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Southern Saints and Sacred Honor: Evangelicalism, Honor, Community, and the Self in
South Carolina and Georgia, 1784-1860

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Abstract

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This study focuses on overlooked connections between the traditional honor culture of the South and the rise of evangelical Christianity in the region in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Historians have argued that it was only as evangelicals moderated their early opposition to the southern shibboleths of honor and slavery that evangelical religion flourished in the South. But this study argues that the interaction between evangelicalism and honor was not as simple as an arc running from early opposition to eventual accommodation. In 1780 as well as 1860 evangelicals critiqued some of the behaviors associated with honor, but from the beginning evangelicals also engaged the discourse of honor and shame to tell their sacred story. Furthermore, from the movement's earliest period evangelicals drew from the same cultural wellsprings that nourished the traditional culture of the South to sustain their communities and enforce their vision of Godly order. Thus this study examines important strands of historical continuity that bound evangelical beginnings and eventualities together in the South.

Just as it shaped southern life in general, honor intersected nearly every facet of the evangelical experience. Early evangelical ministers preached the gospel of a God who was jealous of his honor but let his son be shamed for the sake of sinners. Many preachers laid claim to the status of honorable men as orators, while the duties of office exposed them to the acclaim and obloquy of their communities. Evangelical churches used the power of communal opinion to shape behavior, and evangelical rituals and church discipline became sites of communal judgment that significantly influenced the balance of honor and shame in the local community. For women, church discipline largely repeated and reinforced the mandates of female honor, while for slaves rituals signifying their spiritual rebirth and social inclusion as members of the church were important symbols that offset the social death and dishonor of slavery. Meanwhile, white men struggled, at times successfully, to balance the demands laid on them by their honor and their religion.

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This dissertation is the work of many hands. My footnotes would quickly become unwieldy were they required to bear the weight of all the debts both personal and professional that are contained in every sentence that follows. As I read what I have written, I am continually reminded of conversations with colleagues, sage advice from teachers and mentors, generous guidance from archivists, and especially the sacrifice and support of my wife and family. They have all shaped this dissertation in significant ways, and if I cannot fully repay them I must at least acknowledge their vital presence in something that, by the conventions of authorship, bears my name alone.

The history department at Emory University has been a wonderful place to learn the historical craft. I was fortunate enough to take seminars from Jonathan Prude, Marina Rustow, Matt Payne, Philippe Rosenberg, William Beik, and John Juricek. In addition to his bravura performances in the seminar room, for most of my time at Emory Jonathan Prude also served as Director of Graduate Studies. I, and many others, will always be grateful for his service, his counsel, and his ferocious advocacy on behalf of graduate students. Brooks Holifield's seminar on American religious history was a formative experience. Thankfully for me, his erudition is equaled only by his generosity and humility. I never took a seminar from Joe Crespino, but I was fortunate enough to serve as his Teaching Assistant and thereafter to benefit from his friendship, advice, and example, all of which have already served me well. In the history office, Becky Herring, Patricia Stockbridge, and Marcy Alexander were unceasing sources of reliable information, gentle reminders, and goodwill.

Fellow graduate students in my cohort shaped this project through conversations in seminars, workshops, and coffee shops, broadening my intellectual horizons and providing much needed humor and, at times, commiseration. I feel very fortunate to have come to Emory with such a talented and admirable group of people, including Alex Borucki, Leah Weinryb-Grohsgal, Jane Hooper, Dana Irwin, Amanda Madden, and Adam Rosenbaum. Uri Rosenheck in particular was always ready to challenge my assumptions or provide a perspective from outside the narrow confines of American history, for which I am grateful. Beyond my cohort, Kate Armstrong and Erica Bruchko offered insightful observations drawn from their own work on southern women and the slave economy.

As anyone who knows him can attest, James Roark is a model of how to combine the virtues of rigorous scholarship with the leavening graces of a warm and generous spirit. I am only beginning to realize how lucky I have been to have him as my adviser, and I have rarely known someone who can inspire excellence, rather than demand it, so effectively. This project grew out of a paper, written for his Old South seminar, which he wisely realized could be a dissertation. At every point along this journey he has encouraged, or gently urged me to keep moving forward, while at the same time continually asking the rare sort of questions that illuminate their own answer. I cannot imagine having had a better guide.

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I carried out a good deal of the archival work for this dissertation in the rich collections of the South Caroliniana Library at the University of South Carolina. Allen Stokes and his staff preside over one of the best places in the world to research and think about the history of the American South. In particular, Henry Fulmer, Graham Duncan, Brian Cuthrell, and Robin Copp made my time in Columbia as enjoyable as it was productive. Archivists and staff at other archives were likewise welcoming and helpful, particularly at the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina, Duke University's Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, the South Carolina Historical Society in Charleston, and the Emory Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library (MARBL). Multiple institutions and fellowships provided the funding for my research, including most significantly the Lewis P. Jones Fellowship at the South Caroliniana Library, research awards from the Laney Graduate School at Emory University, and visiting research fellowships from the Institute for Southern Studies at the University of South Carolina. I am profoundly grateful for the support of each.

Without the support of friends and family I would not have completed this project, much less stayed marginally sane doing so. David Eastes frequently reminded me that

there was a life to be lived and a sun to be seen outside of the library. Carey and Suzy Shealy put me up in Columbia on more than one occasion, and made our stay there during the summer of 2009 a pleasure. My wife's parents, Whitfield and Rebecca Howard, were always enthusiastically supportive and unfailingly optimistic. Our stays with them always provided a much needed respite. To my own parents, Philip and Becky Elder, I owe more than I can express here. Long before I took a seat at a seminar table, I sat around a dinner table where discussions of literature, history, economics, politics, and theology were common fare. Indeed, perhaps the most significant part of my education occurred in my mother's kitchen. It is a wonderful thing indeed to grow up in a family that takes ideas and arguments seriously (thanks to my mother), but not too seriously (thanks to my father). Finally, I owe the most to my wife, Catherine. She has borne this burden with me for the last six years, and without her love and companionship I would have faltered long ago. Along the way we became parents, and Philip and Dalton have added immeasurable amounts of confusion, distraction, and joy to our lives and to this process. Any mistyped words, faulty arguments, or mistaken footnotes in what follows may be laid to their account, and I cherish them both for it.

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Introduction

The story of how the American South became the Bible Belt has been told and retold. This dissertation is not intended as a retelling of that story, at least not in a narrative sense. It is instead an examination of part of that story, the relationship between the rise of evangelical religion and honor culture in the Deep South. In many ways, this dissertation aims to qualify a narrative which has sprung up in the excellent historiography of southern evangelicalism over the last two decades in which the evangelical movement in the South described an arc running from early opposition to some of the central tenets and structures of southern society in the eighteenth century to eventual accommodation and defense of those same tenets in the middle decades of the nineteenth. Early evangelicals, we are told, challenged many of the cultural shibboleths of South, including the authority and cultural dominance of the planter class, the constrained place of women in southern society, and even, in their most countercultural moments, the subjugation of black slaves. Historians have richly described the encounter between early evangelicalism and southern culture under chapter titles like “When Worlds Collide,” and “Turning the World Upside Down,” arguing for a fundamental and radical difference between the worldviews of those who espoused evangelical religion and the typical southerner (or at least the typical, white male southerner).¹

¹ The opposition between honor culture and evangelical values is a commonplace in the historiography of evangelicalism. Chapter titles are from Cynthia Lynn Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind, 1770-1810* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3, 146. See also Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1997), esp. 206-252. Rhys Isaac documented the friction between honor and the separate Baptists in the upper South in the eighteenth century. See Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982). Briane Turley and Randall Stephens both see honor culture as a primary obstacle to the spread of the holiness movement in the pre-Civil War South. See Briane K. Turley, *A Wheel Within a Wheel: Southern Methodism and the Georgia Holiness Association* (Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press,

The effect of viewing early evangelicalism in this way becomes clear as the story progresses, as, in this view, the early promise and purity of evangelical social radicalism evaporated in the heat of the evangelical drive to win souls and influence in southern society. From this point of view, the support of southern evangelicals for what they called the “southern way of life” in the decades before the Civil War can only be told as a tragedy, as a story in which the promised beginning did not lead to its promised end. “Southern whites,” Christine Heyrman wrote eloquently of this process, “came to speak the language of Canaan as evangelicals learned to speak with a southern accent.” Yet in this narrative evangelicalism was clearly more transformed than transforming, as evangelical support for slavery seems to prove.²

Honor culture was a central part of this process, and historians describe how evangelicals initially opposed a whole array of hierarchies related to honor in southern

1999), esp. chapter 3; Randall J. Stephens, *The Fire Spreads: Holiness and Pentecostalism in the American South* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2008), 28. Christopher Owen sees evangelicalism as “the only real alternative” to the world of male honor in nineteenth-century Georgia. See Christopher H. Owen, *The Sacred Flame of Love: Methodism and Society in Nineteenth-Century Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), xix. Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), ix-x, 180-185. Mark Noll cites honor and slavery as the two primary obstacles to evangelical growth in the South in the eighteenth century. See Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield, and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 48. For the post-1865 era, see Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), esp. 12-13. Other historians, like Bertram Wyatt-Brown, have seen the interaction between honor and evangelicalism as much more complex, though still in tension. See, for example Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s-1890s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), esp. 111; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, “Religion and the ‘Civilizing Process’ in the Early American South, 1600-1860,” in Mark Noll, ed., *Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the 1980s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 172-176. For other alternate views, see Edward R. Crowther, “Holy Honor: Sacred and Secular in the Old South,” *The Journal of Southern History*, 58 (November 1992), 619-636; Janet Moore Lindman, “Acting the Manly Christian: White Evangelical Masculinity in Revolutionary Virginia,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 57 (April 2000), 393-416. More than a decade ago, Beth Barton Schweiger wrote that “nuancing these oppositions of gender and honor will enable histories that knit together the sacred and secular in ways that southerners would recognize.” Donald G. Mathews et al., “Forum: Southern Religion,” *Religion and American Culture*, 8 (Summer 1998), 147-177.

² Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 27.

life. Typically, accounts of the conflict between honor and evangelicalism have focused on the behaviors and attitudes associated with honor: the violence, vulgarity, and vain boasting that sometimes characterized male honor, for instance, or the ideal of “mastery,” which privileged the authority of white men over white women and black slaves. Evangelicals opposed, and continued to oppose, many of the behaviors associated with male honor throughout the nineteenth century. However, while women and slaves initially found an enlarged space for self-expression and even a measure of spiritual authority in evangelical churches, later evangelicals curtailed these trends in an effort to make the church a safe space for white male honor and authority.³

The relationship between honor culture and evangelicalism in the South, I argue, was much more complex than we have understood. My argument in this dissertation is that examining the relationship between evangelicalism and honor reveals that some of the radical elements of the evangelical movement in the South lasted longer than we have thought, especially in the area of language and rhetoric and especially for black southerners; moreover, many of the movement’s eventual accommodations to southern society were rooted in earlier and deeper harmonies between the cultural assumptions of honor and the moral worldview, language, and practice of the evangelical community. Relying on essentialist understandings of both honor and evangelicalism, talented historians have cast the story as one in which there could only be opposition or accommodation. In reality the cultural conversation between these two moral communities occurred over several decades, at multiple levels and on many stages, including the language emanating from the pulpits and pens of the southern clergy, the

³ Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind*, 3-4, 152-156; Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 206-252.

rituals of the church that carried both sacred and social meanings for the faithful, and the efforts of southern Christians to keep their lives holy and their communities pure through the mechanism of church discipline.

Both evangelicalism and honor are notoriously difficult to define, a fact that is reflected in the difficulty historians have had in accurately describing their relationship. Thus, it is important that any examination of this historical relationship employ definitions sufficiently capacious and flexible enough to capture the complexity of the interaction between a religious movement that had significant social implications (evangelicalism) and a set of cultural attitudes and assumptions that were at their heart ethical in nature (honor).

Historically, a prominent scholar of evangelicalism wrote, evangelicals have been identified by their “unswerving belief in the need for conversion (the new birth) and the necessity of a life of active holiness (the power of godliness).” Indeed, the New Birth championed by Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield in the mid-eighteenth century constituted the heart of evangelical religion. In another definition that scholars have increasingly adopted in recent years, David Bebbington identified four characteristics of evangelicalism: *conversionism*, or “the belief that lives need to be changed”; *activism*, or “the expression of the gospel in effort”; *biblicism*, or “a particular regard for the Bible”; and *crucicentrism*, “a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.” Different varieties of evangelicalism in different historical periods have emphasized or prioritized different parts of this definition, making it flexible enough to include both Arminian leaning

Methodists on the one hand and calvinistic Presbyterians on the other. This definition is the one which has most significantly guided my own view of evangelicalism.⁴

While historians have clearly established the theological and historical outlines of something called evangelicalism that arose in the mid-eighteenth century, it was not a term which the Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians in this study used often to describe themselves. If they used the term “evangelical” at all it more often referred simply to “the gospel,” rather than to a movement of like-minded people. For this reason, and since I have chosen to use the term “evangelical” and “evangelicalism” throughout this study, I should explain what I believe it meant in the context of the Deep South from the 1780s to 1860. Evangelicalism in the sense in which I use it denotes a common religious conversation which took place within the theological framework outlined by David Bebbington, as well as a pattern of social interaction between the clergy and laypeople of the Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian denominations that did not occur naturally between, for instance, the Baptists and Episcopalians.

They did not always agree or like one another. In 1798, somewhere in South Carolina, Methodist itinerant Jeremiah Norman stopped at a fellow Methodist’s home. “At night there came 2 men & tarryed until prayer, one of them is a Baptist...and nearly as great a Bigot as I have met with in all my life,” wrote Norman. Methodists frequently attacked Presbyterians and Baptists for their calvinistic tendencies, while Presbyterians just as often preached against the “Arminian scheme.” Theological differences were vitally important to them. Nevertheless, they argued their positions from a set of common assumptions, including the centrality of scripture, the necessity of conversion in one form

⁴ Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, 15; David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Routledge, 1989), 2-3.

or another, and the need for individual and corporate holiness. In practice and in everyday life, the clergy and laypeople of these denominations mixed easily, with itinerant Methodist ministers staying at the homes of Baptist friends or borrowing Presbyterian churches for their conferences. At the turn of the century, they preached together at revivals. Indeed, in South Carolina it was the Presbyterians who originated the camp-meeting format the Methodists would perfect. Methodist James Jenkins recalled a camp-meeting in 1802 at which twelve Presbyterians, five Baptists, and five Methodists all preached together. These associations among the clergy only strengthened as the nineteenth century wore on, especially among the urban clergy, who frequently shared one another's pulpits and might have more in common with one another than with the rural preachers of their own denomination. For the laity, historians have pointed out that most southerners would go where the preaching was, regardless of what denomination offered it up. Jenkins recalled the story of "Mr. and Mrs. Bell," who were Presbyterians, but not being within range of a Presbyterian church, joined the local Methodist society, "only they wished to be *called* Presbyterians."⁵

Another significant aspect of this dissertation has to do with the position of southern evangelicalism with respect to the overarching phenomenon of modernity, and specifically the changing relationship between individual identity and communal authority that was part of this shift in most of Western society. Many historians have seen in evangelicalism the religious reflection of modern, market-based individualism. In his

⁵ Jeremiah Norman diary, vol. 13, 559, Southern Historical Collection (SHC); James Jenkins, *Experience, Labours, and Gospel Sufferings of Rev. James Jenkins, of the South Carolina Conference* (n.p., 1842), 115, 143. On the urban clergy, see E. Brooks Holifield, *The Gentlemen Theologians: American Theology in Southern Culture, 1795-1860* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1978); and Beth Barton Schweiger, *The Gospel Working up: Progress and the Pulpit in Nineteenth Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

account of the rise of evangelicalism, Mark Noll argued that evangelicalism was in significant ways tied to the rise of the marketplace and the “voluntary” impulses that accompanied that development in the eighteenth century. Richard Hofstadter thought evangelicalism a natural product of Protestantism’s “drive toward individualized piety and conviction.” Part of this aspect of evangelicalism was a new way of conceiving of the self that pointed the way towards the modern, highly individualistic conceptions of selfhood with which we are familiar today. Charles Taylor, in his examination of the sources of the modern self, points to the evangelical revivals of the eighteenth century as a key moment in the development of this new model of selfhood.⁶

It was this aspect of evangelicalism, several historians have argued either explicitly or implicitly, that was most disruptive to the highly traditional, hierarchical, and communalistic mindset of most southerners. It frequently led converts to withdraw from society, severing ties with unbelieving family and friends, and seemed to pose a threat to the order and stability of the community. It was this aspect of evangelicalism, as well, that seems to stand in direct contrast with the assumptions of honor, in which, as historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown wrote, communal opinion formed an “indispensable part of personal identity and gauge of self-worth.”⁷

Recently, other scholars have argued that evangelicalism contained as many debts to the past as portents of the future. Recent scholarship on evangelicalism in Europe, in

⁶ Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, 146-150; Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 302.

⁷ John B. Boles, *The Great Revival, 1787-1805: The Origins of the Southern Evangelical Mind* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1972), 125-142; Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind*, 27-46; Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 116-160; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 34. Significantly, Donald Mathews pushed back against the portrayal of evangelicalism as the “religious mood of individualism.” Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 39.

particular by Bruce Hindmarsh and William Reginald Ward, has emphasized how deeply the evangelical movement was rooted in early modern European culture, and has highlighted the vital role of the religious community in the formation of the evangelical self. My own arguments about the compatibility of conceptions of individual identity and communal authority between evangelicalism and honor owe a significant debt to these scholars.⁸

If evangelicalism bridged the divide between the early modern world and the modern, honor did not. Honor is even more difficult to define than evangelicalism, especially for modern readers. The problem is not new. “Ask ninety-nine men in a hundred what honor is and they will give no intelligible answer,” wrote a frustrated author in *Russell’s Magazine*, a short-lived outlet for the southern literary elite, in an 1857 article against the duel. “It is not the law of God, the moral law, the law of the land. It is independent of these,” the author continued, concluding finally that honor meant nothing except a willingness to defend one’s reputation with pistols. “Men of honor are those who are governed by this law. Honor is ready obedience to it, as virtue is obedience to the moral law. This is the true nature of honor,” the author concluded vituperatively.⁹

A similar conclusion runs through many descriptions of the opposition between such a violent and barbaric code and a religion that placed a premium on humility, piety, and right action. Nevertheless, honor was a much deeper and broader influence in southern culture than such a view can acknowledge. Most historians of the evangelical

⁸ D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); William Reginald Ward, *Early Evangelicalism: A Global Intellectual History, 1670-1789* (Cambridge University Press, 2006); William Reginald Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (Cambridge University Press, 1992).

⁹ “The Duel,” 448, August, 1857, *Russell’s Magazine*, SCL.

experience in the South have acknowledged honor's central place in the southern mind, and the difficulty evangelical religion had in displacing it, but the honor they describe is frequently a narrow, brittle version of the all-encompassing ethic described so richly by Bertram Wyatt-Brown in his *Southern Honor*. In this dissertation, I have relied not only upon Wyatt-Brown's descriptions of the honor ethic in the South, but also on the anthropological scholarship on which Wyatt-Brown based his work, as well as on the continuing and rich interdisciplinary scholarship on honor that has appeared since.¹⁰

“Honor,” wrote the anthropologist Julian Pitt-Rivers, “expresses an evaluation of self in the terms which are used to evaluate others—or as others might be imagined to judge one. It can, therefore, be seen to reflect the values of the group with which a person identifies himself.” One of the pioneers of the academic study of honor, Pitt-Rivers identified several different aspects of the ethic, including honor as a moral concept, or “the absence of self-reproach”; honor as simple precedence or social position; honor as a personal attribute, an intimate part of individual identity that is nonetheless tied to the evaluation of others; honor as the collective possession of a group; and, finally, honor as an element of the sacred, intertwined inseparably with the divine and with religion. At various times and in various chapters, this dissertation will examine how these different moods of honor influenced evangelical language and practice in the Deep South.¹¹

¹⁰ Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, “The Ideal Typology and Antebellum Southern History: A Testing of a New Approach,” *Societas* 5, no. 1 (1975): 1-29; Wyatt-Brown, “Religion and the 'Civilizing Process' in the Early American South, 1600-1860”; Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture*; Julian Pitt-Rivers, “Honour,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, ed. David L. Sills, vol. 6 (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 1991), 503-506; John G. Peristiany, ed., *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966); John G. Peristiany and Julian Pitt-Rivers, eds., *Honor and Grace in Anthropology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

¹¹ Pitt-Rivers, “Honour.”

As Pitt-Rivers' definition suggests, and as Bertram Wyatt-Brown's study of honor in the American South proved, honor was not only a collection of stilted behaviors or required responses to certain situations. It was also an ethical outlook that deeply influenced everything from child rearing to the legal system in the South. Young southern boys were instilled with an abhorrence of shame and an aggressive attitude towards any challenge, while southern women were taught to guard the honor of their families and husbands by abstaining from any activity or social situation that might bring dishonor. Southern juries were famously loath to convict violent offenders since violence was, from the ethical standpoint of honor, a righteous response to the threat of shame. The ethic was also deeply linked to slavery, and the honor of southern whites depended significantly on the contrast between white honor and the dishonor and shame of black slaves.¹²

But for all its apparent influence on the societies in which it is found, honor remains a somewhat hollow concept. Though there seem to be constants, such as an emphasis on female sexual purity, or a zealous concern for reputation, the terms of honor seem to be largely dependent on the culture in which it is found. Two of the pioneers of honor recognized this fact in a later study, writing, "It is therefore an error to regard honor as a single constant concept rather than a conceptual field within which people find the means to express their self-esteem or their esteem for others." What I take this to mean is not that there is no core to the concept of honor, that there is no "there" there, but rather that honor is more than its content: it is also a description of a particular kind of

¹² On gender and honor in southern childrearing, see Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, esp. chapters 5 and 6. On southern juries, see Michael Stephen Hindus, "The Contours of Crime and Justice in Massachusetts and South Carolina, 1767-1878," *The American Journal of Legal History* 21, no. 3 (July 1977): 212-237. On honor and slavery, see Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982).

relationship occurring in specific cultures between individual identity and communal authority. In this relationship, the claims of the self are constantly reflected in the mirror of communal opinion, which is in turn constitutive of individual identity, making communal opinion and individual identity virtually indistinguishable. Nothing could be more different than our modern conceptions of unmoored and self-authored individualism. In various parts of this dissertation, I will argue that specific aspects of evangelicalism shared to a surprising degree this view of the relationship between individual identity and communal authority, making it deeply compatible with the southern mindset in surprising ways.¹³

What this view offers us is the potential to see the relationship between evangelicalism and traditional southern definitions of honor not in terms of opposition or accommodation, but instead as an evolving cultural argument over the terms of honor that would hold sway in the cultural, religious, and political spheres of southern society. This argument had been occurring in Europe for centuries between the European nobility and the church, which argued that God, and not the King, was the fount of honor. In other historical and cultural contexts, it is possible to identify radical changes to definitions of honor and honorable behavior occurring over a short period of time. J.G. Peristiany and Julian Pitt-Rivers offered the Puritan Revolution in England during the 1640s as an example of this kind of swift change to the structure and definitions of honor, although one which did not last. In a recent book that highlights the importance of honor as an ethical concept in the past and the present, the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah argues that changing views of what was honorable in society were an essential ingredient

¹³ Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers, *Honor and Grace in Anthropology*, 4.

of “moral revolutions” as various as the end of dueling in Europe, the practice of foot-binding among Chinese women, and the end of the Atlantic slave trade. Placing the interaction between honor and evangelicalism in the South beside these examples should alert us to the possibility that southern honor may have changed as much during this period as did southern religion, and send us searching for the places in which this cultural conversation unfolded.¹⁴

It unfolded, I argue, in two main areas that we could call rather generally rhetoric and practice, rhetoric being mainly the arena of the clergy and practice being the outworking of evangelical mores in congregational life. Chapters One, Five, and Six deal generally with the clergy and with rhetoric, while chapters Two, Three, and Four examine practice, mainly through the lens of church discipline. The first chapter examines how, far from rejecting the language of honor, evangelicals employed unique conceptions of honor and shame, drawn from scripture, to tell the story of the gospel and urge their audiences to give up worldly honor and pursue the sort of honor that only God could give. Chapter Two examines the structure and practice of church discipline in evangelical denominations, particularly the Baptists, arguing that evangelical practice in this area was more compatible with the assumptions of an honor culture than we have realized, especially in the exercise of communal authority over the individual by the church. Chapter Three examines how gendered versions of honor refracted through the practice of church discipline, specifically how men were able to balance the demands of honor with the demands of the church, and how church discipline frequently reinforced the demands of female honor. Chapter Four examines the meaning of evangelical ritual and

¹⁴ Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers, *Honor and Grace in Anthropology*, 4-5; Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Honor Code: How Moral Revolutions Happen* (W.W. Norton, 2010).

practice for black southerners, arguing that slaves found in evangelical life a significant and alternative social identity that countered the social death and dishonor of slavery. Chapter Five turns back again to the clergy, examining how their role as sacred orators allowed them to participate in one of honor's most hallowed spaces. Chapter Six returns full circle to the theme of rhetoric, examining how the southern clergy thought about the concept of "winning a name," and about related concepts such as fame, duty, and death that figured prominently in the language of honor. Finally, the epilogue tells the little known story of the Guardhouse Riot at South Carolina College in 1856, an episode in which Presbyterian minister James Henley Thornwell played a central role, to illustrate the relationship between southern honor and southern religion in the late antebellum period.

South Carolina and Georgia seemed a natural pairing for a study of southern evangelicalism. The progress and character of the evangelical movement was different, if only marginally so, in the various regions of the South, and although I believe the conclusions of this study apply elsewhere in the South, a study of the entire South would only have added a layer of geographical and chronological complexity to what I fear is already a complex argument. In Virginia, for instance, I would have had to take into account the social upheaval caused by the separate Baptists in the mid-eighteenth century, chronicled so well by Rhys Isaac. In the Old Southwest, the on-the-make character of much of society in the early nineteenth century, as well as the constant influx of white southerners and, in particular, large numbers of slaves, lent evangelicalism there a somewhat different flavor than it had further east, as Randy Sparks has shown so well in his study of Mississippi. A focus on South Carolina and Georgia will, I hope, alleviate

some of the blind spots that crop up in South-wide studies of evangelicalism but may also avoid making conclusions that can be dismissed as peculiar to one state. South Carolina and Georgia during this period contained a variety of environments, agriculture, and social configurations—the urban refinement of Charleston as well as the fledgling towns of northern Georgia, the majority black lowcountry as well as the white yeoman upcountry—which nevertheless tracked along a relatively common path in terms of the progress of evangelicalism. Many of the same personalities figured prominently in both states, including the Baptist Iveson Brookes and Methodist William Martin. Until 1830, the two states were part of the same Methodist Conference, and itinerant ministers frequently crossed state lines to preach their message.¹⁵

The choice of South Carolina and Georgia influenced the timeline of this study, as well. The study runs roughly from the famous Methodist “Christmas Conference” in 1784, which constituted the Methodists as a church rather than simply a branch of Anglicanism, to the secession of South Carolina in December 1860. If the study had included the upper South it would have had to stretch back to at least the mid-eighteenth century. But, as I write in the first chapter, while evangelicalism gained a foothold in the Deep South in the eighteenth century the full flowering of the movement lagged somewhat behind the upper South, taking place in the three or four decades following the Revolution. Many of the preachers who presided over the revivals in the Deep South in the years surrounding 1800 were from the upper South, mainly Virginia, such as the ill-

¹⁵ Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790*; Randy J. Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks: Evangelicalism in Mississippi, 1773-1876* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994); Alfred M. (Alfred Mann) Pierce, *A History of Methodism in Georgia, February 5, 1736 - June 24, 1955*. (Atlanta: North Georgia Conference Historical Society, 1956), 88. In the 1820s, Methodist William Martin itinerated in northern Georgia, South Carolina, and Charleston in the late 1820s and early 1830s. See “Reminiscences,” 22, William Martin Papers, SCL.

Fated Beverly Allen whose story begins the final chapter. Methodist historian George Gilmore Smith recorded that the first Methodists in Georgia, besides the Wesleys' famous visit to Savannah decades earlier, was a group from Virginia that moved to Wilkes County in the northern part of the state in the 1780s. The study ends in 1860 because, as I observe in the epilogue, among the many things the Civil War fundamentally changed for both white and black southerners was the relationship between religion and honor.¹⁶

In an afterword on the sources that informed his book *Religion in the Old South*, Donald Mathews singled out local church records as the foundation for his work. Church records, wrote Mathews, reveal “the interaction of people over a long period of time,” and “a process of social interaction and projection of self into a public personality.” Though many excellent studies of southern religion based on local church records have appeared since Mathews pronounced them an overlooked source, they continue to be used mainly as a database for counting adulteries or excommunications rather than as a rich repository of language and cultural attitudes that reflect the relationship of evangelical communities to their social world. Though dozens of local church records were consulted for this dissertation, I have tended to draw examples from a group of churches whose records are particularly rich and span nearly the whole time period of this study. I have also tried to draw from a variety of churches, from wealthy Presbyterian churches such as Second Presbyterian in Charleston to relatively small backcountry Baptist churches such as Williamson Creek Baptist Church in Walton County, Georgia.

¹⁶ George Gilman Smith, *The History of Georgia Methodism from 1786 to 1866* (Atlanta, GA: A. B. Caldwell, 1913), 26-28.

The evident differences between such congregations only make the similarities between them more compelling.¹⁷

Beyond church records, I have relied on the personal correspondence, journals, and printed sermons of the evangelical clergy. If the Baptists and Presbyterians were the most assiduous keepers of church records, it was the Methodists who excelled at the art of introspection. In 1744, at the first Methodist conference, John Wesley suggested that his preachers keep diaries to improve their spiritual discipline and record the work of God in their lives. His American followers faithfully fulfilled this advice, leaving an abundant record of their efforts to spread the gospel throughout the Deep South. Many of them were similarly prolific in their letters to one another and to family, a characteristic they shared with ministers from other denominations. The clergy and their denominations participated fully in the print culture of the nineteenth century, as well. They printed and reprinted sermons, memorial addresses, essays, memoirs, periodicals, and state denominational histories in profusion. Of particular interest are the numerous funeral sermons, preached for famous and obscure ministers alike, printed in South Carolina and Georgia during the first half of the nineteenth century. As is usually the case, what the living had to say about the dead is a good place to study the definitions and terms of honor in a community.¹⁸

Decades ago, Marxist cultural critic Raymond Williams described what he called “oppositional” forms within a dominant culture. A dominant culture, wrote Williams,

¹⁷ Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, 268. Second Presbyterian Church Records, South Carolina Historical Society (SCHS); Williamson Creek Baptist Church Records (Walton County, Georgia), Mercer University (MU).

¹⁸ Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 129.

contains “a central system of practices, meanings and values” through which people interpret and experience the world. Oppositional, in Williams’ view, describes “someone who finds a different way to live and wants to change society in its light.” Many historians of evangelicalism have portrayed the early stages of the movement in the South along these lines, making evangelical acculturation seem less like a natural process and more like a sad ending, as evangelicals “learned to speak with a southern accent.” In one sense they are undoubtedly correct. Nevertheless, the eventual astounding success of evangelical religion in the South begs for a more complex answer than the capitulation of evangelical values to southern honor and southern slavery. In what follows, instead of examining how evangelicals learned to mimic the southern lilt, I ask how evangelicalism, in its language, rituals, practice, and structure, was able to speak to black and white southerners in a way they understood from the very beginning.¹⁹

¹⁹ Raymond Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays* (London: Verso, 1980), 37-42.

I. 'True Honor Comes From God Alone': Evangelicalism and the Language of the Alternative Community in the Deep South

How can ye believe, which receive honour of one another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?

—John 5:44, KJV

In an undated address, probably given to the undergraduates of South Carolina College in the 1840s when he served as college chaplain, The Rev. James Henley Thornwell wrote down thoughts that likely echoed through the college's chapel. "I shall feel that I have accomplished much if I have disarmed you of your prejudices against the evangelical scheme," Thornwell proclaimed to his audience. "Never, never be ashamed of the Gospel," he warned, "never be ashamed of a crucified Saviour and an indwelling spirit." He continued, arming his audience against the barbs of two varieties of antagonists not likely to be found in great supply in South Carolina during the 1840s: "Let not an atheists' laugh or a skepticks jeer deprive you of the richest honour that God can confer on man—the honour of sharing with His own Son in the glory of His Heavenly Kingdom."¹

In this address Thornwell employed a distinctive interpretation of the gospel that appealed to the two poles of social experience, honor and shame, between which most southerners lived their lives. Most considerations of the relationship between evangelical religion in the American South and the culture of honor that existed throughout the region have found only conflict. This chapter seeks to move beyond these discussions, or at least

¹ Undated address, folder 68, box 2, James Henley Thornwell Papers, South Caroliniana Library (SCL). Thornwell would later serve as president of the college.

to view them from a different angle, by investigating the relationship between evangelicalism and honor at the level of language and rhetoric. Few historians have examined exactly how evangelicals actually thought, spoke, wrote, and argued about the ideas of honor and shame, and how they related these ideals to the sacred story of the gospel. Doing so reveals both how evangelicals viewed themselves in relation to the dominant forces of southern culture, and how a unique and counter-cultural conception of honor and shame, rooted in scripture, continued to shape evangelical identity even as evangelical religion became enmeshed with southern identity in the decades preceding the Civil War.²

“For the existence of Christianity” wrote Baptist minister William Brantly, “you cannot account upon any of the common principles of historical calculation.” Brantly, who ended his career as pastor of Charleston’s First Baptist Church, dying in 1845, made the observation in a published sermon titled “Christianity A Fact Requiring To Be Accounted For.” Certainly, he wrote, the religion’s early adherents had not been attracted to the messengers of the primitive gospel, who “made no pretensions to the refinements of speech, nor to the arts of eloquence.” Neither would a desire for worldly honor or office have impelled anyone to become a Christian in the first two centuries of Christian history, according to Brantly. “They had no honours to offer to their adherents,” he wrote of the early apostles, “because all important offices were held either by Jews or Gentiles.”

² Accounts of the conflict between evangelical values and honor culture frequently focus on the way evangelicalism challenged the hierarchies and behaviors associated with honor. For example, see Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1997); Cynthia Lynn Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind, 1770-1810* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

Furthermore, “they were subjected to such penalties as the confiscation of their goods and banishment.” Indeed, he explained, in light of these facts it was precisely the opposite of honor that frequently awaited the early Christian. “They understood, and made the disciples to understand, that reproach, contempt, poverty and death awaited them on account of their religious profession.” That early Christians endured the reproach and contempt of the world, and that Christianity had not only survived but thrived up to the present day, was nothing short of a miracle, Brantly argued, proof that only God’s hand could have sustained the progress of his gospel.³

Brantly might easily have been telling the story of the rise of the evangelical movement in the South, at least as evangelicals themselves understood it from the vantage point of the mid-nineteenth century. George Whitefield and his awakening certainly made it to the South in the 1740s, and Whitefield preached to huge congregations in Charleston at Josiah Smith’s Independent Meetinghouse in the 1740s, establishing his famous orphanage near Savannah during the same time. Presbyterians had been present in the South Carolina Lowcountry for most of the eighteenth century, and their churches could claim a small but significant number of the most influential members of the South Carolina merchant class. In the backcountry regions of South Carolina and Georgia in the 1760s, Anglican itinerant Charles Woodmason complained acridly that the area was “eaten up by Itinerant Teachers, Preachers, and impostors from New England and Pennsylvania-Baptists, New Lights, Presbyterians, Independants [*sic*], and an hundred other sects.” One intrepid Baptist stole Woodmason’s gown and snuck into bed with a woman who gleefully spread the rumor that the “parson came to bed to

³ William Theophilus Brantly, *Sermons* (n.p.), 40-41, SCL.

her.” The Baptist congregation at Welsh Neck, in what would be Darlington County, was founded in 1738, and was well established by the Revolution. In 1769, the Separate Baptist leader Oliver Hart wrote from South Carolina to his friend Samuel Jones, relating the news of remarkable revivals among the Baptists in the “interior parts of this province.” By the end of the Revolutionary era the evangelical strain of Protestantism had gained a foothold in the Deep South.⁴

Nevertheless, South Carolina and Georgia lagged behind the upper southern states when it came to the spread of evangelical religion, and by the turn of the century the region was still a relative outpost of the evangelical mission, with the greatest period of growth still ahead. Before 1750 there were only five Baptist churches in the colony of South Carolina. In 1780, as the movement spread, there were still only thirty-five Baptist churches in South Carolina, and only five in Georgia. Methodist historian Alfred Pierce wrote that as late as 1830, Georgia was “generally recognized as a pioneer state” for Methodists. In 1799, when Methodist George Clark travelled to St. Mary’s, Georgia, on the state’s coast, there were people who claimed they had never heard a sermon or prayer before in their lives. Even three decades later in 1829, when Methodist itinerant William Martin preached in Hamilton, Georgia, he recorded that he preached in “a small house built of round logs without being ceiled [*sic*] or weather boarded.”⁵

⁴ On Whitefield, first Woodmason quote, and Hart quote, see Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 69, 253, 257, 260. On Presbyterianism in the lowcountry, see Erskine Clarke, *Our Southern Zion: A History of Calvinism in the South Carolina Low Country, 1690-1990* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1996). Second Woodmason quote, see Alan Gallay, ed., *Voices of the Old South: Eyewitness Accounts, 1528-1861* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 194.

⁵ Edwin S. Gaustad, *Historical Atlas of Religion in America*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 12; Alfred M. (Alfred Mann) Pierce, *A History of Methodism in Georgia, February 5, 1736 - June 24, 1955*. (Atlanta: North Georgia Conference Historical Society, 1956), 55. William Martin, “Reminiscences, 1807-1861,” p7, William Martin Papers, SCL.

It was the turn of the century revivals emanating from Cane Ridge, Kentucky, that put the evangelical denominations on a more solid footing in South Carolina and Georgia. Though Presbyterians originated some of the earliest camp meetings in the region, the Baptists and in particular the Methodists soon reaped a bountiful harvest from the religious fervor of these years. In South Carolina, the years of 1802 and 1803 are remarkable in local church records for the explosion of growth in members received by baptism. After years of single digit growth, Bush River Church recorded twenty-eight baptisms in 1802, and one hundred and twenty one in 1803. In 1802, Big Creek Baptist, situated in the South Carolina backcountry, recorded one hundred and twenty four baptisms. In summer of 1802, Methodist James Jenkins wrote to Francis Asbury from Camden, South Carolina, telling him that “hundreds” had been converted that year. “Hell is trembling,” wrote Jenkins, “and Satan’s kingdom falling. Through Georgia, South and North Carolina, the sacred flame and holy fire of God, amidst all the opposition, are extending far and wide.” The revivals would soon slow, and evangelical cultural dominance in the South would not be complete for another three decades or more, but at the turn of the century in South Carolina and Georgia, it must indeed have felt like the very foundations of hell were shaking.⁶

The kinds of people who came into the evangelical denominations in the years surrounding the turn of the century were generally from the lower strata of southern society, though not the bottom. One Methodist preacher, quoting a description of Christ from scripture, called them “disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious.”

⁶ Leah Townsend, *South Carolina Baptists, 1670-1805* (Florence, S.C, 1935), 165, 201; James Jenkins, *Experience, Labours, and Gospel Sufferings of Rev. James Jenkins, of the South Carolina Conference* (n.p.: Printed for the author, 1842), 115.

In general, Methodists were the poorest, while Baptists often occupied the yeomen rungs of the social ladder. Baptist historian Joe King calculated that according to the most reliable gauge of wealth in the South, slaveholding, census records reveal that of 661 possible Baptists in South Carolina in 1790, two thirds owned no slaves and only twenty-one (or roughly three percent) owned more than twenty slaves (not surprisingly, Baptists owning more than twenty slaves were disproportionately from the Lowcountry). In general, when it came to property, Baptists were “usually men of small means,” wrote King. Describing the progress of Methodism in Georgia between 1785 and 1830, Methodist historian George Gilman Smith wrote, “Then the Methodists were humble, obscure, and poor; now [1830] the judge on his bench, the Congressman, and the Assemblyman were not ashamed to be known as Methodists.” Smith may have overstated the case for Methodism’s progress, but he captured the heart of the matter. Historian Donald Mathews noted that early evangelical clergy frequently used the adjective “poor” to designate themselves and their people, referring not necessarily to penury but to their relative social position in southern society vis-a-vis the wealthy planter class. Methodist James Jenkins, looking back on a long career from the vantage point of 1842, wrote, “I have always considered myself the poor man's preacher,” and acknowledged somewhat defiantly that he had been of little use to the “rich and learned” of the world. The clergy in these early years were distinguished in the eyes of their descendants mainly for their pertinacity and physical vigor, but certainly not by their education, wealth, or prominence in society. “The corps of preachers in Georgia was not at this time remarkable for mental

power,” wrote George Gilman Smith of the clergy in Georgia in the early part of the century.⁷

What evangelicalism offered such people in addition to salvation has long been interpreted in generally social terms, though without a great deal of specificity. Stephanie McCurry wrote that evangelicalism gave the lower classes “a social style and self-image, a source of self-respect and self-assertion” to throw up against the pretensions and self-styling of the planter elite. Donald Mathews wrote that the experience of the New Birth had social implications, as well as spiritual ones. It set evangelicals off from the rest of the population, inserting them into believing communities, or churches, in which conversion formed the sole criteria for membership. Evangelicals, wrote Mathews, were restless people with socially upward trajectories who found themselves hindered by the South’s traditional social hierarchies. Not the poorest, but far from wealthy, they were, he wrote, “humble enough to take a certain stubborn pride in the inadequacy of traditional social distinctions to define them.” Instead, they defined themselves through the experience of conversion, which gave them an alternative, and they claimed superior, social identity that did not map onto the traditional social landscape of the South. “They were trying,” wrote Mathews, “to replace class distinctions based on wealth and status—they called it worldly honor—with nonclass distinctions based on ideological and moral purity.” It was this attempt that so irked many non-evangelical southerners, who

⁷ Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 35, 37; Joe M. King, *A History of South Carolina Baptists* (General Board of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, 1964), 141; Jenkins, *Experience, Labours, and Gospel Sufferings of Rev. James Jenkins*, 228-229; George Gilman Smith, *The History of Georgia Methodism from 1786 to 1866* (Atlanta, GA: A. B. Caldwell, 1913), 132, 186.

perceived in the evangelical definition of saints and sinners a rhetorical attempt to claim superiority.⁸

They were not wrong. Evangelicals did not discard the concepts of honor and shame that shaped the traditional social relations of their friends and neighbors. They simply redefined them. Indeed, it was precisely the fact that evangelicals tried to redefine these concepts, rather than simply rejecting them, that caused much of the friction between evangelicals and their antagonists. What the evangelical message offered those of lower social position was a novel reformulation of the traditional definitions of honor and shame that drew on the language of scripture to elevate those the world disdained. Evangelicals' redefinitions of these values continued to contain a potent critique of mainstream society even after evangelicals were no longer on the margins of southern society. It was a message that sought to reorient its hearers within a new way of seeing the social world they inhabited, placing God as not only the ultimate judge of mankind's eternal fate, but also the only true source of honor. The world was mistaken, evangelicals argued. God, not man, was the ultimate judge of both honor and shame, and the church was the mirror of his judgment. When the world mocked what God required, which in the evangelical view happened quite often, evangelicals encouraged each other to view the scorn of the world as honor before God.

Scripture itself was a central part of this process. In writing the history of evangelicalism in the South, historians have not paid enough attention to the book that shaped southern evangelicals and their message. Bertram Wyatt-Brown once noted the

⁸ Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 140; Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, 37-38.

widespread presence in the biblical text of language arising from the historical context of an honor culture, but no historian has fully questioned how the concerns of the biblical text in this area were translated through the lens of two millennia and understood in a culture itself shaped by honor and shame. The Bible formed the wellspring of evangelical thought and practice, and its language, shaped by the cultural context in which it arose, was peculiarly suited to the way southerners conceived their social world.⁹

When William Brantley described the early Christian community and its members' alienation from the societal norms of honor, he drew not from the cultural lingua franca of the South but from descriptions contained in scripture itself. In the last two decades, biblical scholars have reshaped our understanding of the central text of Christianity, arguing that it must be read with an awareness of its cultural context. For many of these scholars, the honor culture of the ancient Mediterranean world was one of the most significant influences on the authors of the biblical text, especially those who penned the books of the New Testament. An aside on the concerns of a Christian community that predated the evangelical movement in the South by nearly two thousand years might seem at best irrelevant in this context; yet the biblical text itself formed a vital link between the two communities, and the influence of this text and its interpretation of honor and shame in the Christian life on the way that southern evangelicals conceived of their story and proclaimed their message is inescapable once examined.¹⁰

⁹ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "Religion and the 'Civilizing Process' in the Early American South, 1600-1860," in *Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the 1980s*, ed. Mark A. Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 173.

¹⁰ On honor and shame in the biblical text and the influence of honor culture on the early Christian community, see David A. deSilva, *Despising Shame: Honor Discourse and Community Maintenance in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Society of Biblical Literature) no. 152 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1995); David A. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove, Ill:

In the book of Hebrews in the New Testament, for instance, one of the author's chief concerns, according to biblical scholar David Arthur deSilva, was to reinforce alternate definitions of honor and shame in an effort to maintain the strength of the Christian community in the face of outside pressure to conform. It was probably from Hebrews that William Brantly took his description of the confiscation of goods suffered by the early Christians, as well as the reproach and contempt they faced from the wider community. Christianity was disadvantaged from the start by the shameful nature of the death of Christ, a point which contemporary observers such as Tacitus were quick to point out. Furthermore, as deSilva describes, the generic veneration of the gods intertwined with much of public life in Greco-Roman society was fundamentally incompatible with the Christian insistence on the exclusive divinity of Christ. Thus, early Christians probably withdrew from many of their society's "public, economic, and civic associations, and made themselves visibly absent during festivals in order to avoid idolatry." This ostensibly anti-social behavior on the part of Christians provoked responses that aimed to use the social force of shame to bring Christians back into line with communal norms; thus the author of Hebrews refers to the church's members being "publicly exposed to reproaches and afflictions." Indeed, deSilva believes that this refers to "a deliberately crafted public spectacle" that was designed to inflict public shame and "bring deviant's back into line with society's norms."¹¹

InterVarsity Press, 2000); Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001); Jerome H. Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998); Jerome H. Neyrey, *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991).

¹¹ See Hebrews 10:32-34. Mirroring the shame of Christ's death, the Emperor Nero crucified numerous Christians to disgrace the movement and discourage others from participating in it. Also, deSilva notes that the author of Hebrews is writing at some unspecified remove in time from these events, but reminding his audience of them in an effort to encourage them to persevere in the Christian life. See deSilva, *Despising*

In response to the scorn of their society, the authors of the New Testament offered early Christians an alternative vision of honor that could sustain them under the weight of the disapprobation of their communities, relatives, and acquaintances. They drew on an idea, first offered by Aristotle, that disgrace endured for a noble end was not shameful, and was instead highly honorable once that end was revealed or accomplished. The author of Hebrews, writes deSilva, urges on his readers the idea that “disgrace endured at the penultimate level of the world and its society resulted in the attainment of honor and the ultimate level of God.” The primary example of this idea for the New Testament authors was Christ himself, who, though his crucifixion marked him as a disgraced criminal in the eyes of Greco-Roman society, was now, as Christians believed, seated at the right hand of God. Christ’s example in “despising the shame” of the cross became the model for Christian life in a world that scorned both him and them. Furthermore, the author of Hebrews held up a litany of examples, “of whom the world was not worthy,” running from Abraham, Moses, and Noah, to the recent martyrs, who had followed the will of God even when doing so exposed them to contempt and persecution. Indeed, the author of Hebrews implies that it would be dishonorable to give up the faith in the face of persecution, a result of weakness and a failure of will.¹²

In place of the world’s opinion, New Testaments authors encouraged Christians to look to what deSilva calls an “alternate court of reputation.” As anthropologists studying honor have pointed out, honor is a concept that is significantly shaped by the values of the specific communities or “courts of reputation” in which it is found. “Minority cultures

Shame, 149, 155, 157.

¹² *Ibid.*, 175, 178-202, 202-205, 279-284.

have therefore often sought to detach their members from regarding as significant others those who do not adhere to the values of the minority group,” writes deSilva. The question put to Christians in the book of Hebrews was this: Whose opinion matters? The first, and most significant answer to this question for the author of Hebrews was “God.” The emphasis in Judaic and early Christian religion on God as an all-knowing judge who would pass a verdict on the actions of human beings meant the God formed the most significant audience for one’s actions. “And before him no creature is hidden,” wrote the author of Hebrews, “but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do.” The community of the church formed the visible counterpart to this divine court of opinion for the believer. Only those who shared a common set of values could agree on definitions of honor and shame and judge one another on the basis of those definitions, so while the world’s opinion did not, or was not supposed to matter to the believer, the opinion of other Christians mattered greatly. In a famous metaphor, the author of Hebrews even extended this earthly court of opinion to include the dead, comparing the Christian life to a race run before an “encircling cloud of witnesses.” “It is before this court,” writes deSilva, “that the believer is called to maintain and enhance honor, which will result in everlasting prestige.”¹³

We know that evangelicals in the South in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries read and preached from these texts. “It was my usual practice to read the Bible in the morning, and spend some time in prayer...in the afternoon I read other religious books, and, sometimes, retired into the woods for prayer and meditation,” wrote the Methodist

¹³ Ibid., 277, 280, 288-289. Quotes from Hebrews are translations by deSilva.

pioneer James Jenkins.¹⁴ Once examined carefully it becomes difficult to overestimate the extent to which the arguments contained in New Testament books such as Hebrews shaped the evangelical approach and argument both during the movement's early years and afterward. Consider, for example, a sermon that Methodist George Dougherty preached in Camden, South Carolina, at the turn of the century in the midst of the revivals that secured the evangelical foundation in the region. Dougherty, as historian F.A. Mood described him, was a "man of much affliction." Tall and thin, Dougherty's face was terribly scarred by small-pox, which had also taken one of his eyes.¹⁵ As recalled by Methodist James Jenkins, the sermon's title was "The Rock of Fear," and in it Dougherty attempted to overcome the main obstacle that he saw to people joining the church, which was the derision that attached to the Methodists in those years. Dougherty assured his audience that in spite of the reproach attaching to the Methodists in many quarters it was not the Methodist Christians who would finally be ashamed:

O! say you, I am afraid my acquaintances will laugh at me; how can I endure to look them in the face? Brothers, sisters, and cousins will laugh at me, and call me a Methodist, an enthusiast. But O, my friends, you will not be ashamed by and by.

Dougherty did not sugar coat the difficulties facing those who converted, and his language echoed the biblical texts more than the social reality of conversion in the early nineteenth-century South, when converts were unlikely to face death or confiscation of property. "You must expect to endure persecution, if you become a Christian," he warned, citing the example of Christ. The persecution that Dougherty told his audience to

¹⁴ Jenkins, *Experience, Labours, and Gospel Sufferings of Rev. James Jenkins*, 52.

¹⁵ Francis Asbury Mood, *Methodism in Charleston: A Narrative of the Chief Events Relating to the Rise and Progress of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, S.C., with Brief Notices of the Early Ministers Who Labored in That City* (Nashville, Tenn: Published by E. Stevenson and J.E. Evans, for the Methodist Episcopal church, South, 1856), 86.

expect was most significantly social: “You must, my friends, submit to be despised for Jesus,” he told them. But Dougherty’s message gave no weight to the scorn of the world—it was only what was to be expected from an ignorant people—and he denied the scoffers’ right or ability to determine the true terms of honor and shame. “Why should you be afraid or ashamed?” he asked. “Why should we regard the derision, the insults of the rabble?” In line with biblical texts like Hebrews, Dougherty’s approach was not to dismiss honor and shame as things to be sought or feared, but rather to reorient his audience towards a new view of these old concepts.¹⁶

Evangelicals clearly understood and welcomed the parallels between attacks against early evangelical preachers and the public shamings of the early church referenced in scripture. The aim of the attacks against the early church, as described by David deSilva, had been to discourage a departure from communal norms through the social mechanism of shame. Evangelicals could point to similar events in their own experience. Sometime around 1772, a Baptist itinerant made himself such a nuisance near Cheraw Hill, South Carolina, that the provincial authorities had him publicly whipped. Such incidents of civil authority being used against the incipient social disruption of itinerant ministers was relatively more rare in South Carolina and Georgia than in some upper South states. Relatively more common near the turn of the century were mob attacks that quickly turned into public shamings. “I would willingly submit to bear the frowns of the mob, if I could gain Jesus,” James Jenkins remembered George Dougherty preaching. “[I]ndeed my friends, I have not only felt their frowns, but the weight of their hands too.” Dougherty probably referred to an incident in Charleston in 1800, where the

¹⁶ Jenkins, *Experience, Labours, and Gospel Sufferings of Rev. James Jenkins*, 124-131.

