.⁸

Local studies of black and white southern evangelicals produce a better understanding of the complexity of the broader issues related to the conjunction of evangelical Christianity with slavery and the dynamics of religious cultural changes brought about by emancipation. This study of evangelical slavery and freedom in the Chattahoochee Valley discloses the complexities of interactions of blacks and whites existing in evangelical slavery and their experiences as they grappled with the uncertainties and conflict brought about by emancipation. The experiences of black and white evangelicals reveal that they shared a religious culture, yet defined, practiced, and shaped the same religion in different ways and with different meanings based on distinctive racial, gender, theological, and social assumptions. Findings of this study augment and challenge previous interpretations of processes and chronology by revealing local patterns of behavior by black and white southern evangelicals between the time of the invasion of the Chattahoochee Valley by Methodist missionaries in 1821 and the practically complete institutional religious separation by 1877.

⁸ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 70; Kenneth K. Bailey, "The Post-Civil War Racial Separations in Southern Protestantism: Another Look," *Church History*, 46 (December 1977): 453-473; Edward R. Crowther, "Interracial Cooperative Missions among Blacks by Alabama's Baptists, 1868-1882," *The Journal of Negro History*, 80, No. 3 (Summer, 1995): 131-132; Robert Earl Praytor, "From Concern to Neglect: Alabama Baptists' Relationship to the Negro, 1823-1870" (M. A. thesis, Samford University, 1971), 54, 59, 74-77; Rufus B. Spain, *At Ease in Zion – A Social History of Southern Baptists 1865-1900* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967), 52.

The Chattahoochee Valley is defined as the region that includes the modern Alabama counties of Barbour, Chambers, Henry, Houston, Lee, and Russell and the modern Georgia counties of Chattahoochee, Clay, Decatur, Early, Grady, Harris, Miller, Muscogee, Quitman, Randolph, Stewart, and Troup. The focus of this study on the Georgia counties of Harris, Muscogee, and Troup, especially when addressing quantitative research, is a pragmatically limited research strategy. This research also includes other counties in close proximity to the three aforementioned counties, such as the Georgia counties of Randolph, Stewart, and Talbot and the Alabama counties of Russell and Chambers.

White settlement in the Chattahoochee Valley, other than that of traders in the Creek country, began in the late 1820s and, by the 1830s, represented a stable version of the Old South. By 1860, the Chattahoochee Valley was representative of the cotton kingdom. It had a diverse socioeconomic base which included elite planters, yeomen farmers, poor whites, merchants, skilled craftsmen, industrial entrepreneurs, factory workers, and slaves. The center of the Chattahoochee Valley was the city of Columbus, Georgia. It was a leading cotton market surrounded by rural counties and connected to the outside by rail and water, over which more than 100,000 bales of cotton were exported each year.⁹

The religious landscape of the Chattahoochee Valley was also typical of Deep South antebellum states. As the area developed after the arrival of white settlers in the 1820s, the Valley's landscape was dotted with Baptist and Methodist churches and very few of other denominations. Each denomination had unique processes, procedures, and

⁹ David Williams, *Rich Man's War: Class, Caste, and Confederate Defeat in the Lower Chattahoochee Valley* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999), 6-7.

structural forms in which they accommodated, administered, and controlled the spiritual lives of whites and blacks. These evangelical denominations constituted the vast majority of religious life in the South. In the Chattahoochee Valley counties of Harris, Muscogee, and Troup, for example, Baptists and Methodists made up 96 percent of all churches in 1850.¹⁰

Primary source records that form the core of documentation include minutes of local Baptist church conferences, proceedings of Baptist associations and conventions, proceedings of Methodist conferences, newspapers, and published narratives of former slaves. Federal records, such as those of the Freedman's Bureau and census schedules, augment local sources.

Chapter One chronicles the events and circumstances surrounding the establishment of first permanent presence of evangelical slavery in the Chattahoochee Valley. Encouraged by the rhetorical and financial resources of the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs, the South Carolina Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church sought to bring the light of Christian "civilization" to the "heathen" Creek Indians when the conference established a mission near Fort Mitchell, in present-day Russell County, Alabama in 1821. Methodist missionaries were also, for all practical purposes, agents in assisting the U.S. government to open up more territory for white people. Slaves in the Creek Nation were also targets of the missionary efforts and the presence of slaves was a central factor in the overall missionary efforts. Fearing insubordination and possible

¹⁰ *The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington: Robert Armstrong, Public Printer, 1853), 354-366; My definition of the word "evangelical" is informed mainly by the work of Donald G. Mathews. I summarize Mathews by using the term "evangelical" to mean Protestant denominations that adhere to New Testament teachings and espouse the need for individuals to experience a personal religious conversion that brings them into a Christian community expressed through membership in church bodies. See Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977)

insurrection by the slaves, Creek leaders, supported by U. S. Indian Agent John Crowell, prohibited preaching to adults. During this mission, however, Methodist missionary William Capers noted the potential for evangelizing blacks. During the process of removal of the Creek Indians, the mission dissipated and the Methodists turned their attention to the nascent white settlements in the Chattahoochee Valley and established their denomination as a permanent fixture.

Chapter Two describes the development of institutional evangelical slavery as white settlers and slaves created biracial Baptist and Methodist churches in the Chattahoochee Valley. Settlers also established Presbyterian churches, but Baptist and Methodist churches far outnumbered the Presbyterian churches. Urban settlers also organized and joined Catholic and Episcopal churches, but these were small in number as well. For example, by 1830, there were sixteen Baptist churches and six Methodist churches in the counties of Harris, Muscogee, and Troup and no Presbyterian, Catholic, or Episcopalian churches. By 1850, these counties included forty-eight Baptist, thirty-four Methodist, but only four Presbyterian churches and one Catholic and Episcopalian church. These governance and polity of these evangelical churches provided the mechanisms of evangelical slavery, especially Baptist churches with their democratic decentralized, autonomous nature. The structures, polity, and decorum of Baptist churches facilitated an environment in which slaves had the most ecclesiastical freedom and the ability to shape evangelical slavery and develop their individual Christian experience.

Unlike urban churches, with their professional ministers, rural churches were served by farmer-preachers who often served more than one church. The membership of

these rural churches consisted mainly of white yeomen farmers, but also some number of wealthy planters with both groups owning slaves, some of whom became members of the churches. As churches formed and matured, they formed and joined associations, such as the Columbus Baptist Association and the Western Baptist Association. The cooperative nature of these associations served to instill orthodoxy and cooperation among evangelical churches and provided another level of managing evangelical slavery.

Chapter Three examines the practice of evangelical slavery within biracial evangelical churches in the Chattahoochee Valley. Southern white evangelicals reacted to increasing abolitionist rhetoric by building a maturing pro-slavery religion and attempting to produce a Christian social order by focusing on the mutual obligations between master and slave, dictated by the evangelical interpretation of several verses in the New Testament. In the 1820s, southern white evangelicals adopted two strategies to bring slaves into the Christian community, save black souls, and ultimately attempt to reconstitute slavery as a defensible, God-ordained institution. They began an earnest attempt to create and retain biracial churches in which blacks, slave and free, could enjoy a measure of ecclesiastical equality. They also engaged in plantation missions to reach those slaves who were not in close proximity to churches.

Black evangelicals included slaves who were forced to attend church and those who willingly chose to attend and become members. They engaged in the procedures of the white dominated churches, but formed their own distinctive theological beliefs apart from white influence. Their religion was theirs – built around ideas about the active role of God in human history and his sure deliverance of them from slavery. Their religious

divergence found expression in their invisible institution as they conducted unilateral religious activities in areas away from whites.

Records of evangelical churches, primarily those of Baptist churches, reveal the actions of white evangelicals in the Chattahoochee Valley as they implemented the strategies through church governance, disciplinary measures, organizational dynamics, and instructional methods. They applied these mechanisms to all members regardless of race or gender, but demonstrated differences in practice based on racial and gender assumptions. Black initiative motivated whites to allow separate services and limited administrative roles for blacks. Finally, church membership numbers and census statistics provide a gauge for a historiographical interpretation of the level and extent of participation of blacks in the biracial churches of the Chattahoochee Valley.

Chapter Four examines developments in the practice and application of evangelical slavery in the Chattahoochee Valley from the time of the sectional split of the Methodist and Baptist denominations until the end of the Civil War. When northern evangelicals embraced more forceful stances against slavery and refused to allow slaveholders to remain in official denominational capacities, southern evangelicals withdrew from their northern brethren. Both denominations officially split in 1845 when southern Methodists and southern Baptists formed their own denominations. After the creation of separate sectional denominations, evangelicals intensified missionary efforts among the slaves and instituted organizational changes to derive maximum spiritual accountability regarding the welfare of the slaves.

Actions of southern evangelicals in the Chattahoochee Valley reveal local manifestations of the sectional denominational split. Local Baptist associations

recommended mechanisms that sought to facilitate more control over the spiritual lives of black members. Evangelical whites in the Chattahoochee Valley also experienced and engaged in a local manifestation of a worldwide revival in 1858 that resulted in a marked increase in black membership, especially in urban churches. With renewed vigor, southern evangelicals, including those in the Chattahoochee Valley, continued efforts to keep blacks in their churches as the national sectional conflict produced secession and war.

Missions to plantations took on another dimension during the Civil War as efforts focused on bringing more slaves into the fold and to keep them obedient to their masters. During the war, evangelicals took on the role of reformers as they sought to ameliorate conditions within the institution of slavery. Reform efforts during the Civil War carried the spiritual burden of creating a Biblically orthodox institution that met the ordained desires of God. The Civil War disrupted the religious activities of black and white evangelicals in the Chattahoochee Valley as white men left their local churches to fight for the Confederacy and black churches in Columbus and LaGrange were used as Confederate hospitals.

Slaves in the Chattahoochee Valley, like slaves throughout the South, understood that their freedom hung in the balance during the Civil War. Slaves also demonstrated a heightened interest in religious activity during this time as they whispered about the possibility of freedom. Though slaves embraced an identity as members of biracial churches, the “invisible institution” also assumed heightened importance as slaves anticipated God using the Union army to bring about freedom. As whites sought to please God by fortifying slavery through increasing interest in the spiritual lives of slaves and by

seeking to reform slavery, black evangelicals anticipated deliverance from slavery from the same God.

Chapters Five and Six explore the individual, organizational and institutional actions that ensued as evangelical slavery ended, displaced by an ambiguously defined evangelical freedom. Methodists and Baptists are separated by chapter because the differences in organization, decorum, polity, and governance resulted in different experiences with the advent of emancipation and the effort of blacks to form independent churches. Chapter Five explores actions, conflicts, and resolutions involving former slaves and various Methodist organizations as blacks sought to create their own independent churches in the Chattahoochee Valley. Black initiative and intermittent white cooperation, always in the context of continued paternalism, successfully created independent black Methodist congregations, but not without a great deal of interaction, conflict, and psychological adjustments by blacks and whites. Emancipation ostensibly allowed individual religious freedom, but holistic religious freedom could only come about through the creation of autonomous black churches.

The MECS initially sought a cooperative relationship with the AME, but they constructed parameters that called for black Methodists to remain politically neutral. The AME aggressively sought to include freedpeople of the Chattahoochee Valley into nascent congregations while the northern church, the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC), sought to build biracial congregations. Initially, the MECS appointed black preachers to oversee black congregations and were willing to allow some higher degree of autonomy to the black congregations. Negotiations over property and the emerging politicization of the AME Church complicated the efforts at cooperation.

Benefits of freedom accrued more slowly in rural areas of the Chattahoochee Valley as a paucity of resources hindered the creation of independent AME churches. Focus is given to the Methodists in Columbus, where the process of transforming the black congregation historically connected with the MECS church into an independent AME church revealed the pragmatic limits of black agency and a continued level of accommodation to white religious society. Ultimately, though, religious reconstruction for former slaves was a success, if gauged by the efforts of the AME Church.

Chapter Six continues exploring the creation of independent black churches by focusing on events, circumstances, and processes involving Baptist churches in the Chattahoochee Valley. Like Methodists, white Baptists envisioned a continuance of the subordination of blacks to the paternal actions of whites in spiritual matters. Within months of the end of the Civil War, Baptist churches and associations across the South, including those in the Chattahoochee Valley, passed resolutions that attempted to define the proper relationship between whites and former slaves. The resolutions of the churches and associations, however, entertained no doubt that white paternalism should continue unabated.

Records of Baptist churches in the Chattahoochee Valley illuminate the Baptist tradition of congregational autonomy, which makes difficult the determination of a specific Baptist position. These records unfurl a chronological and procedural variety of events, circumstance, actions, and reactions during the Reconstruction period. The motivation to create independent black churches – the refusal of whites to offer blacks an equal place within their congregations and the black quest for self-determination – also played a central role in the establishment of independent black Baptist churches.

While racial separation occurred quickly in Columbus, a lack of physical resources and smaller numbers of black members contributed to a lengthy process of separation in rural churches. Amidst signs of conflict, racial discord, and a sense of frustration among both blacks and whites, cooperation between the two races facilitated the creation of independent black Baptist churches in the Chattahoochee Valley. Historians who posit the centrality of black agency marginalize this cooperative nature. Though not as politically active as Methodists, black Baptists ministers, like those in Columbus, involved themselves in politics, but found conflict between their duty to their congregations and the continuing pressures of pragmatic accommodation to whites. Ironically, the church that gave slaves a relatively high status during the antebellum period also hindered former slaves in their quest for a new identity by continual references to their association to former masters.

These chapters reveal the birth of evangelical slavery in a frontier setting, the practice life of evangelical slavery in the context of entrenched proslavery religion, and the birth of evangelical freedom in the midst of political and social change. The narrative of blacks and whites in the Chattahoochee Valley connects evangelical slavery and freedom to suggest that these conditions cannot be fully understood apart from each other.

Chapter 1

“We Are Native Americans” The Methodists Come to the Valley

In 1821, the South Carolina Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church established a mission in the Creek Nation near Fort Mitchell and the Lower Creek town of Coweta, located close to the west bank of the Chattahoochee River in present day Russell County, Alabama. Blacks living among the Creeks played an important role in the events that unfolded as the Methodists sought to indoctrinate the Creek Indians into white culture by teaching “the ordinary arts of civilized life” and by converting them to evangelical Christianity. Citing their fear that exposure to Christianity might incite insubordination and insurrection by the slaves, Creek leaders, supported by U. S. Indian Agent John Crowell, prohibited the Methodists from preaching to adults. Led by Reverend William Capers, who was a slaveholder and had for several years prior conducted services for blacks in North Carolina and South Carolina, the Methodist missionaries also targeted slaves as objects of their mission as they noted the potential for evangelizing blacks who had increasingly participated in the religious activities of the mission.¹

¹ Second Annual Report of the Missionary Committee of the South Carolina Conference, February 26, 1823 in House Report 98, 19th Congress, 2nd Session, serial 161; hereinafter cited as HR 98; William M. Wightman, *Life of William Capers* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1902), 128, 291; Creek Indians inhabited large parts of eastern Alabama and western Georgia, including the lower Chattahoochee Valley. The Creeks were the descendants of various Native American peoples who had inhabited most of the southeastern states for over ten thousand years. For a detailed account of the peoples who made up the Creek Indians, see John R. Swanton, *Early History of the Creek Indians and Their Neighbors* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office), 1922; The seminal anthropological work on Creek Indians is Robbie Ethridge, *Creek Country: The Creek Indians and Their World* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003). Ethridge explores the human and natural environment of the Creek Indian up to the end of the eighteenth century. For an extensive account and description of the eclectic dynamics of the relationship between blacks and Creek Indians see Daniel F. Littlefield, Jr. *Africans and Creeks From the Colonial Period to the Civil War*. (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1979);

Methodists were not the first to attempt to bring Christianity to this area.

Moravian missionaries established a mission to the Creeks in 1736 with the support of Georgia founder James Oglethorpe and the Trustees of the colony of Georgia. War between England and Spain in 1739 ended the mission because the Moravians would not bear arms and the Trustees could not allow them to stay as non-citizens. Moravian missionaries appeared next in the Creek Nation after the establishment of the United States. Under an agreement with U. S. Indian Agent Benjamin Hawkins, the missionaries stayed in a house on land owned by Hawkins at the Creek Agency on the Flint River fifty miles west of Milledgeville. Between 1807 and 1813, the missionaries made several trips to the lower Chattahoochee Valley, but their efforts ended due to the instability brought on by the War of 1812. The Methodist mission effort, however, proved to be the genesis of the first permanent establishment of that denomination in the Chattahoochee Valley.²

The Moravian and Methodist missionaries encountered an ethnically diverse Creek Nation consisting of full-blooded Creeks, mixed-blood Creeks, whites, and blacks and attendance at their religious services reflected this racial diversity. Europeans, as early as the late seventeenth century, entered into the land of southern Indians for a variety of reasons. Some simply sought adventure, freedom, and opportunity. European imperialism brought agents of England, Spain, and France as those nations sought to extend their empires. Commercial activities, most notably the deerskin trade, dominated European interactions with the southern Indians. Hence, most non-Indians in the Native communities prior to the American Revolution were traders. Virtually all of those who

² Edmund Schwarze, *History of the Moravian Missions Among Southern Indian Tribes* (Bethlehem, Pa: Times Publishing Company, 1923), 10-12, 95; Johan Christian Burckhard, *Partners in the Lord's Work: The Diary of Two Moravian Missionaries in the Creek Indian Country, 1807-1813*, trans. and ed. By Carl Muelshagen and Gerald H. Davis. Atlanta: Georgia State College, 1969.

stayed in the Creek Nation took Native wives and became known as “Indian Countrymen.” Marriage to Native women provided access to land, food, and financial connections. Native wives also contributed to commercial enterprises by acting as translators and language instructors. The desire for land was a prime factor in these unions as whites could only gain access to agricultural lands through marriage to a Native woman. Most importantly, cross-cultural marriages gave whites entrance into the clan and the protection offered by the Native community and resulted in offspring who were reckoned to be fully Creek through their mother’s line of descent.³

The first blacks to come in contact with southern Indians were those that accompanied Hernando de Soto’s expedition in the mid-sixteenth century. Extensive contact among blacks and Creek Indians in the Chattahoochee Valley, however, did not occur until after the establishment of the deerskin trade between Creeks and traders in the new colony of Georgia in the early eighteenth century. Blacks were the chattel property of white traders who established stores in Creek towns to facilitate transactions associated with the deerskin trade. Blacks also became part of the Creek population in a number of other ways. Many came into the Creek country of their own volition – some as escaped slaves and others as opportunistic frontiersmen. Creek culture and society included slavery prior to the presence of Europeans and Africans, but African slavery in the Creek country was an institution that evolved over time. Prior to the invasion of the Europeans and the introduction of Africans into the Creek world, slaves mainly consisted of non-combatant (women and children) captives of war who were forced to perform tasks usually done by Creek women. Most of these captives were eventually included in the

³ Theda Perdue, *“Mixed Blood “ Indians: Racial Constructions in the Early South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 3-4, 16, 34, 40.

clan to which they had been assigned and became part of the family network. The demand of slave labor that accompanied the appearance of Europeans motivated Creeks to trade their captives to Europeans in exchange for goods. As Europeans brought their African slaves into Creek country, Creeks began to acquire their own black slaves, and by the early eighteenth century, had begun assuming the white view of the black race. Creek laws written in 1818 virtually assigned slave status to all blacks and reflected the influence of the plantation culture and the growing intolerance of ethnically mixed relationships.⁴

Kathryn E. Holland Braund notes three types of slaveholders in the Creek Nation. The first type of Creek slaveholders were Indian countrymen or their mixed-blood children who viewed slaves as property and laborers, much after the pattern of white plantation slavery. Another type of slaveholders were those that had a client / patron relationship with their slaves. The slaves were expected to take part in their own upkeep and provide some portion of their produce to the slaveholder. The slaves were still property and thus contributed to the prestige of the slaveholder. Those that are more accurately described as slave catchers or slave traders constituted a third type of Creek slaveholders. Slaves were their property, to be disposed of in the same manner as other trade goods.⁵

Prior to embracing white racial assumptions regarding blacks, Creeks had no traditional concept of race. Kinship, not skin color, identified individuals among the

⁴ Littlefield, *Africans and Creeks*, 8; Kathryn E. Holland Braund, "The Creek Indians, Blacks, and Slavery" *The Journal of Southern History* 57, no. 4 (November 1991): 601-636; Claudio Saunt, *Black, White, and Indian: Race and the Unmaking of an American Family* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 30-33; When two Moravian missionaries arrived at the Indian agency in 1807, they noticed the ethnic mixture of whites, Indians, and blacks and noted that some of the Indians owned slaves, as did the Indian agent Benjamin Hawkins. The missionaries, in fact, purchased their own slave, but he ran away, was captured and hanged for an offense of theft that preceded his purchase by the missionaries.

⁵ Braund, "The Creek Indians, Blacks, and Slavery," 625-626.

Creeks and this connection often trumped racial considerations even after adopting racial attitudes of whites. Some blacks in the Creek Nation, however, were not slaves. Many Creeks were apparently attracted to escaped slaves or to the slaves of white traders and it was not uncommon for blacks to marry Indians and the former to be adopted into the clan and given full rights and privileges. The offspring of sexual unions between black men and Creek women were members of the woman's clan. Offspring of a black father and Indian mother, like those of white men and Indian women, were considered full Creek Indians. Thus the black population of the Creek Nation by the mid-eighteenth century was a mixture of chattel property, owned either by whites or Indians, and non-slave *zambos* who were full Creek Indians.⁶

The invention and use of cotton gins in the late eighteenth century facilitated increased production and fed European demand for cotton. This made the rich soil west of the state of Georgia most desirable to whites eager to plant the seeds of the emerging cotton kingdom. The hunger for land replaced the deerskin trade as the most important commodity connecting whites to the Creek Nation. The connection, however, was not based on a trading partnership. Instead, Creeks and other Indians became objects of an official government policy formulated during the Washington administration that sought to change them from hunters to self-sufficient farmers. This change would ostensibly be part of the "civilization" of Indians and would, not so coincidentally, diminish the need for

⁶ Angie Debo, *The Road to Disappearance* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1941), 94-96.; Perdue, *"Mixed Blood" Indians*, 4-7; Braund, "The Creek Indians, Blacks, and Slavery," 615-616. Braund quotes the following from the journal of Georgian William Stephens dated July 4, 1743: "Simple Fornication is allowed, and passes too current among 'em, White and Black promiscuously ..."; The term *zambo* indicates an Indian-black mixture. The term *mestizo* refers to an Indian-white racial mixture. Perdue refers to people of mixed ancestry as "mixed-blood" people. I follow the model of Braund, who simplifies the issue by referring to any combination of Indians, whites, and blacks as "mixed-blood" when referring to racial mixtures among the Creek people.

hunting land. Indians would then be more likely to sell land to white speculators and cotton planters.⁷

Statesmen in the Washington administration, primarily Secretary of War Henry Knox, formulated this policy of assimilating Indians into American society and subsequent presidential administrations used this policy as the basis for plans regarding the Indians as westward expansion continued. Although “civilizing” was ostensibly a secular term, it also included a religious element that was promoted by the United States government and appropriated by Christian denominations as they sought to build a Christian nation. In formulating federal Indian policy, Knox believed that Christian missions would be the key to a successful policy for civilizing the Indians. According to Knox, “missionaries, of excellent moral character, should be appointed to reside in their nations...they should be [the Indians] friends and fathers.” An unofficial alliance between church and state emerged as both entities realized the benefits of pursuing a common goal. The state gained political and sometimes military advantage from its patronage of the Indian mission. Likewise, missionary boards welcomed financial support from the state and were certain that their work contributed to the welfare of the country. Through a nineteenth century lens, a civilized person was also a Christian person and vice-versa. As evangelical churches harvested souls, they sowed the seeds of American civilization among the Indians.⁸

⁷ Ethridge, *Creek Country*, 13-15. For a detailed study of American Indian policy, see Francis Paul Prucha, *American Indian Policy in the Formative Years: The Indian Trade and Intercourse Acts, 1790-1834* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).

⁸ R. Pierce Beaver, *Church, State, and the American Indians* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), 63-64, 85; Anthony F. C. Wallace, *Jefferson and the Indians: The Tragic Fate of the First Americans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 165-170.

By the 1820s, the Creeks were also a politically divided nation and culturally fractured people. Saunt describes a transformation among the Creek Indians following the American Revolution that caused conflict between the old order and a “new order of things.” He argues that Creek *mestizos*, familiar with the market economy, coercive power, and race slavery, caused disruptions in Creek society and presented conflicting opportunities about how they should rule themselves and what kind of economy they would pursue. Alexander McGillivray represented the new order as he epitomized the rise of a class of Creeks alienated from Creek traditions and instead chose the life of plantation management, slave ownership, and large property holdings. Many Creeks resented McGillivray’s propensity to concentrate power. He represented a growing number of Creeks who wanted to protect private property and trade relations and continue the trend toward an inequality of wealth. The civilization policy of the United States, which lent itself to the new order Creeks exacerbated the conflict over property and power. This government policy pushed women to new roles as market producers which intensified existing traditional gender tensions and added another rub to the conflict. Conflict reached a zenith with the outbreak of the Creek War in 1813. Soon thereafter, the days of deerskin economy and rule by persuasion were gone, replaced by rule by a powerful Creek minority of wealthy families.⁹

⁹ Claudio Saunt, *A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1733-1816* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1999), passim; The Creek War, also referred to as the Red Stick War, was caused by a culmination of events and circumstances. Central to the conflict was the divide between those Creeks who opposed assimilation of white culture and those who supported it. Another was a revival of pan-Indianism promoted by Tecumseh and his brother Tenskwatawa, also known as the Shawnee Prophet. Longstanding ethnic divisions and the dynamics of alliances with either Britain or the United States in the War of 1812 also contributed to the war. Americans cast as hostile those who opposed assimilation and called them “Red Sticks” because of the red war clubs they carried. See J. Leitch Wright, Jr. *Creeks and Seminoles: The Destruction and Regeneration of the Muscogulge People* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), especially chapter 6, and Gregory A. Waselkov, *A Conquering Spirit: Fort Mims and the Redstick War of 1813-1814* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006).

Whereas the desire for integration of Indians into white culture drove the Indian policy directed by the Washington administration, Jefferson and subsequent administrations focused on the acquisition of Indian lands while retaining the Knox policy regarding civilization of the Indians. Assimilation by the Indians would, Knox believed, draw them into the white culture and “attach them to the interest of the United States.” Indian lands, no longer needed for hunting, could then be purchased for white settlement. Monroe’s secretary of state John C. Calhoun, to whom responsibility for Indian policy fell, sought peaceful ways of imposing federal policy on the Indians and he followed the Knox maxim in promoting the use of missionaries among the Indians. Congress lined up behind the wishes of the administration and passed the Civilization Fund Act of 1819, which provided \$10,000 for the training of Native people in the ways of white civilization and culture.¹⁰

In March 1820, Thomas L. McKenney, Superintendent of Indian Trade, wrote to Methodist Bishop William McKendree to outline the plan for providing the federal funds to any Christian organization that would help with “renovations of the condition of our Aborigines.” The government would provide \$10,000 to be disbursed when an organization submitted a plan for education that included reading, writing, and arithmetic for all students. Boys would also be taught “knowledge of the modes of agriculture” while girls would also be taught spinning, weaving, and sewing. Although McKenney was an agent of the federal government, he revealed his personal convictions concerning the welfare of the Indians. With the zeal of an evangelist, McKenney asserted his belief that “the North American Indians may be tamed and led to cherish the arts and

¹⁰ Wallace, *Jefferson and the Indians*, 206-207; Michael D. Green, *The Politics of Indian Removal: Creek Government and Society in Crisis* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 46-47. Knox quoted in Beaver, *Church, State, and the American Indians*, 64.

conveniences of cultivated life, and to repose for their present and future welfare not on their manetoes but on Jehovah.” Clearly McKenney supported Christianizing as much as civilizing them. He also warned McKendree that the enemies of missions work were white traders who were more interested in amassing wealth through trade with the Indians. For the next several years McKenney was no less enthusiastic in his support for evangelizing the Indians. In fact, he urged Christian denominations to write Congress to show support for a continuance of cooperation with and financial support for Christian missions. Although he was not timid in advocating mission work, McKenney must have been aware of tension between some Creeks and the state and federal governments and was probably concerned that the reputation of Methodists among the Indians might suffer from a connection between the denomination and government. In a postscript to the letter to McKendree, McKenney urged him not to publish it for fear that “it may be aid to smell of government.”¹¹

McKenney supposed that the Methodists would be eager participants in missions work and it was not long before his supposition turned into reality. It is likely that the promised government support motivated McKendree’s increasing interest in the conditions of the Indian tribes. The Methodist Episcopal Church organized the Missionary Society in 1819, but it was not able to supply the funds necessary to do the work among the Indians that McKendree desired. Government funds would augment Methodist financial planning and McKenney’s offer probably gave McKendree the confidence to pursue mission work among the Indians. McKendree first set his sights on the Wyandot Indians in Ohio and the Cherokee, Creek, and Choctaw tribes in the

¹¹ Thomas L. McKenney to William McKendree, March 13, 1820 and May 8, 1821, William McKendree papers, Special Collections, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University, Atlanta.

southeast. In 1821, the South Carolina Methodist Conference appointed Reverend William Capers to seek approval from the Creek National Council for the Methodists to establish a mission school in the Creek Nation. They charged Capers with carrying out “the benevolent purpose of teaching the ordinary arts of civilized life, and their children the common rudiments of education.”¹²

Capers may have understood his mission to be simply defined, but he would be riding into an area that was the scene of internal conflict, economic despair, corruption, and political intrigue involving Georgia, the federal government, and the schismatic Creek Nation. Political representation of the federal government was embodied by an Indian agent, a presidential appointee that carried with it the dual role of promoting federal policy while ostensibly acting in the best protective interests of the Indians. In 1813, disagreement between federal Indian agent Benjamin Hawkins and Georgia governor David B. Mitchell over the issue of extracting compensation from the Creeks over lost or stolen property in Georgia illustrated the conflict between federal and state officials. Those who favored white expansion, be it politicians, land speculators, or traders, sought to gain influence among the federal Indian agent, and the death of Hawkins opened the door for a new presidential appointee. Georgian William H. Crawford, Madison’s secretary of war and a man with presidential aspirations, persuaded Madison to appoint Mitchell to the position of Indian agent in the Creek Nation.¹³

¹² Robert Paine, *Life and Times of William McKendree* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1896), 375-382; Second Annual Report of the Missionary Committee of the South Carolina Conference in HR 98; John C. Calhoun to John Crowell, 18 May 1821, *ibid.* In 1822, the Baptists also established a mission in present day Tallapoosa County, Alabama on the Tallapoosa River near the Upper Creek town of Tuckabatchee. Europeans designated a division of the Creeks by referring to those that lived in the watershed of the Coosa and Tallapoosa rivers in Alabama as the Upper Creeks; those living in the watershed of the Chattahoochee and Flint rivers in Georgia were referred to as the Lower Creeks. For details of the specific provinces that made up the Creek Nation, see Ethridge, *Creek Country*, 27-28.

¹³ Green, *Politics of Indian Removal*, 52.

Crawford expected Mitchell to run the agency to promote the former's political reputation and to see that he received credit for any gains accrued to Georgia from the Creeks. Mitchell sought personal gain and joined with Creek leader William McIntosh to engage in embezzlement by using federal annuity payments for past land cessions to pay debts owed to a store owned by Mitchell and McIntosh. Mitchell also used the annuity to purchase merchandise from the store to distribute to the Creeks. The Creek leaders preferred cash and complained about Mitchell to the War Department. McIntosh, on the other hand, was busy maneuvering events to benefit himself at the expense of the Creek Nation. Creek national leadership belonged to two aging headmen – Big Warrior (Tustunnuggee Thlucco) of Tuckabatchee led the Upper Creeks and Little Prince (Tustunnuggee Hopoie) led the Lower Creeks of Broken Arrow – and their inability to provide energetic leadership allowed McIntosh to emerge as the leading Creek spokesman in the relations between the Creeks, Georgia, and the United States. McIntosh also had influential and prominent white relatives in Georgia. His half-brothers, John and William R. McIntosh, held important positions in Georgia and his cousin George Troup, an ally of Mitchell and an advocate of Georgia's aggressive policy of Indian removal, was a U. S. Senator and later governor of Georgia. McIntosh's loyalty came into question among many Creeks when, in 1820, he helped negotiate the first Treaty of Indian Springs that resulted in the ceding of more Creek land to Georgia and granting to McIntosh a thousand acres and an undisclosed amount of cash.¹⁴

¹⁴ Ibid., 58-59; William McIntosh was the son of a Creek woman names Senoia and Captain William McIntosh of the prominent Savannah, Georgia family. When he was twenty-five, he was chosen as a chief of the major Lower Creek town of Coweta. In 1825, he signed the Treaty of Indian Springs in which ceded the remaining Creek lands in Georgia to that state. For his role in this treaty, he was executed by a group of the Upper Creeks led by Menawa.

When Mitchell was implicated in a slave smuggling operation, Monroe fired him and, possibly through the persuasion of Crawford's enemy Calhoun, appointed Alabama congressman John Crowell to head the Creek agency. Crowell immediately set out to undermine the political, and more importantly, economic control of the Mitchell-McIntosh machine. Crowell issued a license to his brother Thomas for a store at Fort Mitchell, near the Indian town of Coweta on the Chattahoochee River. Pushing McIntosh aside, Crowell now was in charge of controlling the annuity to the Creek Nation and profiting from the same with his connection to his brother's store. Crowell also pressured Little Prince to have McIntosh's brother-in-law George Stinson arrested for violating the laws that regulated trade in the Creek Nation. When a jury in a U. S. district court acquitted Stinson, whose defense was directed by Mitchell and McIntosh, the Crowell – McIntosh feud had become no small matter in the context of the relationship between the Creeks and the United States. Understanding the political importance of maintaining positive attachments to Creek leaders, Crowell formed an unofficial alliance with McIntosh rival Big Warrior. It was this amalgamation of Creek politics, federal Indian policy, and personal animosity that William Capers encountered when he eventually arrived in the Creek Nation in the late summer of 1821.¹⁵

On the way to the Creek Nation, Capers traveled through the middle of South Carolina and Georgia, stopping in several towns to preach and collect money to support the mission. By mid-August, he had collected a total of \$2,800. The day before he left for his final destination, Capers wrote to Bishop McKendree to give a summary of his goals and strategy for mission effort among the Creeks. Capers was more acutely aware than McKendree of the tensions between some Creeks and the state and federal governments

¹⁵ Ibid., 60-63.

and indicated a desire to distance himself from any connection to these governments so as not to arouse suspicions among the Creeks concerning his motives. He stated that he wanted to “distinguish between the charity of the Church and the policy of the government,” but actually aligned himself with the McIntosh-Mitchell faction by getting endorsements from Mitchell and John McIntosh, William’s half-brother. His goal of having endorsements that would promote an advantage among the Indians seemed, therefore, to be aimed at the Creek headman McIntosh. Drawing no distinction between “Christianizing” and “civilizing,” Capers admitted to McKendree that the object of the church and the government was the same, but he supposed the Indians would be less suspicious of the former.¹⁶

Capers started his journey into the Creek Nation from South Carolina on August 15th and was joined by missionary Christian G. Hill along the way. They entered the Creek Nation on the first of September and Capers preached in the house of innkeeper Drury Spain to a congregation that included Mr. And Mrs. Spain, their daughter, four whites, five Indians, and “three or four” blacks, the servants of Mr. Spain. His sermon was based on the text of Matthew 4:15-16 which states “The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people which sat in darkness saw great light, and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.” One historian argues that Capers focused on “Christianizing” rather than “civilizing,” although this sermon text, aimed at a mixed audience, suggests that Capers endorsed no large distinction between the two. Capers probably assumed that the white men in the Spain house did not need “civilizing” in the

¹⁶ William Capers to William McKendree, August 14, 1821 in Paine, *Life and Times of William McKendree*, 378. Capers’ rationale seems unreasonable as he must have known of McIntosh’s role in the first Treaty of Indian Springs in 1820 that resulted in the ceding of more Creek land to Georgia.

same way or to the same degree as the Indians, but may have needed “Christianizing.” In Capers’ mind, “darkness” could mean spiritual darkness if experienced by whites but cultural, social, and religious darkness if experienced by Indians.¹⁷

Two days after he preached at the Spain house, Capers crossed the Chattahoochee River and saw evidence of the “savage life” as he witnessed Indian women and girls bathing nude in the river. Landing on the west bank of the river, he made his way to the public square in the town of Coweta where he found the chief McIntosh. Here he presented McIntosh with introductory letters and endorsements from Mitchell and John McIntosh, half brother of the chief. McIntosh quickly offered to meet with Capers the next morning to discuss the business and inquiries of Capers concerning his quest to establish mission schools in the Creek Nation. For the next four hours, however, Capers observed Indian ball-play in the midst of an Indian audience that included Little Prince and McIntosh. He was somewhat surprised at the way the chiefs were “undistinguished” among the group of Indians watching the ball-play. As women and children squatted to watch the action, Little Prince sat on the ground with his back against a tree and McIntosh simply laid full length on the ground.¹⁸

Capers was unprepared for the level of “savagery” he witnessed, first with the women bathing in the river and then with the “whole parade of whooping and yelling, of paint and nakedness” he observed at the Indian ball-play. He expressed shock that “so close at the door of civilized man – just beyond the sight of the Bible and the sound of

¹⁷ Drury Spain was a tavern keeper (Spain’s Inn, located approximately 28 miles west of the Flint River) who was also involved in financial dealings and controversies with Crowell and the Indians; *Methodist Magazine, Designed as a Compend of Useful Knowledge and of Religious and Missionary Intelligence, for the Year of our Lord 1822*. Volume V (New York: N. Bangs and T. Mason, Azor Hoyt, Printer, 1822), 233; D. A. Reily, “William Capers: An Evaluation of his Life and Thought” (Ph. D Dissertation, Emory University, 1972), 101-102; Wightman, *Life of William Capers*, 235-240.

¹⁸ Wightman, *Life of William Capers*, 235-240.

our service – there could exist so gross a state of human degradation,” and described himself as both amazed and dejected. Evidently Capers saw the difficulty of his mission because converting the Indians would require some measure of civilization that would precede Christianization.¹⁹

The next day, Capers met with McIntosh and interpreter George Lovett and presented an offer to the chiefs to “teach their children to read and write, and other good things.” The chiefs verbally consented to let Capers proceed with his mission and he quickly began the task of organizing the work. In October, he left for Augusta to procure supplies and employ workmen. He returned later that month and formalized the arrangement with a written agreement dated November 8, 1821 and signed by him on behalf of the South Carolina Conference and by Big Warrior, Little Prince, and George Lovett on behalf of the Creek Nation.²⁰

The articles of agreement called for Capers to establish two schools – one to be located near the Lower Creek town Coweta and the other near the Upper Creek town Tuckabatchee. The agreement invited all Indian children to attend the school and also called for the teacher in charge to provide comfortable living and sufficient food. Other articles of the agreement demonstrated the Indian’s suspicion of the missionaries’ motives and their desire to prevent pecuniary inducements and property expansion by the whites at the expense of the Indians. For example, the agreement prohibited payments to the teachers for services rendered at the school. Likewise, the agreement limited the teachers to sustenance farming by allowing only the number of cows and the amount of cultivated land commensurate with the number of students enrolled. The teachers would

¹⁹ Ibid., 240.

²⁰ William Capers to John C. Calhoun, January 8, 1824, in H. R. 98, p. 24.; Green, *Politics of Indian Removal*, 64.; H. R. 98.

be allowed to raise whatever stock necessary to support them and the children, provided that they have no more than twelve milch cows during the first year and no more than six milch cows for every twenty students thereafter. The teachers could also build a house thirty feet long and twenty feet wide as well as other houses as necessary to accommodate the students.²¹

On December 12, 1821, Capers pitched a tent “on the summit of a high and beautiful hill” one mile north of Fort Mitchell and the same distance west of the Chattahoochee River. Hired workers, under supervision of missionary Whitman C. Hill, soon began construction of the buildings that would make up the Asbury Manual Labor School and Mission. Hill took the opportunity to preach in the neighborhood, but construction proceeded slowly as the workers, according to Capers, appeared to be “very slothful” in their responsibilities. Hill dismissed several workers and left the mission to attend the next Methodist Conference meeting and no work was done for almost a month until the South Carolina Conference sent Reverend Andrew Hamill to evaluate the situation. Finding the buildings undone and incomplete, Hamill put most of his efforts into facilitating completing of the dwelling house. This he finished on May 4, 1822, the very day that Reverend Isaac Smith arrived at Asbury to assume the missionary duties.²²

²¹ H. R. 98. p. 6.; In 1828 William Potts observed that the mission consisted of a dwelling house, a school house, an eating house, and four or five outhouses. Joseph G. Smoot, ed., “An Account of Alabama Indian Missions and Presbyterian Churches in 1828 from the Travel Diary of William S. Potts,” *Alabama Review* 18 (April 1965): 134-152.

²² 2nd Annual Report of the Missionary Committee of the South Carolina Conference, in H. R. 98. 33-34. Whitman C. Hill and Andrew Hamill served at Asbury at various times and would eventually be the first Methodists to conduct services on the Georgia side of the Chattahoochee River in the new town of Columbus. Isaac Smith was born in Virginia, in 1758. He served as a private, and later as an officer, in the Revolutionary War. He became acquainted with the Marquis de Lafayette and the two maintained a lifelong connection. In March 1825 LaFayette visited Smith at the Asbury Mission on the way to Montgomery. Smith was also the father-in-law of Whitman C. Hill.

Soon after Smith arrived, however, a controversy emerged over the right of the missionaries to preach to the Indians. Although the agreement between the Creek chiefs and Capers gave specific details about the responsibilities of the school and the right of the nation to remove any school or teacher that might offend the nation, it stated no conditions or prohibition regarding religious instruction or preaching. When Baptist missionary Lee Compere arrived in 1822 to establish a Baptist mission, however, Capers greeted him with the news that the Creek leaders evinced hostility toward preaching by the missionaries. Having been endorsed by Mitchell in a letter to McIntosh, Compere apparently believed that McIntosh had no objection to preaching. In June 1822, the Creek National Council, acting on an application from Compere, officially rejected his request to allow preaching. Capers attributed the decision to the influence of Indian Agent John Crowell and complained that the missionaries did not have the freedom to assemble and preach to the “many blacks, and a few whites and Indians who desired the benefit of public preaching.” Capers soon realized that there was an emerging alliance between Creek chief Big Warrior and Crowell against William McIntosh. The preaching controversy contributed to the Big Warrior – Crowell alliance as it was yet another issue of conflict between them and McIntosh.²³

The ban on preaching not only threatened the goal of the mission effort among the Indians, it also threatened the Methodist goal of evangelizing blacks. When informed of the ban, members of the Missionary Committee of the South Carolina Conference noted the importance of their mission to the blacks living among the Indians. The committee

²³ Capers to Calhoun, January 8, 1824, in H. R. 98. p. 24; Green, *Politics of Indian Removal*, 62-68; Missionary Andrew Hamill suggested after the fact that McIntosh had no problem with preaching to the children, although “some of our old men would not have preaching.” Andrew Hamill to Capers, March 25, 1823, in H. R. 98.

members hoped that preaching could continue because blacks attended the preaching services and “several of them [were] already awakened.” Because of a “deep concern for their souls,” the missionaries believed it impossible “to retrace our steps” and cease preaching.²⁴

Capers stated that Crowell’s reason for forbidding preaching was his concern that it would incite the slaves toward insurrection. Evidently Crowell was to interpret Capers’ word to the chiefs, but when Capers mentioned preaching, Crowell refused to interpret. Instead he told Capers that preaching would “breed insurrection” among the Indian’s slaves. At this point, Crowell and Capers got into a verbal “altercation” and proceeded to argue in front of the Council.²⁵

Creeks near the Baptist mission at Tuckabatchee also shared Crowell’s concern over slave insurrections, so it is likely that Crowell accurately conveyed the concerns of many Creeks. The fear regarding slave insurrections festered over the next few years and remained a point of conflict between Creeks and missionaries. Another factor that exacerbated the conflict between Creeks and missionaries was the developing issue of forced western migration. In 1828, Indians at the Tuckabathcee mission forcibly removed blacks from a worship service in the house of missionary Lee Compere and commenced to inflict severe beatings upon them. Christopher D. Haveman suggests that the attack at the Compere house reflected a larger effort of violence aimed at Creeks who supported voluntary emigration. The situation at Asbury, at least as described by Capers, seems to

²⁴ 2nd Annual Report of the Missionary Committee of the South Carolina Conference, in H. R. 98, 35.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Green does not, however, describe Capers’ recollection in detail. Saunt argues that missionary efforts to evangelize slaves increased Indian hostility to Christianity. Saunt, *Black, White, and Indian*, 35-36.

reflect nothing more than the Indian's concern over their slaves and the conflict between the Crowell-Big Warrior and McIntosh.²⁶

Despite the upsetting effect of the altercation with Crowell, Capers was patient with Crowell before complaining to Federal officials. For months, Capers tried not to expose Crowell and instead wanted people to attribute the Indians' prohibition of preaching to their "barbarous prejudice" or to have been instigated by vulgar white men who mix among the Indians. It appears that Capers wanted to "keep the peace" with Crowell for future use. After a time, however, Capers appealed to Calhoun and charged that the Government through their agent Crowell was denying their "dearest rights." In what modern historians must judge to be a most ironic statement, Capers flavored his appeal with the claim that that "we are native Americans." Instead of merely interfering with the government – church alliance to "civilize" the Indians, Crowell, according to Capers, threatened the religious liberty of the missionaries.²⁷

Capers' claim confirmed Big Warrior's suspicions about the missionaries. They had changed their tone and moved from asking for the privilege to preach to demanding the right to do so. Crowell disputed Capers' claim that he had not allowed an interpretation of Capers' request at the National Council. In fact, according to Crowell, the opposite was true as the interpreter actually interpreted everything Capers said. Contention over the preaching issue also sparked suspicion and concern from Crowell.

²⁶ William G. McLoughlin, "Red Indians, Black Slavery and White Racism: America's Slaveholding Indians," *American Quarterly* 26 (October 1974):376; Christopher D. Haveman, "The Removal of the Creek Indians from the Southeast, 1825-1838," (Ph.D. dissertation, Auburn University, 2009), 96-102; Saunt also argues that missionary efforts to evangelize slaves increased Indian hostility to Christianity. See Saunt, *Black, White, and Indian*, 35-36; Sean Flynt points to a loss of support among southern Baptists for Compere because of his abolitionist sympathies, promotion of racially integrated congregations, and his vocal defense of the Creeks in defiance of U. S. policy. See Sean Flynt, "In Singleness of Heart: Origins of the First Baptist Mission to the Creek Nation," *Alabama Baptist Historian* 38 (July 2002): 15-24.

²⁷ Capers to Calhoun, January 8, 1824 in H. R. 98.

Isaac Smith claimed that he asked for and received permission from Little Prince to preach in public. Crowell questioned the motives of the missionary and suggested that Smith knew that Big Warrior had prohibited preaching, yet proceeded with their request to Little Prince. Crowell surmised that Smith did this to take advantage of the fact that Little Prince lived close to the mission, but Big Warrior lived some distance from it. This distance might prevent Big Warrior from enforcing the ban on preaching and could cause division among the chiefs. The missionaries, according to Crowell, “were determined by some means or another to obtain their object, regardless of the consequences.”²⁸

The Methodist missionaries could not avoid the entanglement produced by the affairs at Asbury. Competing purposes and strategies within the ranks of those to whom the government had entrusted the Indian policy were undermining the goal of civilizing the Indians. Capers accused Crowell of not supporting the missionaries in their negotiations with the Creeks and claimed that it was due to Crowell’s disdain for religion and his effort to discredit McIntosh, a supporter of the missionaries. Capers heard that Crowell stated that “preaching was fudge, damned nonsense” and this caused no small amount of concern among the missionaries. Crowell admitted saying that on several occasions and even in the presence of Capers, but claimed that Capers had taken the remark out of context. According to Crowell, he was referring specifically to preaching within the Creek Nation and not preaching in general. Crowell saw little hope in preaching to “uninformed Savages who neither understood their language nor believed in the truth of their doctrine.” Instead, he believed that making an impression on the rising

²⁸ John Crowell to Calhoun, March 18, 1824, transcription in T. J. Peddy Collection, Columbus State University Archives.

generation through education was the only way to Christianize the Indians. Any attempt to change the old Indians, according to Crowell, was a “labor in vain.”²⁹

Economic and political factors may have driven Crowell’s cynicism concerning the effect of preaching to the adult Indians. Discrediting McIntosh, according to Capers, might influence Big Warrior to support the store and tavern near Fort Mitchell, thus taking away income from McIntosh. The trade between Indians and whites gives evidence to McKenney’s claim that white traders were the real enemy of missionary efforts. Capers noted that “some degraded white men” encouraged opposition to the missionaries’ preaching. The Indians were indebted to several traders and Crowell’s brother Thomas was involved in the transactions and attempted collections from the Indians. Tavern keepers also sold large quantities of alcohol to Indians and whites, and it is probable that Crowell, the traders, and the tavern keepers feared that if the Indians accepted the virtues of Christianity, their drinking habits might seriously diminish. Capers may have alluded to this when he suggested that Crowell’s opposition to preaching may have been based on Crowell fear that preaching “might injure some interest to the store at Fort Mitchell.”³⁰

Despite the ban on public preaching, the missionaries presented the gospel in a more subtle manner. Although the stated purpose was to establish a school for Indian children, the missionaries wasted no time in establishing a church as an entity separate

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Wightman, *Life of William Capers*, 243; Capers to Calhoun, January 9, 1824, in HR 98; Testimony of James Moss, *Ibid.*, 335; Saunt points out that alcohol contributed to further conflict between men and women. Men, who were solely responsible for the deerskin economy, would trade skins for liquor instead of necessities. Liquor emboldened men toward “masculine” pursuits of war-like behavior and aggressiveness toward women. Saunt, *New Order of Things*, 25; For a contemporary account of the pervasive abuse of alcohol among Creek men, see Lukas Vischer to A. C. Rossire, April 6, 1824 in Robert P. Collins, ed. “A Swiss Traveler in the Creek Nation: The Diary of Lukas Vischer, March 1824” *Alabama Review* (October 2006): 243-284.

from the school. A few months after the establishment of the school, Capers wrote to McKendree describing a congregation consisting of one Indian woman, who was the interpreter's wife, and "three or four blacks," some of whom walked as many as eight miles to attend the church. Indeed, from the beginning the missionaries believed there was the potential for a sizable congregation of local people who understood English, many of whom were no doubt the blacks that Capers observed. When Capers made his initial visit to the Fort Mitchell area he preached on the Sabbath and the missionaries who soon followed also preached at various subsequent times. Capers visited Asbury on several occasions and the children warmly received him. On a Sunday in September 1823, he administered communion to a small congregation and baptized Mr. Martin, the hired manager of the farm connected to the mission. By 1824, upwards of forty children belonged to the school and, according to Smith, several had made much progress in reading and writing skills. The reading assignments, of course, included bible verses, which allowed Smith to condition the Creek children to embrace Christianity. Of the forty or so children, eighteen were reading in the New Testament and some were memorizing verses. Smith could not preach to the general Indian population, but he "raised a little church in our house last Sabbath" and hosted a congregation that included six Creek children. The combination of bible reading, scripture memorization, and a regular church service led to Smith's claim that the six children "...are I believe Christians" and as many as twelve "profess to love God." Smith believed the education of the children would lead to a great many people being "brought home to God" once the missionaries had freedom to preach among the people.³¹

³¹ HR. 98, p 25; Anson West, *A History of Methodism in Alabama* (Spartanburg: The Reprint Company, 1983), 375; Isaac Smith to McKendree, April 10, 1824, McKendree papers.