Methodist opposition to slavery provoked a mob to seize him and subject him to “pumping,” or being forcibly held under a water spigot in the midst of a chanting crowd until authorities stepped in to save him from drowning. Only a few years later in Charleston, another crowd tried to attack a Methodist preacher named Owens, crying “pump him!”, but Owens was able to escape without harm as the crowd argued about the proper punishment. Such incidents seem remarkable from a later perspective for their violence, but their significance at the time was undoubtedly the shame they sought to attach to their targets.¹⁷

Antagonists also made numerous and admirably creative attempts to disrupt evangelical services. The efforts ranged from cracking nuts in the midst of preaching, smoking cigars, and ringing bells, to more serious disruptions. In 1788, while preaching in Charleston, Francis Asbury recorded in his journal that a crowd gathered outside the church and began throwing rocks, one of which came through a window next to the pulpit and landed near Asbury. In the ensuing confusion, women leapt out of the church windows in an effort to escape. Later, writing in an ironic tone, Asbury observed, “am of opinion that God will work here: but our friends are afraid of the cross.” Around 1811, Methodist James Jenkins recorded the use of pistols and even a “cannon” being used to disrupt his preaching in South Carolina. Historians have noted that these efforts to break up religious meetings closely resembled shaming rituals. “These scenes,” wrote Cynthia Lynn Lyerly of the Methodists, “follow the contours of shaming rituals, with their ultimate object being the collective dishonor of the Methodists.” What has not been well

¹⁷ King, *A History of South Carolina Baptists*, 136; Mood, *Methodism in Charleston*, 90, 104. Mood records that Dougherty died soon thereafter from the effects of the pumping, but as he places this event in 1800 and Jenkins records hearing a sermon of Dougherty’s in 1803, it seems likely either that one of them is wrong in the date they assign or that Dougherty actually survived for some years after his ordeal.

understood is that southern Christians themselves fully recognized the purposes behind these efforts to shame them, and, interpreting events through the lens of scripture, sought to turn the shame of the world into honor before God. In the remainder of this chapter, I will examine exactly how evangelicals thought and talked about honor and shame from their perspective, as well as how these conceptions remained central to evangelical self-definition even as an evangelical faith became less and less a marker of social marginality in the South.¹⁸

Even as they consistently argued that worldly honor was an idol that drew men away from the altar of true religion, evangelicals across a denominational spectrum acknowledged that it could also be the support of a hollow sort of morality. In 1804, John Hemphill, a minister in the small and emphatically Calvinistic Associate Reformed Presbyterian denomination, wrote down a definition of the word “Obligation”:

The authority of God is the basis of moral obligation, and nothing but a sense of it upon the conscience will bend a man to strict and universal integrity. He may indeed be prompted by a sense of honor to shun particular forms of vice, but when any species of unrighteousness or abomination coincides with public opinion, he will never scruple to practice it. Knowing that no public odium will attach to his character on account of it, he will make himself quite easy, equally regardless of the internal turpitude of his conduct and of that account, which he will certainly be obliged to give to him who knows perfectly and who will infallibly pronounce a righteous sentence upon all his actions.¹⁹

¹⁸ Francis Asbury, *Journal and Letters*, Elmer T. Clark, ed., (London: Epworth Press, 1958), March 14, 1788, p564; Jenkins, *Experience, Labours, and Gospel Sufferings of Rev. James Jenkins*, 164-165; Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind*, 151-152.

¹⁹ “Obligation,” October 20, 1804, Box 24, Sermons, Hemphill Family Papers, Duke University Special Collections (DU). It is unclear whether this is Hemphill’s definition, or whether it is drawn from some other source. It is important to note here that evangelicals misrepresented, or at least oversimplified the tenets of honor and their relation to public opinion. For while the secular devotees of honor at times valued seeming over actually being, and while honor could in some instances be clearly disjointed from morality as evangelicals understood it (the area of male sexual license being the most obvious example), nevertheless there had always been a strain of honor, running back to Aristotle and other ancients, which advocated that a noble end was worth sustaining temporary shame. Indeed, it was this conception of honor

Elsewhere, religious southerners noted in passing that earthly honor could produce for a time an effect approximating true morality. In 1805, a young man named Joseph Lowry, from John Hemphill's congregation in Hopewell, South Carolina, wrote to him from Columbia, where he was attending college. Lowry had little good to say of Columbia or his fellow students. "There are many difficulties in this market of vice and error," he wrote. "Nine tenths of the inhabitants are destitute of the form of religion and are mockers of morality in every point of view; except pretensions [*sic*] to honesty, and an ideal law of honour, which serves to keep vice in continance [*sic*]." Of his time at South Carolina College in 1806, a young William Capers wrote somewhat more charitably that some of his classmates were "patterns of pure morals and gentlemanly bearing," even if they lacked true religion. James H. Carlisle, afterwards president of the Methodist institution Wofford College, remembered the strict but limited honor that characterized the student body during his time at South Carolina College in the early 1840s. "Important fields of life and conduct were outside of it that should have been inside," wrote Carlisle of the collegian code of honor.²⁰

Others thought the worldly sense of shame similarly useful as a deterrent to commonly accepted forms of immorality. In a sermon preached while he was a chaplain at South Carolina College, James Henley Thornwell identified vanity and shame as the

that allowed evangelicals a rhetorical foothold from which to argue their case. On this aspect of honor, see deSilva, *Despising Shame*, 174-175; and Julian Pitt-Rivers, "Honour," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, ed. David L. Sills, vol. 6 (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 1991), 503-506.

²⁰ Joseph Lowry to Rev. John Hemphill, September 7, 1805, Hemphill Family Papers, DU; William M. Wightman, *Life of William Capers, D. D., One of the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Including an Autobiography* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1902), 60. Carlisle quoted in Daniel Walker Hollis, *University of South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1951), 88.

two main enemies preventing the young men in his audience from embracing the truth of true religion. Of the two, he thought shame less pernicious in its effects since it served a useful role in preserving the moral tone of society. “The sense of shame as a subsidiary sanction of virtue and propriety is an important perhaps an indispensable element in the economy of human nature,” Thornwell announced. “It is a protection from what is little in principle and mean in conduct.” Nevertheless, he warned, a sense of shame was not to be trusted absolutely when it came to discerning the truth, for just as “instances of virtue can be misrepresented to the moral sense, and receive the censure which is due to vice, so truth can be covered in the disguise of falsehood, and provoke the laughter which is due to folly.”²¹

Some outside observers thought the link between honor and morality in the Deep South very tenuous, indeed. In the 1850s, Francis Lieber, a German political philosopher and erstwhile professor at South Carolina College, wrote in amazement of one of his former students who was expelled from the college for dueling, imprisoned for fighting in the street in Charleston, and then was soon afterwards elected to the state legislature at the tender age of twenty-one. “What a state of society this requires and must produce!” wrote the bewildered German.²²

Of one thing God’s messengers in the Deep South were sure: the honor of the world was not worth the winning, for it would perish with the body while the soul lived on. In 1850, writing to his mentor General James Gillespie of the death of a mutual

²¹ James Henley Thornwell, *Discourses on Truth* (R. Carter, 1855), 133-134.

²² Francis Lieber, *The Life and Letters of Francis Lieber*, Thomas Sergeant Perry, ed., (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1882), 126.

acquaintance, James Henley Thornwell exclaimed, “What an unexpected calamity was the death of Elmore! What a lesson in regard to the vanity of man and the emptiness of human honour!” Indeed, death was frequently the occasion for reminding an audience that their concerns over honor were misconceived. Nearly a decade earlier, when he served as college chaplain, Thornwell had impressed this very fact on the undergraduates of South Carolina College when one of the freshman class, a young man named Benjamin Maybin, perished unexpectedly. On such a somber occasion, his words echoing through the old college chapel, Thornwell’s famous oratorical ability must have been on full display as he reminded them of life’s fragility and decried “Wealth, pleasure, learning and honor, the painted vanities which share the affections and homage of mankind.” The death of a promising young man such as Maybin, Thornwell proclaimed, made a mockery of such human pretensions: “In the grave, whither we are all hastening, the rich and the poor are promiscuously mingled together; the distinctions of honour vanish away as colours disappear in the dark.” Thornwell warned his audience against the world’s “bubbles of honor; its gewgaws of pride.” “Shall the soul,” he asked, “be bartered away for trifles that perish in the using?”²³

The attack on earthly honor was always part of the effort to reorient an audience’s view towards a more eternal perspective in which God formed the ultimate judge of honor and shame. William Brantly chided his audience for their obsession with the present, especially their preoccupation with honor and reputation. “Your only anxiety,” he thundered, “seems to be to maintain a respectable station in the world, to render your

²³ JHT to Gen James Gillespie, June 17, 1850, Thornwell Papers, SCL; James Henley Thornwell, *The Vanity and Glory of Man: A Sermon Preached in the Chapel of the South Carolina College on the 9th of October, 1842, on Occasion of the Death of Benjamin R. Maybin, a Member of the Freshman Class* (Columbia, 1842), 6, 7, 58, SCL.

business profitable, to guard the health of your bodies, to make a decent appearance among men, to ward off disease, and, if possible, to evade the requisitions of death and the grave.” This was folly, he proclaimed, a fundamental misunderstanding of how and by whom true honor and shame were to be determined. Their preoccupation in this regard was, he argued, a kind of spiritual shamelessness, a mad obsession with a fleeting and sure-to-perish reputation in eyes of fellow creatures who were themselves doomed to die, while their sin continued to shame them before the only audience that really mattered:

You take pains to clear off a spot from your name, and permit your souls to be criminated [*sic*] in the most pointed terms. You are fierce and vindictive in defending a character which time will soon obliterate from the memory of man, and utterly indifferent to that character on which eternity shall stamp the impress of imperishableness. You are grieved and troubled at the lies of men, and yet care not for the truth, the humiliating truth which God tells upon you.²⁴

Elsewhere Brantly drove home the same theme, warning his audience explicitly that their confusion over the true nature of honor and shame worked their own ruin. “The injury which you inflict upon yourselves by indulging your hearts' defection from the Lord, is a matter worthy of your consideration,” he proclaimed. “You leave honour and dignity to pursue shame and contempt.” The matter could not have been clearer. In the end, preached Brantly and his fellow clergymen, the honor of the world was shame in the eyes of God, and only those who viewed the search for honor in the proper light, as a race run before God and the faithful, would win the honor that would outlast the grave. It was this idea that stood behind Methodist William Martin’s comment in 1837 upon the death

²⁴ Brantly, *Sermons*, 125-127, SCL.

of a Dr. Green, who, Martin recorded in his journal, “has gone down to the grave full of years and full of honors and I trust full of a hope of immortal honour.”²⁵

It was a virtue, then, in a world that poured contempt on the only path to true honor, to bear up under the shame of the cross. In 1804 in Camden, South Carolina, the Rev. J. M. Roberts praised the character of young Joshua Lee, who died at the age of twenty-one. “He would not follow the multitude of young men to do evil, or to any of their scenes of dissipation,” Roberts recalled of Lee. “He despised their scoffs and ridicule, and with holy magnanimity was determined to serve the Lord, let them do as they might. He was not ashamed of his Lord and Master.” Roberts portrayed Lee’s devotion to his faith as winning respect from the noblest elements of human society, but, most importantly, winning approval from God. “Pure and undefiled religion commands respect and esteem from all wise and good men--more--it gains the esteem of angels, but above all, it gains the approbation of God, the judge of the world.”²⁶ This theme retained its vitality in evangelical rhetoric in the South in the decade before the Civil War, when Methodist William Martin prepared a sermon in which he reflected on the meaning of Matthew 5:10-12, which reads:

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

²⁵ "Lying Vanities," in Brantly, *Sermons*, SCL. William Martin, "Reminiscences, 1807-1861," 119, William Martin Papers, SCL.

²⁶ J. M. Roberts, *Funeral Sermon on the Death of Mr. Joshua Lee, Who Died, July 19th, 1804, Aged Twenty-One. "Follow Me."* (Camden, S.C: John Bann Hood, 1804), 10, 14, SCL.

“What is persecution?” wrote Martin in his notes. “Any unkind treatment by which one person injures another either in person—family—Character, or estate— Especially evil treatment of Christians for Christ’s sake[.]” He gave as examples, “evil speaking” and “slander.” The core meaning of such passages for fervent believers like Martin, living in a society in which honor and shame were not abstract concepts but an integral part of personal identity and everyday experience, was that the spiritual and religious meanings of salvation were intertwined with the social world in which they lived. The nobility and honor of suffering shame for the sake of Christ was a potent counter-cultural ideology that fueled the evangelical movement in its early years and lent a sharp edge to its message even as later evangelicals were rarely called to suffer the scorn of their kin and friends for their faith.²⁷

Evangelicals praised the kind of courage that it took to maintain the faith in the face of popular disdain, linking it to the consistency in thought, word, and deed that honor required. “There never have been wanting professors of Christianity rich and honorable and great where...the garlands of victory and the wreathes of literary fame and the robes of office and the honours of the worlds could be enjoyed in connection with its profession,” Whiteford Smith told the audience of a commencement ceremony, probably at Wofford College. This kind of faith, he argued, was not nearly so admirable or honorable as that on display in societies where “the cross of Christ has been regarded ‘an offence’,” or where “the fire and faggot have lighted up the martyrs path.” Holding fast in the face of social pressure or even outright persecution thus became an essential component of the kind of honor that evangelicals urged on their audiences. “It requires no

²⁷ William Martin, “Catechism and Journal,” April 2, 1854, William Martin Papers, SCL.

ordinary degree of courage,” James Henley Thornwell proclaimed, “to resist the contempt to which the profession of vital religion is exposed in the world.”²⁸

Whatever the shame attaching to the followers of Christ in the present, the eternal shame awaiting the unconverted scoffers was incalculably greater. The idea of damnation as eternal shame was one that the southern clergy drew directly from scripture and used to great effect. James Henley Thornwell touched on the theme in a sermon delivered in the chapel of South Carolina College during his term as chaplain. Warning his audience of young, ambitious Carolinians not to be ashamed to proclaim the gospel, Thornwell reminded them of Christ’s words in scripture:

He points to a shame with which sin shall be finally accompanied, more tremendous and appalling than all the reproaches of men—an everlasting contempt which shall astonish and overwhelm the guilty—when God shall laugh at his calamity, and mock when his fear cometh. ‘Whosoever is ashamed of me, and of my words, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed when he comes in the glory of the Father with the holy angels.’²⁹

The potential social implications of such a message were clear, and its attraction for those who sought an alternative to the social style, gentility, and honor of the South’s elite were evident in the class makeup of the evangelical movement in the period before 1830. Thus, it is not surprising to find that it was the Methodists who most frequently emphasized the shame and scorn that attached to true religion and redefined it as a kind of holy honor. Even in the years after 1830 in South Carolina the class breakdown of the evangelical denominations continued to mirror their general reputations, with poor whites more frequently attaching to the Methodist denomination, yeoman and small planters to

²⁸ Whitefoord Smith, Address to Graduates, John 5:44, undated materials, Whitefoord Smith Papers, DU; Thornwell, *Discourses on Truth*, 136.

²⁹ Thornwell, *Discourses on Truth*, 137.

the Baptist, and elite planters most frequently identifying with the Presbyterian church.³⁰ To be sure, there were also Presbyterians who preached the message of holy honor well into the 1850s, but others of this denomination were uncomfortable with a message that seemed almost to require the people of God to seek out ways to offend their neighbors. In 1829, the stylish but short-lived Philadelphia native William Ashmead, pastor of Charleston's Second Presbyterian Church, decried the propensity of his coreligionists to court controversy and flaunt the opinion of the world. It was not the duty of the minister of the gospel to offend men, Ashmead argued:

Some have, indeed, absurdly advanced a position of this kind; and, in the honest endeavour to carry out their theory into practice, have employed every expedient for rendering themselves as unacceptable and disagreeable, in their public ministrations and private deportment, at least to the more enlightened and refined classes of society, as possible. In fact, there have been cases, in which this preposterous idea has been so entertained and acted upon, as entirely to destroy the usefulness, and almost the respectability, of those who adopted it.

Ashmead assured his Charleston audience that were the Apostle Paul alive today, he would be one of them, admired for “the affability of his manners, the wisdom of his conduct, the eloquence of his discourse, and the stern rectitude of his life.” In his criticism, Ashmead probably had in mind the Methodists and perhaps the Baptists who he had the opportunity to observe firsthand in his new southern home, but he applied the criticism to some in his own denomination, as well, giving as his primary example a Presbyterian minister. Ashmead's argument represented the counterpoint in an argument that developed in evangelical circles over the course of the first half of the nineteenth century regarding the relationship of true religion to the criteria of honor and shame in southern society. As the century progressed, more and more evangelicals, even among

³⁰ McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds*, 168-169. Of course, a large number of elite planters were Episcopalian.

the denominations that typically represented the lower rungs of the social spectrum, gravitated towards Ashmead's position. Nevertheless, the radical reversal of honor and shame that appeared in early evangelical rhetoric never disappeared, and remained a powerful source of social critique in the years before the Civil War.³¹

Alongside the message that God's people were to despise the shame of the world, many of the southern clergy described honor as an attribute of God that flowed from him to his true followers, making it folly to seek it from any other source. Honor was one of the most significant attributes of an omnipotent God. Indeed, many evangelicals espoused a view of sin that viewed transgression as a violation of God's inviolate honor. This was a transgression, it was usually noted, that God could not forgive since it was not in his nature to accept dishonor, and which therefore required the expiatory sacrifice of Christ's death to expunge. In an essay written against dueling, The Rev. Thomas Smyth, a native Irishman who pastored Charleston's Second Presbyterian Church for decades, wrote that the main offense committed by duelists was a transgression of God's injunction against the murder of one's fellow beings. By recklessly placing their own and their opponent's life in the balance, Smyth wrote, duelists "gainsay God's will, which is to make God a liar. It is to challenge God's power." Others described the nature of less serious violations in much the same terms. Methodist Whitefoord Smith, preaching in Charleston in 1853, delivered a sermon on the passage Malachi 3:8-10, which includes the passage: "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings." The passage, which Smith used to encourage giving from the congregation,

³¹ William Ashmead, *A Sermon, Preached in the Second Presbyterian Church, Charleston, May 24, 1829, on Assuming the Pastoral Charge of Said Church* (Charleston: Observer Press, 1829), 6-8, SCL.

had a wider import for him, as well. “Many of our sins are not properly estimated because they are not properly viewed,” he announced. Of what do sins rob God? Smith asked. He answered: “1st of his honour. By profaning his name. By neglecting his service.” Honor, then, was something God possessed as an immutable part of his character, and that could be violated by the sins of human beings, requiring, in an understanding of honor that is completely lost to the modern reader but would have been more than passingly familiar to a southern audience, the shedding of blood to be made right.³²

One of the common assumptions of the South’s traditional culture was that honor and shame could be the common property of families, groups, or communities, and that individual honor was directly derivative and constitutive to the standing of the group. Associate Reformed Presbyterian minister John Hemphill gave an example of this idea in relation to God and his followers in an 1830 sermon on the doctrine of imputation, that is, the idea that Christ’s righteousness was imputed to those who believed in him, thus justifying them before God and assuring their salvation. Hemphill gave examples of how the principle of imputation operated in the natural and social world, including how children received character traits from their parents, and how property passed from one generation to another. “Persons,” wrote Hemphill, “are interested in the actions, estates, merits, & demerits, honour & disgrace of others to whom they stand related.” Honor and shame, in other words, could be shared, and just as Christians shared in the shame of

³² Thomas Smyth, *Complete Works of Rev. Thomas Smyth, D. D.*, John William Flinn, ed., vol. 7 (Columbia, S.C: R. L. Bryan Company, 1908), 447. In this description of how and from where honor was to be attained, southern evangelicals echoed, however distantly, older conceptions of honor in which honor flowed from a monarch to his subjects and in which followers shared in the honor or shame of a leader. See Pitt-Rivers, “Honour,” 504. Sermon on Malachi 3:8-10, outlines of sermons, 1853, Charleston, Whitefoord Smith Papers, DU.

Christ's death, they shared in the honor of his triumph over death and his exalted position.³³

Over and over again, the southern clergy made explicit the relationship between God's honor and that of his followers. In 1845, Robert Hardin Reid heard the Presbyterian Dr. Aaron Leland preach in the chapel at South Carolina College, where Reid was a student. Leland preached on 1 Samuel 2:30, which Reid recorded in his journal as "They that honor me will I honor but they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." Leland's fellow Presbyterian James Henley Thornwell sounded the same note a few years later in a commencement address before the college's graduates. Thornwell reminded the graduates that all their classical learning would do them no good if they ignored the eternal destiny of men and did not pay appropriate honor to God. "Honour him & He will honour you," Thornwell advised them, "disown Him & He will cast you off forever." Methodist Whitefoord Smith sounded the same notes in a sermon on John 5:44: "How can ye believe which receive honor one of another and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?"³⁴

The common thread running through the evangelical message about honor was a reliance on scripture to describe God as the ultimate source of honor and the ultimate judge of shame. In a culture in which honor and shame were such prevalent themes in private conversation and public life, it must have seemed a highly appropriate message on which to focus. Indeed, in a strange way, southerners in the first half of the nineteenth

³³ Sermon on Isaiah 53:6, 1830, Box 24, Sermons, Hemphill Family Papers, DU.

³⁴ Robert Hardin Reid diary, March 10, 1845, Robert Hardin Reid Papers, SCL; Commencement Address to the College, December 5, 1853, James Henley Thornwell Papers, SCL; Address to Graduates, John 5:44, undated materials, Whitefoord Smith Papers, DU.

century were in a much more favorable cultural environment for understanding the message of the New Testament as it was originally written than would be any modern reader. The exact interaction between the historical context of the biblical text, evangelical interpretations of that text, and the reception of such a message by an audience in the nineteenth-century South is difficult to delineate, and requires more investigation, especially on the critical issue of reception. Nevertheless, Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians alike sounded the same theme in the half century before the Civil War, drawing on the rich language of the King James Bible to portray alternate visions of true honor and everlasting shame that challenged their audiences to look beyond this world to eternity. The success of evangelicalism in the South is a measurement, however rough, of their success.

Besides God, the other quarter to which southern preachers encouraged Christians to look to in determining honor and avoiding shame was the church, the visible body of believers that formed the most tangible and reliable audience for one's actions. The significant fact about the church in this regard in the minds of southern Christians echoed David deSilva's account of the early Christian community addressed by the author of Hebrews: they shared a common set of values, a different standard from that of the world, and thus formed the only legitimate court of opinion for the true believer. The practical outworking of this idea was evident in the practice of church discipline, which is discussed more fully in the following chapters. Here the focus is simply on how

evangelicals spoke about this court of opinion and its significance to alternative definitions of honor and shame.³⁵

One of the deepest concerns of biblical writers like the author of Hebrews, according to David deSilva, was the physical maintenance of the Christian community, which was essential to maintaining the strength of an alternative social vision, including definitions of honor and shame, in the face of community opposition. Thus, the writer urges his readers, “Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some.” As deSilva also points out, elsewhere in the New Testament authors explicitly tie the communion of believers to the idea of honor, as the apostle Paul did when he wrote that believers should “love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor.” Such exhortations were not only positive, but warned of the need to guard against believers “falling away” from God and the church.³⁶

The language described by deSilva, and the concern for the construction of an alternate social space where different values could be nourished, is strikingly mirrored in the covenants of the myriad Baptist churches that sprang up throughout the Deep South in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. To take only one example, the church covenant of the Cashaway Baptist Church, established in Darlington County, South Carolina, in 1756, recorded a lengthy set of beliefs, including a passage taken in part from the book of Hebrews:

³⁵ Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, 1st ed. (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1967), esp. chapters 1 and 2.

³⁶ deSilva, *Despising Shame*, 285-287. Translations of scripture are deSilva's.

Being sensible that our conversation both in the world and in the church ought to be as becometh the body of Christ we judge it is our duty to walk in wisdom toward them void of offence [*sic*] towards God and to regard each other in our church communion. We esteem it ou[r] duty to walk with each other in all humility and brotherly love to watch over and guard each other's conversation, to stir one another up to love and good work not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as we have opportunity to worship God according to his [will] and when [w]e can to admonish one another according to the rules of the gospel.³⁷

Within the context of such a community a profession of faith took on the same significance that the “word of honor” held in other parts of southern society. A profession of faith was an affirmation, frequently made publicly and accompanied by ritual inclusion into the body of Christ, of the ideals and values of the Christian community. To fall away from the church and one's profession, then, could be interpreted as a shameful inconsistency or weakness. Just as the author of Hebrews warned his readers that to fail to finish the race would be dishonorable, so some southern evangelicals interpreted those who fell away as somehow dishonored or shamed. At the funeral of the Rev. Robert Walker in 1853, Presbyterian Pierpont Bishop recalled Walker's participation in the turn-of-the-century revivals, estimating that over two hundred people had joined Walker's church during what was commonly called the “old revival.” Not all these continued in the faith, however, and Bishop recalled that many had later “dishonored their profession.”³⁸

Many southern evangelicals interpreted the connection between God's honor and that of his people to mean that God would vindicate them not only in the hereafter, but sometimes on earth, as well. In 1811, James Jenkins discovered that a number of

³⁷ Cashaway Baptist Church Records (Darlington County, South Carolina), September 28, 1756, SCL.

³⁸ Pierpont E. Bishop, *A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of Rev. Robert B. Walker, Preached at the Request and Now Published by Order of Bethesda Church* (Chester, S.C: Printed at the office of the Palmetto Standard, 1853), 12-13, SCL.

“slanderous reports” about him were preceding him on his circuit. “These reports, for the most part, had their origin in relation to other persons, but were palmed upon me before they got through many editions,” Jenkins wrote bitterly. He was “publicly posted” at two stops on his circuit, and feared that his ministry might be in jeopardy. “But,” he wrote, “it appeared the Lord took my part against those who would triumph over me,” and the controversy soon subsided.³⁹

At other times, God seemed to mete out retribution more severely and directly against those who sought to shame his prophets, even when they provoked it. In the 1790s, Jenkins was preaching in Georgia. “Going into a store here one day, I took occasion to reprove a man for indulging in blasphemy,” he recalled, “upon which he abused me in a most shocking manner; calling me an impostor, &c. I suppose that it was altogether providential that he did not inflict on me some bodily injury.” A few years later, passing through the same area, Jenkins wrote, “I heard of the awful death of this unfortunate sinner.” Indeed, ill fortune and death frequently visited those who scorned God’s messengers according to the accounts penned by evangelical memoirists and historians. Methodist Bishop James Osgood Andrew, relating the story of George Dougherty’s public “pumping” in Charleston, added that many of the attackers came to no good in the years after the attack, and several died premature deaths. The meaning of such stories was clear to those who told them: God would not be mocked, and those who not only rejected the gospel but scorned its messengers did well to be wary of divine retribution.⁴⁰

³⁹ Jenkins, *Experience, Labours, and Gospel Sufferings of Rev. James Jenkins*, 162.

⁴⁰ Jenkins, *Experience, Labours, and Gospel Sufferings of Rev. James Jenkins*, 62; Mood, *Methodism in Charleston*, 91.

In the late antebellum period, the evangelical exposition of honor and shame coexisted with surprising ease alongside the more genteel definitions of honor that characterized the upper classes of the South, among whom evangelicals increasingly counted themselves. Furthermore, while ministers from evangelical denominations still decried earthly honor and urged their audiences to keep their hands on the gospel plow in the face of scorn, the source of that scorn became increasingly unclear, shifting from specific and easily identifiable elements in society like the crowd that subjected George Dougherty to a public pumping in Charleston to a more generalized and distant atheism, skepticism, and false religion. Scattered opposition to evangelical proselytizing continued well into the waning of the nineteenth century and beyond—the fervent sincerity of evangelicals was always an easy target—but by mid-century it was becoming increasingly unclear exactly who and what constituted “the world” that heaped derision on the church.⁴¹

If few southern clergy abandoned the idea that God was the only source of true honor, by the late antebellum period some expressed much less hostility to the tenets of worldly honor. “I am not one of those who hold that these sentiments are the birth of only pagan ferocity or unholy pride,” wrote a young Robert Lewis Dabney on the subject of honor. Dabney, who would become in later years a champion of the southern cause, was in the minority of southern clergymen in his belief, but his position marked the endpoint of a continuum towards which many southern clergy gravitated in the 1840s and 1850s. By 1863, for instance, the Rev. James C. Furman illustrated the holiness of God’s

⁴¹ Indeed, local roughs with pistols were still shooting up church services in the 1890s in Mississippi. See Ownby, *Subduing Satan*, 133.

jealousy for his people by comparing it to the righteous jealousy a man could feel for his honor. “We mean to say only, but to say strongly, that he preserves his honor with the scrupulous regard which only a man of high integrity can feel. It is in this sense that God employs the term as descriptive of himself,” Furman reasoned. Nevertheless, ministers like Dabney and Furman espoused a version of honor that was still a recognizable variant of earlier evangelical definitions. True honor, wrote Dabney, “which cometh from God and not from man,” was to be found in the man “who from pure motives braves the direst evils and pays the costliest sacrifice for the noblest object.” Significantly, Dabney held up the example of Christ as the prototypical example of such honor, but it was plainly a model intended for general use, and one which Dabney expected would find approval with a broad audience.⁴²

Bertram Wyatt-Brown has noted the effect of evangelical religion on upper class definitions of honor in the late antebellum period, especially on formulations of gentility among men. The three main components of gentility, Wyatt-Brown argued, were sociability, learning, and piety, in that order. The influence of evangelicalism by this time suffused southern society, and did not depend solely on revivals or itinerant preachers. “Men who would spurn the emotion of camp meeting would place a devotional book by their bedsides,” wrote Wyatt-Brown. Wyatt-Brown wonderfully captured the difference between this late antebellum pious gentility and the older, stoic influenced versions of honor that had once characterized the South’s upper classes, by comparing advice given by Thomas Jefferson to his nephew with a similar dictum given by Robert E. Lee to his

⁴² Dabney quotes found in Sean Michael Lucas, *Robert Lewis Dabney: A Southern Presbyterian Life* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Pub., 2005), 32-34; James C. Furman, *Sermon on the Death of Rev. James M. Chiles: Preached at Horeb Church, Abbeville District, South Carolina, on Sunday, 29th of March, 1863* (Greenville, S.C., 1863), 3-4, SCL.

son decades later. “Give up money, give up fame, give up science, give up earth itself and all it contains, rather than do an immoral act,” wrote Jefferson to Peter Carr. “And never suppose that in any possible situation or under any circumstances that is best for you to do a thing tho’ it can never be known but to yourself, ask yourself how you would act were all the world looking at you, and act accordingly.” Of Jefferson’s advice Wyatt-Brown wrote, “One was to imagine public scrutiny, not expect alienation from God or even one’s own sensibilities.” In contrast, decades later in 1851 Robert E. Lee wrote his son Custis, “Be strictly honorable in every act, and be not ashamed to *do right*.” In other words, Lee advised his son that at times the audience could be wrong, that shame must sometimes be endured for the sake of one’s conscience and ultimate vindication. Both Jefferson and Lee urged honor and right action, but the assumptions that stood behind their advice were strikingly different. Though by no means evangelical in a theological or social sense, Lee’s advice nevertheless showed the influence of the evangelical conception of honor and shame that had rung throughout the South for decades.⁴³

The evangelical clergy were shaped by their social environment during this period, as well. This was especially true among the more educated and urban clergy who comprised the group E. Brooks Holifield has called the “gentlemen theologians.” Holifield traces the development of the genteel ideal among the clergy to their increasing social prominence and their extended contact with the other burgeoning professional classes to be found in cities like Charleston, Columbia, and Augusta in these years. “Urban life,” wrote Holifield, “was a nursery in which customary anxieties could bloom and flourish.” Evangelical conceptions of honor and gentility in these years were also

⁴³ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 89, 99-107.

shaped by what Holifield calls “the intellectual tradition behind literate southern culture.” Holifield singles out the tradition of eighteenth-century British moral philosophy, exemplified by figures like the Earl of Shaftesbury, Francis Hutchinson, and Adam Smith, arguing that the southern clergy in his study imbibed from this quarter the idea that “human nature made disgrace as painful as physical torture and esteem as desirable as any material comfort.” This strain of thought seems to have leavened evangelical rhetoric somewhat during these years, producing a formulation that saw the approval of man as desirable but also taught that sometimes disgrace in the eyes of man had to be borne so that honor could be preserved in the eyes of God.⁴⁴

It was this conception of honor that clergymen like James Henley Thornwell urged on young southern men in their role as the custodians of higher education in the South in the late antebellum period. Thornwell could modulate the evangelical conception of honor to fit the occasion and his role in it, whether religious or secular. As a chaplain of South Carolina College in the 1840s, Thornwell denounced “wealth, pleasure, learning, and honor, the painted vanities which share the affections and homage of mankind,” urging the young men in his audience to place all their actions in eternal perspective. In 1854, as president of the college, Thornwell struck a somewhat different tone in addressing the undergraduates at commencement. Here, Thornwell warned the students of the tumultuous times in which they were to live, and urged them to look to the glory of their state, South Carolina, and never to be ashamed to own and defend her. “There are no cowards there—no sycophants or parasites,” he intoned. “All, all I believe to be good men & true.” He continued, releasing them to the rest of their lives

⁴⁴ E. Brooks Holifield, *The Gentlemen Theologians: American Theology in Southern Culture, 1795-1860* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1978), 36-49, quotes on 37, 38, see also fn 51.

in the precious hope that as no son of South Carolina can ever be ashamed of her—so she may never be ashamed of you—Nay I know that of some of you, in after days, she will be proud. Go on Gentlemen as you have begun—noble ends by noble means pursue—When your last summons comes let it find you with harness on your backs—Live for Excellence & you shall reap the reward of everlasting glory—Farewell.⁴⁵

The rhetoric Thornwell employed on this occasion was in many ways a traditional species of nationalistic rhetoric employed in the interest of the state. But it also mirrored strikingly the rhetoric that many southern clergy used to urge a different, and religious view of honor on their people in the first half of the nineteenth century. In the midst of the tumultuous decade of the 1850s, and in the same year that the Kansas-Nebraska Act convulsed the nation and brought all the simmering sectional tendencies to a boil, Thornwell warned the young Carolinians never to be ashamed of their state, to pursue “noble ends by noble means,” and to finish the race of life at full tilt. The reward would be “everlasting glory,” though Thornwell did not distinguish whether by this he meant eternal salvation or earthly fame. Very possibly, he meant both.

In these years before the war, figures like Thornwell, religious figures who straddled the gap between sacred and secular worlds by taking charge of higher institutions of learning, were not unusual. Besides Thornwell, there were figures like Basil Manly, who presided over sweeping revivals in Edgefield County, South Carolina, in the 1820s, and then served as president of the University of Alabama from 1837 to 1855. Manly’s biographer highlights his sensitivity to matters of honor in all the areas of his life, and in his inaugural address to the students in Alabama, Manly proposed evangelical morality as a refining influence on the rowdy and violent sense of honor that prevailed among the student body. He challenged them to aspire to “nicety of principle, a

⁴⁵ Commencement Address to the College, Dec. 4, 1854, James Henley Thornwell Papers, SCL.

dignified sense of honor, refinement of feeling....” It was a perfect definition of genteel honor that combined an adherence to conscience with a sensitivity to honor, wrapping both in a veneer of “refinement” that was the sine qua non of gentility. Manly’s own feelings in this area were challenged when some time later one of his young charges, who had been expelled from the college, “attempted to take hold of my nose,” which thankfully “proved too short or some other cause.” Manly nearly returned the attack with his fist, but expressed gratitude for his forbearance in letting the young miscreant go on his way. The presence of figures like Thornwell and Manly at the helm of state institutions throughout the South illustrates not only the degree to which the evangelical movement had become mainstream in these years, but also the way in which evangelical morality and definitions of honor merged with and supported the genteel ideal.⁴⁶

The tenor of religious rhetoric changed in these years, as well, though not so completely that the old division between the church and the world was obliterated. As evangelical religion became commonplace in the South, it became less and less clear from what quarter the derision of true religion could be expected. In general, those who preached that true honor came from God alone had to look further afield to find those who disagreed. Thus in the 1840s, Thornwell warned the undergraduates of South Carolina College against the “atheists’ laugh or a skepticks jeer.” In another address, Thornwell warned, “In every age, skeptics have relied more upon the power of sarcasm, than upon the power of argument.” Elsewhere, he warned of “the design of the French philosophers” to discredit Christianity by associating it with “uncouth and revolting attitudes.” Methodist Whitefoord Smith observed generally, “the heart of man is opposed

⁴⁶ A. James Fuller, *Chaplain to the Confederacy: Basil Manly and Baptist Life in the Old South*, Southern biography series (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 158, 164-165.

to the principles of the Gospel of Christ.” This was not, Smith observed, because of any moral or philosophical flaw in the gospel message. Rather it was simply because “requiring an acknowledgement of the divine sovereignty and of human dependance..strikes at the full blown conceits of worldly pride...thus prostrating the glory and dignity of human nature at the cross of Christ and bidding him ‘that glorieth glory in the Lord.’”⁴⁷

Locating the resistance to true religion in a generalized and metaphorical human heart was theologically in line with historical Christian theology, but the generations of Methodist clergy before Smith had often been able to point out literal antagonists haunting the edges of their audience. “We had an excellent meeting, though much opposition,” wrote James Jenkins of a meeting in Columbia in 1807. “It may truly be said, the devil raged furiously; and nothing appeared to calm the ignoble vulgar, until brother Meyers openly expressed his determination to read out their names from the stand.” The progress of evangelicalism in the South and the diminishing distance between secular and sacred conceptions of honor can be measured by the contrast between the enemies of religion that evangelicals saw or imagined: rowdy young men who broke up camp meetings in the early nineteenth century and the French philosophers who despised Christianity in the late antebellum period.⁴⁸

The rising social status, and widening intellectual horizons of ministers like Thornwell, Manly, and Smith, had much to do with the fact that they began to advocate a Christian honor whose opponents were atheists rather than local rowdies. One might

⁴⁷ Thornwell, *Discourses on Truth*, 135-136. Address to Graduates, John 5:44, undated materials, Whitefoord Smith Papers, DU.

⁴⁸ Jenkins, *Experience, Labours, and Gospel Sufferings of Rev. James Jenkins*, 155.

expect that among the rural preachers the old enemies were the same. Nevertheless, the tendency to associate despisers of religion with the foreign and the far-off could be found further down the social scale, as well. In his travels through the South shortly before the Civil War, Frederick Law Olmsted observed a church service somewhere in South Carolina or Georgia. The meeting was not for the high and mighty, and Olmsted observed with contempt that children crawled about on the floor during the service, “carrying handfuls of corn-bread and roasted potatoes about with them.” “Dogs were not excluded,” noted the amused but acerbic northerner. The preacher, who “nearly all the time cried aloud at the utmost stretch of his voice,” inveighed against “French infidelity and socialism...Fourier, the Pope of Rome, Tom Paine, Voltaire, ‘Roosu,’ and Joe Smith.” Despite the high emotional pitch of the service, Olmsted could detect in the man’s sermon and the audience’s response “no argument upon any point that the congregation were likely to have much difference of opinion upon.”⁴⁹

Still, even if its enemies were indistinct the old evangelical message retained its vigor well into this period in some quarters, surviving within church walls in the sermons of prominent clergy as well as the harangues of rural, backcountry preachers. While they championed a refined and genteel sense of honor in the public sphere, prominent ministers like Thornwell and Whitefoord Smith, in their role as ministers of true religion, still reminded the people of God that honor and shame existed in the eyes of God, not in the gaze of the world. In humbler environs and among the more common sort of people, preachers still sought to overcome their audience’s supposed scorn for the gospel. The rural preacher whose sermon Frederick Law Olmsted observed seemed intent on

⁴⁹ Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom: A Traveller's Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American States* (New York: Mason Bros., 1861), 266-267.

overcoming a perceived social stigma that kept his listeners from coming forward. “He was leaning far over the desk,” wrote Olmsted, “with his arm stretched forward, gesticulating violently, yelling at the highest key, and catching breath with an effort.” Olmsted recalled the preacher’s message: “A—ah! why don’t you come to Christ? ah! what’s the reason? ah! Is it because he was of *lowly birth*? ah! Is that it? *Is it* because he was born in a manger? ah! Is it because he was of a humble origin? ah! Is it because he was lowly born? a-ha!” While a baffled Olmsted looked on, the preacher continued to berate his congregation with the question in different formulations until he was satisfied that his point had been made. It was a point and a rhetorical formulation, Olmsted suspected, that the audience already knew well.⁵⁰

In seeking to understand the evangelical movement in the Deep South it is important not only to understand how the early movement stood opposed to southerners’ understandings of themselves, but also to understand how a movement that was so distinctive in its early stages was able to speak to southerners at all, and eventually to work its way to the center of southern identity. Where there are no commonly held assumptions, values, or cultural structures, there can be no conversation. In this regard, it is vitally important to study evangelical rhetoric—what its representatives said and with what words and how they said it. This chapter has argued that while preachers throughout the Deep South from the Revolution to the Civil War often and loudly denounced worldly honor, they also fully entered into the cultural conversation that surrounded them, using the language of honor and shame drawn from scripture to tell their sacred story. It was

⁵⁰ Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom*, 266-271.

not truly a possibility in an exchange in which both sides did not question the desirability of honor or the abhorrence of shame that evangelical clergy would discard these terms altogether. Rather, their sermons and addresses reveal an attempt to persuade their audiences that they had fundamentally misunderstood honor and shame, and that, in William Brantly's words, "You leave honour and dignity to pursue shame and contempt." True honor could only come from God, not man, and eternal shame was only his to bestow, as well. This belief was supposed to sustain Christians in the face of the world's scorn, and could form the basis of an alternative court of opinion consisting of God and the saints. Such a view was a consistent feature of evangelical rhetoric from the end of the eighteenth century throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, even as evangelicals' rising social status and definitions of honor among the South's upper classes converged to include piety and a strict adherence to conscience as an element of a genteel reputation.⁵¹

There are several ways in which an examination of how evangelicals used the language of honor and shame can move us forward in our understanding of the evangelical movement in the South. First, an examination of the language evangelicals used requires us to consider what it meant that evangelicals engaged the cultural discourse of honor and tried to twist it to their own advantage. From this angle, at least, the evangelical movement appears to have been partly what Raymond Williams once called an "alternative" cultural movement, rather than an "oppositional" one. In other words, while the evangelical redefinition of honor was the source of real conflict, it did not finally, as Williams wrote, "in practice go beyond the limits of the central effective

⁵¹ "Lying Vanities," in Brantly, *Sermons*, SCL.

and dominant definitions.” This view qualifies a narrative in which evangelicals traded their early ideological purity for influence and converts, coming to terms with both honor and slavery in their effort to make the church safe for white masters. An examination of evangelical rhetoric reveals the way in which the early evangelical movement was able to speak to southerners in a language they understood. The early evangelical preachers offered converts a redefinition of honor and shame that had obvious appeal to those who found themselves barred from achieving social status and honor through traditional avenues. Nevertheless, it offered them a reorientation of the way in which honor was obtained, not a rejection of honor and its terms. At the other end of the narrative, in the era in which evangelical religion formed one of the pillars supporting the southern way of life, an examination of evangelical language reveals that a countercultural definition of honor and shame still existed in evangelical rhetoric, even if it was at times tamed, at times unclear as to its enemies, or at times put to use in the service of refined social ideals.⁵²

Next, such an examination requires a close inspection of the link between the biblical text and evangelical rhetoric. Frederick Law Olmsted noted that the sermon he witnessed in the 1850s “was commenced by reading a text, with which, however, it had, so far as I could discover, no further association.”⁵³ However astute an observer Olmsted may have been, his observation did not hold when it came to the sermons and rhetoric that the average southerner heard on a regular basis. Used to the close exegetical

⁵² Raymond Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays* (London: Verso, 1980), 37-42.

⁵³ Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom*, 266. It should also be noted that evangelical sermons were frequently divided into exhortatory and an explicatory parts, with the former being simply an emotional appeal to convert and the latter being the examination of a text. Olmsted may well have viewed an exhortation, rather than a true sermon.

treatments of a text that characterized the sermon's of learned clergy both North and South, Olmsted overlooked the way in which the approach of the New Testament authors in particular informed the style and content of the evangelical message he heard. The close reliance of preachers on the language and argument of the biblical text is apparent when their written or published sermons are considered in close consultation with the texts on which they were based. Drawing on a text in which the authors tried to sustain the social cohesion of the early Christian community with alternative definitions of honor and shame, preachers in the early national South either consciously or unconsciously hit upon a theme that their audiences well understood from a text with which they were familiar and accustomed to respect.

Finally, a consideration of evangelical language in this area helps to clarify the differences and similarities southerners experienced between ideas of conscience and guilt, which scholars have assumed to be characteristic of the evangelical experience and the modern individual, and shame, characteristic of honor cultures and of a more premodern view of the individual. Bertram Wyatt-Brown pointed to the difference between the internalized guilt and self-control found in evangelical methods of childrearing and the sensitivity to shame that most southern parents tried to instill. Furthermore, many scholars have portrayed the evangelical movement that began in the mid-eighteenth century as the wedge of modernity, seeing the deeply personal experience of conversion as the harbinger of modern self-conscious individualism. In the South and elsewhere, the social disruptions associated with evangelical conversion seem to spring from the extreme individualistic tendencies found in evangelical theology and preaching, which prompted converts to leave their families, resist traditional sources of authority,

and rely on their own conscience to control their conduct. Here, too, an examination of the evangelical interpretation of honor and shame adds clarity. In their writing, sermons, and addresses, evangelicals did not simply discard the concept of shame, rather they reinterpreted its audience, looking to God and to the church as the court in front of whom one's actions mattered. For the southern convert, then, "guilt" at sin may have felt much like shame, especially if one took seriously, as evangelicals did, the idea of a divine judge who looked on at all times. There is little conceptual or cognitive distance between this view of shame and what we have usually called guilt, a fact which serves to further reduce the cultural disparity between evangelicalism and honor.⁵⁴

This chapter has examined the rhetorical arguments of evangelical clergy in the Deep South regarding the relationship of what they termed "true religion" to the cultural touchstones of honor and shame. It has not examined the reality, or practice, of that argument in the church and the extent to which evangelical practice actually contradicted or coincided with the assumptions and practice of honor in the South. The following chapters will take up that task.

⁵⁴ Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 149-174. On evangelical revivals as part of the making of the modern self, see Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 302. On evangelicalism as an individualistic theology, see John B. Boles, *The Great Revival, 1787-1805: The Origins of the Southern Evangelical Mind* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1972), 125-142. For a tempering view, see Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, esp. 39-40. Many portrayals of the social disruption that evangelicalism could produce rely either explicitly or implicitly on the interpretation of evangelicalism as a portent of the modern self and inimical to older models of hierarchy and communal authority. See Heyrman, *Southern Cross*; Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind*.

II. 'In the publick manner': Honor, Community, Discipline, and the Self in the Local Church

Looking back on his long career as a Methodist minister, William Capers remembered vividly an incident that occurred at one of the small, backcountry churches that lay along his circuit in the Chester district of South Carolina in the first decade of the nineteenth century. At one of his stops, a place called Carter's meeting house, a large congregation had gathered, composed of members of the local Methodist society as well as the local community, all interested in the church trial of a woman accused of adultery, which Capers conducted according to the Methodist mode of government. As Capers remembered, "Her father-in-law, and the connections on that side generally believed her guilty," while the woman's husband loudly and pitifully proclaimed her innocence, being, as Capers thought, "partially deranged" by the situation. All the community, including the society members, were "intensely enlisted" on one side or the other of the matter, and when a group of society members chosen by Capers found the woman guilty, the crowd erupted into violence. In the midst of the fight, Capers saw several society members doing their part and the "poor crazy husband fighting his father." The young minister was unable to restore order, and some members of the crowd were openly hostile, one "vulgar woman" screaming at Capers to "go home and suck his mammy," a reference perhaps to his youth as well as his privilege.¹

For Capers, this event was a turning point in his career, the moment he realized that

¹ William M. Wightman, *Life of William Capers, D. D., One of the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Including an Autobiography* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1902), 103-104.

in the war between the church and Satan the spoils did not go to the meek. For our purposes, it serves as a striking illustration of the way that evangelical churches, and specifically the process of church discipline, intersected with the concerns of honor, shame, and reputation in the local community. This chapter explores why it was that a community should gather to hear the verdict of the church on a woman accused of a transgression that was simultaneously sinful in the eyes of the religious community but which also held great significance for the balance of honor and shame in the local community.

Capers' descriptions of the woman's husband follow the common tropes of shame and the adjectives of cuckoldry. He was "deranged" by the shame of his wife's unfaithfulness and pathetically tried to maintain her innocence. Capers' descriptions, "poor," "crazy," were a simple reflection of the husband's situation in Capers' eyes: a man already shamed but so unwilling to accept it that he would fight his own father. The husband's father and brothers, understanding that the shame of a son or of a brother was also one's own, were determined that the woman's misdeeds be exposed and she be punished. No doubt there were other parties with something at stake in the outcome that day. The woman's family, her partner in the alleged affair, and those who by relational, commercial, and informal ties had something material or immaterial to gain or lose by the shame of a woman, her husband, and his family.

That the crowd gathered to hear the church's verdict was not surprising to Capers, though it might be to us. For those accustomed to seeing evangelical churches, and especially their discipline, arrayed against the cultural forces of honor in the South, it is surprising to see them so closely intertwined. This chapter argues that this was not an

accidental or isolated occurrence. From the Revolution onward, evangelical churches worked their way into the fabric of communal life in the Deep South. As public spaces where community opinion coalesced in the form of church verdicts, and where rumors, insults, and reputations were openly probed, churches were inescapably part of the manufacture and maintenance of honor, reputation, and standing in their communities. This process was not without friction and tension, as the ideals of the evangelical community sometimes clashed with the trappings of male honor and the rowdy world of male recreation outside the church. But the areas of congruence were always at least as significant as the areas of conflict, and the underlying assumptions in both honor and evangelicalism about the relationship between individual identity and communal authority were nearly identical, allowing the church to speak in a way that southerners understood.

Though united by common principles and goals and dealing largely with the same issues, denominational practice in addressing matters of discipline varied. Responses fell on a continuum running from private admonishment to public exclusion, depending on whether a particular infraction was mainly one of conscience or whether an individual's actions reflected on the reputation of religion, the church, and God. In the Presbyterian Church, cases came before the session, the board of men appointed church Elders by the congregation. The session took up cases brought by members of the congregation or matters that were common knowledge in the community. In 1814, for instance, the session of Second Presbyterian Church in Charleston investigated the case of Phoebe Cloudy, a black member of the church, on account of "insinuations having been thrown

out to the knowledge of the Session respecting [her] late disorderly conduct.” Three session members visited Cloudy at the home of her father, and finding her a “hardened, insensible, and refractory sinner,” they recommended to their fellow Elders that she be suspended from the church.²

In all denominations, however, public sins had to be dealt with in public. As early as 1767, the members of the Cashaway Baptist Church in South Carolina determined “that if a member falls publickly that he shall be sensured [*sic*] publickly.” Churches in the antebellum era across a denominational spectrum continued the practice. In 1842, the session of Hopewell Presbyterian decided that Betsy McClerkin should be “rebuked before the congregation” for the “scandalous sin of fornication” before she could be restored. At the same church in 1835, Samuel McCaw appeared before the session and “submitted to his rebuke” for a previous offense, after which the matter was “publickly intimated” to the church. Because of the arrangement of church government in the Presbyterian church, the public implications of discipline involved an intermediate level, a hearing before the session, that was not present in the Baptist form of discipline.³

The Methodist *Doctrines and Disciplines* entrusted discipline largely to ministers, who were to follow as closely as possible the instructions found in the book of Mathew, chapter 18, escalating from private admonishment towards, finally, public exclusion. Ministers were to challenge a member in private, then with one or two witnesses, and then in front of the church or a “select number.” “And if there be no sign of real

² Second Presbyterian Church (Charleston) Session minutes, February, 1814, South Carolina Historical Society (SCHS).

³ Cashaway Baptist Church Records (Darlington Co., SC), June 20, 1767, South Caroliniana Library (SCL); Hopewell A.R.P. Church Session Records (Chester Co., SC), May 4, 1842, Oct. 3, 1835, SCL. Ernest Trice Thompson notes the old world origins of Presbyterian discipline. See Ernest Trice Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1963), 77.

humiliation,” the text instructed, “the offender must be cut off.” Importantly, while the entire church played a role in discipline, for Methodists the final authority to exclude resided with the minister, not the congregation. Nevertheless, the execution and effects of discipline were markedly public, and the *Doctrines* went to great lengths to explain that the minister’s judgments were to be observed by the entire church.⁴

Speaking no doubt with the Baptist mode of discipline in mind, the Methodist *Doctrines* observed with horror the practice of handing over “the authority of judging and censuring offenders to the private members of the church,” who “in innumerable instances would have the strongest temptations to partiality.” Indeed, the congregational form of Baptist discipline inspired all of the fears of disorder and perversion of justice in the religious mind that unbridled democracy had always inspired in the political imagination. Baptists carried out discipline as a congregation, in gatherings where all the male (and in some cases female) members heard and voted on the cases at hand. Members could come before the church to accuse themselves or their neighbors of transgressions, which in the absence of outright repentance would initiate a “trial” of the case. As historian Gregory Wills notes, it can be confusing to call these proceedings trials in a formal sense, implying a strict procedural method or a body of set law, since they were more often simply public hearings at which the actions and attitudes of church members were debated. Nevertheless, such events frequently involved witnesses and evidence, and ended in sentences or pardons, making the terminology apt if inaccurate.⁵

⁴ Methodist Episcopal Church, *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America, with Notes by Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury*, 10th ed. (Philadelphia: Henry Tuckniss, 1798), 160-169.

⁵ Methodist Episcopal Church, *Doctrines and Disciplines of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 167; Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1785-*

Any disruption of Christian fellowship was cause for investigation and consideration by the church. Baptist churches frequently began their congregational meetings with in an inquiry into the harmony of the church, as Big Creek Baptist church in Anderson County, South Carolina, did in 1832 when the church clerk noted, “The peace of the church was inquired for and found bro. Frost in disorder.” Here members could bring before the church difficulties or differences existing between them and other members, inform the church of rumors in the community that might involve church members, or inform the church that they felt themselves wronged by the church and ask for consideration of their case.⁶

Baptist historians have noted how appropriate the democratic form of Baptist polity was to the sensibilities of Americans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. While the participation of the congregation was an important spiritual expression of the unity of the church and the relationship of fellow believers for Baptists, it also appealed to the political feelings fired by the Revolution and to a preference for participatory government that increased in strength as the nineteenth century progressed. Evangelicalism itself has often been portrayed as an inherently individualistic form of religion. In this sense, evangelicalism seems an appropriate religious counterpart to the concurrent sweeping shift in political sentiment that saw republicanism, a tradition of political involvement that feared self-interest and prized disinterested virtue in service the community, give way to a liberal democratic tradition that approved the pursuit of enlightened self-interest in politics and found its populist hero in Andrew Jackson. To this way of seeing things, in

1900 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 23-24. The same caution applies to calling the various forms of church discipline in the evangelical South “church courts,” which implies more structure and formality than in most cases these matters involved.

⁶ Big Creek Baptist Church Records (Anderson Co., SC), July 1, 1832, SCL.

its emphasis on individual spiritual experience and the place it retained for the individual voice in church matters, the Baptist structure of church polity can be understood in one sense as the religious form of an increasing emphasis on the individual in American life.⁷

But in the South the Baptist form of church government tapped into deep cultural, as well as political, traditions. Baptists may have viewed the democratic form of their churches as the most appropriate and legitimate way for the church to derive and wield its authority, but they believed deeply in the authority of their communities over the individuals within them. In this respect Baptists spoke a language of communal authority that southerners well understood and which derived much of its power from deep-rooted assumptions about the role of the community in shaping individual identity and reputation, assumptions that also underlay the potency of honor in the South. In this way, evangelicalism was uniquely suited to address the sensibilities of southerners who lived their lives under the auspices of honor and shame.⁸

The purposes and assumptions underlying church discipline have been murkier than its practice for most historians. In part, this is because historians of evangelicalism have been reluctant to credit the parts of the evangelical explanation of discipline that express its significance in terms of God's honor. There have been several skilled examinations of evangelical church discipline since historian Donald Mathews noted decades ago in his

⁷ For individualistic tendencies in evangelicalism, see John B. Boles, *The Great Revival, 1787-1805: The Origins of the Southern Evangelical Mind* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1972), esp. 125-142. On the relationship between evangelicalism and politics, see Patricia U. Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); and Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

⁸ Gregory Wills emphasizes the pre-modern characteristics of church discipline among the Baptists. Wills sees the Baptist mode of church government as both democratic and authoritarian, and as establishing a "precarious balance between pre-modern and modern cultural trends." Wills, *Democratic Religion*, ix.

own gifted analysis of the practice that the meaning of discipline within the evangelical world “is not yet totally clear.” What is clear from both Mathews’ analysis and the analysis of those in his wake is that church discipline was an essential part of evangelical life that anchored individual belief to communal authority and played a role in safeguarding personal piety as well as communal purity. For those who have seen evangelicalism as the religious expression of modern individualism, the universal adherence to and practice of discipline among evangelicals can be a difficult interpretative obstacle, and one best avoided. In this interpretation, discipline can only be viewed as an epiphenomenon of individual belief—a mechanism that mainly served to maintain the rectitude of the individual believer when he or she went astray.⁹

But Mathews and others have recognized discipline as an obvious outworking of a deep strain of communal sentiment in evangelical life. These scholars, seeing the importance placed on discipline among evangelicals, have revealed the evangelical community as more than simply the sum of the individual faiths it contained. It was instead a community of souls, the Church, a material and local expression of the spiritual and universal body of Christ, an entity equally as important in Christian and evangelical thought as the person of the individual believer.¹⁰

Nevertheless, one of the aims of church discipline was undeniably the maintenance

⁹ Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 46. Among those who emphasize the individualistic nature of evangelicalism while largely avoiding the topic of discipline, I would place the important work of John Boles, Cynthia Lyerly, and Christine Heyrman. See Boles, *The Great Revival*, 46; Cynthia Lynn Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind, 1770-1810* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1997).

¹⁰ Among those who have emphasized the central place of community in evangelical life, I would place Donald Mathews, Jean Friedman, and Gregory Wills. See Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, esp. 42-46; Jean E. Friedman, *The Enclosed Garden: Women and Community in the Evangelical South, 1830-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985); Wills, *Democratic Religion*, esp. 26-36.

of personal holiness within a context of communal purity and harmony. There are no better statements of this goal than the church covenants recorded at the beginning of numerous books of minutes from church bodies across the Deep South, statements that often precede decades of minutes that record multiple generations of believers attempting to conform their communities to sacred ideals. In 1805, the founders of the Williamson Creek Baptist Church in Georgia recorded a variety of theological positions on the Trinity, baptism, and scripture in their covenant before arriving at a section on “gospel order.” They defined the church as “a congregation of faithful persons,” who “have agreed to keep up a Godly discipline agreeable to the rules of the gospel.” The purpose of this discipline in the understanding of Williamson Creek’s founders was “for the reclaiming of those Christians who may be disorderly either in principle or in practice.” By identifying both “principle and practice” as potential sources of disorder, the church covenant echoed other such documents that espoused the ideal of personal holiness along with the authority of the community in matters of individual belief and action.¹¹

Individual holiness and communal purity were inseparable for evangelicals. Gregory Wills has observed that the primary purpose of church discipline among Georgia Baptists was the maintenance of purity within a community whose essential characteristics were its separation from the world and a membership restricted narrowly to elect persons. Thus, discipline functioned to maintain the distinction of the church from the world and to synchronize as nearly as possible the church’s membership roll with God’s Book of Life. It was not a concern for order in the abstract that led the Baptists in Wills’ study to guard the purity of their communities so judiciously through

¹¹ Williamson Creek Baptist Church Records, June 5, 1805, Mercer University Special Collections (MU).

the mechanism of discipline; rather, it was the belief that discipline properly exercised glorified God, fulfilled the Baptist vision of a church separate from the world, and would lead to church growth.¹²

To define the purpose of church discipline as a concern for personal holiness and communal purity is undoubtedly accurate, but to confine the concerns that discipline addressed to the individual believer and the community is too narrow an understanding of the evangelical view of discipline and the role of church courts. The actions of the individual believer had implications for multiple and interconnected audiences, each of which were addressed in different ways by the disciplinary process. The first “audience” was, of course, the regenerate conscience of the person herself in relation to God. Evangelical discipline addressed this audience in its concern to provoke repentance, a deeply personal act, in the heart of the true believer.

Another audience was the religious community whose purity was threatened by the actions of the individuals it sustained. Churches throughout the Deep South recorded, as Antioch Baptist did in referring to a rumor about one of its members, that the actions of members had the capacity “to wound the feelings of the church.” The discipline process allowed churches not only to maintain their purity and separation from the world, but also to receive what church records repeatedly refer to as “satisfaction” from the offending member.¹³

¹² Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 31. Erskine Clarke has shown a similar desire among Presbyterians to restrict the sacraments to those who were elect by issuing communion tokens. See Erskine Clarke, *Our Southern Zion: A History of Calvinism in the South Carolina Low Country, 1690-1990* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1996), 66.

¹³ Antioch Baptist Church Records (GA), June 14, 1834, MU. See also, for example, Brushy Creek Baptist Church Records (Greenville Co., SC) Jan. 10, 1795, Aug. 15, 1801, Jan. 18, 1834, SCL; and Big Creek Baptist Church Records (Anderson Co., SC) Aug. 5, 1848, SCL.

The next audience that church courts addressed was the very world from which evangelicals struggled to maintain separate. This audience was not explicitly addressed in the doctrine of church discipline, but an awareness of its presence and the importance of addressing it runs through the church covenants and court records examined for this study. In the covenant of one of the oldest Baptist churches in South Carolina, the awareness that individual actions reverberated in the community outside of the church as well as within it is evident. “Being sensible that our conversation both in the world and in the church ought to be as becometh the body of Christ,” the covenant reads, “we judge it is our duty to walk in wisdom toward them void of offence towards God....” The imperative to walk without offense to God in the presence of believers and unbelievers alike led in the logic of the church’s founders to the duty to “watch over and guard each other’s conversation,” and “to admonish one another according to the rules of the gospel.” Even after evangelicalism was well established in the South, discipline committees continued to be concerned that members’ actions dishonored religion and the church in unbelievers’ eyes, leading to the characteristic apology from a member brought before Little River Baptist Church for being drunk that his actions “had brought a reproach on the cause of religion.”¹⁴

The awareness of a watching world was significant for another important reason, as well. The concern that an individual’s actions might bring reproach on the cause of religion in the eyes of the unbelieving community was accompanied by the belief that the actions of Christ’s followers could dishonor him in these same eyes. In this conception of God’s honor evangelicals in the South were distant heirs to an older view of God in

¹⁴ Cashaway Baptist Church Records (Darlington Co., SC) Sept. 28, 1756, SCL; Little River Baptist Church Records, Oct. 18, 1845, Baptist Historical Collection, Furman University (BHC).

which His holiness and honor in the world's eyes were vulnerable to the dishonorable actions of his followers. This view of sin could be found in many of the biblical texts that provided the logic behind the structure and practice of evangelical communities, and following these texts evangelicals emphasized the ability of God's followers to dishonor him. Methodist Whitefoord Smith exemplified this understanding of sin in a sermon he preached in 1853 in Charleston from the text of Malachi 3:8-10. From the text, Smith asserted that by their sin men robbed God "of his honour. By profaning his name." Thus, church discipline was an important way in which God's honor could be justified to the world and his holiness, a concept closely related to his honor, could be preserved.¹⁵

In the case of the Baptists, this conception of the interrelation between Christ's honor and church discipline can be traced back in an American context at least as far as Benjamin Griffith's 1743 summary of church discipline, which was attached to the first confession of faith adopted by Baptists in America in Philadelphia. Griffith's document was the basis for the church disciplinary practices of Baptists in Charleston well into the nineteenth century. In a guide to church discipline printed in Charleston in 1808 based on Griffith's earlier document, the purpose and practice of discipline are carefully defined. "If the offence be private, the censure may, in some cases ought to be laid on before the church only," the document reads (the "church" meaning those attending disciplinary meetings restricted to members). However, "if the crime is public, and very notorious, the

¹⁵ Biblical scholars have recently begun emphasizing honor culture as an essential context for understanding the writers of the New Testament. See David A. deSilva, *Despising Shame: Honor Discourse and Community Maintenance in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1995), esp. 209-275; David A. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2000); Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001). Sermon on Malachi 3:8-10 in "Outlines of Sermons, 1853, Charleston, SC," Whitefoord Smith Papers, Duke University Special Collections (DU).

honor of Christ calls for the censure to be public.” It was this understanding of sin and the need to preserve Christ’s honor in the world that led Cashaway Baptist Church to suspend their pastor Joshua Edwards for intoxication in the years before the Revolution, citing for their reason that “such a behaviour [*sic*] tends much to the dishonor of God and brings a reproach on our holy religion.”¹⁶

The Methodist *Doctrines and Disciplines* mirrored the distinction between private sins and public scandals that brought dishonor to God. Private matters were to be dealt with according to Christ’s injunction in the gospel of Mathew, in which transgressors were first confronted privately, then with two or three witnesses, and then, if they would not repent, admonished before the church. But sins which brought “public disgrace on the church of God” were dealt with immediately and as publicly as possible. “Surely,” read the Methodist text, “if the offense be of a scandalous nature...the offender ought to be immediately removed...for the honour of God and his cause.”¹⁷

Probably because it is difficult for us to fully comprehend or give credence to the evangelical explanation that church discipline functioned, if not primarily, at least importantly, to vindicate God’s honor, historians have tended to deemphasize this facet of the evangelical explanation of discipline. Historians have sifted sources and discerned the concerns for individual piety and communal purity that underlay the practice of discipline among evangelicals, but the openly expressed concern for God’s honor that stood behind

¹⁶ Bill J. Leonard, *Baptists in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 84; Charleston Baptist Association (S.C.), *A Summary of Church-Discipline: Shewing the Qualifications and Duties of the Officers and Members of a Gospel Church*, 3rd ed. (Charleston, S.C: Printed by J. Hoff, 1808), 22-23, SCL. Guides to church discipline published later contain the same wording. See, for example, *Baptist Confession of Faith and a Summary of Church Discipline* (Charleston, SC, 1831), SCL. Cashaway Baptist Church Records, Dec. 25, 1759, SCL;

¹⁷ Methodist Episcopal Church, *Doctrines and Disciplines of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 163.

these concerns has consistently slipped through all but the most carefully constructed interpretive sieves, despite the fact that it represents a much more solid theological basis for discipline than an abstract desire for order and discipline. Donald Mathews was undoubtedly right to identify the evangelical emphasis on order and discipline in the Christian life as the source of evangelicals' rigorous ethic of communal maintenance, but most religious communities are concerned with boundaries and with order in the abstract. To explain the particular fervor with which evangelicals undertook the task of discipline, it is important to enter into their conception, rooted in their reliance on the text of scripture, that God was holy, and that his honor was partly the concern of his people. Taking seriously this facet of evangelical thought helps to explain the logic behind some of the more obscure aspects of evangelical discipline, especially the importance that evangelicals attached to dealing with sins of a scandalous or public nature as publicly as possible. In doing so they followed not only a concern for order and discipline, but the logic of honor, in which a public insult or dishonor could not be repaired by means of private apology but required public repentance and reparation.¹⁸

Nowhere is this logic more clear than in the practice of exclusion, or excommunication. The loving reproof and reclamation of wayward saints was a constant aim of church discipline; but if repentance was not forthcoming and recalcitrance persevered to open defiance, exclusion from the church was the final option exercised by all the evangelical denominations. Exclusion was not exercised evenly among southern evangelicals. Baptists led the way, excommunicating almost 2% of their members every year, followed by the Methodists and then the Presbyterians at lower rates. The long-term

¹⁸ Gregory Wills noted that discipline "rendered glory to God," and "redounded to the honor of God." Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 30-31; Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, 42.

purpose of exclusion was reclamation, but in the short term exclusion served to preserve the purity of the church and to vindicate God's honor. Baptists in Charleston affirmed this purpose of excommunication in multiple successive editions of their disciplinary guidelines, which explained that excommunication was required *primarily* to sustain God's honor, which had been offended. The summary of discipline listed as the primary purpose of excommunication: "*The glory of God*, which is the ultimate end of it; for as his name is dishonored by the evil practices; or principles of church-members, so this is the most open and effectual way of removing the dishonor that is brought upon it." The document proceeds to list the purity of the church and the good of the sinner as important *secondary* aims of excommunication. This was undoubtedly a purely theological explanation of the significance of discipline, but it was an explanation that had measurable and potent social effects for those excluded from the church.¹⁹

The logic behind excommunication comes into even sharper focus when the actual performance of the act is considered and understood, as it undoubtedly was by many southerners, as a type of shaming ritual. While the sentence of excommunication was passed by the congregation in the Baptist tradition, by a session in the Presbyterian church, and by a presiding minister in the Methodist church, all three denominations united in prescribing a ritualistic announcement of the sentence before the church. The Charleston Baptist Association's instructions for the announcement of an excommunication, printed in 1808, deserve to be considered in full:

In this case [of excommunication], the church appoints the day and summons the guilty member to attend; the minister suits his sermon to the occasion; after which he prays to God for a blessing on the ordinance to be administered, and

¹⁹ On excommunication rates, see Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 22; Charleston Baptist Association (S.C.), *A Summary of Church-Discipline*, 23, SCL.

then proceeds to sum up the sentence of the church; lays open the odious nature of the crime; the dreadful load of guilt, which the sin, with its aggravations, have brought on the offender; he takes notice of the scandal it has brought on religion, how dishonorable to God, and grievous to the church; he observes that the excommunicating act is not intended for the destruction of the soul, but is used as a last remedy for the recovery of the offender, and as a caution to others. Then by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, in the name and behalf of that church he cuts off and secludes the offender by name, from union and communion with the church....

This process had been part of Baptist practice long before 1808, and it was undoubtedly in a ceremony such as this that a man named Owen was excommunicated from Cashaway Baptist Church in 1771, after the church clerk recorded, “it is ordered that he be cut off from being [a] member of the church in [the] publick manner.” Similar instructions for the procedure of excommunication in the Baptist church were published throughout the period before the Civil War.²⁰

In order to fully understand how excommunication from the church addressed the cultural sentiments of southerners, it is necessary to understand the deep harmonies existing between evangelicalism and honor as moral communities. Historians have frequently set a secular honor culture in opposition to the intense religiosity of the evangelical movement. Evangelicals themselves contributed to this apparent division between sacred and secular by their constant division of life into the categories of the church and the world. However, while evangelicals inveighed against a worldly honor that sought only fame and fortune, they also recognized honor as one of the immutable attributes of God, an attribute they participated in as his followers. Indeed, as I argued in

²⁰ Charleston Baptist Association (S.C.), *A Summary of Church-Discipline*, 22-23, SCL; see also, Charleston Baptist Association (S.C.), *A Summary of Church Discipline: Shewing the Qualifications and Duties of the Officers and Members of a Gospel Church* (Richmond, Va., 1794), 22-23, SCL; and Charleston Baptist Association (S.C.), *A Summary of Church-Discipline: Shewing the Qualifications and Duties of the Officers and Members of a Gospel Church*, 2nd ed. (Charleston, 1813), 22-23, SCL. Cashaway Baptist Church Records (Darlington Co., SC), April 20, 1771, SCL.

the first chapter, evangelicals from the Revolution to the Civil War preached that God was the only source of *true* honor.

Honor had always been bound up with the sacred, as an examination of the language surrounding honor immediately shows. The South was no different in this regard from other cultures in which honor flourished. Anthropologist Julian Pitt-Rivers once noted that honor is sometimes explicitly identified as “sacred,” and is subject to “defilement” and to being “stained.” Its restoration frequently requires ritualistic and expiatory acts, especially the shedding of blood. Indeed, Pitt-Rivers noted, the concept of “mana,” once popular among anthropologists of religion as a term describing the sacred essence of a person that could be lost in defeat and death, could have accurately been translated as “honor” in many instances.²¹

Bertram Wyatt-Brown long ago called attention to honor as an ethical and moral system concerned with maintaining communal boundaries, instilling proper behavior, and enforcing the separation of the sacred from the profane, all through the mechanism of communal opinion and communally sanctioned violence. The most striking aspect of honor in the South in Wyatt-Brown’s interpretation was the manner in which as an ethical system it subjected individual identity to communal opinion and authority. If we follow Emilé Durkheim’s famous definition of religion, namely that religion always possesses the categories of the sacred and the profane and is always at its center a social phenomenon occurring in and practiced by communities, then honor would seem unavoidably to intersect the phenomenon of religion at important points in both theory

²¹ Julian Pitt-Rivers, “Honour and Social Status,” in John G. Peristiany, ed., *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 34-35.

and practice.²²

Honor as a moral community comparable to religion can be seen most clearly in the concept of shamelessness. Being shamed, or feeling shame, did not place an individual outside the moral pale of honor. Rather, it confirmed in a negative sense that an individual was sensitive to the moral boundaries of honor and thus, even in transgression, part of its moral community. Shame was not permanent in most cases, and could be erased or outlived. It was a temporary condition that served as a bulwark of racial, gender, and class order and tradition in southern culture.²³

Shamelessness, on the other hand, attached to the person who was perpetually insensitive to shame. Others saw these individuals as not feeling the moral implications of honor, and thus as dangerously unpredictable sources of disorder and dishonor to those around them. Shamelessness could attach to whole groups of people who by function of their place and powerlessness were rendered unable to respond in the way honor demanded. This was mostly the case for the African slaves in the South in relation to the white honor ethic. Slaves' frequent failure to respond to both verbal and physical attacks only confirmed in southerners' minds that their slaves were outside of honor's pale. White women could also attract the label of shamelessness by flaunting sexual mores, the main source of shame for women in the world of honor, or by denying male authority. White men could be labeled cowards for not resisting or resenting insults or by not

²² Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), esp. 25-61; Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Mark Sydney Cladis, ed., Carol Cosman, trans. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 42-46.

²³ On shamelessness, see Julian Pitt-Rivers, "Honour and Social Status," in Peristiany, *Honour and Shame*, 40-41. On shame in the South, see Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 50-55, 298-307; see also Maria Pia Di Bella, "Name, blood, and miracles: the claims to renown in traditional Sicily," in John G. Peristiany and Julian Pitt-Rivers, eds., *Honor and Grace in Anthropology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 152-3.

resisting attacks.²⁴

There was a deep resonance between the qualities associated with the shameless person in the view of honor and the excommunicated person in relation to the religious community. Both communities sought a sort of moral purity, and ejected the excluded persons from the community on the grounds of insensitivity to its moral sentiments. The refusal to repent and confess one's sins was taken within the evangelical community as evidence that a saving knowledge of God's grace was not present, and the person thus not truly regenerate. And while evangelicals ritualized and formalized this exclusion through ceremonies and public announcements, the rites of exclusion that placed a person outside the moral boundaries of honor could be no less ritualized and potentially more public, as anyone subjected to the various forms of charivari in the South could attest.²⁵

The link between church discipline, shame, and shamelessness in southerners' understanding can be seen in the way evangelicals dealt with those who showed themselves unwilling to repent and submit to the community's authority. The rules of decorum adopted by the Neal's Creek Baptist Church in 1832 dictated that all efforts to reclaim a wayward saint should be made, "but should they prove refractory, or refuse to hear the church we must acquiesce in the necessity, and let them be to us a heathen man or a publican." The Methodist church echoed this language exactly in its *Doctrines and Disciplines*, and the Methodists were at pains to show that this treatment of the excluded

²⁴ Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 46. See also Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "The Mask of Obedience: Male Slave Psychology in the Old South," *The American Historical Review* 93, no. 5 (December 1988): 1228-1252. Most importantly, see Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982).

²⁵ Wyatt-Brown has made similar observations. See, for example, Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s-1890s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 85.

member must extend to the entire church. “Let him be unto thee as a heathen man or publican,” the *Doctrines* advised of the excluded person, quoting Christ’s advice to his disciples. “Can anyone imagine that the minister only is to treat the offender thus, and that the rest of the church are to give him the right hand of fellowship? This cannot be.” Treating an excluded member as a heathen had unmistakable resonance with the category of shamelessness in an honor culture, exactly as it was originally intended. Shamelessness was a type of social death in the lexicon of honor, and in the language, performance, and practice of excommunication, evangelicals severed the unregenerate sinner from the religious community in way that southerners well understood.²⁶

Visitors to the South often commented on southerners’ obsession with the light in which others viewed them. Beneath this obsession ran the reality that in the South one’s identity was not wholly one’s own, but was instead subject to constant evaluation. Identity was in an important sense reflective: it was the community’s approval or disapproval that mattered. Violence could sometimes repair the damage done by an insult or a disparaging rumor, but the unified verdict of an entire community resulted in shame that only time could erase. It was the prospect of this type of shame, for instance, that led South Carolina Governor James Henry Hammond to retreat from public life in antebellum South Carolina after rumored sexual dalliances with his nieces, and to spend his time dreaming of the day when reelection would “raise me from the dust and cleanse me from every stain.” Hammond clearly realized that his identity and reputation were not solely under his own control.²⁷

²⁶ Neal’s Creek Baptist Church Records (Anderson Co., South Carolina), July 21, 1832, SCL; Methodist Episcopal Church, *Doctrines and Disciplines of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 162.

²⁷ On the reflective quality of identity in honor, see Peristiany, *Honour and Shame*, 9-10; Carol K. Bleser,

In this context it becomes easier to understand how potent the proclamations of the church could be, especially when they involved a public trial or announcement of one's misdeeds. This was particularly true in light of the efforts of the church to speak with one voice on such occasions, a special challenge for the democratically minded Baptists. At Mechanicsville Baptist Church in 1815, "after [a] serious and scrutinizing search," B. Swinny was excluded "by the unanimous voice" of the church for an impressive display of depravity, including of drunkenness, fornication, and swearing "without suitable evidences of repentance." Churches even appear to have been willing to wait to discipline members until unanimity could be achieved. In the summer of 1848, Big Creek Baptist finally tired of "laboring" with the unrepentant Stricklin brothers. They were expelled, the church clerk taking care to note, "it was the unanimous voice of the church so they are no more of us." It was important to the Baptist conception of democratic and spiritual unity that the church speak with a single voice. The resulting decisions had the authority of communal consensus behind them, an authority that southerners, religious or not, were not accustomed to question.²⁸

This understanding of community authority is borne out by the large majority cases in which offenders confessed their guilt, submitted to the authority of the church, and repented. Gregory Wills interpreted this fact as evidence that offenders in such cases were faced with a choice between preserving their autonomy and honor on the one hand and submitting to their church's authority on the other. "Southern honor retreated before southern discipline," wrote Wills. But it is unclear that those on the receiving end of

ed., *Secret and Sacred: The Diaries of James Henry Hammond, a Southern Slaveholder* (Oxford University Press, 1988), 215.

²⁸ Mechanicsville Baptist Church Records (Darlington Co., SC), Feb. 18, 1815, SCL; Big Creek Baptist Church Records (Anderson Co., SC), Aug. 5, 1848, SCL;

discipline viewed their choice as one between honor and repentance. Submitting without retort to an insult or challenge from an individual or an illegitimate authority was undoubtedly shameful in the moral worldview of honor. But submitting to the unified voice of one's peers, as James Henry Hammond did in his retreat from politics, was in some sense inevitable, and to resist it would have identified an individual as unable even to feel the prick of shame, and thus by definition as shameless. The decision to submit to discipline or not was not so much a decision between honor and faith as it was a referendum on the legitimacy of the church's claim to represent communal opinion. To the extent that a church was established in a community, its claim in this regard grew stronger, and a man's decision to submit to the church's authority can less and less be represented as a contradiction of the law or logic of honor. To acknowledge a unanimous representation of communal opinion was not to forswear honor. Indeed, it was in an important way an acknowledgment of the cultural underpinnings of honor and the belief that communal opinion held sway over individual identity.²⁹

In the early years of the evangelical incursion into the South, there is a discernible sense of separateness in the church covenants and records of early religious communities that is less frequently in evidence as evangelical churches became the central institutions of southern life after 1830. As early as 1756, the church covenant of the Cashaway Baptist Church in Darlington County, South Carolina, recorded as one of its founding

²⁹ Wills finds that 92% of those accused in Georgia Baptist churches from 1785-1860 confessed their guilt. Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 39, 42, 48-49. On communal authority in honor, see Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 34, 45-48. See also Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "The Ideal Typology and Antebellum Southern History: A Testing of a New Approach," *Societas*, 5 (1975), esp. 5. On the importance of institutional representations of communal consensus, see Julian Pitt-Rivers, "Honour," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, David L. Sills, ed., vol. 6 (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 1991), 504.

precepts that “it is our duty to keep the secrets of the church and not to divulge [*sic*] to any what is done in the church...and to respect the church as a garden enclosed, a spring shut up and a fountain sealed.” Part of this inward focus undoubtedly had to do with maintaining an appropriate spiritual separation from the world, a concern not to expose the sacred to the profane. But bound up in the sylvan metaphors of the church as a closed community was also the desire to shield the beloved community and its members from the damage that could be done in the wider world by the level of disclosure its intimacy fostered. The spreading of rumors, whether or not rooted in truth, was a sin that did damage to the social fabric of the spiritual community and, because the reputations of its members were so closely intertwined with the reputation of the church, tarnished the visible representation of the bride of Christ before the world. “Is it not wrong,” Moses Holland, pastor of Big Creek Baptist Church, asked during a church meeting in 1808, hoping to drive a point home, “when we hear of aney [*sic*] thing evil against our members to spread it abroad [*sic*] in the world without first taking gospel steps with them[?]” The church answered unanimously that it was.³⁰

Of all the public spheres in the South in which honor and reputation were at stake, the evangelical church might seem the most unlikely. But as a public space in which the community evaluated individual behavior, the evangelical church and its discipline intersected deep-seated assumptions in the southern mind about the relationship between the community and the individual. The records of evangelical churches clearly show the church as a social space in which church members understood reputation was at stake. The ability of the church to render judgments that could be seen as proxies of communal

³⁰ Big Creek Baptist Church Records (Anderson Co., SC), May 30, 1808, SCL.

consensus practically guaranteed that southerners would understand the implications of church discipline in this way.

For many, the church was a place to confront rumors and to use the platform of church discipline and authority in an attempt to counter the social consequences such rumors could inflict. In 1841, Willis Bandy stood up in front of his church to address “an evil report in circulation about him,” that he had frequently visited the home of a Mr. Whiteford and was “too intimate” with one of his daughters. Bandy admitted visiting the Whitefords, but avowed his “inocent [*sic*] intentions” in doing so. Many others, like Bandy, saw the church as a place where the gathered community could be addressed and rumors put to rest.³¹

But bringing vague rumors out of the shadows of gossip and casual conversation into the public sphere of church discipline was a precarious course of action that could easily backfire, confirming the very thing it sought to deny. In 1801, William Gaston submitted a “Lye Bill” against Agnes Smith to the session of the Cedar Springs Presbyterian Church for saying he was the father of her illegitimate child. He charged that early in the pregnancy, in the company of two witnesses, Smith had “positively denied that she knew any reason or cause for [the pregnancy].” Gaston also charged that Smith had tried to abort the pregnancy. “You may inquire at Sarah McClemons,” Gaston told the session, where Smith had gone “for the getting of the herbs for the sending it [the child] adrift.” Unfortunately for Gaston, when the session called his witnesses, they all denied having said or heard what he charged. In consequence, the session dismissed Gaston’s charges, effectively confirming the very rumor that he had sought to quash.

³¹ Bethabara Baptist Church Records (Laurens Co., SC), June 26, 1841, SCL.

Weeks later when Agnes Smith's child was baptized in the church, she again "laid her child to Wm. Gaston," who, the church clerk recorded, "publicly said it was a notorious falsehood," though few in the congregation probably believed him.³²

Some rumors were more damning than others. Southerners, evangelical or not, regarded incest as a particularly horrific example of sexual impropriety, and the mere whisper of it could send ripples throughout a community. In 1842, just such a situation confronted Hopewell Presbyterian in the case of William Mills. Mills came before the church and charged Jonas and Rachel Reap with spreading the rumor that he was the father of his sister's child. In a written statement submitted to the church, Mills charged,

Whereas slandering & injuring the credit and good name or reputation of a member of the Church of Christ is a heinous [*sic*] sin & scandal contrary to the Word of God & to the profession of this Church founded thereupon—repugnant to the Christian character & injurious to the religion of the Lord Jesus... Yet true it is that you Jonas Reap & Rachel Reap...[set] a report going as [that] I was the father of my sister Abigail's child.

After interviewing multiple witnesses from the church and the community, the session of Hopewell evidently could not ascertain that the Reaps were the *source* of the rumor, which some testified was "common talk in the country." The session determined that "libel was not established." Nevertheless, they warned the Reaps "to be very cautious of speaking such reports in the future."³³

Mills clearly saw the church as a space where rumors could be confronted and reputation shaped, confirming that the church was one of the rare but important institutions in southern life whose official pronouncements were viewed as a distillate of

³² Cedar Springs A.R.P. Church Records, Feb. 20, March 1, 1820, SCL.

³³ Hopewell A.R.P. Church Session Records, April 1, 1842, SCL.

communal opinion. If Mills could establish the charge of libel against the Reaps, the church would effectively be absolving him of the crime of incest, taking the teeth out of the rumors that were circulating in the community. And yet Mills made his charge against the Reaps in the language of the beloved community of the church. The fact that slandering a fellow Christian was a sin, damaging the social fabric of the religious community and rending the bonds of Christian brotherhood, gave southerners like Mills the space within which to address concerns that were just as important outside of the church as in it. Mills charged the Reaps with a sin “repugnant to the Christian character and injurious to the religion of the Lord Jesus,” and yet he was undoubtedly concerned not only with the damage done to religion, but also to his own reputation.

Church members sometimes even tried to leverage the church’s authority to address detractors who were not members. In the records of Baptist churches especially, the designation “Brother” or “Sister” is always applied to members. Thus, when Benjamin South informed his church in 1803 that a “Mr. James Ball” was spreading a rumor that accused him of “drinking to excess and rideing [*sic*] with his saddle wrong end foremost,” he was not accusing another member of rending the bonds of brotherhood but demanding that the church use its influence to stop up the mouth of a detractor in the wider community who may or may not have attended the church. Significantly, the church tried, appointing a committee to inquire of Ball the evidence for the rumor. Ball, however, refused to come to the church and defend his assertions, and South was restored to the church after being suspended on account of his own testimony. Cases like this reveal the fact that the church represented one of the only institutions that could effectively confront the power of informal communal opinion in the traditional culture of

the South, and thus a vital space in which southerners could contend against the vague but weighty currents of rumor in their communities.³⁴

At first glance, the recourse of southerners to the semi-official space of a church court to defend reputation seems contradictory to the instincts of primal honor, which demanded an aggressive response to any slight that threatened to mar one's good name. Honor was in many ways considered a law unto itself, producing the perennial failure of many southern states to prosecute duelists. But the way honor was sustained and shaped by the forces of communal opinion, combined with the extent to which institutions such as the courts could be seen as representations of that opinion, ensured that those seeking to repair or defend their reputation would sometimes view the court as a legitimate and convenient means of addressing such a threat.³⁵

Even at the turn of the eighteenth century, civil court records reveal attempts to address the concerns of honor through the apparatus of the court. In 1798, for instance, in Jackson County, Georgia, a jury awarded William Strong sixty dollars in his case against Samuel Knox for damage done by Knox to Strong's reputation in the community. Strong accused Knox of damaging his "name fame and reputation" with "false scandalous approbious [*sic*] and malicious english words." Strong initially valued the damage done to his reputation at two thousand dollars, signaling that money was less important than addressing Knox's ability to openly slander him in the community. In 1819, when Methodist James Jenkins tried to warn a woman against the character of suitor who had

³⁴ Turkey Creek Baptist Church Records (Abbeville Co., SC), November 12, December 10, 1803; February 11, 1804, BHC.

³⁵ On the important place of the duel and weak efforts to prevent it, see Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 350-361.

formerly been a member of his church, the man tried to sue Jenkins in court for the astronomical sum of twenty thousand dollars. The point was clear: no price tag could be attached to a good reputation.³⁶

It is also important to point out that the expectation of a direct personal response to an insult was a gendered one. While this point will receive more attention in the next chapter, it is important to note that women only rarely used violence in defense of their honor, with that burden falling on male relations. But other avenues of response existed, and women had used them vigorously for centuries. This had historically been true of the relationship between women and ecclesiastical courts in early modern England, for instance, where one historian has found that from 1550-1700 defamation cases in one ecclesiastical court were brought mainly by women in response to rumors of sexual impropriety. Given these points of reference, it should hardly surprise us to find that southerners used the social space of the church and its discipline to address similar concerns.³⁷

In some cases, it is possible that the availability, legitimacy, and authority of the church as a place to address the community may have averted violence. In 1813, instead of assaulting his antagonist, or trying to gouge out his eyes or rip out his hair, William Long accused his fellow member of Turkey Creek Baptist Church William Lord of saying that Long “had told a lye.” In this case, the church was able to ascertain that the

³⁶ Teresa Wilson Dunn, *Jackson County, Georgia Superior Court Records, 1796-1803* (Roswell, Ga: WH Wolfe Associates, 1994), 22; James Jenkins, *Experience, Labours, and Gospel Sufferings of Rev. James Jenkins, of the South Carolina Conference* (n.p.: Printed for the author, 1842), 180-181.

³⁷ J. A. Sharpe, *Defamation and Sexual Slander in Early Modern England: The Church Courts at York* (York England: University of York, Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, 1980); see also Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1570-1640* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); R. B. Outhwaite, *The Rise and Fall of the English Ecclesiastical Courts, 1500-1860* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

charge was false, giving Long the vindication he sought. Similarly, in 1824, a man named Perry charged that a fellow church member had “showed himself a dishonest man and allso [*sic*] had disembled [*sic*],” evidently meaning to expose the man to communal judgment for his conduct.³⁸

Many evangelical churches treated the failure to substantiate a public accusation against a fellow member as a sort of lying or slander in itself. In 1807, Elizabeth Wilburn came before her church for saying “that Elizabeth Crider and Mary Crider were liers [*sic*] and she could prove it.” After an investigation, the church decided that Wilburn was in fact the one who should be subjected to discipline for making an accusation she could not prove, the church clerk recording “Sister Wilburn failing to substanciate [*sic*] her accusation has fallen under our censure untill [*sic*] such time as she makes her accusation good.” Interestingly, the church did not censure Wilburn for making her accusation against the Crider sisters, but for being unable to prove it. The message was clear: while the church was concerned that the Crider sisters live up to the standards of the evangelical community, they were just as concerned that their reputations not be damaged by idle accusations or malicious tongues. In 1832, Sister Holt of the Antioch Baptist Church in Georgia accused Sister Mathews of being drunk. Mathews proved her innocence to the satisfaction of the church, and Holt was charged with “palpable contradictions.” Unfortunately, Holt compounded her problem by publicly “charging all the witnesses with falsehood and saying she never would eat or drink with them again.” Perhaps recognizing that Holt had just given a rather succinct definition of excommunication, the church granted her wish and officially excommunicated her. In

³⁸ Turkey Creek Baptist Church Records (Abbeville Co., SC), December 11, 1813, BHC; Big Creek Baptist Church Records (Anderson Co., SC), January 31, 1824, SCL.

1835 Little River Baptist Church charged Elizabeth Hughs with “saying that her daughter-in-law had different fathers for her children which report she failed to substantiate [*sic*].”³⁹

Cases like these illustrate a basic but often overlooked harmony between the cultural world of honor and the evangelical community. These two strands of southern culture shared an assumption that words, and specifically speech, mattered deeply and had real effects within the community and on the people involved in it. In the third chapter of the book of James, the faithful read: “Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!..it [the tongue] is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.” Words, both honor and evangelicalism assumed, did not return void. Words had an impact, an effect, and most often the effect they had was to do damage to reputations of both individuals, churches, and even to the cause of religion.⁴⁰

This damage had to be counteracted. The assumptions of honor decreed that the only way to recover lost status was either violence or an abject apology from one’s accuser, as admission that they had borne false witness. And while evangelicals denied that violence was an option for the believer, they nevertheless shared a common understanding that the damage done by words was most appropriately addressed in the public setting of the church and by the communal authority of the religious community. Following the logic of honor, evangelical churches made the public demand that accusers prove their charge or recant. In 1805, Mountain Creek Baptist church made this demand

³⁹ Big Creek Baptist Church Records (Anderson Co., SC), June 6, 1807; July 2, 1808; Antioch Baptist Church Records (Taylor Co., GA), June 16, 1832; Little River Baptist Church Records, June 20, 1835, September 14, 1844, BHC.

⁴⁰ On the importance of speech, particularly insults, see Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 43, 53.

of Selah Brimer, but when it was found “that she could not prove the charge” against another member, she was excluded immediately.⁴¹

The church covenant of Cashaway Baptist Church began by professing the belief “that our conversation both in the world and in the church ought to be as becometh the body of Christ.”⁴² The concern for the corporate reputation of the church, and an understanding that individual reputations reflected on that corporate reputation, is evident in church records. As this goal related to honor, churches were at times concerned that its members’ actions be in harmony with the aspects of honor held in common by both saints and sinners, while in other areas the church attempted to ensure that its members’ behavior diverged from the standards of traditional honor by abstaining from certain behaviors in order to sustain a distinct witness before a watching world. The fervent pursuit of personal piety by itself is inadequate to explain the intense interest revealed in church records in members’ actions outside church walls, making it necessary to place this emphasis within the context of a concern for the reputation and honor of the church as the body of Christ. Money, sexual behavior, the giving of one’s word, and recreation were all key areas in which churches demanded that their members maintain either a positive or negative (meaning abstaining) reputation in the public sphere.⁴³

⁴¹ Mountain Creek Baptist Church Records (Anderson Co., SC), May, 1805, SCL.

⁴² Cashaway Baptist Church Records (Darlington Co., SC), September 28, 1756, SCL.

⁴³ “When the individual is encapsulated in a social group an aspersion on his honour is an aspersion on the honour of his group” wrote J.G. Peristiany. Peristiany, *Honour and Shame*, 11, 35. See also Pitt-Rivers, “Honour”. Honor and religious identity were intertwined in the term “old Christian” in early modern Spain. See Julio Caro Baroja, “Religion, Worldviews, social classes, and honor in Spain in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” in Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers, eds., *Honor and Grace in Anthropology*, 96, 110-114. For honor and trade guilds, see Kathy Stuart, *Defiled Trades and Social Outcasts: Honor and Ritual Pollution in Early Modern Germany* (Oxford, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Debts, whether entered into by a simple agreement or a written contract, involved honor because they involved the oath to repay. Failure to repay or, worse, refusal or avoidance, represented a kind of cowardice, and an inconstancy that honor could not stand. The failure to repay a debt represented a moral failure as well as a threat to order, and one that many evangelical churches took very seriously. In a typical case in 1830, the Williamson Creek Baptist Church excommunicated the delightfully named Timothy Swindle, “for leaving his country in disorder and dishonour by not paying his just debts nor submiting [*sic*] to sivil [*sic*] authority.” Indeed, one local church historian found that among the most common offenses found in the records of the Bush River Baptist Church in the years surrounding 1800 was “leaving the neighborhood in a clandestine way, leaving a number of just debts unpaid.”⁴⁴

Avoidance of debt frequently involved secrecy, with its implications of cowardice and shame. In recording these dishonorable sins, church committees frequently used language that clearly paralleled the moral concerns of honor. Turkey Creek Baptist Church excluded Alanson Lord in 1837 for “falsifying his word and not paying his just debts.” In 1834, Mechanicsville Baptist in South Carolina excluded Ervin Ward for leaving the state “in a clandestine manner” to avoid his creditors. Six years later, Ward wrote to his old church from Alabama, explaining that he had fully intended to repay his debts there but had been disabled. He requested a letter of dismissal from his old congregation so that he could join a church in Alabama, but the members of the Mechanicsville church decided to withhold the letter until they could ascertain some arrangement between Ward and his creditors in South Carolina. In numerous cases

⁴⁴ Williamson Creek Baptist Church Records, Oct. 16, 1830, MU; C. M. Smith, *History of the Bush River Baptist Church, 1771-1933* (Kinards, S.C., 1934), 7, SCL.

similar to this one evangelical churches in the South gave evidence of the assumption that their members' actions in the world should correspond to their words, especially in relation to debt, an assumption that was in perfect harmony with the concerns of honor.⁴⁵

Disagreements over money between church members frequently found their way into congregational days of discipline. Such matters concerned both the reputation of the church in the community as well as the internal unity and harmony of the church. Churches were concerned that their members' business and money dealings in the community be seen as upright and honorable, as well as that the bonds of Christian brotherhood among members remain intact. In addition, a case involving business or money dealings unavoidably became a referendum on the reputation and honesty of the accused, who were frequently eager to defend themselves from accusations that could do damage well beyond the doors of the church. In April of 1814, in front of the congregation of Turkey Creek Baptist Church, Ezekiel Nash accused local miller and church member John Cheatham of "refusing to [join] his half bushel to the state standard," and of "denying the truth." The substance of the accusation was that Cheatham was engaging in that special sin of millers throughout the ages—false measurements—and that he refused to have his measurement of a half bushel tested against the state standard. The church immediately appointed a committee of no less than nine men to go to Abbeville, South Carolina, the nearest city, and test Cheatham's measure against the state standard. In May, the committee reported back that Cheatham's measure acceptably

⁴⁵ Turkey Creek Baptist Church Records (Abbeville Co., SC), Feb. 11, 1837; see also April 8, 1843, BHC; Mechanicsville Baptist Church Records (Darlington Co.), Nov. 14, 1834; Dec. 20, 1834; May 16, 1840, SCL; See also Antioch Baptist Church Records (Taylor Co. GA), April 19, 1845, MU; See also Little River Baptist Church Records (Saluda Assoc.), Jan. 14, 1843, BHC.

matched the state standard. The church reprov'd Cheatham, apparently for his initial refusal to have his word tested, but also reprov'd Nash for "hasty speaking." Evidently Nash would not let the matter go, for in the fall the church order'd Cheatham to travel to Charleston to have his measure "sealed" or certified, and to publish the exact difference between his own measurement and the state standard. The church acted "in order to stop the mouths of gainsayers and to establish his [Cheatham's] word not disputing his [earlier] affirmation to us." In cases such as this, church verdicts address'd multiple intertwining interests. Spiritual and worldly concerns were inextricably bound together as the reputations of individual members became inescapably involved in the effort to maintain the church's reputation in the community and internal harmony.⁴⁶

Churches brought members to trial for usury, for charging too much for goods or services in the community, and for outright deception. In 1812, Cheatham's Turkey Creek Baptist Church took a charge against Elizabeth Spruill that she was mixing tallow into the beeswax she sold locally. In 1815, only a few months after he had cleared himself of the charge of false measurements, John Cheatham was accused of a similar fault—mixing meal in with the salt he sold at his mill in order to cheat his customers. A local planter who purchased salt from Cheatham reported to a church committee that he had found no more meal than "common" in his salt of late. The church judg'd that Cheatham had not sinned, but did find him "guilty of giveing [*sic*] the world room to speak reproachful of religion."⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Turkey Creek Baptist Church Records (Abbeville Co., SC), BHC. The Cheatham case begins April 8, 1814, and runs until March 11, 1815. See especially May 14 and Oct. 8, 1814.

⁴⁷ For usury, see Mountain Creek Baptist Church Records (Anderson Co., SC), July, 1807, SCL. For Spruill and Cheatham cases, see Turkey Creek Baptist Church Records (Abbeville Co., SC), Feb. 8, 1812; May 13, 1815; June 10, 1815, BHC.

In cases involving commerce and business matters, the evangelical church stood midway between an older model in which personal reputation and the word of honor formed the basis of commercial interactions, and a newer model, associated with the rise of industrial capitalism, in which membership in appropriate institutions verified trustworthiness. In the churches of the Deep South we can already see Max Weber's characterization of Protestant church membership as a "certificate of moral qualification" for doing business, but the actions of southern churches in this area in the first half of the nineteenth century had as much to do with the logic of honor as with the gods of commerce and capitalism.⁴⁸

Churches frequently responded to rumors in the community regarding sexual promiscuity and illicit behavior. This subject will be treated more fully in the next chapter, but here we will focus on the threat to corporate reputation evangelicals saw in such behavior. In 1838, the session of First Presbyterian Church in Columbia considered the case of Mary Quigley, a "highly esteemed member of the church," who was charged with "antenuptial fornication." Quigley's sin represented what was for evangelicals a distinct category of sin that involved not only a personal failing but also a threat to reputation of the church and the honor of God in the local community. Mary Quigley understood this aspect of her sin quite clearly, and in her letter to the session she expressed her "deep penitence for the reproach this brought on the church of Christ." The

⁴⁸ Strangely enough, Weber used the phrase after witnessing a baptism in North Carolina, Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Stephen Kalberg (Taylor & Francis, 2001), 130. See also, Beth Barton Schweiger, "Max Weber in Mount Airy, Or, Revivals and Social Theory in the Early South" in *Religion in the American South: Protestants and Others in History and Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

session suspended Quigley until they could ascertain that her repentance was genuine.⁴⁹

While not as frequently the subject of discipline in such matters, men were not exempt from the concern that churches showed for the sexual reputations of their members in the community. In 1829, the Antioch Baptist Church in Taylor County, Georgia, felt it necessary to deal with “certain reports in circulation” about Henry Bell, who the church accused “1st of going to bed to a certain young woman, 2nd of making an unlawful and deceitful attempt to go off with her, 3rd of exposing his family in the foregoing conduct.” In response to the charges, the church appointed a group of women to talk with Bell’s wife and report back to their husbands. The whole affair was made even worse because the church had previously authorized Bell as a lay preacher, a privilege they soon rescinded.⁵⁰

Beyond the way that Bell’s alleged sin endangered his own soul and the cause of religion in the community, the church was also conscious that he had “exposed” his family by allowing such rumors to circulate. Exposed them to what? What the church clerk almost certainly had in mind when he wrote these words was the impact of Bell’s actions on his family in the community. Through his actions, Bell quite literally exposed his family to shame in their community in the same way that his actions threatened to damage the reputation of the church. This fact shows not only the interconnectedness of individual and family reputation, but also the way in which this relationship mirrored the one between individuals and their churches.

In some cases, churches were concerned to vindicate a member’s reputation

⁴⁹ First Presbyterian Church (Columbia, SC) Session Minutes, November , 1838, SCL.

⁵⁰ Friedman, *The Enclosed Garden*, 131; Antioch Baptist Church Records (Taylor Co., GA), Oct. 17, 1829, MU. The case continues until January of 1830.

because of the interconnection between individual and corporate reputations. Just as evangelicals were concerned to discipline and exclude church members who dishonored the church and the cause of religion in the community, they were concerned to correct unwarranted stains on the reputations of church members as far as was within their power, since these reflected directly on the church. In 1816, a report reached the session of Second Presbyterian Church in Charleston that Henry Wesner had been in a drunken fight on the public wharf. Doubting the rumor, the session pursued their investigation, citing it as their duty “not only to guard the purity of the Church, by supporting its discipline, but also the character of those who belong to our Communion, when it shall appear to be unjustly aspersed.” The session seems to have been concerned mainly the charge of drunkenness, and when Wesner apologized for getting into a fight with a “worthless man” but resolutely denied being drunk, the church simply admonished him and reminded him of the bearing of his reputation on that of the church, “recommending to our Brother a more strict and guarded walk before the world.”⁵¹

Some reputations mattered more than others in sustaining the reputation of the church in the community. No individual carried a heavier load in this regard than the church’s pastor, whose reputation as an individual was nearly inseparable from that of the church, the denomination, and religion in general. Thus, in 1805 when Cedar Springs Presbyterian member Andrew White circulated the rumor that the church’s pastor, Rev. Alexander Porter, “had taken some unmarked hogs from someone else’s land,” the church launched into a lengthy and intensive investigation designed to vindicate their pastor’s reputation. At least three witnesses signed testimonies in the church record book

⁵¹ Second Presbyterian Church (Charleston), “Session Minutes, 1811-1837,” November 5, December 3, 1816, SCHS.

establishing both Porter's innocence and White's guilt as the source of the rumor. The session concluded that White had "generated a grossly scandalous sin in spreading a scandalous lie unjustly on the Rev. Alex Porter," and excluded him from the church, instructing that his exclusion be announced both in the church and at the general upcoming Presbytery meeting. In this case, the session of Cedar Springs used the power of the church's pronouncement to counteract the damage done to Porter's and the church's reputations in the community by publicly confuting White's rumors and excluding him from the community.⁵²

Evangelicals placed a great deal of emphasis on personal testimony, or experience, in the process of joining a church, but they took other factors into account as well, including local reputation. Potential members were interrogated to the satisfaction of the church or session in an attempt to ensure that those desiring to be a part of the family of God had undergone true conversion and held appropriate doctrinal stances. But these exchanges did not take place in a vacuum, and churches frequently knew something of those applying for membership besides what they volunteered to tell. This could work to the advantage or disadvantage of those applying to membership. When John Hopkins and his wife applied for membership at Big Creek Baptist church in Anderson County, South Carolina, in 1806, the church rejected them "by reson [*sic*] of bad reports." In 1817, Mechanicsville Baptist in Darlington County, South Carolina, heard the experience of William Defee but delayed his request for membership three times over three months until a committee appointed to "enquire into his character" in the community returned

⁵² Cedar Springs A.R.P. Church Records, October 31, November 4, 1805, SCL.

with an “unfavorable” report. The church denied Defee baptism and membership.⁵³

Even though evangelical churches were by definition deeply concerned with lifting the lost out of darkness and into light, churches sometimes showed great circumspection before associating with those who had only recently been citizens of the world. Part of the reason for this caution was a concern for the spiritual purity of the church.

Evangelicals wanted as little chaff among the wheat as possible. However, another reason for this circumspection was that the church’s reputation was at stake. Thus, while those with reputations of the worst sort in the community were theoretically welcome in the church provided they could convince others of their conversion, churches were sometimes hesitant to associate with someone who had a questionable reputation. When Margaret Williford applied for access to the sacraments at Hopewell Presbyterian in 1842, the session spoke with her for some time before deciding that “under the peculiar circumstances of her former loose conduct & the many evil reports in circulation” concerning her, to delay granting her request until her “profession and practice” gave evidence “that she is a member of the church invisible.”⁵⁴

On the other hand, a good reputation in the community gave churches less reason to worry about potential embarrassment. The session of First Presbyterian Church in Columbia, South Carolina, noted with some relief when James and Euphema Wood applied for membership that “the moral & religious character of both were perfectly unexceptionable with [the] community.” Still, the session felt the need to go through a perfunctory examination since Wood and his wife had previously been Baptists, and thus

⁵³ Big Creek Baptist Church Records (Anderson Co., SC), August 2, 1806, SCL; Mechanicsville Baptist Church Records, September 1, 1817, SCL.

⁵⁴ Hopewell A.R.P. Church Records, “Records of Session, 1832-1892,” September, 28, 1842, SCL.

a little suspect on matters of doctrine.⁵⁵

In light of the strong currents in evangelical thought and practice that sustained the countercultural definitions of honor and shame examined in the first chapter, it is surprising to find how often and how seriously evangelical churches took into account the reputation of their members in the local community, the same community which originated many of the definitions of honor that evangelicals ostensibly shunned. This fact suggests two things. First, it suggests that there were considerable areas of overlap between the definitions of evangelical and secular honor. Next, it suggests that even in the areas where the two diverged, evangelicals were just as concerned that their members maintain a kind of negative reputation in the community—a reputation for abstaining from certain cultural norms, as well as for living up to others.