After much correspondence concerning the Capers and Crowell controversy, McKenney instructed Crowell to carry out the wishes of the government in supporting the Asbury mission work and assured Capers that Crowell would do so. Crowell acquiesced and gave the missionaries more latitude in their preaching endeavors and in the fall of 1825, a revival broke out after a prayer meeting at the Mission house. In December 1825 Reverend Smith preached to some of the Creek chiefs, including Little Prince, and about fifty other Indians at the Council Square in Coweta. Although Smith presented an abbreviated sermon due to the cold weather, the chiefs expressed a willingness to hear him at any time. Smith also preached to soldiers stationed at Fort Mitchell and a group of Indians. Eleven of them joined the church along with Joseph Hardridge, a white man who was the interpreter of Smith's sermon to the chiefs. On December 18, 1825, Smith baptized Hardridge, his Indian wife, and two soldiers.³²

The Asbury missionaries were not the only Methodists to take advantage of their freedom to preach. Other missionaries came into the area and conducted services at other locations. Soon after the revival at the Mission house, Smith and another missionary, Samuel K. Hodges, took a group of Indians to a camp meeting during which several adult Indians were converted. Morgan Turrentine preached to Indians at several locations in 1825 and 1826 and reported a crowd of "upward of two thousand" at one Indian town.³³

Despite having more freedom to preach, the missionaries encountered other impediments to their activities at the Asbury Mission. One issue was the conflict and turmoil that surrounded the creation and enforcement of treaties between the different factions of Creeks and the United States. One faction, led by William McIntosh, ceded all

³² Anson West, *History of Methodism in Alabama*, 371, 376.

³³ Reily, "William Capers: An Evaluation of his Life and Thought," 98; *Methodist Magazine*, VIII (1825), 480; *Columbus Daily Enquirer-Sun*, May 15, 1879.

remaining lands in Georgia to that state under the terms of the Treaty of Indian Springs, signed February 12, 1825. Most Creeks opposed this treaty, with support coming only from headmen of the Lower Creeks. Crowell immediately appealed to the War Department, claiming that the treaty was fraudulent. His plea fell on deaf ears as the U. S. Senate ratified the treaty and it was signed by President Adams on March 7th. The aggressive Georgia governor Troup announced the ratification and sent a request to McIntosh to allow surveyors into the ceded areas. Indians, who according to Methodist historian Anson West, “already had an intense hatred of the white people,” reacted with an increasing “aversion to the white people’s religion.”³⁴

McIntosh’s unauthorized cession of land invoked the wrath of other Creek leaders. On the last day of April, a group of Creeks set fire to McIntosh’s house and killed him with a hail of gunfire as he tried to escape. The executioners also killed Etomme Tustunnuggee and McIntosh’s son-in-law Samuel Hawkins and wounded another son-in-law, Benjamin, who managed to escape. Under the guise of offering protection to others in the McIntosh party and to secure the terms of the treaty, Troup mobilized the state militia and called a special session of the state legislature. That body wasted no time in authorizing surveyors to enter the area. They also answered the governor’s request by authorizing a land lottery to quickly allocate land to white Georgians. On June 9, 1825, they created, and Governor George Troup signed, legislation that put in place the mechanisms for surveying and distributing the former Creek lands.

³⁴ Green, *Politics of Indian Removal*, chapters 4 and 5, passim; West, *History of Methodism in Alabama*, 373.

In December 1826, Troup signed the legislation to formally establish and name the counties of Muscogee, Troup, and Lee, Carroll, and Coweta.³⁵

The missionaries found themselves caught up in the politics of Indian removal and an investigation into the role of Crowell in the death of McIntosh. Troup, who had earlier supported the missionaries in their complaint against Crowell, now believed they supported Crowell and the Indians who opposed the McIntosh treaty. In a letter to President Adams, Troup accused the missionaries of opposing the treaty because it might result in their removal from the Creek Nation and a loss of wages. Capers defended the missionaries and pointed out that the earlier conflict with Crowell did not obligate them to testify against Crowell in the matter of McIntosh's death. The meager salary of the missionaries, according to Capers, worked against any pecuniary inducement to side with Crowell. Isaac Smith, then the senior missionary at Asbury, gave credence to Troup's accusation against the missionaries by claiming that McIntosh had been lawfully executed. The matter forced the South Carolina Conference to investigate the actions of Smith. Although they found that he was "lacking ingenuousness," they found that he had done nothing that should result in his removal.³⁶

Creek leaders successfully appealed to President Adams and Congress for an annulment of the treaty. It was repealed by the Treaty of Washington signed April 26,

³⁵ Green, *Politics of Indian Removal*, chapters 4 and 5, passim; "[An Act] To dispose of and distribute the lands lately acquired by the United States for the use of Georgia of the Creek Nation of Indians, by a Treaty made and concluded at the Indian Spring on the twelfth day of February, eighteen hundred and twenty-five."

June 9, 1825" Georgia Legislative Documents, 1825; "An Act to organize the Territory lately acquired from the Creek Indians, lying between the Flint and Chattahoochee rivers, and west of the Flint river," December 7, 1826." Georgia Legislative Documents, 1826. In 1827, Harris County was formed from the northern part of Muscogee and the southern part of Troup County. Also that year, the counties of Harris, Marion, and Talbot were created from eastern parts of Muscogee County. In 1854, Chattahoochee County was formed from the southern parts of Muscogee and the western parts of Marion County.

³⁶ Reily, "William Capers: An Evaluation of his Life and Thought," 99-101; West, *History of Methodism in Alabama*, 374.

1826. Although the final treaty provided for the cession of some Creek lands in Georgia, Governor Troup was dissatisfied with it because it did not provide for the acquisition of all Creek lands in Georgia. He therefore ordered surveyors to begin their tasks according to the terms of the abrogated Treaty of Indian Springs, which called for Georgia's possession to commence on the first day of September 1826. Creek leaders, acting on a demand from Secretary of War James Barbour, withdrew their objection to Troup's early survey. Surveyors poured into the area during the remaining months of 1826 and into 1827, much to the consternation of Creek leaders. Faced with internal divisions and the loss of support from Washington against Georgia, Little Prince led the headmen to sign the Treaty of Fort Mitchell on November 15, 1827, thus completing the cession of all Creek lands in Georgia. White expansion followed and the lower Chattahoochee Valley became the new frontier in Georgia.³⁷

In addition to the political conflict, the missionaries' ethnocentrism and ignorance of the culture and society of the Creek Indians also impeded their goal. Capers described the absence of religion among Indians and seemed relieved that there were "no idol temples to be razed...no superstitious forms...no hateful rites...no damning doctrines of a false religion to be exploded." To Capers, the task of civilizing the "savages" was formidable enough without having to attack another layer of uncivil and unchristian behavior. What he did not understand was that the Creeks demonstrated and practiced a belief system through everyday routines and rituals. He did not realize that when he observed the nude bathers he was witnessing a daily ritual known as "going to water" in

³⁷ Green, *Politics of Indian Removal*, chapters 5 and 6, passim; Debo, *Road to Disappearance*, 89-94; As part of the treaty, the Asbury school received \$1,000. Missionaries Andrew Hamill and Whitman C. Hill witnessed the signing of the treaty.

which Creek men and women bathed, not only to wash off dirt but also to receive spiritual purity.³⁸

Suggesting that the missionaries were more concerned about the sacred than the secular, Capers described the many slaves that were among the Indians and prophetically stated that the “first fruits of [our] labor” could be found among the slaves. Capers juxtaposed the nature of the Indians and the slaves to show that the latter were not savages and already hold a strong predilection toward the missionaries. Unlike the Indians, the slaves “speak our language” and “acknowledge the divinity of our religion” and, in fact, some were formerly members of some church. Capers counted at least one hundred blacks in the neighborhood around Asbury and perhaps larger numbers in surrounding neighborhoods. Some slaves even worked at the mission, having been hired out by their owner.³⁹

Missionaries eventually adjusted to their knowledge of Creek culture as they began to learn more about Creek religious imagery and used that knowledge to try to persuade Creeks to accept Christianity. Creeks believed that balance and purity were part of the cosmological order and that the worlds, both natural and supernatural, functioned well when things were balanced and pure. The Master of Breath revealed to humans the rituals necessary to restore balance and purity. When Presbyterian missionary William S. Potts preached at both the Asbury Mission and the Baptist mission near Tuckabatchee in 1828, he invoked the imagery of the Master of Breath in his evangelical rhetoric. At Tuckabatchee, he told an aged Indian that the Bible was the talk of the Master of Breath to all men, white, red, and black. The Master of Breath was “displeased, was angry every

³⁸ Second Annual Report of the Missionary Committee in H. R. 98; Ethridge, *Creek Country*, 33.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

day with all those who got drunk, broke the Sabbath, lied, stole, or blasphemed.” The curse of the Master of Breath, according to Potts, was the cause of the calamities experienced by the Creek Nation. The old Indian responded that he had heard of Jesus Christ, but he was old and could not remember much about him. His people had a tradition that “these should be told to all people on earth and then the whole world would be burned up.” Rather than attach pejoratively judge the Indian’s Master of Breath persona, the missionaries appeared to appropriate that image for their own purpose.⁴⁰

The statement of this aged Creek man indicates that some Indians may have informally adopted Christian beliefs into their worldview. This did not, however, translate into the conversion of large numbers of Creeks to Christianity. As Wright points out, Creeks may have noticed a similarity between the Master of Breath and Jesus, and they saw the resemblance of Christian concepts of earth, hell, and heaven to their cosmos, but they never accepted that the trinitarian Christian god was the Master of Breath. Indians also continued to be suspicious of the motives of missionaries regarding the issue of the white encroachment of Indian lands.⁴¹

The Creeks may have been suspicious of the missionaries, but they were sure that white encroachment of their lands would continue. The removal of Creeks from Georgia ostensibly limited the Indians to the area west of the Chattahoochee River where a convoluted and protracted process of removal of the Creeks from Alabama occurred.

Throughout the 1820s and much of the 1830s, Creeks, including restless and destitute

⁴⁰ Smoot, ed., “An Account of Alabama Indian Missions and Presbyterian Churches in 1828 from the Travel Diary of William S. Potts”; Ethridge, *Creek Country*, 229; The Indian’s view of the end of the world is derived from the following verses: “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.” (Matthew 24:14 KJV) and “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.” (2 Peter 3:10)

⁴¹ Wright, *Creeks and Seminoles*, 224-225.

refugees from Georgia, continued to travel back and forth across the Chattahoochee River. The Georgia legislature eventually prohibited Creeks from entering into Georgia and Governor Forsyth (elected in 1827) sought assistance from the federal government. In the summer of 1828, the War Department sent a company of troops to Fort Mitchell. As the Alabama governor and state legislature began implementing measures to pressure Creeks to leave that state, the officials in the federal government did likewise. The troops at Fort Mitchell were there for another reason - to intimidate Creeks in Alabama into accepting removal. As it appeared that the Creeks near the Chattahoochee were more amenable to removal than their Upper Creek counterparts, the president ordered the transfer of the troops to Tuckabatchee in September 1828. They remained there until the end of the year and then returned to Fort Mitchell.⁴²

With the election of Andrew Jackson in 1828, it was clear that Indian removal was a mandate of the people. This really needed little clarification, but Jackson brought to the presidency the desire to once and for all put federal force behind Indian removal. Unlike Adams, who squabbled with Troup and contributed to division and conflict between federal and state Indian policy, Jackson embraced actions by the state of Alabama to force Indians there to live under the legal authority and jurisdiction of the state. In addition to Indian refugees, there was a great influx of white settlers, traders, and government officials into the Creek Nation in Alabama. Indians in Alabama became the subjects of continued harassment by white settlers, traders, and government officials. One visitor described the Indians near Fort Mitchell as “miserable wretches” as he observed a

⁴² Green, *Politics of Indian Removal*, 141-154.

starving people being assisted only by whatever supplies and food they could obtain from Crowell at the Indian agency.⁴³

As the fate of the Creeks in Alabama, both as a group and as individuals, continued to unfold, missionaries began spreading their work among the new settlers across the river in Georgia. Besides the white intruders that made their way into Alabama, there were frontier whites who had drawn entries in the Georgia land lottery of 1827. New settlers and speculators began taking title to lands in the nascent counties of Muscogee, Troup, and Harris. Because the missionary interest was concerned with the opening of the new territory of in this state, a conference missionary was appointed to the new territory of Harris County. Methodism was increasing rapidly in the new part of Georgia as the Methodists began organizing charges and districts in the Chattahoochee Valley. In 1828, the South Carolina Conference appointed Morgan Turrentine to serve the Lee Mission in the territory between the Chattahoochee and Flint Rivers, thus bringing Methodism to the Chattahoochee Valley counties of Randolph and Stewart. The Conference also assigned John Hunter to a new mission in Troup County that same year and, in 1830, formed the Randolph Mission.⁴⁴

More relevant to the growing population was the creation of a trading town in 1827 when the state of Georgia laid out the town of Columbus, located approximately 12 miles northeast of Fort Mitchell. The missionaries at the Asbury Mission, Andrew Hamill and Whitman C. Hill, preached in the area on occasion and eventually formed a class

⁴³ Ibid., 155-156. Basil Hall, quoted in Debo, *Road to Disappearance*, 95.

⁴⁴ West, *History of Methodism in Alabama*, 377.; Frank Judson Dudley, *History of St Luke History of St Luke M. E. Church, South* (Columbus, Georgia: Columbus Office Supply Company, n.d.), 16-18; Marynelle S. Waite, ed. *History of the South Georgia Conference, The United Methodist Church, 1866-1984*. (Dallas: Taylor Publishing Company, 1984), 14-15, 188; George Gilman Smith, *The History of Georgia Methodism from 1786 to 1866* (Atlanta: A. B. Caldwell, 1913), 172-173.

consisting of eleven white members. In 1828, the Methodist presence in Columbus became permanent when the South Carolina Methodist Conference assigned James Stockdale as the preacher to the Columbus mission.⁴⁵

On February 3, 1830, the South Carolina Conference formally discontinued the Asbury Mission to the Creek Indians. The deplorable condition of the Indians and white encroachment in Alabama was the final barrier to the Methodist mission work at Asbury. Contact with even more white intruders exacerbated the pervasive use of alcohol among Indians and the destitute condition of the Indians led to the theft of the cattle, poultry, and corn that belonged to the Mission. Removal of the Creeks from Georgia and the conditions in Alabama dealt a devastating blow to the Indians and contributed to an increasing indifference to religion. This situation, added to the other barriers (the ban on preaching, the entwinement of the missionaries in the political imbroglio, and the ethnocentrism of the missionaries), contributed to mixed results and little immediate success in converting Indians to Christianity. Furthermore, the Methodists turned their attention to the masses of people that flooded into the new Georgia counties on the east side of the Chattahoochee River, thus contributing to the obsolescence of the Asbury mission.⁴⁶

As the Georgia side of the river became more settled, in Alabama the Creeks were still in a conflicted and deplorable state. Finally, in 1832, removal of the Alabama Creeks

⁴⁵ “AN ACT to lay out a trading town and to dispose of a the lands reserved for the use of the state near the Coweta

Falls on the Chattahoochee river and to name the same,” December 7, 1827, Georgia Legislative Documents, 1827; West, *History of Methodism in Alabama*, 377; Dudley, *History of St Luke*, 16-18; Waite, ed. *History of the South Georgia Conference*, 14-15, 188.

⁴⁶ West, *History of Methodism in Alabama*, 376-383.; South Carolina Conference Reports, 1825 – 1830 in *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: J. Emory and B. Waugh, 1830), 18; *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, For the years 1773-1828*. Volume 1 (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1840), 430, 459, 489, 523. *Methodist Magazine*, XI (1828), 355.

received official sanction. The removal agreement, the Cusseta Treaty of March 24, 1832, called for the cession of all Creek land in Alabama, but allowed Creeks to claim land in their former territory and obtain patents in fee simple at the end of a five year residency. A few days after the Cusseta Treaty, white encroachment took the form of the Columbus Land Company, organized by wealthy residents of Columbus who sought to add the Alabama lands to the emerging trade and commerce of the Chattahoochee Valley. The company sent agents to Alabama to force Creeks into debt by selling goods (and whiskey) to them on credit. Once the Creeks were indebted to them, white creditors demanded title to land as payment. The company also sent black interpreters to pressure Indians to sell their land at a fraction of its value. This type of land-grabbing fraud commenced for several years until the spring of 1836 when a band of Creeks violently resisted. United States forces, with a great deal of assistance from non-hostile Creeks, put down the resistance in what is known as the Second Creek War or the Creek War of 1836. Hostile Creeks, a total of 2,495 including men, women, and children, were then forcibly removed to the Indian Territory west of the Mississippi.⁴⁷

The Creek War may seem inconsequential and chronologically removed from the story of the Asbury Mission, but there was a connection that reveals the changed nature of the Methodist presence in the Chattahoochee Valley. Of importance were the actions of several people prior to and during the Creek War. Seaborn Jones, a prominent member of the Methodist Church in Columbus, was one of the founders of the Columbus Land Company. James McHenry, formerly a student at Asbury, led the hostile Creeks in the war against the coalition of non-hostile Creeks, Federal soldiers, and local volunteers.

⁴⁷ John T. Ellisor, *The Second Creek War: Interethnic Conflict and Collusion on a Collapsing Frontier* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), 63; Debo, *Road to Disappearance*, 98-101.

When news arrived at the Methodist church that Indians had fired upon a steamboat on the Chattahoochee River, Ignatius Few ceased preaching and immediately organized a volunteer company in the church. With Few serving as captain, the company remained on guard in the city for four or five days.⁴⁸

Membership numbers during the final year of the Asbury Mission, the establishment of missions in the Chattahoochee Valley in Georgia, and the events related to the Creek War reveal a change in the goals of the Methodists. Table 1.1 shows that, although membership in the Asbury church increased each year with the exception of 1826, the missionaries achieved little success in their efforts to convert the Indians to Christianity but greater success in converting blacks. The failure of the Methodists to convert large numbers of Creeks to Christianity does not negate some success among the Indians. Some of the Indians who had been students at Asbury served as preachers and politicians after they moved to the Indian Territory. Samuel Checote, for example, went to the Indian Territory where he served as a Methodist preacher and was an influential person in Creek government and politics.⁴⁹

Table 1.1 Membership in the church at Asbury

Year	Indians	Whites	Blacks	Total
1823	0	2	10	12
1824	7	2	0	9
1825	16	13	3	32
1826	8	4	14	26
1827	15	13	43	71
1828	24	2	45	71
1829	16	1	208	225

⁴⁸ Debo, *Road to Disappearance*, 101; John Martin, *Columbus, Georgia, From Its Selection as a "Trading Town" in 1827 to its Partial Destruction by Wilson's Raiders in 1865*, (Columbus: Thomas Gilbert, 1874), 1:60-61.

⁴⁹ West, *History of Methodism in Alabama*, 376-383.; South Carolina Conference Reports, 1825 – 1830 in *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 18; *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, For the years 1773-1828*. Volume 1 (1840), 430, 459, 489, 523.; Debo, *Road to Disappearance*, 98-101.

The marked increase in black members probably indicates an increase in the number of whites and their slaves coming to the area. It was also related to the recent emphasis by the South Carolina Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church to address the spiritual welfare of slaves. The numbers also, however, exaggerate actual involvement in the church. Andrew Hamill noted, for example, that membership numbers did not reflect the number who regularly attended worship meeting. The exigencies of life prevented regular attendance as Indians were suffering from great distress and slaves were scattered around various parts of the area trying to “procure a support for themselves.” Nonetheless, as whites brought in more blacks and removed the Indians, it appeared that the Gospel Horse was alive in the Chattahoochee Valley, and presumably under white control.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Donald G. Mathews, *Slavery and Methodism; A Chapter in American Morality, 1780-1845* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 67-72; *Methodist Magazine*, XI (1828), 355.

Chapter 2

“God’s Horse Was Tied To The Iron Stake” The Creation of the Evangelical Valley

Even as Asbury Mission on the western bank of the river was declining, settlers flooded the Georgia side and began transforming the multiethnic Chattahoochee Valley frontier into a culturally stable biracial society. The creation of biracial churches in the Chattahoochee Valley constituted an important part of that transformation as these churches replaced the dynamic frontier camp meetings with institutionalizing religion that contributed to the fabric of society.

The biracial nature of these churches was readily apparent. A slave named Joseph was among the founding members of the first Baptist church in Columbus. Milly, “the property of Mr. Garrard,” was a founding member of LaGrange Baptist Church and George, “a man of color,” was a founding member of Flat Shoals Baptist Church in Troup County. Another slave, a woman named Temperance, joined six other women and six men as founding members of Bethel Baptist Church, the first Baptist church in rural Muscogee County. The inclusion of slaves as founding members of these early Chattahoochee Valley Baptist churches illustrated the seemingly egalitarian racial integration of evangelical churches. Hidden among the ink and paper of these church records, however, is the reality of a more complex relationship between white and black evangelicals in biracial churches. By the time these churches came into existence, evangelical religion consisted of a maturing proslavery theology regarding the ecclesiastical and social relationship between the races.⁵¹

⁵¹ *Minutes*, First Baptist Church, Columbus, Georgia, hereinafter cited as *Minutes*, First Baptist Columbus; *Minutes*, LaGrange Baptist Church, Troup County, Georgia Baptist Church Records, Special Collections, Jack Tarver Library, Mercer University, Macon, Georgia, Microfilm Reel # 127 (hereinafter referred to as

The biracial character of evangelical religion had not been long established in Georgia. Most slaves were first exposed to Protestant and evangelical Christianity during the late colonial period by missionaries of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel and by white missionaries during the Great Awakening. During the 1760s, Republican ideology, emphasizing liberty and equality, reinforced and influenced evangelical Christianity. This contributed to an intellectual and religious indictment of slavery, particularly among northern Quakers. This antislavery thought, however, was not limited to northern Christians. Southern Baptist and Methodists preachers spoke loudly against slavery and the latter denomination actively sought to remove slaveholders from their church rolls as late as 1784. Soon thereafter, however, the Methodists tempered their stated opposition to slavery out of a desire to retain access to the South. Planters feared the egalitarian message of the gospel and opposed mission work among their slaves. In response, many southern Methodists tempered their harsh antislavery language, and sought to expand their influence in the region. The Methodist General Conference removed restrictions against slaveholding, but retained the prohibition against slave trading by members. Still, regional tension over slavery would remain, leading the church to divide over the issue.⁵²

The organization of black Christianity in Georgia relied heavily on actions of the slaves themselves. In 1776, George Liele, a slave from Virginia, converted and was baptized and soon began spreading the gospel to slaves on several rice and indigo

GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel # 127); Smith, *History of Troup County*, 48; *Minutes*, Bethel Baptist Church, Muscogee County, Georgia; hereinafter cited as *Minutes*, Bethel Baptist Church.

⁵² Frey, Sylvia R. *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 37; Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 17; Donald G. Mathews, "The Methodist Mission to the Slaves, 1829-1844" *Journal of American History* 51, No. 4 (Mar., 1965): 615.

plantations in Georgia and South Carolina. Among those he baptized were Andrew Bryan, a slave of Jonathan Bryan. David George, a runaway who became a slave on the Galphin plantation near Augusta in South Carolina, heard Liele preach and was instrumental in directing a black church named Silver Bluff. Even as the American Revolution raged, Jesse, another Galphin slave, organized three or four Baptist churches in South Carolina and Georgia.⁵³

One of these black churches was First African Baptist of Savannah, Georgia, officially organized on January 20, 1788, with Andrew Bryan as pastor. Members of this church suffered persecution and physical punishment from slave patrols who feared that the blacks had evil designs against the whites and were plotting insurrection in the church. A little over a year after the organization of the church, some fifty members, including Bryan, were locked up and their meeting-house taken away from them. Intervention by Jonathan Bryan and the support of some of the other owners and sympathetic whites moved officials to release them and to allow them the right to worship freely.⁵⁴

In 1790, this church joined the Georgia Baptist Association and was the only black church in that association at the time. By allowing an exclusively black congregation to become part of their association, white Baptists demonstrated a substantial measure of independence and autonomy allotted to their black brethren. This was indicative of the racial separation supported by evangelical whites who believed in freedom of worship and the residual effect of the antislavery position of many Baptists.

⁵³ Frey, *Water from the Rock*, 38-39.

⁵⁴ James M. Simms, *The First Colored Baptist Church in North America, Constituted at Savannah, Georgia, January 20, A. D. 1788, With Biographical Sketches of the Pastors* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1888), 21, 22.

Early Baptists in America promoted personal freedom and religious liberty and in some places supported emancipation. In the latter decades of the eighteenth century, Baptists issued resolutions denouncing slavery. In 1789, the Virginia General Committee of the Baptists resolved “... slavery is a violent deprivation of the rights of nature, and inconsistent with a republican government, and therefore, [we] recommend to our brethren to make use of every legal measure to extirpate this horrible evil from the land ...”⁵⁵

Reaction to the Virginia resolution, however, revealed emergent divisions among Baptists over the issue of slavery. Upon hearing of the Virginia resolution, a Baptist church in Kentucky asked the Salem Association to issue a resolution supporting the Virginia statement. When the majority of the delegates of that association refused to do so, the church withdrew from the association. In the Upper South, where cotton was not becoming economically vital, ambiguity over the issue of slavery continued into the early 1800s. Some preachers and individual members of Baptist churches in the Elkhorn (Kentucky) Association objected to slavery, but delegates to the association resolved that it was improper for Baptists to be involved in the politics of emancipation. Another Baptist church in that association rejected the notion that scripture authorized Baptist preachers to preach emancipation.⁵⁶

While Baptists in the Upper South debated slavery in the early 1800s, several factors coincided to effect the formation of biracial churches in Georgia and other areas of the Lower South. Just as the emerging cotton kingdom contributed to white expansion

⁵⁵ .Ibid., 25; Mary Burnham Putnam, *The Baptists and Slavery, 1840-1845* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: George Wahr, Publisher, 1913), 12-13; Walter B. Posey, “The Baptists and Slavery in the Lower Mississippi Valley.” *Journal of Negro History* 41 (April 1956), 117-119.

⁵⁶ .Putnam, *Baptists and Slavery*, 12-13; Posey, “The Baptists and Slavery in the Lower Mississippi Valley,” 117-119.

and the accumulation of Indian lands, it also played a part in changing attitudes among evangelical whites who were also part of white expansion. Certainly the growing importance of slave labor for cotton cultivation promoted proslavery attitudes among evangelicals as well as those outside evangelical circles. Christine Leigh Heyrman argues few white southern preachers spoke against slavery by 1800 and evangelicals adopted a pro-slavery stance to accommodate the prevailing white southern social mores. In fact, evangelical anti-slavery statements were almost always found in areas where evangelicals were less likely to own slaves.⁵⁷

This emerging view found a voice in a Richard Furman, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Charleston. In 1800, he wrote a circular letter to the churches in the Charleston Baptist Association intended to bolster support for slavery among Baptist as a counter to antislavery theology in the North and Upper South. Furman espoused the idea that slavery was consistent with biblical teachings and that both slave and master had Christian obligations that would keep the institution in line with the will of God. Slaves should be submissive and obedient while masters were to treat their slaves kindly and provide for their physical and spiritual needs. Furman's letter likely influenced Georgia Baptists as well. Baptists would defend slavery and one mechanism to do so would be to participate with and respond to black desires to have separate congregations headed by black ministers. When the black Savannah Baptist church joined with two white churches to form the Savannah River Association in 1802, the founding delegates adopted the summary of church discipline of the Charleston Association, which called for the

⁵⁷ Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 151.

ordination of black ministers to take charge over separate black congregations and, when engaged in business, for members to call each other “brethren.”⁵⁸

In 1823, Furman wrote a more extensive treatise addressed to the governor that sought to reassure slaveholders who feared the egalitarian nature of the gospel by providing southern evangelicals with a scripturally based defense and protocol for evangelical slavery. Coming on the heels of the aborted insurrection led by Denmark Vesey in Charleston and in the aftermath of a destructive hurricane, the address offered thanksgiving to God for protection from those two events. Vesey’s rebellion had religious connotations – he was a member of an African Methodist church in Charleston – and it demonstrated that blacks had power to shape landscape of slavery even as whites presumably remained in control. Furman’s reaction was to cast Christianity in opposition to insurrection and rebellion and to posit a scriptural basis for slavery. According to Furman, “slaves become part of the family ... and the care of ordering it and providing for its welfare, devolves on [the master].” Even as slaves, Furman continues, “they are also men; and are with ourselves accountable creatures; having immortal souls, and being destined to future eternal reward.” Masters and slaves, said Furman, have mutual obligations – slaves should reverence their master, be obedient, industrious, and faithful to him. Without these actions slaves “can neither be the faithful servants of God, nor be held as regular members of the Christian Church.” Masters, “being the heads of families, are bound, on principles of moral and religious duty, to give these servants religious

⁵⁸ Sylvia R. Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 257-259; Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 68-69, 76. Samuel Boykin, *History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia* (Atlanta: James P. Harrison and Co., 1881), 66.

instruction; or at least, to afford them opportunities, under proper regulations to obtain it.⁵⁹

Furman articulated the tenets of a proslavery Christianity that formed the basis for the expansion of biracial churches in the South. It saw the extension of Christianity to blacks as both enlightening to their souls and designed to limit their desires to revolt against enslavement. The rich lands of the Chattahoochee Valley promised to tie the area to the cotton market, with Columbus facilitating the export of cotton from several surrounding counties. Thus by the time evangelicals settled in the Chattahoochee Valley, Joseph, Milly, George, Temperance and other evangelical blacks were restricted to membership in biracial churches that contained no elements of black independence or autonomy, except for those dynamically granted by paternalistic whites for purposes beneficial to themselves.

As Furman articulated the rationale for the continued creation of biracial churches to southern Baptists, Methodists soon began to include slaves in their mission efforts. In 1824, the South Carolina Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church announced the desire to create a specific department to address the spiritual welfare of slaves. William Capers, formerly of the Asbury mission and now superintendent of missions, began encouraging the preaching to slaves on plantations in areas where there was a large black population without an adequate number of churches or established missionary circuits.

⁵⁹ Putnam, *Baptists and Slavery*, 14; Richard Furman, *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*. 2nd Edition (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1838), 14, 21, 24. Online transcription by T. Lloyd Benson from the original text in the South Carolina Baptist Historical Collection, Furman University, Greenville, South Carolina. <http://eweb.furman.edu/~benenson/docs/rcd-fmnl.htm> accessed October 17, 2010.

The missions actually sought to include both blacks and whites as the mission activities also included an admonition for masters to become Christians.⁶⁰

These actions by Baptists and Methodists in the 1820s revealed a two-fold strategy to bring slaves into the Christian community, save black souls, and ultimately attempt to reconstitute slavery as a defensible, God-ordained institution. They continued to create and retain biracial churches in which blacks, slave and free, could enjoy a measure of ecclesiastical equality. They also engaged in plantation missions to reach those slaves who were not in close proximity to churches. Primarily because mission work required established churches and cooperative organizations, especially among Baptists, evangelicals initially realized little success in creating and maintaining missions to blacks in the Chattahoochee Valley. For example, six years after the South Carolina Methodists announced their desire to create a department to administer missions to slaves, there was only one black mission in Georgia. By 1832, there were four missions, but none officially in the Chattahoochee Valley.⁶¹

Upon creation of the trading town of Columbus by the state legislature, Georgia Governor John Forsyth appointed a five man commission to oversee the laying out of the town, one of whom was Ignatius Few, a recent convert to Methodism who would later serve as pastor at St. Luke in Columbus. The commissioners convened in Milledgeville in early 1828 and chose another Methodist preacher, Edward Lloyd Thomas as the surveyor. On July 10, 1828, the sale of town lots commenced and continued for two weeks. Several

⁶⁰ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 152-154; Mathews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 67-72; Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, 137-140.

⁶¹ William P. Harrison, ed. *The Gospel among the Slaves: A Short Account of Missionary Operations Among the African Slaves of the Southern States* (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1893), 158-160, 162, 177; *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, For the years 1839-1845*. Volume 3. New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1840, 29-30, 128-130, 218-219, 324, 430-431, 557; *Columbus Enquirer*, January 26, 1842.

thousand people, would-be settlers and speculators alike, arrived in stagecoaches, wagons, and carts and stayed in tents throughout the sale and engaged in what was called “an animated and bustling” activity. Carpenters had built sixty frames to be put up as soon as the sale of the land was completed and there were already some houses on low wheels for easy removal to sold lots. Buildings went up rapidly, and by the end of November, there were nearly a hundred framed buildings.⁶²

When settlers initially came to the area, frontier elements were still very much a part of the social, political, and economic landscape. Columbus historian John Martin noted that the city was “a pretty hard place for a year or two... with not much execution of law or government of any kind.” Early issues of the Columbus *Enquirer*, which began publication in May 1828, contained many reports of “duels, impromptu fights, and dueling correspondence.” Creek Indians, still embroiled in the removal effort, also remained part of the social milieu, often going from house to house in search of food during the day and then making their way back to the Alabama side of the Chattahoochee River by night as required by Georgia law. The transition of the area from an unstable frontier to a stable community required institutional moral and legal authority. The Methodist class organized by Andrew Hamill and Whitman C. Hill began institutional evangelicalism in the frontier trading town of Columbus, but in 1828 no formal churches existed. Methodist missionary James Stockdale and other traveling preachers provided the only religious activity, other than the Methodist class.⁶³

The layout of the town, however, accommodated the spiritual as well as the secular. When he laid out the town, surveyor Thomas set aside four lots for religious

⁶² John Martin, *Columbus, Georgia*, 1:10; S. G. Goodrich, *A Pictorial Geography of the World* (Boston: C. D. Strong, 1849), 280.

⁶³ Martin, *Columbus, Georgia*, 1:10, 14.

purposes, one each for the Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Catholics. Religious matters, however, were secondary to secular matters as it would be a few years before any of the denominations constructed permanent houses of worship. Methodists Hamill and Hill came up from the Asbury mission to conduct their class and led services under a brush arbor built near the river with seats made from logs felled nearby. More formal and organized meetings supplanted those at the brush arbor when James Stockdale began holding services in a crude storehouse on the corner of Broad and St. Clair Streets. This building was in fact a physical representation of the institutions needed to build a stable, orderly society and to further remove the area from frontier characteristics. All denominations, for a short period of time, held church services in this building. The building also accommodated rudimentary city council meetings and proceedings of the new Chattahoochee Circuit court presided over by another recent convert to Methodism, Walter T. Colquitt.⁶⁴

Many of the new settlers in Columbus were Methodists from the Georgia counties of Putnam and Greene and the quick growth of the city prompted the South Carolina Conference to designate Columbus as a station and to create the Columbus District,

⁶⁴ Broad and St. Clair are now Broadway and Eleventh. Etta Blanchard Worsley, *Columbus on the Chattahoochee* (Columbus: Columbus Office Supply Company, 1951), 140, 143, 145, 149; Columbus *Dailey Enquirer-Sun*, May 17, 1879; Presbyterians were among those who held services in the courthouse prior to meeting in a small building in the southern part of Columbus. They were originally granted section C of the lots set aside for religious institutions, but they considered that location to be too far away and inconvenient for its members. They subsequently acquired another lot of land a block away from the Baptist and Methodist churches. Historians generally include Presbyterians in studies of evangelical religion. Due to the small number of Presbyterian churches in the Chattahoochee Valley and the small percentage of black members, I have focused on Baptists and Methodists and scarcely included Presbyterians in this study. First Presbyterian Church of Columbus, for example, had only 3 blacks among the 144 members in 1843. Of the 327 members reported in 1859, only 12 were black. Unlike most new migrant members of the Baptists and Methodists, some of the early members of First Presbyterian came directly from Congregational and Presbyterian churches in Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, and Massachusetts, and thus were not slaveholders. See First Presbyterian Church, Columbus, Georgia, Session Minutes 1833 – 1928, Columbus State University Archives, Columbus, Georgia and James J. Gilbert, *A History of the First Presbyterian Church of Columbus, Georgia: During the first History of St Luke of its existence* (Columbus: Gilbert Printing Co., 1930), 9-14.

which covered the area west of the Flint River and north of Columbus. The conference appointed Andrew Hamill as the preacher in charge at the station and as Presiding Elder of the district. In the latter part of 1829, under the leadership of Hamill, the Methodists constructed a crude log structure of wood on the southwest corner of the lot assigned to them by the city surveyor. The congregation that used this building soon became known as St. Luke Methodist Church and initially consisted of fifty-four white members and seven black members. In 1831, the Methodists moved the log building to the northeast corner of lot B and constructed a brick building at the original location. Upon completion of their brick building, the Methodists gave the original log building to the black members for their exclusive use. From this point forward, the white and black Methodists worshipped separately, although the whites continued to administer and presumptively control the religious activities of the blacks.⁶⁵

Baptists in the new city organized Ephesus Baptist Church on February 14, 1829, later to be designated as First Baptist Church of Columbus. The organizing charter members included four men, seven women, and the slave Joseph. The identity of Joseph's owner is not known although it is likely that he was owned by one of the four men. By 1830, the congregation numbered 57 and in that year they erected their first building, a wooden structure approximately 28 by 40 feet, located on lot A as designated by the surveyor.⁶⁶

The creation of evangelical churches in the new town of LaGrange in Troup County followed the same pattern as that in Columbus. The town surveyor designated

⁶⁵ Smith, *History of Georgia Methodism from 1786 to 1866*, 184, 226; Dudley, *History of St Luke*, 16-18; Worsley, *Columbus on the Chattahoochee*, 140-141. I address the dynamics of racially segregated services in Chapter 3.

⁶⁶ *Minutes*, First Baptist Columbus; Worsley, *Columbus on the Chattahoochee*, 144-145.

certain lots for the churches. LaGrange Baptist was organized April 12, 1828, in the same building used for the county court. John Hunter, assigned to the new Methodist mission in Troup County, helped organize the First Methodist Church of LaGrange in January 1828 with the help of Caleb W. Key, a recent settler from Henry County, Georgia, who led a class of twelve others. The first Presbyterian church was organized a year later. The early Methodist congregation met in a crude, newly constructed log building while the Baptists and Presbyterians shared a temporary building on the lot designated for the Baptists.⁶⁷

While the establishment of evangelical churches in urban and rural areas was part of the dynamic milieu of political, social and economic settlement, the creation of these churches in rural areas constituted a central identity to nascent communities. Settlers in rural frontier areas had many tasks to perform to build houses and communities. They had to clear land and construct houses and auxiliary buildings. The cooperative efforts required to establish living conditions for new settlers shattered the mythical picture of rugged individualism. As the settlement of the frontier commenced, the nature of religious activity took on different characteristics, purposes, and meanings. Evangelical efforts to create and sustain communities of social stability and security replaced the initial missionary efforts among the Creek Indians and white traders. Mathews points out that the church provided a community of social stability that replaced the disorder of the frontier world and created a Christian society. Thus, the church provided a means of transforming geographically scattered farms into a community. Evangelical religion expressed to the individual that the community cared for him or her. Individuals were

⁶⁷ Smith, *History of Troup County*, 155-159; Smith, *History of Georgia Methodism from 1786 to 1866*, 180.

renewed and this renewal was the foundation for community. Evangelicals created communal bonds based on the shared emotion of the conversion experience. Methodists and Baptists were no longer sects among the disappearing frontier; they became organizations that contributed to the fabric of a settled society.⁶⁸

The creation of evangelical churches in the rural areas of Troup, Harris, and Muscogee counties was an indivisible part of the establishment of communities. Many settlers from other parts of Georgia that came to the Chattahoochee Valley were evangelicals that sought to establish churches like the ones they left. Other settlers, seemingly non-religious, became the focus of Methodist and Baptist missionaries. Thus the creation of evangelical churches was fruit of the labor of migrating evangelicals who sought to establish godly communities and missionaries who sought to help establish the churches and bring lost souls into the evangelical community.

A survey of the efforts of Baptist and Methodist missionaries, itinerant preachers, and early settlers as they organized churches in Harris County demonstrates the processes and events that characterized the genesis of biracial evangelicalism in the rural areas of the Chattahoochee Valley. The early churches consisted of settler families or individuals who met in houses or under brush arbors until they could construct a meeting house. The meeting houses were sometimes log structures, but typically in rural areas settlers built a frame building with no ceiling under the roof, varying in size according to the anticipated size of the congregation. The early settlers of the Mulberry Grove community, for example, constructed a building that measured 30 by 35 feet and was known as “Mulberry Grove Meeting House.” In many cases they made no provision for warming the building. These buildings were built on land donated by settlers or sold to the first

⁶⁸ Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, 4-5, 36, 40.

trustees or deacons of a church. By the 1830s and 1840s, increased prosperity allowed churches in some communities to erect more suitable permanent buildings⁶⁹

These churches were not initially sanctioned by a denomination, although the congregants were mostly people who had been members of either a Baptist or Methodist church in communities from where they migrated. Thus, nascent communities had a distinctive and nearly exclusive identification with a specific denomination. The first church in Waverly Hall, for example, was a Methodist church and there was not a formally organized Baptist church there until 1893. Those settlers in Mulberry Grove who constructed the first meeting house, however, were Baptist and they soon were constituted as New Hope Baptist Church. Likewise, the Shiloh community in northeast Harris County, where Baptists constituted a church in 1833, had no formally organized Methodist church until 1892.⁷⁰

One event that demonstrated the transition from a frontier to a more settled society was the process of establishing or constituting a Baptist church. This process was common to the creation of Baptist churches throughout America, but it is important to establish these details to interpret subsequent actions of Baptist governance as it relates to individual members. Associational and local church records show that a group of local ordained ministers or missionaries, known as a presbytery, served as witnesses and certified the constitution, or creation, of a new Baptist church. Initiation of the constituting process, however, originated within a group of Baptists in a community who

⁶⁹ *Minutes*, Mount Olive Baptist Church, reprinted in N. K. Rogers, *History of Chattahoochee County, Georgia* (Columbus, Georgia: The Columbus Office Supply Company, 1933), 81; S. G. Hillyer, *Reminiscences of Georgia Baptists: Together With a Study of the Author's Life Written by His Daughter* (Atlanta: Foote & Davies, 1902.), 172; Louise Calhoun Barfield, *History of Harris County Georgia 1827 - 1961* (Columbus, Georgia: The Columbus Office Supply Company, 1961), 567.

⁷⁰ Barfield, *History of Harris County Georgia 1827 - 1961*, 567, 683.

believed “it to be the duty of all resigned men and women to form themselves into a religious society or church . . . for the purpose of keeping house for God.” Charter members of Bethany Baptist Church, for example, drew up a constitution that represented the founding document of their church. After affirming that they had all been “baptized on a confession of our faith and having received letters of dismissal from our respective churches,” they stated that they “deem[ed] it necessary to state the fundamental principals [sic] of our faith on which we unanimously agree to be constituted into a gospel church.” They then itemized the doctrinal beliefs of the church and affirmed such things as their belief in a triune God, their adherence to the doctrine of original sin, their belief in the atoning death of Christ, his bodily resurrection as a foreshadow of the resurrection of the wicked and the righteous, the belief in the (Calvinist) doctrine of eternal and particular election, and the belief in two ordinances – baptism by immersion and the Lord’s Supper, or communion. The members recorded their names to attest to a “solemn covenant to the Lord and one to the other.” Upon examination of the statements of the charter members, the presbytery affirmed and certified the creation of the new congregation.⁷¹

The formation and constitution of churches in other nascent communities in Harris County followed a similar pattern of relationship between the settlement of a community and the organization of Baptist churches. John Hambrick and John W. Cooper constituted Bethany Baptist Church in the midst of a settlement near the present-day city of Pine Mountain on September 8, 1828, making it the first organized Baptist

⁷¹ Barfield, *History of Harris County Georgia 1827 - 1961*, 364, 567. Barfield incorrectly identifies this as the congregation that became Mount Olive Baptist Church. Records of the Columbus Baptist Association in 1830 show Mount Olive and New Hope as separate congregations. In 1833, the name New Hope does not appear in the records of Columbus Baptist Association, but there is a congregation known as Mulberry Baptist Church; Lillian D. Champion, ed., *History of Bethany Baptist Church* (Pine Mountain, Georgia: Charles Rogers, 1978), 4-5.

church in Harris County. Cooper was one of the presbyters who constituted Lebanon, the first Baptist church in the recently designated county seat of Hamilton, on July 1, 1829. A congregation in the Mountain Creek community that initially met in Cooper's house became Mountain Creek Baptist Church on April 4, 1829, when it was constituted by Cooper and Anderson Smith. On August 31, 1829, Cooper and Smith joined John Milner and William G. Henderson to constitute Mount Olive Baptist Church. On November 28, 1829, Cooper and Smith constituted Bethlehem Baptist church in a community east of Hamilton. Zachariah H. Gordon and Jacob King constituted New Hope Baptist Church (renamed Mulberry by 1833) on September 12, 1828 and six days later constituted Bethesda Baptist Church two miles east of the new town of Ellerslie near Ridgeway, another nascent community, on September 18, 1828.⁷²

Gordon and King came from Upson County and served the dual role of presbyter and pastor of some of the new churches. Missionaries sent out by the state convention also helped organize and constitute churches. James Reeves, for example, came to the Troup County area in 1829 to preach and assist in constituting churches. His duties were primarily preaching, but he occasionally served short terms as pastor before going to other areas of the state. In 1833 and 1834, for example, Reeves travelled 1,600 miles in north Georgia, preaching and constituting churches.⁷³

Many who helped to organize churches were "farmer-preachers," men with little formal education who moved into a developing county both to spread the gospel and to

⁷² Jesse H. Campbell, *Georgia Baptists: Historical and Biographical* (Macon: J. W. Burke and Company, 1874), 29; *Minutes*, Columbus Baptist Association, 1842; Champion, ed., *History of Bethany Baptist Church*, 4; Waite, *History of the South Georgia Conference, The United Methodist Church, 1866-1984*, 188; Barfield, *History of Harris County Georgia 1827 - 1961*, 435,457, 459,460, 682.

⁷³ Campbell, *Georgia Baptists*, 29; Boykin, *History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia*, 184. James Reeves was the missionary whose application was rejected by the American Baptist Home Mission Board in 1845 because he was a slaveholder. This precipitated the separation of southern Baptists from their northern brethren and the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention.

embrace the economic opportunity afforded by westward expansion. The Baptist farmer-preacher persona had its roots in colonial times when several factors convened to produce that character. First, Baptists in colonial Massachusetts and Virginia consisted mostly of non-elites who formed an especially irritating dissident group against the established churches in those colonies. The Baptist tenet of religious liberty and staunch advocacy of the separation of church and state posed a threat to the legal, social, political, and economic hegemony of established elites in those colonies. In Virginia, where Baptists were the chief dissenters, the legal and popular persecution was especially egregious prior to the American Revolution.⁷⁴

Second, and perhaps most importantly, Baptist polity, centering on a simple doctrine and democratic organization, appealed to the wide range of white southerners, including planters, yeomen farmers, and lower class people, who comprised a good portion of those people who migrated westward during the early years of the nineteenth century. Baptists from Virginia and North Carolina migrated westward into Kentucky and Tennessee and southwestward into South Carolina, Georgia, and eventually Alabama and Mississippi. Missionary zeal also accompanied the thirst for fertile lands and Baptist preachers were both settlers and missionaries. William Warren Sweet points out that Baptist growth was not simply a matter of the westward movement of eastern Baptists, but proceeded mainly due “to the Baptist genius for making Baptists out of raw material which the frontier afforded.”⁷⁵

Finally, the Baptist common man expressly rejected the idea of educated and salaried ministers, due in part to an aversion to the established Anglican Church in

⁷⁴ William Warren Sweet, *Religion in the Development of American Culture, 1765-1840* (New York: Charles Scribner's and Sons, 1952), 56-58.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 110-111.

colonial Virginia. Baptist preachers came from among the less educated people and were well suited for the exigencies of frontier life. Unlike urban preachers, whose calling translated into a professional position, farmer-preachers shared the experiences of life with their congregations, dealing with crop yields, crop prices, and community issues. They were not only part of the religious community; they were also a part of the secular community in ways more experiential and intimate than their urban counterparts. As missionaries, they may have received the blessing of an association or conference, but were not necessarily formally sanctioned.⁷⁶

John W. Cooper, who aided in the constitution of many Baptists churches in the Chattahoochee Valley, typified the farmer-preacher church founder. He was born in Henry County, Virginia in 1783 and moved with his parents to Wilkes County, Georgia, in 1786. He joined a Baptist church in his early twenties and subsequently moved westward into Monroe County, where he was ordained as a minister of the gospel. He was an early settler of Harris County, moving there in the winter of 1828. Over the next five years, he aided in the constitution of many churches in Harris and Troup – no fewer than six in 1829 alone. That same year, he aided in constituting Ephesus in Columbus, subsequently known as First Baptist Church of Columbus. He also served as pastor in some of the churches, often serving as many as four at a time.⁷⁷

These farmer-preachers made up the ministerial pool that served as pastors in the early Baptists churches in the Chattahoochee Valley. The hagiographies of preachers like George Granberry, Jacob King, John W. Cooper, James Perryman, and Cary C. Willis referred to them as not being “men of literary attainments,” but solidly “men of sound

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Campbell, *Georgia Baptists*, 378.

mind and amiable character.” Although Baptists eventually embraced education as a positive attribute among its clergy, they rarely assigned negative attributes to the less educated farmer-preacher. Granberry was described as “a man of limited education, and of quite ordinary gifts as a public speaker, yet he possessed a sound mind, excellent judgment, [and] ardent zeal in the Master's cause.” King had limited “literary advantages” yet spoke and wrote well and had the gift of anecdotal acumen. Cooper also had limited education, but was familiar above all else with the Bible.⁷⁸

Many of the farmer-preachers of the rural Chattahoochee Valley, like those throughout the South, were also small slaveholders. John W. Cooper, Benjamin Williams, George Granberry, Laban Poole, Dozier Thornton and Barkley Martin were slaveholders with Williams owning fourteen in 1830 and the rest owning ten or less during that same year. Not surprisingly, the hagiographical references to the farmer-preachers also cast them as being kind to their slaves, a characterization that lends itself to the post-bellum Lost Cause mindset that, even in defeat, continued to defend proslavery religion as part of the godly antebellum Southern society.⁷⁹

Carey C. Willis was perhaps the most prominent and important Baptist farmer-preacher in the Chattahoochee Valley. He epitomized the farmer-preacher as he made his living as a farmer, never being compensated to the degree that would constitute a plenary salary. He did, however, accrue wealth over the course of several decades through an increasing ownership of slaves, owning twenty-seven slaves by 1860. Born in Baldwin County, Georgia in 1809, Willis migrated to Muscogee County in 1828. Like others, he

⁷⁸ Ibid., 100, 428, 435; Boykin, *History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia*, 590-592.