Remembering the men in his father's company during the Revolutionary war, Methodist James Jenkins recalled that they were fond of recreation. "Their principal amusements," he recalled, "were foot-racing, horse racing, dancing, &c." In many ways, the social world that existed outside of the evangelical church in the nineteenth-century South is etched in relief across the pages of church record books throughout the region. It is much easier to identify the areas in which evangelical belief and practice diverged from the communities in which they existed than to point out the areas in which they were in essential harmony. Southerners, from the evidence to be gleaned from church records, lived their lives partly in a variety of official and unofficial gatherings where they bought, sold, and bartered, elected public officials, and entertained themselves at horse races,

⁵⁵ First Presbyterian Church (Columbia, SC) Session Minutes, January 5, 1839, SCL.

shooting matches, and dances. As historians have pointed out, these were places where identity, especially masculine identity, was performed, shaped, and contested in a world where communal opinion was an essential part of individual identity. Evangelicals were at times vociferous critics of the behavior that frequently attended such gatherings, but the full extent of evangelical concern in this area has not been fully understood.⁵⁶

Donald Mathews once noted that in the evangelical view, sin involved “both the eternal salvation of the individual and the integrity of the community.” For evangelicals, Mathews realized, individual sin had important social implications. We have seen that in some areas of behavior, especially related to honesty, business transactions and sexual behavior, evangelicals were concerned that members conform to communal norms that were essentially in harmony with the traditional culture of honor in the South. A reputation for honesty, trustworthiness, chasteness (for women), and fair dealing were all equally resonant within and outside of the church.⁵⁷

However, we should not underestimate the degree to which evangelicals expected one another to maintain a reputation for *not* doing some things and for withdrawing from some social spheres where the activities were not only sinful, but dishonoring to the church. In part, this is familiar ground to historians of evangelicalism. Evangelical antipathy to a whole variety of southern cultural practices, especially those associated with male sociability, is well known and easily demonstrated. The point here is not to retread well-known ground, but rather to point out that evangelicals were especially concerned

⁵⁶ Jenkins, *Experience, Labours, and Gospel Sufferings of Rev. James Jenkins*, 16; Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 327-350. See also Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

⁵⁷ Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, 46.

that these behaviors took place in public and therefore made members, and the church, vulnerable to the charge of hypocrisy. They were concerned, in other words, with the honor of the church, and with keeping the sacred and the profane apart. Here again, we see the assumption on the part of evangelicals that communities, no less than individuals and families, possessed a reputation that could be marred and that must be guarded. Once an individual wedded his identity and reputation to the church, he became concerned that others not dishonor the church in the community and in so doing expose him to the same dishonor. Thus, church disciplinary proceedings show an acute awareness of different social spaces and their implications, as well as of the way individual actions reflected on communal identity and, by implication, the other various individuals contained in that community. Just as in the community of honor one could not ignore an insult given in public before others, a church could not ignore public misdeeds that allowed the world to point and scoff at the people of God.⁵⁸

This concern is explicit in some church disciplinary records and can be implied in others from the evident concern not only with the transgression of boundaries, but with *where* those boundaries were transgressed (i.e. in public). In 1833, the session of Hopewell Presbyterian church called John Harbison before them and warned him “to abstain from certain practices which bring evil on himself & disgrace on the church.” The charge against Harbison was “throwing bullets for a wager.” In this and other cases, churches were concerned that their members not participate in some of the social spheres

⁵⁸ Donald Mathews clearly saw evangelicals as concerned with the social implications of sin, but he was focused mostly on the effect that sin had in weakening or damaging the internal integrity of the church, the bonds between Christians as brothers and sisters. And while Ted Ownby has chronicled the continuing concerns of evangelicals in this area in the post-war period, he argues that evangelicals opposed these behaviors mainly because they posed a threat to the sanctity of the virtuous and feminized sphere of the home and the family. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, 42-46; Ownby, *Subduing Satan*, 11-14.

that were associated with honor in the South.⁵⁹

It should be noted that evangelicals certainly disapproved of these events and activities in themselves as leading to sinful levity and encouraging dangerous passions. As with so many of the behaviors and actions that came under church discipline, evangelicals evinced concern for the danger sin posed to individual salvation alongside the social and communal consequences of transgression. Even allowing one's property to be used in such an activity was sinful, and in 1793 the members of Turkey Creek Baptist Church decided that it would be wrong for a member even to lend his neighbor his gun for the purpose of participating in a shooting match. Simply enjoying or attending such events suggested a heart that had not been truly regenerated. The church covenant of Mechanicsville Baptist church in Darlington County, South Carolina, identified a whole litany of southerners' cherished social and recreational activities, including dancing, horse racing, card playing, dice, and billiards, as "all pleasures that are sinfull [*sic*] in their natures and only gratifying to the heart which is opposed to God." Especially troubling was the "profligate manner" in which some so-called Christians spent the Lord's Day. The covenant's authors recorded in shocked disbelief that "some we learn have even prostituted the day to hunting, shooting, and fishing &c." No doubt some in attendance when the covenant was read and approved were not overly shocked.⁶⁰

Some accusations are fairly standard, obscuring the public facet that some sins involved. One such case occurred in 1825, when John Beauchamp was charged in Williamson Creek Baptist Church for "shooting for beef & whiskey." Accusations such

⁵⁹ Hopewell A.R.P. Church Session Records, June 21, 1833, SCL.

⁶⁰ Turkey Creek Baptist Church Records, September 6, 1793, BHC.

as this, because of their sparse language, lend emphasis to the church's concern for the individual sin involved, but must be read within a broader context. Other cases make clear that part of what was at stake was the public nature of the sin. This distinction is implicit in the division that some churches in the Deep South made between "private" and "public" offenses. Shooting competitions fell decidedly in the latter category. Unsurprisingly, "public offenses" frequently contain hints that an audience was involved in the infraction, or that the offenders made a scene that was not easily ignored. Thus Brushy Creek Baptist in 1835 cited Herinton Hawkins and Caleb Green for a "public offence," Hawkins for fighting and Green for cheering him on from the sidelines. Indeed, the emphasis in all cases is on the public quality of the activity, on having been seen by others attending or participating in an activity that all knew was prohibited by the church.⁶¹

Drunkenness was one of the most popular sins among southerners, as well as one that was most clearly considered a sin in itself by discipline committees. Many cases involving the overconsumption of liquor were self-reported out of a guilt that prodded its possessor to take on the extra load of the shame involved in public confession. However, even cases involving the chronically drunken members that seem to have inhabited many congregations usually include the implication that being seen drunk by others was a key aspect of the offense. In an especially telling formulation in 1830, John Doby acknowledged to his church that he had violated "his vow of not drinking [in] publick places." Drunkenness, while not a mortal sin, was clearly taken so seriously by churches because it was one of the more public sins of the flesh and so unavoidably involved the

⁶¹ Williamson Creek Baptist Church Records, March 17, 1825, MU; Brushy Creek Baptist Church Records, Oct. 15, 1835, SCL.

cause of religion and the reputation of the church.⁶²

Churches were wary of receiving habitual drunkards back into fellowship, even upon evidence of sincere penitence. On a Friday evening in the summer in 1824, the session of Second Presbyterian Church heard witnesses in a case against George Cassidy for drunkenness. One witness testified to seeing Cassidy nearly fall off of his horse on the busy thoroughfare of Market Street. The session asked Cassidy's wife to explain why the door of the family's home had been closed on a recent day despite the heat of the summer (a cousin had died, she said). The session asked why her husband recently had been carried home in a chair from the local mercantile store ("exhausted," she said). The session was unconvinced, and wrote a letter informing Cassidy that until he reformed his behavior and led an "exemplary life" before the world, he would be suspended from the sacraments. A month later, when Cassidy appealed to be readmitted, the session denied him on account of "the mischief which must necessarily accrue to the church & the cause of Christ."⁶³

Of course, some public places could not be avoided. Going back even into the more rigid era of the eighteenth century, some Baptist churches had grudgingly acknowledged that legitimate business was sometimes done in close proximity with the reveling and riot that characterized so many official and unofficial gatherings in the South. The first constitution of Cashaway Baptist Church cautioned the congregation, "No member shall at any time without lawfull call go to any horse race[,] shooting match or any publick places without consent and when lawfully called shall not stay longer there than to do his

⁶² Big Stephen's Creek Baptist Church Records, May, 1830, BHC.

⁶³ Second Presbyterian Church (Charleston) Records, "Session Minutes, 1811-1837," August 6, September 28, 1824, SCHS.

or their business.” As this pronouncement suggests by invoking not only recreational gatherings but *all* public places, evangelicals realized that even gatherings for the purpose of politics and commerce were dangerous places for the people of God, who were to act always as representatives of the church and the true religion. At the turn of the century, Turkey Creek Baptist Church considered the question “whether it is commendable for one of our members to attend places of reveling without business,” and decided it was not. No doubt the both congregations knew full well that any nearly any community gathering was an occasion for drinking, gambling, swearing, and card playing.⁶⁴

The situation was much the same in the antebellum era, when Williamson Creek Baptist charged Nathaniel Harris with “gitting [*sic*] drunk at Broth[er] Swain’s sale.” Similarly, elections were legitimate official gatherings that nevertheless held a whole array of potential dangers for the church’s reputation, and a large number of discipline cases involve offenses that occurred in the rowdy, jostling, joyful milieu of politicking in the nineteenth-century South. Most members regretted their sin afterwards, as John Rowel did when he informed his church in 1823 “that he got drunk ab[ou]t the time of Election.” Evangelicals expected their brothers and sisters to be in the world, and sales and elections were certainly part of doing business and being a good citizen. But the public nature of these gatherings assured that the actions of the faithful took on added weight in spaces where they were expected to prove that though in the world, they were not of it.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Cashaway Baptist Church Records (Darlington Co., SC), September 12, 1759, SCL; Turkey Creek Baptist Church Records (Abbeville Co., SC), June 10, 1797, SCL.

⁶⁵ Williamson Creek Baptist Church Records, November 18, 1836, MU; Mechanicsville Baptist Church Records (Darlington Co. (SC), June 14, 1823, SCL.

Although we frequently think of official and unofficial communal gatherings as primarily masculine places where men proved themselves to one another, church records clearly reveal the presence of women at these events, as well as the fact that women, no less than men, carried the reputation of the church with them to shooting matches, horse races, and elections. In 1804, Big Creek Baptist Church excluded Elizabeth Bisener “for going to a shooting match and for associating with bad company.” In 1811, someone reported to Turkey Creek Baptist Church in Georgia that Mary Robartson “had been at a race and a dance.” Merely attending a shooting match or going to a race was evidence of, at least, a frivolous and sinful levity in the heart of a confessed believer. However, these were not mortal sins. They were, as churches professed repeatedly, sins that “wounded” the church.⁶⁶

One particular group of cases calls into question whether or not evangelical churches were as concerned in the pre-war era with the threat of recreation to a sacred and feminized home sphere. Dancing had been an important cornerstone of social interaction for over a century in the South. Women, as well as men, were fond of dancing. From church records, it is apparent that southerners were reluctant to give up going to dances, or “frolics,” simply because they professed a saving knowledge of the Savior. These informal gatherings, often held in homes, were essential facets of social life in many southern communities. Further, the ability to dance was seen as a desirable social grace in both men and women, and many parents of the middling and upper class sent their children to dancing schools to learn this skill.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Big Creek Baptist Records (Anderson Co., SC), November 3, 1804, SCL; Turkey Creek Baptist Church Records (Abbeville Co., SC), March 9, July 15, 1811, BHC.

⁶⁷ Ownby, *Subduing Satan*, esp., 11-13.

The problem, of course, was that before 1860 dancing made nearly every evangelical list of prohibited activities as very nearly the essence of sinful frivolity. Gregory Wills has shown that in the postbellum era, the rigor of evangelical discipline regarding dancing fell off considerably as growing numbers of evangelical church members viewed dancing as an ambiguous sin at best, and many viewed it as no sin at all. Scattered evidence of such attitudes can be found in the antebellum era, as well. As the social class and aspirations of evangelicals changed, many more of them were unwilling to give up a presence in a social space that was so closely tied to the ephemeral but vital quality of sociability that figured prominently in the ideals of the traditional honor culture and its socially upscale variant, gentility.⁶⁸

Members brought before the church for attending dances or frolics employed a variety of excuses that ranged from outright defiance to protestations of innocent intent. Many church members professed not to see what was so sinful about an entertainment that could involve the entire family. In 1833, Thomas Perry rose before his fellow members at Williamson Creek Baptist Church and “justified himself” for being at a “frollick with his family.” Perry went even further, stating that not only did he not regret taking his family to the dance, but that “he would do it again.” Faced with such recalcitrance, the church had no choice but to exclude Perry, but his defense of his family’s pastime is telling. Few other activities defined by evangelicals as innately sinful were ever defended as morally acceptable by those accused (with the exception of violence, perhaps). Giving up drinking, or at least drinking to excess, took less of a social toll outside the church than giving up going to the frolics, balls, and dances where

⁶⁸ Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 121-127.

southerners formed vital social ties. Resistance to the church's proscriptions could be widespread. When no less than seven members of its congregation, including two married couples, were charged with dancing in 1839, the session of Hopewell Presbyterian chose simply to "caution" the offenders against future loose footedness.⁶⁹

Even when parents swore off dancing for themselves, they were loath to give up the social benefits that accompanied the sound of the fiddle for their children. In 1842, the Bethabara Baptist Church of Laurens County, South Carolina, dealt with a spate of discipline cases when a dancing school came to town. One member, Richard Watts, was called before the church for sending his daughter to the school, no doubt wishing her to acquire some of the social graces that might help her make her way in the social world of the antebellum South. Watts told the church that he "understood that he had injured the feelings of some of the brethern [*sic*] by suffering his daughter to go to the dancing school," but refused to apologize for his actions. At the same church meeting, someone reported that Willis Dandy and his wife had likewise sent their children to the dancing school. One month later, probably long after the traveling dancing master had moved on, the church took up the cases again, and Watts informed the church that "his mind had not changed," but that he would not "enter his child...any more to a dancing school nor encourage them to dance here after." Willis Dandy also informed the church that his wife's brother had entered his children into the dancing school without his knowledge.⁷⁰

Indeed, taking the testimony given in dancing cases at face value, it could be difficult to avoid attending a dance since one never knew where or when they would

⁶⁹ Williamson Creek Baptist Church Records, August 17, 1833, MU. Hopewell A.R.P. Church Session Records, April 9, 1839, SCL.

⁷⁰ Bethabara Baptist Church Records (Laurens Co., SC), July 23, August 26, 1842, SCL.

break out. A significant number of those brought before the church on dancing charges claimed that they had not meant to attend a dance, or, even more implausibly, that they had not intended for gatherings they hosted to turn into dances. In 1835, one offender assured the session of Second Presbyterian “that his presence at the party [where dancing had occurred] was unintentional.” In 1844, John Torbet, accused of hosting a dance at his home, apologized to the session of Hopewell Presbyterian Church and said “he would rather it had not taken place & that it was not his intention.”⁷¹

Regardless of the church’s stringency, or the strategies of those accused, it is apparent that the dances and frolics that southerners attended with regularity were, in the view of the church, another public social space into which church members carried the church’s reputation with them. As the regular occurrence of women accused of dancing and the regular use of homes as impromptu dance halls attests, dancing was a form of public recreation that was not a specifically masculine sphere, and thus posed few of the dangers to a religious and feminized home sphere associated with other, more aggressively masculine forms of recreation. What bound together all the forms of recreation that evangelicals proscribed and disciplined was the concern that church members maintain a reputation in the community for abstaining from certain practices and especially from certain social spaces where their participation would expose the reputation of the church to the scorn of the world. If dancing had been merely a private failing, involving danger only to one frivolous and sinful soul, it is unlikely that it would have been treated so frequently as a public offense requiring public repentance. Thus, in 1802, when Joseph Jones held a dance at his home, the session of Cedar Springs

⁷¹ Second Presbyterian Church (Charleston) Records, “Session Minutes, 1811-1837,” January 11, 1835, SCHS; Hopewell A.R.P. Church Session Records, May 16, 1844, SCL.

Presbyterian church determined that “he be publicly rebuked,” and recorded later that Jones “gave public satisfaction for the above things and was rebuked.” The church’s reputation demanded no less.⁷²

The South before 1860 supported remarkably few of the public institutions to be found in abundance in the more urban North. Largely rural and communal as opposed to urban and institutional, the South largely conformed to John Calhoun’s description of it as “an aggregate of communities, not of individuals....” Characterized by a remarkably undiversified and agrarian economy in which economic and social life were inextricably intertwined, and in which face-to-face interactions unmediated by institutional or legal structures were the norm, the South provided precisely the sort of cultural environment in which honor had historically flourished. The ability to make one’s way in such a culture depended to a large degree on reputation as the common coin of both social status and economic success. One of the pioneering anthropological scholars of honor could have been describing the South when he wrote that “Honour and shame are the constant preoccupation of individuals in small scale, exclusive societies where face to face personal, as opposed to anonymous, relations are of paramount importance....”⁷³

Partly because of this reliance on communal authority and opinion, southerners were famously reticent to resort to the law in matters that had traditionally been the concern of the community, preferring instead for matters to resolve themselves through traditionally sanctioned avenues of action and under the auspices of communal opinion.

⁷² Cedar Springs A.R.P. Church Records, May 6, 1802, SCL.

⁷³ Quoted in Wyatt-Brown, “The Ideal Typology,” 5; Peristiany, *Honour and Shame*, 11.

As institutions, evangelical churches occupied a middle ground between the informal forces of communal opinion and the formal structures and penalties of the legal system. Of course, evangelicals themselves understood their discipline as fulfilling most importantly a spiritual role, but the obvious social nature of church discipline led one past historian of American religion to argue that evangelical churches served as the “moral courts” of the frontier in American history, imposing social order in areas where the formal legal code was as yet unable to exert its influence. Whether or not William Warren Sweet correctly located the geography of this phenomenon, he was certainly right to argue that the spiritual purposes of the church and its discipline were intertwined with the social fabric of the community, especially in areas, such as much of the South, where the law was seen as an unsatisfactory instrument to judge the unofficial and organic nature of southern life.⁷⁴

And while it would seem that the church influence was tightly restricted to its members within the local community, this conclusion must be qualified in important ways. Even in the years before a majority of southerners were attached an evangelical church, two factors underlay the church’s wide influence in community life. First was the simple fact that community formation, especially in the Deep South, was sometimes influenced by religious and denominational identity. Thus, while in the nineteenth century Jones County, Georgia, was a Methodist stronghold, the Baptists dominated neighboring Twiggs County, a fact which Frederick Bode has theorized was due to early settlers in the region clustering together in denominational groups. In this manner, communities in the Deep South sometimes formed around a religious or denominational

⁷⁴ William W. Sweet, “The Churches as Moral Courts of the Frontier,” *Church History*, 2 (March 1933), 3-21.

identity in a way not seen in the upper South, contributing to the reach and resonance of the church's authority. Next, the impact of periodic revivals extended the influence of the church in the community by converting individual family members. As Frederick Bode warns in his study of Twiggs County, "the proportion of individuals in the neighborhood who were members of Stone Creek cannot be a measure of the community's viability beyond the walls of the meeting house." Instead, Bode argues, the influence of the church in the local community is better viewed in terms of household participation, and in Twiggs County in 1860 at least 55 percent of households in the community sent either a husband or a wife to worship at Stone Creek Baptist church on a Sunday.⁷⁵

Here also we should take into account Donald Mathews' description of the Second Great Awakening as a process of social organization, as much as an outbreak of revivalistic zeal. Mathews insisted that to understand the wave of revivals that swept the nation in the years surrounding 1800 as primarily of spiritual or intellectual importance was to misunderstand their important social character. The primary accomplishment of the revivals according to Mathews was their initiation and organization of converts into communities of faith, or churches, that lasted long after the fires of revival burned out and that formed one of the central institutions of American and southern life. To illustrate his point, Mathews pointed primarily to the Methodists, whose revivalistic fervor was matched only by their passion for organization and their methodical approach to the Christian life and community. As Mathews noted, "To explain the Revival in this manner

⁷⁵ Frederick A. Bode, "The Formation of Evangelical Communities in Middle Georgia: Twiggs County, 1820-1861," *The Journal of Southern History*, 60 (November 1994), esp. 716-721. See also George Gilman Smith, *The History of Georgia Methodism from 1786 to 1866* (Atlanta, GA: A. B. Caldwell, 1913), esp. 29-30. Smith notes that early Methodism in Georgia was centered in Wilkes County, where a group of Virginia Methodists had moved together.

enables students to see the social impact of what is too often presumed to be a purely religious movement.”⁷⁶

The implications of Bode’s research and Mathews’ argument for church discipline as it related to honor, status, and reputation in the local community are important. In his sweeping and widely accepted argument, Mathews established that one of the primary functions of the Great Revival in the South was the firm establishment of religious communities in local contexts. In his close examination of the formation of these communities in Twiggs County, Bode reveals the connective threads that bound Stone Creek Baptist Church to the majority of households in its community and gave it an importance and social impact in the community that far outstripped its membership rolls. Viewed in this context, church discipline takes on implications much more broad than the role in preserving individual and communal purity that historians have traditionally assigned to it. Because of its ties to the local community and the public nature of much church discipline, a church’s decisions frequently impacted the wider web of social relations beyond its doors and had inescapable implications for honor and reputation.

That church members were sensitive to the implications of discipline both within and without the church is clear. In the summer of 1811, F. Curtis brought an allegation against R. Johnson before the congregation of Big Creek Baptist Church, “for making of a minnet of some rupture there between & for reading pubukly [*sic*] to the church.” Curtis’s allegation had nothing to do with the unnamed problem between he and Johnson, rather he was angry that Johnson had brought the matter before the church, for “he thought it blackened his character” and that this was Johnson’s true intent in bringing the

⁷⁶ Donald G. Mathews, “The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Process, 1780-1830: An Hypothesis,” *American Quarterly*, 21 (Spring 1969), esp. 43.

matter up. Curtis's concern for the implications of a church disciplinary action on his character clearly show that a church members were fully cognizant of the social implications that accompanied discipline, as well as of the possibility that it could be used maliciously to impugn character.⁷⁷

This sensitivity may have been especially common in Baptist churches, where representations of communal opinion were the most direct and forceful on account of the democratic structure of discipline, but it was no less true in other denominations where the dictates of discipline likewise carried the authority of communal consensus. In the case of the Methodists, ministers themselves were finally responsible for imposing the sentences of church discipline and exposing the excluded member to the resulting social and spiritual consequences. This fact caused the Rev. Robert Paine to balk at excluding one young planter from a Methodist society in 1818 for drunkenness because he knew that "expulsion and degradation likely involved ruin." The young planter himself was conscious of this fact, and professed tearfully to Paine, "I didn't *intend* it, brother... Can't help it now; it's over, and I am *ruined*."⁷⁸

Clearly, for this young planter the consequences of church discipline involved social shame and the damage of his reputation in the community, which he understood to have dire financial, as well as social implications. Thus, the shame he feared was in some ways of a piece with the shame of William Meyers, who the Presbyterian Samuel Wells Leland excitedly recorded seeing at the courthouse in Columbia, South Carolina, in 1854.

⁷⁷ Big Creek Baptist Church Records (Anderson Co., SC), July 6, 1811, SCL.

⁷⁸ Richard Henderson Rivers, *The Life of Robert Paine, D.D.: Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Nashville, TN: Southern Methodist Pub. House, 1916), 192. Also quoted in Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 42.

Meyers had somehow disgraced himself in a duel with a man named J.D. Treadwell six years before and was only now showing himself again in public, an event which Leland understood to have ritual significance. “Myers, having now broken the ice, and presented himself in Columbia, when almost everybody was there to see him, will no doubt often repeat his visits,” wrote Leland. A comparison between the implications of church discipline and other forms of dishonor in southern culture further strengthens the view that because church courts could claim to represent an approximation of communal consensus, they were consequently viewed as sites of contest over communal opinion and as potential sources of shame. The sources of Myers’ and the young planter’s shame were different, stemming from having transgressed the boundaries of different moral communities, and yet the consequences (or feared consequences) were in important ways the same. This points to the need to reevaluate the broader cultural context in which church courts operated and the ways in which southerners understood these institutions to be sources of communal authority whose decisions had social, as well spiritual, consequences.⁷⁹

Many of the issues surrounding individual and communal reputation in the church crystallized in the practice of granting letters of dismissal to departing members, certifying their good standing in the church to whatever religious community they would join in the future. Once again, Baptists seem to have been the most assiduous in both granting and requiring letters from those changing congregations. Covering more than a hundred years, the margins of the church record book of the Welsh Neck Baptist Church

⁷⁹ Samuel Wells Leland journal, October 9, 1854, SCL.

in South Carolina are filled with a busy commerce in souls leaving and joining the church, noted as “2 rec’d by letter” or “3 dismissed.” The extant letters are simple in form, often written on a scrap of paper, like one granted Susan Taylor by the Flat River Baptist Church in 1851 that survived closed between the pages of the church record book, but they were powerful tools that both churches and individuals used to seal, transfer, and certify reputation in the local community. Because they were an official certification of standing in the church, letters of dismissal touched on both individual and communal reputation, and frequently became the subject of negotiations between members trying to maintain a reputation and a church trying to avoid the mischief to the church’s reputation that a wayward member with a letter could cause.⁸⁰

The most typical entries regarding letters are those simply noting that members joined “by letter” or were dismissed and granted a letter. In 1829, the church clerk of Antioch Baptist noted simply that six people had joined the church by letter, including a female slave. Warren Flenniken, pastor of Hopewell Presbyterian Church in Chester County, South Carolina, kept meticulous notes on the church’s membership, noting in 1835 that since he had become pastor two years previous, 21 families containing 51 communicants had been dismissed. Members sometimes requested letters because they were moving away from the area, or because they wanted to attend a church that was more convenient for them. Very few churches recorded the reasons given by those requesting letters, and granting them to members in good standing, as well as accepting those with letters from other churches into membership, appears to have been standard

⁸⁰ Welsh Neck Baptist Church Records (Darlington Co.), SCL; Flat River Church Records, Southern Historical Collection (SHC).

practice.⁸¹

Requesting a letter from the church was a moment that clearly illustrated the often unspoken but constant exchange that occurred between the individual and the community in the church. It was a moment when the individual made a claim about himself and the community responded, either confirming or denying the claim. For those requesting that their church certify their good standing, it was also a moment fraught with potential dangers, for the lack of community acknowledgment of one's claims resulted in shame. If any rumors, grudges, or misdeeds attaching to a member's name lurked in the communal consciousness or individual hearts, they were sure to come out in response to a request for a letter. Further, because individual reputations were so intertwined with the church's reputation, a request for a letter was much more than simply a certification of membership. It was a certification of good standing in both the religious community and the local community.

Some churches were close-lipped about the reasons for rejecting a request. When Mary Holbert applied for a letter from her church in 1815, the clerk of Big Creek Baptist recorded simply "we objected against her obtaining one." The church rejected a similar request a year later, the church clerk noting only "a petition from Chlabourn [*sic*] Harris for a letter but it was not granted." In 1819, a case at Mechanicsville Baptist Church in Darlington County, South Carolina, made explicit some of the reasons that a church might refuse to grant a letter. A woman named Booth applied for a letter, but, the church clerk recorded, "on acct. of a report unfavorable to her five brethren of us was

⁸¹ Antioch Baptist Church Records (Taylor Co., GA), February 14, 1829, MU; Hopewell A.R.P. Church Session Records, p.4, SCL.

appointed...to meet her to examine about her before we could let her have it.”⁸²

The church’s hesitancy to grant letters to those who were the subject of rumor and “unfavorable reports” in the local community was not a product of simple puritanical obstinacy. Rather, church members who denied letters were well aware that by granting a letter the church effectively tied her own reputation to that of the grantee by a semi-official act. But despite their care, churches inevitably granted letters to some who would go on to dishonor themselves and the church, or to some who were successful at concealing their transgressions until already in possession of a letter. Churches were especially concerned that those to whom they granted letters might take advantage of the church’s seal on their reputation to engage in a paroxysm of sin before using their letter to join another congregation. The evidence of this concern can be found in numerous cases in which churches sought to retract their approval and retrieve the letters they had granted to those who subsequently proved themselves unworthy. In 1815, the members of Big Creek Baptist were disturbed to hear that “Joseph Kelley is frequently drunk,” and they send James Holbert “to demand of him the letter he obtained from us.” In 1837, a report reached the Providence Baptist Church that George Grum had been in a fight. Although the church proceeded to excommunicate Grum, someone evidently remembered that he had been granted a letter of dismissal at some time in the past. The church immediately formed a committee to go to Grum and retrieve the scrap of paper, but the committee reported back a month later that he refused to give it up. In 1847, Antioch Baptist Church appointed a committee to see William Palmer, who refused to attend the church when called. “Brother J.L. Williamson & L. Ross to visit him &

⁸² Big Creek Baptist Church Records (Anderson Co.), May 1, 1815; October 1, 1816, SCL; Mechanicsville Baptist Church Records (Darlington Co., SC), October 23, 1819, SCL.

demand his letter [emphasis in original],” the clerk noted. Clearly, churches were determined that those to whom they gave letters not use them as a license for sinning, dishonoring the church’s name in the process.⁸³

Churches were also concerned with the authenticity of the letters used to join their congregations. A man named Gouge offered his letter to the Williamson Creek Baptist Church in March of 1828, but the church voted to delay his membership without giving a reason. In May, Gouge again offered his letter, but the church, “not thinking friend Gouges letter in gospel order did not receive him in fellowship.”⁸⁴

Doubts about a letter implied all sorts of things about the bearer, none of them good, and those whose letters were questioned frequently acted as if their honor was at stake. In 1851, John Dagnel, clerk of the Red Oak Grove Baptist Church, wrote to Baptist minister Iveson L. Brookes requesting his help in a “painful and singular case” regarding the church’s pastor, A.L. Kennedy. Kennedy had joined the church two year earlier, presenting “a good letter dismissing him in full fellowship” from a neighboring Baptist church, but recently “there got up a rumor that the letter that Br. K. joined the church with was a speurious [*sic*] one.” The church immediately sent a committee to interview the church clerk at Kennedy’s previous church, who denied ever giving Kennedy a letter. Kennedy himself continued to defend the authenticity of his letter, and promised that if the church would lend him the original he could prove its authenticity. Though “very much divided,” as Dagnel wrote to Brookes, the church granted Kennedy’s request.

⁸³ Big Creek Baptist Church Records (Anderson Co., SC), February 1, 1815, SCL; Providence Baptist Church Records (Jasper Co., GA), February 18, March 18, March 19, April 29, 1837, MU; Antioch Baptist Church Records (Taylor Co., GA), June 19, 1847, MU.

⁸⁴ Williamson Creek (Appalachy) Baptist Church Records, May 17, 1828, MU.

Without knowing the outcome of the case, it is clear that Kennedy's standing in his community hinged on the authenticity of a small slip of paper. It is also clear from Dagnel's concern about the case that he understood the church's reputation was at stake, as well, since the personal reputation of the pastor was so closely related to that of the church. Because it represented a joining together of communal and individual reputation, a forged letter could cast a pall of doubt and dishonor well beyond the individual holding it.⁸⁵

An intriguing aspect of this evangelical practice is the fact that many who requested letters did not move to a different part of the country or even to a different local congregation, as evidenced by the fact that so many churches tried to retrieve letters from those still in their congregations or the local area. In 1834, for instance, Alfred Moore came before the congregation of Antioch Baptist Church in Taylor County, Georgia, accused of drunkenness and fighting. The church agreed to lay the case over, "with a request that [Moore] would hand in his letter that he had applied for some 9 or 10 months in the past." No doubt interpreting the request as a slight, Moore lost his temper and railed "that he could not have justice done him in [the church]." The church, having received ample proof that they had erred in granting Moore a letter, promptly excommunicated him.⁸⁶

Certainly some who requested letters in the face of an impending move or with the intent to transfer their membership later found their plans or their minds changed. But for many others, a request for a letter seems to have served other, less material purposes. A

⁸⁵ John Dagnel to Iveson L. Brookes, November 23, 1851, Iveson L. Brookes Papers, SHC.

⁸⁶ Antioch Baptist Church Records (Taylor Co., GA), September 22, 1834, MU.

large number of church members throughout the first half of the nineteenth century requested letters from their churches soon after trials in which they had been absolved of blame or acknowledged their sin and been restored to the church. In some cases it appears that members were not willing to remain in a congregation where their character had been so publicly probed and questioned, even if it had been finally vindicated. In other cases, where members granted letters continue to appear in the records of the church, it appears that the request for a letter soon after a trial was part of a continuing search for vindication, an attempt to achieve a concrete statement of continuing regard by requesting that the community's consensus be put into writing.

Requests for letters often followed trials closely, within a matter of days. In 1795, the Turkey Creek Baptist Church held a meeting with members of a neighboring church who accused one of Turkey Creek's members, a man named Gafford, of a veritable laundry list of offenses, including "saying he would not be outdone." Gafford was cleared of the charges by his own church, and the clerk noted, "Br. Gafford made his defence [*sic*] so much to the churches satisfaction that they continue him in fellowship." Despite his exoneration, at a church meeting the following day Gafford requested and received a letter certifying him as a member in good standing of Turkey Creek Baptist.⁸⁷

Even more frequently, requests for letters followed immediately after a positive verdict, without any delay at all. Indeed, requests for letters often followed so quickly behind the church's verdict that church clerks recorded them together, in a way that implies a unity or implicitly understood link between the verdict and the request. In 1802, for instance, a church clerk in Abbeville County, South Carolina, noted that Rebekah

⁸⁷ Turkey Creek Baptist Church Records (Abbeville Co., SC), December 11, December 12, 1795, BHC.

Neal came before her church and “made satisfaction for the report that was going about her dancing and applied for a letter of dismissal,” which the church granted. In 1806, again at Turkey Creek Baptist Church, William Lord accused Ally Davis of “calling a young man to come to bed to her.” At the next church meeting, the clerk noted that Davis “came forward gave satisfaction and was restord [*sic*] to fellowship again she applied for a letter of dismissal.” In August of 1825, John Beauchamp was excluded from the Williamson Creek Baptist Church for “shooting for beef & whisky.” At the next church meeting, Beauchamp made his acknowledgments “& was restored to fellowship and granted a letter of dismissal [*sic*] to join any other church.”⁸⁸

Some members did leave after their names were cleared and they were granted a letter, no doubt transferring their membership to other churches where the shadow of a church trial did not reach, but many others stayed. In April of 1836, Antioch Baptist Church in Taylor County, Georgia, held a large trial involving “helps” from four other churches in the case of William T. Burk, the church’s clerk, who was accused of buying lottery tickets. The interim church clerk, in a cramped and illegible hand nearly the opposite of Burk’s polished and confident style, recorded that “After considerable debate the voice of the church was taken and Br. Burk restored to fellowship.” Burk and his wife immediately requested letters of good standing, which were granted without any discussion. But they did not leave, and a few months later Burk resumed his post as clerk and continued to record the church’s business in his commanding style.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Turkey Creek Baptist Church Records (Abbeville Co., SC), July 9, 1802; February 8, March 8, 1806; Williamson Creek (Appalachy) Baptist Church Records, March 17, August entry, September entry, 1825, MU.

⁸⁹ Antioch Baptist Church Records (Taylor Co., GA) March 19, April 16, 1836; see also January entry, 1837, MU.

To anyone who knows the emphasis that evangelicals placed on harmony and brotherhood in their congregations, the abruptness of such requests and the pro forma way in which churches granted them can at first seem puzzling. It seems odd that churches would so easily grant letters of good standing, implying harmony with fellow church members, to those whose motive for requesting a letter arose from the dissatisfaction of being brought before the church. This opacity, of course, implies the need to read such exchanges differently, and suggests that individuals and churches saw the request and granting of a letter as a final, official step in the process of restoration. A letter certifying the good standing and reputation of a church member made the implications of restoration explicit, material, official, and mobile, giving church members a vital resource to combat any future ill effects on their reputation arising from the episode.

Those who did leave a church under a cloud of ill repute without securing a letter often found that they were hampered in trying to make a start somewhere new, whether that was a congregation a few miles away or the next state over. Baptists were particularly concerned that those not joining the church by “experience” (i.e. those previously converted) be able to show evidence of their good standing in their previous congregation. Church records exhibit numerous examples of those who tried to secure letters from a distance in space and time. In 1850, Seaborn Pickett wrote a letter from his new home in Mississippi, asking his old church, Antioch Baptist Church in Georgia to grant him a letter of dismissal. After deliberating, the church granted Pickett’s request, but other churches were less lenient. The most obvious reason for leaving a church without a letter was that the church would not grant one on account of some misdeed or

report. Many later requests for letters, often made in writing from some new location, included the delayed professions of repentance for past misdeeds. But many churches were wary of such requests and the confessions they contained, fearing that their onetime brothers and sisters would say anything to get the letter that would establish them in their new community by certifying their place in the old one.⁹⁰

This caution even extended to other churches writing on behalf of former members. In 1829, Brushy Creek Baptist received a letter from a church in Georgia requesting a letter for Hubbard Carnes, who had been excluded from Brushy Creek some time earlier. Brushy Creek rejected the request, despite Carnes' "profess'd repentance," no doubt complicating Carnes new life in Georgia tremendously. At times, the church took it upon itself to warn members who left without the proper documentation. In 1838, Turkey Creek Baptist Church addressed a letter to a former member in Indiana, James Hodges, asking him to "see bro. Nimrod Lord who removed to Indianna [*sic*] about 18 months ago without a letter...and let him know his situation in this church."⁹¹

Churches could sometimes be understanding, as well. Slaves, in particular, were sometimes granted leeway when it came to letters, since they did not leave their churches and homes of their own free will or at a time of their own choosing. While Turkey Creek Baptist was strict in general about not receiving members without letters, in 1810 the church received a slave named Fanny "under the watch care of the church until she can get a letter of dismissal from Virginia." Later that year, the church received Fanny into full membership despite her uncertified state, the church clerk explaining that she had

⁹⁰ Antioch Baptist Church Records (Taylor Co., GA), August 17, 1850, MU.

⁹¹ Brushy Creek Baptist Church Records (Greenville Co., SC), February 14, 1829, SCL.

been “baptis’d in Virginia and brought away without getting a letter.”⁹²

It can be difficult to discern where departing church members intended to take their letters, or where those accepted “by letter” came from. Few churches recorded the locations associated with letters, or the reasons for which members came and went, hiding the way in which southerners appear to have drifted between congregations with some regularity. Fortunately, Mechanicsville Baptist Church in Darlington County, South Carolina, did keep such a record. From 1827 to 1860, the church recorded more than ninety comings and goings, including the names of churches to which members were going and from which they came, and reasons for leaving. Several members over the years departed with the intention of moving out of the area entirely. The westward migration that swept nearly a million slaves to the new southwestern states in the first half of the nineteenth century is evidenced in the church’s records by entries that read simply “traveling to the west.” A few others left without giving their destination. But the great majority, over 75% of those received or dismissed from 1827 to 1860, came from or were dismissed to other congregations within twenty miles of the Mechanicsville church, most within Darlington County. There were frequent exchanges between the Mechanicsville church and the Welsh Neck Baptist Church at Society Hill, one of the oldest congregations in South Carolina. Likewise, many members over the years transferred their membership to the Baptist church in the city of Darlington, where they no doubt lived, as many of them gave “convenience” as their reason for removing. Overall, the Mechanicsville church exchanged nearly seventy members with 14 churches

⁹² Turkey Creek Baptist Church Records (Abbeville Co., SC) records, February 9, October 12, 1810, BHC.

within Darlington and the directly adjacent counties between 1827 and 1860.⁹³

What the records of Mechanicsville Baptist suggest in the context of the larger picture of the relationship between letters of dismissal and reputation is that because the majority of members who were accepted into or dismissed from churches came from nearby congregations, towns, and communities, these letters represented part of a localized commerce of community regard. For those wishing to continue living in the area, the official approval of their church served as an essential ingredient in the process of maintaining social status in their communities, and especially in the event of a move to a different, but nearby, community. Further, in an area with one of the oldest Baptist congregations in South Carolina, church membership was undoubtedly closely intertwined with life outside of the church in the way that it was in other well established evangelical locales, such as Twiggs County, Georgia, making good standing in a local church an integral part of reputation in the wider community.⁹⁴

As artifacts, these letters hold important implications for defining the place of evangelicalism and its relationship to changing definitions of honor and the onset of modernity in the South. The letters that survive, scattered loosely through church record books and collections of personal papers, testify to an abiding sense of the authority that religious communities exercised over those within them, a fundamentally premodern notion that southerners surrounded by the currents of honor culture would have found familiar. But by their very existence as official certifications of reputation designed to

⁹³ Compiled from Mechanicsville Baptist Church Records (Darlington Co., SC), SCL. Church names and distances from the Mechanicsville records were compared to an 1895 map showing extant and extinct Baptist churches in South Carolina. See Rev. C.C. Brown, "Baptist Map of the state of South Carolina, showing the location of all the white Baptist churches in the state," (Sumter, SC, 1895), SCL.

⁹⁴ Bode, "The Formation of Evangelical Communities in Middle Georgia."

facilitate mobility between communities, the letters also testify both to the multiplication of institutions in southern life, a development that everywhere contributed to the weakening of primal honor. They also serve as evidence of a nascent modernity, one of the essential features of which was the disintegration of the link between individual identity and communal opinion in the face of increased mobility and the forces of industrial capitalism, as well as the rise of the contractual, official, and commercial community in which official certifications of reputation, instead of a good name, were the basis of trust. It is in this context that Max Weber compared church membership to a “certificate of moral qualification” essential to doing business.⁹⁵

But evangelical churches, as we have seen, were not in the business of blindly issuing or trusting official certifications of reputation, often relying equally on older, less official methods of measuring reputation in their decisions on whether or not to grant or receive a letter. In the face of uncertainties, churches quickly fell back on older methods of ascertaining reputation where they were available. In 1829, a church in Alabama wrote to the Mechanicsville congregation requesting a letter of dismissal for a slave named Millie who had been previously excommunicated by Mechanicsville. Millie, the church in Alabama wrote, had confessed and repented “satisfactorily to them” and wanted a letter from her old church in order to join a church near her new home on the southern frontier. The congregation at Mechanicsville decided to trust their Alabama brethren in the matter of Millie and grant the letter, noting “we place full confidence in some of the members of that ch. being personally acquainted with them.” It seems unlikely that Millie

⁹⁵ Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 130.

would have gotten her letter otherwise.⁹⁶

The way in which churches relied on personal connections to verify reputations is clearly exhibited in an 1854 letter from James Clarke of Lumpkin, Georgia, to Iveson Brookes in South Carolina regarding the reputation of physician Samuel Warner. Warner had joined the church in Lumpkin some time earlier, and had “brought a letter” with him. Displaying energy and zeal in the church’s service, Warner quickly became a deacon. Shortly thereafter, other physicians in Lumpkin began circulating rumors that Warner had “sustained a bad character wherever he has been,” along with other unsavory details. Concerned for the reputation of their church, Clarke and other members wrote to Brookes, because, “We believe that you know [Warner], if not personally, at least by character.” In a penciled note on the back of the letter, Brookes noted “bro J. Clarke wishes the standing of Dr. Warner in this region.” Although Brookes’ verdict on Warner has evidently not survived, Clarke’s letter is evidence of the interconnected web of individual and communal reputation and of the official and unofficial methods that churches used to discover them. In this way, the public space of the local church should be viewed as another of the public stages in southern life upon which individual reputations were asserted, defended, and shaped, and in which the force of communal opinion exerted itself on individual identity.⁹⁷

Evangelical communities were unique social spaces within which the elements of individual identity and communal authority intersected on a stage that unavoidably

⁹⁶ Mechanicsville Baptist Church Records (Darlington Co., SC), March 7, 1829, SCL.

⁹⁷ James Clarke (Lumpkin, GA) to Iveson L. Brookes, November 25, 1854, Iveson L. Brookes Papers, SHC.

touched on southerners' deep-seated notions of the way reputation and standing were shaped and preserved. In some ways, evangelical churches functioned as semi-official representations of communal opinion within a society that lacked many of the institutions that formed the supports of reputation and standing in the antebellum North, making them all the more important because of the outsize effect they could have on standing inside and outside the church. At the level of the construction of identity and the relationship between individual autonomy and communal authority, there were deep harmonies between honor and evangelicalism that have gone largely unnoticed by scholars and that only appear when we place this history in the broader context of the history of the self and the collection of historical developments known as modernity.⁹⁸

The root cause of much of the radical social potential that historians have seen in the evangelical movement had to do with the evangelical emphasis on individual experience, a facet of evangelicalism that seems to some historians to have militated against the communally-minded instincts of the traditional culture of the South, including those related to honor. Notions of identity and worth in evangelical thought and doctrine were based on the deeply personal and subjective experience of conversion, a process that formed the touchstone of evangelical selfhood. The evangelical emphasis on the “experience” of conversion arose out of an understanding that God’s wrath, forgiveness, and grace had to be understood and experienced personally in order to assure salvation. By making the deeply personal experience of conversion the criteria for inclusion in the

⁹⁸ The scholarship in this area is naturally vast, and can only be represented here by the work of Charles Taylor, Anthony Giddens, and David Walker Howe. See Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989); Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991); Daniel Walker Howe, *Making the American Self: Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997); and Daniel Walker Howe, “Review: The Construction of the Self in Colonial America,” *Reviews in American History*, 26 (June 1998): 339-344.

evangelical community and the basis for standing and identity within that community evangelicals seem to some historians to have severed the ties between individual identity and communal authority that honor assumed.⁹⁹

Few southern historians have pointed out that the evangelical emphasis on personal experience was rooted in the soil of early modern Europe, where it was intertwined with the genesis of a new understanding of the relationship between knowledge, truth, and the self, and with the elusive phenomenon of modernity. These developments find a representative in the person of John Locke, for whom true knowledge could not be obtained at second hand. As Locke once wrote, “For, I think, we may as rationally hope to see with other Mens Eyes, as to know by other Mens Understandings.” With regard to religion, John Wesley and many southern preachers who advocated a personal and “saving knowledge” of Christ would have agreed. For Wesley and other evangelicals, simple assent to the doctrines of the church or the religious understanding of the clergy was not enough, true religion must also be experienced personally, it must be “heart religion.” It was this aspect of evangelicalism that John Boles identified in the South

⁹⁹ The disruption of this link is the implicit basis for Christine Heyrman’s interpretation of the radicalism of early evangelicalism in the South. Heyrman argues that evangelicals challenged social hierarchies based on gender, age, familial relations, and even race in the South, all categories that Bertram Wyatt-Brown identified as ascriptive in the sense that they automatically conveyed standing and place in the traditional southern community. In the evangelical worldview, however, these characteristics mattered less than the experience of conversion, a fact which led pious sons and daughters, wives, and even slaves, implicitly to challenge the claims of fathers, husbands, and masters to authority and honor by trying to convince them of their unworthiness before God. In Heyrman’s book, Methodist Stith Mead’s conversion led him to reject the example of his wealthy and prominent father and to alienate nearly his entire family on account of his zeal. Cynthia Lyerly begins her study of southern Methodism with the tale of Thomas Hinde, a man “immersed in the culture of honor,” who was converted through the aggressive proselytizing of his wife and daughters. In Lyerly’s book, a chapter on the “The Marrow of the Methodist Self” emphasizes the intense introspection and inward quality of Methodist belief while at the same time implicitly linking the intensity of this spiritual individualism to social radicalism in another chapter, “Turning the World Upside Down,” that examines the ways in which Methodism challenged the traditional social order of the South, especially the values of honor. See Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 117-123; Cynthia Lynn Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind, 1770-1810* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3-4, and chapter titles.

when he wrote, “popular religion in the South has been a personal matter, a thing of the heart...and the theological system preached and believed has rotated about one central axis: the conversion of individual sinners.” In this interpretation, then, evangelicalism was part of a larger process that severed the ties between individual identity and communal authority that existed in the largely premodern communities in which honor flourished as an ethical system.¹⁰⁰

But a growing number of scholars have qualified this view of evangelicalism by examining the strength of evangelical communities and pointing out how many links evangelicalism contained to the past, and to older conceptions of the self. Evangelicals of all denominational varieties fully expected that conversion would be followed soon after by membership in a body of believers who would exercise a watchful care over one another, safeguarding the practice of individual piety with the power of communal authority. As the covenant of one of the earliest Baptist churches in South Carolina stated, “We esteem it ou[r] duty to walk with each other...to watch over and guard each other’s conversation, to stir one another up to love and good work...and when [w]e can to admonish one another according to the rules of the gospel.”¹⁰¹

Even the most individualistic aspect of evangelicalism, the highly subjective and deeply personal experience of conversion, did not represent a radical unmooring of the individual from communal judgment and constraint. The experience of conversion referenced multiple points of authority outside of the individual, including the community

¹⁰⁰ Locke quoted in Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 167; Boles, *The Great Revival*, 141.

¹⁰¹ Cashaway Baptist Church Records (Darlington Co., SC), September 28, 1756, SCL. Among the best recent books emphasizing the vitality of the evangelical community on both sides of the Atlantic are D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Wills, *Democratic Religion*.

into which the convert entered and the commonly acknowledged headship of Christ. Scholar Bruce Hindmarsh, examining the conversion narratives of English evangelicals in the eighteenth century, wrote that while evangelicalism may have participated in the making of modern selfhood, it was firmly anchored in older, communalistic, conceptions of the self. In this sense, evangelicalism represented “an alternative version of modern self-identity,” and was situated, Hindmarsh wrote, “on the trailing edge of Christendom and the leading edge of modernity.” It is in this context that any examination of church discipline and authority must take place. This view of evangelicalism, as a unique bridge between older and newer ways of seeing the self, can also serve to illuminate the ways in which evangelicalism spoke in a way southerners understood from the very beginning.¹⁰²

As we have seen, the process and practice of church discipline in the South were in an important sense based on fundamentally pre-modern assumptions arising directly from the logic and language of honor. The public stage of church discipline was designed with honor and shame in mind by a people who read in their scripture that their God was jealous of his honor and understood what that meant. It is time to take these concerns seriously as motivating factors and primary concerns in the worldview of southern evangelicals. There were multiple reputations and definitions of honor on display and at stake in the public actions of churches. Man’s honor, God’s honor, and the reputation of the church were all equally involved in a church discipline case or in a letter certifying reputation and standing. In some cases, the honor of God and His church required that an offender undergo the ritual exclusion and shaming of excommunication, that the sacred and the profane be parted before the eyes of the community in order that no stains should

¹⁰² Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 2-3, 6.

attach to God's name or to his people. In other cases, the conflicting demands of honor could be resolved through the mechanism of repentance and the confession of wrongdoing. Just as in the traditional culture of the South a heartfelt public apology could sometimes repair the damage done by an insult and avert a crisis in which honor had to be defended or lost, repentance functioned within the evangelical community to resolve tensions, preserve harmony, and maintain both the standing of the penitent and the honor of God and the church.

A cultural examination of church discipline suggests the need to reorient and broaden the discussion of the relationship between honor and evangelicalism in the South. By placing an examination of honor and evangelicalism in the context of the history of the modern self, it is possible to see that although what honor valued and what evangelicalism prized were often quite different, and sometimes opposite, they shared common assumptions about individual identity and communal authority that allowed evangelicalism to speak in an accent southerners understood. Instead of focusing solely on behaviors that honor permitted and religion proscribed, we should also examine the way that evangelical communities drew their strength from the same cultural wellsprings that nourished honor, a fact that may well have aided evangelicalism's meteoric rise in the South. In other words, instead of focusing on what southerners repented of, we should focus on the fact that they repented at all, and on the fact that they did so in front of a community whose authority they explicitly acknowledged. In this way it becomes possible to see the evangelical church as another of the public stages in southern life where honor, reputation, and identity were shaped and contested, as well as a mediating space between honor and grace, and a waypoint along the path from the pre-modern

world of honor to the complex array of forces that shape modern individual identity.

III. Dual Citizens and a Twice Sacred Circle: Men, Women, and Honor in the Local Church

When Nathan Bedford Forrest met his future wife on a dirt road outside Hernando, Mississippi, it was hardly clear they would make a good match. Forrest would go on to international fame as a Confederate cavalry commander and leader of the Klu Klux Klan, but in April of 1845, he was already a figure of local distinction. Less than a month before he met his wife he had shot two men on the streets of Hernando in a fight that was less duel than brawl. The story had it that he pursued two other men from the scene with a bowie knife when he ran out of ammunition. The fight made the papers in nearby Memphis. When Forrest came upon Mary Montgomery and her mother one Sunday in April, their wagon had become stuck in the mud on their way to church. Forrest, it seems, was headed in a different direction. After a short courtship marked by plenty of persistence, Forrest convinced his intended bride that he would make a good husband. But her uncle and legal guardian, the Rev. Samuel Montgomery of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, had his doubts. “Why Bedford, I couldn’t consent,” the Reverend Montgomery said, according to one witness, “you cuss and gamble, and Mary Ann is a Christian girl.” “I know,” Forrest replied, “and that’s just why I want her.” Forrest and Mary Ann Montgomery were soon married despite the groom’s decided lack of religious credentials.¹

In one sense the Reverend Montgomery’s unease seems to illustrate precisely the sharp conflict that historians have described between the religion of honor practiced by

¹ Jack Hurst, *Nathan Bedford Forrest: A Biography* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1993), 15-17. An account of the fight appeared in the Memphis-area *American Eagle* newspaper on March 21, 1845.

many southern white men and the ethics of evangelical religion to which Mary Montgomery and her uncle were devoted. But in another sense Forrest's reply warrants its own examination since it implies a much more complex view of the relationship between honor culture and evangelicalism in the South than we currently have. Often historians have portrayed a South under the sway of two competing moral communities, honor and evangelicalism, which are assumed at most times and in most places to have been at odds. Furthermore, the contradiction is generally expressed in gendered terms, with a masculine honor ethic arrayed in opposition to a feminized evangelical morality. Thus Cynthia Lynn Lyerly describes a "gulf between pious Methodist women and worldly men of honor." And yet for southerners the two communities were never as separate as historians have sometimes portrayed them, though men and women experienced them in very different ways. This chapter will compare honor and evangelicalism not as separate and opposed cultural structures but as moral communities that overlapped in the everyday lived experience of southerners and in which gender played an important role.²

The concept of moral communities used throughout this chapter may need explanation. Without entering into the lengthy discussion surrounding the definition of religion (and also honor), we can at least say that there were important parallels between honor and evangelicalism in terms of how each community defined its membership, maintained its boundaries, and viewed those who did not adhere to its standards. Both communities were concerned to maintain a clear boundary between the sacred and the profane, and to limit membership to an elect who were alive to the moral demands or

² Cynthia Lynn Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind, 1770-1810* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 95.

spiritual truths of the community. Those who remained outside the boundaries of the community or who were excluded from membership were deemed in a similar sense morally unregenerate on account of their apparent inability to feel either shame at their dishonor or guilt at their sin. Honor, no less than evangelicalism, was concerned with maintaining boundaries between members (who were honorable) and nonmembers (who were shameless) and with preserving the sacred (honor) from contamination by the profane (dishonor).