⁷⁹ Manuscript Census Returns, Fifth Census of the United States, 1830, Harris County, Georgia, <http://www.ancestry.com>. accessed December 7, 2010; Campbell, *Georgia Baptists*, 380, 449; Boykin, *History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia*, 572.

was not well educated, yet he was an industrious, temperate, hard-working man. He converted soon after he arrived in Muscogee County, was baptized by the missionary and church planter Zachariah H. Gordon and was one of the first to join the newly constituted Bethel Baptist Church in June 1829. Bethel church ordained him a deacon in 1831 and then a minister of the gospel in 1836. For more than fifty years thereafter, Willis served as pastor for several churches, often simultaneously, for many years in the Chattahoochee Valley, such as Bethesda in Harris County, where he served for seventeen years. He also served at Rehoboth, Liberty and Mt. Zion in Muscogee County, Harmony in Chattahoochee County, and Beulah in Stewart County, while always maintaining his membership and serving as pastor at Bethel for over forty years. He also served as moderator of the Columbus Baptist Association on numerous occasions.⁸⁰

Methodists also formed and organized churches in Harris and Troup counties. When the South Carolina Conference sent James Stockdale to the Columbus mission, they also assigned him to ride through Talbot and Harris counties to hold meetings and organize churches. He visited the house of Josiah Matthews in Talbot County and they gathered other Methodist inhabitants in the area to build a log structure to serve as a meeting house for a church they named Corinth. Stockdale may have also helped establish the first Methodist church in the eastern part of Harris County in 1827. This church, initially known as Mount Zion, subsequently moved to Waverly Hall, a town established in February 1829. While Stockdale rode westward into the Chattahoochee Valley, Andrew Hamill rode north from Columbus into lower Harris County in the nascent community of Cataula and helped organize the first Methodist church there in the

⁸⁰ Boykin, *History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia*, 590-592; *Minutes*, Columbus Baptist Association, 1833, 1839, 1842, 1846, 1847.

summer of 1829. Initially named “Providence,” it was built of logs by early settlers Thomas Clowers, Wingate Vinson, and Henry Mathis. The church was renamed Lebanon in 1834. In Troup County, a Methodist congregation met in various houses for several months in 1827 before meeting in a school building for the next few years. They constructed a permanent building in 1833 and took the name Asbury Chapel. Circuit preacher John Hunter helped to organize Mount Pleasant Methodist Church near the Mountville community in 1828.⁸¹

Another Methodist minister, William Martin, travelled from North Carolina and passed through Talbot County, where he cleared bushes and assisted in setting up the wooden blocks on which was laid the foundation of the first church erected in Talbotton. He journeyed on into Harris County and arrived at Hamilton on Sunday, March 8, 1829. He preached at the courthouse, which he described as a small log house, with an earthen floor and cabin roof. He also noted that the courthouse served as a place of worship for all denominations. As in Columbus, Judge Walter T. Colquitt held court there during the day and probably preached in the evenings.⁸²

Reverend Martin also preached at several private homes on his trip from Hamilton to Columbus. His activity typifies early Methodist efforts to plant churches amid the nascent communities. Circuit riders traveled about on horseback or in a horse-drawn buggy, visiting communities where no regular services were held. They made contact and stayed with hospitable settlers and announced that preaching would be held as soon as possible. Martin may have stayed at the house of Reuben R. Mobley near the Whitesville

⁸¹ Smith, *The History of Georgia Methodism from 1786 to 1866*, 180. Waite, *History of the South Georgia Conference, The United Methodist Church, 1866-1984*, 175, 188; Barfield, *History of Harris County Georgia 1827 - 1961*, 364, 681-682; Smith, *History of Troup County*, 160, 164-165.

⁸² Columbus *Sunday Enquirer-Sun*, May 18, 1879.

community. In 1828, Mobley, a staunch Methodist, moved into the area and soon allowed his home to be the headquarters for the periodic visits of traveling preachers. Mr. Mobley called a meeting at his home of those who had converted to Methodism or were attendees of the sermons of the preachers. There they founded the first Methodist church in that area of Harris County. A few years later, in the summer of 1837, settlers chose several men to be trustees of the church and authorized them to buy land from Thomas Saddler (also a trustee) and build Whitesville Methodist Church.⁸³

These early churches, though representing separate communities and congregations, shared organizational characteristics that connected them and facilitated evangelical orthodoxy. The structure, policies, and decorum of evangelical churches served to promote the establishment of Christian communities and the adherence of individuals, both black and white, to Christian orthodoxy. Mathews points out that evangelicals were “concerned with both the private and public, personal and collective aspects of life.” Thus, the church “as a redemptive community scrutinized conduct with great caution.” Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches had similar processes for administrating congregational polity, but extant records of Baptist churches in the Chattahoochee Valley are far more numerous than those of Methodist and Presbyterian churches and a review of those records tell us how evangelical churches procedurally disciplined members, processed new members, and conducted worship services. Most importantly, because of the biracial makeup of evangelical churches, records of Baptist churches tell us how evangelicals facilitated the dynamics of evangelical slavery.⁸⁴

⁸³ Barfield, *History of Harris County Georgia 1827 - 1961*, 713, 725-726.

⁸⁴ Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, 43, 46; Harrington, ed., *History of Piney Grove Baptist*, 12; Champion, ed., *History of Bethany Baptist Church*, 4. Records of First Presbyterian Church of Columbus

In the organization and administration of decentralized, democratic Baptist churches, one sees the mechanisms in place for creating and maintaining an evangelical community. Each church had a Constitution, Articles of Faith, and Decorum. The church Decorum included the rules of governance and the format and order of church conferences. Baptist churches convened monthly conferences, usually on a Saturday, after “divine worship,” which consisted of a sermon, prayer and hymns of praise. The pastor, acting in his assigned role as moderator, facilitated these conferences according to a specific order. Churches appointed a clerk to “keep a fair record of all proceedings.” The clerk also read the church Decorum and Articles of Faith at various times. At Piney Grove Baptist Church, for example, the church clerk read the Decorum and Articles of Faith at the opening of each third conference or quarterly meeting. A typical church conference began with the moderator issuing a welcoming invitation to “visiting brethren and sisters to seats [sic] with us” and reading the minutes from the last conference. The next order was to “open the doors of the church for the reception of members.” After this the conference addressed disciplinary issues involving members who may have engaged in some type of unchristian behavior or were involved in a dispute with another church member. The remainder of the conference involved miscellaneous business such as arranging repairs to the church building, assigning persons to various committees, passing resolutions, and appointing deacons and calling pastors.⁸⁵

and Whitesville Methodist Episcopal Church in Harris County indicate that processes in these churches are similar to those in Baptist churches.

⁸⁵ Harrington, ed., *History of Piney Grove Baptist*, 12; Champion, ed., *History of Bethany Baptist Church*, 4; Hillyer, *Reminiscences of Georgia Baptists*, 173-174. The founding documents and rules of governance of the Baptist churches under consideration varied only in minor inconsequential ways. The autonomous nature of Baptist congregations did not preclude a great measure of orthodoxy. When recording details of church conferences some church clerks recorded more details than others, but the same basic information, membership transactions for example, are found in all Baptist church minutes.

People officially joined Baptist churches in one of two ways. First, a person could be “received by experience” or could make a public “profession of faith.” These terms, used interchangeably, refer to a person stating that she or he has accepted Jesus Christ as Savior and thus had a salvation experience. For example, an entry in the minutes of Bethany Baptist Church states “received by experience Elvira Moon.” Another entry states “received by experience Maria, servant of Moses Pruett.” During a church conference, when the moderator announced that the “doors of the church” were open to receive members, he would invite any one present who felt a desire to unite with the church to come forward to the front seat during the singing of a hymn. The candidate typically had to give a verbal account of their conversion experience and usually did so by admitting themselves a sinner who had tried in vain to attain righteousness but had come to the point of crying to the Lord for mercy. The feeling of despair led to a catharsis of faith in which the person believed in and accepted Jesus as their savior. At the conclusion of the testimony, a voting member (usually male) spoke up to make a motion that the candidate be admitted to membership in the church. If the majority of the members voted to accept the motion, the church accepted the person into the membership.⁸⁶

A person could also present themselves to a church with a “letter” in hand and request to be received as a member. The church letter was literally a letter written by a church upon request that stated that the requesting person is a member in full fellowship and that she or he will be dismissed from the sending church when they join to any other church of the same faith and order. Once the church granted the letter during a church

⁸⁶ Harrington, ed., *History of Piney Grove Baptist*, 12; *Minutes*, Bethany Baptist Church, Harris County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel # 351); Hillyer, *Reminiscences of Georgia Baptists*), 181-184.

conference, the subject of the letter took possession of it and presented it to a church when requesting membership. The receiving church reviewed the letter and, during a church conference, voted to either receive or reject that person as a member. For example, when two slaves sought membership in Benevolence Baptist Church, the clerk noted “Received two slaves, property of Spyers Butts. Green and Dina presented letter of dismissal from Lebanon Church Crawford County which was received.”⁸⁷

In both cases of facilitating membership, the process ended by the singing of another hymn and the practice of extending to the new member the “right hand of Christian fellowship.” At some churches, the clerk read the Articles of Faith and Decorum to the new members. At Piney Grove, for example, the clerk read the Articles of Faith and Decorum to those new members who had made a profession of faith and were received as new converts. To those new members who joined by letter, the clerk only read the Decorum, but not the Articles of Faith.⁸⁸

The procedural mechanisms that facilitated membership in Baptist churches were a prelude to the ordinance of baptism. In this ordinance, new believers are fully accepted into the church body. Without participation in the ordinance of baptism, a person could not belong to the body and could not fully identify themselves as a Christian. Baptists believed that baptism had no saving power – the conversion experience gave evidence of the reception of salvation – but it did represent the consummation of the process by which an individual assumed an identity among a group of fellow believers. The minister would arrange a convenient time and place, beside a suitable body of water, where the

⁸⁷ *Minutes*, Bethany Baptist Church, Harris County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel # 351); *Minutes*, Benevolence Baptist Church, Randolph County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #108);

⁸⁸ Harrington, ed., *History of Piney Grove Baptist*, 12; *Minutes*, Bethany Baptist Church, Harris County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel # 351); Hillyer, *Reminiscences of Georgia Baptists*, 184.

candidates and a number of church members would congregate. The attendance of church members to witness the baptism signified that it was an event that demonstrated evangelical unity that crossed racial lines.⁸⁹

Baptismal services began with the pastor calling for an opening hymn, followed by a short address by the pastor in which he explaining to them the need of consecrating themselves to the service of Christ, or, perhaps, expounding the significance of baptism. Sometimes the pastor would remind the church that they had an obligation to watch over the new member. On some occasions the pastor might deliver a brief message to unbelievers to persuade them to “come to Jesus.” After the monologue, the pastor would lead the candidates into the water, sometimes individually or in sets of two. He then proceeded to fully immerse the person in the water and raise them out of it. Baptism was thus a symbol of a new life, a statement by the individual that he or she was a witness for Christ, and recognition that the individual was now a full participant in the evangelical community.⁹⁰

In addition to having common procedures and decorum, Baptist churches also joined together in associations, yet retained their autonomous standing. Baptist churches formed associations as a means of fostering cooperation between churches as they sought to carry out evangelistic missions, promote education, and discuss issues of common interest. These associations had no authority to mandate the actions or direction of the individual churches. The autonomous nature of Baptist churches dictated that individual churches received any information, advice, directions, or promotion from the association as suggestions rather than rules. Autonomy aside, in cases where a church might show

⁸⁹ Hillyer, *Reminiscences of Georgia Baptists*, 186, 187.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 189.

disdain for the actions of the association, delegates could vote to disallow that church from cooperating with the association. Thus, while membership was voluntary, individual churches and associations could prove coercive on the behavior of their constituents.

Local churches appointed messengers to attend meetings, both quarterly and annually, with the annual meeting being the most important. An association also chose correspondents to attend annual sessions of neighboring Baptist associations to effect cooperation between churches covering a large geographical area. Although churches practiced standard procedures related to the operations of the churches, individual churches enforced the details of these practices autonomously. Though not mandated by the associations, churches applied and practiced guidelines and suggestions that came from associational meetings, thus contributing to continuity and orthodoxy. The net effect, as Mathews succinctly states was that “associations, presbyteries, and conferences made possible the forging of local, sometimes isolated churches into networks . . . which helped shape the thinking and behavior of individuals and congregations.”⁹¹

Chattahoochee Valley Baptists initially organized two associations in 1829. Sixteen churches, including several from Harris and Troup counties, formed the Western Baptist Association at LaGrange on November 7, 1829. Ministers from the Yellow River and Flint River Associations, from north central and central Georgia respectively, formed the presbytery that formalized the constitution of this association. Other newly constituted churches in Muscogee, Harris, and Troup counties quickly followed to organize the second association. Ministers from the Flint River Association and the Itchacannah Association, also from central Georgia, met at the Mulberry Meeting House in Harris County on November 29, 1829 and formed the presbytery that constituted the

⁹¹ *Minutes*, Columbus Baptist Association, October 9-12, 1830; Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, 53.

Columbus Baptist Association. The presbytery accepted letters from twelve churches as follows: from Talbot county, Valley Grove, New Providence, Talbotton, Antioch, Bethel, Concord; from Harris county, Bethesda, New Hope (Mulberry), Lebanon (Hamilton), Mount Olive; from Muscogee county, Bethel and Columbus. They then defined the bounds of the Association as not only the counties of Harris, Muscogee and Talbot, but also Randolph, Lee and Marion counties. Like other Baptist associations in Georgia, both the Columbus and Western associations safely guarded their autonomy and deferred official connection with the Georgia Baptist Convention until 1839 and 1842 respectively.⁹²

By 1830, the population of Harris County was 5,105, with blacks making up almost half of that number. Fifteen years later, the population had almost tripled, consisting of 7,166 whites and 6,972 blacks, less than thirty of whom were free blacks. The growth in population in the 1830s contributed to the organization of more Baptist and Methodist churches and changed the religiously homogenous nature of many of the early communities. The religious identification of settlers became less important as evangelical churches became more accessible to people of the same community areas. Methodists established a camp ground near Mulberry Grove in 1836 and Methodist settlers established Mulberry Methodist Church there a few years later. Also in the early 1830s, Methodists established Hopewell church near the Bethany community, New Hope church in the New Hope community, Independence church between the communities of Mountain Creek and Mulberry Grove, Smyrna church near the Mountain Hill community, and Hamilton church in the county seat. Also in the early 1830s, Baptists

⁹² Campbell, *Georgia Baptists*, 1874), 99-100, 105, 106, 110; Boykin, *History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia*, 213- 214.

established namesake churches in the communities of Antioch, Shiloh, and Beech Springs, and Union church near Jones Crossroads.⁹³

As the population of the Chattahoochee Valley increased, Baptist churches in counties below Columbus such as Randolph, Stewart, Sumter, and Early joined the Columbus Baptist Association. The increase in churches strained ministerial resources as several ministers spent a great deal of time traveling across the large area. By 1833, the Baptists realized the need to form another association to accommodate the numerous churches in these counties. Eighteen churches from the southern boundary of the Columbus Baptist Association met at Richland in Stewart County and organized the Bethel Baptist Association. By 1839, the Columbus Baptist Association consisted of twenty-eight churches, including fifteen in the counties of Harris and Muscogee. The Western Baptist Association at this time consisted of thirty churches, including four in Harris County and ten in Troup County.⁹⁴

Population growth and the increase in the number of congregations also affected Methodist organization in Georgia. Christopher H. Owen asserts that during the 1820s Methodism “attracted a sizable contingent of affluent members ... and country elites” ...and had “expanded in the commercial centers of Savannah and Augusta.” In fact, townspeople made up a disproportional number of converts. Thus, the creation and organization of churches in the cities of Columbus and LaGrange represented the transition of the Chattahoochee Valley from an area of frontier religion to a place where

⁹³ George White, *Statistics of the State of Georgia: Including an Account of its Natural, Civil, and Ecclesiastical History; Together with a Particular Description of each County, notices of the Manners and Customs of its Aboriginal Tribes, and a Correct Map of the State* (Savannah: W. Thorne Williams, 1849), 317; Waite, *History of the South Georgia Conference, The United Methodist Church, 1866-1984*, 188; Barfield, *History of Harris County Georgia 1827 - 1961*, 523,583, 553-555; *Minutes*, Columbus Baptists Association, 1842; *Minutes*, Western Baptist Association, 1844.

⁹⁴ Campbell, *Georgia Baptists: Historical and Biographical*, 101-102; *Minutes*, Columbus Baptist Association; *Minutes*, Western Baptist Association.

there existed an institutionalized religious expression of affluent townspeople. In 1830, members of the South Carolina Conference agreed that the work in Georgia and Florida was so extensive that they created a new and separate conference, the Georgia Conference. In 1831 the first annual meeting of the Georgia Conference convened at Macon and reported that it consisted of six districts: Augusta, Columbus, Athens, Milledgeville, Oconee, and Tallahassee. By the mid 1830s, there were eleven established appointment stations or charges in the Columbus District, including those in Columbus, LaGrange, West Point, Troup County, and Hamilton.⁹⁵

Less than a decade after the initial white settlement of the Chattahoochee Valley, evangelicals were providing a religious environment that included mechanisms that attempted to facilitate the establishment of an ordered biracial evangelical community. As Baptist churches formed and matured, they joined associations, such as the Columbus Baptist Association and the Western Baptist Association. Georgia Methodists, spurred by a growing population, coalesced in local districts hierarchically attached to the Georgia Conference. The cooperative nature of these churches served to instill orthodoxy among evangelical churches, especially the autonomous Baptist churches.

The growth of St. Luke Methodist Church in Columbus demonstrates the development of biracial evangelical churches in the Chattahoochee Valley. In the span of less than three years, membership in the Methodist congregation in Columbus had

⁹⁵ Christopher H. Owen, *The Sacred Flame of Love: Methodism and Society in Nineteenth-Century Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 31-34; Smith, *History of Georgia Methodism from 1786 to 1866*, 180; *Minutes*, Western Baptist Association, 1844; Waite, *History of the South Georgia Conference*, 184. The term “charge” indicates the pastoral assignment, which can be a single church or a circuit of churches. A circuit means a group of churches. In these histories the term “station” or “station church” usually indicates a single church supporting a full-time pastor. *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, For the years 1839-1845*. Volume 3. (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1840), 29-30.

increased from sixty-one to 288, mostly the results of a revival in 1831. Only seven of the original members were black, but of the 288 members in 1831, ninety-seven were black, an increase of black members from 11 to 34 percent. The congregation also funded the construction of a brick building, reportedly the first brick Methodist building in Georgia, replacing the original wooden building. Black members used the original wooden building for the next eighteen years until the construction of a brick building for their exclusive use.⁹⁶

The actions of Baptist churches and the Columbus Baptist Association demonstrated another sign of the development of biracial evangelical churches in the Chattahoochee Valley. Slaves were among the first members in the small rural Baptist churches and were subject to the same decorum, discipline, and procedures of church administration as the whites. The Columbus Baptist Association also facilitated the reception of slaves by addressing a query regarding slaves who sought to join local churches, but did not have a letter of dismissal from another Baptist church because they were “dragged from their homes and church without notice, and no letter can be obtained.” In 1830, a year after the formation of the Association, delegates answered the query by recommending that the receiving church go to great lengths to obtain knowledge of the servant’s membership. In the absence of documented membership, the delegates advised that a church should exercise sound discretion.⁹⁷

Those who settled the new counties of Harris, Muscogee, and Troup included blacks and whites who quickly established and joined evangelical churches. Tables 2.1 and 2.2 illustrate the chronology and development of biracial churches in these counties.

⁹⁶ Smith, *History of Georgia Methodism*, 359-360; *Columbus Daily Enquirer-Sun*, May 17, 1879.

⁹⁷ *Minutes*, Columbus Baptist Association, 1830.

By December 1829, there were sixteen Baptist churches and six Methodist churches in Harris, Muscogee, and Troup counties, and they formed the basis of the emerging religious stabilization of a diminishing frontier. Methodist circuit riders and Baptist missionaries continued to bring evangelical religion from other parts of Georgia and established vibrant growing churches in area. By the mid-1830s, biracial evangelical churches dominated the religious landscape of the Chattahoochee Valley as the Baptists and Methodists spread into other newly settled counties south of Muscogee County. In these churches, black, white, male and female members found a spiritual identity that joined them to a fulfilling religious community. Within established churches and with associational cooperation, white evangelicals would use the mechanisms for admitting and dismissing members to bring slaves under their authority, thus effectively tying God's Horse to the iron stake. For their part, slaves would keep the Gospel Horse alive by embracing Christianity on a personal level and defining evangelical slavery as part of their liberation worldview.

Table 2-1 Baptist Churches in Harris, Muscogee, and Troup counties 1828 – 1840

Church	County	Town or Community	Date of Constitution
LaGrange	Troup	LaGrange	April 12, 1828
Bethany	Harris	Goodmans Crossroads	September 8, 1828
Mulberry	Harris	Mulberry Grove	September 12, 1828
Bethesda	Harris	Ridgeway; Ellerslie	September 18, 1828
Flat Shoals	Troup	Flat Shoals Creek	February 11, 1829
1 st Baptist Columbus	Muscogee	Columbus	February 14, 1829
Mountain Creek	Harris	Mountain Creek	February 20, 1829
Bethel	Muscogee		June 29, 1829
Hamilton	Harris	Hamilton	July 1, 1829
Mount Olive	Harris	Mulberry Grove	August 31, 1829
Antioch	Troup		October 12, 1829
Mount Zion	Troup		October 13, 1829
Bethlehem	Harris		November 28, 1829
Hepzibah	Troup		1829
Long Cane	Troup		1829
Pleasant Grove	Troup	Vernon	1829
Mount Carmel	Muscogee		1830
Mount Zion	Muscogee		March 11, 1831
Rehoboth	Harris	Cataula	August 26, 1831
Beech Springs	Harris		October 29, 1832
Mt. Olive	Muscogee		1833
Shiloh	Harris	Shiloh	1833
County Line	Harris		1834
Mount Moriah	Muscogee		1835
Liberty	Muscogee		September 30, 1837
Union	Harris	Jones Cross Roads	August 29, 1838
Antioch	Harris	Antioch	September 7, 1838
Harmony	Muscogee		March 28, 1840
Concord	Troup		Between 1830 and 1840
Shiloh	Troup		Between 1830 and 1840
Providence	Troup		Between 1830 and 1840

Table 2.2 Methodist Churches in Harris, Muscogee, and Troup counties 1827 – 1840

Church	County	Town or Community	Date of Constitution
Mount Zion	Harris	Waverly Hall	1827
Mount Pleasant	Troup	Mountville	1828
Asbury	Troup	Harrisonville	September 28, 1828
Whitesville	Harris	Whitesville	1828
LaGrange	Troup	LaGrange	1828
St. Luke	Muscogee	Columbus	1829
Hamilton	Harris	Hamilton	1834
Mulberry	Harris	Mulberry	1836
Hopewell	Harris	Goodmans Crossroads	Between 1830 and 1840
Independence	Harris	Mountain Creek; Mulberry Grove	Between 1830 and 1840
New Hope	Harris	New Hope	Between 1830 and 1840
Smyrna	Harris	Mountain Hill	Between 1830 and 1840

Chapter 3

“How Could Anybody Be Converted On Dat Kind Of Preachin’?” The Practice of Evangelical Slavery

An early historian of Columbus wrote that the city was “in the very heart of the cotton growing region, with superior facilities for obtaining the raw material and shipping the fabrics.” With Columbus as the center of trade, manufacturing, and shipping, the Chattahoochee Valley was a land of cotton and slaves. In 1828, merchants bought the first bale of what was fast becoming a vibrant trade in cotton. In the early 1830s, planters from the surrounding counties brought their cotton to Columbus and sold it to merchant firms like Stewart and Fontaine. The receipts of cotton in the city from September 1837 to June 1838 totaled 42,452 bales. By the late 1840s, at least sixteen steamboats took cotton down the river to Apalachicola where agents representing firms in New York, New Orleans, and Europe purchased it.¹

Cotton production increased during the subsequent years in the Chattahoochee Valley counties. By 1845 Harris County was producing 8,000 bales of cotton annually. In 1860, the counties of Harris, Muscogee, and Troup produced 14,906, 6,925, and 17,879 bales of cotton respectively. Other counties in close proximity were Chattahoochee, Randolph, and Stewart and the cotton production of those counties produced 7,206, 11,276, and 25,902 bales respectively in 1860. Planters also produced cotton for the Columbus market in the rich lands lying between the Chattahoochee eastward to the Flint River.²

¹ Martin, *Columbus, Georgia*, 1:9, 96; Lynn Willoughby, *Flowing Through Time: A History of the Lower Chattahoochee River* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999), 70.

² White, *Statistics of the State of Georgia*, 318; Willoughby, *Flowing Through Time*, 70; Williams, *Rich Man's War*, Appendix 9, page 206.

Columbus also lived off of the cotton market in other ways. In 1832, Ephraim Brown operated a cotton gin factory and in 1838 the Columbus Factory, a textile mill three miles north of Columbus, began operations, spinning 1,000 pounds of cotton a day in the subsequent decades. Columbus had five textile mills by 1850, processing over 48,000 bales of cotton per year, and five cotton warehouses. Troup County also had cotton trading centers along the river at Franklin and Vernon, and by 1850 the county had four fully operational textile mills.³

Some connection to cotton provided the livelihood for a great number of people in the Chattahoochee Valley, but to numerous slaves, cotton was their life and death. From the planting of cotton in the early spring until the movement of the cotton to market during the late summer and fall, slaves, both men and women, worked the fields from dawn until dark. Constantly under the threat of a whipping if they did not do their share, field hands harbored no illusions about freedom. They knew that freedom was a dream to be longed for as most men and women understood the realities of the slave society. Those that escaped field labor remained enslaved in the system, either as a domestic servant or, in the case of those with skills, a laborer sweating to support the plantation infrastructure. Urban slaves also worked their skills as blacksmiths, carpenters, shoemakers, teamsters, millers, or they were forced to work in the factories of Columbus, especially during the Civil War when white labor left to fight the war.⁴

³ Martin, *Columbus, Georgia*, 1:35; White, *Statistics of the State of Georgia*, 445-446; Willoughby, *Flowing Through Time*, 70.

⁴ "Washington Allen," In *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography Volume 12 -- Georgia Narratives, Parts 1 and 2*, ed. George P. Rawick, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1972), *The African American Experience*. Greenwood Publishing Group.
<http://aae.greenwood.com/doc.aspx?fileID=RSX&chapterID=RSX-08&path=/primarydocenc/greenwood/> (accessed May 27, 2009); Williams, *Rich Man's War*, 70-72.

Tables 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3 illustrate the patterns of population growth in Harris, Muscogee, and Troup counties from 1830 to 1860, demonstrating a massive influx of settlers between 1830 and 1840, with the number of slaves increasing more than threefold. While the white population leveled off and even decreased between 1850 and 1860, the slave population continued to rise before leveling off in 1860. Perhaps more demonstrative of the increase in slavery in these counties is the fact that in 1830 Harris and Troup counties ranked 38th and 40th respectively out of seventy-six Georgia counties in the total number of slaves, but in 1840 those two counties ranked 9th and 6th respectively out of ninety-three counties. These numbers also demonstrate an increase in wealth during these years, both in sum and as a percentage of a slaveholder's wealth. In 1854, a slave trading firm in Harris County advertised a twenty-one year old field hand for \$1,050 and several house servants, seamstresses, and carpenters for \$1,000 each. Of the sixty slaves sold by the firm of Hatcher and McGhee in Columbus in September, October, and November 1859, forty-five of them sold for more than \$900. Records of evangelical churches that show slaves being received as members, either through a letter of a statement of experience, partially obscure the economic aspect of slavery. Above all, slaves, even evangelical slaves and those belonging to evangelical masters, were property and no expression of common religious belief could fully obscure the noxious exploitive character of human bondage.⁵

⁵ University of Virginia Library Historical Census Browser, <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/index.html> (accessed March 8, 2011); Records of the Slave Trade Firm of McKee and Lowe, Harris County, Georgia, August 4, 1854, <http://www.dollsgen.com/slavetradefirm.htm> (accessed March 8, 2011); Hatcher & McGehee Negro Book, Columbus, Georgia, Transcribed by Callie B. McGinnis http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~afamerpl/slavetrade/GA/hatchermcgehee_negrobook.html (accessed March 8, 2011)

Table 3.1 Population of Harris County, 1830-1860

County	White females	White males	Total whites	Slave females	Slave males	Total slaves	Pct. slaves
1830	1,312	1,518	2,831	1,085	1,184	2,269	44
1840	3,609	3,873	7,482	3,220	3,198	6,418	46
1850	3,318	3,391	6,709	3,974	4,008	7,982	54
1860	2,978	3,001	5,979	3,983	3,753	7,736	56

Table 3.2 Population of Muscogee County, 1830-1860

County	White females	White males	Total whites	Slave females	Slave males	Total slaves	Pct. slaves
1830	985	1,275	2,260	570	670	1,240	35
1840	3,293	3,646	6,939	2,342	2,359	4,701	40
1850	5,277	5,078	10,355	4,220	3,936	8,156	44
1860	4,458	4,508	8,966	3,664	3,781	7,445	45

Table 3.3 Population of Troup County, 1830-1860

County	White females	White males	Total whites	Slave females	Slave males	Total slaves	Pct. slaves
1830	1,698	1,909	3,607	1,135	1,053	2,188	38
1840	4,224	4,458	8,682	3,621	3,402	7,023	45
1850	3,901	3,890	7,791	4,660	4,388	9,048	54
1860	2,956	3,267	6,223	5,001	5,001	10,002	61

The wealth accrued by slaveholders put economic self-interest as the chief motive for institutional slavery and also translated to political power. Money was as important as votes and planters dominated the political landscape throughout the South. David Williams describes a process in Muscogee County where campaign workers rounded up people, treated them to lodging in a hotel and plenty of alcohol and took them to the polls the next day. Planter politicians also regularly raised specters of slave rebellions and

abolitionism, and played upon racially based fears of non-slaveholding whites who might lose social status if slavery ended.⁶

Southern white evangelicals also offered a biblical defense of slavery well-suited to the planters' interest in preserving slavery. When the Rhode Island Anti-Slavery Convention met in 1836 it claimed that "the system of American slavery is now sustained chiefly through the influence of the pulpit." Indeed, even as other evangelicals assailed the system as an unholy institution, southern evangelicals used their own interpretations of the Bible to support slaveholding. Southerners embraced a Reformed, literal hermeneutic that provided an "immense implicit authority." Reformed theology had roots in the beliefs of the several European forms of the Protestant Reformation influenced by John Calvin and was transported to the New World by New England Puritans and Virginia Anglicans. The seeds of Calvinism in America grew within several denominations, including many Baptists, who embraced the Calvinist belief in the supremacy of biblical authority. This theology informed the practical belief that believers are required to follow the commands of the Bible in every aspect of life, so southern evangelicals built a strong case that the support of slavery could be found explicitly in the Bible. When evangelical and non-evangelical abolitionists insisted on applying the spirit of the Bible, not the letter of the law, to work against the institution of slavery, southerners criticized such heretical approaches and conclusions.⁷

Some southern evangelicals continued to promote antislavery sentiment, but by the 1830s, a north-south theological division over slavery prevailed. Southern white evangelicals found scriptural justification and legitimacy to produce a Christian social

⁶ Williams, *Rich Man's War*, 26.

⁷ Putnam, *Baptists and Slavery*, 7; Mark A. Noll, "The Bible and Slavery," in *Religion and the American Civil War*, ed. Randall M. Miller, et al (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 44-45, 49.

order by focusing on the familial relationship and mutual obligations between master and slave, dictated by the evangelical interpretation of several verses in the New Testament.

In his 1823 treatise on slavery that held that slavery was not only not sinful, but instead was a tool for evangelism, South Carolina minister Richard Furman referenced Leviticus 25: 44-46 which states:

Both thy bondmen, and thy bondmaids, which thou shalt have, shall be of the heathen that are round about you; of them shall ye buy bondmen and bondmaids. Moreover of the children of the strangers that do sojourn among you, of them shall ye buy, and of their families that are with you, which they begat in your land: and they shall be your possession. And ye shall take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit them for a possession; they shall be your bondmen for ever: but over your brethren the children of Israel, ye shall not rule one over another with rigour.

Slavery's evangelical defenders could draw on six different passages from the New Testament concerning the behavior of slave and master. All of these are in letters or epistles written by the Apostle Paul to churches and individuals. The central theme in these passages is that slaves ought to obey masters and that masters should reciprocally treat their slaves fairly and as brothers in Christ. Furman made special use of Paul's letter to Timothy:

Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed. And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort.

Other scriptures describing the master-slave relationship and giving specific direction to each regarding the proper behavior toward God and to each other were likewise popular with southern evangelicals and their allies. In his letter to the Galatians,

Paul wrote that there is no distinction between slaves and free, but that “ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” Paul’s letter to the Ephesians contains the admonition to slaves to be obedient to their masters and to work for their masters because they are “servants of Christ.” With these passages as guidance, white southern evangelicals accepted God’s commandments, not only to keep slaves, but to also recognize them as spiritual brothers. Thus, white evangelicals conveniently used scripture to reinforce social and religious control over slaves. Even when white evangelicals were sincere in their identification of slaves as spiritual brothers, they were not able to consider extending spiritual to physical freedom.⁸

Spiritual equality, to white evangelicals, embraced the scriptural tenet that “there is neither slave nor free” as a defense of slavery. Regardless of their status as slaves in a white society, black souls have equal competency before God and may receive spiritual status equal to whites. Even though evangelical fervor of the American Revolutionary period had led even many southerners to challenge the South’s peculiar institution, by the antebellum period southerners in the Chattahoochee Valley and other slave regions had found even more elaborate means of justifying slavery. White evangelicals believed that blacks descended from Ham, the son of Noah, who was cursed by his father to be the slave of his brothers Shem and Japheth. E. B. Teague, pastor of LaGrange Baptist Church, stated “The curse pronounced on Canaan, has never been removed; and, therefore, the children of Ham are in servitude to this day.” Blacks also accepted their descent from Ham, but viewed it as proof of inclusion in the human race, thus rendering

⁸ Leviticus 25: 44-46; First Timothy 6:1-2; Galatians 3:28; Philemon 16; Ephesians 6: 5-9 (King James Version).

blacks not as biblically ordained slaves, but as the offspring of a people who had built vibrant productive societies in Africa.⁹

Slaves in the Chattahoochee Valley and those in other parts of the South actively engaged in their own Christianity, defined and practiced by them without the permission of whites. Though they belonged to biracial churches administered by whites and embraced the pseudo-equality offered by whites, evangelical slaves also exercised unilateral spiritual power and agency to fashion both individualistic and institutional Christianity. In biracial churches, blacks could achieve ecclesiastical equality with whites, but the conversion experience was an individual one, regardless of race. Thus, slaves shaped evangelical slavery to allow them to have a relationship with God as individuals with no need to compare themselves to whites. They achieved individual importance within a dehumanizing system that cast them as supremely inferior. The Baptist doctrine of particular election especially heightened their sense of importance and individuality by the belief that God chose them to be saved. The scriptural arguments used by white evangelicals created a good rhetorical defense and promoted the practice of evangelical slavery based on a literal interpretation of the Bible, but actions of slaves in the Chattahoochee Valley who were members of evangelical churches also demonstrated that they were in control of their own spiritual destiny. Slave initiative also forced white evangelicals in the Chattahoochee Valley to retain a constant posture of spiritual oversight, a behavior also noted by Charles Irons in his study of evangelicals in Virginia.¹⁰

⁹ *Christian Index*, June 3, 1862; Sylvester A. Johnson, *The Myth of Ham in Nineteenth-Century American Christianity* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004), 7-12. The story of Noah's sons is found in Genesis chapter 9, verses 18-27.

¹⁰ Charles F. Irons, *Origins of Proslavery Christianity*, 19.

As the Chattahoochee Valley became more settled, evangelical churches represented an institutional presence in communities, towns, and cities. By the mid-1830s the religious frontier was no longer so fluid in geography or practice. Settlers continued to move in and establish new churches that practiced evangelical slavery through organizational and procedural mechanisms that sought to facilitate religious orthodoxy and social order.

It was their duty, believed white evangelicals, to take the gospel to blacks because they were all people created by God. Slavery was not incidental but was part of God's providential plan for the salvation of many Africans. Thus, the religious instruction of slaves was an obligation rather than a matter of choice. Slaves also constituted a promising missionary field due to the close physical proximity to whites. Irons posits the idea that evangelicals sought to bring slaves into their churches to stifle the liberating power of black Christianity and to construct an ideology that reinforced the justice of the institution regardless of black behavior. If slaves joined churches, whites could believe that slavery was a benign vehicle for Christianity. In the wake of the Nat Turner insurrection, white evangelicals also saw religious instruction as the best way to undermine the influence of black preachers and perhaps prevent further insurrection. Thus, the Christian slave, in the minds of whites, would find sufficient equality in evangelical churches to diffuse rebellion and insurrection.¹¹

The transactions that most clearly characterized the beliefs, attitudes, desires, and actions of white and black evangelicals were expressed through the actions and deliberations of local churches on issues of decorum, order, and discipline. Black and

¹¹ Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 220-227; Irons, *Origins of Proslavery Christianity*, 12, 190.

white, slave and free, male and female, were under the authority of the church, but the administration of church matters mirrored southern culture. White male members constituted the governing members of Baptist congregations and the obligation fell to them for upholding the virtue of commitment. Stephanie McCurry proposes that the subordination of women and the distinctiveness of evangelical religion contributed to the proslavery argument in the south, mainly because women's rights activists linked their movement with the abolitionist movement and provoked a defense of slavery from southern women. They were part of a familial construction founded in New Testament religion which placed them in the structure that also included children and slaves. These households were headed, of source, by men who exerted divinely ordained control.¹²

Christine Heyrman notes that by the 1830s, southern white evangelicals relegated women to roles of submission to male spiritual authority and accommodated the structure of male-dominated family life, which also included an acceptance of slavery as part of the natural familial order. Gregory Wills, however, documents that antebellum Baptist churches usually granted female members the right to vote, but the autonomy of congregations resulted in various churches differing on whether or not to allow women to vote in church government. It was more likely that Baptists allowed women to vote on disciplinary issues, but not issues pertaining to church government. The decorum of Piney Grove Baptist stated that "every question shall be decided by the majority of the church unless it is one involving [sic] fellowship; in that case unanimity is required." The decorum of Bethany Baptist implies that women had some voice in the church conferences by qualifying some directives regarding members with the operative "male"

¹² Stephanie McCurry, "The Two Faces of Republicanism: Gender and Proslavery Politics in Antebellum South Carolina." *Journal of Southern History* 78 (March 1992), 1245-1264.

qualifier. Thus, many churches prohibited white males, as the leaders of church governance, from being absent from conferences. At Bethany Baptist, any male member failing to attend conference had to “sign their reason.” If a male member failed to attend two successive conferences, the church would appoint a committee of one or more members who were instructed to cite him to attend the next conference and to give an answer for himself. The failure of any member to attend three successive meetings without good excuse brought upon the offender the charge of “unchristian conduct.”¹³

When members exhibited disorderly conduct, the congregation of Baptist churches appointed a committee of male members to cite the person for the offense and settle the issue if possible. Some churches had standing committees, but others appointed committees as situations warranted. In 1838, Mountain Creek Baptist Church appointed a committee to “settle some Negro cases likely to come before the church.” Later records of the church indicate the appointment of ad-hoc committees to handle disciplinary cases. The committee would meet with the accused member and report back to the church at the next conference. Based on the recommendation of the committee, the church would take action, either absolving the member of the charges or excommunicating them.¹⁴

Blacks enjoyed the same procedural rights in disciplinary matters and were afforded the same spiritual dispensation as whites. Slaves belonged to masters and mistresses, not congregations, yet they were part of the congregations as brothers and sisters. Despite the tint of ecclesiastical egalitarianism, slaves remained caught in a cycle of “not belonging and yet belonging.” Records of southern antebellum Baptist churches

¹³ Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 158-160; Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1785-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 51-52; Harrington, ed., *History of Piney Grove Baptist*, 12. Champion, ed.; *History of Bethany Baptist Church*, 7.

¹⁴ *Minutes*, Mountain Creek Baptist Church, Harris County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #585).

contain references to blacks as “brother” and “sister” almost in opposition to their status as chattel property and this certainly allowed slaves a measure of individualism they could not find on plantations. The equality felt by blacks, however, was always diluted by continued white control and the constant reference to black members being the property of whites. Ubiquitous descriptions of black members as “colored” or “the servant of” in the church records weakened the assumed equality reckoned by references to “brother” and “sister.” Clerks often used the term “servant” instead of the term “slave,” reflecting the same type of euphemism found in documents such as the United States Constitution.¹⁵

Randy Sparks notes other evidence of inequality by observing that in records of Baptist churches in Amite County, Mississippi, some blacks who joined a church were not named, a condition that never occurred with whites. The evidence is less convincing in records of Baptist churches in the Chattahoochee Valley and indicates that the practice of excluding the names of new black members was not systematic. Of the eighteen blacks who joined Bethany Baptist Church between 1833 and 1850, only one was unnamed. Between 1837 and 1850, the clerk of Mount Zion Baptist Church recorded the names of all nineteen new black members. Rehoboth Baptist Church admitted nineteen new black members between 1839 and 1850 and the clerk recorded all of their names. At Mountain Creek Baptist Church, however, the clerk omitted the names of twelve of the forty-three blacks who joined the church between 1829 and 1850. The clerk also compiled a list (undated) that showed twenty-five black members, one of whom is listed as “woman.” Clerks at other Baptist churches compiled lists of black members with varying amounts

¹⁵ Clarke, *Wrestlin' Jacob*, 117; *Minutes*, Bethany Baptist Church, Harris County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel # 351); *Minutes*, Mountain Creek Baptist Church, Harris County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #585); *Minutes*, Mountain Creek Baptist Church, Harris County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #585); *Minutes*, Pleasant Grove (Vernon) Baptist Church, Troup County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #127); *Minutes*, Bethel Baptist Church; *Minutes*, Mount Zion Baptist Church.

of information ranging from dates of membership, status within the church, and in some cases, dates of death. All lists included the names of the slaves and the names of their owners – a constant reminder of their status as chattel property.¹⁶

Evangelical leaders expected church members to exhibit Christian characteristics in all walks of life. The conduct of members was closely monitored for disorderly behavior, which included actions such as intoxication, fornication, adultery, swearing, dancing, lying, and stealing. According to Mathews, the establishment of social relations with the church community required strict inquiry into behavior. Each person, black and white, was so important that he or she could not be left alone in sin. Both the eternal salvation of the individual and the integrity of the community were at stake and thus behavior that threatened to disrupt the evangelical community required disciplinary measures.¹⁷

Gregory A. Wills's study of discipline in Baptist churches indicates that blacks received disciplinary action slightly more often than whites for offenses related to drunkenness and speech. Records of Bethel Baptist Church in Muscogee County indicate disciplinary patterns for drunkenness deviate from the findings of Wills. In the period between 1834 and 1860, Bethel excommunicated no black members for drunkenness while excommunicating eleven white members for the offense. The church, however, found blacks guilty of offensive speech more than whites. The church excommunicated three black females for swearing, but excommunicated only one white male for the same

¹⁶ Randy J. Sparks, "Religion in Amite County, Mississippi, 1800-1861," in *Masters and Slaves in the House of the Lord: Race and Relations in the American South, 1740-1870* (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 1988), 71; *Minutes*, Bethany Baptist Church, Harris County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel # 351); *Minutes*, Mountain Creek Baptist Church, Harris County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #585); *Minutes*, Mountain Creek Baptist Church, Harris County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #585); *Minutes*, Pleasant Grove (Vernon) Baptist Church, Troup County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #127); *Minutes*, Bethel Baptist Church, Muscogee County, Georgia, 1829-1872; *Minutes*, Mount Zion Baptist Church.

¹⁷ Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, 43, 46.

offense. Wills also found that for sexual offenses and offenses against the church, churches excommunicated blacks less frequently than whites. Bethel excommunicated one white man and three white women for adultery or fornication and two blacks males and two black females for those offenses. But for two offenses – violent offenses and offenses against property, Wills found that churches excommunicated blacks 1.5 times more than whites. Bethel, however, excommunicated four white males and two white females for stealing or unchristian conduct and four black males and two black females for those offenses. The church excommunicated blacks at an equal or higher rate only for offenses such as “unchristian conduct,” lying, stealing, swearing, and the sexual sins of adultery and fornication. Bethel cited neither black males, black females, nor white females for “contempt of church,” which was a reference to repeated absences from church conferences or divine worship meetings.¹⁸

While Wills’s research suggests that certain behavior of blacks was scrutinized more closely than that of whites, Randy J. Sparks surveyed the antebellum records of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Amite County, Mississippi to conclude that regardless of the alleged offenses, evangelicals excluded slaves from membership at approximately the same rate as they excluded whites. Between 1833 and 1854, Ebenezer listed a total of 314 members, 74.5 percent were white and 25.5 percent were slaves. Ebenezer excluded thirty-six members during that period; 72.2 percent were white and 27.8 were black. Records of Bethel reveal a similar exclusion rate. Bethel’s membership list from 1829 to 1860 contained 658 names, 76.9 percent white and 23.1 percent slave. Seventy-one

¹⁸ Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 66; *Minutes*, Bethel Baptist Church, Muscogee County, Georgia.

members were excluded during that period; 77.5 percent were white and 22.5 percent were black.¹⁹

Patterns of discipline, when broken down by gender, reveal gender role assumptions. The explanation for males being the only members excluded for “contempt of church” is easy to explain. Bethel, like other Baptist churches, required male members to attend conference because they constituted the governing group of members. Bethel also excluded more men than women, although women constituted a significant majority of members, thus indicating that women conformed to evangelical expectation more consistently, a finding that corresponds with the findings of Randy Sparks and Jean Friedman in their studies of Mississippi and North Carolina respectively. The exclusion of men at a higher rate than women also demonstrates that men, who controlled the disciplinary process, scrutinized the behavior of their fellow male members to enforce their role as heads of households in a culture dominated by a hierarchical structured familial ethos. Only in the category of sexual sins did the number of women excluded exceed that of men. At Bethel, for example, of the six white women excluded from the church between 1830 and 1860, three of those were for adultery, while only one white male was excluded for that same offense during the same period.²⁰

Disciplinary records of Bethel Baptist show a different pattern than that found by Sparks as related to the discipline of blacks. Sparks found that Academy Baptist Church in Mississippi excluded black males at a far higher rate than black females. Bethel,

¹⁹ *Minutes*, Bethel Baptist Church; Randy J. Sparks, “Religion in Amite County, Mississippi, 1800-1861,” in *Masters and Slaves in the House of the Lord*, 76.

²⁰ *Minutes*, Bethel Baptist Church; Randy J. Sparks, *On Jordan’s Stormy Banks: Evangelicalism in Mississippi, 1773-1876* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 153-154, 160-161; Jean E. Friedman, in *The Enclosed Garden: Women and Community in the American South, 1830-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 14-17.

however, excluded an equal number of black males and black females. These similarities and discrepancies demonstrate that certain trends hold true, but local variations occur, probably resulting from local factors and variables more difficult to detect.²¹

Records of Baptist churches reveal the influence and power some slaves had in the church that they did not have in society. Some churches accepted the testimony of slaves regarding the conduct and character of another slave seeking membership. In a conference at Bethel Baptist Church in 1831, a slave by the name of Amy applied for membership, but had no letter of dismissal from another church. The church accepted Amy after another slave gave evidence of her good behavior. Another slave named John, who “left Virginia without obtaining a letter,” convinced LaGrange Baptist Church to accept him because the church had observed that his conduct “being good was satisfactory.”²²

Baptists churches also demonstrated the importance of slave conduct when they facilitated either receiving a new member or dismissing one by letter. Congregations went to great lengths to ascertain the character of potential members and to give approval of members requesting letters of dismissal. A slave woman named Minerva, purchased by David Dean from a Mr. Henderson in North Carolina, sought membership in Bethel Baptist Church. She stated that she was a member of a Baptist church in North Carolina but had not been able to obtain a letter of dismissal. The Bethel congregation appointed two white members to investigate her claim. They first obtained permission from her

²¹ *Minutes*, Bethel Baptist Church; Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks*, 163-164, 168, 169.

²² *Minutes*, Columbus Baptist Association, 1830, 6.; *Minutes*, Bethel Baptist Church, Muscogee County, Georgia; *Minutes*, LaGrange Baptist Church, Troup County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #127).

owner to write to her former church and former owner. This process took over a year before she was received into full fellowship on July 1, 1836.²³

Even as enslaved people, blacks willingly joined evangelical churches for reasons of their own. They found that these churches offered a sense of liberation, hope for deliverance, strengthening of self-esteem, and inclusion with whites in a communal relationship. Mathews notes that evangelical religion broke down the social distance between blacks and whites. According to Mathews “the impulse was not revolutionary egalitarianism, to be sure, but it did offer blacks a means of establishing their claim upon the Christian care, respect, and love of their newfound comrades.” Evangelical churches also offered slaves a sense of ecclesiastical equality and they valued church membership and wished to remain in good standing with a congregation. The scriptural arguments used by white evangelicals created a good rhetorical defense and promoted the practice of evangelical slavery based on a literal interpretation of the Bible, but actions of slaves in the Chattahoochee Valley who were members of evangelical churches also demonstrated that they were in control of their own spiritual destiny. When Mt. Zion Baptist Church refused to accept a “Christian acknowledgement” from an excommunicated slave named Josh, he presented himself to Mountain Creek Baptist and persuaded that congregation to accept him.²⁴

Another slave was not so fortunate in his patient, determined quest for church membership. A lengthy interaction between Bothford Baptist Church in Sumter County and Mountain Creek Baptist Church ensued over the application of a slave named Arnold to join the former. In July 1845, the church at Bothford requested that the Mountain

²³ *Minutes*, Bethel Baptist Church, Muscogee County, Georgia.

²⁴ Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, 67; *Minutes*, Mountain Creek Baptist Church, Harris County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #585).

Creek church restore Arnold to fellowship and grant him a letter of dismissal because he had “acknowledged his misconduct.” In September 1846, the Mountain Creek church received another letter from Bothford regarding Arnold and the former church refused to grant Arnold a letter of dismissal “in consequence of drunkenness.”²⁵

Masters and churches collaborated to discipline slaves and this allowed the church to fulfill its role of enforcing spiritual orthodoxy and gave the master an additional mechanism of control. Masters benefitted by defining slave behavior as a Christian duty rather than simply a law of the plantation. The congregation of Mountain Creek Baptist excluded Ned and Page for “rebell[ing] against the authority of there [sic] master.” In 1847, the congregation appointed a committee to “see John a collered [sic] brother the property of Bro. White and know the cause of his unchristian conduct in using an axe on his fellow servant.” Joel Culpepper, a member of Bethany Baptist, brought a charge of “unchristian conduct against his slave Dinah. The church excluded her from fellowship two months later. Masters sometimes served as a final authority against actions by an appointed committee, thus betraying the Baptist tenet of democratic church governance and demonstrating the forceful intrusion of the dynamics of slavery. LaGrange Baptist excluded Charles, a slave belonging to “Bro Bacon,” for stealing. The committee excluded him although the charges were not fully established. When his owner opined that Charles was innocent, the church restored him to fellowship.”²⁶

Some Chattahoochee Valley masters required their slaves to attend church while others were less concerned about the spiritual life of their slaves. Former slaves had different recollections about church attendance. Celestia Avery and Charlie Pye stated

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ *Minutes*, Bethany Baptist Church, Harris County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel # 351).

that slaves were required to attend church and had to have a pass to attend church on another plantation while George Womble recalled that slaves were allowed to go. A survey of former slaves in other parts of Georgia reveal that coercion played an important role in church attendance, but it is difficult to determine with certainty that coercion was the reason most slaves went to church. For example, of sixteen former slaves interviewed, eight stated that their master required them to attend church, but five mentioned going to church with no clear evidence of coercion. Three former slaves clearly stated that their master allowed them to go. Church attendance could not always be an indicator of the dynamics of slave church attendance as several masters provided religious services on their plantations or in their homes. Edie Dennis, a slave on the plantation of Columbus lawyer Hines Holt, recalled that her master treated her kindly and took interest in the spiritual welfare of their slaves by regularly calling them in for prayer meetings. To be sure, some masters were concerned about their slaves becoming Christians and gaining a feeling of equality, but some masters sought to gain slave loyalty through the influence of Christianity. This was reflected in the fact that some slaveholders allowed or required their slaves to attend churches despite not being members themselves. Between 1829 and 1860, slaves belonging to ninety-four different slaveholders were members of Bethel Baptist Church, but thirty-four of the slaveholders were not members of that church. Of the thirty-six slaveholders listed in the records of Benevolence Baptist Church between 1842 and 1865, only six were not members, but at Pleasant Grove Baptist Church, thirteen of the thirty-four slaveholders mentioned in the church records were not members. Despite some fears about the socially equalizing potential of Christianity,

many masters envisioned that it was more likely that slaves as members of evangelical churches would be loyal and content.²⁷

Evangelical ministers did not always frame their call for obedience in the context of other-worldly rewards and punishment. Rather than evoking the threat of receiving the judgment of God, the preacher reminded the slaves of the certain this-worldly punishment of stripes administered by their masters. Raboteau presents several examples of Christian masters being worse than non-Christian masters in matters of physical discipline. Celestia Avery recalled that her master, Peter Heard of Troup County, required his slaves to go to church, but would not allow them to pray. He allowed singing as an form of “self-expression” by the slaves, but if he caught a slave praying, he would give them a “good whipping,” often whipping them “unmercifully and in most cases unnecessarily.” Heard told his slaves that they were only praying “so that they might become free niggers.” George Womble’s master allowed them to go to church, but “the only baptisms that any of us get was with a stick over the head and then we baptized our checks with our tears.” Womble also stated that slaves on the Womble plantation were

²⁷ “Celestia Avery,” In *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography Volume 12 -- Georgia Narratives, Parts 1 and 2*, ed. Rawick, <http://aae.greenwood.com/doc.aspx?fileID=RSX&chapterID=RSX-020&path=/primarydocenc/greenwood/> (accessed May 27, 2009) “Charlie Pye,” In *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography Volume 13 -- Georgia Narratives, Parts 3 and 4*. ed. Rawick, <http://aae.greenwood.com/doc.aspx?fileID=RSY&chapterID=RSY-004-094&path=/primarydocenc/greenwood/> (accessed June 1, 2009); “George Womble” IN *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography Volume 13 -- Georgia Narratives, Parts 3 and 4*. ed. Rawick, <http://aae.greenwood.com/doc.aspx?fileID=RSY&chapterID=RSY-004-220&path=/primarydocenc/greenwood/> (accessed June 1, 2009); “Edie Dennis,” *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography Volume 12 -- Georgia Narratives, Parts 1 and 2*, ed. Rawick, <http://aae.greenwood.com/doc.aspx?fileID=RSX&chapterID=RSX-252&path=/primarydocenc/greenwood/> (accessed May 29, 2009); *Minutes*, Bethel Baptist Church; *Minutes*, Benevolence Baptist Church, Randolph County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #108); *Minutes*, Pleasant Grove (Vernon) Baptist Church, Troup County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #127).

treated “more like animals rather than like humans,” and he recalled getting whipped so severely that he had no feeling in his legs.²⁸

Evangelical churches also enforced strict discipline on both black and white members regarding marriages. In 1831, the members of Bethel Baptist in Muscogee County excommunicated a white woman for “marrying a second husband without knowledge of the death of the first and bringing forth a child before the time of her marriage would authorize.” The church also excommunicated a slave named Leaven for “unwarrantably quitting his wife and running away from his master’s service.” Mount Zion Baptist Church in Talbot County excommunicated a slave named Wiley for unchristian conduct for “quitting his wife without just cause and living from her for several months.” Albert, a slave member of Mountain Creek Baptist Church, and Austin, a slave member of Bethany Baptist Church, were both excommunicated for having two wives.²⁹

Slaves saw marriage as the institution that provided the basis for a stable family and provided protection and support in the face of the cruelties of slavery. Blassingame notes that autobiographies of former slaves are replete with references to the importance of a stable family life. Evangelicals imbued the institution of marriage with religious significance. Slave marriages were not recognized by law, but evangelicals recognized plantation marriages and gave them stern attention within the bounds of the church.

²⁸ Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 165-168; “Celestia Avery,” In *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography Volume 12 -- Georgia Narratives, Parts 1 and 2*, ed. Rawick, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1972), *The African American Experience*. Greenwood Publishing Group. <http://aae.greenwood.com/doc.aspx?fileID=RSX&chapterID=RSX-020&path=/primarydocenc/greenwood/> (accessed May 27, 2009); “George Womble,” In *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography Volume 13 -- Georgia Narratives, Parts 3 and 4*. ed. Rawick, <http://aae.greenwood.com/doc.aspx?fileID=RSY&chapterID=RSY-004-220&path=/primarydocenc/greenwood/> (accessed June 1, 2009);

²⁹ *Minutes*, Bethel Baptist Church, Muscogee County, Georgia *Minutes*, Mount Zion Baptist Church, Talbot County, Georgia.

Marriage was the most important institution in terms of social order as the husband and wife constituted the providence and plan of God for relations between male and female. Evangelicals viewed marriage as sacrosanct given the analogous relationship with the image of Christ and his bride, the church. Charles Colcock Jones promoted the formal solemnization of slave marriages because it would “elevate and throw around the marriage state a peculiar sacredness.” Georgia Methodists observed that there was a “prevailing practice among our colored people of coming together as man and wife without the performance of any marriage ceremony.” The denomination sought to prevent that practice and to bring slave marriages under their control by resolving that Methodist slaveowners should require a ceremony when slaves married.³⁰

Most slaveowners recognized marriages for purely secular reasons and attempted to arrange marriages between slaves on their own plantations. This allowed a master to control some aspect of a slave’s life and could result in the natural increase of more slaves if the union produced children. By encouraging marriage, masters presumably gave slaves fewer reasons to run away by giving them some sense of security. Some slaves did, however, run away to other plantations for romantic visits. Rias Body recalled that it was common for husbands and wives to reside on different plantations. In these cases, some masters allowed the husbands to visit their wives and spend the night as long as they were back on their home plantation by morning. Some masters even purchased the female to keep the male loyal or arranged a marriage between their slaves to prevent them from leaving the plantation. Arrangements between two slaveowners secured the

³⁰ John W. Blasingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 171-172; Charles C. Jones, *The Religious Instruction of the Negroes in the United States* (Savannah: Thomas Purse, 1842), 233; *Minutes of the Georgia Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, 1849, 76.

permission needed for their slaves to get married. When Wesley Gaines sought the hand of Julia, a slave on a neighboring plantation in Muscogee County, his owner Gabriel Toombs sent a note that read “Mr. W. G. Woolfolk – My boy, Wesley, wishes to marry your girl Julia. He has my consent if it meets your approbation.” Celestia Avery recalled that marriages on the Heard plantation in Troup County were made by the masters of the parties concerned. There were no marriage licenses. If both masters mutually consented, the marriage ceremony was considered over with. If the spouses lived on separate plantations, the husband was given a pass to visit his wife once a week. Former Columbus slave Charlie Pye stated that slaves did not marry on the plantation. Instead, a couple obtained the consent of both masters and then jumped the broom, with no other celebration.³¹

Charles F. Irons posits that the actions of white evangelicals, especially regarding the facilitation of separate black worship services and conferences, actually reveals white reaction to black initiative. According to Irons, blacks pressed white evangelicals to give them permission to preach and to hold their own services separate from whites. Irons studied the development of proslavery Christianity in Virginia and argues that black initiative and the white reaction to the Nat Turner insurrection in 1831 influence the rise of slave missions and separate black churches. After Turner, whites sought to mitigate the liberating power of Christianity by bringing more slaves under the control of the white church. This curtailed black religious expression and made the relationship between

³¹ Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 165; J. Ralph Jones, “Portraits of Georgia Slaves,” *Georgia Review* 21 (Spring 1967), 411; “Celestia Avery,” In *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography Volume 12 - Georgia Narratives, Parts 1 and 2*, ed. Rawick, <http://aae.greenwood.com/doc.aspx?fileID=RSX&chapterID=RSX-020&path=/primarydocenc/greenwood/> (accessed May 27, 2009); The Atlanta Constitution, August 16, 1903; “Charlie Pye,” In *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography Volume 13 -- Georgia Narratives, Parts 3 and 4*. ed. Rawick, <http://aae.greenwood.com/doc.aspx?fileID=RSY&chapterID=RSY-004-094&path=/primarydocenc/greenwood/> (accessed June 1, 2009).

whites and blacks less personal. Even in established biracial churches, however, whites accommodated blacks who sought to negotiate more independence in worship and governance. Whites responded by granting separate ecclesiastical environments to blacks, thus demonstrating their preoccupation with the actions of black evangelicals as well as black agency and initiative. This led to the building of separate buildings for blacks or separate services for blacks. While blacks enjoyed separate environments, in which they developed models for post-slavery churches, whites believed they were moving blacks out of the invisible institution and into a visible one. For whites, the success of the slave mission was evidence of God's approval of proslavery Christianity. Their support for slavery was based in the context of their relations with slaves rather than in political or regional interests.³²

Several Baptist churches in the Chattahoochee Valley had separate buildings, services and conferences for black members, but the model offered by Irons does not sufficiently explain the dynamics that facilitated separation of blacks from whites. Black initiative played a significant role in the administration of separate services and conferences, but whites had the final authority over control and administration of the blacks. In urban areas, blacks often congregated in separate facilities and engaged in separate services and conferences that were administered by a parental white church. Although they were part of a separate congregation, blacks were counted as members in the white church. In the rural areas, biracial churches consisted of yeomen farmers, small farmers, and planters. Farm and plantation slaves worshipped with the whites, but usually sat in designated places such as balconies or lofts. Some rural churches allowed slaves to hold separate services and conferences in the same buildings at times designated by the

³² Irons, *Origins of Proslavery Christianity*, 190, 207.

whites. In urban and rural churches, black deacons and elders served along side their white counterparts and admitted some black preachers to the clergy, but whites supervised practically all black activity with varying degrees of consistency.

Black members of Bethel Baptist and LaGrange Baptist participated in separate conferences and services for blacks in the 1830s. Benevolence Baptist in Randolph County initiated a separate preaching service and conference for blacks in the summer of 1848. They structured the organization and function of the separate black congregation on the model of the white congregation with instructions to the white clerk to make out a list of black members for the “use of the church and coloured (sic) conference.” The implication is that a black member would facilitate the black conference as the whites stated that the list of black members would be used to ascertain absences to be reported at the next conference.³³

White ecclesiastical hegemony produced records that rarely revealed explicit black initiative in evangelical proceedings unless a church had a separate conference for blacks. Black conferences included the same types of activities found in white conferences, but black activity was always under the supervision of whites. Wills points out that whites allowed blacks to manage their own ecclesiastical events, but with the consent of whites. Every church that allowed separate conferences appointed a white moderator to limit black independence. When LaGrange Baptist authorized a separate black conference in March 1834, the church required that the “cause of dealing is reported to the church.” At a conference for blacks in 1848 at Benevolence Baptist, the congregation appointed a committee of three blacks to address a feud between slaves

³³ *Minutes*, Mountain Creek Baptist Church, Harris County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #585); *Minutes*, Bethel Baptist Church, Muscogee County, Georgia; *Minutes*, Benevolence Baptist Church, Randolph County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #108).

Baccus and Cordin and charges of adultery against three other slaves. At a subsequent conference, the blacks appointed two black men to visit another slave accused of adultery.³⁴

Another factor that determined whether or not blacks had separate conferences was the availability of blacks who could hold the trust of whites to carry out the functions necessary to administer the conferences. In February 1831, LaGrange Baptist received by letter Simon, a “deacon of the blacks.” In July 1832, the church received by letter Solomon, who was “privileged by the church from whence he came to exercise in the bounds of the church.” It is likely that the blacks requested to have their own conference and the white members allowed Simon and Solomon to perform some type of administrative functions over other black members. Whites at LaGrange also recognized a noticeable degree of black agency when they ordered a slave named Ann to be cited “to our next black conference,” assuming the blacks would deal with Ann accordingly. Members of the black conference did just that as they excluded Ann from the church for the sin of fornication.³⁵

Although blacks had separate conferences and preaching, the hand of the master was always close by. At LaGrange Baptist, the black conference appointed “Simon and Squire, servants of Bro. J. Culberson,” to notify him to attend at the next black conference. Even when masters were not members of the church, they still had the final authority regarding the religious dispensation to their slaves. When two slaves at Benevolence gave “satisfactory experiences of grace,” their reception into the church was deferred until the next conference and they were instructed to bring permits from their

³⁴ *Minutes*, Benevolence Baptist Church, Randolph County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #108); *Minutes*, LaGrange Baptist Church, Troup County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #127)

³⁵ *Minutes*, LaGrange Baptist Church, Troup County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #127)

masters. Two weeks later, the slaves presented permits from their masters and were received by the church.³⁶

Although the white members of LaGrange Baptist allowed separate black conferences, they retained a substantial measure of control over the blacks. Whites served as moderators and clerks of the black conferences, even as they began to give more control to blacks in the administration of church business. At a black conference in August 1838, the members appointed a committee of five black brethren to “arrange all business for the black conference and if possible to settle all their difficulties.” Despite the admonition that blacks should “arrange all business,” black conferences at LaGrange Baptist operated irregularly and white conferences continued to deal with cases related to black members. Although having separate conferences for blacks, records show black members still being received and disciplined by white conferences, an inconsistency that continued until 1855 when it appears that whites allowed the black conferences to handle all matters related to membership and discipline of black members. By this time, the number of black members exceeded the number of white members.³⁷

When blacks had their own services with a minimal amount of white supervision, they likely engaged in worship in or conducted services in a manner that did not adhere to white standards, thus displaying agency and initiative. This may have been the case at Mountain Creek Baptist Church when the congregation agreed in June 1837 to prohibit the blacks from holding meetings in their church house “for the future.” The church then appointed a committee of four white members to “attend to the order of the blacks.”³⁸

³⁶ *Minutes*, Benevolence Baptist Church, Randolph County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #108)

³⁷ *Minutes*, LaGrange Baptist Church, Troup County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #127).

³⁸ *Minutes*, Mountain Creek Baptist Church, Harris County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #585); *Minutes*, Mount Zion Baptist Church, Talbot County, Georgia.

White evangelicals also had several reasons for allowing separate services for blacks. First, urban churches with a majority black membership sought to separate whites from those they likely saw as “noisy, ill-behaved black churchgoers.” There was also a class element to the separation of blacks and whites as churches like First Baptist Columbus and St. Luke Methodist established both factory missions for the working class and separate black congregations.³⁹

Space may have also been an issue. As black membership grew, it was likely that existing buildings simply did not have enough room for the large number of members. Churches with a small number of slave members were more likely to have no separate services. Some churches with a small number of slaves, such as Pleasant Grove Baptist in Troup County and Bethany Baptist Church in Harris County had no separate services for their slaves. The membership of Pleasant Grove included no more than twenty-two slaves and only thirteen slaves were members of Bethany. In both churches, there is neither documented nor circumstantial evidence that blacks held separate services at either of these churches.⁴⁰

The tremendous membership growth of First Baptist Columbus created a situation that surely required separate conferences and meetings for the black members. More than black initiative lay behind the actions of First Baptist Columbus when they provided a separate building for their black members. To be sure, black initiative was likely a factor, but the doubling of the membership between 1833 and 1839 and the transition of the white population from a frontier class to an urban middle to upper class pushed the

³⁹ Irons, *Origins of Proslavery Christianity*, 188; *Minutes*, First Baptist Columbus; Dudley, *History of St Luke*, 16-18.

⁴⁰ *Minutes*, Bethany Baptist Church, Harris County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel # 351); *Minutes* Pleasant Grove (Vernon) Baptist Church, Troup County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel # 127).

congregation to build a brick building at the cost of \$18,000 in 1841. It is not known if First Baptist Columbus held separate conferences and meetings for their black members prior to giving them a separate building in 1841, but the membership numbers suggest that space restrictions were a prime factor in the separation of blacks and whites. In 1846, the black members moved the original building to the southwest corner of the lot, on the corner of Jackson and Church streets, and enlarged it by adding 20 feet to one end.⁴¹

Separation of blacks also fit into the pattern of role separation in which men and women and children were routinely physically separated in churches according to social and cultural patterns. The design of Antioch Baptist Church in Harris County reflected the gender and age separation practiced in evangelical churches. The church had three doors - one at the front of the building and two at the back. The older men came in one of the back doors while younger men came in the other back door. The women and children came in the front door and sat in separate sections with older women and small children in one section and younger women in another.⁴²

Baptist churches often held separate services for blacks after the regular service on Sunday. Benevolence Baptist Church agreed to hold a service at 3 o'clock on each Sabbath of their regular meetings to have preaching "expressly for the blacks." Mountain Creek Baptist resolved that the pastor should devote a portion of each Sabbath on the day of our regular meeting to the blacks. When white preachers preached to slaves in separate services, they delivered sermons intended for the perceived simpler mind of blacks and often preached sermons that admonished slaves to obey their masters and to refrain from stealing. When the Western Baptist Association adopted a resolution to recommend that

⁴¹ *Minutes*, Columbus Baptist Association, 1860; *Minutes*, First Baptist Church, Columbus, Georgia; Columbus *Enquirer-Sun*, September 28, 1879; *Minutes*, Western Baptist Association, 1844, 1847.

⁴² Barfield, *History of Harris County Georgia 1827 – 1961*, 332.

pastors set aside an hour on days of their regular meetings for the “particular instruction of the blacks,” the delegates resolved further that a system of simple oral instruction be adopted in place of “preaching in the usual way.” Former slaves from the Chattahoochee Valley recalled that the usual sermons of white preachers stressed little more than obedience to the master and the necessity of good behavior. Indeed, masters sought to reduce instances of lying and stealing by stressing orderly behavior and obedience as a salient part of religious instructions of slaves. Even if a congregation included blacks and whites, a white preacher would speak a portion of the sermon specifically to the blacks. Former slave George Womble recalled that the preacher would walk to the back of the church to “tell them not to steal their master’s chickens, eggs, or hogs.”⁴³

Raboteau observes that despite the limits of slavery, black preachers and congregations were able to exercise a measure of authority, self-government, and power. Black evangelicals, however, sometimes failed to measure up to white expectations in religious behavior and whites responded by suspending separate preaching services and conferences. At LaGrange Baptist, in May 1840, black members elected their own deacon, but an increase in black membership and acute instances of aggressive behavior by the blacks resulted in limitations being placed on the blacks by the white members. In October 1842, members of LaGrange Baptist resolved “that no black member of this church makes any more publick [sic] appointments for preaching, exhortation, or prayer for the present.” This demonstrated that black preachers were quite active among the

⁴³ *Minutes*, Benevolence Baptist Church, Randolph County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #108); *Minutes*, Mountain Creek Baptist Church, Harris County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #585); *Minutes*, Western Baptist Association, 1847; “George Womble,” In *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography Volume 13 -- Georgia Narratives, Parts 3 and 4*. ed. Rawick, <http://ae.greenwood.com/doc.aspx?fileID=RSY&chapterID=RSY-004-220&path=/primarydocenc/greenwood/> (accessed June 1, 2009).

black congregation at that church and the activities and conduct were unacceptable to the white leadership. Whites may have simply become irritated at having to closely monitor the activities of blacks and this caused some measure of conflict within the white membership. In any case, the whites at Benevolence settled this issue by requiring that their pastor preach to and provide religious instructions to the black members.⁴⁴

White ministers sometimes retained control over black congregations to minimize the influence of a black preacher. Blassingame points out that the black preacher was the “true shepherd” of evangelical slaves. If he was literate, he was one of the few slaves who could read. He had special oratorical skills and was the master of vivid phrases, folk poetry, and picturesque words. Because the black preacher was also enslaved, he had to make painful compromises in order to keep his position in the church. He was trained by white preachers and in some cases preached obedience and submissiveness to the masters. Raboteau describes the slave preacher as an illiterate, witty, and eloquent character who was “carefully watched and viewed with suspicion” by white observers. Perhaps more than other slaves, he had to exhibit the dual personality that enabled accommodation to slavery and white expectations. In the presence of whites, he preached only those messages congruent with white orthodoxy. In the invisible church, his message of deliverance from slavery by the God of Moses would be most welcome. A minority of black preachers emphasized obedience to masters and eschewed actions that promoted spiritual or physical rebellion.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ *Minutes*, Benevolence Baptist Church, Randolph County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #108); *Minutes*, Mount Zion Baptist Church, Talbot County, Georgia; *Minutes*, LaGrange Baptist Church, Troup County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #127). In 1835, 30 blacks were members of LaGrange Baptist Church. By 1846, there were 168 black members.

⁴⁵ Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 131-132; Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 208, 232.

The slave preacher portrayed by Blassingame and Raboteau, however, does not seem to exist in the black Columbus Baptist congregation, at least not as the formally recognized pastor. Reverend Daniel Reese was the first pastor after the creation of the separate congregation in 1841, and was soon followed by another white minister, Reverend James Whitten, who served as pastor of the black church during the late 1840s and most of the 1850s. Whitten was one of the farmer-preachers who came to the Chattahoochee Valley in the mid 1830s and resided in Harris County for several years where he served as pastor at Mountain Creek Baptist. During his tenure at that church he served as a delegate to the Western Baptist Association and the Georgia Baptist Convention. He relocated to Columbus after the death of his second wife and, in addition to serving as pastor of the African church, served as pastor of the Factory Mission. There is no doubt that slave preachers existed and provided relevant ministerial duties, and there were probably slaves in the Columbus church who acted in some sort of leadership position, but central to the experience of some slave churches was the role played by the white minister. One Troup County slave recounted that slaves were given separate churches, but the minister she remembered was white.⁴⁶

Whites also took control of black congregations to monitor, limit, and control the black worship experience. Slave services provided a venue for slaves to meet with friends and lovers and allowed opportunities for socializing and releasing pent-up emotions. Blassingame notes that when slaves worshipped, they emphasized the hope of deliverance from their earthly condition and divine retribution for the cruelty of their

⁴⁶ *Minutes*, First Baptist Columbus; "Celestia Avery," In *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography Volume 12 -- Georgia Narratives, Parts 1 and 2*, ed. Rawick, <http://aae.greenwood.com/doc.aspx?fileID=RSX&chapterID=RSX-020&path=/primarydocenc/greenwood/> (accessed May 27, 2009).

masters. Shouting, singing, and charismatic preaching characterized black worship and gave evidence that slaves believed that a master may be able to inflict bodily pain, but could not tether the soul of the slave to white designs.⁴⁷

Slaves were also irritated at having to remain subjected to white authority in the church and often gathered in secret to get away from constant white supervision. Raboteau describes the secluded meeting places where slaves met – ravines, woods, and thickets known as “hush-harbors.” This venue added another place for the expression of slave Christianity, along with plantation gatherings, biracial churches, and segregated houses of worship. It allowed blacks to build religious communities with varying degrees of autonomy and prepared them for freedom. Here slaves engaged in their “invisible institution” and developed their own brand of Christian worship, which included “perpetual motion and constant singing,” and represented the syncretism of African and conventional American evangelical modes of worship. As a part of worship, slaves swayed, clapped, and engaged in a “ring shout.” Three or four stood still while singing a short melody in unison while the others walked around in a ring in single file as they joined the singing.⁴⁸

Regardless of the degree to which blacks were involved in administering separate black congregations, slaves received a good measure of self-worth and experience. In urban settings, separate black congregations developed a strong institutional identity not realized in rural black congregations. Urban churches in Columbus offered a measure of protection to black evangelicals while at the same time allowing traces of independence

⁴⁷ Blassingame, *Slave Community*, 130.

⁴⁸ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 215; Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 134; Members of the Second African Baptist Church in Columbus, organized in 1865, referred to their church as “Shady Grove” as early as 1866 to commemorate the fact that the first members met “under a grape arbor in an oak grove” in 1863. See Chapter 6 for details about the organization of this church.

by virtue of having a separate identity. It was in the invisible institution, however, that plantation slaves as individuals had a connection to each other through the institution of slavery. In biracial rural churches in the Chattahoochee Valley, white evangelicals met black initiative with a mixture of accommodation and control.

Several former slaves testified to the existence of the invisible institution in the Chattahoochee Valley. Mary Ferguson remembered that slaves were “very religious and given to much loud praying and singing.” When this disturbed the master, he ordered them to stop and commanded them to stop all activities in the slave quarters and go to bed at 9 o'clock each night. The slaves responded by “slippin’ off to a big gully in de pasture to sing and pray whar de white folks couldn’ hear us.” On the Holt plantation near Columbus, slaves gathered in secret meetings during which all would rise, shake hands around, and begin to chant the canticle below:

Jest befo’ day, I feels ‘im. Jes befo day, I feels ‘im.
My sister, I feels ‘im. My sister, I feels ‘im.
All night long I’ve been feelin’ ‘im.
Jest befo’ day, I feels ‘im. Jes befo day, I feels ‘im.
The spirit, I feels ‘im. The spirit, I feels ‘im!
My brother, I feels ‘im. My brother, I feels ‘im.
All night long I’ve been feelin’ ‘im.
Jest befo’ day, I feels ‘im. Jes befo day, I feels ‘im.
The spirit, I feels ‘im.⁴⁹

Easter Jackson, a former slave in Troup County, testified to the existence of the invisible institution in the Chattahoochee Valley as she recalled that even though they attended regular services in the basement of LaGrange Baptist Church, slaves also attended “prayer meetin's, once a week, first on one of the plantations den a nother; when

⁴⁹ “The Story of Aunt Mary Ferguson, Ex-slave,” In *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography Volume 12 -- Georgia Narratives, Parts 1 and 2*, ed. Rawick, <http://aae.greenwood.com/doc.aspx?fileID=RSX&chapterID=RSX-020&path=/primarydocenc/greenwood/> (accessed May 27, 2009); Jones, J. Ralph Jones, “Portraits of Georgia Slaves,” *Georgia Review* 21 (Spring 1967), 128.

all de niggers would meet and worshup, singin' praises unto the Lord; I can hear 'em now, dere voices soundin' fur away." George Womble remembered slaves going into the woods to conduct their own services. At a certain spot they all knelt, huddled in a circle, turned their faces toward the ground and began moaning and praying. By huddling in this circle and turning their voices toward the ground the sound would not travel very far.⁵⁰

In addition to participating in the invisible institution, slaves also resisted white Christianity and exhibited their own measure of freedom by not officially joining white churches. This may explain the fact that only three of the twenty-seven slaves belonging to C. C. Willis, pastor of Bethel Baptist Church, were members of that church. Former Georgia slave Tom Hawkins claimed "couldn't none of us read no Bible and dere warn't none of de Niggers on our plantation ever converted and so us never had no baptizin's. De preacher preached to de white folks fust and den when he preached to de Niggers all he ever said was: 'It's a sin to steal; don't steal Marster's and Mist'ess' chickens and hogs;' and sech lak. How could anybody be converted on dat kind of preachin'?"⁵¹

As evangelicals established and administered biracial churches and cooperative organizations in the Chattahoochee Valley, they also increased missionary efforts to take the gospel to slaves beyond the reach of existing churches. Many slaveholders confronted the white missionaries with suspicion as the former feared the egalitarian flavor of

⁵⁰ "Life Story as told by Aunt Easter Jackson Ex-Slave," In *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography Volume 12 -- Georgia Narratives, Parts 1 and 2*, ed. Rawick, <http://aae.greenwood.com/doc.aspx?fileID=RSX&chapterID=RSX-341&path=/primarydocenc/greenwood/> (accessed June 1, 2009); "George Womble," In *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography Volume 13 -- Georgia Narratives, Parts 3 and 4*, ed. Rawick, <http://aae.greenwood.com/doc.aspx?fileID=RSY&chapterID=RSY-004-220&path=/primarydocenc/greenwood/> (accessed June 1, 2009).

⁵¹ *Minutes*, Bethel Baptist Church, Muscogee County, Georgia; Manuscript Census Returns, Eight Census of the United States, 1860, Muscogee County, Georgia, Slaves Schedules; "Thomas Hawkins," In *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography Volume 12 -- Georgia Narratives, Parts 1 and 2*, ed. Rawick, <http://aae.greenwood.com/doc.aspx?fileID=RSX&chapterID=RSX-52&path=/primarydocenc/greenwood/> (accessed May 29, 2009).

Christianity. Missionaries mitigated this fear by emphasizing the religion's social order based on reciprocal obligations to the scriptural admonitions that applied both to slave and master. In 1833, Capers published *A Catechism for little Children and for Use on the Missions to the Slaves in South Carolina*. This simplified instruction stressed the post-conversion duty of slaves to love God and preserve the integrity of family relationships while committing themselves to faithfulness to their masters. A growing abolitionist movement in the North and emerging sectional tensions in the evangelical denominations also contributed to the perceived need to pursue and strengthen slave obedience. The goals of plantation missions then was to evangelize the poor, make slaves docile and obedient, create model plantations, defend against the abolitionist attacks, and sooth the conscience of those slaveholders who might have begun to question the morality of slaveholding. The moral uplift offered to slaves through acceptance of the gospel refuted claims by abolitionists that slavery degraded the black race. Thus, evangelicals supported the institution of slavery, gave assurance that Christianity would strengthen the master – slave relationship, and attacked abolitionism as a danger to spiritual welfare of slaves.⁵²

Janet Duitsman Cornelius argues that the slave missions were the places of interaction between blacks and whites and presented slaves with opportunities that contributed to the eventual success of the independent black church. According to Cornelius, slave missions gave slaves a small space in the oppression of slavery, gave them a chance for literacy, allowed black leaders to develop, and presented the opportunity to conduct their own meetings. Black leaders mediated between the spiritual needs of black parishioners and the world of slavery and it was in the missions that the black leaders obtained training and guidance to foster leadership skills. Slave missions

⁵² Mathews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 77-85; Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 174-175.

also provided whites with the rationale for training and supporting black leaders and protecting black congregations.⁵³

Unlike their success in creating biracial churches, evangelicals realized no great success in creating and maintaining missions to blacks in the Chattahoochee Valley. Only one black mission existed in Georgia when the Georgia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church was organized and sanctioned in 1830. By 1832, there were four missions, but none officially in the Chattahoochee Valley. By 1833, Georgia had six missions that included 1,266 members and covered forty-five plantations. These numbers do not include members in regular charges or the black members in separate churches in the cities. In 1841, there was a Chattahoochee mission located several miles below Columbus that was exclusively black and the next year, there was a new mission to blacks in Meriwether and Troup counties.⁵⁴

Records of the Columbus Baptist Association reflect a growing interest in local missionary work, but there was no separate or designated missionary to the blacks. When the association, with unanimous support, formed a domestic missionary society in 1837, it resolved to “send contributions to support itinerant preaching” because of the many settlements “which are, to a large extent, destitute of the gospel.” The society offered no special or specific missions to slaves; the emphasis on missions coincided with conflict and disagreement among association churches regarding mission work. Some Baptists rejected the idea of institutional missions, Sunday Schools, and theological institutions of higher learning because they felt these organizations subverted the work of God by

⁵³ Cornelius, *Slave Missions and the Black Churches in the Antebellum South*, 2-4.

⁵⁴ Harrison, *Gospel among the Slaves.*, 158-160, 162, 177; *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, For the years 1839-1845*. Volume 3. New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1840, 29-30, 128-130, 218-219, 324, 430-431, 557; *Columbus Enquirer*, January 26, 1842.

promoting human agency as a part of the salvation experience. These Baptists either left an existing Baptist church or, if they constituted a majority of the membership, simply exercised their democratic governance to establish themselves as an “antimissionary” church. At the 1836 annual association meeting, the delegates resolved not to let the “difference of opinion related to the mission cause” affect fellowship and cooperation between the churches. According to Mathews, Baptists had more black members, but did not send out missionaries. The Columbus Baptist Association did send out missionaries, but initially gave no special attention to slaves. The association sent out three missionaries in 1838 and reported that they “have been abundantly blessed in various sections.” This success encouraged a continued emphasis on missions and during the 1839 annual meeting, Jesse H. Campbell preached on the subject of missions and a collection yielded \$65.87 for support of domestic missions.⁵⁵

In 1841, the Columbus Baptist Association commissioned Isaac B. Deavors as a “domestic missionary” and authorized him to preach, baptize, promote temperance and Sabbath Schools, constitute churches, and serve as colporteur, but in areas destitute of the gospel preaching was his main object. Deavors increased the number of days in service for several years thereafter and reported a moderate level of success. In 1845, the association commissioned a second domestic missionary, Charles H. Stillwell. He and Deavors performed the same duties in various parts of the Chattahoochee Valley, but Stillwell was soon convinced that he could do no great work in establishing and maintaining Sabbath Schools. He turned his attention to preaching at protracted meetings, but many delegates to the association expressed a desire to continue focusing on Sabbath Schools. In a report that coupled slaves with children, a committee implied that some in

⁵⁵ *Minutes*, Columbus Baptist Association, 1837, 1839.

the association did not feel the importance of regular religious instruction “to our children and servants.” The advantage of regular instruction through Sabbath Schools would be “a healthy and steady action imparted to our Sunday School operations, and the religious instruction of our servants.”⁵⁶

The efforts of white evangelicals in the Chattahoochee Valley, in biracial churches and missions, to bring slaves into the Christian community may have ultimately failed to achieve their desired results. Raboteau asserts that “by the eve of the Civil War, Christianity had pervaded the slave community,” but William C. Johnson rejects Raboteau’s argument and questions the claims of historians who argue that millions of slaves embraced Christianity. Johnson points to a low percentage of black members relative to the total black population and cites the “lack of human and financial resources available [for missions], entrenched slaveholder opposition, widespread Southern religious apathy, planter absenteeism, heavily skewed demographic patterns, slave opposition to white religious hypocrisy, and enduring African religious” to argue that the mass conversion of did not occur.⁵⁷

The model promulgated by Johnson finds expression in statistics of evangelical churches in the Chattahoochee Valley counties of Harris, Muscogee, and Troup. In 1850, the number of white members of Baptist and Methodist churches in these counties was 42 percent of the number of white adults between the ages of fifteen and one-hundred in the general population. The number of black members, however, was only 17 percent of the number of black adults between the ages of fifteen and one-hundred. Percentages

⁵⁶ Ibid., 1844, 1846.

⁵⁷ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 215; William Courtland Johnson, ““A Delusive Clothing”: Christian Conversion in the Antebellum Slave Community,” *Journal of Negro History* 82, No. 3 (Summer, 1997), 307.

increase, 55 and 23 percent respectively, if one considers the general population of those between the ages of twenty and one-hundred.⁵⁸

According to statistics from 1845, urban churches had a higher percentage of slave members relative to the black population than that of rural churches. The number of black members of First Baptist Columbus and St. Luke Methodist in Columbus was 26 percent of the total black population of Columbus whereas the number of black members of rural Muscogee County churches was only 14.9 percent of the total black population of Muscogee County. The higher percentage of blacks included slaves from plantations outside of the city of Columbus proper that might otherwise be members of a rural Muscogee County church. Some of this number also came from the Alabama side of the Chattahoochee River. Blacks were drawn to the city by the prospects of socializing with other blacks, meeting friends and lovers, and the possible opportunity of making contacts for part-time employment. Some of the slaves belonged to affluent members of the urban churches and had greater access to the city. The frequency of meeting of urban churches also allowed blacks to attend church every Sunday and thus get away from the plantation more often than their rural counterparts.⁵⁹

White evangelicals in the Chattahoochee Valley, like evangelicals throughout the South, fashioned a pro-slavery religion that was accepted by a number of slaves. Whites used their proslavery religion to rebut claims of abolitionists and to assume a sense of control over blacks. In these churches, slaves found spiritual equality, a sense of

⁵⁸ *The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington: Robert Armstrong, Public Printer, 1853), 354-366; *Minutes*, Columbus Baptist Association; *Minutes*, Western Baptist Association; *Columbus Daily Enquirer-Sun*, May 17, 1879; *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, For the years 1839-1845*. Volume 3. New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1840, 557.

⁵⁹ White, *Statistics of the State of Georgia*, 317, 443, 547; *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, For the years 1839-1845*; *Minutes*, Columbus Baptist Association; *Minutes*, Western Baptist Association; *Columbus Daily Enquirer-Sun*, May 17, 1879.

community based on a decrease in the social distance between them and whites, and hope for deliverance. Paradoxically, slaves also resisted slavery by both accepting and rejecting Christianity. Acceptance of evangelical orthodoxy represented a religious balm that soothed the sores of slavery, but even this acceptance included rejection of white religion as slaves met secretly and practiced their own brand of Christianity. The experiences of slaves in the white controlled church as well as their experience in their own “invisible church” also prepared them for a time when as free people they could form and maintain their own independent churches.

Low membership numbers, however, cast doubt on the measure of success of white evangelical efforts to bring slaves into the Christian community. The number of slaves that actually engaged Christianity might suggest that the effort by whites was more important to them as a defense mechanism against growing abolitionist sentiment than it was as an effective strategy to save black souls. Most likely, low membership numbers reflected the fact that many slaves simply rejected Christianity altogether. They saw the inconsistency between slavery and white Christianity and saw themselves a religiously superior to whites. Southern white evangelicals, however, found that defending slavery was tiresome, especially when the main defense was in reaction to the assaults of their northern brethren.

Chapter 4

“I Saw the Gospel Horse Begin to Paw” The Fortification and Declension of Evangelical Slavery

William P. Harrison, a white Methodist who served as pastor of St. Luke in Columbus during the last two years of the Civil War, asserted that because of the commitment of the Methodists to evangelizing slaves, they “kept themselves true to their trust to the last day of their bondage.” Washington Allen, a black Methodist minister who as an eleven year old lived on a plantation in Russell County, recalled the time when the Union cavalry was heading toward Columbus and proclaimed that “God was using the Yankees to scourge the slave-holders just as He had, centuries before, used heathens and outcasts to chastise His chosen people – the Children of Israel.” These statements reveal the great divergence between black and white evangelicals regarding the religious nature of the Civil War era. Many white southern evangelicals held to their belief that slaves practiced Christianity most demonstrably during the Civil War by remaining loyal to their masters. Whites also came to believe that God would judge them with defeat if they did not reform slavery to meet biblical standards. Black evangelicals, however, believed they were seeing God’s judgment and the fulfillment of God’s promise of deliverance in response to their prayers. Indeed, between 1845 and 1860, white evangelicals increased efforts to teach and preach to the black population. Black membership increased during this period at a higher percentage than did that of whites, thus demonstrating that blacks chose to accept and express Christianity more openly. More importantly, the increase in the number of black members represented more slaves looking to God for liberation.¹

¹ Harrison, *Gospel among the Slaves*, 300; J. Ralph Jones, “Portraits of Georgia Slaves,” *Georgia Review* 21 (Summer 1967), 272.

Denominational conflict over the issues of slavery reached a pinnacle in the 1840s. For several decades the Methodist General Conference had emphasized spiritual and institutional unity. By the 1830s, abolitionists called slavery a moral evil and labeled slaveholders as sinners, but evangelicals North and South managed to retain unity. Although the language of division spoke loudly in the 1830s, moderate abolitionists within the Methodist and Baptist ranks tempered their actions for fear of disrupting the denomination. Southern Methodists answered accusations of sin and immorality with a consistent defense of slavery. They simply reiterated their position that slavery was necessary for maintaining social order and that it enabled the spread of the gospel among blacks. Southern Methodists also devised an argument grounded in the separation of scriptural discipline and secular government, similar to the Baptist policy of the separation of church and state. According to this argument, civil law defined slavery as a legal institution and it was the duty and obligation for Christians to obey and support the state in matters related to slavery. Thus, as a legally defined and state supported entity, slavery as an institution was beyond the reach of scriptural law. Moreover, Christians limited their obligation to uphold civil and social relationships, making Christians liable for supporting the social stability of the master-slave relationship.²

By the early 1840s, almost every northern annual conference had petitioned the Methodist General Conference to take a stronger stance against slavery. Southerners sought to mitigate the irritation by interpreting the General Rule on slavery as a prohibition of involvement in the slave trade and not a general prohibition on

² Mathews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 237-240; Eugene Portlette Southall, "The Attitude of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Toward the Negro from 1844 to 1870," *Journal of Negro History* 16 (Oct., 1931): 359.

involvement in the institution of slavery. The national body was able to disarm the conflict for many years, but the hierarchical structure of the denomination and the need for more bishops within that structure pushed the slavery issue into the midst of the 1844 General Conference meeting. Northern Methodists, especially those in New England, demanded that no slaveholder be elevated to the office of bishop. Southern Methodists demanded the opposite. Two cases came before then General Conference when it held its annual meeting in New York in 1844. Francis A. Harding was a minister in the Baltimore Conference and that organization precisely and directly ordered Harding to emancipate his slaves or be deprived of his ministerial position. Harding's appeal to the General Conference produced no small amount of vitriolic rhetorical volleys from those on both sides of the issue. The vote in the General Conference upheld the Baltimore Conference ruling and dealt a severe blow to southerners.³

Southerners knew the worst would come shortly as the case of Bishop James O. Andrew of Georgia became the focal point in the slavery debate. Andrew was a passive slaveholder, having been bequeathed a slave girl and a slave boy and becoming a reluctant master to slaves he gained through his marriage to his second wife. As manumission was not legal in Georgia at that time, Andrew sought to distance himself from slavery by securing the slaves to his wife through a deed of trust. Abolitionists rejected Andrew's self-discipline and demanded that slavery be purged from the highest offices of the church. For several days, Andrew considered resigning and delegates from both sides sought ways to conciliate North and South. Finally, however, the delegates voted to instruct Bishop Andrew to desist from his duties as long as he was connected with slavery. Despite attempts by William Capers to devise a system of quasi-division

³ Mathews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 251-253.

created around slaveholding jurisdictions, there remained no tenable solution to prevent separation. On June 10, 1844, the delegates passed a proposal to separate the Methodist Episcopal Church into two parts. In May 1845, Southern Methodists met in Louisville, Kentucky and voted to organize the independent Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MECS).⁴

In Columbus, readers of the *Enquirer* saw a brief explanation of the events in New York. Methodist minister Lovick Pierce requested the local newspapers to give space in their journals to provide information about the conference proceedings to the people of Columbus. He also urged moderation and courtesy in response to the church having “her peace disturbed by the northern conference.” The author of an editorial in the same newspaper exhibited less moderation and courtesy. He defended Andrew and charged that “On the poor and pitiful plea of expediency his assailants have based the correctness of their action, and assailed the vast multitude of their southern brethren, under the flimsy pretext of purifying the episcopacy.”⁵

Methodists in Columbus could not escape the controversy. To be sure, there is little doubt that the majority of white members of St. Luke supported separation from their northern brethren. This separation, however, forced immediate attention on the pastor of St. Luke, the New York born and heretofore admired Daniel Curry, who had been in Columbus less than a year. Consequences enjoined almost immediate action. Less than a month after the General Conference, a committee in St. Luke passed a strong resolution in support of the division and instructed A. H. Flewellen, a member of the committee that entertained the resolution, to tell Curry that just as he had kept his

⁴ Mathews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 258-268, 279.

⁵ Columbus *Enquirer*, June 26, 1844.

antislavery views quiet from the pulpit, he would be expected to do the same in public. Curry wrote an address to the members and friends of the church stating that his ministerial relations had been “suddenly terminated” and explaining his opinion and feelings regarding slavery and the actions of the General Conference regarding Bishop Andrew. Curry stated personal opposition to slavery, but weakly defended slaveholding Methodists by stating that “the relation does not necessarily involve the matter in sin.” Curry continued by voicing both regret for the circumstances and support for the actions of the General Conference regarding Bishop Andrew. Finally, Curry stood strong in the conviction that he had the “privilege of holding [his views] sacredly, of expressing them prudently, and of defending them in conversation or by writing if I choose to do so.” He resolved to “surrender a position which I cannot hold with self-respect and a good conscience.” Soon thereafter, the church gave Curry severance pay and he left the area for a friendly northern environment.⁶

Congregational autonomy of the Baptist denomination preempted chronic institutional conflict over slavery, but the voluntary organizations entered into by Baptists brought the issue of slavery into sharp contrast. At the Triennial Convention of 1841, in which the foreign and domestic mission boards met, some southern associations submitted protests against the antislavery activities of northern churches. Delegates from the Savannah River Association pledged that Georgia Baptists would not continue cooperation unless abolitionists were dismissed from the leadership of the convention.

⁶ Martin, *Columbus, Georgia*, 1:151; *Columbus Enquirer*, July 10, 1844.

Northern moderates cooperated with southern wishes to remove the vice president of the Board of Foreign Missions and replace him with Rev. Richard Fuller of South Carolina.⁷

Southern delegates considered themselves victorious, but increased antislavery agitation by northern Baptists soon negated the southern sense of victory. Indeed, Baptists in Boston contemplated the formation of a missionary society and pledged that it would disconnect from slaveholders if the Triennial Convention did not do so. Delegates to the 1844 Triennial Convention, with moderates in the majority, passed a resolution that left the issue of slavery to individual interpretation. The Home Missionary Society and the General Conventions passed similar resolutions that same year, but when Executive Committee of the Georgia Baptist Convention submitted an application for the appointment of James Reeves, a slaveholder, to the mission field, the issue raised consternation and awareness in both the North and South. Northern churches and associations resolved against communion with slavery while southern Baptists continued to demand that southern missionaries obtain appointments from the board of the Home Mission Society. The board rejected the application of the Georgia missionary, declaring that the application introduced the issue of slavery and thus violated the purpose of the board's constitution that sanctioned neither slavery nor antislavery.⁸

Delegates to the Alabama State Convention resolved "to demand from the proper authorities in all those bodies in whose funds we have contributed, or with whom we have in any way been connected, the distinct explicit avowal, that slave-holders are eligible and entitled, equally with non-slave-holders . . . to receive any agency, mission or

⁷ William Warren Sweet, *The Story of Religion in America* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950), 298-301; Boykin, *Baptist Denomination in Georgia*, 204; Posey, "Baptists and Slavery in the Lower Mississippi Valley," 128-130.

⁸ *Ibid.*

other appointment.” The Foreign Mission Board answered the resolution by affirming its position not to be “a party to any arrangement which would imply approbation of slavery.” The statement of the Foreign Mission Board and the refusal of the Home Mission Board to accept the application of James Reeves effectively severed any remaining cordial feelings the southern Baptists had for their northern brethren. When the Virginia Baptist Foreign Mission Society broke ties with the northern board and recommended a southern convention, other church associations and churches resolved to move forward with separation from their northern brethren. Delegates from eight slaveholding states met in Augusta, Georgia in May 1845 and formally organized the Southern Baptist Convention.⁹

When the Georgia Baptist Convention convened later that year in Forsyth, delegates approved a resolution that commended the actions in Augusta and resolved to “become auxiliary” to the Southern Baptist Convention, and to appoint delegates to the next meeting of that body. The Columbus Baptist Association in that same year asked each church to appoint at least one missionary agent who “shall present a subscription to every member of the church who is able to give any thing” to support the newly formed Southern Boards of Missions, both Foreign and Domestic. Separation remained incomplete, however, as there were other organizations shared by northern and southern Baptists. In 1846, the Executive Committee of the Columbus Baptist Association proposed the organization of a Publication Society “because the best works issuing from Europe and the Northern States contain sentiments which are objectionable to the feelings and dangerous to the peace of the Southern Churches.” Other southern associations embraced similar sentiments and when the Southern Baptist Convention met in 1846,

⁹ Ibid.; *Journal of the Proceedings of the (Alabama) Baptist State Convention*. n. p., 1844, 8.

delegates continued the process of separation by requesting that the American Baptist Publication Society not send an agent to the southern churches.¹⁰

The geographical fracturing of evangelicals allowed each section to localize their efforts along ideological lines and enhance their own sectional interests regarding slavery. Now southern evangelicals became engaged in a post-separation defense of slavery demonstrated by an increasing emphasis on the spiritual condition of slaves. Blake Touchstone concludes that planters also demonstrated a growing interest in the religious instruction of slaves. And the shift in attitude was “closely linked to the political, social, and religious developments of the final antebellum years.” After the creation of separate sectional denominations, evangelicals, with support from slaveowners, intensified missionary efforts among the slaves and instituted organizational changes to derive maximum spiritual accountability regarding the welfare of the slaves. Between 1844 and 1864, Methodists expended more than a million dollars in support of the mission to slaves. William Capers influenced the adoption by the South Carolina Conference of specific organizational initiatives directed to those ends. The General Conference of the MECS slightly revised the initiatives and adopted a plan that provided for an apportionment of ministers and missionaries that would provide coverage for as many areas as possible. In places where there were regular churches, local pastors carried out the mission work and missionaries were sent to remote places and plantations. The plan called for separate buildings for blacks and whites if possible or separate seating in biracial meetings. It also advised ministers to set apart specific times for oral catechisms for children and adults and suggested the appointment to slave missions of spiritually

¹⁰ Boykin, *Baptist Denomination in Georgia*, 204-205, 212; *Minutes*, Columbus Baptist Association, 1846.

mature missionaries who had demonstrated deep concern and altruistic tendencies in their actions towards slaves.¹¹

According to Georgia Methodist historian George G. Smith, the separation of black and white congregations would better serve the black members. Methodists encouraged blacks to assist in building churches of their own in the cities and the Mission Boards supplied the preachers. The preacher assigned to the black churches were often “young men of promise” placed at a station where they could gain experience during the year. It was a “highly honorable position” and was a welcome relief from circuit riding. St. Luke had provided a separate building for blacks since 1831, but by 1848, there were 378 black members. The growth of membership through the ensuing years and the increasing emphasis on missions to the slaves promoted the idea of a new building for the blacks of St. Luke.¹²

On July 13, 1849, trustees of St. Luke petitioned the Columbus Board of Aldermen for permission to erect a building on the East Commons to be used as a house of worship for blacks. The main reason for this petition was said to be for “the protection of the Negroes in their worship and the safety of the community from large congregations of that population.” The board granted this petition and the plan was laid out for the building to be erected on a lot at the intersection of St. Clair Street and Mercer Street. William W. Tilley, whose residential property was separated by a half acre parcel from the proposed location of the black church, sought an injunction to prevent construction of the church. Tilley complained that his property value would decrease by half as those

¹¹ Blake Touchstone, “Planters and Slave Religion in the Deep South,” in *Masters and Slaves in the House of the Lord: Race and Relations in the American South, 1740-1870* (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 1988), 99-126; Southall, “Attitude of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South,” 362-363.

¹² Smith, *History of Georgia Methodism*, 270; *Columbus Daily Enquirer-Sun*, May 17, 1879.

erecting the church had already trampled down the grass and herbage and the ensuing “noise and confusion” of worship by blacks would constitute both a private and public nuisance. The judge ruled in favor of the St. Luke trustees, stating that state law did not consider religious worship by blacks to be regarded as a nuisance.¹³

After the split from the North, the Southern Baptist Convention rhetorically emphasized religious instruction of the black population, but did substantially little to that end. In 1849, the Board of Domestic Missions appointed two missionaries to the blacks and entered joint efforts with local and state agencies, but urged masters to take the burden. In 1853, the Board offered to pay half the salary of any missionary to slaves, but there was no mention in reports of the Board of anyone who had taken on this task. Local Baptist associations also recommended changes to administrative protocol that would provide greater accountability for the spiritual oversight of slaves.