This is not at all to say that these two communities were the same in their form and function or that their similarities were as significant as the substantial differences between them as ethical systems. It is simply to argue that both *were* systems, or social communities defined at least partially by ethical boundaries. There was a significant social dimension to the evangelical community and an important sense of the sacred within honor that makes such a comparison interesting. Even before Bertram Wyatt-Brown called attention to honor as a system of ethics in the South, anthropologists noted the religious content of honor in other areas of the world. Likewise, Emile Durkheim long ago expressed most strongly the social and communal nature of religion when he wrote that religion “unite[s] its adherents in a single moral community.” Thus, while keeping in view evangelicalism’s important and unique religious nature, it is possible to compare the social dynamics of these two moral communities as they operated together in the lives of southern men and women.³

³ Julian Pitt-Rivers, “Honour and Social Status,” in John G. Peristiany, ed., *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 34-35; Julian Pitt-Rivers, “Honour,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, David L. Sills, ed., vol. 6 (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 1991), 506; Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Mark Sydney Cladis, ed., Carol Cosman, trans. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 46. Although Durkheim’s observations were not specifically about evangelicalism, scholars such as Donald Mathews

In the winter of 1812, a man named Howard stood before the congregation of the Mountain Creek Baptist Church in South Carolina and confessed that he had been fighting, “occasioned,” he said, “by a man giving him the ly [*sic*].” Howard needed no prompting from his audience to understand that his actions were contrary to the example of Christ, and that he had acted towards his antagonist as a citizen of the world rather than a son of heaven. Howard assured the members of his church “that he did not approbate such conduct” and that he had already sought forgiveness from God. It only remained for the church to accept his proffered repentance as genuine, which they did, the church clerk recording simply, “and the Church heard him.”⁴

For many southern men who joined evangelical churches, the blood of Christ had the power to wash away sins, but it did not remove them from a world where they had to answer to the demands of honor. This messy reality has often been overlooked, and can only be recovered by close attention to what men said and did when these two communities made conflicting demands on them. There is no clearer example of the ethical divide between honor and evangelicalism than the way in which each community viewed and dealt with violence, and there is no better place to study this difference than in the record books of churches throughout the Deep South which preserve religious communities’ struggle to maintain the demands of another world against the exigencies of the present one. Men in evangelical churches, it often seems, were dual citizens of

have found Durkheim's observations fully applicable. See Donald G. Mathews, “The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Process, 1780-1830: An Hypothesis,” *American Quarterly*, 21 (Spring 1969), 23-43.

⁴ Mountain Creek Baptist Church Records (Anderson County, South Carolina), January, 1812, South Caroliniana Library (SCL).

warring countries.

How did men like Howard balance the demands of honor, which occasionally required violence, with the demands of their Christian faith and of their churches, which often required repentance for those same acts of violence? As Gregory Wills has noted, the very process of church discipline, which required repentance and submission to church authority from the offending member, “turned the system of honor on its head.” For some southern men, this was too much, and Wills has calculated that despite marked leniency towards men, from 1785 to 1860 Georgia Baptists alone excommunicated twice as many men as women, frequently for offenses related to the male honor culture of the South, including gambling, horse racing, getting drunk, and fighting.⁵

But underneath the wealth of statistical data mined from church records and the well chronicled antipathy of the local chivalry towards all things evangelical during the movement’s early years lies the simple fact that in the normal course of life many southern men somehow managed to maintain their place in the communities of honor and the church, even when an act of violence threatened to undo the delicate balance of their dual citizenship. Of all the offenses examined in Gregory Wills’ study, violence was the least likely to get a man excluded from the church, with excommunication occurring in 41% of cases between 1785 and 1860 (as opposed to 81% for sexual offenses, for instance). Thus, the offense that seems to stem most directly from the ethics of honor in the South was the least likely to result in permanent exclusion. This fact calls into question the hard-edged opposition between evangelicalism and honor described by many scholars, and points the way to an investigation of how churches dealt with this conflict

⁵ Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1785-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 37, 54-56.

in practice.⁶

The South was a violent place, and as a man it was hard to make one's way without at some point being caught in a situation that demanded a choice between violence and shame. Many southerners recorded matter-of-factly the remarkable violence of their surroundings. On one Sunday alone, during election season in 1854, Presbyterian physician Samuel Wells Leland treated participants in two fights. He was called to barbecue where a man had been "knocked down, and stamped in the face, and skinned [*sic*] dreadfully." Officially the fight was over politics, though Leland sniffed out the true culprit—"whiskey." "Before this election is over we will hear of many such cases," wrote Leland, noting that "Mat. Haley another neighbour [*sic*] of mine came home last night with his face all swollen up. He too had got into a fight with Bennan, and altho he whiped [*sic*] him; yet got hurt himself."⁷

Presbyterian diarist Mary Davis Brown of South Carolina regularly recorded several acts of extreme violence near her home in York County in the years before the Civil War. In 1857, she wrote, "Tom Bell shot ould Mr. Alen he met him in the street and orderd him to lay down some circulars he [Allen] had printed concerning a dispute between Bell and him." A few months later, in 1858, she recorded, "Mr. B Derer was killed by Mr. Tom Dickson in yorkvill...They was a disputing in Dicksons tailor shop and he struck him on the head and broker his scull with the press board." A mere week later, she recorded "another scrape at york" in which one man hit another "with a rock and knocked him down and then jumped on him and beet his head bad with a rock."

⁶ Ibid., 56.

⁷ Samuel Wells Leland journal, August 13, 1854, SCL.

Significantly, Brown's record of the violence that surrounded her in the 1850s came after decades of evangelical influence that had evidently largely failed to suppress southern proclivities in this area. Clearly, the environment in which evangelical churches attempted to impose order and discipline was a demanding one, in which violence could flare up at any moment over the most mundane detail.⁸

In describing what often seems to be mere brutality, it is important to keep in mind that in the eyes of honor violence had a moral significance far beyond its physical ramifications. Violence in response to an insult or challenge evidenced a man's zealous concern for his honor and his abhorrence of shame, proving that he was one of honor's elect. Oppositely, the lack of a violent response to a direct attack was evidence of obliviousness to the demands of honor and the inability even to feel shame, relegating a man to the morally insentient category of shamelessness. This complicated the moral implications of violence tremendously for southerners, and southern juries were famously reticent to convict in cases involving assault and murder, rendering far fewer guilty verdicts in such cases than northern courts even though southern courts dealt with a significantly higher proportion of violent crime. In April of 1858, Mary Davis Brown recorded the outcome of the trials of two men charged with murder in the incidents she recorded earlier. "Court week is over," she wrote, "and they have not hung Tom Bell ore [sic] Tom Dickson." It should be kept in mind that the same southerners who served on juries also served on church discipline committees.⁹

⁸ Mary Davis Brown diary, October 31, 1857, March 19, 1858, March 26, 1858, SCL.

⁹ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 366-371. See also Michael Stephen Hindus, "The Contours of Crime and Justice in Massachusetts and South Carolina, 1767-1878," *The American Journal of Legal History* 21, no. 3 (July 1977): 212-237. Mary Davis Brown Diary, April 26, 1858, SCL.

Keeping the demands of honor and the moral dimension of violence in view when considering the disciplinary records of evangelical churches can illuminate the dilemma that some men faced. It helps, for instance, to make clear exactly what William Hays meant in 1805 when he reported to his church that he had “struck Alaxandre [*sic*] Stevenson with a gun and knocked him down.” Hays confessed that in so doing he had sinned, and “considered himself faulty.” But he hinted that under the circumstances he had had no choice but to attack Stevenson when he promised that “he should take care to do so no more, if he could help it.” Significantly, the church accepted this carefully qualified repentance and allowed Hays to continue in membership.¹⁰

But for the violence that honor required, the church demanded repentance. Repentance showed a sensitivity to sin and to the boundaries and moral demands of the community that in evangelical theology was a symptom of the regenerate heart. When it came to violence, the most powerful moral exemplar for evangelicals was the person of Christ, who allowed himself to be shamed and crucified by his antagonists. But violence did not automatically alienate a man from the communion of the church, provided that he repented of his actions and did not repeat them too often. An act of violence simultaneously supported a man’s claim to honor and cast into doubt his religious claims, requiring him to acknowledge his sin and repent in order to remove the shadow that his actions had cast. Thus, for many southern men who claimed both honor and salvation, violence and repentance were contradictory but closely linked experiences that formed part of a common lived experience.

Navigating the conflicting demands of these two communities could be a challenge.

¹⁰ Mountain Creek Baptist Church Records (Anderson County, South Carolina), December [n.d.], 1805, SCL.

According to John Lyde Wilson's famous guide to dueling etiquette published in 1858, members of the clergy were exempt from appearing on the field of honor. Yet in church records it is clear that many of the laity did not believe that a profession of faith absolved them from the demands of honor. Even as they acknowledged their actions as sin, many men pled that they had only done what honor required, and expressed disbelief that their religion would require them to submit passively to shame. In the summer of 1818, Liberty Baptist Church in Georgia opened a door for the confession of faults, and Thomas Hamby informed the church that "he had been in a passion in consequence [*sic*] of some men abuseing [*sic*] his wife and family and went so far as to offer to fight them." Hamby evidently wanted the church to confirm that he had been justified in his threat of violence, but the church clerk recorded that his fellow Baptists "thought he had done wrong in offering to fight." A month later the church was still asking for Hamby's repentance, but he stubbornly refused, saying "that he was very sorry to wound the feeling[s] of the Brethren but could not say that he was Sorry in any other case." Then, turning the tables, Hamby indignantly asked the church to consider the question, "is there *any* cause for which it would be right for a Baptist to git mad[?]" The church decided to delay the question until their next meeting. Hamby was not alone in his indignation. In 1846, Little River Baptist Church excluded J.S. Barns, "not only for fighting, but also for justifying himself for his conduct."¹¹

While some churches required full repentance even for the offer of fighting, other churches sometimes seemed partially to acknowledge the demands of honor faced by

¹¹ John Lyde Wilson, *The Code of Honor, or, Rules for the Government of Principals and Seconds in Duelling* (Charleston, 1858). Liberty (Carmel) Baptist Church Records, July 25, 1818, August 22, 1818, Mercer (MU); Little River Baptist Church Records, September 19, 1846, BHC.

their male congregants and to soften the rigors of discipline accordingly. In 1822, the session of First Presbyterian Church in Columbia, South Carolina, heard the case of Daniel Baldwin, a member of the church who was accused of “assault & battery on the body of Robt. E. Russel.” The session had no trouble establishing Baldwin’s guilt, which he freely admitted, but they found many circumstances that “palliated the guilt, & rendered the provocation singularly strong.” On account of this and “great marks of contrition” on Baldwin’s part, they only suspended Baldwin from the sacraments for a short time. When, in 1837, newspaper editor Samuel Weir beat a local politician named Fawcett with a cane for posting a handbill around town calling him a liar, he found himself in front of the session of First Presbyterian Church acknowledging that he had “acted contrary to the principles & spirit of the Gospel of Christ & that he seriously regretted it.” The session decided simply to reprove Weir for “indulgence of his temper.”¹²

The language in which some church clerks recorded the violent acts of male members hinted at another mitigating factor attaching to male violence. When Thomas Hamby confessed that he had “been in a passion” when he had offered to fight the men who insulted his wife, he drew on a commonly held understanding of human nature that conceived of emotions and instincts as elemental forces ideally held in check by the rational and moral facets of the human character. In evangelical thought, the breakdown of this relationship frequently resulted in sin, particularly male sin. This way of

¹² First Presbyterian Church Session Minutes (Columbia, SC), May 23, 1822, September 9, 1837, SCL. For Weir-Fawcett incident, see also Julian A. Selby, *Memorabilia and Anecdotal Reminiscences of Columbia, S. C.* (Columbia, SC: The R. L. Bryan Company, 1905), 135.

conceiving of male sin was not peculiar to the South, but in southern churches sins of passion seem most often to have been acts of violence, frequently in circumstances involving honor. In the minds of many southerners this would have been quite understandable, if regrettable. The loss of reason in response to the sting of shame showed a man's sensitivity about his honor, a trait that few southerners evangelical or otherwise would condemn in itself, though it could sometimes be the source of censurable behavior. Thus, in 1830 the members of Little River Baptist Church admonished Robert Burton to "exercise...his mind" before pardoning him "for getting in a passion with Isaac Shacky and presenting a loded [*sic*] gun at him and saying he would kill him." Few things got southern men in a passion more quickly or more often than a perceived challenge to their honor, and many evangelical churches seem to have viewed this as a besetting, if understandable, sin peculiar to their male congregants.¹³

While violence rooted in a passionate response to an insult or other provocation drew conflicted responses from church disciplinary committees, whisky-fueled fights did not. In most cases, men had a much more difficult time defending themselves against the combined charges of drunkenness and violence than against charges of violence alone. While alcohol was undeniably a large part of male culture in the South, it had none of ambiguous moral implications associated with violence. Honor sometimes demanded

¹³ Liberty Baptist Church Records, July 25, 1818, MU. On faculty psychology in America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Daniel Walker Howe, *Making the American Self: Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 5-9. On passion and violence, see Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 43. Susan Juster found that passion was frequently associated with male sin in evangelical churches in revolutionary era New England. See Susan Juster, *Disorderly Women: Sexual Politics and Evangelicalism in Revolutionary New England* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994), 159. Little River Baptist Church Records (Saluda Association), October 16, 1830, Baptist Historical Collection, Furman University (BHC).

violence in defense of one's reputation or in response to an insult, but honor rarely demanded getting drunk. Punishing drunkenness was thus much less complicated in a moral sense than punishing violence since the underlying cultural justifications for drunkenness were not nearly as strong as they were for certain types of violence. Further, drunkenness gave disciplinary committees an explanation and source for violent behavior that had more to do with the devil in the drink than with the promptings of honor, making it easier to discipline men accused of both drunkenness and violence. In 1834, Antioch Baptist Church in Georgia excommunicated Alfred Moore "without debate" for "drinking ardent spirits to intoxication and fighting." In 1835, Antioch charged Jesse Stallings with "joining in a combat of fighting at Centerville and for drinking ardent spirits to intoxication at Mr. Mays Store," later excommunicating him. Churches drew distinctions between the motivations behind violent behavior as well as between the situations in which they occurred. In most churches, drinking and fighting were an indefensible combination.¹⁴

Violence in self-defense was permissible in most churches, even if it sometimes drew pro forma censures from disciplinary committees. In 1837, G.L. Williamson informed the Mechanicsville Baptist congregation that he had "engaged in an affray which he very much regretted—having been unjustifiably attac[k]ed by an individual for an act done by him in the discharge of his public duties as an officer." The church absolved Williamson completely, judging that he had "been forced into it in self-defence." In 1822, First Presbyterian Church in Columbia suspended William Cline from the sacraments for three months rather than excommunicate him after they decided he

¹⁴ Antioch Baptist Church Records, September 22, 1834, February 14, 1835, June 18, 1836, MU; See also, for example, Bethabara Baptist Church Records (Laurens County, South Carolina), January 19, 1833, SCL.

had acted only to defend himself in a recent altercation. The implicit acknowledgment in Deep South churches of the right to defend oneself against violent attack might seem unremarkable; after all, only a few pietistic and pacifist sects would completely deny such a right. Nevertheless this acknowledgement ran counter to the examples of many evangelical clergy in the South who infuriated attackers by refusing to respond in kind. The often-conflicted manner in which disciplinary committees accepted this defense further hinted at the conflict between the main thrust of evangelical mores and the ethics of honor in this area.¹⁵

There were rare occasions when a church seems to have acquiesced to the moral demands of honor. In the spring of 1833, David Wilson testified to the session of Hopewell Presbyterian Church that he and a group of other men had been standing on the “north side of the church” after the service when William James Strong walked past. William Harbison and David McCalla left the group and stopped Strong, demanding of him that “it was time & place to tell the truth.” Witnesses thought their disagreement was over politics. At some point during the exchange, witnesses overheard McCalla say “I demand it,” and then heard Strong answer back “I disregard you and all the lies you can tell,” after which McCalla attacked Strong with a stick “large enough to knock a man down with.” One witness recalled that Thomas Torbet had warned those present “not to hold one without the other was held or else it would be foul play.” William Boyd testified that nobody, including him, tried to stop the fight, although there were at least ten men present who could have tried. Faced with the tacit approval of the fight by so many of the church’s male members, the Elders chose not to try to untangle the threads of right and

¹⁵ Mechanicsville Baptist Church Records (Darlington County, South Carolina), May 20, 1837, SCL; First Presbyterian Church Records (Columbia, SC), July 20, 1822, SCL.

wrong in the case. Instead, they agreed that Strong, McCalla, and Harbison had “acted imprudently tho’ not amounting to a censure.”¹⁶

Though many churches were ambivalent about men’s violent behavior, few were this lenient. The surest, quickest way to reestablish standing within the church was unconditional and heartfelt repentance. Churches frequently recorded careful observations of the behavior of men accused of violent behavior in an attempt to discern whether remorse and repentance were genuine. In 1816, when the session of Second Presbyterian Church investigated a charge against Henry Wesner for getting drunk and fighting on one of Charleston’s public wharves, Wesner vehemently denied being drunk but admitted to getting into a fight with a “worthless man.” Wesner, the session’s clerk recorded, “appeared to behave on the occasion, much like a humble and pious man...with many expressions of penitence & sorrow.” The session, convinced by Wesner’s display of humility and remorse, let him go with only a warning.¹⁷

Because violence was so often associated with the irrational and unpremeditated passion of anger, it may have been easier for men to acknowledge their actions as sin, and many of them acknowledged their sinfulness without equivocation. Indeed, much of the violence to be found in church records was voluntarily reported by the men involved, signaling genuine remorse. In repenting, men frequently lamented that they had been unable to control themselves in situations where Christian ethics dictated forbearance but honor demanded action. Even ministers, the moral exemplars of the religious community,

¹⁶ Hopewell A.R.P. Church Session Records (Chester County, South Carolina), April 18, 1833, SCL.

¹⁷ Second Presbyterian Church (Charleston) Records, Session Minutes, November 5, December 3, 1816, SCHS;

sometimes failed to follow Christ's example. At a church meeting in 1825, the members of Brushy Creek Baptist Church had to deal with the "unhappy affair" of their Pastor, Lewis Rector. The church clerk recorded the scene: "After prayer Brother Rector rose and in a feeling manner acknowledged, that he had under the influence of sudden passion struck a man and used harsh and reproachful language to him." The church professed itself "deeply affected" by their minister's failure, but "perfectly satisfied" of his "sincere penitence." They voted not to exercise any discipline.¹⁸

In describing the often antagonistic relationship between honor and evangelicalism, historians have only followed the descriptions of evangelicals themselves, who keenly felt and recorded a chasm between the church and the world. Yet clearly many of the men who claimed conversion remained alive to the moral world of honor. Also clearly, many men were able to maintain this dual citizenship, although not without difficulty and even occasional intransigence. When honor demanded violence, men frequently described it as a necessary evil, as unavoidable in one context as it was lamentable in another. Many churches appear to have agreed. The frequency with which men repented of violence and were accepted back into their churches suggests that we have perhaps focused too often on the conflict between God-fearing saints and honorable sinners without considering how often in the South they were the same person.

There are at least two observations to be made about how men could maintain in practice two allegiances that seem to have been so opposed in principle. The first is the observation of Clifford Geertz that "no one, not even a saint, lives in the world religious

¹⁸ Brushy Creek Baptist Church Records (Greenville County, South Carolina), March 12, 1825, SCL.

symbols formulate all the time.” Instead, Geertz urges us “to see man as moving more or less easily, and very frequently, between radically contrasting ways of looking at the world, ways which are not continuous with one another but separated by cultural gaps across which Kierkegaardian leaps must be made in both directions.”¹⁹

But any attempt to understand the past on its own terms requires us also to observe that evangelicals were never as concerned with conflicting worldviews in the abstract as they were with the practical struggle between what the apostle Paul called the old and the new man that took place in the heart of every believer. Evangelicals fully acknowledged, indeed expected, that the task of living in the world but not being of it would be difficult and inevitably involve failure as believers contended with conflicting demands for their allegiance. One of the central purposes of church discipline was to guide Christians along this narrow path, sustaining and correcting them when they went astray. Men would not have been able to maintain an uneasy balance between these two communities if the violence that they did in honor’s name had not been completely comprehensible within the lexicon and moral worldview of evangelicalism. It required no Kierkegaardian leap to be both a sinner and a saint. To the extent that men followed the dictates of honor and refused to turn the other cheek, they were following the ways of the world and not the example of Christ. But to the extent they were willing to name their actions sin and repent, they proved their citizenship in the kingdom of heaven.

For all the conflict between the cultural mores of honor and evangelicalism for men, there were also a few significant and often misunderstood harmonies. For many

¹⁹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 119, 120.

men, the difficulty of balancing two contrasting identities lessened with age, and the barriers that kept younger men from joining the church lost their significance. Church disciplinary records encourage the view that at times many southern men struggled, often successfully I argue, to balance the demands of honor with the example of a savior who submitted to shame for the sake of sinners. But there are other dimensions of this relationship to consider. Church records reveal the strife and conflict of a moment, a fixed point of time, but they cannot illuminate how the urges of honor could yield to the gentler virtues of grace across the span of a lifetime. Age is often an overlooked factor in the cultural opposition between male honor and evangelical values, but there are compelling reasons to take a long view. Anthropologist Julian Pitt-Rivers once wrote of the way honor could be transformed into the complimentary quality of grace in the Mediterranean cultures he studied, encouraging scholars to see the two operating smoothly within a single life-cycle even though they might conflict otherwise:

The man of honor must in a sense convert his honor into grace and thus render himself impregnable, because legitimate, be loved by those he has defeated, make peace where once he made war, trade his de facto power for right, his dominance for status, his business acumen for magnanimity. He must struggle to achieve honor, but the proof that he has achieved it is that he no longer needs to struggle.²⁰

It is possible to see evangelicalism and the virtues it represented as taking part in a similar transition for many southern men. For some historians, the process by which men of honor became Methodists (or Baptists) involved significant cultural disruption. Of Thomas Hinde, a wealthy and prominent Virginian, “immersed in the culture of honor,” who converted to Methodism in late eighteenth century, historian Cynthia Lynn Lyerly

²⁰ Julian Pitt-Rivers, "Postscript: the place of grace in anthropology," in Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers, *Honor and Grace in Anthropology*, 243.

wrote, “his world was indeed turned upside down by the church.” Indeed, Lyerly proves beyond a doubt that Hinde feared the social upheaval that he saw associated with Methodism’s rise, and tried unsuccessfully to keep his wife and daughter from converting to the despised sect. The transformation that followed Hinde’s conversion was striking. Lyerly describes how Hinde forgave debts and gave away considerable amounts of money. Hinde’s story, wrote Lyerly, “ illustrates the vast gulf between secular southern mores and the Methodist worldview.”²¹

And yet it is possible to see Hinde’s conversion as part of a culturally coherent pattern. When he was converted in 1788, Thomas Hinde was more than 50 years old, already past middle age by the standard of the times. A transformation that may well have been countercultural in a younger man, like many of those who became Methodist ministers across the South, was not nearly so shocking in a man of Hinde’s age and acknowledged stature. Indeed, Hinde’s conversion appears to have given him a language and set of social ideals admirably suited to the transition from the field of honor to a state of grace, and though his transformation was no less remarkable for this fact, it was, perhaps, not so great a cultural leap as it might seem.

Hinde was not alone. While by the 1830s it was not unusual for southern women to undergo evangelical conversion at an early age, many prominent southern men seem to have waited until later in life. Evangelicals, especially the Methodists, remarked on the conversion of these established men with special interest in their diaries. In 1809, Methodist James Jenkins told of the conversion of a Captain Buchanan in Winnsboro,

²¹ Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind*, 3-4. Indeed, Hinde’s behavior mirrors many of the cases examined by Pitt-Rivers and Peristiany, such as the Cypriot sophrons, older men whose established masculinity and honor is confirmed and converted into grace at the end of their lives by their giving away all their possessions. See Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers, *Honor and Grace in Anthropology*, 116, 243.

South Carolina, who had served in the Revolutionary War and of whom Jenkins wrote, “no one, perhaps, stood higher in the confidence and esteem of the whole district than himself.” At first objecting to Jenkins’ preaching because it was too loud for his taste, the Captain soon converted along with his wife and built a meetinghouse for the Methodist congregation at his own expense. In another example, Methodist William Martin remarked on a pattern in one revival near Darlington, South Carolina, in 1833. “We had a gracious revival during the year,” wrote Martin, “at which there were a good many conversions; among them three men, heads of families—men past the meridians of life.”²²

Some men waited past even the meridian of life. In these late life conversions, the interplay of religion and honor became even more complex, its strands inseparable as men who had resisted conversion and dependence on God as an admission of weakness finally passed from the agonistic frenzy of honor into the peace of God’s grace with their acknowledgment that there was indeed one greater than themselves. It was no shame, finally, for a man who had achieved the acclaim of his community to humble himself before an almighty God. Still, some felt the need to make it clear that their conversions were not made out of the fear of any human foe. In 1839, Methodist Whitefoord Smith preached the funeral sermon of the Augustus Clayton, a prominent citizen of Athens, Georgia. Clayton had converted to Methodism in the last year of his life, and in his funeral oration Smith was concerned to refute the perception that Clayton had converted out of senility or a cowardly fear of death. In other words, out of a lack of his senses or

²² James Jenkins, *Experience, Labours, and Gospel Sufferings of Rev. James Jenkins, of the South Carolina Conference* (n.p.: Printed for the author, 1842), 156-158; "Reminiscences of a Methodist Preacher no. 10," newspaper clipping in William Martin journal, William Martin Papers, SCL.

his honor. Smith brought his audience Clayton's message from beyond the grave: "Say to those stout-hearted stoics—those men of bravery, who say that this is all fear; that they may call it so: but who would not fear a God?"²³

Even Nathan Bedford Forrest, a man who lived his whole life by the violent ethics of honor, could tread the well-worn path from a militant honor to a saving grace. In 1875, after a lifetime of resisting religion and only two years before he died, the Confederate hero suddenly appeared at his wife Mary Ann's side at the Court Street Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Memphis to hear the Rev. George T. Stainback preach. After the sermon, Stainback recalled that Forrest drew him aside and wept, telling Stainback, "I am a poor miserable sinner." Though Forrest later joked that his conversion was prompted by a bout of illness, he professed the same faith to Stainback from his deathbed two years later. "I want you to know," he told Stainback on that occasion, "that between me and...the face of my Heavenly Father, not a cloud intervenes. I have put my trust in my Lord and Saviour." Forrest did not follow his own famous advice on military matters—to get there first with the most—when it came to religion. But he got there at last nevertheless.²⁴

Evangelicals eagerly recorded the stories of prominent men who converted later in life for a variety of reasons. Frequently the transformations wrought by these conversions were dramatic, proof to the evangelical mind of an inner transformation and the regeneration of the soul. For some, perhaps Methodists in particular, these conversions proved that they were making headway among the middling and upper sorts in the South.

²³ Whitefoord Smith, *A Discourse, on the Occasion of the Death of the Hon. Augustin S. Clayton, Delivered in the College Chapel, Athens, Ga., on the 23d June, 1839* (Athens, Ga, 1839), SCL.

²⁴ Hurst, *Nathan Bedford Forrest*, 370, 378.

Certainly some also saw in these conversions a renunciation of worldly honor, its vanity and its strife. But in another sense, such conversions look less like a renunciation of honor than its natural completion. Julian Pitt-Rivers calls the transition from honor to grace within one lifetime “a relation of complementarity, and in the end concordance...If you lack grace you will not attain honor, in which case you will lack the means to be gracious.” Not all southern men trod the same path to grace. Some never reached it, or reached it by different paths. Nevertheless, for some men full of age and established honor, the conversion to an evangelical faith encompassed not only a religious change but also a transition from the pursuit of honor to its natural fulfillment—a state of grace.²⁵

If honor and evangelical religion were often antagonistic factions in the identities of southern men in churches across the Deep South, the same was not true for southern women. Historians have often focused on the potential conflict between women’s religion and male honor. Scholars have described how the wave of evangelical fervor that worked its way downward from Virginia into the Deep South in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries created both a language of equality and a social space for expression that had not existed previously for southern women. The gaunt and harried prophets of the early evangelical South preached a spiritual equality that provoked deep misgivings among southern masters in relation to both their slaves and their womenfolk, misgivings that were stoked by evangelical practices that challenged the authority and honor of southern husbands and fathers. In the communities established by these restless religionists, southern men saw the daughters, sisters, and wives who lived under their

²⁵ Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers, *Honor and Grace in Anthropology*, 243.

roofs and submitted to their authority valued and empowered in unfamiliar ways, and taking part in new social spaces in which women were allowed and encouraged to speak publicly and granted a measure of spiritual authority that gave off a suspiciously seditious odor in the nostrils of many a southern patriarch.²⁶

Deeper and more primal was the understanding that an unwatched woman posed a threat to a man's honor by making him vulnerable to the age old image of the cuckold—the ignorant husband of an unfaithful wife, the unknowing father of another man's children. As one historian has pointed out, this was the image that most disturbed southern men when their wives went into the unmediated (by them) spaces of the church, the revival, and the prayer meeting. It was not, as some ministers charged, an animosity towards religion or an allegiance to Satan that fueled men's hostility towards the evangelical faith. Rather, it was the fact that these spaces represented areas of life where their wives, daughters, and sisters were out from under the protective umbra of paternalistic authority designed to protect their own honor and reputations by sealing off women from the possibility of dishonor. It was this fear, as one historian wrote, that lent the enduring rumors of sexual libertinism surrounding evangelical practices their weight in a southern context. Southern men “were preoccupied by the virtue of southern white women because it bore so directly on the honor of southern white men.”²⁷

But the honor culture so frequently arrayed against evangelical religion is without exception a masculine ideal. Aside from the work of Bertram Wyatt-Brown, who paid close attention to anthropological definitions of honor developed by other scholars and

²⁶ Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind*, 94-118; Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1997), 162-186.

²⁷ Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 180-186 (quote on 184).

thus to the importance of women within honor culture, historians of the South in general portray honor as exclusively the concern of white men. Historians focused on behavior and on the places where honor was displayed and maintained in southern life have naturally found that men were the ones dueling, fighting, drinking, and betting on horse races. In large part such accounts either ignore the place of women in the moral worldview of honor, or interpret women's role—like slaves'—as so subservient to male honor that it was non-existent. In this view, women entered the male world of honor only as objects to be fought over, and not as possessing honor themselves.²⁸

Yet southerners clearly believed that women possessed a kind of honor that was nearly synonymous with a reputation for sexual purity, sustained by restraint, prudence, and modesty in every area of life. While honor was undoubtedly a male-dominated ethical system, women were vital participants in their own as well as their male relatives' and family's honor. Anthropologists studying honor describe a gendered division of honor's labor, with men sustaining the public qualities of name and reputation and women sustaining the family's lineage and purity of blood. In the Mediterranean world where anthropologists first pioneered the study of honor, women's honor consisted of "having shame." The most honorable woman, so the old Spanish saying went, was one "locked in the house with a broken leg." It was in this vein that Cervantes' hero Don Quixote advised a young bachelor to look more to reputation than fortune in a wife, "for the good woman gets not good report solely by being good, but by appearing so; for

²⁸ On women and honor, see Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 50-55. Cynthia Lynn Lyerly asserts that women were denied any participation in honor, but found meaning in religion. See Cynthia Lynn Lyerly, "Passion, Desire, and Ecstasy: The Experiential Religion Southern Methodist Women, 1770-1810," in *The Devil's Lane: Sex and Race in the Early South*, Catherine Clinton and Michele Gillespie, eds., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 169.

looseness and public freedoms hurt the honor of women more than private misdeeds.”²⁹

Apart from simple piety, the virtues of character embraced by many evangelical women were nearly indistinguishable from those that were ensured to preserve their and their family’s honor in another context. In 1861, after the death of Julia Kemp, a member of the Brushy Creek Baptist congregation in upcountry South Carolina, her fellow members recorded her passing in the church record book, praising her as an exemplar of “those clustering virtues and graces which adorn the Christian character and make woman altogether lovely.” Chief among these virtues were those that supported the central pillar of a chaste reputation: modesty, restraint, a prudent silence, and an avoidance of the public eye. In 1848, at the funeral of Hannah Nott, member of the Baptist Church in Barnwell, South Carolina, the presiding minister made clear that Nott’s primary virtue had been the care she took to keep her other laudable traits from attracting attention:

Modest and retiring she avoided that open display of her virtues, which, though they may have excited more public attention, would lessen the power of her influence, and the sweetness of her own private enjoyment. The female character is never contemplated in a more favorable aspect, than when it conceals itself from the gaze of public attention.³⁰

A woman’s honor was thus more vulnerable and fragile than a man’s, depending on restraint rather than action, and a single deviancy from the narrow path could result in

²⁹ See Julian Pitt-Rivers, "Honour and Social Status," and J.K. Campbell, "Honour and the Devil," in Peristiany, *Honour and Shame*, 42-46 (quote on 45), 145-146. “Sexual purity is...often regarded as the essence of honor in women.” Pitt-Rivers, “Honour,” 505. Maria Pia Di Bella separates male and female attributes of honor into the categories of “name” for men and “blood” for women, see Maria Pia Di Bella, "Name, blood, and miracles: the claims to renown in traditional Sicily," in Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers, *Honor and Grace in Anthropology*, 151-166. Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, trans. Henry Edward Watts (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1899), 159.

³⁰ Brushy Creek Baptist Church Records (Greenville County, South Carolina), 1861, SCL; M. R. Soares, *A Sermon Preached on the Death of Mrs. Hannah Nott: In the Baptist Church of Barnwell, S.C. on the 3d of October, 1848* (Charleston: Walker & Burke, 1848), 25, SCL.

disaster that reverberated throughout a woman's lifetime, affecting not only herself but also those around her. This could be the case even when circumstances were beyond a woman's control. "Something of a tragedy has occurred in our neighborhood recently," wrote Georgian Gertrude Thomas, a Methodist, in 1852, describing the rape of a woman in the area. Despite her sympathy with the victim and outrage at the crime, Thomas nevertheless described the event in terms that evidenced her awareness of the rigid nature of sexual honor, writing that the rapist "entered [the victim's] room and effected her ruin." Indeed, throughout her journal Thomas acknowledged the cultural imperative of female sexual purity and proclaimed her adherence to it, even as she sharply decried the existence of a sexual double standard. "I am no 'Woman's Rights Woman,' in the northern sense of the term," wrote Thomas in 1858, "but so far as a woman's being forever 'Anathema Maranatha' in society for the same offense which in a man, very slightly lowers, and in the estimation of some of his *own sex* rather elevates him—In this, I say there appears to be a *very very* great injustice." Thomas's solution to the injustice of the sexual double standard, however, was not to relax its prescriptions for women, but rather to extend them to men, and she quickly affirmed herself "the greatest possible advocate for women's purity in word, thought, or deed..." Thus, even when lamenting the deficit of a male parallel, a woman's honor was its own category that southerners like Thomas were able to define in distinction from the male ideals that have preoccupied most historians.³¹ Certainly most southern women, evangelical or not, would have

³¹ On lineage, blood, and women's relationship to honor, see Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 50-55, 118-125, 226-253. Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, *The Secret Eye the Journal of Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, 1848-1889*, Virginia Ingraham Burr, ed., (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 111, 160-161. Throughout her journal, Thomas provides an example of how evangelicalism could provide a critique of male sexual license while at the same time reinforcing standards of female sexual purity.

understood the cautionary poem that Maria Baker, granddaughter of Baptist divine Richard Furman, recorded in her school notes in Charleston around 1830:

*A traveller, if he chance to stray,
May find again the once lost way,
Polluted streams again run pure,
And deepest wounds admit a cure,
But woman no redemption knows;
The wounds of honour never close.*³²

Such warnings abounded in the burgeoning evangelical middle and upper classes in the years after 1830. Indeed, strict definitions of female propriety emphasizing modesty, restraint, and chastity were cornerstones supporting the rising edifice of evangelical respectability during this period. In 1847, Elvira Estes wrote to her daughter Harriet, a student at a Baptist female academy, urging her to exercise the restraint and purity on which female reputation depended. Estes cautioned her daughter against taking liberties with her reputation while she was away from her family: “There has been many a poor innocent, headlong girl, who has ruined her respectability by imprudent behavior while at school.” Estes’ advice to her daughter also made clear where lay the greatest threat to a young girl’s reputation. “Receive no love confessions, either written or verbal,” wrote Estes, “[and] allow no one to joke you about beaux, tell them you are a school girl &

³² Quoted in Kathryn Carlisle Schwartz, *Baptist Faith in Action: The Private Writings of Maria Baker Taylor, 1813-1895* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 18. One of Maria Baker’s cousins, Alabama plantation mistress Sarah Gayle, further demonstrated the harmony between evangelical values and cultural expectations for women of her class. In her examination of Gayle, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese observed that Gayle experienced little dissonance between her identities as a woman, a plantation mistress, and an evangelical Christian. Gayle was able to find within evangelicalism a set of virtues that corresponded to the expectations placed on her gender and class by the South’s traditional culture. Prominent among these expectations were those associated with honor. In her diary, as Fox-Genovese observed, Gayle “explicitly links her standards of female honor to the acceptance of prescribed female roles.” As Nell Irvin Painter wrote of Gertrude Thomas, “[she] embedded her identity as a Christian within her identity as a woman.” See Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, “Family and Female Identity in the Antebellum South: Sarah Gayle and Her Family,” in *In Joy and in Sorrow: Women, Family, and Marriage in the Victorian South, 1830-1900*, Carol Bleser, ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 26. Thomas, *The Secret Eye the Journal of Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, 1848-1889*, 32.

cannot listen to such conversation.”³³

The late antebellum alliance between evangelical values, female honor, and class identity had an institutional representation, as well, in the female academies that sprang up across the South. In the decades before the Civil War, most young southern women who, like Harriet Estes, came to evangelical faith experienced conversion sometime in their teens, many of them in the revivals that periodically swept through the population of academies like the one led by Baptist Iveson Brookes at Penfield, Georgia, or the Wesleyan Female College in Macon. As Anya Jabour has described, by the late antebellum period many viewed evangelical conversion as a rite of passage, an expected part of a young woman’s maturation that signaled she had committed herself to a religious faith that would reinforce the qualities expected of her as a southern woman. At these schools, young southern women-to-be of a certain class experienced conversion, received an education, and prepared for their roles as wives and mothers who would exhibit the complimentary graces of education, adherence to the ideals of southern womanhood, solicitude for the reputations of their husbands and families, and religious faith.³⁴

But despite its prominence in formulations of evangelical respectability in the antebellum period, the harmony between evangelical values and female honor was not

³³ See E[lvira] A[nn] Estes (Bruton, SC) to Harriet Sarah Estes (Hamburgh, SC), May 30, 1847, Iveson L. Brookes Papers, SCL. To prove her point, Estes could easily have pointed to the four motherless, school age daughters of prominent South Carolinian Wade Hampton II, who retreated from public life and never married after rumors of a scandalous relationship with their uncle James Henry Hammond, then governor of South Carolina. Hammond eventually returned to politics. Drew Gilpin Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 241-245.

³⁴ Anya Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters: Young Women in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 39-43. Mary Montgomery, Nathan Bedford Forrest's wife, attended the Nashville Female Academy. See Hurst, *Nathan Bedford Forrest*, 16. Gertrude Thomas attended the Wesleyan Female College in Macon. See Thomas, *The Secret Eye the Journal of Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, 1848-1889*, 4.

constrained to a certain class. Nor was this aspect of the relationship between honor and evangelicalism the product of a late blooming strategic accommodation to southern culture on the part of evangelicals. Among the lower ranks of society where evangelicalism achieved early success many immediately saw evangelical values as nearly indistinguishable from cultural definitions of womanhood. Somewhere in South Carolina in 1799, in the early years of the Methodist incursion into the Deep South, an old woman approached the itinerant Jeremiah Norman to complain that a man had called her granddaughter “wicked.” The old woman, Norman recorded, was highly agitated over the “injury done her [granddaughter’s] character.” Norman, never overly attuned to social niceties or the concerns of this world, dismissed the woman’s complaint. “I answered that I supposed she would not say herself that the young woman was religious [*sic*],” wrote Norman, “& that was all I understood by his saying that she was Wicked, that it did not operate against her character as a woman only that she had no religion.” Norman’s careful definition likely did little to satisfy the old woman’s concern.³⁵

Scholars like Elliot Gorn have proved that for white men honor was a pervasive ethical system that extended well beyond the South’s upper classes, exhibiting itself in more unorganized form among the more common sort of southerners. This was no less the case for white women and sexual honor. Bertram Wyatt-Brown once noted that the rigid ideals of sexual honor that bound upper class southern women operated differently among those of lower social position. “By and large women of planter rank were too strictly supervised too have much experience with infidelity,” he wrote. “Therefore, most examples of feminine adultery—and of responses to it—involved the middle and lower

³⁵ Jeremiah Norman, *Diary*, vol. 15, 765, Southern Historical Collection (SHC).

orders of the white South.” Nevertheless, and as Wyatt-Brown was quick to point out, attitudes towards female adultery among the lower classes were “scarcely casual,” even though its occurrence might be relatively less rare.³⁶

Evangelical ideals, adamant in their insistence on sexual propriety from the earliest period, fit most easily into the cultural molds of middle and upper class womanhood and sexual honor adhered to by women like Gertrude Thomas. Thus, throughout the Deep South it was socially acceptable for upper class women to be Methodists or Baptists much earlier than it was for upper class men. For women of lower social position, many of whom joined and continued to join evangelical churches from the 1780s forward, evangelical ideals in this area, in addition to being in harmony with generally accepted definitions of womanhood, no doubt held the added significance of subtle class implications that separated the relatively looser application of sexual honor among the general populace from the more inflexible ideals that held sway near the top of the social order. In this, as in other areas, evangelical values proved a sturdy vehicle for the aspirations of many southerners who moved into the middling ranks of society in the first half of the nineteenth century. The fact that many of the women in evangelical churches both early and late in this period were from a different, and often lower social class than women whose identities can be discovered in diaries and letters in the late antebellum period represents an opportunity to extend, both chronologically and in terms of class, our understanding of the relationship between women, religion, and honor.

Despite remarkable growth and change in many areas, including increasing social status, the rise of an urban, professional clergy, and changing attitudes towards slavery,

³⁶ Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 298-299.

from the 1780s to 1860 the continuities of church disciplinary practices in regard to women are far more striking than the variations. Unsurprisingly, at least when considering the reach of the honor ethic and the commonalities of discipline among evangelical churches, this remains the case even when denominational differences, distinctions between rural and urban churches, and the geographical and demographic particulars of each congregation are taken into account.³⁷

Wide disagreement exists among scholars of evangelicalism as to whether a double standard existed when it came to church discipline and women. All members of evangelical churches were ostensibly held to the same standard and subject to the same discipline, but some scholars have found that evangelicals disciplined women disproportionately for crimes related to sex. Other scholars studying similar records have found no such evidence.³⁸ Numbers can only tell so much, but a close reading of the language and emphasis of the rich and detailed church records kept by many

³⁷ Despite significant differences of theology, location, and demography, the discipline exercised by these churches was consistently and remarkably similar in terms of its stated aims, application, and understood significance. In terms of chronology, the cases here are weighted towards the pre-1830 period during which the conflict between honor and evangelicalism was supposedly greatest. Several cases also come from the 1830s, when evangelical churches in South Carolina and Georgia experienced rapid growth. There are relatively fewer cases from the decades after 1840. This is due in part to the waning of evangelical discipline described by Gregory Wills and others, and to a greater extent to the fact that other sources illustrating the unity between evangelical values and female honor, such as the diaries cited above, are more readily available in the late antebellum period.

³⁸ Jean Friedman found that charges involving sexual offenses made up 44 percent of charges against women in selected North Carolina and Georgia churches from 1830-1889, while making up only 6 percent of charges against men. But in his study of evangelicalism in Mississippi during roughly the same time period, Randy Sparks found that sexual offenses made up only 8.7 percent of total charges against white women, compared to 4.7 percent for white men, hardly a large difference. Sparks notes the difference between Friedman and himself, but has no explanation. Meanwhile, Gregory Wills found an almost precise parity between genders charged with sexual offenses in his study of Georgia Baptists, and Randolph Scully found that sexual offenses made up 13.2 percent of charges against white women and 4.2 percent of charges against white men in his study of Virginia Baptists from 1772-1840. Jean E. Friedman, *The Enclosed Garden: Women and Community in the Evangelical South, 1830-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 131; Randy J. Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks: Evangelicalism in Mississippi, 1773-1876* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 161-162; Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 59; Randolph Ferguson Scully, *Religion and the Making of Nat Turner's Virginia: Baptist Community and Conflict, 1740-1840* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 159, table 10.

congregations reveals the complex ways in which the moral communities of honor and evangelicalism overlapped for women. What is clear from such a survey is that while evangelical churches had the same standards for both sexes, these standards were generally in harmony with the cultural roles associated with white female honor, making it easier for women to meld their church, family, and community lives together while at the same time making transgressions against the church more weighty since by transgressing the church's standards women also transgressed deeper cultural boundaries.³⁹

There is also the important question of what role women played in enforcing the cultural assumptions of honor within the disciplinary process. It is easy to make the argument that discipline represented merely the imposition of accepted female codes of conduct on women by men in the interests of male honor. In many, perhaps most, cases that was undoubtedly true. After all, as Randolph Scully wrote, even though women in the Baptist churches he studied could bring charges against men, such charges were “filtered” through the authority and representation of male deacons, who brought cases before the church, and the all-male committees who often investigated the cases. In other denominations, a minister or all-male session wielded the same power. But this conclusion does not do justice to the complexity of a situation in which women were involved either directly or indirectly in the disciplinary process and formed the majority of the congregation in most churches. Gregory Wills wrote that while southern Baptists believed in spiritual egalitarianism, they “resisted social egalitarianism,” and “honored

³⁹ This is reflected in the fact that all the major statistical studies of evangelical discipline confirm that women were charged significantly less than men, but when charged were much more likely than men to be excommunicated, and less likely to be restored. See Friedman, *The Enclosed Garden*, 132-133 (Tables 1.4, 1.5, 1.6); Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 55-56.

social hierarchy.” Yet many Baptist churches acknowledged women’s spiritual equality by officially and unofficially allowing women to vote on matters of discipline. “We suspect,” wrote Jesse Mercer, editor of the *Baptist Christian Index*, “it is the general practice of the churches of our order, to allow women this use.” Furthermore, even in denominations where a male minister or session wielded primary authority, their authority was largely “consensual,” depending on the approval and trust of a church membership in which women frequently formed the largest part. The fact that women were involved to varying degrees in the process of discipline is significant, indicating that at times women themselves took part in or sanctioned disciplining their sisters for departing from the ascriptive roles dictated by honor and the church. Whether they did so with hearty approval, grudging acknowledgment, or fearful acquiescence cannot be recovered from the myriad scribblings of harried church clerks, and a single decision may have elicited all these reactions and more among women in a congregation. The remainder of this chapter will examine how the disciplinary process in evangelical churches reflected the symbolic role and moral authority ascribed to women by an honor culture, while also reinforcing female restraint and buttressing male honor in the vital areas of speech and sex.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Scully, *Religion and the making of Nat Turner's Virginia*, 155. Gregory Wills argues that women's participation in Baptist churches was widespread, if not always officially acknowledged. See Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 51-52, 55. Charles Dutton Mallary, *Memoirs of Elder Jesse Mercer* (New York: Printed by J. Gray, 1844), 447-448. Beth Barton Schweiger, *The Gospel Working up: Progress and the Pulpit in Nineteenth Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 29. Frederick Bode relates an incident in which the pastor of the First Baptist Church in Savannah married a woman well above his own station, evidently irking some of his congregants, especially men, and sparking a schism in which a portion of the congregation asked for the minister’s removal. After being sustained in his office by the votes of many of the women in his congregation, the minister sought to bring one of his antagonists before the church on a charge of defamation. An all-male disciplinary committee decided to acquit, but a vote before the whole church resulted in a conviction, largely on the strength of the female vote. Frederick A. Bode, “A Common Sphere: White Evangelicals and Gender in Antebellum Georgia,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 79 (Winter 1995), 800.

Though evangelicals often praised a similar set of virtues in both men and women, an understanding of the differences between the sexes and their roles in life was inscribed into the structure and practice of the evangelical community. In 1785, the opening page of Turkey Creek Baptist Church's record book listed the names of eight male members on the left and nine female members on the right. A straight steady line divides the columns. The line separates husbands, wives, and families into the more basic categories of man and woman. For evangelicals this was one of the most fundamental divisions of society. Although both men and women were to adhere to the same gospel, their ways of living in the world were to be different.⁴¹

At the deepest level, evangelicalism shared with honor a common vision of women's symbolic role and moral authority. Women were seen as the natural curators of honor's sacred essence. Male bravery and honor, it was thought, depended on the moral probity of women, particularly of mothers. While fathers could direct and discipline, it was the mother in her role as the "moral arbiter of bravery" who inculcated an early and lasting sensitivity to honor's moral demands. The relationship between men and women was one of exchange, in which the purity, restraint, and reserve of women made a silent but powerful demand that men live up to their role as defenders of female virtue.

Women's role within honor exhibited what Bertram Wyatt-Brown called a

⁴¹ In his examination of obituaries, Frederick Bode argues that evangelical men and women to some extent occupied a "common sphere" of virtues. Nevertheless, Bode acknowledges that men and women were different when it came to their sins, and that it proved "impossible to introduce into southern, public discourse, whether secular or religious...an insistence on a common human nature to which gender...was thought to be irrelevant." See Bode, "A Common Sphere," 797-798, 808. Turkey Creek Baptist Church Records (Abbeville County, South Carolina), Baptist Historical Collection, Furman University (BHC). Note that while the term "district" is used in the text to refer to locations in South Carolina (Georgia already used "county" in this period), "county" is used in the footnotes since this is how the records are named and located in most archives.

“differentiation in moral duty” from men’s more active role. The different duties of men and women sprang from their different fields of activity. Men, wrote Wyatt-Brown, “lived in exterior circumstances,” while women lived “in the inner sanctuary that required vigilant safeguarding.”⁴²

Evangelicals had little trouble navigating a cultural landscape in which women sustained the moral core of society. Even in the movement’s early days in the South, evangelicals recognized women as having a different moral constitution than men, one more suited to the evangelical goal of “heart religion.” In 1833, in the midst of revivals that swept thousands in South Carolina and Georgia into the evangelical fold, Baptist Jesse Mercer wrote, “In the formation of the social frame, what constituent so important as the influence,—the mind of woman! She gives to the life of man its moral tone.” In 1848, a Baptist minister at the funeral of a female church member described the public honors paid to famous men, arguing that virtuous women were more deserving of such fetes. “If, however, public respect should be measured by the importance of the relation which we sustain to the moral world, the virtuous female is entitled to a larger share.” For many southern women, then, an evangelical faith served to reinforce and reinscribe their cultural role as caretakers of the moral core of life, giving form to the inchoate demands of female honor.⁴³

Their symbolic role gave women a limited amount of leeway within their

⁴² For the argument that evangelicalism imbued southern women with a special moral role and authority, especially within the family, see Scott Stephan, *Redeeming the Southern Family: Evangelical Women and Domestic Devotion in the Antebellum South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008). Also see Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 54-55.