The Columbus Baptist Association recommended that member churches record the numbers of blacks and whites separately “so that the number of each may be distinguished.” The Western Baptist Association joined the Columbus association and both published separate numbers in their annual reports beginning in 1846. In 1847, the Western Association also resolved that the blacks “be organised [sic] in separate bodies, subject to the regulation of the Churches.” This call for the separation of blacks and whites resulted from the desire of white evangelicals to exert more control over the spiritual lives of black members. The absence of antislavery sentiment, removed by the

¹³ Columbus, Georgia, *Minutes of the Board of Aldermen 30 Jan 1846 - 2 Jan 1852*, Record Book A, Office of the Clerk of Council, Muscogee County, Georgia; Columbus *Enquirer*, July 24, 1849; Martin, *Columbus, Georgia*, 2:36-37.

sectional separation of the denominations, also left whites feeling less threatened and more amenable to black desires for separate services.¹⁴

Black members of Benevolence Baptist Church engaged in separate services between 1848 and 1861, but always under white scrutiny. Several times during this period, the white members suspended and reinstated separate black meetings. The white members at Mount Zion visited the issue of separate black meetings annually from 1846 to 1849 and each year voted to have separate preaching to the blacks in the evenings after the regular (white) meetings. Some churches also initiated revisions of their records to increase awareness of their black members. In 1850, Rehoboth Baptist Church appointed a committee to revise the church book specifically to examine four colored members to ascertain their standing. In 1855, Benevolence Baptist Church examined and revised their membership numbers in order to get an accurate account of all members.¹⁵

One Chattahoochee Valley congregation demonstrated their commitment to a renewed interest in the spiritual welfare of slaves. In 1848, the congregation of Mountain Creek Baptist Church in Harris County resolved to “promote [the] cause of the Redeemer’s Kingdom and do all the good that we can to our fellow creatures.” One way they proposed to do that, they resolved, would be to “release our servants on our regular monthly meeting days and give them an opportunity of attending preaching.” This resolution also included a desire to “endeavor to prevail on our members to attend and

¹⁴ Spain, *At Ease in Zion*, 46; Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 61; *Minutes*, Columbus Baptist Association, 1846; *Minutes*, Western Baptist Association, 1847; *Minutes*, Rehoboth Baptist Church, Harris County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #187); *Minutes*, Benevolence Baptist Church, Randolph County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #108).

¹⁵ *Minutes*, Rehoboth Baptist Church, Harris County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #187); *Minutes*, Benevolence Baptist Church, Randolph County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #108). *Minutes*, Benevolence Baptist Church, Randolph County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #108); *Minutes*, Mount Zion Baptist Church, Talbot County, Georgia.

that we induce as many of our familys [sic] to attend as can with convenience.” This ostensibly accommodating measure on the part of these Chattahoochee Valley evangelicals encapsulates the mindset of evangelicals regarding slaves and slavery. The “Redeemer’s Kingdom” was a place where slaves should be exposed to preaching because they were fellow creatures and part of an extended family.¹⁶

With the task of promoting local religious instruction to slaves left primarily up to masters and local congregations, the Columbus Baptist Association turned its attention to evangelizing blacks in Africa. By taking the gospel to blacks who were not enslaved, Baptists sought to uplift the black race outside of slavery and demonstrate to their slaves, and their erstwhile northern brethren, that ministry to slaves was part of a larger effort to aid in the spiritual development of blacks in any given condition and in any given locale, foreign or domestic. In 1849, the Columbus Baptist Association passed a resolution to solicit funds for foreign missions from member churches and they followed this action by funding their own missionary to Central Africa. The first missionary mentioned is Sister Dennart, who was given financial support in the amount of \$55 during 1853. Although missions to China and American Indians were also supported, the association pledged to apply all funds contributed in 1854 to the Central African Mission. The association also appointed a physician A. D. Phillips as the new missionary to Central Africa. Phillips arrived on the coast of Africa on the first of January, 1856, and began a long missionary endeavor. He remained faithful despite suffering the death of his wife three months after their arrival. Phillips continued to receive the financial and spiritual support of the association over the next 15 years even though many churches gave no financial aid. The

¹⁶ *Minutes*, Mountain Creek Baptist Church, Harris County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #585).

association recognized the failure of churches to contribute and resolved in 1857 to make a more vigorous effort to support the effort in Central Africa.¹⁷

The Columbus Baptist Association intended the establishment of Sabbath Schools to be instrumental in providing religious instructions to children and servants. Not until 1857 did the association report activities of a missionary to the blacks. The association also resolved to withdraw all affiliation with the American Tract Society because of that organization's support of abolition. Locally, cooperating churches of the association and some of the local churches carried out missions to slaves. William C. Johnson, the associational missionary to the blacks, reported seventeen baptisms in 1857. Offerings by individual members, both black and white, were reported annually in the association minutes during the 1840s and 1850s, ranging from a \$5 offering from a white man to ten cents offered by a black man. The congregation at First Columbus formed a Missionary Society and this organization supported missions in the local area as well as the efforts of A. D. Phillips in Central Africa.¹⁸

As evangelicals engaged in sectional divergence, the issue of slavery became the central national issue in the politically problematic expansion that ensued after the war with Mexico. The Wilmot Proviso called for the prohibition of slavery in any territory derived from the lands acquired as a result of that war. Sectional voting on the Wilmot Proviso redefined the Whigs and Democrats in a manner not unlike the splintering of the evangelical denominations in the mid 1840s. The denominations split; the political parties remained but there was little doubt that party cohesiveness required continued compromise. More important than party unity was the need to craft solutions to hold the

¹⁷ *Minutes*, Columbus Baptist Association, 1849-1857.

¹⁸ *Minutes*, Columbus Baptist Association, 1857; *Minutes*, First Baptist Church, Columbus, Georgia.

Union together. The Compromise of 1850 kept the Union together, seemingly giving all interested parties something that represented a political victory. The Georgia Platform, molded in a way to both save the Union and retain southern interests, answered Calhoun's reactionary Southern Doctrine and gave conditional hope that perhaps slavery would not permanently divide the United States as it had divided the denominations. But there would be no peace. Politicians were unable to rescue the Union from the compromises and events of the 1850s. An economic crisis, the Panic of 1857, contributed to feelings of despair and motivated some to search for spiritual comfort as they began to realize, as Charles H. Spurgeon put it, "instability of all human things." As the end of the decade approached, the nation was in an unprecedented crisis.¹⁹

C. C. Goen argues that southern secession from evangelical denominations in the 1840s represented the "first major national cleavage between slaveholding and non-slaveholding sections." These divisions interrupted national unity, reinforced an emergent alienation that cultivated images of "the other side," and heightened sectional tensions driven by the moral outrage that each section felt against the other. The fissure also opened up northern churches to abolitionist tactics. Thus, the 1850s, the decade of incessant political conflict over the fate of slavery in the expanding United States, contributed to increasing ecclesiastical conflict between North and South, and between proslavery religion and abolitionist religion. Although northern evangelicals never became fully abolitionist or even fully antislavery, the sectional ecclesiastical conflict

¹⁹ The authoritative works on the events leading up to secession and the Civil War are David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1976) and James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) and William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists Triumphant, 1854-1861* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Milledgeville *Southern Recorder*, June 8, 1858.

provided some of the rationale for southern evangelicals to embrace an offensive – defensive posture in the decade leading up to the Civil War.²⁰

Prominent in the spiritual arena in Columbus during the latter part of the 1850s was James Harvey DeVotie. In 1856, he accepted the call to the pastorate of First Baptist Church of Columbus. DeVotie had a long and distinguished ministry in Alabama where he served at churches in Montgomery, Tuscaloosa, and Marion. Born in 1814 to Presbyterian parents in Oneida County, New York, DeVotie left behind the “ungodly and profane” of his young life and demonstrated a conversion experience at age sixteen. At age seventeen, he left New York for Savannah to work with his merchant uncle, a Baptist. As DeVotie examined the New Testament, he came to embrace the doctrines of Baptists and was baptized in December 1831. He felt a conviction to preach and, soon after his baptism, entered Furman Theological Seminary in South Carolina. Wayne Flynt, preeminent historian of Alabama Baptists, describes DeVotie as a “fractious, opinionated man,” and relates that DeVotie’s life as a student was a short one as he withdrew from Furman after writing insulting letters to one of his professors. After a brief stint as pastor of a church in Camden, South Carolina, DeVotie accepted a call to serve as pastor of First Baptist of Montgomery and two years later served at First Baptist of Tuscaloosa. At both churches, he endured controversy in the midst of success. His tenure at First Montgomery

²⁰ C. C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation* (Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press, 1985), 13; For the effort of abolitionists to gain support among northern churches, see John R. McKivigan, *The War Against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches, 1830-1865* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984). McKivigan argues that northern churches, for the most part, never embraced abolitionism, with the exception of the “comeouter” sects. Abolitionists called for Christians to come out of their tolerant denominations to form sects that required a commitment to abolition and the refusal to fellowship with slave owners.

was marked by an effort by some members to remove him from the pastorate. Their efforts failed when DeVotie expressed humility and asked to be restored to fellowship.²¹

When he was pastor of Siloam Baptist Church in Marion, DeVotie began building a prominent and influential career among Alabama Baptists. He helped establish Howard College and served as president of the Alabama Baptist Bible Society and editor of the *Alabama Baptist*. He extended his reach into the Southern Baptist Convention, serving as president of the Domestic Board of Missions. At the church in Marion, DeVotie enjoyed a most successful tenure. Membership increased from 285 in 1840 to 676 in 1854 and the members funded the construction of a handsome brick building to accommodate the growth. In 1854, he left the church to serve for one year at nearby Hopewell Baptist Church.²²

When First Columbus asked DeVotie to accept their call, he declined. He wrote to his daughter years later that he had heard that the congregation was “divided in feeling” and “difficult to satisfy.” The church soon repeated its invitation and this renewed interest, “urged with warmth,” convinced DeVotie to visit the city and entertain the inducements of the church. It is likely that much of the interaction between DeVotie and the representatives of First Columbus centered on salary negotiations. As Flynt points out, DeVotie was one of the few Baptist ministers whose salary negotiations are documented. Before he accepted the call to Hopewell in 1854, DeVotie negotiated with a church in Greenville, South Carolina, one in New Orleans, and First Baptist LaGrange before finally settling on Hopewell. The scenario at Columbus played out successfully for

²¹ *History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia* (Atlanta: James P. Harrison and Co., 1881), 187; Wayne Flynt, *Alabama Baptists: Southern Baptists in the Heart of Dixie* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 18-19.

²² *History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia*, 188.

First Columbus as DeVotie accepted the second offer and began his pastorate at Columbus in August 1856.²³

As DeVotie began his ministry at First Columbus, Baptists in the Chattahoochee Valley continued to strengthen and adjust mechanisms to bring and keep blacks under the spiritual scrutiny of whites. They took steps that represented a stronger focus on connecting slaves with local churches and a shift in the prioritization of the missions to slaves. At their annual associational meetings in 1856, delegates to the Columbus Baptist Association entertained a report from an appointed committee regarding the “Duties of Masters to Servants.” Delegates to the Western Baptist Association in that same year examined a report from a committee appointed to formulate “a plan for the most efficient means of communicating the blessings of the Gospel to the Blacks.” Acknowledging the supremacy of the master in all matters related to slaves, the committee report of the Western Baptist Association began with a suggestion that pastors in local communities “sustain relations to the owners and the slaves peculiarly fitting them to preach to and teach the black population within the bounds of the church they serve.” In the absence of an organized convention-wide mission effort among slaves, the responsibility fell to local pastors. The report urged pastors to “visit in the destitute neighborhoods and upon the out-of-the-way plantations, as often as may be found convenient.” The best facilitation of this strategy included making room in the meeting houses or holding services expressly for slaves. These meetings would give slaves the opportunity to exercise their gifts of “edification in prayer, exhortation, and singing.” The committee also sought to mitigate behavior deemed unacceptable in worship by suggesting that “judicious whites” attend

²³ Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 76; James H. DeVotie to “Dear Daughter” n. d., James Harvey DeVotie Papers, Special Collections, Samford University Library, Birmingham, Alabama.; hereinafter cited as DeVotie papers.

the meetings “to secure order” and renew and strengthen the idea among blacks that whites cared for them.²⁴

The committee also suggested that masters require “our servants” to attend daily devotions, either those conducted by their master or by one of “their own number.” Should slaves have the ability to read and exhort, they should take part in the devotion and, as children are compelled to attend family devotions, so should slaves be required to attend. The committee recognized that slaves loved to sing and suggested that masters exploit their interest by giving them hymns to sing as part of the devotional service. By doing this, masters could intrude into the slaves’ most ubiquitous, unique, and demonstrative display of religion, and force slaves to “acquire much good theology from such authors as [Isaac] Watts.” Evangelicals were aware that slaves made up their own songs and that the songs were an expression of the life of the slaves and his hopes of release from bondage. Slaves could not closely relate to hymns sung in white churches and few white people shared the experiences of the slave. There was thus a gulf between the experiential life of slaves and whites and, in the context of evangelical Christianity, represented a challenge to white hegemony.²⁵

The surveys of slave spirituals by Blassingame and Raboteau reveal frequent references to reunions with family in Heaven, solace for their suffering, dissatisfaction with white control, and freedom and deliverance. Raboteau points out that slave spirituals were not only sung, but performed, acted out, or dramatized by a band of shouters. Evangelicals sought to replace slave songs with hymns like those penned by Isaac Watts that presented some of the basics of evangelical Christianity – the sacrificial crucifixion

²⁴ *Minutes*, Columbus Baptist Association, 1856; *Minutes*, Western Baptist Association, 1856.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

of Christ, personal redemption from sin, the superiority and glory of God, and a call for individual action by obedient Christians. Unlike the animated performances of slaves, whites performed hymns in a less emotional, more systematically organized manner. Evidence of this organization of singing in evangelical white churches is found in the minutes of Mountain Creek Baptist Church. The members called for a “Choir of Singers” to occupy the seats in front of the pulpit and to “furnish themselves with a suitable selection of books.” True to the policy of order and obligation, the church required that the names of the choir members be recorded in the minutes.²⁶

Continuing the suggestion from the 1847 resolution, the Western Baptist Association committee directed pastors to explain themes “in terms plainer and more outright.” The committee stated that the results of oral catechistical instruction had proved useful and noted that the Southern Baptist Publication Society was revising Ryland’s Catechism. This catechism was the work of Robert Ryland, pastor of the First African Baptist Church in Richmond. In the lesson “Masters and Slaves” appeared the question “Should servants obey masters who are unkind?” with the answer: “Yes.” The use of Ryland’s catechism should be done with caution, the committee urged, because “as present relations to this population and to other sections of the country call for the circumspection of the serpent as well as the harmlessness of the dove.” The committee probably recognized that, in addition to their instruction to the slave population, they were playing to a northern audience as well. As Cornelius notes, “abolitionists argued that catechisms subverted Christian instruction in order to encourage slaves to be docile and obedient.” Evangelicals knew they had to defensively demonstrate for their northern

²⁶ Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 137-144. Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 243-266. *Minutes*, Mountain Creek Baptist Church. I am indebted to Janet Marie Barber, Director of Music Ministry at Bethesda Baptist Church, Ellerslie, Georgia, for information and interpretations of the hymns of Isaac Watts.

brethren that the relationship between white and black Christians was based on sincere care of the former for the latter rather than being simply a religious form of slavery.²⁷

It appears that some evangelicals in the Chattahoochee Valley subscribed to the wishes of the associations. In conference on August 11, 1854, Rehoboth Baptist Church passed a resolution to “advise all the [owners] of servants within the bounds of this general meeting to call these together and read to them the word of God and explain it to them and also have them preached to as often as they can.” In July 1857, the white members of LaGrange Baptist considered appointing black deacons to administer communion to the blacks separately. In addition to allowing the blacks to have more administrative responsibilities, the whites also began construction on a new larger building that included a basement that would eventually serve as a separate meeting facility for blacks.²⁸

This renewed interest in the spiritual lives of slaves, however, may have resulted in churches showing a more forgiving attitude toward slave behavior. If the goal was to retain slaves within the church community, discretion favored a new start for a slave in a new location. In 1856 a slave named Emily, a member of LaGrange Baptist Church, attempted to join another church and did not have a letter of dismissal from the LaGrange church. The church directed the clerk to write to the church in which Emily was seeking membership and inform them that “Emily’s conduct while here was of doubtful character.” While refusing to grant a letter of dismissal, the church nonetheless recommended that the receiving church “act in her case according to their opinion of her

²⁷ Minutes, Western Baptist Association, 1856; Cornelius, *Slave Missions*, 130.

²⁸ *Minutes*, Rehoboth Baptist Church, Harris County, Georgia Baptist Church Records, Special Collections, Jack Tarver Library, Mercer University, Macon, Georgia, Microfilm Reel #187 (hereinafter referred to as GBCR, Mercer, MF #187); *Minutes*, LaGrange Baptist Church, Troup County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #127). Between 1855 and 1865 blacks were rarely mentioned in the regular white conferences.

present course of conduct.” It was likely that Emily’s doubtful character did not include drunkenness or aggressive behavior unsuitable to whites.²⁹

Baptists also continued to closely scrutinized members, black and white, even those who had left the local congregation. In 1849, Rehoboth Baptist Church in Harris County dismissed by letter Jefferson Jones, a “free man of color” and his wife Flora, the servant of Mrs. Crook. Jones neither left the area nor sought membership in a sister church. His job as a blacksmith kept him in the public eye and allowed the congregation to maintain contact with him. Seven years later, the church rescinded its dismissal letter and excluded him for failing to attach himself to another [church] and for displaying “immoral conduct in his having a plurality of wives.”³⁰

Baptist congregations were also frustrated by masters who either sold their slaves or sent them to another plantation outside of the bounds of the church. In 1855, the Western Baptist Association entertained a query from Shady Grove church regarding this issue. The query read “What course should be pursued towards church members owning slaves, whose membership is at the same church with that of themselves, for removing such slaves out of the bounds of the church holding them in fellowship and the church having no knowledge where they are?” The Committee on Queries answered by assigning the responsibility to the masters, stating that “it is the duty of Masters to procure letters of their slaves who are members of the church, when they removed them out of the neighborhood.”³¹

²⁹ *Minutes*, LaGrange Baptist Church, Troup County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #127).

³⁰ *Minutes*, Rehoboth Baptist Church, Harris County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #187); Manuscript Census Returns, Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Harris County, Georgia, Schedule 1, Population.

³¹ *Minutes*, Western Baptist Association, 1855.

The increased interest of masters toward the spiritual lives of their slaves and the heightened desire of some slaves to participate in religious activities was evident in the Chattahoochee Valley in the 1850s. Masters allowed missionaries to visit plantations and hold services there or in places nearby where slaves could gather. Some slaveowners built chapels on their plantations, such as the one on James Turner's plantation approximately seventeen miles below Columbus in Russell County, Alabama. In addition to sponsorship by the evangelical denominations, some slaveowners paid a preacher to attend to the spiritual desires of masters regarding their slaves. Washington Allen recalled that his owner paid a preacher to preach to the slaves every Sunday afternoon and that the preacher "told us plenty 'bout hell fie and brimstone." Methodist circuit preachers also joined plantation missionaries in preaching to blacks if there was an organized congregation of blacks. Circuit preacher James Wilson Shores preached to several black congregations in the Alabama counties of Barbour and Russell and reported that while he preached to one congregation, a missionary preached to blacks on plantations in an adjacent county. Shores also preached at a Baptist church in Eufaula, demonstrating that preachers and plantation missionaries downplayed denominational differences and worked across denominational lines to preach to slaves. When the Baptist preacher from Columbus was unable to maintain a regular ministerial schedule on the Dawson plantation in Russell County, Alabama, a Methodist preacher occasionally performed ministerial duties there.³²

³² James Wilson Shores Papers, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama; hereinafter cited as Shores papers; Columbus *Enquirer*, July 3, 1860; *Minutes*, First Baptist Columbus; "Washington Allen," In *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography Volume 12 -- Georgia Narratives, Parts 1 and 2*, ed. Rawick, <http://aae.greenwood.com/doc.aspx?fileID=RSX&chapterID=RSX-08&path=/primarydocenc/greenwood/> (accessed May 27, 2009).

When Shores preached to the black congregations, he used scriptures that supported the idea of obedience to God, but also used scripture to address other areas of Christian behavior. He appealed to slaves to be converted by using Matthew 18:3 – “And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” He referenced Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 – “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” – to remind slaves that their whole life was subject to God’s commands. He also, however, supported the slave’s emphasis on a future rest. For example, he referenced Hebrews 4:9 - “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God,” Job 3:19 – “The small and great are there; and the servant [is] free from his master,” and Revelation 14:13 – “And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.” Although he did not support the slaves’ interpretation that the end of slavery constituted their future rest, he did remind them that slavery would end with death. This may have been little consolation to slaves living through hell on earth, but it does indicate a departure by Shores of the typical “slaves obey your masters” paradigm so often reported by former slaves. To be sure, Shores was employing a more nuanced tactic to retain slave loyalty, but it was possible that Shores understood that slaves saw the transparency of the old paradigm and felt forced to try another approach. According to Shores, he “love[d] to preach to the Blacks. They usually listen attentively and

received the truths presented readily.” Shores enjoyed considerable success among the blacks as they constituted twenty-eight of the fifty-five people he baptized in 1854.³³

Missionary efforts also tapped into slaves’ desire for religion and resulted in a revival in the spring of 1857 on the Terrell – Dawson plantation on the Chattahoochee River south of Columbus in Russell County, Alabama. The revival continued throughout the summer, but those converted made no immediate connection to any church probably because the plantation was “very inconvenient to any church.” This local revival among slaves preceded by a few months the outbreak of a worldwide revival that began, according to theologian J. Edwin Orr, with a series of meetings in Hamilton, Canada in the fall of 1857. Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian clergy in the United States heard or read about the Hamilton revival and soon “awakenings” occurred in various states, most notably New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. Typically, local leaders called for a time of prayer during which they prayed for an “outpouring of the Holy Spirit.” In New York City, businessman and city missionary Jeremiah Lanphier sought to bring revival to the North Dutch Reformed Church in lower Manhattan. Membership numbers had been declining at that church as the middle and upper class members left and were replaced by lower class working people. Lanphier invited others to join him in a noonday prayer, the first of which commenced on Wednesday, September 23, 1857. Within six months, 10,000 businessmen were gathering daily for prayer in New York and revival soon appeared in the United Kingdom, Australia, South Africa, and India.³⁴

³³ Shores papers.

³⁴ Milledgeville *Federal Union*, June 8, 1858; J. Edwin Orr, *The Fervent Prayer: The Worldwide Impact of the Great Awakening of 1858* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), 3-5. The worldwide revival is referred to variously as the Revival of 1857-1858, the Businessman’s Revival, the Noon Prayer Meeting Revival, and the Awakening of 1858.

In early 1858, secular newspapers, especially those in New York, carried news of the revival. The noted evangelist Charles Spurgeon observed that it appeared that religion was the subject of every conversation. Spurgeon portrayed a revived America as “[t]he minds of men, thus weaned from the earth by terrible and unexpected panic, seemed prepared to receive tidings from a better land, and to turn their exertions in a heavenly direction.” Revivals were ongoing in March in Maine, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York, Maryland, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. One traveler opined that “from Omaha City, Nebraska to Washington, there was a line of prayer meetings along the whole length of the road” and that “wherever a Christian traveller [sic] stopped to spend the evening, he could find a crowded prayer meeting along the entire breadth of our vast republic.”³⁵

Spreading mostly in urban areas, revival came to southern cities, although Orr notes that the revival was less spectacular in the South because there were fewer cities and fewer newspapers there. To one southerner, the northern manifestation of the revival was nothing more than an “irreligious” exercise directed by abolitionist clergy, “men who less than two years ago exhorted their congregations to ply the knife and torch against their Southern brethren.” He also attributed the revival to “monetary revulsion among our Yankee brethren” and the fact that northerners “no longer had Kansas to be excited about, and had to become exercised on some other subject.” He reserved his most sardonic language to attack Henry Ward Beecher. Noting that Beecher was writing an introduction to a book entitled *Narratives of Remarkable Conversions*, the writer supposed that

³⁵ Orr, *The Fervent Prayer*, 30; Milledgeville *Federal Union*, March 23, 1858; Macon *Georgia Telegraph*, March 30 and April 27, 1858.

Beecher would “include his “great awakening” in the old North Church of New Haven , when he took up a collection to buy rifles to send to Kansas.”³⁶

In March 1858, evangelical denominations in Mobile had daily preaching in their churches. By April, revival was declining in New York, but still going strongly in Quebec and increasing in many southern cities including Savannah and Augusta. In May, revival occurred in the Georgia cities of LaGrange and Athens, with the revival in the latter city lasting five weeks and ending with the ministers “engaged in the good work being worn out with fatigue.” The revival in Columbus occurred in May and June. DeVotie recalled that the revival in Columbus began in the summer of 1858 when people from the city churches met together daily for prayer, alternating daily from one church to another. In the evenings and on Sundays, each church had preaching services in their own houses of worship. DeVotie, like Spurgeon, hyperbolized that “the influence pervaded the whole community and the subject of religion was the theme of conversation every where” and described it as “one of the most remarkable I have every known.”³⁷

By the first of June, seventy people, including six blacks, had joined the Presbyterian Church, one hundred-seventy had joined the Methodist Church, sixty had joined the Baptist Church, and twenty-six had joined the Episcopal Church. By June 22nd the number of converts was as follows: Methodist – 195; Baptist – 83; Presbyterians – 70. There were somewhere between 500 and 1,000 new converts joining the various churches in Columbus. DeVotie puts the number of converts at 1,000, while others put the number between 500 and 900. By July 27th, the Columbus *Enquirer* reported, revival in

³⁶ Ibid., Milledgeville *Federal Union*, April 20, 1858.

³⁷ Macon *Georgia Telegraph*, May 25, 1858; Milledgeville *Southern Recorder*, June 8, 1858; DeVotie papers.

Columbus had ceased, but had moved across the river and coincided with the dedication of the new Methodist Episcopal Church in Girard. Elsewhere in the state, revivals were progressing strongly in Rome, Lawrenceville, and Jefferson during August and September.³⁸

The First Baptist Church of Columbus extended the revival to the Dawson plantation in Russell County, Alabama where the revival among the slaves had occurred the previous spring. In May 1858, the church authorized James Whitten and James Watt to visit the plantation to examine and receive those slaves who were found worthy to be members of First Columbus. The examination process involved listening to the slaves as they described their experiences and consulting with the overseer to determine which slaves had “walked so as to win the confidence of the overseer.” After careful consideration, the ministers used their “best judgment” to receive fifty-seven slaves and quickly (in about thirty-five minutes) baptized them.³⁹

The local effects of the revival were found mostly among blacks in urban areas, especially in Baptist churches, blacks constituted 112, or 53 percent of the 212 persons baptized by DeVotie during the revival. At St. Luke Methodist, however, black membership increased only 14 percent in 1858, but blacks still showed a renewed interest in religion as demonstrated by the fact that St. Luke granted a license to preach to the slave David Jones and renewed the licenses of six other black preachers. The model of increasing black membership persisted for the next few years at First Baptist Columbus. Between 1857 and 1860, the number of black members there increased by 79 percent

³⁸ First Presbyterian Church, Columbus, Georgia, Session Minutes 1833 – 1928; *Columbus Enquirer*, June 8, 1858; *Columbus Enquirer*, June 22, 1858; *Columbus Enquirer*, Jul. 27, 1858; *Macon Georgia Telegraph*, August 10 and September 7, 1858. Newspaper accounts do not show the division of converts by race.

³⁹ Milledgeville *Federal Union*, June 8, 1858.

(from 262 to 469) compared to a 36 percent increase (from 223 to 303) in the number of white members. The black membership in LaGrange Baptist, where the revival occurred in May, increased 43 percent in 1858 while the white membership increased by only 26 percent.⁴⁰

Observers of the revival in Columbus stated that “we have never seen nor read of such a phenomenon in the moral and spiritual world...the very atmosphere seems to be filled with a moral odor, and all who come into it feel the overwhelming force of moral obligation and an irresistible call to *duty*.” (Italics in original). DeVotie, like other evangelicals, was excited about the increase in membership, but most likely found satisfaction in the outward behavior of the black converts. DeVotie proudly recalled that “[t]he revival among the blacks was marked by the absence of undue excitement, and the evidence of true conversion on the part of the many who united with the church.”⁴¹

One notable white convert in the revival was Marshall J. Wellborn, a prominent lawyer, judge, state legislator and one-term Congressman. He was born in Putnam County in 1808, studied law at the University of Georgia, and was among the early settlers of Hamilton in Harris County, having moved there in 1828. He subsequently moved to Columbus and established a successful law firm. In 1842, he served as Judge of the Superior Court of the Chattahoochee Circuit and was elected to the United States Congress in 1848 as a Democrat. He served but one term and then moved back to Columbus to resume his law practice. His conversion during the revival compelled him to give up his law practice and devote much of his time to lay ministry. He retained the

⁴⁰ DeVotie papers, *Minutes*, Columbus Baptist Association, 1857, 1860; Dudley, *History of St Luke*, 61; *Minutes*, Western Baptist Association, 1857, 1858; Macon *Georgia Telegraph*, May 11 and July 20, 1858.

⁴¹ DeVotie papers, *Minutes*, Columbus Baptist Association, 1857, 1860; *Minutes*, Western Baptist Association, 1857, 1858; Macon *Georgia Telegraph*, May 11 and July 20, 1858.

typical paternalistic view toward slaves and donated land for the construction of a new building for the black members of First Columbus soon after his conversion experience. He also contributed towards the building of a new Methodist church in Columbus in 1858, after the revival of that year. He continued in the lay ministry and was ordained in Columbus on June 29, 1864. Both Hamilton Baptist Church and Bethesda Baptist Church in Ellerslie called him to serve as their pastor and he accepted their calls on the condition that he would serve without pay. He continued to preach two Sundays a month at both churches until his death in 1874.⁴²

Historians have minimized the effect of the revival of 1857-1858 on the spiritual landscape of the South. William Warren Sweet connects it to the introduction of the YMCA and the religious work among the armies during the Civil War and asserts that it contributed to the creation of the Christian and Sanitary Commission and numerous Freedmen's Societies. William G. McGloughlin dismisses the idea that the revival qualified as an awakening or revitalization movement. Conceding the fact that tensions over the slavery issue and the financial panic of 1857 produced "grave social tensions," McGloughlin asserts that there was no "major shift in the prevailing ideological consensus or any major reorientation in the belief-value system that had emerged after the second Great Awakening." The northern urban experience could be seen as, according to McGloughlin, "a ritual plea for God's assistance during a temporary business crisis," but nationally it could have been a concerted effort, North and South, to relieve the social tensions of the slavery and secession crisis.⁴³

⁴² *History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia*, 569-575; *Columbus Enquirer*, November 9, 1858; *Columbus Sunday Enquirer-Sun*, September 28, 1879.

⁴³ William Warren Sweet, *Revivalism in America: Its Origin, Growth, and Decline* (New York:

Some historians point to the fact that the leaders of the revivals consciously avoided controversial topics like slavery or doctrinal difference, but McLoughlin points out that most historians now agree instead of increasing national harmony, the revival exacerbated sectional animosity. As an urban revival, it solidified the North and could have motivated secular businessmen to see the importance of maintaining the Union at any cost. In order to sustain the nation's covenant with God and its manifest destiny as a people, the people elected Lincoln and thereby "induced the very sectional division that the revival is credited with overcoming, or seeking to overcome."⁴⁴

Timothy L. Smith asserts that the "Awakening of 1858 appeared to contemporaries to deepen the national soul-searching and so pave the way for the election of Lincoln and the coming of the war." Revivalists such as Charles Finney, Albert Barnes, and Gilbert Haven viewed social responsibility and concerted reform as a result of individual soul-searching. God's ancient commandments, although not discounted, deferred to a providential intrusion in events to bring about justice and mercy. Human bondage, according to this theological paradigm, must be addressed in the full context of America's sin. The otherworldliness of theological interpretations must yield to this-worldly attacks on sin in American society, chief of which was the sin of slavery. Observing that there was no repentance over slavery in the South, Finney and other northerners believed that revival had bypassed the South. Finney believed that "the Spirit

Charles Scribner's and Sons, 1945), 160-161; William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 141-143.

⁴⁴ McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform*, 141-143.

of God seemed to be grieved away from them. There seemed to be no place found for Him in the hearts of Southern people at that time.”⁴⁵

John Corrigan views the revival in the context of its manifestation in Boston and argues that the revival was a “collective emotional performance” that asserted the Protestant identity in Boston and actually drew boundaries as people engaged in the revival process in group meetings, (i.e. businessmen, young men, firemen, and women) rather than as individuals. Bostonians also believed the revival was “shut out from the South,” as news of southern activities was sparsely reported in the Boston newspapers. According to Corrigan, abolitionists like Theodore Parker criticized the revival as being overly emotionally and a failure to address the evils of slavery and corruption.⁴⁶

The revival of 1857-1858, in its local manifestation in the Chattahoochee Valley, followed the concerted and strengthened effort of evangelicals in the mid 1850s to keep slaves within the spiritual parameters of white hegemony, but mostly demonstrated that blacks took an active role in deciding their religious experience. Black membership increased, both on plantations and in urban churches. The revival resulted in the need to build new church buildings to accommodate the increased membership. St. Luke sponsored the construction of a new building to house a separate Methodist congregation, soon to be known as St. Paul Methodist Episcopal Church, South. The addition of at least 100 white members and 112 black members to First Baptist Columbus strained the meeting capacity of the facilities used by both groups. Factory workers were among the revival converts and First Columbus built a new mission house to hold that congregation.

⁴⁵ Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), 223. Finney is quoted in Orr, *The Fervent Prayer*, 29.

⁴⁶ John Corrigan, *Business of the Heart: Religion and Emotion in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 21, 34, 35, 40.

The recent convert M. J. Wellborn donated a tract of land on the northwest corner of St. Clair and Front streets as a place to construct a new house of worship for the blacks. With assistance from some white members of First Columbus, the blacks built a “large, handsome church.” On the 22nd of August, Pastor DeVotie led a dedication ceremony. The main group of white members of First Columbus also began raising money for construction of a main edifice. During construction, members crammed into the building previously occupied by blacks until completion of the new building in 1861. All classes and races of members of First Columbus occupied a new building or were in the process of occupying a new building as the decade came to an end.⁴⁷

The revival spirit among blacks also resulted in an increase in the number of missions dedicated to the blacks. In 1858, four “colored missions” existed in the Chattahoochee Valley, each one designated for a county. These were the Harris Colored Mission, Troup Colored Mission, Chattahoochee Colored mission, and the Randolph Colored mission.” The black congregation in Columbus was also designated as the “colored charge.” Between 1858 and 1864, the number of missions to slaves in Georgia increased from twenty-eight to thirty-seven, nine of which were in the Chattahoochee Valley, and the number of slave church members from 8, 264 to 11,611. In Columbus, the number of black members in St. Luke Methodist Church increased from 657 in 1857 to 700 by 1862.⁴⁸

Black and white evangelicals the Chattahoochee Valley ended the decade having gone through a revival that resulted in a growing membership. This reflected a sectional

⁴⁷ Columbus *Daily Enquirer-Sun*, May 17, 1879; Columbus *Sunday Enquirer-Sun*, September 28, 1879; Martin, *Columbus, Georgia*, 105.

⁴⁸ Milledgeville *Southern Recorder*, December 28, 1858; Harrison, *The Gospel among the Slaves*, 299-300, 323-324.

trend that saw an increase in the number of churches in Alabama and Georgia. In the decade prior to the Civil War, the number of Baptist churches in Alabama increased such that by 1860 there was a six-fold increase in the number of members. During that same period, the number of Baptist churches in Georgia had increased from 879 to 1,141 while the number of Methodist churches had increased from 795 to 1,035.⁴⁹

Locally, physical separation continued with the construction of new houses of worship. The overriding result of the sectional crisis and revival, however, was a stronger and deeply entrenched national division over the issue of slavery and a renewed commitment by southern white evangelicals to spiritually unify slaves and free persons with a religion that defended slavery as a God-ordained institution. Americans, North and South, experienced the revival of 1857-1858 in different ways. As each section prayed to the same God concerning the same issues, they received different answers. Black evangelicals, however, continued to seek the answer for which they had been praying for decades and it appeared that a positive answer would soon come.

Both the Columbus Baptist Association and the Western Baptist Association offered no statements about the sectional crisis between 1857 and 1861, other than alluding to the increasing abolitionist sentiment by the American Tract Society. Both associations passed resolutions in 1857 vowing to discontinue association with that society. South Carolina responded to the election of Lincoln by unilaterally seceding from the Union. Other southern states followed, but not without debate over the manner and expediency of secession. Some Georgia politicians, like Alexander Stephens, argued that the election of Lincoln posed no immediate threat to the institution of slavery

⁴⁹ Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 66; T. Conn Bryan, *Confederate Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1953), 230.

because of constitutional limits on his powers as president. Democrats, argued Stephens, still had a majority in Congress and could thus block any Republican attempt to modify or abolish slavery. Henry L. Benning, a prominent Columbus attorney, was among a group of Georgians who argued that the South had compromised enough and immediate secession was the only recourse. According to secessionists like Benning, the ascendance of the Republican Party and the election of Lincoln represented the culmination of decades of northern economic exploitation and posed an immediate threat to states' rights, social order, and white superiority. Governor Joseph Brown called for an election to choose delegates to a state convention to debate Georgia's actions. Despite strongly voiced dissent from Unionists like Stephens, secessionist delegates outnumbered Unionists by a large margin and they took Georgia out of the Union on January 19, 1861.⁵⁰

DeVotie was a secessionist and believed the southern cause was just. He compared the southern cause with that of the American colonists and supposed that had the South been successful, "our people would have been equally honored with the heroes [and] patriots of the revolution which broke the cords of English oppression in 1776." Many evangelical clergy in Georgia opposed secession. Baptist minister Jesse H. Campbell was "an uncompromising Unionist" and voted for John Bell, the presidential nominee of the Constitutional Union Party in 1860 presidential election. Methodist Bishop George F. Pierce labeled himself as a Union man and had also voted for Bell.

⁵⁰ *Minutes*, Columbus Baptist Association, 1857; *Minutes*, Western Baptist Association, 1857; Kenneth Coleman, ed., *A History of Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 125-128; See also Michael P. Johnson, *Toward a Patriarchal Republic: The Secession of Georgia* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977). Primary documents related to Georgia's secession are in William W. Freehling and Craig Simpson, eds., *Secession Debated: Georgia's Showdown in 1860*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

Some clergy, such as Methodist minister and historian George G. Smith were less enthusiastic for either union or secession. Once secession was accomplished, Baptists relegated their commitment to separating church and state to much less importance and joined other evangelicals in widespread support of the Confederate States of America. The Georgia Baptist Convention met in Athens in April 1861 and pledged that Georgia Baptists would "not be behind any class of our fellow citizens in maintaining the independence of the South."⁵¹

Georgia Baptists made up almost half of the delegates to the Southern Baptist Convention in 1861 when that body adopted a resolution in support of the nascent Confederate States of America. Noting that the new government had sent special commissioners to Washington with "overtures for peace," the resolution framed a defensive posture for the southern position. The committee chastised northern churches and pastors for not protesting "this appeal to the sword," and expressed "astonishment and grief," that "we find churches and pastors of the North breathing out slaughter, and clamoring for sanguinary hostilities with a fierceness which we would have supposed impossible among disciples of the Prince of Peace." Methodists also resolved in their conference to support the Confederacy. Delegates to the Methodist Conference in December 1861 vowed that "there is no such thing as a Union Party among us."⁵²

Individually, evangelical ministers, secessionists and unionists alike, volunteered to serve in the Confederate armies. Many volunteered for service in the army, but most served as chaplains. By the end of the war, twenty-three Georgia Methodists had served as chaplains. In April 1861, DeVotie asked for and received a leave of absence for a term

⁵¹ *History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia*, 226.

⁵² *Ibid.*; Bryan, *Confederate Georgia*, 230-232.

of two months to accompany the Columbus Guards as chaplain, yet refused an official commission because he did not believe government funds should be used to support any church. He accompanied the troops to Tybee Island and served in an unofficial capacity until the troops left for Virginia.⁵³

The call to war prompted a shift in priorities by the Southern Baptist Convention. Spain describes the “apathy of Southern Baptists toward religious condition of colored” and notes that in 1861, the home missionary agency did not employ a single missionary in the work of evangelizing the nearly four million slaves. Financial hardships drained state and local resources for mission work during the war, but local associations continued to beg for contributions to support missions to Indians and soldiers. Indeed, an emphasis on missions to soldiers lessened support for other missions. The Northern blockade prevented materials to be sent to foreign missionaries, but the work continued. The Columbus Baptist Association also continued to support their missionary to Central Africa. In 1862, the association reported that twenty natives in Central Africa had believed and were baptized, yet the association failed to employ a missionary for either whites or blacks during that year. Delegates resolved to try to support missions until “we get through this dreadful war that has been forced upon us.” Despite the war, Columbus Baptists reaffirmed “their convictions of duty to send the gospel to every creature” and anticipated a full reopening of missions work when the war ended.⁵⁴

Missions to plantations took on another dimension during the war. Many overseers joined the Confederate army and those that remained faced the task of

⁵³ DeVotie Papers; Bryan, *Confederate Georgia*, 230-232.

⁵⁴ Spain, *At Ease in Zion*, 47; *Minutes*, Columbus Baptist Association, 1862; Bruce T. Gourley documents this shift in central Georgia. See Bruce Thomas Gourley, “Baptists in Middle Georgia during the Civil War” (Ph.D Dissertation, Auburn University, 2008), Chapter 3.

controlling the slaves. The actions of insubordinate slaves consumed the minds and resources of slaveowners throughout Georgia. The state legislature amended and strengthened laws that put further restrictions on slave activities. Laws required slaves going from one plantation to another to carry passes from their masters showing that they had permission from their masters to be away from home. A law passed in 1863 prohibited slaveowners from allowing their slaves to hire themselves out and required the slaves to live on the premises of their owners.⁵⁵

Thus, during the war, missionary efforts relied on the local churches and individual evangelicals to renew efforts to bring more slaves into the fold and to keep them obedient to their masters. In Columbus, Laura Comer noted that some of her slaves, even one of whom she had been fond, were now “liars and thieves.” In a personal gesture of reform, she eschewed punishment and allowed her slaves to hold their own prayer meeting and noted that they “appear to be entirely changed – they serve cheerfully and well.”⁵⁶

On the surface, it may appear that the initiative of white evangelicals increased their focus on the religion of slaves during the Civil War, but black evangelicals demonstrated an increased interest in religious affairs as they saw the reality of God delivering them from bondage. Like slaves throughout the South, those in the Chattahoochee Valley understood that their freedom hung in the balance during the Civil War and they followed the war with an excited interest. Mary Gladdy, a slave on the Hines Holt plantation in Muscogee County, recalled that as a young girl, she observed the “the whisperings among the slaves,” during the Civil War as they talked about the

⁵⁵ Bryan, *Confederate Georgia*, 122-126.

⁵⁶ Edwards, *River City at War*, 214-215.

possibility of freedom. The excitement of slaves did not escape the attention of whites. In the summer of 1862, city authorities in Columbus, assuming that black religious meetings included activities that agitated for freedom, limited black gatherings to two nights a week. The “invisible institution” assumed heightened importance as slaves anticipated God using the Union army to bring about freedom. On the Holt plantation, slaves gathered secretly in their cabins two or three nights a week and held “prayer and experience meetings.” They placed a large iron pot sideways against the cabin door to keep the sound of their voices from ‘escaping’ or being heard from the outside. They would then “sing, pray, and relate experiences all night long.” According to Gladdy, “their great, soul-hungering desire was freedom; not that they loved the Yankees or hated their masters, but merely longed to be free and hated the institution of slavery.”⁵⁷

First Baptist Columbus renewed efforts to perform mission work among local plantation slaves and found that the slaves were eager to join in. After the death of James Whitten in 1859, the slaves on the Edgar Dawson plantation had received no regular ministerial visits. The overseer, a member of the Baptist church in Tuskegee, Alabama, and a Methodist minister had sporadically attended to the spiritual lives of the Dawson slaves. In June 1862, First Columbus commissioned Arphax Whitten, son of James, to visit the plantation of Edgar Dawson and to “preach to the Coloured [sic] members there.” After Whitten preached at the plantation, he compiled a report on the status of the slaves relative to their church membership. He listed the members who had been removed to another plantation and those who had died. He also reported that ten slaves desired to

⁵⁷ “Mary Gladdy, ex-slave,” In *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography Volume 12 -- Georgia Narratives, Parts 1 and 2*, ed. Rawick, <http://ae.greenwood.com/doc.aspx?fileID=RSX&chapterID=RSX-193&path=/primarydocenc/greenwood/>. (accessed May 27, 2009); Stewart C. Edwards, “River City at War: Columbus, Georgia in the Confederacy” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Florida State University, 1998), 207.

join the church and suggested that the church make arrangements to receive those wishing to join “by experience.” In conference two weeks later, the church voted to receive the slaves as members.⁵⁸

A year later, James Watt, the white pastor of First African Baptist, accompanied Whitten to the Dawson plantation to administer the ordinances of communion and baptism. Whitten reported many difficulties on the plantation in the past year, but gave an encouraging report and expressed that the “hope that discords so common among coloured [sic] people left without a guide have been satisfactorily met and they are now in a healthy state of prosperity.” The number reflected religious prosperity – in 1862 there were sixty-two slaves who were members. A year later there were seventy-nine, despite the loss of nine members by exclusion and eight members by dismissal “by letter.”⁵⁹

The congregation of First Baptist Columbus also renewed their focus on its black members during the Civil War and blacks took an active role in providing for themselves. In September 1862, the Finance Committee reported that the final bill on the black church had been received and that the debt had been extinguished, with a large proportion of the funds having been contributed by the black members. It was also in September 1862 that First Columbus formed a committee to examine the relationship between First Columbus and its two missions – the Factory Mission and the African Church. The committee reported the expediency of allowing the members of the black church to handle their own disciplinary and financial business, but always under the supervision and approval of the white membership in conference. The committee also decided that

⁵⁸ *Minutes*, First Baptist Columbus; *Minutes*, Columbus Baptist Association, 1863.

⁵⁹ *Minutes*, First Baptist Columbus.

the minutes of the conferences of the Colored Church should be sent to the white church for inspection and reporting.⁶⁰

Renewed interest by blacks and the focus on blacks by local congregations and associations yielded an increase in the number of black members in Baptist churches in the Chattahoochee Valley during the Civil War. In 1860, First Baptist Columbus reported 469 black members. By 1865, this number had increased to 564, compared to an increase of only twenty-eight white members during the same period. This reflected an overall increase in the number of black Baptists in the South. In 1860, blacks made up between 35 and 40 percent of Baptist church members. By 1870, blacks were 44 percent of Georgia Baptists.⁶¹

Separation from their northern counterparts in the 1840s provided more freedom for unilateral actions regarding slavery, but secession from the United States allowed white southern evangelicals to minimize their defensive nature regarding slavery. Instead, they focused on actions regarding slavery, especially regarding legal restrictions against evangelical desires. As Clarence Mohr points out, "...reformers now hoped that political separation from the North would make it possible to give their religious and ethical precepts a firm basis in statute law." With their support of the Confederacy seemingly without question, evangelical reformers sought to ameliorate conditions within the institution of slavery. In truth, reforming slavery had been on the minds of evangelicals for decades and there was always a slice of defensiveness attached to every effort. Reform efforts during the Civil War, however, carried the spiritual burden of creating a Biblically orthodox institution that met the ordained desires of God. Failure to

⁶⁰ *Minutes*, First Baptist Columbus..

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 67.

do so would bring the judgment and wrath of God upon his southern people. Drew Gilpin Faust places reform efforts in the context of the creation and sustenance of Confederate Nationalism. Faust asserts that southerners admitted the centrality of slavery to secession and evangelicals used fast-day sermons to promote the transformation of slavery “into a fully Christian institution.” As Faust points out, advocates of reform across the South sought legislative action to remove barriers to Christian knowledge and conduct.⁶²

White evangelicals were among those in Georgia who sought reforms regarding slave knowledge and conduct. They pleaded with the state legislature to repeal the 1829 statute that prohibited people from teaching blacks to read and write. Columbus lay minister M. J. Wellborn attacked the law with no small measure of alacrity and expressed regret that the law prevented “a Christian master the privilege of teaching his slave to read the gospel and argued that it “lays bonds on the blessed Gospel of Christ.” He also asked “Shall men in power place lock and key on the Bible by public law?” Minutes of the Columbus Baptist Association and the Western Baptist Association contain no reference to the law, but Wellborn provided a strong and commanding presence when he travelled to central Georgia and spoke to the Central Baptist Association in favor of the abrogation of the law. Nathaniel M. Crawford, president of Mercer University and Samuel Boykin, editor of the *Christian Index*, called for the repeal of the law as did several Baptist Associations. Those calling for repeal argued that the original reason for the prohibition was the threat of abolitionist material getting in the hands of slaves. This

⁶² Clarence L. Mohr, “Slaves and White Churches in Confederate Georgia,” in *Masters and Slaves in the House of the Lord: Race and Relations in the American South, 1740-1870* (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 1988), 158-159. Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 58-60, 77-78. In *A Consuming Fire: The Fall of the Confederacy in the Mind of the White South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), Eugene D. Genovese argues that southerners saw Confederate defeat as God’s judgment on the South for failing to bring institutional slavery into compliance with Biblical principles.

was no longer a viable threat given the withdrawal from the Union. The Georgia Presbytery also called for the repeal of the law and Methodist Bishop George Foster Pierce called for repealing “all laws in conflict with the letter or the spirit of the scriptures.”⁶³

Some white Baptists, such as those in the Middle Cherokee Baptist Association, argued against repealing the law. They trumpeted the idea that the salvation of a slave depended on the preaching of the gospel and movement of the Holy Spirit. Any level of literacy, or a lack thereof, constituted neither an advantage nor a disadvantage to a slave’s salvation experience. Perhaps the most conspicuous reason against abrogation of the law was the fear that an educated slave would most likely be discontent and rebellious.⁶⁴

White evangelicals in Georgians, however, were most irritated with an amendment to the state code that prohibited blacks, slave or free, from preaching or otherwise officiating in churches. In 1863, Georgia Baptists petitioned the state legislature to repeal the amendment. This new law amended a law passed in 1833 that required black preachers to obtain a permit from the county Inferior Court. The court would only issue a permit if three ordained ministers issued written certificates attesting to the good moral character and the ability of the black to teach the gospel. Baptists had inconspicuously skirted the 1833 statute, but the total ban of black preachers and officials

⁶³ Bryan, *Confederate Georgia*, 242-243; “An act to be entitled an act, to amend the several laws now in force in this State, regulating Quarantine in the several sea ports of this State, and to prevent the circulation of written or printed papers within this State calculated to excite disaffection among the coloured people of this state, and to prevent said people from being taught to read or write; and to repeal the act assented to the ninth December, eighteen hundred and twenty-four, entitled an act, to repeal the law of eighteen hundred and seventeen, prohibiting the introduction of slaves into this state.” December 22, 1829 Georgia Legislative Documents, 1829; Marshall J. Wellborn to Jesse M. L. Burnett, Mar. 6, 1863, quoted in Burnett, “Some Confederate Letters,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, XXI, 2 (June, 1937), 196-197; *Christian Index*, February and April 6, 1863; Central Baptist Association was comprised of churches in Baldwin, Bibb, Butts, Greene, Henry, Jasper, Jones, Morgan, Newton and Putnam counties, and included the prominent cities of Milledgeville and Macon.

⁶⁴ Burnett, “Some Confederate Letters,” 198.

might prove too difficult to ignore. Baptists argued that the law united church and state and usurped the authority of God, and unlawfully gave civil authority over the religion of slaves. Crawford also referred to prominent black preachers Andrew Marshall of Savannah and Joseph Walker of Augusta and pointed out that “if men like them arise now, they would be banned.” The petition stated in part that the law “trespasses upon the rights of conscience, and is a violation of religious liberty ... to say nothing of the sacred right of the black to preach, exhort, or pray, if God has called and commanded him to do so.”⁶⁵

First Baptist Columbus, “with the new Code spread open before their eyes,” violated this law when the church voted in their January church conference to request Pastor DeVotie and James. M. Watt, the minister to the blacks, to suggest the names of three “coloured [sic] Brethren” who would be suitable to serve as deacons and to officiate in matters related to the black congregation. A month later, DeVotie and Watt presented the names of Thomas Hicks, Robert Bethun, and John Dawson and the church ordained the men soon thereafter. These deacons, however, still had to send their conference minutes to the white church for inspection and approval, and the white church continued to appoint two lay members to meet with the blacks at their appointed meetings.⁶⁶

As they viewed the amended law, Georgia Baptists recognized that the original law also represented usurpation of ecclesiastical power by civil authority. They admitted they had previously acquiesced to the law because the inconvenience “was not very great.” Adherence to the 1833 law, however, required no small amount of effort in

⁶⁵ *History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia*, 264-265.

⁶⁶ *History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia*, 264-265; “An act concerning free persons of Colour, their Guardians, and Coloured Preachers.” December 23, 1833” Georgia Legislative Documents, 1833; *Minutes*, First Baptist Columbus; Burnett, “Some Confederate Letters,” 198.

LaGrange Baptist church when that congregation considered granting licenses to preach to three black members. In September 1859, the church appointed a committee to examine the facts regarding the ministerial labors of “coloured [sic] brethren Giles, Joe, and Lewis.” The committee reported two months later that the “law had not been complied with in the case of either of the brethren mentioned.” The committee then appointed three ministers - the pastor E. B. Teague, William A. Callaway, and James O. Screven, - to fulfill the requirements of the law and examine the men “with reference to their qualifications.” For some unstated reason, the ministers and committee found no consensual reason for granting the licenses and the following month the church accepted the recommendation of the committee to withhold the licenses until further instructed by the church.⁶⁷

White Georgia Baptists blamed themselves for not protesting the law prior to this time and remorsefully stated that they should have known better. It is probable that during the previous decade, they did not want to be seen as contemptuous of civil authority by their northern counterparts, and thus did not protest against the law. More importantly, pre-Confederate white Baptists understood that any effort to effect changes to codified slavery could bring into question their commitment to societal racial etiquette and orthodoxy.⁶⁸

On April 18, 1863, the Georgia legislature repealed the exclusively prohibitive section of the law, but left intact that part that required a slave to obtain written permission from the Inferior Court. Local congregations, however, remained unsure about the legal requirements and sought clarification. Unwilling to nullify the law like

⁶⁷ *Minutes*, LaGrange Baptist Church, Troup County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #127).

⁶⁸ *History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia*, 267-268.

First Baptist Columbus, Benevolence Baptist in Randolph County sought to comply with the statute. In September 1863, members of Benevolence entertained a motion to grant a license to preach to Green, a slave of Peter McArthy. The church appointed a two man committee to “investigate and learn the law relative to his case.” At the next church conference in October, the church heard a favorable report from the committee and authorized Hartsfield and King to draw up a license and, four weeks later, the church issued the license to Green.⁶⁹

Although safely distant from the battle lines, the Chattahoochee Valley experienced the war much in the same way as other regions. The absence of men who had left for the front lines disrupted religious activities. In July 1863 the pastor of Benevolence Baptist in Randolph County, James O. Cumbie, asked for and received permission to leave for two months to “labor with our soldiers.” The church appointed a committee to find a replacement, but the committee was unable to do so. The church remained without a pastor for the rest of the year. Cumbie preached to soldiers of the 32nd Georgia Infantry near Savannah for two weeks, and probably continued to do so in other places. Later in the year, Cumbie sent a letter to the congregation to inform them of his decision to resign and the church in conference in January 1864 accepted the resignation. Many of the church minutes listed those men who were serving in the army. Memorials were offered up for those who were killed or had died in the service. Other churches were hurt by the absence of male members. Mount Gilead Baptist church in Harris County,

⁶⁹ *Acts of the General Assembly of the State of Georgia, Passed in Milledgeville at an Annual Session in November and December, 1862: Also Extra Session of 1863* (Milledgeville: Boughton, Nisbet, and Barnes, State Printers, 1863), 137; *Minutes*, Benevolence Baptist Church, Randolph County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #108). In the records of Benevolence Baptist Church, the slave preacher Green is referred to as the property of Peter McCarthy or McArthur. At emancipation Green chose the McCarthy surname variation “McArthur.” He also served as pastor of the black congregation of Cuthbert Baptist Church before moving to Columbus where he served as the pastor of the First African Baptist Church by 1872. See Chapter 6.

“owing to the prevalence of the War and the unsettled state of the Country,” suspended church business in 1862 and did not resume until the end of the war in 1865. When the church resumed operation, there remained a shortage of men. In September 1866, the church directed two women to cite a male member for persistent absences at the next conference.⁷⁰

The exigencies of war also affected the religious activities of black evangelicals in Columbus and LaGrange. When the war came to Georgia beginning with the battle of Chickamauga in September 1863, the need for hospital care and the proximity of the enemy forced the movement of hospitals to areas away from the front. Urban areas in and near the Chattahoochee Valley met the criteria needed when Samuel Stout, director of hospitals for the Confederate Army of Tennessee, needed to establish additional hospitals. These areas were close to the front, but far enough away from the battle to be safe from capture or cavalry raids. A hospital known as the Cannon Hospital was in LaGrange by November 1863. By the summer of 1864, Confederate hospitals were located in several central Georgia cities, including the Chattahoochee Valley cities of Columbus, LaGrange, West Point, and Fort Gaines. Columbus was especially suitable with its abundant supply of water, food, and wood. The elevation of the city minimized drainage problems that might be conducive to outbreaks of malaria. Most importantly, the proximity of Columbus to railroads gave it added value as a site for hospitals. Stout chose several places to locate hospitals in Columbus, including the African Baptist church building at St. Clair and Front streets. Beginning in December 1864, the Confederate

⁷⁰ *Minutes*, Benevolence Baptist Church, Randolph County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #108); “Thirty-Second Ga. Regiment,” James O. Cumbie, *Christian Index*, July 13, 1863; *Minutes*, Mount Gilead Baptist Church, Harris County, Georgia Baptist Church Records, Special Collections, Jack Tarver Library, Mercer University, Macon, Georgia, Microfilm Reel #577 (hereinafter referred to as GBCR, Mercer, MF #577).

government paid First Columbus \$250 a month to rent the African church, thus displacing the black congregation from that time until the end of the war.⁷¹

Similar circumstances in LaGrange displaced black from their place of worship. When a fire at the Cannon Hospital in LaGrange destroyed buildings, bunks, and medicines, patients temporarily occupied private houses until the Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian churches could be made ready for use. The Confederate government impressed the basements of the Baptist and Methodist churches, where the blacks met, and the whole of the Presbyterian church. The Baptist church allowed the Presbyterians to meet in their building on an alternating schedule, but had to make different accommodations for their own black members. It appeared for a while that the blacks would be spared the problem of losing the basement. Because the basement was built directly on the ground and would be difficult to keep clean, S. M. Bemiss, Stout's assistant medical director, recommended that the Cannon Hospital ward be closed. It seems that the ward was not closed or that it took some several months to do so because LaGrange Baptist appointed a committee to procure a place of worship for its black members.⁷²

Despite rumors to the contrary, most of the Chattahoochee Valley area saw no discernable military threat until the capture of Columbus became one of the goals of Union General James H. Wilson in the spring of 1865. Wilson and his men left Tennessee in March 1865 and soon entered Alabama and captured Selma. The loss of an

⁷¹ Glenna R. Schroeder-Lein, *Confederate Hospitals on the Move: Samuel H. Stout and the Army of Tennessee* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 138, 142; Stewart C. Edwards, "River City at War: Columbus, Georgia in the Confederacy" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Florida State University, 1998), 177-181; *Minutes*, First Baptist Columbus.

⁷² Schroeder-Lein, *Confederate Hospitals on the Move*, 106-107; *Minutes*, LaGrange Baptist Church, Troup County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #127)

industrial city like Selma caused many in Columbus to fear that the city would also be one of Wilson's targets. Their fears were realized as Wilson left Selma, captured Montgomery, and headed for Columbus. The city was a major railroad and shipping center and the industries there produced rifles, cannon, cotton, shoes, swords, belts, buckles, bayonets, cartridge boxes, and knapsacks. As a river city, Columbus was also the home of the Confederate Naval Iron works, where workers cast cannon, built gunboats and repaired steamboats. Wilson's goal was to capture Columbus and destroy any resources needed by the Confederacy.⁷³

Wilson focused on the military strategy of capturing Columbus, but his invasion represented the beginning of the end of a religious order that kept slave prayers silent by the threat of punishment or the acquiescence of pragmatic slaves. Eleven year old Washington Allen, a slave on a plantation in Russell County, Alabama, anticipated the arrival of the Wilson's troops in the Chattahoochee Valley. Allen represented that group of slaves who retained a close loyalty to their white family, yet longed to be free. He recalled that his "master's folks knew me to be a praying boy," and they asked him to pray as Wilson's troop approached. According to Allen,

I didn't have any love for any Yankees – and haven't now, for that matter – but I told my white folks straight-from-the-shoulder that I could not pray along those lines. I told them flat-footedly that, while I loved them and would do any reasonable praying for them, I could not pray against my conscience: that I not only wanted to be free, but that I wanted to see all the Negroes freed! I then told them that God was using the Yankees to scourge the slave-holders just as He had, centuries before, used heathens and outcasts to chastise His chosen people – the Children of Israel.⁷⁴

⁷³ Edwards, "River City at War," 268-269; James Pickett Jones, *Yankee Blitzkrieg: Wilson's Raid Through Alabama and Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1976), 127-128.

⁷⁴ J. Ralph Jones, "Portraits of Georgia Slaves," *Georgia Review* 21 (Summer 1967), 272.

On the afternoon of Easter Sunday, April 16, Wilson arrived in Girard and soon planned his assault on Columbus. Afternoon skirmishes on the Alabama side gave way to a peaceful interlude as Wilson waited for more of his forces to arrive. It was not until approximately eight o'clock that evening that the attack on Columbus began when Union forces crossed the Chattahoochee River and entered the city. Less than a mile away, Reverend DeVotie and his family stood on their front porch and observed the events of that "dreadful, dreadful night." By contrast, slaves on a Stewart County plantation, hearing of the battle near Columbus cried joyfully, realizing that "it ain't gonna be long now." Approximately two hours after the battle started, victory belonged to Wilson and the city of Columbus was in Union hands.⁷⁵

Other Chattahoochee Valley slaves expressed both excitement and worry as they heard about the Yankee victory. On the Dix plantation in Troup County, the "word spread lak wild fire...the Niggers wus free." Worried slaves went to the big house and asked of their erstwhile master, "Where is we goin'?" "What is we goin' to do?" These slaves did not fully embrace freedom, instead demonstrating worry and uncertainty about the meaning of freedom. They did not fully realize that Washington Allen's master did not get deliverance from God. On the contrary, Allen bold expression of prayer contradicted the wishes of his master and represented a new religious order. The legal end of slavery was still months away, but evangelical slavery in the Chattahoochee Valley had been

⁷⁵ Jones, *Yankee Blitzkrieg*, 136-138; DeVotie papers; "Rhodus Walton" In *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography Volume 13 -- Georgia Narratives, Parts 3 and 4*, ed. Rawick, <http://aae.greenwood.com/doc.aspx?fileID=RSY&chapterID=RSY-004-197&path=/primarydocenc/greenwood/>. (accessed June 1, 2009).

struck an initial blow. The Gospel Horse pawed and evangelical slaves would soon see the Gospel Horse break loose and come tearing through Georgia.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ “Life Story as Told by Aunt Easter Jackson Ex-Slave.” In *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography Volume 12 -- Georgia Narratives, Parts 1 and 2*, ed. Rawick, <http://aae.greenwood.com/doc.aspx?fileID=RSX&chapterID=RSX-341&path=/primarydocenc/greenwood/>. (accessed June 1, 2009).

Chapter 5

“I Saw the Smile of God” Methodists and Religious Reconstruction

Under a clear, azure sky on a spring day in 1865, Wesley J. Gaines plowed the fields belonging to Gabriel Toombs in Chattahoochee County, Georgia. The day began as many before, but this one would end much differently for the Toombs’ slaves. While Gaines and the other slaves were working, someone came to the field and announced that the war was over and slavery was dead. Gaines wept with joy and looked up into the sky and began singing praises to his deliverer. More than three decades later Gaines recalled that moment with words that describe the experiential emotions of freedom:

I felt the chains fall from my limbs, the gloom lift from my soul, the manacles drop from my hands. I heard the bolts break and saw the prison door fly open. I caught the hands of the angel and walked forth to the beautiful light. I gazed upon the hills of freedom and breathed the health-giving air. I snatched up the flowers blooming at my feet, pressed them to my heart and then kissed their scented lips in return for their welcoming smiles. I ran, I leaped for joy. I saw the smile of God. I heard the anthems of the angels. A new world was at hand, and I walked it, I imagine, with something of the rapture with which the angels walk the streets of gold. Oh! never till I enter the gates of the city of the New Jerusalem and wander along by the river of life, purling through the gardens of God, can I be happier than in that first hour of freedom.¹

Soon other slaves – now former slaves - joined in the chorus. Freedom came that day, born with hope and promises, yet burdened with uncertainties and ambiguities soon to emerge. Like other former slaves throughout the South, however, Gaines soon began to

¹ Wesley J. Gaines, *The Negro and the White Man* (Philadelphia: A. M. E. Publishing House, 1897), 72-73; That the “war was over” referred to Lee’s surrender as Gaines mentioned “the tragedy that closed at Appomattox.” For biographical information see Wesley J. Gaines, *African Methodism in the South -or- Twenty-Five Years of Freedom* (Atlanta: Franklin Publishing House, 1890).

wonder about several issues confronting the freedpeople – their legal status, their rights as free persons, and their quest for land and economic stability. In addition to these, Gaines would soon be confronted with another matter – the spiritual future of former slaves. Gaines would eventually be elevated to the office of bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), but for the next few years he would play an integral part in the exodus of former slaves from the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MECS) and the formation of autonomous black Methodist churches in the Chattahoochee Valley. Like many aspects of the Reconstruction period, the religious reconstruction Gaines experienced would be filled with conflict, uncertainty, and ambiguity. Ultimately, though, religious reconstruction for former slaves was a success, if gauged by their success in the creation of AME congregations in the Chattahoochee Valley and other areas of the South.²

The actions of various Methodist organizations in soliciting former slaves for membership in Chattahoochee Valley Methodist churches demonstrated the black initiative and intermittent white paternalistic cooperation that successfully created independent black Methodist congregations. Former slaves could now make visible their invisible institution and could focus on developing it according to their designs. But the

² I take the term “religious reconstruction” from Daniel Stowell. He defines religious reconstruction as “the process by which southern and northern, black and white Christians rebuilt the spiritual life of the South in the aftermath of the disruptions wrought by the Civil War.” Stowell frames his work around the different ways in which white evangelical northerners, white evangelical southerners, and freedpeople interpreted the results of the Civil War. According to Stowell, northern evangelicals interpreted the defeat of the Confederacy as God’s judgment on white southerners for the crimes of slavery and treason. Southern evangelicals believed God was invoking a loving discipline for their many failures, such as failing to recognize slave marriages and the sanctity of the slave family, and their restrictions on black preachers and religious meetings. Freedpeople believed God had heard their prayers and had proved faithful in delivering them from slavery. See Daniel W. Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion: The Religious Reconstruction of the South, 1863 – 1877* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 7, 180-181. Biblical metaphors related to the creation of independent black churches come from Katharine L. Dvorak, *An African-American Exodus: The Segregation of the Southern Churches* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1991).

creation of independent black churches in the Chattahoochee Valley, and indeed throughout the South, was part of the ambiguous character and definition of race relations during Reconstruction. The late emergence of Jim Crow is evidence that race relations were not firmly established after the antebellum order fell. Emancipation changed the boundaries and parameters affecting and defining interaction between blacks and whites, but the characteristics and definition of freedom were not quickly established throughout the South. What did it mean to former slaves to be free? Black ministers interviewed by General Sherman after the capture of Savannah held no ambiguous meaning of freedom when they asserted that it meant reaping the fruit of their own labor. The requirements of a biracial society, in which whites remained determined to interject their own meaning of freedom, complicated the simple definition offered by the black ministers. Whites also asked the same questions concerning the meaning of freedom, but without the same uncertainty felt by blacks. Black freedom, according to most southern whites, must still be defined by whites. Of concern to whites in some parts of Georgia was the fear of violent insurrections by former slaves seeking retribution against whites. In the summer of 1865, rumors and fear of an uprising of former slaves against whites swept through Savannah and central Georgia. Newspapers reported similar activity in north central Georgia later in the fall. In early December, a committee led by the Provost Marshal concluded that some freedmen in Harris County had been attempting to incite an insurrection, but had not yet developed a concrete plot. The committee stated that the “evidence pointed to something more definite on the direction of Columbus.” This perceived threat against their desire for continuing hegemony bolstered the belief of whites that a new paternalism had to be established and former slaves had to adhere to it.

Consequently, the old planter regime sought continued control over their former slaves, but now through labor contracts and legal limits such as the Black Codes. Thrown into this mix of uncertainty, ambiguities, and assumptions was the issue of religious reconstruction.³

Even in the spiritual realm, relations were permanently altered yet without any distinct delineation of boundaries, infrastructure, and social relations. One thing was certain – the majority of freedmen wanted and demanded religious independence, which was interconnected to the two things they needed to reap the fruit of their own labor: land and a labor system that promoted economic independence. Religious independence could only be permanent if former slaves owned land, not only individual private property, but communal church property. Furthermore, blacks could only enjoy religious independence if former masters did not make labor dependent on religious choices. It is possible that whites connected labor and religion in a manner similar to that of the Episcopal minister in Alabama who required attendance in chapel services as a contractual obligation of freedpeople employed on his plantation.⁴

Emancipation ostensibly allowed individual religious freedom, but holistic religious freedom could only come about through the creation of autonomous black

³ C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 11, 22-23; For a descriptive treatment of the uncertainty of the meaning of freedom see Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Random House, 1979); Columbus *Daily Enquirer*, June 23, and December 6 and 9, 1865; Dan T. Carter, "The Anatomy of Fear: The Christmas Day Insurrection Scare of 1865," *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (Aug., 1976), 346-347; Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 70; Although Aaron A. Bradley agitated for black rights in Georgia in late 1865, debate over the issue of discrimination on public carriers did not have a legal forum until the constitutional convention in 1868. Black politicians in Georgia accepted segregated school systems, but protested loudly over segregation that promoted inequality. Jim Crow type legislation in Georgia was incrementally installed in the last half of the nineteenth century. See Edmund L. Drago, *Black Politicians and Reconstruction in Georgia: A Splendid Failure* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 41-42; 97-100.

⁴ Harriet E. Amos, "Religious Reconstruction in Microcosm at Faunsdale Plantation," *Alabama Review* 42 (October 1989): 261.

churches. Although evangelical blacks and (eventually) whites shared the goal of separate autonomous black churches, the motives and timing of each group differed. Furthermore, the blacks shared no unanimous attitudes or ideas about their religious future as freedmen. Although the vast majority of former slaves chose to significantly limit white influence, there were a minority of them that, for decades after the Civil War, insisted on retaining close ties with whites.

When introduced to the freedom they had longed and prayed for, former slaves left white Methodist churches in large numbers. Between 1865 and 1870, there was a massive withdrawal of blacks from southern evangelical churches. The number of blacks in the Georgia Conference of the MECS had decreased from a pre-war total of 27,691 to 1,504, with the vast majority of that decrease occurring after 1865. The Columbus District reported 1,173 black members in 1865, but only 117 in 1869. These numbers demonstrate the strong desire of former slaves to create independent black churches, being motivated, as Eric Foner points out, by two causes: the refusal of whites to offer blacks an equal place within their congregations and the black quest for self-determination. The first post-bellum segregation, then, was the exodus of former slaves from their Egypt - the white evangelical churches, into their Canaan – a Promised Land of autonomous black churches. The desire for ecclesiastical autonomy and segregation initially lay within the religious community of former slaves. When the desire gave birth to initiative, agency, and actions on the part of the former slaves, white evangelicals responded with varying degrees of anger, acceptance, reluctance, agreement, and rejection.⁵

⁵ Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*, 227; Katharine L. Dvorak, *An African-American Exodus*, 1; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 88-89; Daniel W. Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion: The Religious Reconstruction of the South*,

Whites may have misinterpreted the religious beliefs of slaves by attributing patience to them in the context of loyalty to their masters. Ella Clark, daughter of a wealthy Georgia planter and wife of Methodist bishop James Osgood Andrew Clark, gave credence to the portrayal of patient slaves. She recounted how “the patient Negro waited for the end. But even where he loved his master, he longed for freedom...He simply waited.” As emancipation became a reality, whites would be surprised to see their “patient” slaves riding the Gospel Horse away from the white churches.⁶

Religious reconstruction was, by nature of the interests of those involved, a process that was inundated with conflicting goals and visions. Stowell posits several elements of the vision of freedpeople concerning their religious future. First, they asserted that whites could no longer properly look after their religious interests. This entailed the creation of independent churches led by black preachers. Second, the freedpeople would accept assistance from northern and southern evangelicals, but only if they could preserve complete control over their own religious lives. Finally, freedpeople had an intense desire for education.⁷

As the Gospel Horse galloped throughout the South, the reaction of white evangelicals, according to Stowell, involved five stages of accommodation as they sought to retain ecclesiastic connections with black evangelicals. First, whites assumed that they best understood the freedpeople and thus would be in a better position to help them. The notion of “help” was just a ruse, for most white evangelicals simply insisted that

1863 – 1877 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 80; Minutes of the South Georgia Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1869. n.p., 1869; *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1861-1865*. Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1870.

⁶ Ella Anderson Clarke, “Reminiscences of Ella Anderson Clark”, James Osgood Andrew Clarke Papers, Special Collections, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University, Atlanta, 34.

⁷ Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*, 73-78.

emancipation should require no lessening of white spiritual paternalism. Second, many white evangelicals sought to organize separate black churches with white ministers. A third stage of accommodation was actually a continuation of the antebellum practice, used by some churches, of appointing black ministers to separate black congregations remaining under the control of whites. While the use of this mechanism during the antebellum period indicated some measure of white acquiescence to black initiative, whites primarily based the post-bellum practice on their realization that blacks would refuse to remain under white control. The fourth stage of accommodation involved the creation of separate black associations and conferences that retained some organizational connection to white evangelicals. The final stage was complete separation of black and white evangelicals, with black associations and conferences having no formal, legal, or ecclesiastical connection to white organizations.⁸

Religious reconstruction in Georgia, and by extension in the Chattahoochee Valley, demonstrated variations of the stages of white accommodation. Several factors contributed to a variety of events that do not easily fit into Stowell's accommodation paradigm. First, the difference in organizational structure between Methodists and Baptists required that separation between black and white Methodists occur in a much different fashion. The hierarchical organization of the Methodists made it more likely that there would be more consistent action among the local congregations. Issues of property and the credentialing of ministers were matters directed downward from the office of the Bishop. The autonomous nature of local Baptist congregations resulted in the unfolding of a much less consistent array of events as blacks sought their own Baptist autonomy. To be sure, local and state Baptist associations offered resolutions as a statement of principle

⁸ Ibid., 85-88.

and there was a great deal of similar behavior among the local congregations. Conditions pertinent only to individual congregations, however, resulted in unilateral actions in dealing with the issues of emancipation. Thus, the model presented by Stowell was more likely found in Methodist arenas.

The three major African-American Methodist denominations that claimed freedmen during the Reconstruction period were the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AMEZ), and the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in America (CME). The AME had existed since 1816, but there were relatively few congregations in the South. The CME was formed in 1870 with the assistance of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MECS). Although the AMEZ was prominent in other areas of the South, it was not heavily involved in the Chattahoochee Valley during Reconstruction. Another church that vied for the freedmen was the white Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC), which was known as the northern Church.⁹

Beginning with the establishment of the first AME church in Georgia in December 1864 and continuing for the next several years, black and white Methodists struggled with the issue of the changed relationship between them due to emancipation. Although the former slaves never deviated from their goal of an autonomous church, questions pertaining to the relationship between the AME and the MECS remained. Initially, the MECS sought to continue as a paternalistic spiritual entity, although it was

⁹ Charles Spencer Smith, *A History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Book Concern of the A.M.E. Church, 1922), 520; Charles Henry Phillips, *The History of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in America*, Religion in America Series II, ed. Edwin S. Gaustad (New York: Arno Press, 1972), 23-26. For a thorough examination of the efforts of the MEC to create biracial churches in Georgia see Daniel W. Stowell, "The Negroes Cannot Navigate Alone," in *Georgia in Black and White: Explorations in Race Relations of a Southern State, 1865-1950*, ed. John C. Inscoe (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994).

willing to allow some higher degree of autonomy to the black congregations. Some MECS ministers even assisted the AME in organizing congregations from among their black members. Despite this cooperation, the MECS still held onto the belief that it would have some input into the spiritual growth of the former slaves. L. J. Davies spoke for many MECS ministers, writing “For a number of years to come they will be tied to us. They will not prosper in any other organization. But we are determined not to give them up without a struggle.”¹⁰

Competition for the souls of freedmen was intense throughout the South and the MEC was also in the competitive milieu. One issue of contention between the AME the MEC was the role of blacks in positions of authority and power. The AME formed in Philadelphia in 1816 partly as a result of blacks seeking total independence from white ecclesiastical authority. The AME would be perfectly suited for the freedmen. Why would blacks want to be part of a white-dominated church again? The MEC sought more than spiritual gain – its goal was to reconstruct the South into its cultural and political mold, in addition to redeeming the rebellious whites and dependent blacks. The attitude of this denomination epitomized that of northern Christians – they believed southern churches were unfit to minister to the needs of their members, both black and white. The sins of slavery and rebellion, according to many northern Methodists, still contaminated the southern church. The AME eventually sought a goal similar to the MEC for its people, but initially this denomination just wanted “to seek a church where they could be free and untrammelled in their religious worship.”¹¹

¹⁰ *Southern Christian Advocate*, July 13, 1866.

¹¹ Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*, 82-84; Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*, 85-88; Gaines, *African Methodism in the South*, 13.

As southern white Methodists realized the goals of the MEC, they eventually embraced the goal of black Methodists to form independent churches, preferring segregated denominations rather than the mixed congregations that would be the result of the inclusion of former slaves in MEC congregations. As Hildebrand acknowledges, black Methodists believed that their denomination was best suited to meet the needs of and to perform an elevation of the black race. Their goal was to preach a gospel of freedom that emphasized total independence from white control. Southern white Methodists believed that antebellum connections to blacks might result in some type of post-bellum interdependence that would not be possible should blacks join the MEC.¹²

The separation of black Methodists from the MECS actually began before the end of the Civil War. On December 29, 1864, the black Methodist congregation in Savannah known as Andrew's Chapel officially broke ties with the MECS and transferred their relationship to the AME under the Elder in charge, James Lynch. The members of this church claimed a de facto right to ownership, since they had paid for the building and had worshipped in it for many years. They were now able to take over their church because General Sherman had conquered Savannah and provided protection for the blacks. This was the beginning of religious reconstruction in Georgia, and soon the AME commenced with missionary efforts to broaden the reconstruction. The General Conference of the AME Church of 1864 called for the establishment of the church in the South and in May of 1865, Bishop Daniel A. Payne and three other black northern missionaries entered Charleston to begin the task of organizing the first session of the South Carolina Conference. In June this new conference assigned itinerant preachers to several major

¹² Reginald F. Hildebrand, *The Times Were Strange and Stirring: Methodist Preachers and the Crisis of Emancipation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 32-33.

cities in the Carolinas and Georgia and appointed two missionaries to Georgia - William Gaines and James Lynch. Gaines, the older brother of Wesley, was assigned the potentially fruitful mission field of west Georgia, which included the black congregation associated with St. Luke numbering approximately 700.¹³

Soon after emancipation, in the summer and fall of 1865, efforts of AME missionaries showed signs of success as thousands of former slaves left the MECS for membership in the AME. MECS bishops initially reacted to the AME missionary efforts with a sense of calm acceptance. In August 1865, Bishops Robert Paine, James O. Andrew, and George F. Pierce met in Columbus and composed a “Pastoral Address” to other ministers and, by extension, the white southern church as a whole. The bishops reminded their members that it was through the influence of Christianity and the work of the MECS that the slaves had behaved inoffensively and without violence. Now as freedmen, their passive and non-violent behavior continued. The bishops admitted that many blacks had left the southern church, and more were likely to follow due to the “social inducements” from other churches. The bishops, however, advised that “if they elect to leave us, let them go, with the assurance that as heretofore we have been, so we will continue to be, their friends.” The bishops also enjoined their fellow Methodists to neither oppose the blacks who would leave nor neglect those who remained in the MECS. As Dvorak points out, the white bishops interpreted the exodus as being based on social terms rather than religious terms and that the white bishops viewed the AME as less

¹³ *Christian Recorder*, Feb. 4, 1865; *Minutes of the South Carolina Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1866* (n. p., n.d.); Gaines, *African Methodism in the South*, 6-8; *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1861-1865* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1870).

threatening to the social hegemony of whites because the AME would be less likely (than the MEC) to encourage social equality.¹⁴

As the AME missionary efforts in Georgia unfolded, however, the MECS reacted in a less acquiescent and more naively paternalistic manner. Indeed, as Stowell points out, “Underlying all southern evangelicals’ decisions [on the religious future of the freedpeople] was a persistent and profound belief in the inferiority of the black race.” The continuing power of paternalism - God-ordained according to white evangelicals – would be evident in all interactions between blacks and whites. When the Georgia Conference of the MECS met in Macon in November 1865, delegates appointed a special committee to report on “the relations of the colored people.” White paternalism prevailed as the conference, based on the report of the special committee, resolved “to continue preaching the gospel ...to the colored people in our bounds, recognizing in them, now that they are free, the same immortal beings for whom Christ died that they were when they were slaves.” The conference also passed several resolutions calling for the enlistment of local preachers to be put over the colored charge, and solicitation of funds from the former slaves to finance continued work among them. Citing “our familiarity with their habits and character, and the seeming intention of Providence that they shall remain among us,” the whites sought to continue to “connect the colored people with the whites.” To that end, the conference addressed the issue of the appointment of pastors for the black churches that remained in the MECS by recommending the appointment of black preachers who would remain under the general supervision of the white preachers. The

¹⁴ *Southern Christian Advocate*, August 31, 1865; Dvorak, *An African-American Exodus*, 106-109.

conference followed this recommendation and ordained black preachers and deacons each year from 1865 until 1868.¹⁵

Two issues that were inextricably entwined in the events surrounding the relationship between the black and white Methodist churches were the negotiations concerning property and the emerging politicization of the AME Church. This special committee also addressed the matter of black congregations that had requested the transfer of church property and sought permission to withdraw from the MECS. The committee evaded the issue by claiming that they had no authority to mediate the transfer of property and must wait until action was taken by the Quarterly (local) Conference under the direction of the next General Conference. Recognizing that many blacks had already left the MECS, the Georgia Conference resolved to let the blacks continue to use the property for worship in such cases “where no considerable number of such members continue to be members of the M. E. Church, South.”¹⁶

When the General Conference of the MECS met in New Orleans in April 1866, the issues regarding blacks received much attention. Delegates from the AME attended this meeting and requested that the MECS arrange to transfer property used by blacks to the AME. Some whites wanted to agree to this request, but most had no desire to give away church property. Two main reasons for refusing to transfer the property were the reluctance to undermine their own efforts at keeping still loyal blacks in the white churches and the disaffection with the political leanings of the AME. Gravelly points to

¹⁵ Columbus *Daily Sun*, November 21 and November 25, 1865; *Southern Christian Advocate*, November 30, 1865;

Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*, 46. *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1861-1865* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1870), 11-13.; *Minutes of the South Georgia Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1867* (n. p., n.d.), 5; *Minutes of the South Georgia Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1868* (n. p., n. d.), 4-5.

¹⁶ *Ibid*; Columbus *Daily Sun*, November 21, 1865.

the connection between property and politics as the whites made transfer and ownership of property by the black congregation contingent on the blacks assuming a non-political role. Ultimately, the 1866 General Conference echoed the Georgia Conference of 1865 by recommending that local congregations allow the use of church property in cases where the entire congregation had left for the AME.¹⁷

Foremost among the goals of the MECS, however, was to retain the small remnant of blacks who had not joined the AME and remained in the biracial MECS congregations. Of the 207,000 blacks on the roll of the MECS before the Civil War, a remnant of only 78,000 black members remained by the end of 1865. MECS delegates devised a plan that would allow blacks to form Annual Conferences, and at such time that two or more were formed, to organize a separate General Conference with the same relation to the white General Conference as the Annual Conferences. Although the goal was to eventually allow blacks to have an independent and autonomous Church, it was almost five years before this entity came into being as the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church (CME). Hildebrand explains the main reason for the formation of the CME was that whites wanted to continue to influence the blacks in social, political, and religious matters. Whites, however, would never agree to allow racial equality within their denomination. Despite their continued commitment to spiritual egalitarianism, ecclesiastical equality was too much of a threat to white hegemony. Hildebrand asserts

¹⁷ William B. Gravely, "The Social, Political, and Religious Significance of the Formation of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Methodist Church (1870)." *Methodist History* 18, no. 1 (October 1979): 13-15, 23; Macon *Georgia Weekly Telegraph*, May 28, 1866.

that those that remained in the MECS accepted the “new paternalism” of the Southern church.¹⁸

The 1866 MECS General Conference also adopted a vague and confusing policy at this conference. The conference authorized the Bishops to confer with the Bishops of the AME “with a view to a union between our colored churches and that church.” One white pastor sought clarification of this policy because of a situation that affected his church. J. C. Simmons was the pastor of the MECS congregation in Lumpkin, Georgia in 1866 when AME preacher Fortune Robinson arrived and tried to take charge of the black congregation. Simmons asserted that the black congregation had not requested the assignment of Robinson because they assumed that they would continue to be associated with the MECS. James E. Evans, a pastor in nearby Columbus, explained that the General Conference of 1866 had allowed for a fraternal relationship with the AME and a continued association with those black members who had not left the white church. According to Evans, the AME would not seek to induce blacks to leave the white church and the white church would not prevent any blacks from transferring to the AME.¹⁹

¹⁸ Hildebrand, *The Times Were Strange and Stirring*, 10-11; Phillips, *The History of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in America*, 23-26; In some cases, a black congregation would not join the AME because their black pastor did not desire it. Such was the case of Trinity Church in Augusta. Henry M. Turner believed that the entire congregation desired to unite with the AME but that Rev. Edward West was keeping them associated with the MECS. Described by Henry Turner as being “old and ignorant”, West was actually elected as deacon in January 1865 by the MECS. For over a year, West could not be persuaded to join the AME, and he was rewarded by the MECS in December 1866 by being ordained as an elder. Although West’s congregation was briefly part of the AMEZ, it left that organization to return to an association with the MECS and began a CME congregation upon creation of that denomination. It is likely that West shared the apolitical, accommodating attitude of Lucius Holsey who asserted that Christianity offered escape from damnation and exposure to “superior” white civilization. This attitude is similar to the secular model of Booker T. Washington who saw slavery as part of a “divine plan for black progress.” See Glenn T. Eskew, “Black Elitism and the Failure of Paternalism in Postbellum Georgia: The Case of Bishop Lucius Henry Holsey,” *Journal of Southern History* 58 (November 1992): 646-647.

¹⁹ Macon *Georgia Weekly Telegraph*, May 28, 1866; *Southern Christian Advocate*, July 6 and July 20, 1866.

The resolutions passed by the Georgia Conference and the General Conference of the MECS indicated an attempt to end the uncertainty and ambiguity of the opinions of white Methodists. At least now there was an official position on which actions to take, or defer, regarding the former slaves. Prior to this there were divided opinions. Some white Methodists were irritated at what they saw as ungrateful behavior on the part of blacks, who now sought total independence from the whites. Many southerners viewed the early separations as temporary, believing the backs had been enticed by vague and empty promises and would eventually, sooner rather than later, return to the white churches.²⁰

A group of Georgia Methodists near Newnan, approximately 30 miles north of LaGrange, suggested colonization of the former slaves to effect a total separation of the races. According to these Methodists, emancipation severely damaged the morally uplifting effect of Christianity on the slaves. They claimed their evangelization of the slaves resulted in setting the slaves on equal footing with whites in spiritual matters. This elevated the race “to a respectable state of enlightened Christianity” from which they had now fallen due to the change from slavery to freedom. The former slaves were now being manipulated by “meddling Northerners and scalawag Southerners” to cultivate a bitter hatred against the white race. This hatred caused both white and black to commit crime and sin that was destroying the moral influence of the whites. To remedy this situation, this group called for the government to give forty acres of land from the “Wild Territorial Lands” to each head of family and to enact laws to ensure their removal and settlement in the colony. To guard against the appearance that they wanted to wash their hands of any further responsibility for the former slaves, this group of Methodists resolved to supply

²⁰ Katharine L. Dvorak, “After Apocalypse, Moses,” 184.

moral and religious instruction to the colony “until such time as they can supply themselves with ministers of their own race and colour.”²¹

John H. Caldwell, a former minister in the MECS, was one of the “scalawags” to whom the Newnan Methodists likely referred. When a white man assaulted two black women who were on their way to the church service, Caldwell protested to the Freedman’s Bureau and complained that the civil authorities would not exact justice against the whites. Caldwell also asked that he not be identified as the person who filed the complaint because he felt his life was in danger. Caldwell represented a group of Southern white evangelicals who sought to build biracial congregations under the auspices of the MEC. He had served as a minister in the Georgia Conference since 1844, including a stint as a professor at Andrew Female College in Cuthbert. Although he ardently supported the Confederacy, after the war he assumed the role of a religious scalawag as he came to a different understanding of slavery and the war. In June 1865, he preached sermons that assigned guilt to Southerners who had supported a slave system

²¹ Featherston family papers, Woodruff Library, Emory University; The idea of colonization was not limited to this group of Methodists. Abraham Lincoln had been a proponent of the colonization of free blacks early in his political career. As president, he supported a plan to colonize free blacks in Central America or the Caribbean. In 1862, he signed an agreement for the settlement of 5,000 blacks on an island off Haiti. In 1865, Jacob Cox, Republican gubernatorial candidate in Ohio, proposed the colonization of blacks in a separate territory where they could “work out their own salvation.” Although most blacks rejected the idea of leaving America, in 1866, 1867, and 1868 a total of over 1,000 blacks left southern states for Liberia under the auspices of the American Colonization Society. In May 1868, 464 blacks, motivated by positive reports from Liberia, left Savannah for that country. Of this number, 204 were from the Columbus area, including Judge Cook, former pastor of First African Baptist. In 1871, President Grant endorsed an unsuccessful plan to annex the Dominican Republic. The reasons for this were the desire for a Caribbean naval base, expansion of American business interests, and Grant’s belief that Southern blacks might wish to seek refuge there and that their successful free labor venture might compel Cuba and Puerto Rico to abolish slavery. See Foner, *Reconstruction*, 6, 222-223, 288-289, 494; *Georgia Weekly Telegraph*, May 15, 1868; *Macon Daily Telegraph*, May 16, 1868; *Columbus Daily Enquirer-Sun*, March 28, 1885; For details of Lincoln’s support for colonization see Charles H. Wesley, “Lincoln’s Plan for Colonizing the Emancipated Negroes,” *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Jan., 1919), pp. 7-21.

that was not practiced in keeping with God's law. His message countered the feelings of his congregation and they soon petitioned for his removal. Caldwell first appealed to MECS Bishop Pierce and upon failure to receive word from Pierce, appealed to Major General George H. Thomas, military commander in charge of Georgia. Thomas reinstated Caldwell to his pastorate of the Newnan church and he continued there, eventually leaving the MECS to become a MEC missionary to Georgia. He helped establish a large biracial MEC church in the Troup County city of LaGrange and promoted the transfer of black congregations to MEC churches in the Georgia cities of Newnan, Jonesboro, Oxford, Rome, and Griffin.²²

Caldwell went further with his castigation of the MECS. He refuted the argument that the division of Methodism in 1844 was a necessary measure taken by southern Methodists to protect against the abolitionist fever that had increased in the preceding decades. Instead, according to Caldwell, the number of slave converts would have been almost twice the realized number in the MECS had there been no sectional division. He also accused the MECS of providing deceptive statistics that exaggerated the number of new (post-emancipation) "colored" missions supported by the denomination. By doing so, the MECS, according to Caldwell, was telling the MEC and its missionaries to "stay where you are, you are not needed here."²³

²² John H. Caldwell to Davis Tillson, August 9, 1866, in Assistant Commissioner for the State of Georgia, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands. Records. National Archive Microfilm Publication M798, Record Group 105, Reel 11; hereinafter cited as RG 105; Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*, 9, 60-61, 138.

²³ John H. Caldwell, "Relations of the Colored People to the Methodist Episcopal Church, South," *Methodist Quarterly Review* 48 (July 1866), 431-435; The term "scalawag" was a derogatory term given by white Democrats to white southerners who supported the Republican agenda. Stowell uses the phrase "religious scalawag" to describe white southern ministers and laypeople who joined northern denominations and, like political scalawags, were held in contempt by the mass of southern whites. Like Stowell, my use of the term is not intended to be derogatory. Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*, 207n28.

The statements by Caldwell also illustrate that white Methodists, north and south, remained hopelessly irreconcilable. As soon as the war ended, questions arose regarding the reunification of northern and southern Methodists, but conflicting views on the meaning of the Civil War and disagreement over how to facilitate reunification without compromising those views prevented any hope of sectional reconciliation. White southern Methodists insisted on a merger of the two bodies as equals, but northerners wanted southern churches to join the MEC individually. Most galling to the white southern Methodists was their belief that the MEC sought to reconstruct southern society and promoted biracial churches that, unlike those during the time of slavery, might promote the notion of full ecclesiastical equality for blacks. According to the leading MECS bishops, “a large proportion, if not a majority of Northern Methodists have become incurably radical. They have incorporated social dogmas and political tests into their church creeds. Their pulpits are perverted to agitations and questions not healthy to personal piety, but promotive [sic] of political and ecclesiastical discord, rather than those ends for which the church of the Lord Jesus Christ was instituted.”²⁴

Despite the attempt by Caldwell and other MEC ministers, most blacks rejected the idea of continued biracial congregations, even those organized by the MEC. Henry M. Turner represented those blacks that wanted complete separation from the whites. In early 1866, he resigned from his army commission and directed all of his efforts to the cause of the AME in Georgia. During this time, he accepted the assistance of white pastors who openly encouraged the blacks to join the AME, despite the resolutions of the General Conference of the MECS in New Orleans. In Griffin, MECS pastor Charles Fulwood sought to prevent the black congregation from joining the MEC denomination by organizing them into the AME. Turner came to Griffin at Fulwood’s invitation and

²⁴ Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*, 162-164; *Southern Christian Advocate*, August 31, 1865.

preached to a large biracial crowd, urging the blacks to join the AME. A few days after this, Fulwood notified Turner that the organization was complete. As late as the latter part of 1867, other black congregations transferred to the AME as well.²⁵

In some locales, however, the competition between Methodist denominations was of a less cooperative nature. In May 1866, the South Carolina Conference of the AME appointed three preachers to the missions in Stewart County - Wesley Gaines to the Florence mission, Seymour B. Jones to the Fort Gaines mission and Fortune Robinson to the Lumpkin mission. The MECS elders reacted with vociferous resentment to the presence of AME missionaries in the MECS Lumpkin District. J. L. Davies acted as spokesman for the other elders when he wrote, "The colored church in the bounds of this District has generally been doing well religiously. They have manifested almost without exception, subordination and contentment. Recently, however, the advent of certain appointees of the African M. E. Church have disturbed and divided some of the Churches." One factor that complicated this conflict was the relationship between Davies and Gaines. Davies was a former pastor to Gaines and had ordained him in 1865 in the MECS. As an important player in the formation of AME churches, Gaines now faced opposition from Davies, and this conflict became a war of words between the two. By August, the Florence mission was enjoying great prosperity which undoubtedly prompted resistance by Davies and other white elders to subsequent efforts of Gaines.²⁶

In October, Gaines reported to the Freedmen's Bureau that Davies and another MECS elder, E. A. H. McGee, opposed the separation of the blacks and would not allow

²⁵ Stephen Ward Angell, *Bishop Henry McNeal Turner and African-American Religion in the South* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 68-71; Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*, 95-96.

²⁶ *Minutes of the South Carolina Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1866, May 16, 1866; *Southern Christian Advocate*, July 13, 1866; *Christian Recorder*, August 25, 1866.

them to have a church of their own. Former slaves solicited the assistance of the Freedman's Bureau in several areas of need, but it was rare when the issue was purely religious in nature. The Bureau provided financial aid to help construct buildings for education purposes, but sometimes this was in conjunction with efforts of the American Missionary Association or the Freedman's Aid Society of the MEC. On this occasion, however, Gaines appealed directly to the Freedman's Bureau to intervene in a dispute with MECS elders, which was more than likely a dispute over buildings and property. When Gaines wrote to Captain Fred Mosebach, the Freedman's Bureau agent in Columbus, asking for assistance, Mosebach referred the issue to General Tillson, who subsequently assigned the case to E. F. Kirksey, the agent for Stewart County. Specific actions taken by Kirksey are unknown, but eventually Gaines continued his ministry in this church and was quite successful in doing so. By December 1866, this church had several hundred members.²⁷

Considering the former relationship between Gaines and Davies, the rhetoric of the latter may indicate a measure of reluctance to disparage his former protégé. Davies made no effort to hide his contempt for the efforts of the group, but he refused to name them individually and stated that "some," not all, were "quite ignorant, and wholly disqualified for their mission." Using an argument that Gaines himself used concerning the appointment of black preachers, Davies asked "Can a preacher who can neither read nor write edify a congregation?" This separated Gaines from other preachers, because Davies knew full well the literacy level of Gaines.²⁸

²⁷ Fred Mosebach to Davis Tillson, Oct 1, 1866; Wesley J. Gaines to Fred Mosebach, Oct 1, 1866; W. W. Deane to Fred Mosebach, Oct 4, 1866, all in RG 105; *Christian Recorder*, August 15, 1866; *Christian Recorder*, December 15, 1866.

²⁸ *Southern Christian Advocate*, July 13, 1866.

It is also probable that Davies did not want to give names because he was careful not to invoke the wrath of Klan-like violence on Gaines and other black preachers. Violence had been perpetrated against blacks in Newnan earlier in the year, and a month earlier in Auburn, Alabama, AME preacher Robert Alexander had been beaten to death. Southern white evangelicals may have been opposed to equality for blacks, but it is likely that their only approval of violence as a strategy for suppressing black initiative was voiced in silence.²⁹

The Freedman's Bureau may have been reluctant to intervene in the dispute between Gaines and the MECS, but that does not exclude the influence of the Bureau in spiritual affairs. Granted, the Bureau espoused no theological or ecclesiastical doctrine, but there was an inherent ideological goal that blended well with the aims of the AME. Two influential Freedman's Bureau officials, John Emory Bryant and Davis Tillson, shared the Republican ideology of free labor, upward mobility, economic progress, and the egalitarian principles of the Declaration of Independence. Regardless of the difference between them in practice, they epitomized the goals of some Republicans for the reconstruction of the South. Likewise, the AME expanded the spiritual realm beyond the traditional white evangelical theology that had been used to defend slavery. In addition to the tenets of individual salvation and personal responsibility toward God, the AME included life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness as God-ordained aspects of true religion. AME espoused this ideology and, in fact, accepted it as part of their God-given identity. As Bishop, Wesley Gaines asserted that the AME had never been a political church, thus indicating that its self-consciousness ideology was spiritually based and

²⁹ The account of the beating and death of Robert Alexander is found in Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Alabama Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1870, M809 Roll 23 "Miscellaneous Papers".

bestowed by God, not politically motivated. To former slaves, this translated into civil, political, and economic rights. Several black ministers, therefore, encouraged the continuance of the Freedmen's Bureau in Georgia, because the agency was the only resource for protecting the rights and privileges of the former slaves and they did not trust local and state civil authorities to help gain and secure the rights of the freedpeople.³⁰

Although the AME claimed churches in all major cities in Georgia by mid-1866, missionary activities in some rural areas proceeded at a much slower pace. Freedmen in rural areas remained tethered to the white church, perhaps because they had no other buildings in which to meet. There the practice of separate services for black members continued after emancipation almost as though nothing had changed. The limited resources of the AME allowed this control to remain until such time as churches were formed and the former slaves had the choice to join an AME church.³¹

Despite the wishes of the white leaders to foster cooperation between the denominations, the actual events reveal a less than enthusiastic response by local whites. Policies and decisions of the MECS Annual Conference may have been less influential in rural areas when dealing with property issues and the status of the freedpeople. In an 1866 report of the spiritual conditions of Corinth church near Talbotton in the Columbus District, pastor L. R. Redding was more concerned about the need for a new building for

³⁰ Ruth Currie-McDaniel, *Carpetbagger of Conscience: A Biography of John Emory Bryant*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987); Paul A. Cimbala, *Under the Guardianship of the Nation: The Freedmen's Bureau and the Reconstruction of Georgia, 1865-1870*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997); *Christian Recorder*, June 9, 1866; Gaines asserted "While the A. M. E. Church believed fully in the freedom of the race and appreciated those who brought about that freedom, this church is not and never has been a political church no more than is any other Christian church." See Gaines, *African Methodism in the South*, 22. He, of course, was conveying his own political moderation to the AME despite evidence to the contrary, namely the actions of many AME ministers who were quite active in politics during Reconstruction.