⁴³ “Woman’s Influence,” *The Christian Index*, September 14, 1833; also quoted in Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 56. On women and the goal of “heart religion” among the Methodists, see Lyerly, “Passion, Desire, and Ecstasy”. See also Stephan, *Redeeming the Southern Family*; and Soares, *A Sermon Preached on the Death of Mrs. Hannah Nott*, 26.

constrained spheres of influence, but the limits of women's moral authority are clearly evident in congregational records, where churches consistently expressed the belief that a woman's moral ascendancy did not trump a man's control over his household. It mattered little, in this regard, whether or not the man in question attended church. In the years surrounding 1800, as the social radicalism of the evangelical movement still simmered in some quarters, Benjamin Northcut was something of a busybody in the Turkey Creek Baptist Church in Abbeville District, South Carolina. Twice during this period, Northcut sought to pursue charges against women whose daughters were attending what he termed "places of carnal rendezvous [*sic*]," and which the church somewhat less sensationally recorded as "frolics" or dances. The problem was that the girls in question evidently had the permission of their non-attending fathers, even while pious mothers disapproved. Twice, in 1801 and in 1806, Northcut asked the church to consider the question "how far does a married woman's authority extend in forbidding [*sic*] her daughter from frolics where her husband does not interfere[?]." In both cases, the church disappointed Northcut's intentions, denying the ability of wives to overrule their husbands even in such a serious matter as dancing. The power of mothers in such a situation, the church answered twice, extended only "to pointed forbidding [*sic*] them." The church recognized, in other words, that even unbelieving fathers' word was law when it came to their households and the women living in them. Bertram Wyatt-Brown has argued that in law as well as custom southern fathers had the last word when it came to naming, rearing, and disciplining children, even as women did most of the work of raising them. And while some evangelicals may have encouraged and even celebrated women who pursued their religion in the face of a husband's disapproval, it is clear this was not to be taken as a

general principle.⁴⁴

While women could and did accuse men before the church, some areas of life were clearly assumed outside the pale of female moral authority. Two cases from the Welsh Neck congregation in South Carolina illustrate this point. In the first case, in 1833 a woman named Wallace told the church through a deacon “her feelings were greatly wounded with Br. Sparks; for refusing to take Br. Wallace's word; and for having obtained a verdict in court against him, which was unjust.” In her complaint, Wallace accused Sparks of refusing to take her husband’s word and of appealing to the civil courts instead of bringing the matter before the church as Baptist doctrine instructed. She also implied an insult to her husband, since refusing to take a man’s word was tantamount to calling him a liar. But in making her complaint Wallace, the clerk noted disapprovingly, “manifested a hasty spirit & much feeling” in her accusation. The church declined to act on Wallace’s complaint, averring that Sparks had only acted as the executor of an estate, and that the matter was “entirely beyond the cognizance of the church. The civil tribunals of the country having settled it.” A matter involving honor and official business between two men, in other words, was not a woman’s business.⁴⁵

Two years later, a woman named Thomas complained to the church that a man named Turnage, had “engaged to do a certain piece of work for her husband by the job; & after it was finished, had made his charge by the day.” Thomas, in other words, accused Turnage of dishonesty in his business dealings with her husband, who may not have been a church member. After investigation, the church decided “there was a misapprehension

⁴⁴ Turkey Creek Baptist Church Records, June 13, 1801; April 11, 1806, BHC; Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 242-247.

⁴⁵ Welsh Neck Baptist Church Records (Darlington County, South Carolina), August 3, 1833, SCL.

of the contract on her [Thomas's] part," and that Turnage was not subject to discipline. Thus, while churches acknowledged the spiritual equality, and even expertise, of women, as well as their role as moral exemplars, the reach of female moral authority did not extend into the world of business, law, or commerce.⁴⁶

Women who overstepped the limits of their role completely, going so far as to rebel directly against male authority, were rare, and easily categorized as shameless by virtue of actions that seemed to defy nature no less than societal norms. In July of 1811, Nancy Robartson came before her church and acknowledged her sin, which was "speaking unadvisedly," and was reprovved and restored. But if she restrained herself before the church, Robartson soon took out her anger on her husband and his brother, who had perhaps been responsible for bringing her to the church's attention in the first place. The next month, the church excluded Robartson for the scene that evidently ensued upon the family's return from the church meeting. Robartson called her husband "a dam'd liar," and called his brother a "Son of a bitch" for good measure. She then commenced "threatening [*sic*] to strike her husband in the mouth," and finally did just that, somehow also breaking his gun in the process, though whether from spite or by using it on him is unclear. The church records show no discussion of Robartson's case before her prompt excommunication.⁴⁷

One of the most significant areas in which the ideals of female honor emphasized

⁴⁶ Welsh Neck Baptist Church Records (Darlington County, South Carolina), December 5, 1835, SCL.

⁴⁷ Turkey Creek Baptist Church Records, July 15, 1811, August 3, 1811, BHC.

restraint and served to safeguard male honor involved speech. One of the few real powers a woman possessed in the traditional culture of the South lay in her tongue, which could give the lie to men's claims about themselves. And while evangelicalism undoubtedly opened avenues for self-expression that had not previously existed for women, it also closed off, or attempted to close off, some older ones through its prohibition on spreading rumors, gossip, and slander. In the South words were powerful, part of a broader and deeper "language" of symbols and meaning that southerners used to order their world. Outside observers marveled, and some southerners lamented, that the wrong words could end friendships, provoke violence, and even lead to the loss of life in the South, evidence of the close relationship between speech, honor, and identity. "The cause of their falling out [was] a mere quibble," Presbyterian Samuel Wells Leland observed in 1853 of a duel between two friends in Charleston. Because it held the power to damage reputations, spark rumors, and call into question the most basic claims that southerners made about themselves, speech was a potentially dangerous form of expression. For those who did not understand the thick context that surrounded the act of speaking in the South, the reactions provoked by a veiled implication or a petty slight could seem disproportionate. But to southerners these were vital matters that threatened their control over their very identities.⁴⁸

Women held a special place in such a culture. While a woman's words could do as much damage as a man's, women were neither subject to direct reprisal nor permitted to

⁴⁸ Kenneth Greenberg has written the best discussion of the place of speech within the broader symbolic language of honor, although he does not always pursue the degree to which this aspect of honor applied to women. See Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Honor & Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, the Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), esp. xi-xiv, 3-23. Samuel Wells Leland, Journal, August 13, 1853, SCL.

engage in violent defense of their own reputations. This mix of power and powerlessness, as Bertram Wyatt-Brown observed, gave rise to an atmosphere in which women were both lauded and feared. It was also the case, because of their association with moral virtue, that women's words generally received acceptance and credence on certain matters of honor and reputation, making a woman with a loose tongue a particularly vexing problem from a male point of view.⁴⁹

The records of local churches reveal both the importance that attached to speech in the church and community as well as the way that the church provided an avenue for (mostly) men to address the problem of their female detractors. Every town had its gossip, and in early modern England, as in colonial New England and Virginia, such women had been subjected to communal punishments such as "ducking," reflecting both the social threats posed by female speech as well as the lack of other avenues of addressing them.⁵⁰

For a man, questioning a woman's character was a dangerous business, not to be done lightly. Thus, cases like that of James Ward, charged by Brushy Creek Baptist Church with "onbecoming [*sic*] talk" about Nancy Raines in 1841, were not common. There were other avenues to deal with such things. Far more characteristic in the records of local churches is the case of Rosey Oldridge, who Turkey Creek Baptist Church excommunicated in 1791 for "evil speaking." More colorful, but in the same vein, was the charge Liberty Baptist Church in Newton County, Georgia, brought against Harriet

⁴⁹ Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 50-55.

⁵⁰ Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 52. In early modern England, ecclesiastical courts regularly served as avenues to address issues of speech and honor concerning women, particularly sexual slander. See J. A. Sharpe, *Defamation and Sexual Slander in Early Modern England: The Church Courts at York* (York England: University of York, Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, 1980).

Belsher in 1833 “for telling [saying] Mr. King had wrote a scandalous letter and that she could get him to write again if she chose.” Like male violence, whispered words among women paradoxically contributed equally to order and instability, creating an atmosphere in which it was important to speak and act rightly since any misstep reverberated to the detriment of reputation.⁵¹

Sometimes the words in question were related directly to church matters, and efforts to silence this sort of speech involved a defense of individual and corporate reputations, as well as an attempt to maintain communal harmony. In one early case, the Cashaway Baptist Church of South Carolina excommunicated Hannah Murphy in the following manner:

Whereas Hannah Murphe a member of this church having villified [*sic*] several members of the church and after having made up of all the means we could to reclame her but in vain, the church concluded to excommunicate her and it is hereby done and to be publicly read tomorrow untill [*sic*] she returns to repentance.

By publicly excising Murphy from their midst, the church assured that her words would not have their full impact. In 1787, the Turkey Creek Baptist Church similarly excluded Nancy Hanks, “for speaking disrespectful of the brethren [and] also for disowning the truth.” Likewise, in 1806 Thomas McGregor reported to his fellow members at a congregation in Anderson, South Carolina, that Catherine Armstrong “had been talking very unbecomingly about members of the church,” and she was suspended from membership. In all such cases, churches used the means at their disposal to minimize the damage that could be done to the church and its members by such women

⁵¹ Brushy Creek Baptist Church Records (Greenville County, South Carolina), May 22, 1841, SCL; Turkey Creek Baptist Church Records (Abbeville County, South Carolina), August 11, 1791, BHC; Liberty (Carmel) Baptist Church Records (Newton County, GA), January 12, 1833, MU.

in the local community.⁵²

While regard for the unity and reputation of the church were the primary concerns in some cases, the majority of cases involving women and speech seem to have been brought by men who sought to silence a female detractor and address threats to their reputations. In 1814, Joshua Prichard went before the Mountain Creek congregation of Anderson, South Carolina, to complain that a woman named Mulkey had told “a very unfamous [*sic*] tale concerning him. And denies telling her author for which he cannot fellowship her.” Officially, Prichard accused Mulkey of disrupting the fellowship of the church by spreading rumors, but implicit in his complaint was frustration at the whole impersonal and indistinct social process in which rumor and gossip functioned to reinforce communal norms. Faced with a woman who would not divulge her source, there was little a man could do except perhaps to hope that by pursuing discipline against those who spread it the rumor itself might be dampened or discredited.⁵³

While the accusation of lying could be explosive when it passed between two men, there was little a man outside the church could do when accused by a woman. However, within the church the mechanism of church discipline provided an option. In the midst of a long running dispute between her husband and a man named Brown, Rebecca Tumblin in conversations accused her husband’s antagonist of lying. Brown immediately brought her before the church, “for saying he was a liar,” a charge he eventually established to the

⁵² Cashaway Baptist Church Records (Darlington County, South Carolina), September 16, 1769, SCL; Turkey Creek Baptist Church Records (Abbeville County, South Carolina), May 7, 1787, BHC; Mountain Creek Baptist Church Records (Anderson County, South Carolina), December 1806, 16, SCL.

⁵³ Mountain Creek Baptist Church Records (Anderson County, South Carolina), June 1814, 30, SCL.

church's satisfaction and Tumblin's misfortune.⁵⁴

But while church discipline clearly afforded men another avenue to address the amorphous force of rumor and women's secret speech, it was not always a satisfactory means of redress. In 1818, a physician named Hale, a member of the Welsh Neck congregation of South Carolina, attempted to prosecute a woman named Pledger who he claimed had told him of another woman who had "said things in her [Pledger's] presence that were calculated to injure his reputation as a physician." Pledger denied hearing any such thing to the church, however, and when no other witnesses came forward, the case faltered and Hale eventually left the church and became a Presbyterian (a denomination where his complaint might have been met with greater sympathy by an all-male session).⁵⁵

Less frequently, women themselves used the forum of discipline to address matters of speech and reputation among their sisters, with mixed success. In 1830, for instance, a woman named Fort alleged that "Sister Bowie had told her certain scandalous things of her (Sister Fort's) husband's relations, & which she heard from a third person, a member of the church." When Bowie denied saying anything of the sort, the church decided to place both parties under censure until things could be sorted out. Women's attempts to address the secret currents of speech running through evangelical congregations frequently took the form of attempts to defend their own and their family's reputations. Fort's concerns illustrate the extent to which women's identities, honor, and reputation, while distinct, were to a large degree intertwined with that of their families, and

⁵⁴ Williamson Creek Baptist Church Records (Walton County, GA, also called Appalachy Baptist), August 19, September 16, 1820, Mercer University Special Collections (MU).

⁵⁵ Welsh Neck Baptist Church Records (Darlington County, South Carolina), 70-75, SCL.

especially that of their husbands. This seems to have been the concern of Polly Leach, as well, when in 1813 she accused Betsy Spruill before the Turkey Creek Baptist Church of saying to Leach's husband "that there was a lewd young woman in the settlement; and if she was a man as he was she would try her." Spruill denied her words and in the absence of other witnesses, the church dismissed the case.⁵⁶

Beyond words spoken in secret, the problem of the free speaking woman was an old one to which church discipline offered new solutions. In an important subset of cases multiple charges, often four, five, or even more, were brought against a single woman at once. While for men such cases were typically single episodes involving multiple offenses such as drinking and fighting, for women the majority of charges in such cases frequently related to separate incidents of unguarded or actively hostile speech that eventually became impossible to ignore. The effect of bringing several charges at once was to draw attention away from specific lapses and instead to give the impression of an undisciplined threat to the church and community. Two cases will serve as examples.

In one such case, J. Johnson charged Jane Pinson with four separate offenses arising from his pursuit of debts owed him by her husband at his death. Pinson had publicly accused Johnson of "defrauding her" and had sought council at the Abbeville, South Carolina, courthouse to sue him for six hundred dollars. In addition, Johnson charged Pinson with "Abusive Language and unchristian like conduct towards me at her Mothers...by calling me a hypocrite liar & cC." Johnson informed the church that he had attempted to resolve the matter privately, following the instructions found in the book of Matthew, but that Pinson refused to withdraw her accusations. The church sided with

⁵⁶ Welsh Neck Baptist Church Records (Darlington County, South Carolina), September 3, 1830, SCL; Turkey Creek Baptist Church Records, July 24, 1813, BHC.

Johnson and declared a non-fellowship with Pinson, giving Johnson the vindication he sought.⁵⁷

In 1844, a church in South Carolina charged a woman named Armstrong with seven different charges, four of them explicitly concerning speech. It appears Armstrong was upset with the church's pastor William Hitt for secretly (as she claimed) performing a marriage ceremony between her daughter and a physician named James Austin. Among the charges against her were "Leaving her seat and going To Sister Margaret Hill and requesting her to move that she might Spit on Doc. Austin," as well as "saying in Conference day In the Church all that she was sorry [*sic*] for That Brother Armstrong did not split Austins Brains out with a Singletree," and "Charging the Church that they wanted to turnd [*sic*] her out because she would not tell a lie." The church admonished Armstrong, and her husband later submitted a letter from his wife promising reform.⁵⁸

For the most part the evangelical prohibition on gossip, slander, and other forms of speech seems to have operated in the interests of male honor to restrict one of women's customary avenues of influence. But before we conclude that evangelical discipline was simply another and more systematic form of repression aimed at women, we should note that in order to fully take advantage of this avenue of addressing female speech southern men had to submit themselves to the same discipline (no small consideration). We should also note again the evidently common involvement of female members in the discipline process in Baptist congregations. Taken together, these considerations suggest that while

⁵⁷ Bethabara Baptist Church Records (Laurens County, South Carolina), June 25, 1842, SCL.

⁵⁸ Bethabara Baptist Church Records (Laurens County, South Carolina), November 9, 1844, SCL. For another example, see Liberty (Carmel) Baptist Church Records (Newton County, GA), January 12, 1833, MU.

church discipline represented a real option for men trying to protect themselves from the currents of gossip and from the words of free speaking women, its benefits were not without cost or uncertainty.

If women's speech was important, their behavior in other areas of life, especially in regard to sex, was of even greater consequence to themselves and those around them. By the same standard that evangelical morality opposed the sexual license permitted to men in southern culture, it was in fundamental harmony with honor's emphasis on female sexual purity. It is also clear that for most of the period from the Revolution to the Civil War, evangelicals shared with the rest of southerners the common assumption that there was little distinction between private and public spheres. Indeed, the willingness of churches to investigate the most intimate details of members' lives was of a piece with the lack of a truly private sphere in the South's traditional culture. In 1786, for instance, Thomas Foster accused Sarah Smith, the wife of one of Turkey Creek Baptist's Deacons, with the scandalous sin of "suffering a young man to bed with her daughter in her own house and also for bedding [*sic*] with a man herself in his [the man's] own house."⁵⁹ In this area, as in so many others, evangelicalism exhibited a deep harmony with the cultural assumptions of honor, in which every private act had the potential for public consequences. While in the North after 1830 churches became noticeably reticent to assert their authority in the area of private sexual practices, no such trend can be discerned in the South until at least two decades later. The result of these factors was that the church sometimes seems to have functioned almost as an institutionalized expression

⁵⁹ Turkey Creek Baptist Church Records, February 11, 1786, BHC.

of honor's assumptions in the local community.⁶⁰

It is important to note that evangelical standards in regard to sex theoretically applied equally to men and women. Nevertheless, a close reading of disciplinary records from a variety of evangelical churches suggests that while evangelicals strove to apply standards for sexual behavior to both men and women, a cultural predisposition to see female deviancy as more dangerous to the community resulted in a view of sexual misconduct as especially malignant when committed by a woman. Most importantly, from a broader cultural perspective the predominance of women as members of evangelical churches functioned practically to reinforce the standards of female purity and restraint that honor had always demanded, while the lower membership ratios and rates of excommunication for men functioned to minimize the conflict that occurred when evangelicals attempted to apply their standards equally to Adam as to Eve.⁶¹

It is likewise important to remember that most white women had very little chance of being charged with a sexual offense. While not unknown in most churches, charges for sexual offenses were not weekly or even monthly occurrences. In 1806, for example, when Big Creek Baptist excluded Ann Nickelson for "whoredom," it was the only such

⁶⁰ On the lack of a private sphere in the South, see Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 33-34. Susan Juster noted the lack of a public/private distinction among New England Separate Baptists in the eighteenth century. See Juster, *Disorderly Women*, 81-82. Mary Ryan observed that by 1830 Northern churches were no longer asserting communal authority over the private sphere. See Mary P. Ryan, "The Power of Women's Networks: A Case Study of Female Moral Reform in Antebellum America," *Feminist Studies*, 5 (Spring 1979), 71-72. Meanwhile, in the South, Gregory Wills discerns little abatement of discipline or weakening of assumptions about communal authority among Georgia Baptists until at least the 1850s. See Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 117-118, 139.

⁶¹ In possibly the most sophisticated statistical analysis of church disciplinary records, Gregory Wills found that among Georgia Baptists sexual misconduct was the only area in which women were charged equally with men according to the ratio of their membership. Men were charged forty-five times as often as women for drunkenness, for instance, but both men and women were charged with sexual offenses at about the same rate: 21 charges per 10,000 members for white males, and 22 charges per 10,000 members for white females. However, women were more frequently excommunicated. Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 55-56, 59, fn32.

case the church dealt with that year. Given the number and majorities of women in many congregations, what is truly significant is the degree to which women steered clear of activities that would have brought down the discipline of the church, showing again the unity of evangelical ethics with the cultural expectations placed on women outside the church.⁶²

Reading cases closely frequently reveals different attitudes toward women and men charged in cases of sexual misconduct. In 1825, the congregation of Liberty Baptist Church in Georgia took up an accusation against Patsy Phillips for fornication. After “finding the accusation true,” the church excluded Phillips, and proceeded to excommunicate Patsy’s mother, Polly Phillips, “with respect to her consealing [*sic*] the conduct of her daughter Patsey.” Finally, the church examined the involvement of a male member, Jesse Parnell, and excommunicated him after investigation “as being in the transgression with sister Patsey.” It seems that the fornication of Patsy Phillips was the primary and actionable offense, with her mother’s and Parnell’s involvement being secondary concerns flowing out of the first.⁶³

It also seems that certain sins were forgiven but not forgotten when it came to women and sexual misconduct. Reputations mattered, and some were deserved, attaching to women who refused to conform to cultural or ecclesial standards and who resurface in church records over a span of years. In December of 1820, the Williamson Creek Baptist Church in Georgia addressed “evil reports” circulating about Elizabeth Maynard, wife of William Maynard, and a man named Amos Spillers. Spillers subsequently appeared

⁶² Big Creek Baptist Church Records (Anderson County, South Carolina), April 5, 1806, SCL.

⁶³ Liberty (Carmel) Baptist Church Records, June 25, 1825, MU.

before the church and denied any wrongdoing, but not before William Maynard pronounced some “hard sayings about Mr. Spillers” that the church decided to overlook in light of the situation. A month later, the church excommunicated Spillers not for fornication or adultery, but for wishing to withdraw his membership. Meanwhile, Elizabeth Maynard’s fate lingered on over the summer of 1821 until in September the church finally excommunicated her for “disorderly conduct in leaving her husband cohabiting too much with Amos Spillers.”⁶⁴

That was not the end of Elizabeth Maynard. Seven years later, in August of 1828, the Williamson Creek Baptist church clerk recorded, “Elizabeth Maynard came forward & made her acknowledgments to the satisfaction of the Church & was restored to fellowship.” Whatever had transpired in the intervening years between Maynard, her husband, and Amos Spillers, the church accepted Maynard back into its fellowship. But the reunion did not last. A year later the church again met to address “certain reports in curkelation” about Maynard, appointing two men to summon her to the next church meeting to address the charges. But at the next meeting, one of those appointed reported, “he had discharged his duty in seeing sister Maynard & conversing with hir [*sic*] on the subject & informed her that the church required hir [*sic*] to attend October Conference in corse but she did not talk like coming.” After discussion, and taking into account “a general & civil report against hir [*sic*],” the church excommunicated Maynard a second and evidently final time.⁶⁵

In Elizabeth Maynard’s case, her refusal to stand trial led her church to fall back on

⁶⁴ Williamson Creek Baptist Church Records, December [n.d.], 1820, February 17, 1821, March 17, 1821, September 15, 1821, MU.

⁶⁵ Williamson Creek Baptist Church Records, September 19, 1829, October [n.d.], 1829, MU.

the consensus of community opinion to exclude her. In other cases, churches relied on rumors circulating in the community to initiate or even to decide cases. In 1833, Brushy Creek Baptist Church took up the case of Mary Mahany, and quickly decided upon exclusion without an investigation. “Her case being notorious she was excommunicated without further ceremony,” the clerk noted. The next year, the church excluded a woman named Floyd on the same logic. “Bro. Howel reported that he had not cited Sister Floyd as was ordered by the church [but] that her acts was so notorious that he did not think it necessary to see her, as she could not make satisfaction.” In 1838, the session of the First Presbyterian Church of Columbia, South Carolina, put a more learned gloss on the same logic, noting that Mary Quigley, a “highly esteemed member of the church,” was “‘fama clamosa’ charged with the sin of antenuptial fornication.” (The Latin translates roughly as “by current scandal.”) In each of these cases, the church’s judgments were more a seal on the verdict of communal opinion rather than a disciplinary action reinforcing the division between the church and the world.⁶⁶

Certainly men were disciplined for sexual offenses as well as women, though rarely for “antenuptial fornication.” Furthermore, those responsible for discipline seem to have viewed sexual offenses as less shocking, though still serious, in a man. In contrast to the tide of wagging tongues that carried female deviance to the notice of the church, cases involving men were rarely labeled “notorious.” And in contrast to the lengthy report that First Presbyterian compiled concerning Mary Quigley and the rumors swirling around her in the community, entries concerning men are for the most part brief and factual. At their

⁶⁶ Brushy Creek Baptist Church Records (Greenville County, South Carolina), September 14, 1833, November 15, 1834, SCL; First Presbyterian Church (Columbia, SC) Session Minutes, November 1838, SCL. For another “common fame” case, see First Presbyterian (Columbia, SC) Session Minutes, Feb. 4, 1825, SCL.

November meeting in 1816, the session of Second Presbyterian Church in Charleston noted among other matters that Isaac Parsons was accused “guilty of fornication.” At the next meeting, an Elder reported that Parsons had confessed, and the session matter-of-factly excommunicated him.⁶⁷

Furthermore, men’s indiscretions were frequently couched amidst other charges. In 1815, for instance, Mechanicsville Baptist Church in South Carolina, excluded a man named Swinny after an investigation “for Drunkenness frequently repeated which he acknowledged[,] for fornication given in testimony and believed[,] and for swearing profanity without suitable evidences of repentance.” For men, sexual offenses, while punished, were one among many, and evoked little of the palpable indignation that often surrounded women charged with similar offenses.⁶⁸

Discipline for women accused of sexual offenses in the small number of Scots-Irish populated A.R.P (Associate Reformed Presbyterian) Presbyterian churches found throughout the South Carolina and Georgia backcountry could be especially harsh, but was also more closely and frequently followed by restoration. In 1839, the Hopewell Presbyterian Church in Chester District, South Carolina, examined nine people “for a seat at the Lord’s table.” The church admitted all but one, a Mrs. McCormick, whom they judged “guilty of an agravated [*sic*] offence of fornication.” The all-male session informed McCormick that if she wanted to partake of membership and communion, she would have to repent and submit to a public rebuke before the congregation. The next Sunday, McCormick informed the session of her willingness to undergo the ritual

⁶⁷ Second Presbyterian Church (Charleston, SC) Records, Session Minutes, November 5, 1816, December 3, 1816, South Carolina Historical Society (SCHS).

⁶⁸ Mechanicsville Baptist Church Records (Darlington County, South Carolina), February 18, 1815, SCL.

punishment, and consequently she was “publicly rebuked before the congregation & received into the communion of the church.”⁶⁹

McCormick’s willingness to undergo a severe and public humiliation seems extraordinary, as does the rapidity with which the church accepted her into membership afterwards. Nevertheless, the case was not unique. Across nearly two decades, from 1842 to 1859, Hopewell Presbyterian tried Betsy McClerkin for fornication on three separate occasions. On the first two occasions, in 1842 and 1855, McClerkin appeared before the session, acknowledged her sin, and submitted to the verdict of a public rebuke before the congregation, after which she was promptly restored. But on the third occasion, McClerkin was not restored, perhaps either because she refused to repent or because the session finally refused to accept her repentance.⁷⁰

Cases in which a reputation for deviance adhered to women across years and even decades illustrate the complex interrelationship of the moral communities of honor and evangelicalism for women. While evangelicals disciplined both men and women for sexual offenses, the cultural grid of honor seems to have predisposed those dispensing discipline to see female sexual misconduct as an especially pernicious form of sin. However, because evangelicals really did run their communities according to a different standard, one in which the acknowledgment of sin and genuine repentance could in most circumstances win reentry into the family of God, women almost certainly found a more accessible avenue to official restoration in the church than they did in the broader community.

⁶⁹ Hopewell A.R.P. Church Session Records (Chester County, South Carolina), September 24, 1839, SCL.

⁷⁰ Hopewell A.R.P. Church Session Records (Chester, County, South Carolina), May 4, 1842, October 17, 1855, July 23, 1859, SCL.

Ironically, the very process of that resulted in women being accepted back into the church could seal their social exclusion outside of it. The unofficial consequences of a public trial would have resonated far beyond their function in maintaining the boundaries and order of the sacred community, doing permanent damage to a woman's standing in the community no matter what the verdict. In his study of church formation in Twiggs County, Georgia, Frederick Bode found that church membership rolls understated the influence of churches in a community where the majority of households contained at least one church member. In communities with few institutional structures the decisions of the church would have carried more weight, even with those who were not members. In the Chester district of South Carolina in the first decade of the nineteenth century, Methodist William Capers oversaw the church trial of a woman accused of adultery. A large congregation gathered to hear the verdict at a place called Carter's meetinghouse. "All the society [members] and most of the people of the neighborhood were intensely enlisted for or against the accused," Capers recalled of the crowd. Capers conducted the trial according the Methodist Discipline, forming a small committee of jurors to try the case and decide it. When the guilty verdict was announced and Capers pronounced the woman's expulsion, "a riot ensued and considerable violence," with church members on both sides of the fray.⁷¹

Since female honor was inextricably linked to male honor, the publicity of a church trial could accentuate the shame inherent in such situations for men, as well. As Capers

⁷¹ Frederick A. Bode, "The Formation of Evangelical Communities in Middle Georgia: Twiggs County, 1820-1861," *The Journal of Southern History*, 60 (November 1994): 716-721; William M. Wightman, *Life of William Capers, D. D., One of the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Including an Autobiography* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1902), 103-104; "Consensus is not easily established in a complex society," wrote Julian Pitt-Rivers of the importance in honor cultures of institutional representations of communal opinion. See Pitt-Rivers, "Honour," 504.

remembered, “[the woman’s] father-in-law, and the connections on that side generally believed her guilty,” while the woman’s husband loudly and pitifully proclaimed her innocence, being, as Capers thought, “partially deranged” by the situation. In the midst of the fighting at Carter’s meetinghouse, Capers saw the “poor crazy husband fighting his father.” Violence, after all, was the final, desperate resort of men attempting to refuse the kind of shame that accompanied a wife’s unfaithfulness.⁷²

Nevertheless, the effects of such a case could be more permanent and more serious for women. Unlike official standing in the church, which could be restored, the stain left by such an episode could endure as an unforgivable sin, relegating women to the state of an outcast within the community. Perhaps it was just such a situation that drove a woman in one of the communities visited by Jeremiah Norman in the 1790s to a desperate and destructive end. “Wickedness hath surely got great advantage here,” Norman recorded in his journal, “not far off lies one who has committed whoredom and [then] cut her child’s throat & made attempt to cut her own. She is yet alive but not expected to recover. Oh what will become of such wickedness?” Under the circumstances, wickedness likely had less to do with the matter than despair.⁷³

Within the evangelical community, then, a woman could acknowledge and repent of misconduct and be received back into the church. But the very process and publicity of discipline likely cemented her shame in the wider community. Yet many women chose to repent and be publicly humiliated for their sin, and there is a certain logic discernable in their decisions. To the extent the church’s verdict was taken to represent a community

⁷² Wightman, *Life of Capers*, 103-104.

⁷³ Jeremiah Norman, *Diary*, vol. 5, 16-17, SHC.

consensus that extended beyond immediate membership, women likely saw no real alternatives to submission. And since the prospect of being excluded from the church as well as reviled in the community was likely an even worse fate to contemplate, it is unsurprising that many women chose the lesser of two evils. That many women chose to confess and repent, winning the official acceptance of the religious community at the cost of solidifying their shame, illustrates the potential of church discipline to sway the balance of honor and shame in the local community, as well as the complex way in which the moral communities of religion and honor overlapped for women.

For a very few women whose extreme sins seemed to indicate the moral depravity an unregenerate heart, even the mitigating effects of restoration to official church membership were unavailable. In 1813, the session of Second Presbyterian Church in Charleston conducted an investigation of the “suspicious” death of member John Smyth. The session discovered that Smyth had most likely not died of natural causes, “[his death] having been attended with circumstances leading to strong suspicion that poison had been administered to him, in order to effect his destruction [*sic*].” Worse still, blame for Smyth’s death immediately attached to his wife Helen, who, “in conjunction with a certain person, professing himself to be a physician and who had lived on terms of intimacy with the deceased,” had conspired to bring about her husband’s death. Wracked by guilt, Helen partially confessed her crime to the church’s pastor, Dr. Andrew Flinn, also confessing that she and the fake physician were not only conspirators, but lovers.

“What was to be done with such a wretched creature as this[?]” wrote the church’s clerk of the session’s deliberations. In addition to hinting at murder and confessing to adultery, Helen had also confessed her “habitual intoxication” to Flinn. “She need not,”

wrote the clerk acidly, “proof enough can be had in the neighborhood where she lives.” Despite Helen’s confession and evident remorse, which the church would usually have accepted as evidence of repentance in any normal case, the session excommunicated her, taking the extreme measure of having her name erased from the list of members rather than simply crossed out.⁷⁴

Helen Smyth’s case represented one of the deepest fears that the moral worldview of honor and the traditional society of the South could contemplate. Helen was not only unfaithful to her husband in life, but also actively conspired in his death. The moral core of life had proved rotten. A reputation for drunkenness only further confirmed in the session’s eyes that Helen was indeed completely shameless. The revulsion of Second Presbyterian’s session at Helen Smyth’s crime represented not only an aversion to her titanic load of sin, though it was that, but also horror at her shamelessness and her violation of the twice sacred circle that surrounded southern women in the church.

The presence of slaves in evangelical congregations not only influenced the application of discipline when it came to white women, honor, and sex, but also actively shaped definitions of white female honor.⁷⁵ The sincere attempt by evangelicals to apply discipline even to those church members whose relationships were subject to the economic undertow of slavery is evident in the number of black church members excluded for adultery or fornication throughout the period before 1860. Black church members were disciplined for sexual offenses at rates far exceeding white members, and

⁷⁴ Second Presbyterian Church (Charleston, SC) Records, Session Minutes, August 1813, 17, SCHS.

⁷⁵ Church discipline undoubtedly had its own meanings for black women, which I deal with more fully in the following chapter. The focus here, however, is the significance of their presence before the church, frequently for sexual transgressions, to the correlation between evangelical values and white female honor.

in his study of Baptists in Virginia Randolph Scully found that “black women faced sexual discipline more often than any other group” from 1772 to 1840. Select church records in South Carolina and Georgia follow this pattern, as well. For instance, Mechanicsville Baptist Church in Darlington District, South Carolina, excluded 62 of its black members from 1815 to 1860. Of these, 29 were women and 14 were excluded for either “adultery” or “bastardy.” In most of the remaining cases the reasons for exclusion are not given, but likely some were sexual in nature. This means that roughly half, and perhaps more, of the black women excluded from Mechanicsville across a forty-five year period were expelled for sexual transgressions.⁷⁶

Just as white honor in general was defined in opposition to and bolstered by black dishonor, the defining characteristic of white female honor, sexual continence, was sharpened and given heightened importance in an environment where the preponderance of cases involving sexual offenses were brought against black women. Among its many significances, the practice of discipline in evangelical congregations thus appears as one of the most significant spaces in southern life in which white female sexual honor was contrasted with apparent black shamelessness. This would have been the case even for white women from non-slaveholding households whose identity and honor were nevertheless shaped by the encounter with their black counterparts within the framework of the church. For white women, this intersection of race, sex, and honor in matters of

⁷⁶ Scully, *Religion and the making of Nat Turner's Virginia*, 159, see table 9. Randy Sparks found that adultery was the most common charge against black women in evangelical congregations in Mississippi between 1806 and 1870. Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks*, 168. In a forthcoming article based on records from twenty-three Middle Georgia Baptist congregations, Jeff Forret found that black church members were five times more likely than whites to be charged with adultery, but found that black men and women were charged with adultery at roughly equal rates. Jeff Forret, “Slaves, Sex, and Sin: Adultery, Forced Separation, and Baptist Church Discipline in Middle Georgia,” unpublished article, obtained from author, n.d. Mechanicsville Baptist Church Records (Darlington County, South Carolina, South Carolina), SCL.

church discipline undoubtedly added unseen and unrecorded meanings to the ordeal of being charged with a sexual offense.⁷⁷

In many churches with significant black congregations, white women were excluded much less frequently than black women for sexual offenses. This is not surprising considering what we know about the challenges facing slave marriages, and the high proportion of black women charged with sexual offenses probably represented a reality in which blacks engaged more often in behavior that whites saw as adultery. But, on the opposite side of the equation, the implications of charging a white woman with a crime more often associated with the black members of the congregation could not have been absent from the minds of those dispensing discipline. The ideal of white female honor would only have been strengthened by the occasional lapse that contrasted the consistency of white honor with black shamelessness in the minds of whites. Nevertheless, too many such examples would undoubtedly have had the opposite effect, exposing fissures in the cultural edifice of honor and casting doubt on the racial associations that accompanied ideas of honor and dishonor in southern society. Baptists in particular, with their tenacious devotion to discipline, had to balance this threat against their belief in the spiritual benefits of rigorous discipline in their congregations.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ On the way black dishonor and white honor were related, see Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), see esp. 5, 74, 79. Of course black men and women interpreted these patterns differently, and even used the evangelical acknowledgment of their marital and sexual lives to their own advantage. See Janet Cornelius, "Slave Marriages in a Georgia Congregation," in Orville Vernon Burton and Robert C. McMath, eds., *Class, Conflict, and Consensus: Antebellum Southern Community Studies* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1982), 131.

⁷⁸ In Mississippi, Randy Sparks found that charges of adultery alone made up 17.8 percent of charges against black women in his study, while making up only 1.3 percent of charges against white women. In Virginia, Randolph Scully found that from 1772 to 1840 adultery made up roughly 1 percent of charges against white women in the three Virginia counties in his study, while making up 10 percent of charges against black women. Randy Sparks found that sexual offenses in general made up more than a quarter of

Some churches where black congregants significantly outnumbered white, and which charged significant numbers of their black members with sexual offenses, seem to have charged white women with sexual offenses only rarely, or not at all. In the same time period that fourteen black women were excluded from Mechanicsville Baptist for sexual offenses, the records reveal only two white women, their cases separated by more than twenty years, excluded for similar offenses. The Mechanicsville congregation was predominantly black and situated in Darlington, in one of the state's heavily black districts. At one point, for instance, the church was composed of 109 white members and 187 black, and women constituted between sixty and seventy percent of both groups. Other churches similarly constituted showed a similar disparity. Midway Congregational in Liberty County, Georgia, was located in the part of the state where the Rev. Charles Colcock Jones centered his efforts to convert the South's slaves. In her study of Midway, Janet Cornelius noted that cases involving marriage, adultery, and fornication dominated the business of disciplinary committees charged with hearing slave members' cases as slaves took full advantage of the church's official acknowledgment of their unions in an attempt to gain stability and legitimacy for their relationships. In contrast, Midway's records do not record a single instance of a white woman being disciplined for a sexual offense (or any other offense) during the entire period of Cornelius' study. However varied were the individual meanings and experiences that made up these patterns for both white and black women, the overall effect of these disciplinary trends was to sharpen the

charges against black women, while making up 8.7 percent of charges against white women. Randolph Scully found essentially the same in Virginia, with sexual offenses making up 27.5 percent of charges against black women and 13.2 against white women. Gregory Wills found that Georgia Baptists excluded whites and blacks at roughly equal rates for sexual offenses, but does not divide his findings by gender. Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks*, 161, 168-169; Scully, *Religion and the making of Nat Turner's Virginia*, 158-159, tables 9 and 10; Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 66 fn55.

contrast between white female sexual honor and black dishonor, making the disciplinary process a central part of the manufacture and maintenance of white female honor.⁷⁹

The interconnectedness of honor and evangelical morality for women goes a long way toward explaining the high rates of conformity exhibited by women in comparison to men in churches throughout the South. In Georgia, Gregory Wills found that women were disciplined at a far lower rate than men among Baptists. Randy Sparks noted in his study of Mississippi evangelicals, “white church women were more successful in shouldering the burdens of evangelicalism than white men.” Christine Heyrman, observing that white women were disciplined at far lower rate than men, surmised that converted white women, more than men, “took to heart the commitment to reform their lives.” Cynthia Lynn Lyerly wrote simply, “women were better at being Methodists.”⁸⁰

Attempts to explain the pattern of women’s behavior by pointing to a greater religious seriousness on their part seem incomplete at best. There is little doubt that many women found solace in the religious promises of evangelicalism from the uncertainties

⁷⁹ Mechanicsville Baptist Church Records (Darlington County, South Carolina), “Sister Hill” in 1834, and “Miss Mary Cook” in 1858, SCL. In 1840, the Methodist church in the city of Darlington was 78.3 percent black. See Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 164, table 4.2. On Midway, see Janet Cornelius in Burton and McMath, *Class, Conflict, and Consensus*, 135-136. Midway was Presbyterian in all but name. See Erskine Clarke, *Dwelling Place: A Plantation Epic* (New Haven Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005), 6. Many of the churches in Jeff Forret's forthcoming article on slave adultery follow the same pattern. Fishing Creek Baptist Church in Wilkes County, Georgia, for instance, charged twenty-three black women with adultery from 1821 until the end of the Civil War. During the same period no white women were charged with adultery. Fishing Creek's congregation was 60% black during this period. Forret, “Slaves, Sex, and Sin: Adultery, Forced Separation, and Baptist Church Discipline in Middle Georgia,” Table 1, Table 2.

⁸⁰ Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 54-56; Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks*, 163; Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 172. Although Methodists left fewer records at the local level, Cynthia Lynn Lyerly also sees low rates of prosecution for women, along with a clear gender divide in terms of types of offenses, in the Methodist records she examined. Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind*, 98-100.

and dangers of marriage and childbearing in a pre-industrial and patriarchal society. Nevertheless, the existence of honor as an alternative and reinforcing moral structure paralleling the tenets of the evangelical community helps to explain both why women encountered fewer barriers to their entry into the church than did men, leading to higher rates of female membership throughout the period before 1860, as well as why they were more scrupulous in conforming to its expectations. For women, there were fewer contradictions involved in the decision to join the evangelical community and more at stake once they did.

From a broader cultural perspective it also appears possible to take a more complex view of the relationship between honor and the evangelical movement in the South. Most historians have seen only opposition or accommodation in the interplay between a narrowly masculine honor ethic and a largely feminized evangelical community. Yet honor had its own distinct set of ideals for women, ideals that men and women carried with them into the church. High rates of membership for women and lower rates for men had the practical effect of minimizing the undeniable conflicts between evangelical values and the behaviors associated with male honor while maximizing the reinforcing effect that evangelicalism had on female versions of honor. In other words, while the evangelical movement may have challenged the deep cultural roots of honor in some areas of southern life, it may have served to reinforce and nourish them in others, especially in relation to women. A man who joined an evangelical church ran the risk of eventually being caught in one of the contradictions between his honor and his religion, but women—no less a part of honor's sphere than men—found instead an atmosphere that solidified, reinforced, and even institutionalized preexisting cultural mores.

All of this may throw some light on one of the more familiar tropes in evangelical history—the husband who permitted religion for his wife but shunned it for himself. Certainly historians have given us enough images of husbands and fathers who opposed, sometimes violently, the participation of their wives and daughters in the evangelical community. Methodist James Jenkins remembered a woman at one of his meetings in the early nineteenth century who had resisted the opposition of her husband, “even to stripes.” Such examples abound, and yet, as Christine Heyrman acknowledges after cataloguing several cases of “furious opposers,” such men were rare, occupying an outsized place in the evangelical imagination as well as in the historiography of evangelicalism. “Far more common,” as Heyrman allows, were men who offered no opposition to their wives’ entry into the evangelical community. Jenkins also remembered a head of household who permitted the Methodist to stay and preach but when queried if he wished to serve God replied, “He did not wish to be questioned on that subject.” After all, behind every “Mother in Israel” who sheltered an itinerant minister or held a religious meeting in her home, there likely stood a permitting husband or father. In a society where male authority was so thoroughly entrenched in law and custom, and in which women were not given free rein even in the domestic sphere, it could hardly have been otherwise.⁸¹

Indeed, aside from the vast majority of men who did not actively resist were another, smaller group who actively sought out or facilitated religion in their households. By most accounts, it was the Methodists, with their youthful circuit riders and high regard for female spirituality, who inspired the most discomfort among southern men in relation

⁸¹ Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 186; Jenkins, *Experience, Labours, and Gospel Sufferings of Rev. James Jenkins*, 107, 59.

to their wives and daughters. But for every man that viewed his wife's attraction to the Methodists with a wary eye, there appears to have been one who welcomed the increased measure of piety these young itinerants represented. When a young William Martin first arrived at the home of "Capt. C" in the backcountry of Georgia in the 1820s, the good captain took it upon himself to prove to his wife that Martin was a preacher by offering his guest a sip of whiskey. When Martin refused (an insult from any normal guest), the delighted captain told his wife "I told you so!" and proceeded to have Martin's drink for himself. Nevertheless, Martin remembered his "kind hearted" host fondly, recalling that the captain told him, "I desire you to preach as often as you can...I will always be present and respectful, but don't speak to me about religion." In Wilkes County, Georgia, one of the earliest strongholds of Methodism in the state, a physician named Thomas Bird defended his Methodist wife at a dinner party where guests were poking fun at the Methodist practice of "shouting." "You shall shout just when you please," Bird reassured his wife, though he himself was not a Methodist. Across the Deep South, even as some men opposed their wives' newfound religion, other men evinced the belief that nothing was threatened to their authority or honor by their wives' participation in evangelical churches.⁸²

And then, of course, there is Nathan Bedford Forrest's quick retort—"That's just why I want her"—to the Reverend Montgomery's objection that his niece Mary was a "Christian girl" who could not be married to a man displaying more devotion to his honor than to religion. In the context of evangelical attitudes about women and the most

⁸² "Reminiscences of a Methodist Preacher, no. 6," clipping from *Southern Christian Advocate* in volume "Reminiscences, 1807-1861", William Martin Papers, SCL; George Gilman Smith, *The History of Georgia Methodism from 1786 to 1866* (Atlanta, GA: A. B. Caldwell, 1913), 85.

obvious outworking of those attitudes in the practice of church discipline across the Deep South, Forrest's reply illustrates the understanding that a woman's commitment to an evangelical faith was also a commitment to the deeper values of her society, a commitment to her own, as well as her husband's honor. Within the church, women like Mary Montgomery submitted to and participated in a disciplinary process designed and implemented for the purposes of Zion, but also shaped by Christian men and women with deeply ingrained assumptions, rooted in their culture, about a woman's honor. Thus, when Forrest asked for Mary Montgomery's hand her uncle objected by depicting the conflict between evangelical values and the habits of male honor, while Forrest responded with an efficacious appeal to the perfectly harmonious picture of gendered honor presented by the marriage of a man such as himself to a woman like Mary Montgomery.

A decade ago, historian Beth Barton Schweiger observed that “nuancing these oppositions of gender and honor will enable histories that knit together the sacred and secular in ways that southerners would recognize.” This chapter is an attempt to fulfill that aim. The central argument of this chapter has been that the moral communities of honor and evangelicalism overlapped for men and women much more extensively than we have previously understood. This overlapping influence was complicated immensely by the fact that honor in particular expected a very different set of behaviors, attitudes, and actions from men than it did from women, while evangelicalism, while clearly delineating between men's and women's roles in life, enforced a broadly similar ethics on both. Men, I have argued, experienced this overlap as a kind of dual and conflicting

citizenship that can be seen most clearly in their attitudes towards the violence that honor demanded and their religion proscribed. Women, on the other hand, experienced much less cultural dissonance from their identities as southern women and evangelical Christians, with the two identities largely serving to reinforce and support one another.⁸³

It would be unfortunate if this chapter were to be interpreted as arguing that the central significance of church discipline was social and not spiritual. As Gregory Wills has so ably argued, Baptists saw the practice of discipline as essential to preserving “primitive and pure” communities of faith that would attract God’s blessing and bring about revival. This was a purely religious motivation that had little to do with cultural context. And yet, unavoidably, such religious reasoning was influenced in practice by evangelicals’ cultural predispositions and had important social effects. One of the main problems with the study of evangelicalism as it relates to honor has been that scholars have implicitly posited a moment of cultural rupture coincident with conversion that divided southerners into the camp of either honor or religion. For most southerners this divide would make little sense, even if they acknowledged the tension that could exist between the two in everyday life. Southerners carried their religion with them when they left their churches. It shaped the way they lived in the world outside. Similarly, they carried the cultural predispositions of honor with them when they crossed the church threshold to worship or to meet for days of discipline, and it should be no surprise that a way of looking at the world that influenced so many spheres of life outside the church should also be found operating within it.

⁸³ Donald G. Mathews et al., “Forum: Southern Religion,” *Religion and American Culture*, 8 (Summer 1998), 163.

IV. Social Death and Everlasting Life: Slave Identity, Honor, Ritual, and Discipline in the Deep South

“On my arrival to South Carolina,” wrote William Thomson, a Scottish weaver, “the first thing that particularly attracted my attention was negro slavery.” Only days after Thomson arrived on the Sea Islands near Beaufort, South Carolina, in 1840, he heard that the local Baptist church was going to baptize “sixteen or eighteen negro slaves.” Thomson decided to attend, arriving at the river early on a clear October Sunday morning to find “hundreds” of slaves and a few whites already gathered on the banks of the river. The Baptist preacher waded into the river wearing a white gown, while a black deacon named Jacob, of monstrous size, stood by to make sure the river did not sweep away the new members of God’s family. As the slaves entered the river one by one, Thomson could clearly hear the preacher’s voice repeating the phrase, “I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost—Amen,” as he immersed each slave in succession. Then, when they had finished, “they came up from the river, in a body,” singing these words:

*I’m not ashamed to own my Lord
Or to defend his cause:
Maintain the glory of his cross,
And honour all his laws.*

Thomson was deeply affected by what he had seen. “I almost expected to see something ridiculous,” he wrote, “but, in reality, the whole affair had rather an imposing and solemn effect.” Mainly, Thomson was impressed by the weight the slaves seemed to attach to the entire scene. Later that morning, at a service at the Baptist church, which Thomson believed had “twelve or fourteen hundred negro members,” the preacher asked

all those who had been baptized to stand up as he addressed them on their Christian duties “to God and to their master,” and urged them to hold fast to the faith they had professed. Then, in another scene that particularly impressed Thomson, the preacher asked each of the slaves baptized that morning to come forward and receive the “right hand of fellowship” from the preacher and the church elders. Thomson emphasized the unusual and genuine nature of the contact between the minister and the slaves. “I took particular notice of the shaking of the hands. It was a real transaction,” he wrote with surprise. That evening, with blacks and whites gathered together, the church took the Lord’s Supper, where Thomson noted that “The white people did not use any of the cups that the slaves drank out of, but the cups that the whites had used were then used by some of the slaves.”¹

Evangelical religion and its rituals held potentially radical meaning for the South’s slaves. Biblical stories of Israel’s enslavement and exodus, of Christ’s humiliation, death, and resurrection, and the pronouncement of the Apostle Paul that within the family of God there were neither slave nor free were deeply meaningful to a people in bondage, often to a degree that made southern masters uncomfortable. Slaves found spiritual solace in a gospel that spoke of Christ as “disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious,” (1 Peter 2:4), and they quietly used the medium of a shared religion to negotiate the boundaries of their master’s paternalistic ideology. Slaves did not simply embrace evangelicalism as a set of intellectual tenets or emotional styles practiced by white itinerant preachers in rough wooden chapels or brush arbor churches, but became themselves powerful practitioners and interpreters of the religious force and meaning of

¹ Willie Lee Rose, *A Documentary History of Slavery in North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 463-465.

evangelicalism.²

The relationship of evangelicalism to slavery changed over time. In the late eighteenth century, some evangelicals boldly preached against slaveholding as a sin, and the Methodists even attempted an ill-fated experiment requiring members to free slaves or leave the church. In time, as historians like Christine Heyrman have shown, evangelicals moved to make their churches less threatening to southern masters by circumscribing the roles and freedoms of black members. Eventually, of course, southern evangelicals would come to terms with slavery through mechanisms like the Mission to Slaves, which attempted to Christianize the institution of slavery and to instill in slaves and masters alike a sense of their mutual responsibilities and duties. In the antebellum period, as opposition to slavery became more pointed in the North, churchmen like Baptist Basil Manly and Presbyterian James Thornwell led the way in the development of a fully orbed proslavery ideology that denied any contradiction between the gospel and human bondage and advocated slavery as the most humane and biblical relationship between the two races.³

What follows is a modest attempt to contribute to a more precise understanding of the extent and limits of evangelical radicalism in regard to race through a comparison of the relative position of black southerners within the moral communities of honor and evangelicalism. Through the window of congregational records in the Deep South, such a comparison serves somewhat to diminish the distance between an early evangelical

² Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 232-279.

³ Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1997), 206-252.

radicalism and a later accommodation and conservatism in regard to race. A comparison of these two communities reveals the extent to which evangelicalism did not simply evolve to reflect its social environment but continued to demand of white southerners throughout the period before the Civil War at least a limited acknowledgment of the common family of God. Likewise, such a comparison also reveals the extent to which the social realities of slavery shaped evangelical attitudes and practices from the movement's earliest history in the Deep South.

Whatever radical potential evangelicalism held for slaves sprang from a kind of inclusivity that ran counter to most of the rigid boundaries that separated white and black southerners. By claiming the offer of salvation for their own an oppressed people forced white evangelicals to choose: Would they would acknowledge a common and free gospel or instead move to reinstate the racial boundaries of the material world on the immaterial geography inhabited by souls neither white nor black? The history of evangelicalism and slavery in the South is largely the story of that negotiation.

The institution of slavery was intimately connected to honor in the South, as it has been in all cultures where the two have coexisted. Indeed, honor culture would not have been nearly as pervasive and powerful a force in the South without the presence of African slavery. The vital connection between honor and slavery is often obscured from our perspective by the fact that slaves were clearly outside the circle of white honor in the South, neither entitled to honor nor able to defend it against the ravages of white patriarchy in a slave society. Nevertheless, as sociologist Orlando Patterson has argued, in a broad sense the institution of slavery was essential to the depth and strength of honor

culture in the South because it created the kind of undifferentiated economic landscape in which there were limited and easily identifiable pathways to success, nearly all of which involved slaveholding. Furthermore, in a narrow sense owning slaves also contributed directly to the personal honor of slaveholders since control over others bolstered the personal sense of self-worth that was the psychological foundation of honor. As Patterson wrote, “wherever slavery became structurally very important, the whole tone of slaveholders’ culture tended to be highly honorific.” In many of the slave societies in Patterson’s comparative study, slaves were sought solely for the honor conveyed by owning them, regardless of economic benefit.⁴

In all such societies, slaves were identifiable by their lack of honor and by their status as marginal or excluded members of society. Patterson felicitously expressed the condition of slaves in regard to honor when he wrote that all slaves existed in a kind of “secular excommunication” that rendered them “socially dead.” In the worldview of honor, then, slaves were shameless: moral inanimates who through their words and actions could neither defend honor, incur shame, or influence the honor of others. This is not to say, of course, that slaves themselves always accepted this judgment. Indeed, a vibrant culture of honor operated in the slave quarters, mirroring in many respects the tenets of white honor from which slaves were excluded. Nevertheless, in relation to white society part of the very definition of slavery was the slave’s lack of honor and his assimilation into and furthering of his master’s social personality. Thus, Orlando Patterson wrote of the “godlike manner” in which masters “mediated between the socially

⁴ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), 79.

dead and the socially alive.”⁵

Such descriptions can sometimes seem too arcane, academic, or abstract to have applied to the way real people experienced slavery, but in a speech given in 1846 in England, Frederick Douglass described the state of the slave in terms that echo Patterson’s description of social death:

The condition of the slave is simply that of the brute beast. He is a piece of property—a marketable commodity, in the language of the law, to be bought or sold at the will and caprice of the master who claims him to be his property; His own good, his conscience, his intellect, his affections, are all set aside by the master. The will and the wishes of the master are the law of the slave.⁶

Elsewhere, Douglass described his “resurrection from the dark and pestiferous tomb of slavery.” By this, Douglass referenced not the moment he crossed a geographical boundary into freedom, but the moment he finally, violently resisted the dehumanization of slavery and the attacks of the slave driver Covey. Of that moment Douglass wrote, “It recalled to life my crushed self-respect and my self-confidence...A man, without force, is without the essential dignity of humanity. Human nature is so constituted that it cannot *honor* a helpless man, although it can *pity* him...I was no longer a servile coward.” The most important effects of slavery for Douglass had to do not with the physical oppression of slavery but with the social and psychological effects described by Orlando Patterson though it goes without saying that few slaves found the particular kind of redemption that Douglass described.⁷

Slaves were separated from the world of white honor in the South not only by the

⁵ Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 5, 46. For honor in the slave population, see Jeff Forret, “Conflict and the “Slave Community”: Violence Among Slaves in Upcountry South Carolina,” *Journal of Southern History*, 74 (August 2008): 551-588.