³¹ Like Columbus, urban areas throughout the state had separate buildings for black congregations. Savannah and Augusta had several black churches with large congregations. Separation from the MECS came quickly in those cities, as noted before in the case of Andrew Chapel. See Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*, 71-72.

the whites. "I am perfectly satisfied that the prosperity of this church would be very materially increased by locating and building at Plattsburg a new church, turning over the old one for use of the colored (sic) people" wrote Redding. Whereas previously the white Methodist missionaries in this circuit had shown great concern for the spiritual condition of the slaves, it now appeared that they gave less priority to spiritual matters.³²

A more egregious case of white apathy, which was abetted by conflict between the native black preacher and the northern black missionary, occurred in Stewart County. During its first session, the AME Georgia Conference appointed Theophilus G. Steward as pastor of the black congregation of Methodists in Lumpkin where he began his work on July 7, 1867. Steward was one of three northern AME missionaries supported by the American Missionary Association who accompanied Bishop Payne when he entered South Carolina to begin the work in the South. When he arrived in Lumpkin, he found "opposition of a most peculiar kind." The blacks had shown remarkable initiative by securing a lot and buying a building from the whites for \$150. The whites gave up this building after they constructed a new building for themselves, similar to the actions of the church in the Talbot circuit. Part of the agreement was that the blacks had to move the building from the existing location within a certain period of time, which Steward soon learned, was about to expire. By the time of Steward's arrival, the black initiative had run its course. Although they had made the deal to get the lot and the building, they had paid nothing on the building and had made no effort to move the building. In fact, Steward reported that they "were sitting down apparently helpless and hopeless." Apparently, the native preacher was unable, or unwilling to try to complete the work. The opposition

³² *History of the Talbot Circuit, Columbus District, Georgia Conference, Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, Talbot Circuit Folder, Box 4-18-4, Arthur J. Moore Museum, Epworth by the Sea, St. Simons Island, Georgia.

encountered by Steward was in the person of the current black preacher Thomas Crayton, whom Steward described as “a native minister, very poorly equipped for his task.”

Steward felt that this preacher was extremely unhappy about being replaced by Steward and this was evident in his opposition to Steward’s work.³³

As Walker points out, this situation required a minister with organizational skills. Indeed this was the case as Steward proved to have the required skills. He immediately set a date (August 1st) to move the building and began assigning various tasks to various groups of blacks. He organized the children to obtain nails for the new roof and raised a group of young men who agreed to furnish the shingles. He organized a society of women and gave them the responsibility of furnishing the building with new windows. As planned, the move began on the first of August as two carpenters supervised the move. They cut the building into sections and 30 men carried it to the new site. The first meeting in the new church took place on August 25th and the new roof was completed on September 12th.³⁴

Walker used the example of Steward’s work to show how AME ministers produced and experienced success in church building in less than desirable conditions. Walker, however, does not mention the conflict between Steward and Crayton, nor does he describe the apathy of the whites. It is obvious that the whites simply carried out a convenient financial transaction but did little if anything at all to assist the blacks. Steward indicated that he faced opposition, but did not offer many details about the role of whites, other than stating that they were pessimistic about black success and not in favor of it at all. The white Methodists had a more congenial relationship with the native

³³ Theophilus Gould Steward, *Fifty Years in the Gospel Ministry* (Philadelphia: A.M.E. Book Concern, n.d.), 92, 95.

³⁴ Walker, *Rock in a Weary Land*, 70; Steward, *Fifty Years in the Gospel Ministry*, 93-96.

black pastor Thomas Crayton, having worked out the initial arrangement for the acquisition of the building. The arrival of Steward in July, however, coincided with the emergence of the Republican Party in the South facilitated by Congressional passage of the Military Reconstruction Act in March. The act placed the South under military rule and authorized military commanders to register voters and hold elections, thus enfranchising blacks and guaranteeing the election of black officials. To the whites in the area, Steward embodied the convergence of religious and political reconstruction. He was not only a black minister that sought complete ecclesiastical independence from whites, he was also a northern Republican who served in the Freedmen's Bureau and as an election manager for Stewart, Quitman, and Webster counties.³⁵

Another factor that seemed to surprise and threaten white southern Methodists was the strong agency displayed by the former slaves when the AME sent missionaries into the emancipated South to claim the former slaves and create an independent Methodist denomination. On August 9, 1867, Steward recorded the following in his diary: "Got the court-house to hold meeting on Sunday afternoon. People opposed to our work trying every way to break us up. They are too late." A week later he made another entry: "Raised our church today; a great disappointment to many whites who thought we would not be able to do it." It is likely that the whites of Lumpkin did not imagine that Theophilus G. Steward possessed the ability to move the former slaves to quick and successful action in creating the AME church there. The stipulation that the blacks move the old building to their own lot may have been seen as the white church rejecting and severing the connection with the former slaves. To the former slaves and the northern

³⁵ Walker, *Rock in a Weary Land*, 70; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 276-277; Steward, *Fifty Years in the Gospel Ministry*, 95.

black missionaries, however, the move may have been symbolic of total independence characterized not only by spiritual separation, but by physical separation as well.³⁶

The rise of the Republican Party in the South with Congressional Reconstruction in 1867 allowed black Methodists to participate in the process that gave them equal political rights with whites. The Military Reconstruction Act enfranchised former slaves and soon the AME was a powerful player in the nascent black political arena. The emergence of political activism by the AME Church undermined the relationship between the AME and the MECS. While the notion of black ecclesiastical independence was difficult for whites to accept, political and social equality remained totally unacceptable. Although Wesley J. Gaines denied that the AME was ever a political church, there is no doubt that political equality was paramount to the new freedom sought by the former slaves. After enfranchisement, Henry M. Turner was elected to the Georgia legislature. He also added political activism to his religious agenda and began recruiting former slaves as members of the Republican Party.³⁷

Events in Harris County also demonstrated the effects of Congressional Reconstruction. There was no significant change in the structure and relationship between the white church and the “colored charge” there until after 1867. In the summer and fall of 1866, pastor F. M. T. Brannon taught large classes on Sunday evenings, with the only major hindrance being the rainy weather that occurred on many of those Sundays. He reported that a great number of blacks were doing their best to learn to read the Bible, although some were more interested in plowing than reading. Another minister conducted a Sabbath school in Hamilton and gave instruction in reading and writing. The white

³⁶ Steward, *Fifty Years in the Gospel Ministry*, 95.

³⁷ Steward, *Fifty Years in the Gospel Ministry*, 95; Gaines, *African Methodism in the South*, 21-22; Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*, 452, 471.

ministers described the blacks as being generally content with their status and believed they exhibited no desire to join either the MEC or the AME.³⁸

It is not known whether or not the one hundred member black congregation in Harris County had a separate building, but unlike in Columbus, they had no black pastor until after 1867. Brannon continued his ministerial duties, such as conducting weddings, probably in the same manner as James V. M. Morris, a white Methodist itinerant preacher in the Augusta and Sparta areas. In 1866 and 1867, Morris preached to black congregations on Sunday afternoons after the conclusion of services for whites. He also provided other ministerial services to the freedmen, such as conducting weddings, baptizing new converts, organizing Sabbath Schools and visiting the sick. In performing these ministerial tasks, he continued the antebellum practices that sought to keep blacks under the authority of whites. The scriptures used as background for the sermons preached by Morris clearly indicate the desire to continue white spiritual paternalism. With the exception of one sermon based on Psalms 143:2, every sermon was based on passages from the New Testament. This is significant because it was merely a continuation of antebellum practices that eschewed Old Testament imagery of Moses freeing the Hebrew slaves from Egyptian bondage and emphasized the New Testament scripture that stated “Slaves, be faithful to your master.” Some former slaves accepted this continued paternalism, but most rejected it and eventually went to the AME church.³⁹

³⁸ *Southern Christian Advocate*, Oct 22, 1866.

³⁹ *Ibid.*; Ephesians 6:5, King James Version; James V. M. Morris diary, Woodruff Library, Emory University.

Brannon officiated several marriages between freedpeople in Harris County in the latter part of 1867 as recorded in Harris County Court of Ordinary, Marriage Records Book B. *Christian Recorder*, January 20, 1866; *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1861-1865*, 11-13.; *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1866*.

By the end of 1867, however, the political and spiritual influence of the AME showed significant progress. Brannon reported that “by the interference of political agitators, the colored people have become alienated from us, and for several months, have been indifferent to the ministry of the Word.” Based on his assessment, Brannon suggested that a black pastor be assigned to the church. Reports from other areas also demonstrated the exodus of blacks into the Promised Land of the AME; the Burke Colored Mission near Savannah had been discontinued because the members united with the AME.⁴⁰

Addressing the political status of the AME Church in the South Carolina Conference in 1867, a committee stated that other denominations sought “to antagonize us with that element and power which has brought freedom and manhood suffrage to our country.” This resolution was evidently aimed at the MECS and it stated the goal of the AME as an instrument of God was “to lift the black race up from degradation.” It also defined the enemies of the AME as those who would cause division and seek to destroy the church. This rhetoric indicates a difference in definition of the term “politics” by the AME and the MECS. The latter interpreted any attempt by blacks to take part in the political process as defining the AME as a political entity. The former only did what those with full and equal citizenship would do – use the political process to promote their welfare as a people and as a church. As Gravely points out, whites focused on the spiritual nature of the church to urge the blacks to stay out of politics. At the same time, however, whites rationalized their own support for Andrew Johnson against the Radical Republicans. The emergence of black political power and its connection to the AME

⁴⁰ *Minutes of the South Georgia Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1867.*

brought to the surface the issue of property. Whites would not relinquish titles to property that might be used for support of the Republican agenda.⁴¹

The process of separation of blacks in large urban Methodist churches appears to have taken less time than that of rural churches. That they existed as separately housed congregations is certainly true, but the determination and definition of independence is subjective. Regardless of the control exerted by the white church over its black congregation, urban churches that had their own buildings enjoyed a higher degree of autonomy than their rural counterparts, which continued to meet in the white church buildings. Events in Columbus, however, demonstrated that the transition from slave church to free church, even in an urban area, was no short process. Many of the factors involved in the transition from freedom, such as property disputes, political conflict, and economic disparities, are evident in the events that eventually created the large and magnificent St. James AME church in Columbus. When William Gaines visited Columbus in 1865, he probably addressed the congregation in the building on the corner of St. Clair and Mercer streets, which was built by St. Luke church for its black members in 1849. It was there that Wesley J. Gaines met his brother and officially joined the AME denomination and afterward was given authority to organize churches in Muscogee and Chattahoochee counties. The date of official sanction as an AME church is unknown, but by October 1865, whites recognized Mack Stewart as the pastor of the black Methodist

⁴¹ Smith, *A History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 520; Gravely, "The Social, Political, and Religious Significance of the Formation of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Methodist Church," 18.

church, regardless of the absence of official recognition of that congregation as an AME church.⁴²

The rhetoric used by Wesley J. Gaines does not accurately account for the state of the AME church in Columbus. He was partially correct when he stated that the “colored Methodists were withdrawn from fellowship” because freedom brought the former slaves an escape from the paternalism of the whites. However, his rhetoric indicates a complete separation, which was not yet true. Although not physically withdrawn from the whites, a social withdrawal was definitely under way. Writing of the year 1865, the historian of St. Luke reported “The negroes had been freed and were rejoicing vociferously in that freedom.” Evidently the former slaves wasted little time trying to gain religious autonomy. The black congregation associated with St. Luke was perceived by the whites as being “antagonistic to the Southern Church.”⁴³

For several years, the blacks that had *de facto* possession of the church building at St. Clair and Mercer Streets and the whites that had title to the building wrangled with each other over ownership. This congregation may have assumed a separate identity with the arrival of William Gaines in 1865, but several local black Methodists were more concerned with the role of the church in the community than they were about the affiliation of the church. Responding to a rash of robberies in the city, black citizens met in the black church and passed a resolution to disassociate with “any colored person, male or female, who commits any act detrimental to the well being of the colored people.” Among the signatories were Mack Stewart, Harry Stubbs, Edmund L. Bailey,

⁴² Columbus *Daily Sun*, September 2, September 5, and October 5, 1865; Gaines, *African Methodism in the South*, 10; Mack Stewart’s surname is also spelled Steward. This variation is commonly found in references to the white Stewart family as well.

⁴³ Gaines, *African Methodism in the South*, 10; Dudley, *History of St Luke , South*, 71.

and Washington Love. The former three would serve consecutive terms as pastor of the church until the appointment by the AME in 1867 of South Carolinian David Pickett.⁴⁴

With emancipation, Mack Stewart probably anticipated a new role for himself in the Methodist church. He had been involved in the Methodist church since 1812, most recently as a free black. It is not known when he came to Columbus, but the white family that owned him came to the area around 1830. Charles Dawson Stewart moved from Greene County, Georgia to Columbus and soon became a prominent citizen. Along with his sons-in-law, John Fontaine and Henry V. Meigs, and his son George, Stewart was a leading entrepreneur in Columbus and surrounding areas. The Stewarts owned real estate in Columbus and across the Chattahoochee River in the small town of Girard, Alabama. It was here that the Stewarts resided in the area of Summerville, where affluent people in the Columbus area owned “summer” homes. Theophilus S. Stewart, another son of Charles, was a physician who lived in Columbus until moving to Cobb County in 1856. He was also a prominent citizen for several years, serving as a city alderman in 1851. In 1862, Theophilus purchased land in Columbus as trustee of Mack Stewart and released the land to Mack in June 1865 when Mack paid the full purchase price “out of his own means” to obtain the property in his own right.⁴⁵

Mack became associated with St. Luke Methodist Church because Charles D. Stewart, a long-time member of the church. Charles’ son George was ordained a deacon in the church and served as an itinerant preacher at his own expense for several years.

⁴⁴ The officials at St. Luke acutely exercised less restraint and control over the use of this building, because in September 1865 a black man from Boston addressed a large number of men, women, and children. *Columbus Daily Sun*, September 2, 1865; *Columbus Daily Sun*, October. 5, 1865.

⁴⁵ John Martin, *Columbus, Geo., From Its Selection as a “Trading Town” in 1827 to its Partial Destruction by Wilson’s Raiders in 1865*, Part II, 1846-1865.; Alexander I. Robison to Theophilus S. Stewart, Muscogee County Deed Book M, Page 192, June 24, 1865.

Mack probably accompanied George on his itinerancy and thus became a prominent person to the congregation of slaves in and around Columbus. Since 1831, the slaves owned by members of St. Luke Methodist Church had worshipped separately from whites and, since 1849, had occupied a brick church several blocks away from the white church. Stewart had been a free black for several years, so emancipation had a different meaning to him. Although as a pastor he retained a higher status than other blacks, the advent of emancipation decreased his status over blacks who were no longer enslaved.⁴⁶

The case of Mack Stewart in Columbus sheds some light on the feelings of whites towards local black preachers soon after emancipation. The lack of black missionaries hampered efforts of the AME, so the church found it necessary to sanction preachers from among the local congregations. It had been the practice of the MECS to ordain black deacons and preachers in some cases, but always under the careful direction of white authority. A preacher like Mack Stewart was literally in two ecclesiastical worlds – he was in the position to be solicited by the AME to be one of their pastors, while at the same time he was a black preacher who had experienced the typical paternalism of white clergy and was probably trusted by whites. He was well respected by the editors of the *Columbus Daily Sun*, and Henry M. Turner called him “a great man.”⁴⁷

Other black preachers may have been in the same position as Stewart. Fortune Robinson was from Columbus and as a slave was owned by Methodist preacher W. W. Robison. Several ministers associated with Andrew’s Chapel in Savannah were owned by white ministers. It is probable that their experience was similar to Mack Stewart’s in that they had been in the white Methodist church for many years and had accompanied their

⁴⁶ Dudley, *History of St Luke*, 71; Harold Lawrence, ed., *Methodist Preachers in Georgia 1783-1900* (Tignall, Georgia: The Boyd Publishing Company, Ltd., 1984.), 529.

⁴⁷ *Columbus Daily Sun*, October 5, 1865; *Christian Recorder*, March 17, 1866.

masters on ministerial efforts. Stewart, Robinson and other blacks may have been among those who, according to Stowell, “shared a genuine emotional attachment [to whites] which manifested itself in a harmonious division and continued interaction after separation.” The radical change called for by AME leaders may not have been possible with local blacks like Stewart and Robinson. Although they may have had close connection with whites, these local blacks embraced the notion that the AME offered more than the MECS in the way of religious and political freedom. When Stewart volunteered to leave Columbus to serve the Appalachian (Florida) Mission in June 1866, Harry Stubbs replaced him as pastor of the black congregation. After Stubbs served for about two months, Edmund Bailey replaced him. It is probable that Bailey, Stubbs, and Stewart were too closely connected with the whites of Columbus to effect the clear separation sought by the AME, hence the appointment of David Pickett to the pastorate of the Columbus congregation to replace Bailey in 1867.⁴⁸

The assignment of Pickett also coincided with a more aggressive political activism by the AME in Columbus. On Monday, May 20, 1867 freedmen gathered at the AME church to hear Henry M. Turner and the scalawag George W. Ashburn. According to the editor of the Columbus Daily Sun, Turner “was extreme” and “Ashburn made a violent, vindictive Radical speech.” Not all freedmen, however, were impressed by the tone of Turner and Ashburn. Scipio Lane, in a letter to the newspaper, criticized Turner for giving a speech that “was anything but calculated to harmonize the two races.” He added, “I am a friend to the South and dislike to hear the country that gave me birth abused by Rev. Mr. Turner or any one else.” Washington Love, who had signed the

⁴⁸ Mary Jane Galer, ed. *Columbus, Georgia: Lists of People, 1828-1852 and Sexton's Reports to 1866* (Columbus, Georgia: Iberian Press Co., 2000); Official Records of the War of the Rebellion, Series I, Volume XLVII; Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*, 91; Columbus *Daily Sun*, May 5 and May 12, 1867.

resolution against robbery in 1865, wrote to the newspaper to correct the conception projected by the person who reported on the meeting. Love bluntly wrote that he “did not say a word as endorsement of the radical views of Ashburn or any other speaker.”⁴⁹

The trustees of St. Luke also responded to the activism of the AME by adhering to the resolutions passed by the General Conference in 1866 regarding the use of property by the AME congregations that maintained fraternal relations with the white church. They appointed a committee to study the transfer of the building to the AME and this committee adopted and sent to pastor David Pickett the following resolution:

Resolved, that so long as the Colored Church now occupying the (Brick) Church shall retain the present connection with the A. M. E. Church, and that Church shall in good faith continue its fraternal relations to the M. E. Church, South, said colored congregation shall have the use of the church building as when they were members of the M. E. Church, South.⁵⁰

The term fraternal relations connoted at least two things. First, the black members would remain affiliated with the AME, which prevented them from changing affiliation to the MEC, which was still despised by the MECS for its anti-slavery stance. Second, the AME church must continue to be non-political. The message was clear: speeches of the nature of those given by Turner and Ashburn threatened the right of the AME to continue to use the brick building.

The editor of the Democratic newspaper Columbus *Daily Sun* also contributed to the effort to intimidate the AME. The Sunday edition of the newspaper contained a section entitled “Church Directory” that gave the meeting times, locations, and names of pastors of all churches in Columbus. Since the summer of 1865, this directory included information about the “colored” churches. In the December 4, 1867 edition, the editor

⁴⁹ Columbus *Daily Sun*, May 23 and May 24, 1867.

⁵⁰ Dudley, *History of St Luke*, 77.

mentioned that some readers had observed that the paper neglected to place the prefix “Rev.” before the names of the colored pastors. In fact, the editor noted, Elder Turner had used this fact to give claim to his charge that there is unfairness in every relation with which the whites treated the blacks. With biting sarcasm, the editor replied “If they wish to call their preachers ‘Reverend’ we have no objection. All we know are good men and highly thought of. We’ll call ‘em that way, too, of the other hurt feelings, especially as we never expect to run for office. Next time we’ll put in the ‘Rev’ if we think of it, as we are not fond of being preached about or held up as examples of any body.” For at least the next two years, the newspaper excluded information about the black churches from the Church Directory.⁵¹

In 1868, white Methodists refused to give up easily in their desire to retain some measure of control over the former slaves. There was, however, an indication that perhaps the political activities of the AME had yielded fruit. In April, thirty-two blacks were elected to the General Assembly. In May, the trustees of St. Luke petitioned the city alderman for permission to dispose of their interest in the property and building. It is possible that the trustees resigned themselves to the reality of AME political success, but events in the summer revealed the determination of whites to maintain white supremacy. Klan-like activity increased in Georgia and employers punished politically active freedmen by discharging them from working and living on their plantations. In September, Democrats and white Republicans conspired to remove blacks from office. The removal of black political influence and the expected results of violent white intimidation could have persuaded the St. Luke trustees to believe that black religious

⁵¹ Columbus *DailySun*, December 4, 1867.

power should, and could, also be curtailed. In August, the trustees rescinded their May petition.⁵²

Politics aside, the AME congregation in Columbus, now called Asbury Chapel, demonstrated remarkable growth as seen from the 1868 reports from their Sabbath Schools. The number of members significantly increased and by 1869 the congregation put plans into motion to fund and build a new church building. Across the Chattahoochee Valley, AME churches were growing in number and membership. In the Cuthbert District, ten AME congregations existed; the Macon district included three congregations within the Chattahoochee Valley. The AME congregation in Columbus numbered approximately 2,000 and there was a new mission in Columbus, which probably contributed to the organization of St. John's Chapel, the second AME church in Columbus.⁵³

Some number of blacks, however, chose to remain as members of St. Luke. They obviously agitated for a more equitable position within the white church and persuaded the St. Luke trustees to take action. In 1870, the year that the CME was formed, St. Luke purchased a building from the Baptists for a remnant of remaining blacks to forestall that congregation from joining the AME. In 1884, black Methodists founded the first CME

⁵² Alan Conway, *The Reconstruction of Georgia*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), 165-168; Minutes of the Board of Alderman, Columbus, Georgia, Book F, pp. 338, 351; For an account of the Klan activity in Georgia and other southern states, see Allen W. Trelease, *White Terror: Ku Klux Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971); For primary documentation of events in Georgia, see LaWanda Cox and John H. Cox, eds. *Reconstruction, the Negro, and the New South* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1973)

⁵³ Columbus *Daily Sun*, August 30, 1868; *Christian Recorder*, April 17, October 23 and November 5, 1870.

church in Columbus, known as Holsey Chapel, and it is probable that some remnant of the black members of St. Luke were among the founding members.⁵⁴

Another instance in 1871 demonstrated the continuously ambiguous nature of relations between black and white Methodists in Columbus. The St. Luke congregation granted the trustees of the “Colored M. E. church” all the right and title to property, but continued to appoint white ministers to oversee, in some measure, the property used by the blacks. St. Luke appointed a white minister to supply the black church in 1872 and it is likely that the property issue between St. Luke and the black church was not resolved to the measure of full black autonomy until the latter part of 1873. Although the Church Directory published in the Columbus *Daily Enquirer* showed Asbury Chapel as a separate “colored” church in June 1872, as late as November of that year, the AME admitted that the Columbus church, despite having a membership of approximately 2,000, was “somewhat under question, as to our right and title.”⁵⁵

The unresolved issue of property title neither precluded nor encumbered the vibrant growth of the black congregation. By 1873, the church boasted the largest Sunday School in the city. The Columbus *Daily Enquirer* reported twenty baptisms in the Chattahoochee River by Reverend W.H. Noble on Sunday, May 18, 1873 and the following Tuesday, approximately 800 members of Asbury Chapel members, including 500 children, marched from the church to the Howard grove in Linwood to enjoy recitations, speeches, music, and food. Rev. Noble and the pastor of St. John AME led a protracted camp meeting north of the city near Fortson in the latter part of August. The

⁵⁴ Dudley, *History of St. Luke*, 79; History of Holsey Chapel CME, Holsey Chapel CME vertical file, Columbus Public Library.

⁵⁵ Columbus *Daily Enquirer* June 24 and July 2, 1872; *Christian Recorder*, November 20 1873.

meeting drew large crowds, including almost one thousand who took a train to the meeting on Sunday the 31st.⁵⁶

Although former slaves desired to have ecclesiastical freedom, the actions of Wesley Gaines in Columbus during his pastorate of Asbury Chapel demonstrate some level of accommodation to white religious society. Stowell's description of the freedpeople's vision of religious reconstruction does not include pragmatic accommodation to southern white religious leadership. Indeed, Stowell asserts that blacks needed to establish their own churches because southern white ministers could no longer care for the spiritual needs of blacks. The rejection of southern white assistance may have been ubiquitous after the collapse of cooperation between the AME and the MECS in 1866. Gaines, however, understood the benefits of cooperation with and solicitation of the whites of Columbus. Political action may have been a key to social and political equality, but Gaines understood that black religion that excluded political characteristics resulted in continued financial support from white contributors. Gaines returned to Columbus in February as the new pastor of Asbury Chapel and the remarkable growth of the church continued. Gaines continued his rejection of a political role and established a record of cooperative relations with the whites of Columbus. Most importantly, he accepted the theological mentorship of Joseph Key, the pastor of St. Luke, the parent church of Asbury. In June, the church enjoyed a revival that lasted at least three weeks and yielded almost two-hundred new members. Twenty-six of these new members joined on the night that Dr. Key preached. In a letter to the *Christian Recorder*, Gaines reported the results of the revival and the promise of the local whites to help with the construction

⁵⁶ Columbus *Daily Enquirer*, May 20, May 21, and September 2, 1873;

of a new building. He did not, however, mention in the letter that the MECS minister Key had preached a fruitful sermon.⁵⁷

The phenomenal effort of the AME ministers and the desire for religious freedom bore the fruit of a growing congregation in Columbus. Gaines had indeed seen the “smile of God” at the time of his emancipation and it appeared God’s smile was a continuing presence in his life. The building was overwhelmingly insufficient to meet the needs of the congregation and Gaines led in the formulation of plans for a new building. In November, the members of Asbury Chapel asked the city Commons Commissioners to provide them with a lot on which to erect a new building.⁵⁸

By 1875, after a tumultuous time of Reconstruction during which Georgia had re-entered the Union three times, the fortunes of black Georgians rested in the hands of the Democrats. White rule was firmly in place and the glimmering hope of a “New South” was on the horizon. Waning Republican interest did not prevent radicals from trying to protect some vestige of Reconstruction. The Republicans managed to garner enough support in 1875 for a new civil rights bill to at least fire some kind of parting shot throughout the South. Part of the effort was a new Civil Rights bill that prohibited discrimination in public accommodations and access to facilities such as restaurants, theaters, trains and other public transportation. Benjamin Butler maneuvered the bill through the protests of apathetic Democrats and Republicans and it became law on March 1, 1875.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Columbus *Daily Enquirer*, June 20 and July 8, 1874.; *Christian Recorder* July 9, 1874; Columbus *Daily Enquirer*, Nov. 14, 1874; See Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*, 73-79.

⁵⁸ Columbus *Daily Enquirer*, November 14, 1874.

⁵⁹ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 553-556.

Southern whites did not trust the apathy of many northerners. Instead they viewed the bill as a full forced attempt to continue Reconstruction and they looked to continue suppressing and intimidating blacks. When the Columbus Commissioners of Commons granted the request of the Asbury Chapel trustees, they knew that the Civil Rights bill was being formulated and they sought to continue white control of the political arena. Their grant stipulated that the three-fourths of an acre on the commons could only be used for religious purposes. Otherwise, the title would revert back to the commons.⁶⁰

In March 1875, construction began on the new Asbury Chapel building, but controversy regarding the political involvement of Gaines threatened to disrupt white support for his ecclesiastical endeavor. When word reached the editors of the Columbus *Daily Enquirer-Sun* that Gaines had written a Philadelphia newspaper to voice support for the Civil Rights Bill, they met with him and asked for an explanation. Ironically, on the day they met with Gaines, the newspaper reported the laying of the cornerstone of the “African M. E. Church” and, in a separate article, the editor praised both Gaines and Baptist pastor Green McArthur for urging their congregations to act moderately within the context of the recently passed Civil Rights Bill. The next day, however, the editor reported the meeting with Gaines and chastised him for acting more like a politician than a preacher and for writing “letters which tended to injure our section – the very men from whom he was seeking aid.” The editor quoted the letter to have Gaines saying “[Blacks] pray for its passage nightly and they should do so. God has made all of one blood, and the black man should have every right the white possesses.” Gaines claimed that he had not been fairly represented by whoever brought this to the editor’s attention. His explanation,

⁶⁰ Columbus *Daily Enquirer*, January 13, 1875; In 1883, the Supreme Court declared the Civil Rights Bill of 1875 unconstitutional.

which included a statement about his lawsuit against a Macon railroad for being ejected from a white passenger coach, framed his support for the bill in non-radical terms in that his support of the bill was representative of what “every negro desired.”⁶¹

Gaines, more than likely feeling the pinch between federal interposition and local reality, quickly made penance, probably through political silence. His subsequent actions are unknown, but his record of political moderation helped to repair any potential damage to his reputation among white supporters and he proceeded to raise over \$400 for the new church building from among the white citizens of Columbus. A few days after the meeting between the editor and Gaines, the newspaper reported that the basement of the building was nearing completion. A month later, the editors described the progress of the construction of the new building and described Gaines as “one of the most industrious and energetic men in his work we have ever seen.”⁶²

Throughout the spring and summer, Gaines and the congregation continued to raise money to complete the new building. In April, the congregation gave a supper that included competition between the Methodists preacher Gaines and E. P. Holmes (of St. John AME) and Baptist minister Green McArthur for the title of “most popular colored preacher.” Votes cost five cents each and, not surprisingly, Gaines received the most votes. Other “contrivances were resorted to” and the venture raised a total of \$303.10. Gaines also went north to visit Boston and other cities where he obtained approximately \$300 and a plentiful supply of books. The success in raising funds allowed for continued construction and regular payments for labor and material.⁶³

⁶¹ Columbus *Daily Enquirer*, February 17, March 11, and March 12, 1875.

⁶² Columbus *Daily Enquirer*, March 23 and April 10, 1875.

⁶³ Columbus *Daily Enquirer*, April 10, May 8, and August 4, 1875.

The congregation dedicated the new building on Sunday, the Fourth of July 1875, and held a protracted revival in September. Each night for two weeks, with some loudly annoying services going on past midnight, Reverend Gaines preached with such energy that the revival ended only because of the mental and physical drain imposed on him. During the two weeks, 76 people converted and joined the church, plus another 16 joined by transferring their membership from other churches. Forty persons were baptized and there remained another 200 probationists. Symbolically, the break from St. Luke was finalized with the adoption of a new name. This congregation no longer belonged to Asbury Chapel, the old mission of St. Luke. The people were now members of St. James African Methodist Episcopal church – a large visible structure that gave evidenced testament to their resilience.⁶⁴

There were, however, a few more cosmetic issues with the building that had to be addressed. The window fixtures were not complete and there was some plastering needed for walls both inside and out. Work proceeded slowly over the next nine months and many church members felt disheartened over the lack of progress. Gaines again called upon the support of the white community to provide monetary assistance. With the exception of the episode related to his letter to the Philadelphia newspaper, Gaines had demonstrated to the whites of Columbus that his goals for uplifting the blacks were sufficiently void of political behavior. The editor of the *Columbus Sunday Enquirer* believed whites would contribute to the church and they expressed “no hesitancy in endorsing him as a good Christian man, worthy of the respect and confidence of the community” because “[He] attends faithfully and strictly to his duties as pastor. We have never heard of his mingling in politics.” Some whites responded to Gaines’ request and

⁶⁴ *Columbus Daily Enquirer*, September 15 and September 21, 1875.

took advantage of an offer to make an excursion via train to Macon at the cost of \$2 for a round trip. Approximately 450 people - eleven full cars, including one car of white passengers - made the trip and this resulted in a net gain of \$300 for the church.⁶⁵

As Gaines continued to lead fund-raising efforts, one excursion gained the attention of the newspaper editors. Gaines had made arrangements with the railroad officials to provide daily transportation to a nearby camp meeting for 35 cents per passenger, with the stipulation that half of the proceeds would be returned to the railroad. The need for additional funds to complete the St. James building became secondary to the economic needs of white people. As important as the spiritual needs of blacks were, it was the need for labor that most concerned the editors. They asserted that this excursion would “greatly interfere with the picking of cotton” as “[E]very hand is needed in the whitened fields, and this assemblage will have a tendency to draw them off.” Since the end of slavery blacks sought ways to get out of the fields and this statement by the editors represented a conflict between the desires of whites to remand blacks back to slavery-type field labor and the goal of blacks to chart their own course. Despite the end of slavery and even in the face of white paternalism in black spiritual matters, whites remained committed to the assignment of blacks to a subservient labor class.⁶⁶

By November, the remaining work on St. James had been completed and the building was a structure valued at \$20,000 and was part of the landscape that “all would be proud to look upon.” In a time in which ownership of property signified black progress, the black Methodists of Columbus now had a magnificent common possession. Columbus now boasted two vibrant AME congregations – the initially independent

⁶⁵ Columbus *Sunday Enquirer*, June 18, 1876; Columbus *Daily Enquirer-Sun*, July 25, 1876.

⁶⁶ Columbus *Daily Enquirer-Sun*, September 7, 1876.

congregation of St. John and the congregation at St. James, which had been tethered to St. Luke, but had now left the anteroom and entered their great palace in the Promised Land. The former represented the burgeoning spiritual growth of a free people and while the latter had been forged through the fiery furnace of biracial social, political, and religious complexities. Both, however, demonstrated the remarkable efforts of former slaves in the Chattahoochee Valley through their initiative and agency as they experienced freedom.⁶⁷

W. E. B. Du Bois succinctly described the black experience of Reconstruction as he wrote “the slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again toward slavery.” Although the Reconstruction amendments set the stage for the civil rights movement in the twentieth century, blacks failed to acquire full and equal social, economic, and political opportunities. Political reconstruction may have been a “splendid failure,” but the successful efforts of the AME, although delayed and complicated by white interference, brought about a splendidly successful religious reconstruction. Separation from white churches was not quickly done due to limited resources, white resistance, and an early attempt to preserve some fraternal relationship with the MECS. Finally, however, the AME in Georgia removed itself from further influence of the MECS and became the political and spiritual haven for most of the former slaves. It was in the white-less autonomy of the AME church that blacks found spiritual fulfillment. It was also in these churches and in the central figure of the black preacher that blacks found the cohesiveness to fashion a uniquely black social and political culture.

Politically, the AME became victim to the fracturing of the Republican Party in the South

⁶⁷ Columbus *Sunday Enquirer*, November 12, 1876; *Christian Recorder*, December 23, 1876; *Historical Sketch of St. James African Methodist Episcopal Church*, St. James AME vertical file, Columbus Public Library, Columbus, Georgia.

and, like most blacks, felt abandoned. Within the span of a decade, however, the AME had made remarkable gains in the mission fields of Georgia. Black Methodists in Georgia entered Canaan and completed their spiritual exodus. The ecclesiastical autonomy and religious independence so eagerly sought appeared to be living and breathing in the Chattahoochee Valley as the Gospel Horse had indeed been ridden in the white man's pulpit.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Du Bois quoted in Foner, *Reconstruction*, 602; For a clear and concise evaluation of Reconstruction see Foner, *Reconstruction*, 602-612; Conway provides an earlier revisionist look at Reconstruction in *The Reconstruction of Georgia*; Angell, *Bishop Henry McNeal Turner and African-American Religion in the South*, 68-71; Drago, *Black Politicians and Reconstruction in Georgia*, 1982), 88-89.

Chapter 6

“He Finally Broke Loose” Baptists and Religious Reconstruction

After the Civil War, white southern Baptists demonstrated little initiative to reunite with their northern brethren. In 1865, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) rejected an overture from northern Baptists to unite in mission work with the American Baptist Home Mission Society (ABHMS). Still reeling over the war-time seizure of southern church property by the ABHMS, southern white Baptists at both the state level and within the SBC unanimously favored continued separation. They also believed the northerners would focus on political issues and black equality, and southerners wanted no part of that. For the next several years, the ABHMS and the SBC discussed ways to cooperate, but joint efforts did not occur until 1894.¹

Baptist autonomy, however, rendered actions by the SBC much less important than those of local congregations. Like the Methodists, white southern Baptists responded to emancipation by initially demonstrating a desire to retain the status quo in the “spiritual relationship” between whites and former slaves. White Baptists envisioned a continuance of the subordination of blacks to the paternal actions of whites in spiritual matters. Within months of the end of the Civil War, white Baptist churches and associations across the South passed resolutions that attempted to define the proper relationship between whites and former slaves. In August 1865, the Columbus Baptist Association adopted a resolution offered by Reverend James DeVotie, pastor of First Baptist Church Columbus, regarding the spiritual obligations of the whites toward their former slaves: “Resolved, that it is the sense of this Association that the change in the

¹ Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*, 166, 176-177.

relations heretofore existing between ourselves and our slaves, does not relieve us as Baptists Christians from obligations to exert ourselves as before to promote their spiritual welfare.” White Baptists should continue to promote the spiritual welfare of the former slaves and this would best be served by continuation of the existing relationship. The Columbus Baptist Association also passed a resolution calling for the organization of Sabbath Schools for the children of men regardless of class, condition or color. There was little doubt that emancipation would bring political and social changes, but white Baptists sought to minimize the effect of emancipation on spiritual matters. Although they would assist in the formation of independent black Baptist churches, they emulated white strategies in political affairs by attempting to slow down the process of spiritual emancipation.²

Historian Rufus Spain generalizes that for several months after the war, white Baptists accepted the responsibility to continue to preach to freedpeople, but in 1866 they shifted the emphasis to training black preachers to work among their own people. The Baptist policy of congregational autonomy renders this generalization problematic and makes difficult the determination of a consensus Baptist position. The resolutions of the churches and associations, however, entertained no doubt that white paternalism should continue unabated. Baptists, like their Methodist counterparts, soon realized that the freedpeople resisted this effort to control them and were intent on bringing about one change – the formation of their own churches.³

² *Minutes*, Columbus Baptist Association, 1866, 5; Basil B. McGinty, *History of East Liberty Baptist Association, Chambers County, Alabama 1836-1961*, 68.

³ *Minutes*, Columbus Baptist Association, 1857; *Minutes*, Columbus Baptist Association, 1865, 6, *Minutes*, Columbus Baptist Association, 1865, 12; *Minutes*, Columbus Baptist Association, 1870, *Minutes*, First Baptist Columbus; Kenneth K. Bailey, “The Post-Civil War Racial Separations in Southern Protestantism: Another Look,” *Church History*, 46 (December 1977): 455-456. Spain, *At Ease in Zion*, 53. Spain’s work typifies the Anglo-centric historiography that was supplanted by the work of Foner and other revisionists..

The motivation to create independent black Methodist churches – the refusal of whites to offer blacks an equal place within their congregations and the black quest for self-determination – also played a central role in the establishment of independent black Baptist churches. The democratic nature of church governance in local Baptist congregations made white Baptists especially sensitive to the changed status of blacks. As was the experience of other southern evangelical denominations, the withdrawal of blacks drastically reduced the biracial membership numbers. In 1857, there were 23,720 black members in churches of the Georgia Baptist Convention. By 1870, the number of black members was 9,705. The Columbus Baptist Association reported 1,048 black members in 1857 and 1,387 in 1864; by 1870 only 375 remained on the church rolls. By end of Reconstruction, Georgia Baptists counted only 1,906 black members out of a total of 80,700 members.⁴

Alwyn Barr, in his study of black urban churches in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas, found that biracial Congregational, Episcopal and Presbyterian churches tried to retain control over blacks longer than other denominations with Episcopalians maintaining Sunday Schools for blacks as late as 1872. Records of biracial Baptist churches in the Chattahoochee Valley, however, indicate that white Baptists attempted to retain some measure of control over blacks several years after that. Organization of separate black congregations consisted of several tasks which varied with each congregation. Like the Methodists, property was an issue but in a different way with Baptists. Many urban Baptist churches, like the Methodists, had erected separate buildings for exclusive use of the blacks during the antebellum period. Unlike the Methodists, Baptist churches were autonomous not only in polity and practice but also in

⁴ *Minutes*, Columbus Baptist Association, 1857, 1870.

ownership of property. While whites were not inclined to contribute to any spiritual equality that might contribute to social equality, institutional separation in many Baptist churches was, especially in rural areas, a lengthy process that involved cooperative contact between blacks and whites.⁵

In addition to the fact that local Baptist congregations were autonomous and democratically governed, several other factors complicate the chronology of black separation and the creation of independent black Baptist churches. A lack of physical resources was perhaps the main reason for the lengthy process of separation. Urban churches likely had either a separate building for the black congregations, or a relatively greater ability to quickly provide resources to the freedpeople with which they could establish a separately housed congregation. Rural churches were more likely to lack these resources, although this was not always the case. Both blacks and whites were frustrated over the lack of needed resources, both physical and human. Just as the greatest desire of freedpeople was for the ownership of land, the greatest practical need for Christian freedpeople was to have a separate, independent meeting place. A new church structure would be a physical icon that signified a clear break with the past.⁶

Whites in urban biracial churches with black majority memberships may have been eager to effect separation to prevent those majorities from attempting to exercise control under the parameters of Baptist polity. Conversely, rural biracial churches with minority black memberships perceived no acute threat of a black ecclesiastical takeover. Even in cases that demonstrated the outwardly peaceful and cooperative nature that many

⁵ Alwyn Barr, "Black Urban Churches on the Southern Frontier, 1865-1900." *Journal of Negro History*, 82 (Autumn 1997): 368. Barr's findings also show that black Baptist congregations experienced growth and stability in the 1880s, a pattern also found in black Baptist churches in the Chattahoochee Valley.

⁶ Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*, 468.

times characterized the separation of black and white Baptists, there were signs of conflict, racial discord, and a sense of frustration among both blacks and whites. Despite the common goal of having an independent church, there was sometimes disagreement among black members that may have complicated and elongated the process of separation. The continued defense of racial order and the assertiveness of whites may have retarded the process of black separation, though it could also provide further impetus. Irons noted that black Virginia Baptists “held white religiosity in contempt” and whites “found their self-identity as benevolent paternalists shaken” in the face of black desires for separation. In some cases, however, both blacks and whites who were accustomed to the antebellum practice of holding separate services and conferences for black members saw no immediate reason for separation. Also, familial and religious bonds that had been forged during slavery contributed to a measure of hesitation among former slaves to separate from whites.⁷

All of these factors have conspired to render an ambiguous historiography regarding the timing, causes, motivation, and outcome of the separation of blacks from biracial Baptists churches. Spain concludes that by 1870 the process of separation in the former Confederate states was virtually completed. Irons notes that the exodus of blacks from white churches in Virginia occurred more quickly than in South Carolina and Georgia suggesting perhaps that black evangelicals who did not encounter the Union army until late in the war may have been the slowest to organize their own churches. His observation that almost all black evangelicals in Virginia and in the South had left white-dominated congregations by 1875 demonstrates the difficulty in incisive chronology

⁷ Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity*, 249; Spain, *At Ease in Zion*, 52; Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*, 75.

regarding the creation of independent black churches. The variability of chronology that marked the separation of blacks from Baptist churches in the Chattahoochee Valley further complicates the historiographical ambiguity. For example, First Baptist Columbus issued letters of dismissal to black members less than four months after the end of the Civil War, but that process did not formally occur at Bethany Baptist Church in Harris County until 1875.⁸

Eric Foner writes “With the death of slavery, urban blacks seized control of their own churches.” The imagery of a quick and forceful seizure was encapsulated in the actions of the freedpeople in the First Baptist Church of Cuthbert when they refused to accept continued white interference in the choice of their own pastor and withdrew en masse without seeking consent of the whites. Blacks at Cuthbert reacted as they did in response to a conflict over having their own preachers. The white members, expressing the feeling that they were “responsible to some extent for the character of the ministry [being] dispensed among them from our pulpit,” refused to allow any black preacher to use the pulpit other than Green McArthur without the consent of their pastor and deacons. The actions of these freedpeople, however, proved to be an exception to the otherwise protracted and outwardly peaceful separation of blacks from white churches in the Chattahoochee Valley. The actions of the whites at First Cuthbert, when they subsequently disclaimed all responsibility for the new black church, was also an exception to the actions taken by most white Baptists. One white Baptist wrote that Baptists should deny all responsibility for the exodus of black members from white churches and then “we shall be innocent of any evil consequences that may arise from it.”

⁸ Spain, *At Ease in Zion*, 151-154; Irons, *Origins of Proslavery Christianity*, 248-249; *Minutes*, First Baptist Columbus; *Minutes*, Bethany Baptist Church, Harris County, (GBCR, Mercer, MF #351).

Statements such as this, when compared to the helpful actions of many white Baptists during the black exodus, reveal an inconsistency between rhetoric and action among white Baptists, which was undoubtedly molded by the autonomous nature of Baptist congregations and honest disagreements among blacks and whites about how and when separation should occur.⁹

In his study of Alabama Baptists, Robert Praytor explains the separation process in terms of a transition from concern to neglect on the part of white Alabama Baptists. Agreeing with Spain, Praytor attributes the growth of white apathy to the fear of whites that continued close contact with blacks would lead to social equality. As they faced the reality of the “social dilemma called Reconstruction,” they hastened the separation of black from whites and a decline in concern. He argues that by 1869, white Baptists in that state had shifted from mass evangelization of blacks to an emphasis on the instruction of a few black ministers. This represented the deterioration of relationships between the races and a lack of concern for the religious welfare of blacks by white Baptists. By 1870, according to Praytor, relationships between black and white Baptists at all levels (convention, association, and local church) were almost completely severed.¹⁰

⁹ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 88; Iva P. Goolsby, Florence T. Moye, and Cornelia M. Mattox, *Randolph County, Georgia – A Compilation of Facts, Recollections, and Family Histories* (Randolph County Historical Society, 1977), 57; *Christian Index*, February 24, 1866; *Minutes*, Cuthbert First Baptist Church, Randolph County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #672). Another historian assumes that the demise of slavery at the end of the Civil War also meant the concomitant end of biracial churches. Noting that a black man joined a white Baptist church in Macon in 1966, Mark Newman stated that the new member “was the first black person to join a Southern Baptist church in Georgia since the Civil War.” Although Newman was focusing on events in the latter part of the twentieth century, his statement nonetheless demonstrates the problematic nature of post-bellum chronology and the level of understanding among historians of the chronology and contingency of the post-bellum separation of black and white evangelicals. See Mark Newman, “The Georgia Baptist Convention and Desegregation, 1945-1980.” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*. 83, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 704-710.

¹⁰ Robert Earl Praytor, “From Concern to Neglect: Alabama Baptists’ Relationship to the Negro, 1823-1870” (M. A. thesis, Samford University, 1971), 54, 59, 74-77; Spain, *At Ease in Zion*, 52.

Cooperation between blacks and whites and the self-sacrificing efforts on the part of whites is marginalized by historians who posit the centrality of black agency in the formation of independent black churches. Any measure of cooperation between whites and blacks must always be seen in the context of white paternalism and the desire to extend that in every circumstance. Foner credits black initiative and agency as the foremost characteristics in building the black community during Reconstruction. Undoubtedly, the actions of former slaves constitute a most remarkable effort in bringing blacks out of the shadows of slavery, especially in the creation of independent black churches. The focus on the centrality of black initiative and agency posited by Foner and others, however, obscures the cooperative nature of the relationship between black and white evangelicals in the aftermath of slavery. Cooperation between blacks and whites took several forms including, but not limited to, sharing the same buildings, blacks asking whites to serve in administrative roles, and whites providing land to black congregations. This cooperative relationship was especially evident in Baptist churches where the decentralized, autonomous nature of the churches promoted pragmatic rather than dogmatic action. To be sure, Baptist orthodoxy was married to societal racial norms and white Baptists sought to continue white hegemony. There were, however, less egregious actions taken by whites to effect black ecclesiastical separation. The distinction between presumptuous paternalism and pragmatic altruism is not easily discerned by examining records of Baptist churches. Indeed, as Foner points out, “blacks emerging from slavery pooled their resources to purchase land and erect their own churches.” This they did but, probably more often, land and buildings could not be acquired without some measure of white assistance.¹¹

¹¹ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 88-95.

Samuel S. Hill adds to the chorus of historians who posit black agency as the central theme of religious reconstruction. He claims that black knowledge about church life “was less organizational than theological,” but the protracted process of separation in Baptist churches in the Chattahoochee Valley belie his claim that “[w]ith respect to creating organization, they learned to form their own because whatever they had, they had to form for themselves.” Noting the assistance from northern black churches, Hill excludes, however, assistance from southern whites. Stating that “[black] churches were overwhelmingly the products of freed men and women’s faith capacity for a kind of in-service training - that is, learning to organize by organizing,” Hill presents a history totally void of southern white inclusion.¹²

The experiences of churches in the Chattahoochee Valley gives evidence to the thesis of Kenneth K. Bailey, who asserted that “C. Vann Woodward's cursory reference to "the voluntary withdrawal of the Negroes from the white-dominated Protestant churches, often over white protest, in order to establish and control their own separate religious institutions" is a notably inadequate characterization.” Unlike Foner, Bailey sees difficulty determining “...the extent to which the color separations can be attributed to the initiatives of whites rather than blacks.”¹³

Likewise, Edward R. Crowther’s description of “persistent post-bellum inter-action between white and black evangelicals” in Alabama cast more shadows on Foner’s interpretation. In Crowther’s view, after the Civil War black Baptists continued to accept some level of paternalism from white Baptists as the latter tried to demonstrate that the

¹² Samuel S. Hill, “Religion and the Results of the Civil War,” in *Religion and the American Civil War*, ed. Randall M. Miller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 364.

¹³ Kenneth K. Bailey, “The Post-Civil War Racial Separations in Southern Protestantism: Another Look,” *Church History*, 46 (December 1977): 453-473.

master was the best friend of the former slaves. Obstinacy certainly pervaded white reactions in the face of black initiative, but in many cases the benevolent actions of whites appear to exclude strong expectations of continued paternalism.¹⁴

An examination of Baptist churches in the Chattahoochee Valley during the Reconstruction period offers both evidence of and challenges to the historiography of this era. For example, it is not accurate to suggest that the blacks of First Baptist Columbus “seized” control of their church. The actions of the white members of that church in allowing the organization of the First African Baptist Church in August 1865 document their role in this “seizure” by the blacks. The white congregation initially addressed the changed relation between owner and slave by recognizing the wishes of the black members to organize their own independent church or churches. In conference on the morning of August 13, 1865, members of First Baptist Columbus unanimously authorized the dismissal of the entire black membership, numbering somewhere between 597 and 634, and authorized pastor DeVotie to assist in the organization of the African church. They also unanimously voted to convey unto the black members the building on Front and St. Clair that they had used as a house of worship since 1858. That afternoon, DeVotie reported that he had assisted the dismissed black members in forming the First African Baptist Church and that twenty of the former slaves desired to organize a separate church. The whites of First Baptist Columbus, numbering perhaps 300 less than the black membership, had quickly separated the blacks and removed any possibility of

¹⁴ Edward R. Crowther, “Interracial Cooperative Missions among Blacks by Alabama's Baptists, 1868-1882,” *The Journal of Negro History*, 80, No. 3 (Summer, 1995): 131-132.

governance conflict that may have ensued with a majority black membership that was no longer legally enslaved.¹⁵

Events at First Baptist LaGrange demonstrated the diverse nature of the separation of black and white Baptist churches. Unlike First Baptist Columbus, there was no separate building for blacks in LaGrange, but there had been separate conferences since 1834. In September 1865, the LaGrange members authorized a white member, Brother Logan, to work in a Sabbath School for the blacks. In November 1865, the pastor of First LaGrange was granted authority by the church to get help as he sought to administer the “colored charge.” In a paradoxical move, the church effected a pecuniary separation of blacks by putting the financial burden on the black members by authorizing the pastor to “supply such pastoral help for the colored part of our church as he may think best and they can pay for.” Organizational separation commenced in December when the church granted letters to “the colored members of the church for the purpose of organizing themselves into a separate body.”¹⁶

Since the black members had no building, in January 1867 they sought to rent the basement of the white church. The white members voted to appoint a committee to meet with the black pastor, J. T. Montgomery, to make arrangements, but the two parties could not agree on the terms, probably due to the paucity of funds accumulated by the blacks. Eventually, an agreement was reached and the blacks commenced holding services in the basement. The agreement obviously included provisions regarding rental fees to be

¹⁵ Records of First Columbus showed the black membership of 597 in August 1865, but in a report a month later, the number of black members is shown as 634. *Minutes*, First Baptist Columbus; Foner, Eric. *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 88-89; Rufus B. Spain, *At Ease in Zion: A Social History of Southern Baptists, 1865-1900* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967), 151-154; Mark Newman, “The Georgia Baptist Convention and Desegregation, 1945-1980.” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*. 83, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 704-710.