⁶ Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (New York: Miller, Orton & Mulligan, 1855), 408.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 246-247.

unthinking assumptions of a slave society about race and servitude, but also by active ritual and symbolic acts that slave societies throughout the world had always used to represent the social death and degraded status of the slave, thus accomplishing a symbolic buttressing of the master's authority and honor. The "ritual of enslavement" outlined by Patterson usually involved the symbolic erasure of the slave's past and kinship ties, a change of name, a material marking of slave status, and finally the incorporation of the new slave into the household of the new master.⁸

The process is most clearly visible in the experience of slaves brought to North America directly from Africa, and the well-known story of Abd-al-Rahman Ibrahima, purchased by a farmer in Natchez in 1788, exhibits all these ritual stages. Ibrahima underwent not only a physical separation from his history and kin across the Atlantic but also a symbolic one, part of the process that Orlando Patterson called "natal alienation." Ibrahima's new master, Thomas Foster, had his new slave's long hair cut and gave him the cruelly ironic name "Prince," a backhanded reference to Ibrahima's royal lineage. In Bertram Wyatt-Brown's interpretation of the story, Ibrahima understood these marks of his new position explicitly through the lens of honor and shame, one day appearing in the doorway of his master's house and placing Foster's wife's foot on his neck in symbolic acceptance of his degraded role. That Foster and his wife instantly understood Ibrahima's meaning in this act reveals the extent to which master and slave in the South shared a common understanding of the significance of honor and shame in their relationship.⁹

⁸ Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 52.

⁹ Terry Alford, *Prince Among Slaves* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 1-38, 45-47; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "The Mask of Obedience: Male Slave Psychology in the Old South," *The American Historical Review*, 93 (December 1988), 1228-1229.

It was not only newly enslaved Africans who were ritually stripped of their honor and identity in this way. The rituals of social death and dishonor were reinscribed into slaves' consciousness by the processes associated with the domestic slave trade, as well. As Walter Johnson observes of the social death experience by slaves sold in the markets of antebellum New Orleans, "the dead, their bodies disjointed from the past and their identities evacuated, would walk to sale." Slaves sold in New Orleans frequently came from the Upper South, and in their journey from one slavery to another they underwent a process of remaking in which slave traders forged new narratives about their histories and personalities, fed and fashioned their bodies to conform to the ideals of the marketplace, dressed slaves alike in an effort to obscure particularities, and presented them clothed and unclothed to potential buyers to be felt and judged as merchandise. "By detaching slaves from their history and replacing human singularity with fashioned salability," writes Johnson, "the traders were doing more than selling slaves: they were making them." Part of this process of commodification, as Johnson is well aware, was separating slaves anew from the circle of honor occupied by their prospective masters, making them available for use as symbolic instruments in the enactment of white honor.¹⁰

Understanding that a significant part of the experience of slavery was its ritualized separation of the slave from the moral community of honor helps to clarify one aspect of what slaves may have found radically different and appealing about evangelical religion. In the evangelical community the rituals of spiritual life that marked members' entry into the community and unity with Christ existed in marked contrast to the rituals of social death that surrounded slavery. Religious rituals such as baptism and the Lord's Supper

¹⁰ Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 118, 129.

were perhaps the most important part of what historians have seen more generally as the radical social potential of evangelicalism for slaves. “Slaves in the African-American and biracial evangelical churches gained powerful symbols of humanity and spiritual equality,” wrote Randy Sparks in his study of evangelicalism in Mississippi. “They were ushered into a new community and given a social existence away from their masters.” By virtue of their spiritual rebirth, then, slaves also gained a social identity as members of a church where they were acknowledged as moral actors with a will of their own who could be held accountable for their sins. Nevertheless, despite the radical contrast between the social death and dishonor of slavery and the spiritual life and social personhood that slaves found within the church, slaves’ new existence was often shaped and moderated by the authority of a master whose authority the church recognized.¹¹

Baptism and the Lord’s Supper were the ritualized avenues through which black southerners gained a new and separate social existence. If the most degrading and definitive separation of a slave from the moral community of white honor occurred when men and women were forced to stand naked before prospective buyers in a ritualized moment of shamelessness that represented their absolute subjugation and social death, then surely the most significant evangelical ritual for slaves was baptism, the ceremony that symbolized new life and entry into the church. Indeed, Albert J. Raboteau called baptism “perhaps the most dramatic ritual in the slave’s religious life.”¹²

Practiced differently by each denomination, the contrast between baptism as a life-

¹¹ Randy J. Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks: Evangelicalism in Mississippi, 1773-1876* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 62-63.

¹² Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 227.

giving ritual and the rituals associated with slavery is most clear in the records of Baptist churches. There were important parts of the ritual that preceded the scene witnessed by William Thomson in Beaufort in 1840. To be baptized into the church as a new believer (rather than transferring membership, which required a letter certifying baptism and good standing from another congregation), prospective members of Baptist churches first had to relate their “experience” before the gathered congregation. Churches regularly made time to hear testimonies, and church record books regularly record “a door opened for experience.” Testimonies usually followed a narrative progression from the realization and conviction of sin to the realization and release of God’s forgiveness. Those who told their stories were judged on their sincerity and on the degree to which their stories coincided to the accepted schema of conversion narratives. Within the broad outlines of the conversion narrative, each believer narrated a personal story of sin and salvation that was intended to convince the audience of the authenticity of their conversion. Those who came before the church testified that they were spiritually alive, that they had been grafted into the community of saints and the family of God. If the church deemed an experience satisfactory, baptism followed soon after as a sign and seal of a new spiritual life and a new social identity as part of the visible, as well as the invisible church.¹³

Black evangelicals expressed their experiences publicly in terms similar to those used by white evangelicals and were often heard alongside them in churches across South Carolina and Georgia. On a summer day in July 1818, the members of Liberty Baptist Church in Newton County, Georgia, heard the experience of two women, which the church clerk summarized for posterity. Rebecca English, a white woman, testified “that

¹³ See, for example, Turkey Creek Baptist Church Records, April 8, 1797, Baptist Historical Collection, Furman University (BHC).

she found her self wretched and misrabel [*sic*] in conciquence [*sic*] of her sins but that she believd [*sic*] the Lord for Christ's sake had pardoned them all." Then the church heard Judy, a slave of John Wilckers, who "gave a relation of her lost condition by sin and deliverance for what Christ had done." Accepting their experiences, the church received both women "by the wright [*sic*] hand of fellowship unto baptism." Likewise, at the first official meeting of the Antioch Baptist Church in Georgia in 1829 two slaves, Moses and Judy, were "received by experience to Baptism" and listed as founding members of the congregation.¹⁴

All the evangelical denominations required prospective members to relate their experience of the grace of God for the evaluation of the church. For slaves, however, joining a church almost always involved the permission of their master. Writing the history of the Brushy Creek Baptist Church of Greenville, South Carolina, in 1904, G.B. Moore noted with surprise how many "servants" joined the church from 1819-1832. Writing in an era of segregated religion, Moore expressed amazement that slaves "were subject to the same discipline, heard the same preaching, enjoyed the same church privileges" as white church members, but also noted that the black Baptists had to have "permits" in order to attend.¹⁵

It was much the same in other denominations. In a typical entry, the clerk of Second Presbyterian Church in Charleston noted in 1829 that two slaves of Thomas Condy, Abram and Celia, had been admitted to membership "with permission in writing

¹⁴ Liberty Baptist Church Records, July 25, 1818, Mercer University Special Collections (MU); Antioch Baptist Church Records, January 28, 1829, MU. See also Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks*, 63-64; Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1785-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 62-63.

¹⁵ Brushy Creek Baptist Church Records (Greenville County), 1904, p366, South Caroliniana Library (SCL).

from their owner.” In 1821, Jack, a slave owned by the South Carolina College applied for membership at Columbia’s First Presbyterian Church. The clerk recorded “the importunate desire of Jack to become a member of this Church,” and noted that a committee had been formed to inquire of Jack’s character from representatives of the college. When a man named Rudolph at the college reported unfavorably on Jack, the session postponed his request indefinitely. Nevertheless, Jack’s insistence on joining the church hints at the importance that slaves attached to membership, while his failure to achieve his goal shows that even so abstract a master as a college could bar the way for slaves seeking the social embodiment of their spiritual selves.¹⁶

Even with a master’s approval acceptance was not a foregone conclusion. In 1831, the records of Brushy Creek Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina, noted that two black women were “heard” but not “received.” Likewise, in 1840 after a spate of discipline cases involving black members of the Welsh Neck Baptist congregation, pastor James C. Furman recommended to the church “as to the propriety of being more guarded in future in the reception of members.” Nevertheless, it seems that prospective white members were refused entry as often as black members on the whole and for similar reasons, including reputations for misconduct and a failure to satisfactorily express the inner workings of the Spirit. On the whole, it would seem that the scrutiny of a convert’s experience invested the acceptance of the church with more significance than an uncritical assessment might have possessed.¹⁷

¹⁶ Second Presbyterian Church Records, Session Minutes, Oct. 9, 1829, South Carolina Historical Society (SCHS); First Presbyterian Church Records, Session Minutes, July 7, 1821, SCL.

¹⁷ Brushy Creek Baptist Church Records (Greenville County), May 14, 1831, SCL; Welsh Neck Baptist Church Records, June 14, 1840, SCL.

The actual performance of the baptism followed soon after official acceptance at the nearest body of water where new members could be appropriately immersed according to Baptist doctrine. Frequently white and black were baptized together at the ceremony, although some churches with large black congregations might hold separate ceremonies. The record book of the Mechanicsville Baptist Church in Darlington, South Carolina, noted of one such ceremony, “met at the water and received to the ordinance of Baptism May, Lizar & Calvin, belonging to Mr. J.w. Lide...after public preaching the right hand of fellowship was extended to them.” From such descriptions it is evident that baptism was not a single ritual but a group of closely connected rituals that together symbolized the rebirth and inclusion of the new member into the church. After narrating their experience of God’s grace new members were greeted with the “right hand of fellowship” as church members shook their hand or even embraced them. Closely following this came the baptism itself with its powerful symbolism of death and rebirth, followed at times by preaching (arguably itself a Protestant ritual), prayer, and another round of the right hand of fellowship.¹⁸

The spiritual symbolism of baptism, and especially of the full immersion practiced by Baptists, in which those baptized were understood to have been “buried” with Christ and reborn into the family of God, could only have been doubly significant for slaves, holding important social as well as spiritual implications. White southerners were inheritors of the Protestant Reformation, a religious movement that desacralized whole swaths of life and delineated sharply between the secular and the sacred, and between the social and the spiritual. It was partly on the basis of this religious inheritance that whites

¹⁸ Mechanicsville Baptist Church Records (Darlington County), August 4, 1855, SCL.

were able conceptually to maintain a distinction between spiritual equality in Christ and the staggering social inequalities of slavery. Early Baptists and Methodists in the South, though Protestant, pushed against these distinctions, seeing God and the Devil at work directly in the everyday affairs of men and thus testing the boundaries of the Protestant religious imagination. Not coincidentally, some early Methodists and Baptists also saw the distinction between spiritual and social equality that sustained slavery as a creation of man, not God, and originated genuine if faltering efforts against an institution they saw as an obvious contradiction of Christian brotherhood.¹⁹

Slave origins along the western coast of the African continent made black southerners the piecemeal inheritors of a religious worldview that, like pre-Reformation Christianity, made little distinction between sacred and secular areas of life. Instead, a sense of the sacred permeated everyday actions and objects. Thus, some masters noticed with discomfort that their slaves failed to grasp the fact that the religion offered to them was only to have its effect on their souls and not on their enslaved bodies, and an embarrassingly large part of the project of white missionary efforts to slaves in the antebellum period consisted of the attempt to inscribe on slaves' minds this crucial distinction. Observers often noted with puzzlement the way in which the figures of Christ and Moses melded together in slave religion, a result not of slaves' lack of capacity to differentiate between the two but of their instinct to make earthly deliverance of a piece with otherworldly salvation. From this viewpoint, the idea of a religious ritual like

¹⁹ See Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* / Eter L. Berger, 1st ed. (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1967); Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Scribner, 1971); Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 28-76. Caral Pestana argues that before the Reformation the Atlantic world, including Europe, West Africa, and the North American continent, was characterized by a common, sacralized view of the world. Carla Gardina Pestana, *Protestant Empire: Religion and the Making of the British Atlantic World* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

baptism impinging not at all on the world of secular social relations outside a delimited sacred sphere would have made little sense to slaves, even if they duly acknowledged it for the benefit of white onlookers.²⁰

Certainly the ritual of baptism left a deep impression in the minds of many freedmen. “I ain’t forgot dem baptizin’s,” recalled Anderson Furr, born in Hall County, Georgia. “Evvybody went in dem days. Dere warn’t no place in de church houses for to be ducked dem days, so de white folks had a pool dug out by de branch for de baptizin’s, and white folks and slaves was ducked in de same pool of water. White folks went in fust and den de Niggers.” Even though independent black churches existed, especially among the Baptists, most slaves recalled churches where blacks and whites attended together and were baptized at the same ceremony. Slaves would travel for miles to attend a baptism. “If there was a baptizing inside of ten miles around from where us lived, us didn’t miss it,” recalled Charlie Hudson, born in Elbert County, Georgia.²¹

Anderson Furr’s recollection that “white folks went in fust and den de Niggers” suggests that the white members of his Georgia church were concerned that even the performance of a religious ritual should reflect the appropriate social order (casting doubt on the claim that such rituals had only spiritual significance). The impulse to implicate the social order even in sacred rituals becomes even more clear in the descriptions of the Lord’s Supper, or Communion. Like baptism, the Lord’s Supper was a religious ritual that contained a powerful symbolism of inclusion and spiritual life. Following Christ’s

²⁰ Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 248-255; Mechal Sobel, *Trabelin' on: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979), 58-60; Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 250-251; Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 3-80.

²¹ George P. Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1972), vol. 12A, 349; vol. 12B, 227.

command at the Last Supper to remember him until he came again, the faithful used the elements of bread and wine to celebrate Christ's sacrifice and look forward to his return. In light of scriptural warnings against letting unbelievers participate in this sacred meal, all evangelical denominations employed mechanisms to ensure that only church members in good standing participated. Methodists only allowed society members to take Communion, which meant only those who had completed a prescribed trial period and undergone examination by the minister. Well into the nineteenth century the Elders of many Presbyterian congregations in South Carolina and Georgia would interview church members and distribute Communion tokens made of wood or lead to be handed in by members before being administered the sacrament.²²

In his description of the Lord's Supper as practiced in the John's Island Presbyterian Church in South Carolina in the late eighteenth century, historian Erskine Clarke observed that the sacrament as performed there contained both "ideological" and "utopian" elements. In the service, the communion table with the elements was placed near the front of the church. White church members would come forward and present their communion tokens and receive the bread and wine, followed afterwards, but in a similar manner, by black church members. To a certain extent, then, the service reflected the social reality outside the church's walls, while also serving in an ideological sense to naturalize the inequalities between white and black by including them even in the performance of the Lord's Supper. But in another sense the eschatological implications of the Supper—the fact that it pointed forward to Christ's coming and the remaking of the

²² Methodist Episcopal Church, *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America, with Notes by Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury*, 10th ed. (Philadelphia: Henry Tuckniss, 1798), 119-120; Erskine Clarke, *Our Southern Zion: A History of Calvinism in the South Carolina Low Country, 1690-1990* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1996), 66.

world without slavery, as most blacks and some white believed—were inescapably present for black and white alike. This, as Clarke wrote, meant that black Presbyterians were in a meaningful way included in the religious community and given a “distinct social identity.”²³

In other denominations the performance of the Lord’s Supper presented a similarly potent and symbolic mix of present reality and future promise. In 1808, Edward Hooker, a northern tutor at the recently established South Carolina College, described a Communion service at the local Methodist Church in Columbia to his sister in Connecticut:

Last Sunday was the quarterly meeting or Sacrament time at the Methodist C. Their mode of administering it is somewhat peculiar. The minister prefaces the ceremony with prayer and some remarks, and then the communicants approach, and kneeling around the altar partake of the bread and wine in that posture while singing is at the same time going on. The ladies first approach, then the white men; after they are through, then the women slaves, and after that the men slaves. The slaves comport a considerable part of the Methodist Congregation and they occupy the gallery exclusively.²⁴

Despite efforts to turn sacred rituals into a *tableau vivant* of southern society, the participation of enslaved people in Christian rituals like baptism and the Lord’s Supper, which ushered converts into a new spiritual and social identity and looked towards the renewing of the world, contained unavoidable and potentially transformative symbolic power. The historical relationship between Christianity and slavery had frequently crystallized around ritual. Despite the directive of the Council of Dort in 1618 that baptized slaves should be freed, baptism had rarely become an avenue to freedom in any

²³ Clarke, *Our Southern Zion*, 66-67.

²⁴ Edward Hooker (Columbia, South Carolina) to Sally Hooker (Farmington, Conn.), March 27, 1808, Edward Hooker Papers, SCL.

of the Christian nations of Europe or the New World. Nevertheless, slaveholders throughout the Atlantic world continued to be wary of the implications of Christianizing their slaves in general, and of Christian rituals in particular. In 1667 the colony of Virginia found it necessary to assure slaveowners that baptizing their slaves did not require manumission. Early Methodist and Baptist antipathy to slavery, along with a few celebrated (though rare) cases of manumission, encouraged some slaveholders to see evangelicalism in particular as a dangerous variant of Christianity, and their opposition frequently focused on religious rituals. Around 1790 Andrew Bryan's famous First African Baptist Church in Savannah had 225 baptized members, but nearly 350 unbaptized converts, "many of whom have not permission from their owners to be baptized" despite their owners permitting them to attend.²⁵

When offered to slaves, the sacrament of Communion sometimes engendered similar discomfort among whites. In South Carolina, a few years before the Communion service Edward Hooker observed in Columbia in 1808, the irascible Methodist James Jenkins found his inclusion of slaves in the sacrament of Communion opposed by a group of white onlookers. "I expected hot work," he recalled, "for I was resolved to stand my ground." Though the episode has been used to demonstrate general hostility towards evangelicalism among a segment of the white population, Jenkins' narrative clearly identifies the ritual of the Lord's Supper as the particular point of conflict. "While I was preaching, in they came, but took their seats," he remembered. "I thought it was no time to be mealy mouthed, hence I poured out the law and the consequences of sin with

²⁵ Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 275-276; John Rippon, *The Baptist Annual Register, for 1790, 1791, 1792, and Part of 1793, Including Sketches of the State of Religion Among Different Denominations of Good Men at Home and Abroad* (London: Dilly, Button, and Thomas, 1793), 342; Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 141.

unmeasured severity.” Still the men stayed seated. “After sermon I began to administer the sacrament,” Jenkins recalled, and it was at this point that the men came forward, one taking the loaf from Jenkins while he knelt at the front of the congregation. “He then forbid my giving the sacrament to the negroes,” wrote Jenkins. “I asked him, if any of them belonged to him? He replied, ‘No.’” Jenkins escaped without harm, but was evidently unsuccessful in administering Communion to the black members of his congregation. Such opposition, even by whites who did not own the slaves in question, points to the special significance implied by slaves’ inclusion in such rituals, a significance that whites, as well as blacks, well understood.²⁶

Much depended on context in determining how the spiritual significance of ritual related to the social relations of slavery. At the turn of the century when Methodist James Jenkins offered the bread and the wine to black Christians on his circuit in Manchester, South Carolina, the situation seemed to some white observers to have suspect social implications that should be actively, even violently resisted. Jenkins himself took context into consideration when he related the opposition of his white audience to the recent Methodist pronouncements against slavery. But in 1808 when Edward Hooker observed Communion in the Methodist Church in Columbia, he did not hint that the spectacle of white and black Christians partaking of the Supper together caused any discomfort among those present. On the contrary, as Erskine Clarke observed, the performance of the ritual in the proper official context and in the proper order, white before black, only reinforced for whites the organic nature of their institutions and the naturalness of their

²⁶ James Jenkins, *Experience, Labours, and Gospel Sufferings of Rev. James Jenkins, of the South Carolina Conference* (n.p.: Printed for the author, 1842), 96-97; Cynthia Lynn Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind, 1770-1810* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 127.

superiority.²⁷

From a white point of view evangelical rituals could lend themselves to a paternalistic interpretation of slavery. With a rising tide of anti-slavery sentiment roiling the North as the century progressed, southern slaveowners moved to Christianize and domesticate the peculiar institution, reinterpreting the social relations of slavery through the metaphor of the family. Thus, whites saw in the combined services at which white and black took Communion together but in succession a harmonious image of their society that reflected spiritual inclusion and equality alongside natural social distinctions.

The same could be said of baptism. The same ritual that had such significance for some slaves could also, in other situations, be interpreted with a paternalistic slant. This was especially the case in churches that practiced infant baptism. In 1852, for instance, the record book of Hopewell Presbyterian Church lists infants baptized that year in the church. While entries for white children include parents, entries for black children do so only rarely. More frequently, baptisms of black infants involved multiple infants at the same ceremony and only the master's name is listed. In this context, the inescapable effect was undoubtedly a furthering of the master's claim on the offspring of his slaves, as well as an enactment of the paternalistic image of the master as the father of a family both black and white.²⁸

Evangelical rituals had a social as well as a spiritual importance for slaves. They ushered converts into the body of Christ represented by the local church and gave slaves a social identity and moral agency that were denied them within the community of honor

²⁷ Jenkins, *Experience, Labours, and Gospel Sufferings of Rev. James Jenkins*, 96-97.

²⁸ Hopewell Presbyterian Church (A.R.P.) Record Book, 1852, SCL.

by virtue of the social death that slavery entailed. Nevertheless, the authority of earthly masters exerted itself even on this aspect of slaves' identity. And while many southern whites were clearly discomfited by the very implications of evangelical ritual that slaves embraced, they also found ways of interpreting and performing these rituals that appropriately reflected the social relations of slavery and the important distinction in their minds between this world and the next.

While slaves were ritually deprived of honor and social personality in relation to the white community, recent scholarship has begun to emphasize the extent to which a parallel culture of honor existed in the slave quarters. That slaves could possess honor in relation to one another but not in relation to their white masters may seem contradictory. Yet we should remember that even within the white population the community of honor was riven by class distinctions. A man of honor would not accept a challenge by an inferior, while deference on the part of high and low alike served as the social grease that moved white society smoothly along. While elite southerners performed ritualized displays of valor on the dueling field, men from the lower echelons did their best to maim one another, believing that to disfigure an opponent's body was to disprove his claims. While the outlines for winning honor or incurring shame were broadly similar across classes, the spheres of upper and lower class honor rarely met except in the sense that their common whiteness set both off from the dishonor of the slave.²⁹

The stratification of honor in southern society makes it less surprising that scholars

²⁹ See Forret, "Conflict and the 'Slave Community'"; Elliott J. Gorn, "'Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch': The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry," *The American Historical Review*, 90 (February 1985), 18-43.

have unearthed an energetic parallel culture of honor among slaves, especially men. Slaves, historian Jeff Forret has found, fought for many of the same reasons as their white counterparts: love, money, and most importantly, honor. Echoing Bertram Wyatt-Brown's older observation that "male honor was richly prized in the slave quarters," Forret found that slave men, "protected their women, settled scores with enemy bondmen, issued threats, boasted of their manhood, [and] brooked no insults." Perhaps most significantly, Forret found evidence of slaves using the phrasing of honor to describe their conflicts with one another. For instance, in one case before the court in Anderson District three slave witnesses testified that they "heard Bas give Joe the Dam lie" before a fight. The fighting that often followed an exchange of insults was nearly indistinguishable from the eye-gouging, ear-biting fracas that erupted among the non-elite southern whites studied by Elliot Gorn.³⁰

An examination of the records of evangelical churches in South Carolina and Georgia confirms Forret's analysis and adds further dimensions to the ways slaves defined and accessed honor among themselves, as well as the way that slaves' honor remained pointedly unacknowledged by the white community. Evangelical churches were undoubtedly concerned with black members' behavior, and for most of the period before 1860 evangelical communities exercised a rigorous discipline with regard to black members. The official records of evangelical churches have multiple significances when it comes to slaves and honor, none of them explicit. Records often preserve fleeting and unintended glimpses into the world of male honor in the quarters. The same records reveal the way in which slaves' dishonored status in relation to the white community

³⁰ Wyatt-Brown, "The Mask of Obedience," 1249; Forret, "Conflict and the "Slave Community"," 581-582; Gorn, "Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch."

silently influenced the practice of discipline within the church, especially when it came to slaves' sexual lives. Finally, records reveal the carefully bounded and precarious avenues to office and status that the church provided to some black evangelicals who served as deacons, watchmen, and preachers serving both the white and black communities.³¹

Churches throughout South Carolina and Georgia had many of the same problems with the black brethren that they faced with their white brothers. To judge from church records, black male evangelicals fought, swore, and drank at a pace equalling their white counterparts. Violence between male slave members was common in many churches with large black congregations, and most conflicts arose over women or sharp words. The Welsh Neck Baptist Church in Darlington County, South Carolina, regularly heard cases of conflicts between slaves over the years. In 1814, the church excommunicated a slave named Billy after an investigation revealed that he had “designed to commit adultery and fought with the woman’s husband.” In 1827, a slave member named Sam was found guilty “in violently opposing the marriage of old Mingo, an aged member of this church, with Peggy.” Sam might have been forgiven his impetuosity considering the circumstances, as the clerk observed, “some of the above disorder occurred at a funeral sermon preached by Scipio [an elderly black deacon]. After which he [Scipio] was invited to marry Old Mingo, to Peggy the wife of the deceased.” It is unfortunately impossible to know whether Sam’s actions arose from an attachment to Peggy or from a sense of impropriety at the swift transition from burying to marrying. In 1836, the same congregation heard the case of a slave named Prince, who “engaged in a quarrel & made threats of injury to a fellow servant Titus.” Prince and Titus reconciled, but the clerk

³¹ Forret cites church records in a couple instances, but focuses mainly on court records.

recorded that Prince “was unwilling to satisfy members who were grieved by his conduct,” evidently believing his behavior justified by Titus’ unnamed offense.³²

Just as white men sometimes described their actions as regrettable but unavoidable, so slaves sometimes seemed to justify their violence by an appeal to the logic of honor. In 1821, John, “a black man,” stood before the Brushy Creek Baptist congregation and “acknowledged that he was wrong for getting angry and striking [*sic*] a black man.” Nevertheless, John insisted on including that his opponent had hit him first, “striking him two or three times without any provocation.” The church clerk recorded that this explanation was accepted, writing, “acknowledgment received as satisfactory.” As with white offenders who appealed implicitly to the requirements of honor in their statements of regret, churches also sometimes accepted the carefully qualified repentance of black men. Thus, while slaves had no honor a white man was bound to respect, and in contradiction to the claims of masters on black bodies, churches paradoxically seem to have recognized that even slaves could feel the need to respond to an unjust attack on their person by another slave.³³

Black men were often brought before the church for violence against slave women. It is difficult to draw broader conclusions about the slave community and the prevalence of domestic violence from the narrow window afforded by church records. What seems likely is that violence against wives and lovers sprang from the same set of motivations that underlay conflicts with other men. In 1821, for instance, a slave named Sam confessed to the congregation of Little River Baptist Church that he was guilty of

³² Welsh Neck Baptist Church Records (Darlington County), [n.d.] 1814, p61; [n.d.]1827, p119; January 10, 1836, p194, SCL.

³³ Brushy Creek Baptist Church Records (Greenville County), November [n.d.], 1821, p23, SCL.

“striking and choking a negro woman and continuing in a revengeful spirit.” The church forgave him. In 1847, Antioch Baptist Church in Georgia excommunicated a slave named Nelson, “for beating his wife.” What such cases illustrate is not that black men were more prone to such violence, but perhaps that they were more available to the discipline of the church for their actions.³⁴

Church records also reveal that eye-gouging and ear-biting were not segregated pursuits in the communities of the Deep South. In 1802 in upcountry South Carolina, for instance, Benjamin Chamblee went on a spree that included “getting drunk, cursing and swearing and drawing a knife to stab a man and fighting a negro.” In 1837, Poplar Springs Baptist excluded a slave named Willis who they were informed “has been rebelling [*sic*] and striking his Master.” Upon questioning Willis claimed only to have struck his master once, while his master, not a member of the church, claimed that Willis “struck him as often as twice and made the third attempt.” The church excluded Willis on his own confession as well as for lying.³⁵

But if whites and blacks sometimes traded blows that brought them before the church, other instances of violence showed unmistakably that slaves’ degraded status influenced church disciplinary committees in their decisions. In 1837, Hopewell Presbyterian Church disciplined William Hindman for “getting in a passion & striking a negro man of Mr. Carlisles.” In such cases, it would seem the offense was more against Carlisle than his bondsman, an understanding mirrored by southern courts that viewed

³⁴ Little River Baptist Church Records, June 20, 1829, BHC; Antioch Baptist Church Records, August 13, 1847, MU. Jeff Forret portrays sexual honor as a major source of conflict in the slave community. See Forret, “Conflict and the “Slave Community,”” 568-575.

³⁵ Mountain Creek Church Records (Anderson County), January [n.d.], 1802, SCL; Poplar Springs Baptist Church Records (Laurens County), August, September, 1837, SCL.

violence against blacks as primarily a transgression against an owner's property rights and only secondarily, if at all, an assault on a slave's person.³⁶

Slaves' legal status in the South reflected the symbolic power of the slave's social death and dishonor. In 1854, Presbyterian Samuel Wells Leland recorded in his journal a particularly poignant example of the way that slaves were viewed as an extension of their master's social personality. "I was astonished to see in the newspapers, a reward of 2000\$ offered for the apprehension of Dr. Edwin Gunter and his brother Edward Gunter, charged with the murder of Jesse Scurry," Leland wrote, also noting, "Scurry was the man who some time ago stabled [*sic*] Dr. Gunter in an affray." The Gunters were soon apprehended, and Edwin Gunter stood trial for shooting Scurry as the doomed man rode in a buggy driven by a slave. A month later, Leland recorded that Gunter had been acquitted of the murder, which the jury perhaps saw as a justifiable killing in light of the earlier conflict between the two white men. But, Leland wrote, Gunter still had to stand trial for "killing the negro, who was sitting in the buggy with his master." The jury soon acquitted Gunter of this death, as well. That Gunter would take the life not only of his enemy but also of Scurry's slave to satisfy his honor seems gratuitous. That a jury could include the killing of the slave in its justification of Scurry's murder seems incomprehensible. That is, until one considers the extent to which slaves embodied a master's honor and thus served as a logical, even legitimate target for those who, like Edwin Gunter, sought to recoup their own.³⁷

The same intertwined symbolism of honor and slavery in which a slave's dishonor

³⁶ Hopewell A.R.P. Church Session Records, April 29, 1837, SCL.

³⁷ Samuel Wells Leland Journal, September 22, September 26, October 24, December 1, 1854, SCL.

contributed to a master's honor also demanded that a master's authority be absolute. Early evangelical churches, especially the Baptists, struggled to square this aspect of slavery with equality in Christ and with what they saw as a responsibility to discipline disorderly, unjust, or cruel behavior on the part of masters who were also church members. Thus there are scattered examples in the Deep South churches of masters being disciplined for mistreating their slaves. In 1799, for instance, Turkey Creek Baptist disciplined a woman named Niswanger for general cantankerousness, including mistreating a slave. "She is said to be a contentious person in her family and 2nd she hath impiously abusd [*sic*] her servant."³⁸

More commonly, especially as the nineteenth century progressed and evangelical churches gathered in greater numbers of masters, some churches seemed reluctant to discipline masters even for the most flagrant crimes against their slaves. In 1828, the session of First Presbyterian Church in Columbia tried member Richard Sandley for the death of one of his slaves, finding "that some time during the past summer...but then residing on his plantation in the country [Sandley] was charged with the death of a negro man & that the same charge was fully acknowledged by Mr. Sandley himself." After hearing Sandley's version of his slave's death, evidently from a case of overwrought punishment, the session "fully acquitted Mr. Sandley of all design to take the life of said negro," resolving only "to Admonish Mr. Sandley in relation to his unhappy affair & caution him against giving way to passion when the life of a fellow creature is concerned." In their verdict, the session walked a fine line between acknowledging Sandley's authority and legitimacy as a master and demanding of him the behavior

³⁸ Turkey Creek Baptist Church Records, October 11, 1799, BHC.

expected of a Christian.³⁹

Records of violence involving slaves, and especially male slaves, reveal both an active regard for honor in relation to other slaves as well as a staggering vulnerability in relation to whites due to the social dynamics and dishonor of servitude. Undoubtedly black women experienced this duality in a similar way, though through violence of a different sort. But for the most part their ordeals remained too sensitive for treatment in a church record book.

Churches also exercised rigorous discipline over slave members' private lives, including marriage and sex. Paradoxically, a process that involved significant concessions on the part of white church members to slaves' claims about their relationships, and likely reinforced slaves' sense of their social identity within the church, may also have contributed to whites' conviction of black shamelessness. In her study of Midway Congregational Church in Liberty County, Georgia, Janet Cornelius observed that while southern law did not recognize or prosecute fornication and adultery among slaves, churches regularly did. Thus, Cornelius wrote, churches like Midway "performed the functions of a divorce and marriage counseling court for slave members." At Midway, according to Cornelius, cases involving slave marriages, adultery, and fornication took up the majority of the time devoted to discipline among the black congregation in the antebellum period.⁴⁰

³⁹ First Presbyterian Church Records (Columbia), December 20, 1828, SCL.

⁴⁰ Janet Cornelius, "Slave Marriages in a Georgia Congregation," in Orville Vernon Burton and Robert C. McMath, eds., *Class, Conflict, and Consensus: Antebellum Southern Community Studies* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1982), 131, 136. In a forthcoming article based on the records of twenty-three Baptist churches in Georgia, Jeff Forret found that black church members were charged with adultery five times more often than whites. Jeff Forret, "Slaves, Sex, and Sin: Adultery, Forced Separation, and Baptist Church Discipline in Middle Georgia," unpublished article, obtained from author, n.d.

The case was much the same at Mechanicsville Baptist Church in Darlington County, South Carolina. From 1815 to 1860, Mechanicsville excluded 62 of its black members. Of 35 cases in which a reason for exclusion was given, 24 (nearly 70%) stated the cause as either adultery or bastardy. The examples of Midway and Mechanicsville illustrate the extent to which white evangelicals acknowledged black unions as legitimate and prosecuted perceived breaches in marital and sexual ethics among black congregants. Throughout the antebellum period, churches expressed their charges and decisions regarding black congregants using language that implicitly acknowledged the reality of the marriage bond that had been violated. For example, in 1830, Antioch Baptist Church in Georgia excommunicated a slave named Judy “for living in a state of adultery [*sic*].” And in 1863, the session of Hopewell Presbyterian Church charged a slave named Mariah with the “sin of violating the marriage bed,” a phrase that hints at the traditional lens through which the session viewed her transgression. Churches also excluded women for having children out of wedlock. In 1835, Turkey Creek Baptist excluded a slave named Elizabeth “for having a child without a husband.”⁴¹

Over the years, the Mechanicsville congregation proved only a little less concerned about male slaves’ behavior. Of 24 exclusions for adultery or fornication from 1815 to 1860, 9 were men. Other churches appear to have followed this pattern. In 1835, a slave named Billy stated before the congregation of the Bethabara Baptist Church of Laurens County, South Carolina, “that he was he supposed the father of a child by a woman, who was not his wife.” He was quickly excluded. In 1842, a committee reported to the

⁴¹ Mechanicsville Baptist Church Records (Darlington County), SCL; Antioch Baptist Church Records, July 17, 1830, MU; Hopewell Presbyterian Church, “Records of Session,” March 28, 1863, SCL; Turkey Creek Baptist Church Records, July 11, 1835, BHC.

congregation of Little River Baptist Church that a slave named Tom “deserves the highest censure of the church for attempting to seduce a woman of his colour.” A year earlier, the church excommunicated a slave named Willis after an investigation proved him guilty of “an attempt of rape.” Sometimes the evidence of misconduct was difficult to deny or misconstrue. In 1848, the Welsh Neck Baptist Church of Darlington County, South Carolina, excluded a slave named Anson, noting, “the principal charge against him is his being infected with a disease which is usually contracted from adulterous practices, & as he entirely exculpates his wife, the only conclusion to which we can come is that he is guilty of adultery.” Unsurprisingly, slave men appear to have been charged with sexual offenses more often than white men.⁴²

Although enslaved people probably saw the advantageous implications of whites’ willingness to hold them to traditional marital and sexual ethics, they also sometimes pushed back, showing an unwillingness to adopt wholesale the definitions and customs of the master class. In 1833, Lewis Ball informed his church that his slave Clarisa had “taken up with another womans husband.” Clarisa, being called upon to answer the charge, “denied the fact further than she washed his cloths and said she was determined to wash for him whether the church said she was right or rong [*sic*].” After some discussion over what exactly the case involved, the church decided that even if they could not accurately define Clarisa’s transgression they could not abide her defiance, and excluded her. Other slaves were excluded for transgressions that similarly offended white sensibility. In 1830, the Poplar Springs Baptist Church excluded a slave named Jack who

⁴² Mechanicsville Baptist Church Records (Darlington County), SCL; Bethabara Baptist Church Records (Laurens County), November 21, 1835, SCL; Litter River Baptist Church Records, April 17, 1841, January 15, 1842, BHC; Welsh Neck Baptist Church Records (Darlington County), July 23, 1848, SCL.

sealed his fate in his trial for having an “unlawful wife” by defiantly declaring, “[h]e would hug the girls when he pleased.” Such declarations hint at the existence of alternate definitions of marriage, partnership, and sexual propriety in the slave quarters, even as slaves in other situations sought the legitimacy and fragile security conferred by the acknowledgment of slave unions in the church.⁴³

Surveying the records of churches that had significant or majority black membership, historians have sometimes asked why enslaved people would submit to increased oversight of their lives. “Why did they remain in a church in which their private lives were so closely scrutinized?” wondered Janet Cornelius of black members at Midway Congregational. Furthermore, black southerners seem disproportionately to have joined denominations that practiced rigorous discipline over all areas of members’ lives. Significantly, in the South only Presbyterian, Baptist, and Methodist churches regularly held disciplinary hearings for black members. Baptists, a denomination that in the South excommunicated nearly 2 percent of their membership annually in the antebellum period, far exceeding either Presbyterians or Methodists in their fervor for discipline, attracted more black converts than either of the other denominations.⁴⁴

The answer to Cornelius’ question has many facets. The attractions of religion for an enslaved people, as well as the complex negotiations between masters and slaves bound by a common religious commitment, have been examined and eloquently described by scholars like Eugene Genovese and Albert J. Raboteau. From one point of

⁴³ Bethabara Baptist Church Records (Laurens County), August 17, 1833, SCL; Poplar Springs Baptist Church Records (Laurens County), September [n.d.], 1830, SCL.

⁴⁴ Cornelius in Burton and McMath, *Class, Conflict, and Consensus*, 135; Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 22-23.

view, the discipline that evangelical churches exercised over even the most intimate details of members' lives might seem like the price slaves paid for the solace of religion and a stronger claim on the obligations of Christian masters. However, the tenacity with which some slaves pursued membership and its obligation to submit to the discipline of the church suggests that other dynamics were at work, as well. The stark contrast between the ritualized social death of slavery, with its accompanying attribution of moral insensitivity to honor and shame, and the clearly marked social identity in the form of church membership that accompanied evangelical conversion, helps to explain both why slaves sought membership and how even the rigors of church discipline contributed to a sense of identity for enslaved people. Church discipline, after all, was an acknowledgment of the moral agency of the individual, an acknowledgement that slaves were sentient members of the evangelical community who had crossed a boundary. How slaves reacted to discipline had direct bearing on their spiritual as well as social identity. If the sting of shame constituted negative evidence of honor, the pangs of guilt and the act of repentance proved the guilty sinner's regenerate status within the evangelical community. The contrast with the social death and dishonor of slavery could not have been greater. Far from being a cost slaves bore for their religion, discipline may have had its own austere attractions.⁴⁵

All this may help account for the fact that slaves excluded from evangelical churches often sought restoration. In his comprehensive study of Edgefield, South Carolina, Orville Vernon Burton remarked on the high number of slaves who rejoined evangelical churches in Edgefield after being excluded. "Whenever slaves were

⁴⁵ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, esp. chapters 5 & 6; Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*.

dismissed from church, they almost inevitably asked to be restored to church membership, and were usually successful.” The records of Mechanicsville Baptist Church qualify Burton’s observation somewhat. Out of 62 blacks excluded from the Mechanicsville congregation from 1815 to 1860, 24 can be found rejoining the church, some after a period of several years. Others no doubt rejoined without leaving a record. Still, the high rate of slaves who rejoined the church even after exclusion is a rough measure of the depth of slaves’ religious commitment as well as the power of the social identity that church membership conveyed.⁴⁶

More than giving slaves a new social identity that contrasted with their lack of a distinct personality in the eyes of honor, evangelicalism provided slaves, especially men, limited paths to increased regard among their own people as well as the white community. The role of slave preachers, deacons, and watchmen in evangelical churches was complex. These figures mediated between their own people and the white population, often winning equal shares of admiration, trust, and suspicion from both groups for their actions. Slaves appointed to one of these stations usually enjoyed an increased importance and stature in the slave community, often serving as central figures for their communities. Nevertheless, even when whites venerated black preachers or deferred to the decisions of black deacons regarding black church members, there remained a clear divide, a chasm between white honor and black dishonor.

W.E.B. Du Bois once wrote of the slave preacher,

⁴⁶ Orville Vernon Burton, *In My Father's House Are Many Mansions: Family and Community in Edgefield, South Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 155; Mechanicsville Baptist Church Records (Darlington County, South Carolina), SCL.

The Preacher is the most unique personality developed by the Negro on American soil. A leader, a politician, an orator, a “boss”, an intriguer, an idealist,— all these he is, and ever, too, the centre of a group of men, now twenty, now a thousand in number. The combination of a certain adroitness with deep-seated earnestness, of tact with consummate ability, gave him his preeminence, and helps him maintain it.⁴⁷

Du Bois’ description, repeated by Eugene Genovese in his account of the slave preacher, echoes many of the qualities associated with honor in the white community. Black preaching in the South encompassed as wide an array of styles and personas as did white preaching. Genovese observed that blacks in southern cities often heard black preachers who were as well or better educated than some of their rural white counterparts, while rural slaves meeting in rough brush arbor churches frequently heard extemporaneous sermons given by one of their own who had a talent for speaking and a familiarity with scripture.⁴⁸

But whatever the style or location, black preachers were the rare figures in the slave community allowed to exhibit in some measure the qualities of natural authority, oratorical ability, and force of personality that the white community lauded in its leaders. And while separated from the world of white honor on account of their race, black preachers accumulated much of the admiration in the black community that accrued to talented preachers and orators among whites. In his travels through the South, Frederick Law Olmsted noticed that nearly every slave community had a revered religious figure:

On almost every large plantation, and in every neighborhood of small ones, there is one man who has come to be considered the head of pastor of the local church. The office among the negroes, as among all other people, confers a certain importance and power. A part of the reverence attaching to the duties is

⁴⁷ William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (A.C. McClurg & Co., 1907), 190-191.

⁴⁸ Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 255-279.

given to the person; vanity and self-confidence are cultivated, and a higher ambition aroused than can usually enter the mind of a slave. The self-respect of the preacher is also often increased by the consideration in which he is held by his master, as well as by his fellows; thus, the preachers generally have an air of superiority to the other negroes.⁴⁹

Nevertheless, and even in cases where whites freely acknowledged the power of black preaching, the line between white honor and black dishonor held fast. Indeed, this was for whites the key distinction. Whites could remain comfortable with the most extreme displays of ingenuity, intelligence, and forcefulness on the part of slaves provided it occurred in the proper context and with this vital distinction maintained. The most highly esteemed black preachers among whites were those who exercised their authority and eloquence from the pulpit in pursuit of souls, but who meekly acknowledged their place once they had left off preaching. Indeed, appropriate humility before whites was part of the job for slave preachers. A stubborn humility on the part of such figures reassured whites that the divide between sacred and secular, between white and black, and between honor and dishonor remained in place. Northern visitors sometimes failed to understand this vital distinction. When Frederick Law Olmsted tried to question a particularly “distinguished” slave preacher on one plantation about his unofficial office and its prominence in the local community, he met only with laughing answers that deflected his questions. The preacher, Olmsted thought, assumed that Olmsted was trying to make fun of him, in spite of Olmsted’s best efforts to convince him otherwise. “I found it impossible to get a serious reply,” wrote a frustrated Olmsted, without realizing that the slave’s impenetrable light heartedness had its roots in the grave reality that to be acknowledged by a white man violated the strict divide that separated

⁴⁹ Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom: A Traveller's Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American States* (New York: Mason Bros, 1861), 260.

slave from free, dishonor from honor.⁵⁰

Slaves who felt the calling to preach could apply to their churches for permission just like white church members. After hearing and considering a request, churches would decide whether the would-be preacher could “exercise” his gift. Churches were not in the habit of granting such licenses indiscriminately to white or black applicants, but the barriers that faced black hopefuls were more substantial. Most churches made a distinction, as well, between “exhorting” and “taking a text,” the former entailing urging religious considerations of a general nature on an audience while the latter included actual biblical exposition, a much more serious matter. In 1809, the members of Big Creek Baptist in Anderson County, South Carolina, reconsidered the gift of “Black Peter,” a slave preacher. The church clerk recorded, “concluded that he is derected [*sic*] to desist from taking a publick text and aiming to preach or advise on purticular head of doctrine from such like the church beleaving [*sic*] him not quallified [*sic*] at this time to go farther than exhortation.” Whether or not Peter followed the church’s restrictions on his gift we cannot know. It likely depended on his audience.⁵¹

A church’s response to aspiring preachers depended on the political environment as well as the personality of the slave himself. Religiously tinged slave rebels like Nat Turner and the alleged insurrectionist Denmark Vesey inspired many churches across the Deep South to restrict the sphere of action granted to slave preachers, or at least to attach more preconditions to their work by the 1820s and 30s. In 1838, “Brother Charles a colloured member...made application to Exercise a publick gift” at Brushy Creek Baptist

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Big Creek Baptist Church Records (Anderson County), August 1, 1809, SCL.

in Greenville County, South Carolina. The church “agreed that he might preach in the daytime in the bounds of the church with the consent [*sic*] of his master.” One Sunday a year later the church clerk recorded, “Preaching by Charles a Coloured member of this church.” Less than a year later, the church appeared abruptly to reverse their course. On receiving a request from a slave named Hampton to preach, the church gathered to hear him exercise his gift before the church, but afterwards decided “that they would withhold from colored members the liberty of preaching.” Seven years later, in 1848, Hampton tried again, applying for “admittance to preach.” The church again frustrated his request, “being a ware that the laws of the land for bid large groups of negros convineing together with out some white person to se to ther Good behaviour.”⁵²

Either Brushy Creek abruptly changed their policy toward black preachers in 1840, or else they were uncomfortable with Hampton on other than religious grounds and so used the law of the land as an excuse, an excuse they had not invoked in earlier cases. Such cases show the unique position of a successful slave preacher, a figure trusted by whites and dependent on their approval, respected among blacks, but all the while excluded strictly from the circle of white honor on account of the symbolic boundaries of slavery.

In churches with large black congregations, white members frequently appointed black deacons to look after the needs and discipline of black members. In many Baptist churches, black deacons served as preachers, as well. In 1854, Mechanicsville Baptist mourned the passing of Adam, a black deacon of long standing in the church. “He had been preaching the Gospel for more than fifty years,” wrote the church’s clerk. Indeed,

⁵² Brushy Creek Baptist Church Records (Greenville County), March 17, 1838, June 22, 1839, May 23, 1840, September 23, 1848, SCL. For a similar case, see Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks*, 66.

Adam had served as a mediator for Mechanicsville's significant black congregation for decades, first appearing in the church's records in 1830, when the church agreed at its next meeting to "take up the subject of appointing one or more black members as help to Bro. Adam to act as deacon." In addition to carrying out the duties of administering aid and discipline, Adam often preached to separate meetings of the black congregation, as well. In the frenzied wake of Nat Turner's failed rebellion in Virginia in 1831, the white members of Mechanicsville moved to increase their oversight of the black congregation, declaring in October 1831, "that our black brethren Adam & Joe do not be at liberty to make any appointment for preaching or other exercise of a religious nature except at the meeting house and that on our regular preaching days." Nevertheless, the white church leaders continued to defer to Adam in matters regarding the care and discipline of the black congregation, and when J.M. Sanders petitioned the church for a letter of dismissal for his slave Wherry in 1835, the church granted his request, "provided bro. Adam was satisfied with the same, which enquiry he was." In 1848, the church appointed a committee of black members to assist Adam in his duties, effectively acknowledging his central role and creating a mirror image of the white diaconate to assist him.⁵³

Significantly, black leadership within the church frequently followed already established patterns of leadership within the slave community. In Liberty County, Georgia, Midway Congregational Church formed the epicenter of the Rev. Charles C. Jones' efforts to evangelize the South's slaves. Janet Cornelius found that in the antebellum period Midway employed four "selectmen" and nearly 30 "watchmen" to oversee the spiritual needs of black church members. Toney Stevens, a slave, served as a

⁵³ Mechanicsville Baptist Church Records (Darlington County), September 25, 1854; October 1, 1831; October 17, 1835; June 25, 1848, SCL.

full-time selectman and preacher for the slave community at Midway. Cornelius also found that many of the selectmen and watchmen at Midway were overseers and foremen on the surrounding plantations, positions that betokened white trust and established them as mediators between the white and black communities in both spiritual and temporal affairs. Erskine Clarke, who studied the same community and described in detail the formation of official black leadership in Liberty County, wrote that black selectmen and watchmen “carved out visible, public space within Liberty County for black leadership.” The importance of these offices within the black community probably cannot be overstated.⁵⁴

There is a tendency among historians to lament that the meanings implicit in evangelical rituals and religion were never fully realized in the case of the South’s slaves. We would do better, though, to look closely at what evangelicalism actually meant to enslaved people who no doubt had few illusions about its power to effect a material change in their condition. This chapter has argued that one way of understanding what evangelicalism represented in relation to slavery is to evaluate slaves’ position in the evangelical community vis-a-vis their position in the moral community of honor in areas such as ritual, church discipline, and the space that existed in the evangelical church for black leadership. In a very real way, slaves experienced the evangelical community as a contradiction of their status as slaves in an honor culture. Even as southern whites carefully arranged their rituals to mirror their racially stratified society, slaves’

⁵⁴ Cornelius in Burton and McMath, *Class, Conflict, and Consensus*, 134; Erskine Clarke, *Dwelling Place: A Plantation Epic* (New Haven Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005), 208-212 (quote on 209). Clarke notes that much of the work of this body involved hearing cases relating to slave marriages. See also Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks*, 65-67.

participation in rituals like baptism and the Lord's Supper had inescapable symbolic implications for those who had eyes to see. And even if slaves' dishonored status influenced the discipline of the church, discipline itself remained a striking acknowledgement of the moral agency that slaves possessed as Christians. The power and depth of these spiritual and psychological resources only became evident in their fullness in the years after emancipation.

While evangelical religion did not free the South's slaves, and in fact became complicit in their enslavement, it paradoxically also established important limits and counterweights to the social death and dishonor of slavery. As qualified as it was, the acknowledgment of slaves as legitimate members of the evangelical community stood in marked contrast to other areas of southern life. In southern courts slave testimony was rarely admitted and slaves were treated under some areas of the law as property, with no will of their own. While most southerners, of course, knew enough about their slaves to know better, this situation was in keeping with the logic of slaves' position within the moral community of honor, in which the slave had no standing. In contrast, within evangelical churches slaves were asked to testify to an experience of grace that ushered them into a new relationship with God and their fellow Christians. Strictly speaking, according to the logic of honor, the demands of church membership made little sense when applied to a slave. White evangelicals in churches across the Deep South struggled with this contradiction throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, while black evangelicals embraced it.

From a broader perspective, much of the complexity of paternalistic and proslavery ideology of southern white evangelicals can be seen as an attempt to reconcile the

contradictions between these two understandings of slaves' status. The paternalism described by Eugene Genovese and others matured alongside evangelicalism in the South, and the family metaphor that paternalistic and Christian masters employed to describe slavery served, if not totally to reconcile, at least to contain and describe this contradiction in a way that matched and made sense of southerners' experience. The ideology of paternalism allowed white southern evangelicals to acknowledge slaves' humanity and individuality while at the same time asserting their dependence and subjugation. The metaphor of the family served to blunt both the force of slaves' dishonor and the potential of their religious identity. It is impossible to fully evaluate evangelicalism's effects on southern society without taking both into account.