¹⁶ *Minutes*, LaGrange Baptist Church, Troup County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #127).

assumed by the black congregation. In short, whites wanted blacks to pay their share. They also wanted blacks to share in the tasks of building maintenance. In March, 1869, the white church in conference "...resolved by the church, that the colored church, be required to furnish a sexton, or the means necessary to provide one, who shall be under the directions of the deacons." The next month "Bro Awtrey reported that he had a conference with a deacon of the colored church and that they did not feel able to provide a sexton for the church." The deacons were also instructed to meet the colored church in conference and inform them that this church expects them to pay something, according to their ability, as a rental for the use of the basement of the church for church purposes. A month later the black church expressed a willingness to comply. "Bro Awtrey and Bro Pitts attended the conference of the colored church and notified them of the expectation to pay rent and \$26.00 was collected with a promise to collect more."¹⁷

Concern over the activities of the Ku Klux Klan may have contributed to the desire of whites to help black congregants build a separate building. Though the Democrats swept the state election in 1870, Klan activity continued in 1871, reminding people that terrorism against blacks was still a strong possibility. In Floyd County, the Ku Klux burned a black church and a false rumor spread that the blacks had burned it themselves in a dispute over its location. In December, the members of LaGrange church instructed the deacons to "confer with the colored church and notify them that it would be necessary for them to vacate the basement of this building; and if they should desire to build, give them assurance that assistance should be furnished them by this church." The following month, the church was more specific in its demands on the black church when

¹⁷ Ibid.

a committee was instructed to require the colored church to pay rent “sufficient to insure the church against fire.”¹⁸

Racial tensions and differing identities were also evident as whites frowned upon the methods of worship and religious expressions of blacks. A committee of Bethel Association in southwest Georgia reported that “...religious meetings among them are generally becoming noted for extravagance and disorder, and often for performances violative of common decency.” The tension was especially acute in situations where blacks continued to meet in white owned buildings. In June 1871, First LaGrange instructed Brother Hightower to notify the black pastor and deacons of the fact that their meetings at night were disturbing the community on account of being protracted too late. The whites also requested the colored church not to hold meetings during the white church conferences. This not only demonstrated an attempt to continue control over blacks, but also was a sign that the invisible black church was now visible, separate, and probably practicing a different style of worship.¹⁹

The black Baptists in LaGrange responded to wishes of the whites and began the process of securing property and building their own house of worship. Lacking resources and facing obstacles inherent in the times, blacks in LaGrange continued to look to whites for assistance. In July, 1873 they requested the white church to appoint a committee “to devise ways and means for completing their building.” It is possible that the blacks left the white church and temporarily worshipped under a brush arbor. Rev. Anthony Williams, former pastor of Shady Grove Church in Columbus, was the pastor at

¹⁸ Ibid; Allen W. Trelease, *White Terror: Ku Klux Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 242.

¹⁹ *Minutes*, LaGrange Baptist Church, Troup County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #127); Irons, *Origins of Proslavery Christianity*, 249.

this time and the church history contains a reference to him and a member named Dunlap cutting trees and shaping them into sills and framework for a church. A permanent house of worship was eventually built by members, each giving his time to the church. After 1873, there are no more references to the colored church in the records of the white First LaGrange.²⁰

Although the formation of a separate black Baptist church took place quickly in Columbus, creation of these churches took much longer in rural areas and was almost always a protracted process. For more than a decade after emancipation, many Baptist freedpeople remained in rural white churches. Unlike urban churches, rural churches rarely had separate buildings for their black members during the antebellum period. To be sure, the practice of allowing blacks to hold separate services in the same building used by whites allowed some measure of freedom, even during slavery. Lacking the resources of the urban scene, however, freedpeople continued to be connected with whites through the sharing of the same house of worship. More importantly, use of the white-owned buildings brought with it a continuance of white paternalism and the concomitant deference to white authority in many cases. It is ironic, then, that in the most democratic of evangelical denominations, freedpeople continued to be denied ecclesiastical independence.

Events in rural Baptist churches in the Chattahoochee Valley demonstrate the factors that contributed to a protracted process of black separation and complete independence. In April 1866, the white members of Antioch Baptist Church in Chambers County, Alabama voted to let the blacks use the church house for their own services, but

²⁰ Ibid. The black church is now known as First Baptist Church while the white church is known as First Baptist Church on the Square.

stipulated that a committee of seven white men were to be present at each service. In 1867, the church met with the blacks to hear Tom Wooddy, a former slave owned by Samuel Wooddy, preach a trial sermon. It was not until 1869, however, that he was ordained by the white church and all black members requested and received letters of dismissal to form their own church.²¹

At Harmony Church in Chattahoochee County, blacks continued to be led by a white pastor for several years after emancipation. In August 1866, the congregation granted to J. H. Corley, a white minister, “the privilege ... of preaching to the colored people on Sabbath evening after regular meeting.” Almost a year later the congregation renewed the authority of Corley to “use of the church house on the evenings of the Sabbaths of the regular monthly meeting in order that the colored people might secure the benefits of preaching.” It was at Harmony during this time that there was evidence of the blacks’ freedom of movement as demonstrated by the fact that black members were not present to speak for themselves. Membership changes demonstrated cooperation between whites and blacks and the physical removal of former slaves who now had more freedom to move. In August 1866 a white member, Sister S. E. Thomas, applied for a letter for a colored sister Mariah Walker which was granted. In April 1868, a black woman, Orange Huff, “through Bro. George,” applied for and received a letter of dismissal.²²

Some rural churches moved more quickly to allow black congregants their own pastor. Benevolence Church in Randolph County ordained Green McArthur as early as September 1866, but maintained strict control over the black congregation until granting the black congregation the “privilege of holding their own conference every third

²¹ McGinty, *History of East Liberty Baptist Association*, 68.

²² *Minutes*, Harmony Baptist Church, Muscogee / Chattahoochee County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #145)

Sunday evening” in February 1867. McArthur moderated the monthly conferences with the assistance of the white pastor and with a white member acting as their clerk. This small measure of independence produced some results unsettling to the whites, who saw the need to appoint white men to attend the black conference in June. A white member replaced McArthur as moderator for the June conference and continued in that capacity until the November conference.²³

This arrangement continued at Benevolence until August 1868 when the white congregation initiated the separation of the black members into their own church. The whites appointed a committee “to confer with the coloured [sic] members of this church and advise them to draw letters and constitute a church to themselves.” A month later, the white committee reported that the black members approved of the suggestion that they constitute their own church. The black pastor McArthur requested letters of dismissal for all black members and they were granted, with one exception. Demonstrating their continued attempts to control black members, the whites refused to issue a letter of dismissal to Daniel Knighton pending an investigation into “the manner in which he is living.” Confronted with the charge of living in adultery, Knighton refused to change his living arrangement and was excommunicated from the church.

The whites at Benevolence allowed the black congregation to continue to use the building beginning in January 1869 and continuing for the next five years on the condition that they keep the church in order and repair any damages that might occur. The whites also saw fit to examine their property boundaries and designate a burying place for the blacks, thus officially separating in death those they separated in life. Whites paid less attention to the blacks during this interim as there are no records of interactions

²³ *Minutes*, Benevolence Baptist Church, Randolph County (GBCR, Mercer, MF #108).

between the whites and blacks until June 1874, when the whites voted to deny the blacks use of the building because of the “misbehavior of colored people at our last meeting.” It appears the blacks were, in some form, offending white protocol by engaging in their own styles of religious expressions. This prohibition was likely permanent as there is no mention of black members in subsequent records.²⁴

At Bethel Baptist Church in Muscogee County, as late as 1867, there seemed to be no greater degree of autonomy enjoyed by the black members as they were still considered members of Bethel. They had their own regular meetings, but still under the ministerial oversight of the white pastor. Sometime between 1867 and 1872 a physical separation took place, although the blacks were still listed as members of Bethel. At the end of 1868, there were 83 black members and 116 white members. Over the next four years, former slaves continued to join Bethel and their race was always recorded in the minutes. On May 25, 1872, a group of former slaves organized Locust Hill Missionary Baptist Church. The official separation of blacks and whites was documented in the minutes of the Bethel church conference dated October 28, 1872 as letters of dismission were granted “...to all Col Brothers and Sisters of good standing who desire it.”²⁵

A protracted series of events also characterized the process of racial separation at Antioch in Troup County and gave evidence of organizational, institutional, and racial conflict between whites and blacks. Both groups agreed that blacks should have their own church and during the church conference of February 1867, the whites entertained a petition from the blacks that requested use of the church house for their own meetings. The whites deferred action and requested that the blacks present a plan for using the

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ *Minutes*, Bethel Baptist Church, Muscogee County, Georgia; History of Locust Hill Missionary Baptist Church.

church. Whites again deferred action during the March conference because the blacks had not been able to develop and submit a plan. Evidently, for reasons not stated, the blacks were unable to develop and present a plan for several months. More than a year later, in May 1868, the church appointed a committee of five blacks and five whites to discuss the question and propriety of separating the congregations. A month later, the church adopted the suggestion of this committee. It called for the constitution of a separate black church which would use the church house for one year, provided they did not interfere with the worship of the whites, did not allow any breach of the law, and took good care of the house. The church granted letters of dismissal to “all colored members in good standing,” and appointed a white presbytery to organize the black church. During the next monthly church conference, a presbytery consisting of the white pastor and one black member met with the black members and constituted the black church. The clerk of the white congregation furnished a list of black members to the black clerk and the presbytery ordained a black preacher, designated as an “evangelist for his own color.” It is possible that disagreement among the blacks over which specific course they should take protracted the process of separation, although it seems more plausible that they were divided over the issue of continued white paternalism. Although blacks requested separation, it was the whites who finally provided the administrative force behind the creation of a separate congregation and thus devised an organization that sought to continue their control over the spiritual actions of blacks.²⁶

The constitution of a separate black congregation in Bethany Baptist Church in Harris County was also a protracted process. It was not until 1870 that the church allowed the blacks to use the church house, “provided they keep good order and shall keep the

²⁶ *Minutes*, Antioch Baptist Church, Troup County, Troup County Archives, LaGrange, Georgia.

house clean.” The blacks continued to meet there over the next several years and the white church renewed their permission to allow the blacks the use of the church in January 1874. In July of that same year, the white church “granted the Colard [sic] Brethren the privilege of constituting a church at this place.” Twenty-five blacks remained on the roll of the white church in September 1874 and the formal process of dismissing the black members did not take place, however, until over a year later in October 1875. The black church continued to use the building for another ten years. In 1884, the white church agreed to let the “colored Brethren use the house for another twelve months when we are not using it provided they will keep it on good order.” The entrenchment of a Jim Crow mentality probably brought about conflict among the whites that threatened congregational unity and led them to end the agreement with the blacks. Less than five months after the church agreed to continue the sharing arrangement with the blacks, the white congregation appointed a committee “to notify colored people that we cannot accord them the use of this church any longer without serious detriment to ourselves.”²⁷

Even after the creation of the Antioch “Colored” Baptist Church, the white church continued to accept black members, continued to discipline them, and insisted on restoring black members to fellowship before allowing them to join the black church. This practice continued for another year. The church restored Ebb Strong, a “colored brother,” to full fellowship and immediately granted a letter of dismissal in February 1869. The church also restored Ann Goss, another black member, to full fellowship in July 1869 and granted a letter of dismissal a month later. By September 1870, there were no longer any black members. The white church granted letters of dismissal to

²⁷ *Minutes*, Bethany Baptist Church, Harris County, (GBCR, Mercer, MF #351).

several black members during that month and the church minutes contain no further records of black members after that date.²⁸

Until the early 1870s, blacks at Mount Gilead Baptist in Harris County continued to be accepted as members and were treated in much the same way as they had been during slavery. Whites still evangelized, baptized, and disciplined blacks in the same manner as whites. It was also still common for blacks to be received by experience and by letter and to be excluded from fellowship because of unchristian behavior. Edna, “a woman of color” made a profession of faith and joined Mount Gilead in Harris County in September 1866. Frank, “a man of color,” made a profession of faith joined the same church in October 1867. They remained on the church roll, along with two other blacks, Frank’s wife Phena and Sarah Ann, until 1873 when the church granted letters of dismissal to them in August 1873. The membership list of September 1873 showed no black members.²⁹

The practice of whites giving land to blacks and assisting in the building of black church buildings was the most visible manifestation of cooperation between whites and blacks. Whites hastened the physical separation from blacks by doing this and gave the blacks an opportunity for which they had long desired. This was indeed a paternalistic action on the part of whites, at least psychologically, but it could have also demonstrated a willingness on the part of whites to rid themselves of an increasingly unwanted obligation. Providing land to blacks also kept them in close proximity to whites who might need to secure the labor of blacks. The white Lipscomb family donated land for the

²⁸ Ibid; Stowell documents division among blacks at a Baptist church in Albany that prolonged the final separation in that church. See Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*, 75.

²⁹ *Minutes*, Mount Gilead Baptist Church, Harris County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #577); Frank and Phena adopted the surname Bradshaw.

black Canaan Baptist Church in Troup County and the whites assisted in the organization of that church. Four years after the organization of the black church Mount Zion, also in Troup County, whites gave one acre of land to that congregation. Whites also gave land to the black Wehadkee Baptist church and thirty-six white members of West Point Baptist Church assisted in the organization of Bethlehem Baptist Church in that city. C. C. Willis, pastor of Bethel Baptist Church in Muscogee County gave land to the former black members of that church when they formed Locust Hill Baptist Church. White individuals also gave land to several black churches in Randolph County, Georgia.³⁰

Black Baptist congregations in some parts of Georgia quickly formed associations and by the end of 1865, there were four. None, however, were in close proximity to LaGrange prompting the black LaGrange Baptist Church, although still physically linked with the white church, to seek membership in the white Western Baptist Association in 1866. The white association appointed a committee to deal with the “different questions raised by this application” and they described the situation as one that should not be “carelessly considered or hastily disposed of.” The statement of the committee revealed an acknowledgment of the transient nature of any action taken by the white association. The committee stated that “...they owe alike to themselves and their race to enter at once upon a course of action by which they gradually educate themselves up to a point of intelligence where they can stand alone, and take care of themselves. The sooner they arrive at this point the better it will be for them and for us.” Demonstrating unwillingness to accept the black church as an equal member, the committee then recommended that the church be received under the watch-care of the Association and a suggestion that other

³⁰ Oliver N. Greene, Sr., *From the Brush Arbor to the Temple Beautiful: An Historical Compilation of African American Churches in Troup County, Georgia*, 86; History of Locust Hill Missionary Baptist Church; Goolsby, et al, *Randolph County, Georgia*, 30.

black churches form their own associations. The committee also promised assistance from the white association and encouraged “our white brethren, especially ministers, to visit, encourage, and instruct the colored brethren.”³¹

The process of forming independent black associations repeated the experience of biracial churches during the antebellum period. Initially there were few associations containing member churches drawn from large geographic areas of Georgia. Extant records of the black Ebenezer Association indicate that it was in operation by 1867. During that year more than twenty churches applied for membership. Applicant churches included those as far north as Bartow County and as far south as Dougherty County. This association contained churches on the western border of the state in Troup and Muscogee County and a church on the eastern border in Burke County. Additionally, an applicant church in Edgefield County, South Carolina stretched the boundary across state lines. Ebenezer was one of four geographically large associations belonging to the Missionary Baptist Convention of Georgia in 1870. By 1875, this convention included thirteen smaller associations as new associations were formed and churches in closer proximity had become part of these new associations. Mount Calvary Association was formed in 1870 and included seven black Baptist churches in Muscogee County and three in Harris County. This group of churches included First African and Shady Grove of Columbus, both of which had withdrawn from the Ebenezer Association prior to 1871.³²

By 1869, the number of black Baptists churches in the Chattahoochee Valley had increased to the point that they were doing exactly what the Western Baptist envisioned –

³¹ *Minutes*, Western Baptist Association, 1866, 6-7. Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*, 86-87.

³² Missionary Baptist Convention of Georgia, *Proceedings*, 1870, 2-3; Missionary Baptist Convention of Georgia *Proceedings*, 1875, 24; *Minutes*, Ebenezer Baptist Association, 1867, 2-3; *Minutes*, Mount Calvary Baptist Association, 1875, 10.

they were seeking help in organizing their own associations. Mount Moriah Colored Baptist Church in Stewart County sent a letter to the white Bethel Association asking for advice and assistance in organizing a colored association. The letter was referred to a committee that called Bethel the “Mother Association” to the proposed new black association. The committee recognized that “the colored brethren desire to organize an Association in southwest Georgia and a number of churches have agreed to send delegates to Mount Moriah Church, Stewart Co. on Friday before the fourth Sabbath in Nov 1870.” The committee also stated that “we rejoice in the evidence of kindly feelings, we have in this request” and proposed the appointment of a committee of nine brethren to meet with the black delegates to aid in the organization of their Association.” Black churches in Alabama also sought assistance from white associations in forming their own associations. The response from the East Liberty Association was almost identical to that of the Bethel Association as they suggested that black churches form their own associations and offered to help in any way.³³

The formation of Mount Moriah Baptist Association indicated an increase in the number of blacks who had withdrawn from white churches. In 1869, there were still 752 blacks who were members of white churches in the Bethel Association. By 1870, this number had decreased to 231. The massive exodus of blacks from white churches contributed to a “last gasp” attempt by Bethel Association in 1869 to retain control over black members. The association appointed a committee to consider their duty to the “colored brethren” and the result was a scathing report on the destitute condition of the freedmen. The report also gave a brief history of the treatment of the slaves in the churches that stated that the slaves were treated equally in spiritual matters, were allowed

³³ *Minutes*, Bethel Baptist Association, 1869, 4-6; *Minutes*, East Liberty Baptist Association, 1868, 137.

to have their own conferences and meetings of worship, had received instructions from pious clergy and white brethren of “superior intelligence,” maintained kind relations with whites, had submitted to instructions from whites as spiritual guides, and had received Biblical instructions which had led them to Jesus. In the eyes of the Bethel Baptists, the destitute condition of the freedpeople indicated a failure of white Baptists to continue their Christian paternalism. Their perceived failure, however, did not deter them from continuing to intervene in the religious life of freedmen. In 1870, the association expressed concern for their black members because they perceived them as being used as political pawns by those who challenged the politically dominant views of southern white Democrats. The report of the Bethel committee accused those causing trouble of undermining the relationship between the freedmen and their white brethren. This resulted, according to the committee, to the freedmen being removed from sound doctrine and being alienated from their white brethren. Those who had been faithful slaves in the white Baptist churches were now freedmen who are “in a condition of willful, but misguided, yet no less dangerous, destitution of the true gospel.” Despite the obvious despair over the spiritual condition of the freedmen, the committee recommended, with “no political end in view,” that the white members unite to carry the light to them “from our position of superior intelligence” and commend those few faithful and good black men.³⁴

The paucity of basic education for blacks presented a problem for blacks trying to organize their own churches and associations. The pastor of the Benevolence Colored Baptist Church in Randolph County sent a letter to the Missionary Baptist Convention in 1870 asking for assistance in his effort to obtain education. The Convention formed a

³⁴ *Minutes*, Bethel Baptist Association, 1869, 4-6; *Minutes*, Bethel Baptist Association, 1870, 8-10.

Committee on Ministerial Education that recommended that all churches throughout the state “use their utmost endeavors to assist their pastors in educating themselves.”

Benevolence still lacked an educated pastor six years later and they hired a white man, T. J. Coram, to serve as clerk for two years or until they elected a clerk from their own membership.³⁵

Another black association, the Fowl Town Baptist Association, was organized in the 1870s in southwest Georgia. This association received correspondents from the white Bethel Association as well as from Mount Moriah. Bethel and Mount Moriah, in turn, sent correspondents to Fowl Town and to each other. One white correspondent was Reverend W. H. Cooper, a prominent member of the Bethel Association who had served as pastor of several southwest Georgia churches. He assisted Fowl Town Association by serving as their clerk for the first seven years of its existence. White support took the form of clerical and administrative assistance. The minutes of Mount Moriah were in a format identical to that of Bethel as far as structure, language, and protocol. Resolutions passed in 1877 by Fowl Town Association and Mount Moriah Association contained a sentence that was identical to one passed by Bethel the year before. The sentence was “We think there is a vast field opened for good through the medium of the Sunday School, in regard to the colored people.” If authored by a black clerk, it is likely to have been in first person form. This sentence was obviously copied verbatim from the Bethel minutes.³⁶

³⁵ Missionary Baptist Convention of Georgia, *Proceedings*, 1870, 5, 7; Goolsby, et al, *Randolph County, Georgia*, 30; *Historical Sketches of Woman’s Missionary Societies and of Churches in Summerhill Association*, 28.

³⁶ *Minutes*, Bethel Baptist Association, 1876, 269; *Minutes*, Mount Moriah Baptist Association, 1877, 11; *Minutes*, Fowl Town Baptist Association, 1877; *Baptist Denomination in Georgia*, 141.

By the early 1870s, with black Baptists continuing to find ecclesiastical independence by establishing churches and forming associations, both black and white Baptists agreed that the improvement of the black race was a worthy goal, although they had different ideas about what that meant and how to achieve that. Whites continued to worry about the role of blacks in society and the intervention in their affairs by meddling northerners. As late as 1876, two white associations, Bethel and Bowen, passed resolutions decrying the fact that blacks were lacking proper teaching and were being taught sentiments by other denominations that are causing religious and social prejudice against white Baptists. This sounds remarkably similar to the resolution of Bethel Association passed six years earlier. It seemed that blacks were seeking to retain some manner of associational connection to whites and continued to find themselves caught between a desire for independence and the need for assistance from white Baptists. In 1875, the Columbus Baptist Association continued the practice of appointing correspondents to the Mount Calvary Association and Shady Grove church indicated support for the white efforts by contributing \$2 to the white association. In 1877, Fowl Town Association acknowledged their need for help from whites to teach in the Sabbath Schools and called upon “our white brethren to come and help us.”³⁷

Although religious reconstruction proceeded successfully among black Baptist congregations, the tumult of political and social reconstruction continued to interject conflict into church life. James Washington notes that blacks, North and South, realized that emancipation was more military than political and that by the 1870s black Baptists had deemphasized political equality and had begun to focus on the spiritual and material

³⁷ Columbus *Daily Enquirer-Sun*, October 13, 1875; *Minutes*, Bethel Baptist Association, 1876, 2; *Minutes*, Bowen Baptist Association, 1876, 230; *Minutes*, Fowl Town Baptist Association, 1877, 6.

needs of their congregations. White southern Baptists had always defined “spiritual” to exclude political involvement by blacks and evidence indicates some blacks accepted this paradigm. Baptist congregational democratic autonomy also contributed to less influence by outsiders and more concern for the well-being of the congregation apart from the Baptist denomination as a whole, unlike the local Methodist congregations that were subjected to pressure from hierarchical authority. Although not as politically visible in Georgia as were the Methodists, black Baptists however, were still clearly entrenched in racial politics.³⁸

Congregational autonomy, even among black Baptists, may have been more advantageous to whites who sought to continue to influence and coerce the political actions of black evangelicals. Black Baptists had no Henry Turner and, instead of aiming at conferences, denominations, conventions, and associations, local authoritarian whites could target black congregations, most likely taking aim at the pastors. Black ministers found themselves in situations that complicated their freedom and made them less independent than other blacks. Their situation was demonstrated when dealing with another issue with which black evangelicals contended – conflict within their congregations based on differing political views. The Baptist tradition of political non-involvement was tested in the nascent black congregations in Columbus during the electoral season of 1872. Although most black Baptists continued to support the Radical Republican agenda, the election of 1872 exposed latent and passive schisms among blacks in Columbus. Grant’s beleaguered first term tumbled into the election season

³⁸ James Melvin Washington, *Frustrated Fellowship: The Black Baptist Quest for Social Power* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986), 112-122; The ministers involved in politics in Georgia during the Reconstruction period were mostly Methodists. See Drago, *Black Politicians and Reconstruction in Georgia*, Appendix C.

facing dissenters within the Republican Party. They advocated civil service reform, tariff reduction, lower taxes, an end to land grants to railroads, and most importantly to the white South, an end to federal intervention partially defined as a return to local (white) self-government. Thus the Liberal Republicans were born. This departure from the Radicals, however, did not include the desertion of southern blacks. The Liberals insisted that the Reconstruction amendments be enforced, thus allowing for support among Southern blacks. The choice of Horace Greeley and Gratz Brown as the party's presidential ticket demonstrated the almost hypocritical nature of the selection process as chief organizer Carl Schurz and others carried on an array of back-room activities, including some negotiations with Democrats over the possibility of a joint ticket.³⁹

With the protectionist Greeley came dissatisfaction among tariff reformers but a concentrated focus on a new policy for the South – support for home rule and the call for blacks to “Root, Hog, or Die.” These policies, in effect calling for the return of white conservatism, were compatible with Democrat ideology and many felt that Greeley was the best chance to defeat Grant. Southern Republicans were also attracted to the moderate course of the Liberal Republicans, which may give them leverage in states, such as Georgia, where, by 1870, Democrats had begun reclaiming political power.⁴⁰

Abolitionists, who had seen their original goal realized and now were the guardians of the promises of Reconstruction, could not support Greeley's accommodation to southern whites. A Civil Rights bill, introduced by Charles Sumner, was a corpse lying around somewhere in the halls of Congress, having been weakened through the process and eventually killed by political maneuvering. Grant, however, had regained black

³⁹ Washington, *Frustrated Fellowship*, 112-122; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 499-503.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 503; Judson C. Ward, Jr., “The Republican Party in Bourbon Georgia, 1872-1890.” *Journal of Southern History*, 9 (May, 1943): 196-197.

support with his aggressive movements against the Ku Klux Klan. To the abolitionists, their continuing concern for the welfare of the freedmen certified overwhelming support for Grant. Some blacks, however, supported Greeley because of his reputation for opposing slavery and supporting equal rights for blacks. The support of Greeley by Sumner also contributed to black support for the former.⁴¹

Blacks that supported Greeley organized “Greeley and Brown Clubs” around the country. In Georgia, these clubs were organized in July, first in Savannah and then Augusta. On Saturday night, August 31st, a crowd of about 400 blacks and whites met in Columbus at the Muscogee County Court House to form the (colored) Greeley and Brown Club of Muscogee County. White Democrats used the occasion to take advantage of the small, though threatening, schism among blacks and spoke in favor of Greeley at the gathering. The blacks passed a resolution in support of Greeley and officially organized the club. Understanding the importance of black ministers to the black community and assuming that the local Baptist ministers were more conservative than their Methodist counterparts, the organizers chose the pastors of three local churches to be officers of the club. Unfortunately, the pastors had not attended the meeting and were not immediately aware that they had been chosen. One pastor, still unaware of his proxy position, arrived at his church the following morning and was “met by an angry, radical, ignorant crowd, composed of such bullet-headed darkies as frequent Radical meetings.” The crowd would not allow him to preach and managed to make a motion that he be

⁴¹ James M. McPherson, “Grant or Greeley? The Abolitionist Dilemma in the Election of 1872.” *American Historical Review*, 71 (Oct., 1965): 43-61; For varying interpretations of the election of 1872, see Richard Allan, “The Liberal Republicans of 1872 in Historiographical Perspective.” *Journal of American History*, 62 (June 1975): 40-73. For details and an analysis of the election of 1872, see Matthew T. Downey, “Horace Greeley and the Politicians: The Liberal Republican Convention in 1872.” *Journal of American History*, 53 (March 1967): 727-750.

removed from the church. Only when he swore on a Bible that he was completely ignorant of his selection was he allowed to take the pulpit.⁴²

As leaders of freedmen, black ministers during Reconstruction had been the target of Klan violence and fear of such reactionary actions must have never been far from their minds. Urban black ministers may have also been concerned about their livelihood. Green McArthur, pastor of First African Baptist, was not too far removed from an unstable occupation, having been employed as a “huckster” according to the 1870 Randolph County census. Less than two years later he was the pastor of the largest black church in Columbus and earning a steady income. To accommodate local whites and to show whites a facade of political conservatism, the three pastors acted quickly to explain their circumstances. They met with Frank W. Gunby, Chairman of the “Colored Club, Muscogee County,” and persuaded him to explain the actions that led to their selection as officers. It was understood, Gunby explained, that they were chosen because they were “leading men, of prominence and intelligence,” and they could “serve or resign, as they saw fit.” McArthur asked the editor of the newspaper to explain that “his pastoral labors occupy all his time, and he cannot devote attention to politics.” The editor supported McArthur’s claim that he was selected Vice President of the club without his consent and praised him for preaching “the religion of Christ.” The two other ministers, Nelson W. Ashurst, pastor of the colored church across the river in Girard, and Primus Stafford, pastor of Second African Baptist (Shady Grove), jointly authored a letter to the

⁴² Columbus *Weekly Enquirer*, July 23, 1872; Columbus *Daily Sun*, September 3, 1872; *Georgia Weekly Telegraph and Journal & Messenger*, September 10, 1872

newspaper in which they claimed to be “staunch Republicans,” but as “ministers of the Gospel, do not desire to take an active part in politics.”⁴³

The formation of the Greeley and Brown Club of Muscogee County fostered a flurry of rhetorical activity and posturing by whites and blacks. Jim Watson, son of the former pastor of First African Baptist, had attended the organizational meeting and heard his name placed in nomination as an officer. He went to the offices of the *Columbus Daily Sun* three days after the organizational meeting to explain that he, too, was chosen as an officer without his consent. Noting that Watson was a teacher employed by the city to teach in a colored school, the editor sardonically excoriated him and described him as a one who is “fond of words of four syllables that are not found in dictionaries and wonderful deductions.” He was acting, according to the editor, under the “influence and threats [of] Radical negroes.” It is probable that Watson had been chastised by his father, a supporter of Grant.⁴⁴

Seeking to intimidate radical blacks and to promote and elevate the cause of conservatism among blacks, the editor of the newspaper described black supporters of Greeley and Brown as “pioneers in a great moral movement that will prove of immense advantage to their race and to their section.” The editor allowed A. J. Ketchum, a black organizer of the Greeley and Brown Club, use of the newspaper to admonish “his race” to consider the dangers of the “political persecution” exhibited at the church. He stated that he was “grieved to see it exhibited in a profoundly religious assembly of my people.”

⁴³ Manuscript Census Returns, Ninth Census of the United States, 1870, Randolph County, Georgia, Schedule 1, Population; *Columbus Daily Sun*, September 3 and September 4, 1872.

⁴⁴ *Columbus Daily Sun*, September 3 and September 17, 1872.

Taking an accommodating posture, he denounced party fanaticism and warned blacks not to “endanger your new found rights.”⁴⁵

Black Baptist ministers in Columbus could not escape the political torrents of the time, but strove to keep themselves focused on preaching the Gospel of Christ and not Radical politics – at least in the eyes of whites. That one black pastor faced an angry crowd that was large enough to intimidate him demonstrates that most of his congregation, as was the case with most blacks, supported the Grant ticket. As evident by their initial nomination in the Greeley and Brown Club, however, there must have been some number of blacks who assumed the pastor might favor a more conservative political stance. In their role as tacit leaders in their communities and being aware of the self-identity of their congregations, the pastors may have had difficulty positioning themselves within the tradition of Baptist polity and still, in effect, standing up for social and political equality. The election of 1872 presented blacks with a unique dilemma – Grant or Greeley – but it also presented an opportunity to identify themselves as “staunch Republicans” while taking a political posture that outwardly accommodated whites. To deflate the political conflict, the black Baptist pastors contended that they had no time for politics, thus pleasing whites and giving blacks a reason for not being involved in overt political activity, be it conservative or radical. It is possible that these black ministers shrewdly hid behind the specter of Baptist polity and tradition and effectively used the newspaper to their advantage without alienating their congregants.

Blacks involved in the belabored process of establishing independent black Baptist churches were also involved in another effort to remove themselves from white control – they sought individual autonomy in the form of a new name. Identity as a free

⁴⁵ Ibid., September 5, 1872; Columbus *Weekly Enquirer*, September 10, 1872.

person represented one of the most important possessions of former slaves. Not only did former slaves want a visible institutional church of their own, they also desired to be known as a free, valuable person with an identity to others imbued with a positive self-esteem. For decades after the end of slavery, whites continued to relegate blacks to an almost invisible status in society. On March 20, 1875 a monstrous storm system that spawned several tornados assaulted the Chattahoochee Valley. About 11:00 o'clock a "whirlwind" passed about two miles south of Hamilton and continued several miles southwest of that place. South of Columbus, a tornado destroyed Beulah church in Stewart County. The most severe damage was done by a tornado that arose nine miles northeast of Columbus and hit Harris and Talbot Counties. Bethesda church in Harris County was totally destroyed as were Mt. Vernon and Valley Grove churches in Talbot County. The death toll in Harris and Talbot counties numbered twenty-six, broken down as ten whites and sixteen blacks. While all of the white victims are identified by name, none of the blacks are identified, other than to note where they were killed.⁴⁶

The refusal of whites to identify black victims allowed whites to continue to marginalize the existence of the blacks in a white society. The act of choosing a surname demonstrated a meaningful social identity for blacks. Herbert G. Gutman points out that blacks had surnames even during slavery, but most of the slaves' surnames were not those of their owners and were rarely acknowledged by whites. After emancipation, whites began to recognize black surnames, but this was not an immediate action on the part of whites. In slavery, the church represented one place where slaves achieved the

⁴⁶ Columbus *DailyEnquirer-Sun*, March 23, 25, 1875; *Minutes*, Columbus Baptist Association, 1875, 9.

highest level on the ladder toward equality with whites. After slavery, however, former slaves had to wait for years to find an identity that was not linked by whites to slavery.⁴⁷

Ironically, the church that gave slaves a relatively high status during the antebellum period also hindered former slaves in their quest for a new identity. Baptists saw no reason to make any adjustments in the way of recognition of freedpeople. In April 1867, two years after emancipation, Antioch Baptist Church in Troup County received by experience Hannah Whatley and the clerk described her as “colored, formerly the property of Rev. V. D. Whatley.” In April 1866, Darien Primitive Baptist Church in Chambers County, Alabama, excluded Joe, a “man of color and formerly a servant of Jacob Bailey,” for falsehood and theft. In September 1866 at Rehoboth Baptist Church in Harris County, Thomas, “a freedmen formerly the property of O. Ely” joined the church and in May 1867 David a freedmen, formerly the property of W. H. Thompson also joined. Even in cases where a former owner was not listed, the blacks continued to be listed a “colored” and listed separately from whites.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Pantheon Books, Random House, Inc., 1976), 230; Based on exhaustive research in several southern states, Gutman concluded that few slaves retained the surname of their former masters. Many freedpeople did not choose the name of their immediate past owner. Some surnames were those of earlier masters instead of the most recent one. Others simply chose surnames that had no connection to their owners. Kenneth H. Thomas, Jr., based on research of a Marion County plantation and post-bellum labor contracts, found that members of one slave family may have multiple surnames and, in some cases, slaves adopted a new given name and made their slave name their surname. Records of Baptists churches in the Chattahoochee Valley also demonstrate the eclectic nature of surname choices among freedpeople. Of the seventeen blacks identified in post-bellum records of Bethany Baptist Church, nine retained the names of their owners. Compared to the research of Gutman and Thomas, this indicates a higher level of adherence to the names of former owners. Other records of Chattahoochee Valley churches, however, and newspapers and marriage records, clearly follow the models found by Gutman and Thomas. See Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925*, 230-256, *passim*, and Kenneth H. Thomas, Jr., “A Note on the Pitfalls of Black Genealogy: The Origins of Black Surnames.” *Georgia Archive* 6 (Spring, 1978), 22-30.

⁴⁸ *Minutes*, Antioch Baptist Church, Troup County, Georgia; *Minutes*, Rehoboth Baptist Church, Harris County (GBCR, Mercer, MF Reel #187); *Minutes*, Bethel Baptist Church, Muscogee County, Georgia; *Minutes*, Darien Primitive Baptist Church, Chambers County, Alabama; *Minutes*, Ephesus Primitive Baptist Church, Chambers County, Alabama.

By the end of Reconstruction, black churches claimed autonomy and independence, but it is historically inaccurate to suggest that these black churches were created as they withdrew from whites churches. Any view toward that end simply posits a white-centric view of black history. Unfortunately, the paucity of chronologically exhaustive written records of black churches complicates the process of accurately recording black church histories. Indeed, the actions of blacks are, more often than not, hidden within the voluminous collections of white church records. As Irons notes, in many cases the actions of blacks can be deduced by examining the recorded actions of whites as they react to undocumented black initiatives. Contemporarily accepted histories published by congregations, both black and white, lack much historical authority and represent a conglomeration of orally documented traditions, reconstructed memories, parochialism, and even some historical facts. Granted, the audiences of these histories are church members who seek to promote fellowship and religious patriotism in their churches. These histories do, however, contain glimpses of truth from which inferences can be made and assumptions constructed. Unlike the WPA narratives, they are typically free from outside interference and obstructions to good communication. In the case of black churches, histories reflect the significant influence of memories of former slaves. Maggie Meredith edited a history of Locust Hill Baptist Church in 1972 and stated that she had been part of the church since 1920. It is highly probable that she knew and listened to former slaves or the children of former slaves and created her history based on handed-down memories.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Irons, *Origins of Proslavery Christianity*, 18; *History of Locust Hill Missionary Baptist Church*, Midland, Georgia, presented to the church November 2, 1980; For an analysis of the use of oral history see John W. Blassingame, "Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves: Approaches and Problems," *Journal of Southern History* 41 (November 1975): 473-492. I suggest that these church histories, while diluted by some of the problems

The appropriation of Christianity by slaves for their own religious purposes molded a spiritual identity separate from that assigned them by whites. Former slaves, while recalling their membership in white churches, place the creation of their churches during the antebellum period, thus claiming a separate identity that preceded the post-bellum separation. In 1879, members of the First African Baptist Church in Columbus laid the corner stone for their new building and claimed a separate historical identity. Granted, they accepted that they had been co-members in the white church, but noted that they were given a separate building and that separately their membership increased. The history of this church, as created and maintained by its members, traces its beginning to the time when whites made a building available in 1842 and allowed them to worship separately. The documented efforts of whites in assisting in the organization of independent black churches, and any histories that are derived from that documentation, have their basis in an assumed continual paternalism. In historical memory there continues to be a dual identity in which blacks accept their history as members of white churches, but also define and describe an independent identity based on their own interpretation of a chronological birth.⁵⁰

Founding members of Locust Hill Missionary Baptist Church in Midland were former slaves who had been members of the white Bethel Baptist Church. Their history includes a reference to slaves assembling themselves together. Records of Bethel confirm separate meetings for the black members, but the inference in the black church history is

described by Blassingame, do not have “two authors” and thus have significant value in historical interpretation.

⁵⁰ *History of First African Baptist Church*, Columbus, Georgia; *Columbus Sunday Enquirer-Sun*, September 28, 1879.

that the assembly of slaves was apart from both the physical and organizational structure of the white church.⁵¹

The documented history of Greater Shady Grove Missionary Baptist Church shows an independent establishment in 1865 when the pastor of First Columbus helped twenty former slave members organize a second African Baptist church. Contemporary members of the black church, however, accept that their church was established “under a grape arbor in an oak grove” in 1863. The twenty black members of First Columbus who desired their own church probably represented the core of the congregation that had worshipped under the grape arbor in 1863. According to the records of Greater Shady Grove Missionary Baptist Church, the white pastor DeVotie met with two black ministers - Rev. Watson (pastor of the First African Baptist Church), and Rev. Griggs - in the home of Boston Miles to organize the church. The first official members were Boston Miles, Mary Moore, and Anthony Williams, the latter of whom would serve as the second pastor of Shady Grove and later pastor of LaGrange Colored Baptist Church. The church was named Shady Grove to commemorate its first place of worship and soon began meeting in a building owned by the white church. Even with a place to meet provided by the white church, the black congregation considered itself to be a destitute church because it did not have sole ownership of a house of worship and only had twenty-six members in 1867. At the end of that year, however, the church reported the baptism of sixty-six new members. This notable increase in membership continued and by the summer of 1870, the membership had increased to about 250. “The meetings are well attended by all denominations...the strictest decorum is kept by the deacons and

⁵¹ *History of Locust Hill Missionary Baptist Church*, Midland, Georgia, presented to the church November 2, 1980.

members.” Although this black congregation assumed the name of Shady Grove and was known by that name as early as 1866, most newspaper reports and associational records continued to refer to this congregation as Second African Baptist Church or simply Second Baptist Church as late as the mid-1870s.⁵²

Another aspect of church history that demonstrates the identity of black churches with antebellum origins concerns the names assumed by black churches after separation from whites. Blacks developed a sense of belonging in some churches that carried over into the days after emancipation. When they formed their own congregations, most black churches adopted new names, but several retained the same name as their parent white church. The blacks who left Bethany Church in Pine Mountain chose to keep that name as their own. This was also the case with the Mount Olive Church and Bethlehem Church in Harris County, First Baptist in LaGrange, Benevolence Church in Randolph County, and Wehadkee Church in Troup County.⁵³

The historiography of these black churches supports the thesis of Larry E. Rivers, who challenges interpretations that show the antebellum independent black church as ineffective and virtually nonexistent. He posits the idea that recent historiography hints at a more vibrant, viable black church, but historians “rarely ventured far in their speculation.” Rivers argues that historians have underestimated the number of organized, independent black congregations and licensed or ordained black preachers. He examines black Baptist, AME, and CME churches in Florida and the black preachers who

⁵² *History of Greater Shady Grove Baptist Church*, Columbus, Georgia; When this church sought incorporation in 1968, they discovered that there were several churches named Shady Grove in Georgia. The members agreed to add the word “Greater” to the name.; *Christian Recorder*, July 21, 1866; *Columbus Daily Sun*, February 6, 1869; *Columbus Daily Sun*, July 6, 1870; *Minutes*, Ebenezer Baptist Association, 1867, 2-3; *Minutes*, Mount Calvary Baptist Association, 1875.

⁵³ The 1875 date for dismissal of all black members does not match the 1877 date shown on the cornerstone of black Bethany Baptist Church. The historical marker in front of the white Bethany Church dates the creation of the black Bethany to 1885.

organized or supported these churches during the antebellum period as evidence that whites did not always maintain strict control or supervision over black congregants. Members of the congregation that would become Shady Grove Baptist Church worshiped in their invisible institution at night with each member bringing kindling wood or pine knots with which to build a fire. Thus, Rivers' thesis about black churches in Florida also applies to churches in the Chattahoochee Valley that also find their roots in pre-emancipation activities. The experience of these churches reflected the creation of an enduring institution with significance in the present.⁵⁴

Statistics cannot completely tell the story of spiritual reconstruction, but numerical evidence indicates that the invisible institution, the black church in slavery, became visible. Aside from the documented presence of slaves in Baptist churches during the antebellum period, there were probably a significant number of slaves that chose, if they could, to stay in the invisible black church. In 1864, Baptist churches in Muscogee and Harris counties reported 1,292 black members. In 1875, black Baptist churches in these two counties reported a membership of 2,214 – no small increase in the span of eleven years. There were 250 black members in the white Mount Olive church in 1865. The black Mount Olive church reported 415 members ten years later. First African Columbus had almost 200 more members in 1875 than they had in 1865. Other factors may have contributed to the increases in black church membership numbers, but it is clear that the participation of blacks increased after emancipation.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ *History of Greater Shady Grove Baptist Church*, Columbus, Georgia; Larry Rivers, "Origins of the Organized Clergy in Florida's Slave Community" Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Georgia Association of Historians at Fort Valley State University, Fort Valley, Georgia, Feb. 22-23, 2008. I am indebted to the author and Canter Brown, Jr. for making this article available to me.

⁵⁵ *Minutes*, Columbus Baptist Association, 1864, 1865; *Minutes*, Mount Calvary Baptist Association, 1875.

The separation of black Baptists from white churches in the Chattahoochee Valley was a process that cannot succinctly be described and explained. Racial identities, conflicts over racial etiquette, political conflict, religious expressions, resources shortages, Baptist polity, and the ever-changing uncertainties of the Reconstruction period conspired to produce a process with no clear historiographical orthodoxy. There is, however, little doubt that the creation of independent black Baptist churches signaled a successful venture for former slaves. Immediately after the war, one Chattahoochee Valley slave owner told his former slaves "...Go on back to your cabins and go to bed, dey are your homes and you can stay on here as long as you want to." By the time Reconstruction ended, black evangelicals had chosen not to.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ "Life Story as Told by Aunt Easter Jackson Ex-Slave." In *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography Volume 12 -- Georgia Narratives, Parts 1 and 2*, ed. Rawick, <http://ae.greenwood.com/doc.aspx?fileID=RSX&chapterID=RSX-341&path=/primarydocenc/greenwood/>. (accessed June 1, 2009).

Conclusion

The magnificent St. James African Methodist Episcopal Church stands today in Columbus near the intersection of 6th Street and 10th Avenue. According to the *Historical Sketch of St. James African Methodist Church*, the front doors, reportedly made by slaves, came from the Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church. This historical sketch contains no reference to the fact that Asbury was actually an AME church and that its initial congregation was composed of former slaves associated with the white St. Luke Methodist Church. Also missing from the narrative is the fact that the building from which the doors were taken was a brick building constructed by funding supplied by the biracial congregation of St. Luke in 1849.

In Pine Mountain, the congregation of Bethany Baptist Church meets in a small brick church that has a cornerstone stating that the church was organized in 1877. The words on the cornerstone do not reveal that the building houses an African American congregation and there is no reference to any connection to the white Baptist church by the same name from whence the original members of the black church came. In Shiloh, across the street from Old Shiloh Baptist Church, is Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church. In 2010, members of the latter recently celebrated its history and claimed that the church was founded in 1867. The spatial relationship demonstrated by the location of the white and black Baptist churches in Shiloh is also found in other rural locations throughout the South. In other places in the rural South the landscape of churches includes a black missionary Baptist church located no farther away than a few miles from a white Baptist church.

The assumed histories of these churches hide a long and complex history of the congregations who represent the continuity and connection between the days of slavery and the time of freedom. Hidden in these histories and on the cornerstones are the complex interactions, conflicts, and cooperation that characterized the ancestral biracial evangelical congregations of the churches. As whites kept Andrew Brown's Gospel Horse at bay, slaves accepted, rejected, or otherwise showed indifference to Christianity, whether in the chaotic frontier areas that constituted the dissipating Creek Nation east of Alabama and west of Georgia or the institutional evangelical churches in the Chattahoochee Valley of both of those states.

Slaves were present and involved in the events that defined the Chattahoochee Valley from the time of the arrival of Methodist missionaries until the creation of independent black evangelical churches. The stated fear of slave insubordination and possible insurrection contributed to the conflict between Methodist missionaries and some Creek leaders, thus obstructing evangelical plans to fully "civilize" the Creeks.

Slaves were also part of institutionalized evangelical religion in the form of Baptist and Methodist congregations in the Chattahoochee Valley and it was here that the Gospel Horse remained in the firm grasp of white evangelicals. Whites reacted to increased abolitionist sentiment by using their proslavery religion in an attempt to produce a Christian social order built on a literal interpretation of the Bible, which assigned to blacks a subservient role, but also enjoined masters to ameliorate the evils of slavery. Blacks, slaves and free, responded by appropriating Christianity for their own purposes, among which were the claim of ecclesiastical equality, the promise of future

liberation, and, in the context of both separate services and the “invisible institution,” some measure of freedom.

Slavery was the issue that precipitated the sectional division of the Baptist and Methodist denominations in the mid-1840s. Southern white evangelicals responded to the division by intensifying efforts at crafting a milder, supposedly more Christian version of slavery that might soothe their conscience and provide a viable defense against the antislavery evangelical religion of their erstwhile northern brethren. When the Civil War came, the Gospel Horse began pawing at the ground and southern evangelicals added their fear of God’s judgment to their arsenal of justification for slavery demonstrated by attempts to reform slavery to meet the scriptural requirements.

Finally, with emancipation, the “invisible institution” became visible as the Gospel Horse was loosed and former slaves initiated an exodus from white churches. With a complex mix of paternalistic accommodation and control, whites tried to hold the reins of the Gospel Horse, but he proved too strong and he rode in the white man's pulpit. The creation of independent black churches ensued, eventually culminating in religious reconstruction. In a letter published in the March 21st 1876 issue of the *Christian Recorder*, Reverend Wesley J. Gaines wrote “There is a bright promise of the near approaching day, when the whole land will be bathed with the full effulgence of gospel light and liberty. After all of our struggles, we have won the day in Georgia so far as the church is concerned.”¹

After the Civil War, white southern Methodists engaged in activities unrelated to issues with emancipation, but patently related to their desire to remain a sectional denomination. During the post-war years, white Georgia Methodists continued to

¹ *Christian Recorder*, March 21, 1876.

emphasize missions, Sunday Schools, and benevolence. Education was a priority and in 1872 Georgia Methodists supported five colleges, including Andrew College in Cuthbert. They also supported the American Bible Society and the Methodist publishing house which promised to “furnish a magazine equal to any in the United States.” They also expended much of their energy on structural changes, such as extending the term of pastoral service and promoting more lay participation as conference delegates, conducting district conferences, and more importantly, addressing the increasing church growth by dividing the Georgia Conference into the North Georgia Conference and the South Georgia Conference.²

White Georgia Baptists also continued to try to be the light of the world as they saw it and addressed behavioral problems brought on, they believed, by the demoralizing effects of the war. One association lamented that “there is too much intemperance, profanity, neglect of church duties, heresies, dissensions and general unchristian conduct tolerated by the followers of Jesus. Many, perhaps all, of our churches need purifying, and the only way to secure the strength and efficiency of the churches is to keep them pure.” Another association believed “there is too much worldliness, too little family prayer, too little effort to secure and sustain the ministry.” Delegates to the Georgia Baptist Convention stated the meaning of worldliness in concrete terms and expressed “entire disapprobation of church members dancing, playing cards, even for amusement, visiting theatres and circuses and drinking spirituous liquors as a beverage”³

White Baptists in the Chattahoochee Valley shared these views as evident in the actions of the Columbus Baptist Association and the Western Baptist Association. After

² Smith, *History of Georgia Methodism from 1786 to 1866*, 334-336; *Columbus Weekly Enquirer*, December, 20, 1870; *Columbus Weekly Enquirer*, December, 24, 1872.

³ Boykin, *History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia*, 237-238.

1868 these associations advocated temperance, promoted Sunday Schools, and supported foreign and domestic missions. Efforts aimed at the latter included support for Peter Folsom as a missionary to the Choctaw Indians. In 1877, Folsom reported that the Choctaw mission supported four churches, including two that consisted of “colored” members. It appears the Gospel Horse galloped westward with the Indians.⁴

⁴ *Minutes*, Columbus Baptist Association, 1868-1875; *Minutes*, Western Baptist Association, 1868-1877.

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