V. "A Voice at its Full Thunder": Evangelical Oratory, Honor, and the Self

When Samuel Wells Leland visited his family in Columbia, South Carolina, in 1854, he immediately heard that “some distinguished ministers of the Methodist Church in Columbia” were in town for their annual conference. Leland, a Presbyterian, nevertheless took advantage of every opportunity to hear the visiting Methodists preach, and he recorded an atmosphere of crowded churches and expectant crowds that waited to hear the more famous preachers ply their craft and consumed multiple sermons every day of the conference. Leland declined to attend a sermon by the famed William Capers, “as I have often heard him,” but attended a sermon by Methodist Bishop Lovick Pierce. “The church was filled to overflowing,” remembered Leland, “and although the galleries even were occupied, by the whites, yet hundreds were without seats.” Pierce, buoyed by the occasion and the crowd, lived up to his reputation as an impressive pulpit orator. “He preach[ed] from the text ‘and I determind [*sic*] to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified, etc.’” wrote Leland in his journal. “He fully came up to the general expectation, and was at times thrillingly eloquent.”¹

The Methodists that Leland heard in Columbia in 1854 represented an important variety of a central cultural figure in the South—the orator. Oratory was arguably more important in the cultural atmosphere of the South than it was elsewhere in the nation, and the orator was inextricably bound up in the public world of politics, religion, influence, and honor in the South. This chapter focuses on the intersection of evangelical oratory

¹ Samuel Wells Leland Journal, November 19, 1854, South Caroliniana Library (SCL).

and the traditional honor culture of the South, focusing mainly on clergy from South Carolina and Georgia between the end of the Revolution and the Civil War, a period encompassing evangelicalism's greatest period of growth in the region. As producers of public speech in the South, evangelical preachers were inescapably related to themes of influence, mastery, and honor in a largely oral and auditory culture. Evangelical clergy gave addresses on important occasions, argued points of theology in public debates that held the potential for honor or shame, paid close attention to the physical and performative aspects of their craft, and took pride in their ability to reach into the deep recesses of the human heart. Evangelical preachers interpreted their abilities and successes as a mixture of oratorical skill and the influence of the spirit, and they developed a uniquely evangelical style of celebrating powerful oratory that emphasized the humility of the orator and the influence of the spirit alongside descriptions of heroic feats of eloquence and inspiration.

The ancient historical link between oratory and honor turned on the ability of orators to influence their audiences and compel them into action. Traditionally, orators had aimed to influence the members of their audience in their political or military capacity, but evangelical oratory aimed to influence a new conception of the self that was advancing throughout the Atlantic world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and which was closely associated with evangelicalism itself. Thus, evangelicals claimed a place for themselves within one of the most hallowed spheres of honor through their mastery over an aspect of the human personality that traditional oratory and honor rarely contemplated.

In an address to the Euphradian and Clariosophic debating societies at South Carolina College in 1856, Presbyterian minister and former college president James Henley Thornwell explained why such societies were important to a young man's education. Speaking of Americans in general, but clearly addressing his young southern audience in particular, Thornwell linked the ability to speak well directly to success in society. "No people make such a constant demand upon the viva vox as our own," he said, "and among none is the facility of public speaking so indispensable to success in every walk of life... The speech is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end of every enterprise whether little or great." Thornwell urged his audience to use the power of the spoken word wisely. "Among a people of such itching ears, it is manifestly of the last importance that glib tongues should be cultivated."²

Thornwell laid out for his audience a hierarchy of communication that placed the orator above the writer and the philosopher. Good public speaking, he said, was harder than writing and demanded a quicker mind than did philosophy. Comparing the orator and the philosopher, Thornwell argued that while their aims might be similar and their knowledge comparable, the orator progressed through the "golden chain" of logic more rapidly. "The one does instantly, with the promptness of instinct or inspiration, what the other does slowly, heavily, critically." Thornwell obviously, but perhaps surprisingly considering his subsequent reputation as one of the South's leading intellectuals, considered himself more orator than philosopher.³

Most importantly, orators were able to influence their audiences in a way that no

² Semi-Centennial Address to the Euphradian and Clariosophic Societies, South Carolina College, December, 1856, 4-5, James Henley Thornwell Papers, SCL.

³ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

other form of address could match. The link between the orator and his audience was more direct, more immediate than that between a writer and a reader. In addition to this, Thornwell recognized that the spoken word reigned supreme in a society that possessed only marginal rates of literacy. “The press with us has not superseded the living voice.” The orator’s influence derived not only from skill or knowledge or immediacy, but also from the quality of self-mastery. Thornwell harked back to Cicero, who had placed the orator at the apex of human accomplishment because, said Thornwell, “He is master of himself, & being master of himself is enabled to become the master of others.” As Thornwell explained to his audience, the orator’s ability to influence those around him and to become their “master” was the central explanation for the important place of the spoken word in their culture. “Whatever may be the case in other lands, here a man must speak & speak well, if he expects to acquire & maintain permanent influence in society. [T]he test of excellence is, ‘let us hear him,’ & if he cannot pass this ordeal, he need never hope to rise to distinction or to produce any lasting effect upon his own generation.”⁴

Thornwell did not have to prove his theories to the young men in his audience. They knew the power and importance of public speech in their society. Thornwell had only to point to past members of their own societies to prove his point. He reminded them of Hugh Swinton Legaré, one of the most accomplished orators and influential statesmen the college had ever produced. He pointed them to the long shadow of William Harper, an alumnus and statesman who had served on the college’s board of trustees and who was famous for his ability to capture an audience and bend them to his will. “Instead of

⁴ Ibid., 5, 11.

playing with the lighter feelings,” Thornwell said of Harper, “he stormed the very fortress of the will. He woke the prisoned soul. He bound the hearer hand and foot & carried him whither he would...he ruled, like a wizard, the world of the heart & could call up its sunshine or draw down its showers...He left his auditors no time to criticize—they could only act.”⁵

In praising the skill of Legaré and Harper as orators, Thornwell’s unmistakable message to his audience was that their ability to master others with their voices was linked directly to their fame as statesmen and their honorable position in society. In praising their ability Thornwell also tacitly praised himself. The debating societies at South Carolina College extended Thornwell an invitation to address them on the subject of oratory because they acknowledged his expertise and experience in the area. By 1856, Thornwell had built a reputation through his tenure as professor and then president at the college, and as a pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Columbia. When he addressed the societies in 1856, he held a professorship at the Columbia Theological Seminary. When Benjamin Morgan Palmer wrote his friend’s biography after Thornwell’s death, he recalled that as an orator Thornwell was neither emotional nor dramatic, but that his arguments proceeded with an inexorable force—“Logic on fire,” one observer called it.⁶

As Thornwell’s audience fully understood, the ability to speak well in front of others was an essential part of the repertoire of any man who hoped to win public

⁵ Ibid., 21-23, 26-27.

⁶ On debating societies at South Carolina College, see Daniel Walker Hollis, *University of South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1951), 230-254. On Thornwell’s speaking abilities, see James Oscar Farmer, *The Metaphysical Confederacy: James Henley Thornwell and the Synthesis of Southern Values* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986), 61; Benjamin Morgan Palmer, *The Life and Letters of James Henley Thornwell* (Richmond: Whittet & Shepperson, 1875), 392.

acclaim. This was, perhaps, no different than it had ever been, as Thornwell's enlistment of Cicero attested. As far as Thornwell and his audience were concerned the orator was a mode of humanity that had existed forever. Aside from the truth or untruth of this assumption, in the oral culture of the South the orator undoubtedly occupied a special place that was closely tied to the public world of honor, shame, and renown.

Bertram Wyatt-Brown has argued that the South was an "ascriptive" culture, in which external characteristics such as gender, race, and age automatically lent their bearer the internal qualities associated with these characteristics in the eyes of the community. Thus, a certain amount of regard and privilege adhered simply to the quality of being a man, or being a woman, or being white. As long as an individual did not wander too far outside the boundaries associated with her role, she could expect to enjoy the benefits of that role as her right. But for southern men especially, life in the popular and public sphere involved more than the simple status of white manhood. The male world of honor involved the active pursuit and defense of a reputation, engendering competition and conflict in a variety of public spaces.⁷

Many of the public spaces in which men vied for honor and reputation were tied to recreation. Some of these activities brought them into conflict with evangelical ideals and modes of conduct. Shooting matches, horse races, gambling, and other forms of entertainment were certainly just plain fun for many southern men, but they also formed part of a public sphere in which men defined themselves. There was nothing intrinsic to any of these activities that made them by nature part of the culture of honor in the South. Rather, it was the fact that they took place in public and involved performance and

⁷ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "The Ideal Typology and Antebellum Southern History: A Testing of a New Approach," *Societas*, 5 (1975), 4.

competition that made them especially susceptible to implications of honor and shame.⁸

Other areas of life in the South, slightly more formal than horse racing, had this same characteristic. The possibilities of honor and shame were naturally even more pronounced in areas of life that were explicitly public. Politics in the North was certainly subject to the currents of honor and shame, as the Burr-Hamilton duel abundantly proved, but where in the North honor was part of the political sphere due to its impact on a politician's usefulness and ability to operate effectively, in the South it sometimes seemed that politics was simply another facet of honor. In 1805, Edward Hooker, a northern Tutor at the new South Carolina College, commented, "I find it is here considered a great thing to get in favor with the people, to acquire a kind of control over their minds and be looked up to by them as a leader." Hooker found in talking to many of his new acquaintances that the avenue of influence did not matter nearly so much as the influence itself. One could be an officer in the militia, a lawyer, a politician, or just about anything that allowed one access to the public's regard.⁹

As Thornwell assured his audience in 1856, nothing secured this access to public recognition more certainly than the ability to speak, and to speak well. Young men throughout the South took this to heart, and throughout the first half of the nineteenth century southern colleges sustained what one historian has termed a "cult of oratory."

⁸ For an examination of recreation and male culture, see Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 339-350.

⁹ See, for example, Joanne B. Freeman, "Duelling as Politics: Reinterpreting the Burr-Hamilton Duel," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 53 (April 1996), 289-318. On honor and politics in the South, see Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Honor & Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, the Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996). Edward Hooker, "Diary of Edward Hooker, 1805-1808," 880-881, SCL.

Debating societies such as the ones which Thornwell addressed were part of nearly every collegiate experience, and participation in them, while voluntary, was nearly universal. As a student (and already a Baptist minister) at South Carolina College, Basil Manly was a member of the Clariosophic Society, where he began to build his reputation as one of the finest orators in the South. In their memories of college, southern men often evinced more fondness for these fraternal societies than they did for their alma maters and took more satisfaction in their successes in this forum than in their other academic pursuits. Such societies “served as a combination of political, social, fraternal, and intellectual clubs,” and students participated in them with a degree of seriousness that they gave to little else in their college lives. Societies usually held weekly debates, assigned members to argue the affirmative and negative, and collected libraries from which members could draw arguments. Debaters devoted hours to preparation, and interpreted success and defeat (as judged by a vote) in terms of honor gained or lost. Debates frequently focused on subjects of honor, such as the ever popular “Should not the seduction of a female under the promise of marriage be punished with imprisonment or death?” In their form and intent, as well as in the content of the debates they held, societies such as the Euphradian and Clariosophic societies at South Carolina College were born of the assumption that the surest path to honor, fame, and influence in the oral culture of the South was a speech well argued and winsomely delivered. Even the subject matter at southern colleges was arranged with the goal of providing orators with the raw materials from which to fashion eloquent addresses. When Virginian Hugh Blair Grigsby attended Yale in the 1820s, he was disappointed to find what he thought an undue emphasis on mathematics, as opposed to the classical subjects of use in making speeches. He wrote

home in disgust, “Examine the history of every orator, and of every writer, and you will find none who ever studied mathematicks attentively.” The ability to quote Cicero was far more important to the aspiring orator than being able to do a sum.¹⁰

The ability to speak well was so highly valued in the traditional culture of the South in part because of the way in which speech itself was conceived. There was precious little distance in the minds of most southerners between what a man appeared to be and what he, in fact, was, and speech was an important part of this appearing. External traits and characteristics were taken to be accurate representations of the inner self, or, perhaps more accurately, were considered to be of greater importance than any inner self. An English observer travelling in the South once noted that southerners paid close attention to all a person’s observable behaviors, “your temperament, speech, look and act, are all taken by him; and if you can get at the tablet of his mind, you will find...your exact worth written there upon.” In an oral culture, the correlation between outer appearance and inner worth led southerners to invest greater significance in the form than in the function of speech. This significance took for granted a harmony between the virtue and inner qualities of a man and the ability to phrase and polish a sentence that pleased the ear. If a man was “an eloquent orator, enchanting storyteller, or witty raconteur,” he could gain a reputation and wield some degree of influence based on the assumption that his abilities bespoke deeper qualities of his person. “What he was,” Wyatt-Brown wrote

¹⁰ Hollis, *University of South Carolina*, 230; Robert F. Pace, *Halls of Honor: College Men in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 68-69; A. James Fuller, *Chaplain to the Confederacy: Basil Manly and Baptist Life in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 30-31; Grigsby quoted in Michael O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 30. Of course, Yale had its own literary societies.

of such a man, “was intimately related to how he used his tongue.”¹¹

Perhaps no one illustrates the deep psychological connections between the spoken word, influence, power, and honor in the nineteenth century South better than Henry Hughes. Hughes, a megalomaniacal Mississippian who regularly beseeched God in his diary to help him in his quest to dominate the world, was sure that his abilities as an orator were the key to this destiny. “Almighty God let me be a despot,” Hughes wrote in a typical entry, before adding as a palliative, “A kind one; I would be a kind one.” In order to prepare for his destiny, Hughes read obsessively about law, morality, politics, and especially oratory. “The orations of Demosthenes will be my study,” he recorded in 1848. “When I shall by a study of these speeches, have made myself equal to the Athenian orator, my own powers & opportunities will enable me to exceed any orator that ever was.” A few months later he wrote, “I have finished the perusal of Cicero on the Character of an Orator.” Hughes was convinced that greatness was near at hand. “The tide is approaching; I stand ready with my bark.”¹²

Hughes’s diary vividly illustrates the depth of the cultural and psychological roots that attached to the silver-tongued orator in the South. In his nearly delusional state, Hughes nevertheless saw clearly that the ability to wield words was one of the most powerful and influential forms of expression in his culture. The orator that Hughes hoped to be used his words to influence others, to mold them, and, finally, to master them as Cicero had predicted. As one anthropologist observed of honor in other parts of the

¹¹ Charles Casey, quoted in Kenneth R. Wesson, “Traveler’s Accounts of the Southern Character: Antebellum and Early Postbellum Period,” *Southern Studies* 17, no. 3 (1978), 311; Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 47-48.

¹² Stephen William Berry, *Princes of Cotton: Four Diaries of Young Men in the South, 1848-1860* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 253, 224, 231, 225, 15.

world, “the essence of honor is personal autonomy...for to command over others enhances it, while obedience restricts it.” In the oral culture of the South, then, because the spoken word was a source of authority, communal regard, and power, it was also a source of honor.¹³

Anyone who, like Hughes, hoped to rise to power and prominence among his peers through the use of his tongue also sought out opportunities to be heard. In the South such opportunities were not too difficult to find. “No class, rank, profession or pursuit is exempt from the necessity of an occasional speech,” Thornwell reminded his audience in 1856. Indeed, nearly any occasion in the nineteenth-century South deserved an oration by the local talent. Before his career as a Methodist began, William Capers took a year off from South Carolina College and began to eye a career in politics. “I was looking with downright ambition (perhaps I should say vanity) to enter the Legislature as soon as I should be of age,” he remembered. Consequently, he began to look for places near his home in Sumter District to make speeches and build a reputation. He managed to get picked as the orator for a Fourth of July celebration in the district and gave a speech of the sort that could secure a future in politics. “The oration was long enough,” Capers remembered, “and sufficiently spiced with youthful patriotism, the Black river boys, the pride of the country, and all that. And besides having the whole country around to hear me, there was a great dinner; and at the dinner just such a sort of toast as it tickled my vanity to hear.” With his reputation as an orator in hand, Capers thought he was on his way.¹⁴

¹³ Julian Pitt-Rivers, “Honour,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, David L. Sills, ed., vol. 6 (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 1991), 506.

¹⁴ Thornwell, “Semi-Centennial Address,” 4-5; William M Wightman, *Life of William Capers, D. D., One*

By 1856 the tradition of evangelical oratory was already more than a century old. In England in the mid-eighteenth century, George Whitefield competed with circus entertainments for the attention of crowds in the open air at Moorfields, and in America huge crowds gathered to hear the famous evangelist when he travelled through the country in the 1740s. In Philadelphia, Benjamin Franklin estimated that Whitefield could be heard by thirty thousand people at once, and mirthfully related the story of a friend who had attended Whitefield's preaching determined not to contribute any money to the offering and found himself emptying his pockets into the plate instead. Another observer remembered of Whitefield that "Every accent of his voice, and every motion of his body, speaks, and both are natural and unaffected...He has a great mastery of words, but studies much plainness of speech."¹⁵

In the South, the clergy were seen as a natural branch of the oratorical arts. When Hugh Blair Grigsby published his *Letters of a South-Carolinian* in 1827, it consisted mainly of sketches of prominent southern orators among whom several were members of the clergy. Nevertheless, the evangelical clergy occupied a unique place in the South's culture of public words. As messengers of God, the task the preacher set for himself was to use his voice to save sinners, and his voice was a means to this end. In tales of camp meetings, revivals, and congregational awakenings, evangelicals described conviction

of the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Including an Autobiography (Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1902), 50-51.

¹⁵ Account in D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 77; Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Frank Woodworth Pine (Garden City Pub. Co., 1916), 194, 197; Whitefield quote in Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 49.

and conversion as the result of a shrouded and mysterious mixture of God's spirit and the preacher's skill. Donald Mathews wrote of the "aura of power and perhaps even of mystery" that sprang up around the evangelical preacher, but also noted that this aura was yoked to and in tension with the sense that a preacher was a representation of his congregation, often chosen by them as a reflection of their social and religious sense of themselves. Preachers were to model Christ in his servanthood. Thus Mathews wrote of the "responsibility of a talented few to convert, nurture, and guide the many."¹⁶

Evangelical preachers fully acknowledged that their abilities were from God, that they were instruments used by Him, for His glory, and in the service of His people. However, they struggled to escape the implications of their abilities in a culture that placed so much emphasis on their talents. Throughout the era leading up to the Civil War evangelicals in the Deep South recorded the stories of their accomplishments as God's messengers with a complex mixture of humility and pride. They worried that people only came to their meetings to be entertained; they worried that the manner and form of their speaking would, for good or bad, overshadow the message that they preached. They lamented that sometimes people went away admiring the messenger without having heard the message. And yet, through many of the accounts of evangelical preaching in the Deep South there runs a vein of deep satisfaction that people listened.¹⁷

Whether there were too many opportunities to hear evangelical oratory or too few depended on one's perspective. As early as 1767, Anglican itinerant Charles Woodmason had complained of evangelizing preachers, a "sett of rambling fellows" he called them,

¹⁶ O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order*, 640; Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 84-85.

¹⁷ Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, 84, 85.

who travelled the backcountry stirring up dissent against the Anglican Church. But in 1805, Edward Hooker, the northern tutor, wrote to a friend, “It is much to be regretted that there is not stated, regular preaching in Columbia. Were it not for the Methodists, there would be little or none of any kind.” The Methodist insurgency that began in earnest after the Revolution produced figures such as Francis Asbury, who itinerated thousands of miles with preaching as his central mission. Writing from Charleston to his friend Edward Dromgoole in Virginia in 1790, Methodist Reuben Ellis related Asbury’s recent visit to that town. “The public exercises were attended with such power as I believe was never seen here before,” he wrote, “...I think Bro. Asbury preach’d the greatest sermon that ever I hear[d].” On one trip through North Carolina in 1780 Asbury preached nineteen times from June 17 to July 24, roughly once every two or three days, to gatherings ranging from thirty to four hundred people. And many of Asbury’s lieutenants preached even more frequently than he. Nevertheless, Methodist James Jenkins would remember that in the decade following the Revolution and before his conversion, he heard only two sermons in his part of South Carolina. The situation had certainly changed by 1854, at least in the urban environs of Columbia, South Carolina, where Samuel Wells Leland recorded attending three sermons on one Sunday in 1854.¹⁸

Even in the years preceding the explosion of growth that accompanied the Great Revival at the turn of the century, evangelicals realized grudgingly that their preaching was a means of entertainment for a significant part of their audience. In 1785, Asbury

¹⁸ Woodmason in Alan Gallay, ed., *Voices of the Old South: Eyewitness Accounts, 1528-1861* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 190-196; Edward Hooker to David Lilly, May 8, 1807, Edward Hooker Papers, SCL; Ellis to Dromgoole, Feb. 23, 1790, Edward Dromgoole Papers, Southern Historical Collection (SHC); Francis Asbury, *Journal and Letters*, Elmer T. Clark, ed., (London: Epworth Press, 1958); James Jenkins, *Experience, Labours, and Gospel Sufferings of Rev. James Jenkins, of the South Carolina Conference* (n.p.: Printed for the author, 1842), 31-32; Samuel Wells Leland Journal, Dec. 3, 1854, SCL;

arrived at a preaching stop: “here was a large assemblage of people; some to pay and receive taxes; some to drink; and some to hear me preach: I gave them a rough talk...” Despite genuine efforts to awaken their audiences to the serious and eternal dangers they faced, early evangelicals such as Asbury noted that their audiences sometimes ignored the message and came to see the messenger. Traveling the Edisto Circuit in South Carolina in 1788, Asbury noted with his characteristic but insightful pessimism, “the people are insensible, and, I fear, are more in love with some of Christ’s messengers than with Christ.”¹⁹

But even as solemn and serious an ambassador of Christ as Asbury recognized that this admiration could be useful, and that a graceful address might sometimes be of more use than a “rough talk.” One of the qualities that Asbury valued most in his recruits to the Methodist cause, aside from spiritual seriousness, was the ability to speak well. Upon meeting future Methodist great Hope Hull in 1786, Asbury described the young Hull in his Journal as “a smooth-tongued pretty speaker, a youth that promises fair for future usefulness.”²⁰ Being a smooth-tongued speaker did not assure, of course, that the evangelical message would go down easily or that its messengers would be universally admired. In the decades surrounding the turn of the century, Methodist meetings were broken up and Methodist ministers harassed and even attacked on a regular basis.²¹

Observers frequently commented on the style of evangelical oratory, and not always favorably. Edward Hooker was a meticulous observer of the evangelical style in

¹⁹ Asbury, *Journal and Letters*, Jan. 28, 1785; March 17, 1788.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, March 4, 1786.

²¹ Cynthia Lynn Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind, 1770-1810* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 151.

South Carolina. Writing to his sister in Connecticut in 1808, Hooker described the preaching at Washington Street Methodist Church in Columbia. He found that the preaching was in some ways familiar to his northern Congregationalist ears. “In both churches the preaching is extemporaneous; without even notes,” he wrote. “The sermons of the Methodists are often warm and animated even to an extreme;—sometimes ingeniously contrived and decently delivered,” he wrote with qualified approval, “but too frequently ungrammatical[,] disconnected and without solidity.”²²

Descriptions of evangelical preaching consistently remarked on the emotional impetus and volume of the address. Writing in his diary in 1805, Hooker expressed his displeasure with the preaching he had heard that day in Columbia at the Methodist Church. “A great part of the sermon was certainly bordering on extravagance,” he wrote. “I was glad to see the preacher warm, as every preacher should be: but I was sorry to see his warmth not in the least tempered by judgement.” Hooker remembered the sermon as “all one uninterrupted current of affected pathos and monotonous roar.” Roaring was a common characterization of evangelical preaching for much of the nineteenth century. Indeed, to some the main purpose of this type of preaching seemed to be to prove the stamina of the preacher. Writing from Sumterville, South Carolina, in 1838, James Hemphill wrote to his brother William, “The Baptist preacher here is a roarer—he can talk longer and stronger than any man extant.”²³ On his trip through the South in the 1850s, Frederick Law Olmsted attended a religious service somewhere in South Carolina or Georgia. The main object of interest for Olmsted was the figure and style of the

²² Edward Hooker to Sally Hooker, March 27, 1808, Edward Hooker Papers, SCL.

²³ Hooker, “Diary of Edward Hooker,” 852-853; James Hemphill to William R. Hemphill, May 31, 1838, Hemphill Family Papers, Duke University (DU).

preacher, “who nearly all the time cried aloud at the utmost stretch of his voice, as if calling to someone a long distance off.” Olmsted noted that “as he was gifted with a strong imagination, and possessed a good deal of dramatic power, he kept the attention of the people very well.”²⁴

Evangelical clergy and laity frequently interpreted addresses filled with pathos and delivered at high volume differently than did outside observers. Writing home to his father from college in Chapel Hill in 1817, future Baptist minister Iveson L. Brookes related that he had heard three sermons that Sunday, of which he had liked the first the most. “Old Brother Brown,” wrote Brookes, had given a sermon “fraught with truth[,] dressed in simplicity & expressed in power suited to alarm sinners.”²⁵

As evangelicals slowly climbed toward the ideal of an “enlightened and refined people” in the nineteenth century, they continued to value the emotional and impassioned style of address that Edward Hooker heard in Columbia, but they also began to place increasing emphasis on eloquence. And despite stock images of roaring Baptists and shouting Methodists, the evangelical denominations had always had their exemplars of eloquence. Unsurprisingly, some of the more eloquent and polished evangelical orators in the Deep South were to be found in urban centers, especially Charleston. Richard Furman, progenitor of a distinguished Baptist line, became the pastor of the Baptist Church in Charleston in 1787, and was perhaps the most prominent Baptist in the South in the early years of the nineteenth century. Furman was distinguished throughout his life as a preacher and public orator. Baptist historian David Benedict, upon visiting

²⁴ Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States: With Remarks of Their Economy* (New York: Dix & Edwards, 1856), 455, 456.

²⁵ Iveson L. Brookes to Jonathan Brookes, Oct. 19, 1817, Iveson Brookes Papers, SHC.

Charleston and hearing Furman, noted in his diary, “he is a very correct extempore speaker.” In 1825, Joseph Cook remembered Furman’s preaching style as refined, natural, and powerful. “When standing in the sacred desk, he was completely at home,” Cook recalled. “His language was chaste, and, though simple, yet dignified and forcible.” And although Furman’s style pleased his urbane audience, he still warned them of their danger in warm terms. “When warning the wicked to flee from the wrath to come,” Cook recalled, “he was awfully impressive.”²⁶

For some in evangelical circles, oratorical eloquence was most admired when accompanied by the cooler fires of reason. Presbyterians had long been established in the lowcountry of South Carolina and Georgia, and while Presbyterians were not (usually) given to roaring or shouting, they resided firmly in the evangelical tradition and originated some of the first camp-meetings of the Great Revival in South Carolina around the turn of the century. Lowcountry Presbyterian divines drew on a long tradition of Reformed preaching that emphasized a rational rhetorical style but believed deeply in the power of language and argument to move the spirit. Many Presbyterians, such as Charleston’s Josiah Smith, had welcomed George Whitefield and his refined but emotional style during the first Great Awakening in the 1740s, and continued to look back to him as an exemplar of the ideal preaching style that mixed correct doctrine, a dignified style of address, and emotional appeal. In the nineteenth century, as Erskine Clarke observed, Presbyterians relied on “the union of correct doctrine with an

²⁶ David Benedict, *A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America, and Other Parts of the World* (L. Colby, 1850), 703; David Benedict, *Fifty Years Among the Baptists* (New York: Sheldon, 1860), 57; Joseph B. Cook, *The Good and Faithful Servant Approved and Honoured by His Divine Master: A Funeral Sermon, Occasioned by the Much Lamented Death of the Rev. Richard Furman, D.D., Pastor Of the Baptist Church in Charleston, S.C* (Charleston, S.C., 1826), 34-36, SCL.

evangelical fervor” in their preaching. Thus, Presbyterian pulpit oratory featured “long and logical but intense sermons” that were addressed to the mind but aimed at the heart.²⁷

Methodists had their own apostles of eloquence, although in the early years of Methodism in the Deep South eloquence was as much a liability as an asset to the cause of Christ. In the 1780s in Charleston, it was the eloquent oratory of the Irish Methodist William Hammet that led a contingent of Methodists in that town to rebel against Asbury’s leadership. Methodist historian F.A. Mood described Hammet as “a man of attractive bearing, courteous in his manners, and one ‘whose pulpit performances had acquired for him almost unrivalled popularity.’” Soon after his arrival in Charleston, many of the city’s Methodists began demanding that he be appointed there, impressed with Hammet’s ability to preach in a style that attracted the city’s elite. “Here, in Charleston,” wrote Mood, “he found himself to be the ‘star’. Persons who before had despised the [Methodists] now crowded to hear the great Irish orator; and hung, in breathless attention, upon his lips.” When Asbury refused to appoint him as a preacher in Charleston, Hammet became the leader of a schismatic movement in the Methodist church in Charleston that lasted until his death.²⁸

But eloquence alone was not sufficient for the evangelical task. Indeed, eloquence without impact made an orator vulnerable to intimations of vanity or ineffectiveness. One night in 1854, Samuel Wells Leland listened “amongst a dense crowd” in Columbia,

²⁷ Erskine Clarke, *Our Southern Zion: A History of Calvinism in the South Carolina Low Country, 1690-1990* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1996), 80-81, 170-173. For an important strain of rationalism in the southern clergy's writing and preaching, see E. Brooks Holifield, *The Gentlemen Theologians: American Theology in Southern Culture, 1795-1860* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1978).

²⁸ Francis Asbury Mood, *Methodism in Charleston: A Narrative of the Chief Events Relating to the Rise and Progress of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, S.C., with Brief Notices of the Early Ministers Who Labored in That City* (Nashville, Tenn., 1856), 48-49, 55-56.

South Carolina, to an hour and a half sermon by the Methodist Dr. Joseph Cross. Leland, a Presbyterian, was not as impressed with Cross as he had been with Cross's fellow Methodist Lovick Pierce earlier in the day. Leland complained of Cross, "His discourse was filled from beginning to the end, with gorgeous descriptions, and poetic effusions, keeping the mind continually on the stretch, gratifying, but not improving the hearer." Sometimes, for a variety of reasons, even the most earnest and eloquent orator could not reach the depths of the heart that evangelical preaching sought. William Martin described his friend Whitefoord Smith in his journal as the quintessential orator, possessed of a wonderful voice, an evocative imagination, and a plentiful vocabulary that "captivated" the large crowds at the Methodist church in Columbia. "But it is to be feared," wrote Martin, "most of them come to hear, and admire the preacher, while they are unmoved by the awful subject he presents, and go away not only pleased with the preacher and his sermon, but also with themselves." And in a comment that captured the essence of the goal of evangelical oratory, Martin lamented, "the great deep of their hearts is not broken up."²⁹

As the nineteenth century progressed, observers increasingly identified a southern brand of preaching that employed the dramatic potential of the gospel subject to fuel oratorical performances that aimed to save souls. In 1847 Virginia Moses Hoge wrote a relative that the northern-born preacher at his Presbyterian church in Richmond did not preach "Southern sermons," by which Hoge meant that the good man's sermons contained "no bursts of passion, no involuntary emotion, no sudden and splendid inspiration, bearing a man away from his manuscript and from his commonplaces as in a

²⁹ Samuel Wells Leland journal, Nov. 19, 1854, SCL; William Martin journal, Sept. 30, 1842, SCL;

chariot of fire.”³⁰

Part of what Hoge identified as a characteristically southern style was a special attachment among southern clergy and congregations to extemporaneous preaching. Reading out an address interrupted many of the orator’s natural rhythms and prevented the harmony of distinct elements that produced a convincing display of oratorical prowess and spiritual power. In 1860, Baptist historian David Benedict thought that an early preference for extempore sermons was fast dying out among Baptists nationally, but southerners appear to have maintained a strong preference for the inspired and extempore address. The objection of southern congregations, as Basil Manly explained to his son in 1844, was not “against writing sermons,” but “against reading them to the congregation.” William Capers’ biographer claimed that out of the thousands of sermons the great man had given in his career, he had written out only a half-dozen sermon outlines.³¹

If speaking extemporaneously, as many of the evangelical clergy did, it helped to have an inspirational subject. In this regard, evangelical orators were blessed with one of oratory’s essential accouterments: a subject with sufficient breadth, depth, and dramatic potential to support inspired flights of eloquence. In a culture that generally acknowledged the broad outlines of Christianity, if not always the specific tenets of evangelicalism, there could hardly have been any weightier subject than the fate of one’s soul. Evangelical preachers took full advantage of their solemn subject, portraying the message of the gospel as a dramatic narrative of sin and salvation in which the rigid lines

³⁰ Quoted in Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 41.

³¹ On extemporaneous preaching, see Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order*, 39-43; Benedict, *Fifty Years Among the Baptists*, 55-58; Manly quoted in Fuller, *Chaplain to the Confederacy*, 49-50; Wightman, *Life of Capers*, 494.

of time and history collapsed and Adam's sin, God's anger, and Christ's atoning sacrifice were reenacted and individualized in the hearts and experience of their audiences. This was the dramatic backdrop against which the evangelical orator preached. Pierpont Bishop recalled of his fellow Presbyterian James Adams that while Adams was proper in his theology and dignified in his address, yet "as his soul rose with the grandeur of his subject, and his affections kindled in view of this melting theme, he preached with a solemnity and fervor that powerfully moved the hearts of his hearers." It was no doubt partly on account of the rich and weighty subject matter of evangelical oratory that when in 1844 the Phi Delta literary society at Mercer College in Georgia debated the popular question, "Does the pulpit afford a wider field of eloquence than the bar?" the affirmative side won the debate.³²

There was, of course, a denominational divide in preaching styles, with Baptists and Methodists preferring a warmer, more emotive style, and Presbyterians in general hewing to a rational style of address that aimed to influence the heart by way of the mind. And while some Presbyterians could thunder and roar from the pulpit with the best, the denomination's ideal type and its essential unity with broader evangelical goals is exemplified nowhere better than in Benjamin Morgan Palmer's description of his friend James Thornwell. Palmer first depicted Thornwell in terms that seem to contrast directly an emotional style of address, describing him as "Eschewing all effort to work upon the superficial emotions, or to play upon natural sympathies." But Palmer continued his

³² Pierpont Edwards Bishop, *A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of Rev. James S. Adams Preached Before Bethel Presbytery During Their Spring Sessions, 1844, in Catholic Church, Chester District, S. C.* (Columbia, S.C: Issued from Morgan's Letter Press, 1844), 14, SCL; see also Cook, *The Good and Faithful Servant*, 35, SCL; Mark Swails, "Literary Societies as Institutions of Honor at Evangelical Colleges in Antebellum Georgia." (M.A., Emory University, 2007) Appendix 2, Mercer: Phi Delta Topics, April 20, 1844. Swails notes that this topic was common at the colleges he studied. Swails, 164.

description in language that linked Thornwell firmly to the goal of evangelical oratory more generally, and made it clear that by conquering the citadel of the mind, Thornwell hoped to capture the heart:

Stripping his subject of all that was adventitious, he laid bare to the eye the single principle upon which it turned; so single and so bare, that the most untrained were compelled to see precisely what was to be elucidated. Then followed a course of argument, close, logical, clear, profound, bending forward to one conclusion, towards which the hearer was carried, with his will or against it, led captive in chains of logic that could nowhere be broken. When the truth had won its way, and the mind was brought into a state of complete submission, the argument was gathered up in its weighty and practical conclusions, and hurled upon the conscience, compelling either the confession of guilt upon the one hand, or a complete stultification of reason upon the other. These appeals to the heart were often fearful in their solemnity; all the more because based upon the previous assent of the understanding.³³

The clergy did not employ their talents solely in the service of God. Honor of an official sort had always attached to special roles in specific situations, and it was only natural that since the evangelical clergy formed one of the largest pools of oratorical talent in the South, they were frequently asked to prepare addresses on occasions of national, state and civic importance. Clergy were favorite choices to give July Fourth speeches across the South, to address militia gatherings, and to deliver eulogies of famous figures. These roles held a special significance for the clergy because the invitation to give such an address reflected the community's regard and affirmed the abilities that had been demonstrated in the pulpit. Further, the role of speaker on such occasions was on honor in itself, a kind of temporary office that conveyed prestige and allowed the oratorical abilities associated with the pulpit to be converted into the

³³ Palmer, *The Life and Letters of James Henley Thornwell*, 547.

common coin of public regard.³⁴

Although the city of Charleston was in general an Anglican stronghold during Richard Furman's tenure as pastor of the Baptist church there, he was called upon frequently to give public addresses on special occasions, illustrating that the evangelical emphasis on preaching made figures like Furman acknowledged experts in public oratory. Among other memorable addresses, Furman in 1800 lamented the death of George Washington, was petitioned by the Society of the Cincinnati to give an address on the death of Alexander Hamilton, and delivered a memorable July Fourth oration in 1802 at the invitation of the same society. Joseph Cook recalled in 1825, "In the discharge of these appointments he acquitted himself with honor." Although Anglicans in the South had their oratorical champions, it is significant that Furman, a Baptist, was so often pressed into civic service in Charleston, and one historian has argued that the Anglican emphasis on liturgy and sacraments left little time for pulpit orators to practice their craft.³⁵

Methodist Whitefoord Smith seems to have given as many of these types of speeches as perhaps any other clergyman in South Carolina and Georgia in the late antebellum period. During the Mexican-American War in 1846, Smith gave a speech to Palmetto Regiment of the South Carolina Volunteers, commanded by Pierce Butler. Smith reminded the volunteers "that every man in this regiment is under personal moral

³⁴ For the way roles affected honor, see Pitt-Rivers, "Honour."

³⁵ James A. Rogers, *Richard Furman: Life and Legacy* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), 210-213. For example, see Richard Furman, "Humble Submission to Divine Sovereignty the Duty of a Bereaved Nation," on the death of George Washington, and "America's Deliverance and Duty," given on the Fourth of July, 1802, SCL. Cook, "The Good and Faithful Servant," 32, SCL. The opinion on the Anglican clergy is found in Walter Lynwood Fleming, *The South in the Building of the Nation: History of Southern Oratory*, Thomas E. Watson, ed., (Richmond, Va: The Southern Historical Publication Society, 1909), 129.

obligations” to behave generously and virtuously towards friend and foe. Butler wrote to Whitefoord Smith afterwards, thanking him for the address to his volunteers. “The peculiar appropriateness of your discourse today before the Volunteers was regarded happy by all,” wrote Butler, adding “In no idle compliment Dear Sir—it is that I ask you to do me the favor at your earliest convenience to reduce to writing at least the substance...that you uttered...[it was] most solemn & impressive.” Butler informed Smith that he wanted to print a thousand copies of the address for dissemination. In the wake of the Second Seminole War in 1836, Smith gave a July Fourth oration in the Presbyterian Church in Augusta in which he praised the “undaunted firmness, and heroic valor of the Warriors of the Revolution,” compared George Washington with the old Roman hero Cincinnatus, and asked his audience, “may we not hope for the Commonwealth still, as the spirit of heroic courage is yet glowing in the breasts of the young men of our land?”³⁶

Even undelivered public orations could serve to demonstrate communal regard. The death of John C. Calhoun in the spring of 1850 prompted an outpouring of oratory across the nation, and one newspaper in the Deep South excitedly announced in early April that Smith would deliver an address on the great man’s passing. “There is but one opinion we believe, as to the propriety of the selection [of Smith] made by the committee,” the author wrote, adding “we have heard the wish generally expressed that he will accept....” When Smith was unable to give the speech due to “professional duties,” he instead published the speech he would have given on the occasion. An article remarking on the published

³⁶ Whitefoord Smith, *Substance of An Address Delivered to the Palmetto Regiment, Dec. 26, 1846* (1846), SCL; Pierce Butler to Whitefoord Smith, Dec. 26, 1846, Whitefoord Smith Papers, DU; Whitefoord Smith, *An Oration delivered on the Fourth of July in the Presbyterian Church in Augusta, 1836* (August, Ga., 1836), 8, 10, 15, SCL.

sermon noted, “The perusal of this composition has naturally produced regrets that its Reverend author was obliged to decline the appointment. . . . We are confident it would have been a specimen of eloquence and a just tribute, worthy of the immortal dead, and honorable to the pious and splendid oratory of the speaker.” In his fulsome praise of Smith’s oratorical abilities the article’s author seemed nearly to forget the “immortal dead,” illustrating that such occasions were as much about witnessing heroic feats of oratory as they were about eulogizing the dead, commemorating important events, or instilling virtue in the soldiery. Quite often, the central focus of such occasions was a speech by an orator who had honed his abilities in the pulpit.³⁷

While they often gave addresses on important occasions, evangelicals disapproved of many of the forms of recreation that occurred in the public sphere and which were the cultural environments in which southern men compared themselves with each other, defined their masculinity, and competed for honor. There was, however, one area of evangelical life that strongly echoed the competitive world of male honor that evangelicals were theoretically cut off from by their beliefs. Historians have noted the close relationship between oratory, debate, and honor, and have studied this relationship in examinations of debating societies at southern colleges. A similar culture of religious debate existed among the representatives of various theological positions in the evangelical community. These debates, which varied widely in tone, were a form of popular entertainment in which the laity expressed a surprising degree of interest in seeing complex theological issues debated by “champions” of particular positions.

³⁷ Loose clippings in folder “Correspondence, 1807-1850,” Whitefoord Smith Papers, DU;

Brooks Holifield noted that such debates exuded “an aura of stereotypically masculine aggressiveness.” Even outside the realm of outright debate, one historian has noted that the evangelical laity “ranked preachers with the keen interest otherwise reserved for racehorses and hunting dogs,” leading to an atmosphere of competition that paralleled the combative atmosphere of honor supposedly relegated to the world outside the church (though Christine Heyrman calls this parallel “unexpected”).³⁸

It is clear from descriptions left by evangelical clergy that this atmosphere of competition and outright debate held some of the same implications that attached to other arenas of contest in the South’s traditional culture. This was especially true of the “controversies” in which some of the clergy took part. In 1858, a Presbyterian named Johnston wrote to James Henley Thornwell and begged him to come to Chesterville, where a Baptist minister had recently preached a sermon on the unity of the church “which some think should be answered.” Johnston implored Thornwell to come and deliver a response, writing “I do hope that you may send an appointment on, and let the notice go abroad that you will preach on the Unity of the church, and you will have crowds to hear you.” While Johnston hoped to lure Thornwell with the honor of an oratorical triumph in front of a large crowd, the prospect of defeat held the opposite potential for shame. The old Methodist warhorse James Jenkins recalled a Baptist minister who travelled the circuit behind the Methodists preaching the Baptist doctrine of full immersion, until Methodist John Julius Goss “attacked him in the church, and

³⁸ See Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s-1890s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Hollis, *University of South Carolina*, 230-254; Pace, *Halls of honor*, 68-72; E. Brooks Holifield, “Theology as Entertainment: Oral Debate in American Religion,” *Church History*, 67 (September 1998): 514; Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Knopf, 1997), 221, 222.

confuted him publicly.” Jenkins noted sarcastically that the Baptist afterwards “felt it his duty to relocate, and I suppose has never taken a circuit since.”³⁹

Even if an actual debate never took place, the maneuvering that preceded such an affair could bear striking similarities to the exchanges preceding other confrontations. In 1812 in South Carolina, James Jenkins preached a sermon that “greatly offended some of our Baptist friends.” The Baptists of the community requested that their “champion,” a man named Woodward, be allowed to debate Jenkins on the subject, and Jenkins agreed. “I knew that he possessed greater abilities than myself,” Jenkins remembered, “but felt no disposition to decline the contest.” On the day of the proposed debate, Jenkins outmaneuvered the Baptist by asking him if he had come to oppose the Methodists or the Devil, to which Woodward replied, of course, that he had come to oppose the Devil. Jenkins then proposed that they preach together instead of debating, which they did, probably much to the confusion of the expectant crowd. Before the scheduled debate on the following day, Jenkins remembered that Woodward confessed to him that he had come “to have a controversy with me,” and professed that although he disliked controversies, “if I wished it, he would have one.” Jenkins replied that “I would leave it to his choice; I was ready for any subject.” As Jenkins gleefully remembered it, Woodward backed down and departed, “to the no slight disappointment of the congregation.”⁴⁰

This carefully navigated exchange unmistakably echoed other types delicate

³⁹ Johnston to James Thornwell, Aug, 15, 1858, Thornwell Papers, SCL; Jenkins, *Experience, Labours, and Gospel Sufferings of Rev. James Jenkins*, 99-100; also see Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1785-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 95.

⁴⁰ Jenkins, *Experience, Labours, and Gospel Sufferings of Rev. James Jenkins*, 166-167.

encounters involving honor that sometimes ended with pistols at ten paces rather than in the pulpit. There was more than personal reputation at stake in the encounter, as well, and Brooks Holifield has observed that participants and observers believed that such debates could have important local consequences for the future of their denominations. As Jenkins certainly understood, what was at stake was not only his individual reputation as a preacher, but also the reputation of the Methodists in general and the future of his denomination in the surrounding area. Just as John Julius Goss's shaming of a Baptist interloper had prevented a challenge to the authority of Methodism on his circuit, Jenkins seems to have viewed his defeat of Woodward as a victory for Methodism and a shame to the local Baptist community.⁴¹

The divide between refined pulpit orators and popular roarers was present in the area of debates as it was in other aspects of evangelical oratory, echoing nothing so much as the divide between ritualized, elite "affairs of honor," and the "ungrammatical" affairs of honor that took place further down the social hierarchy. The divide centered especially around the word "controversy," which carried pejorative connotations of the harsh and loud oral combats that sometimes erupted, or were scheduled, between representative of opposing viewpoints. As evangelicals began to move more easily in the higher circles of southern society after 1830, some of them attempted to distance themselves from the rough and tumble arena of religious controversies. In his biography of William Capers, William Wightman portrayed the great man as one of Methodism's earliest apostles of eloquence and refinement. Wightman was careful not to portray Capers as shrinking from confrontation or a challenge, but averred that he was "yet far removed from the position

⁴¹ Holifield, "Theology as Entertainment," 514-515.

of a controversialist preacher.” Certainly this difference in style did not mean that refined pulpit orators shrunk from debate. Alexander Means remembered Ignatius Few, who shared with Capers an upper class pedigree and a refined style, in language that drew more on Walter Scott than John Wesley. “In the tournament of debate he rarely met his equal,” Means opined, “for he wielded Damascus steel, and under the flash of his blade and the prowess of his arm many a gasconading knight has been unhorsed.”⁴²

Beyond outright debate, many evangelicals recorded an awareness of a sense of competition and comparison that ran just beneath the surface of relationships between preachers, even of the same denomination. Methodist clergy especially seem to have constantly evaluated one another as they travelled, preached, and lived together in a brotherhood of sacred calling. James Jenkins recalled a preaching appointment near Greensboro, Georgia, at which he and several other Methodists preached to a large crowd from the doorway of a house. Enoch George preached such a “moving, melting sermon” that “none of the preachers would open their mouths after him.” Except Jenkins, who recorded that “after a severe struggle between fear and duty, I arose, all in a tremour, and commenced exhorting.” Jenkin’s exhorting ignited the wavering crowd, and “we had such a time as I hardly ever witnessed before.” The inevitable comparisons of preaching ability that gave Jenkins pause before exhorting after the inimitable Enoch George were part and parcel of an atmosphere spiritual watchfulness in which Methodists observed one another for signs of sin and backsliding. Recalling this atmosphere, William Capers thought that on the whole it was more spiritual than worldly, writing

⁴² Wightman, *Life of Capers*, 256; Thomas O. Summers, ed., *Biographical Sketches of Eminent Itinerant Ministers, Distinguished, for the Most Part, as Pioneers of Methodism Within the Bounds of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Nashville, Tenn: Southern Methodist Pub. House, 1859), 314.

I believe our jealousy was a godly one...Preachers (at least the younger ones) were not often together for a few days without giving each other a proof of love in some correction. It might be in their pronunciation of...a word, some article of dress, or the way the hair was combed; or it might be something more serious, touching their spirit or manners; so that we were always watching over each other.⁴³

The central purpose of evangelical preaching, of course, was not to entertain the populace on important occasions or to showcase a preacher's abilities in debate.

Preachers were to use their abilities to convict their audiences of sin, to convince them of God's love, and thus to save them from His wrath. In accomplishing this sacred duty it was essential to speak powerfully, convincingly, even eloquently. Whether they were popular roarers or refined pulpit orators, those who were the most successful instruments of God usually had the most agile tongues, the most commanding presences, and the most intuitive understanding of their audience. But for all evangelicals, a successful sermon was a complex interplay between the oratorical skills of the preacher and the enlivening influence of the Holy Spirit, who imbued a speaker's words with power and moved the audience to hear and accept the message of salvation. This interplay led to a distinctly evangelical style of celebrating oratorical power that was wary of pride, recognized the Spirit's influence, and employed humility as an antidote to descriptions of a speaker's skill and power.

Preaching was very nearly the essence of evangelical worship in all denominations, in addition to being the main means of bringing people into the church. Early evangelicals stripped worship of most of its liturgical gilding and placed the text of scripture at the center of their interaction with their God. The interaction between the

⁴³ Jenkins, *Experience, Labours, and Gospel Sufferings of Rev. James Jenkins*, 83; Wightman, *Life of Capers*, 134.

believer and the text theoretically took place at an individual level as often as possible, but this interaction was frequently mediated by a clergy who functioned in the space between an oral culture and a theological belief in the importance of the written word. Despite different styles of preaching, evangelicals were generally united in their understanding of the purpose of preaching.⁴⁴

The central duty of a Methodist minister as expressed in the 1798 *Doctrines and Disciplines* was simple. To the question “What is the duty of a preacher?” the answer was “1. To Preach.” The methodical language of the *Doctrines and Discipline* belies the eternal importance that evangelicals placed on preaching, and the sense of urgency that infused the task of bringing God’s message to a dying world. Preaching was effectively a sacrament for evangelicals, a means of grace through which salvation flowed. In 1822, Peter Cuttino wrote to Iveson Brookes, who had taken a job as head of an academy in Eatonton, Georgia, to reprimand his friend for not also making time to preach in the community. “Souls are of great value,” Cuttino wrote, “and are continually passing from time to eternity.” Despite Brookes’ position as head of a school, Cuttino believed that the duties of his “sacred office as a minister of Jesus” were the most pressing. The Methodist practice of itinerancy gives the clearest illustration of the vital role of preaching in the evangelical endeavor. In the early 1830s, itinerant William Martin was assigned to the Deep River circuit, which he recorded in his diary was “a five week circuit with 32 preaching places...” Martin preached in a different location almost every day, and

⁴⁴ On the centrality of preaching, see Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, *American Methodist Worship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); John B. Boles, *The Great Revival, 1787-1805: The Origins of the Southern Evangelical Mind* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1972), 111-121. This was the case in American Protestantism more generally, as well. See E. Brooks Holifield, *God's Ambassadors: A History of the Christian Clergy in America* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 105, 118-119.

frequently he preached multiple times a day. Souls were precious, and time was short.⁴⁵

While Methodists like William Martin endured a myriad of physical privations in the material world, the intensity with which they prosecuted their work sprung from its otherworldly purpose. In a circular letter to the churches of the Welsh Neck Baptist Association in 1842, James Furman gave a particularly clear definition of the spiritual and otherworldly purpose of evangelical preaching:

The design of the gospel ministry is not to build up an earthly empire, and dazzle the world by the glory of its victories, while it marshalls hostile armies on the field to grapple in deadly strife with their fellow men, drenching the earth with human gore: it is to renovate the world--to dethrone the prince of the power of darkness--to break the fetters of a universal and dreadful slavery, and to demolish the 'Bastile of Death.'⁴⁶

Few evangelical clergy were in a position to marshal armies, but the danger that Furman was at pains to warn against was the worldly temptation associated with the clergy's otherworldly purpose. In North Carolina in 1780, Francis Asbury wrote in his journal, "preached to about five hundred people; was much led out... The people were solemnly attentive: I was tempted to think I had done well; but I opposed the devil and overcame him." The central place and sacred importance of preaching in the evangelical endeavor, and the regard paid to smooth-tongued speakers in southern culture more generally, made preachers particularly susceptible to the sin of pride. Evangelical definitions of a preacher's role frequently contrasted the sacred calling of saving souls with the danger of pursuing a worldly reputation. Success as a preacher and popularity

⁴⁵ *Doctrines and Disciplines of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America*, 10th, ed., (Philadelphia, 1798), 58; Whitefoord Smith, Sermon on Acts 2:38, Whitefoord Smith Papers, DU; Peter Cuttino to Iveson Brookes, March 16, 1822, Iveson Brookes Papers, SHC; William Martin journal, 12-13, SCL.

⁴⁶ Minutes of the Welsh Neck Baptist Association, 1842, 13, SCL.

with the people were particularly perilous, opening the way for temptation and self-glorification.⁴⁷

The temptation faced by preachers to take too full a measure of satisfaction in their abilities and success in the pulpit was not new. The ecclesiastical structure and rules of order contained in the “Summary of Church Discipline” used by the Charleston Baptist Association in 1808 were taken directly from a document of the same name that had been attached to the first confession of faith adopted by Baptists in America in Philadelphia in 1742. In the Charleston document, those who would preach were solemnly and succinctly warned “to preach with the view of bringing souls to Christ, and not for the sake of honor or filthy lucre.” Methodist Bishop James O. Andrew expressed nearly the same sentiment decades later in 1859, when he asked, “does he stand there between the living God and a dying people, and, in the presence of both, aim only or mainly to acquire or maintain a poor, sickly, dying, worldly reputation?” Throughout the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, evangelicals like Andrew showed a lively awareness that the oratorical skills of a preacher were a double-edged sword that could be employed either for God’s glory, or for their own.⁴⁸

The dangers and temptations associated with oratorical skill and preaching success were both individual and corporate. For the preacher himself, popularity could lead to self-love and even apostasy as he ceased to point people towards God and instead absorbed their attention himself. When future Methodist Bishop William Capers was a

⁴⁷ Asbury, *Journal and Letters*, June 18, 1780.

⁴⁸ Charleston Baptist Association (S.C.), *A Summary of Church-Discipline: Shewing the Qualifications and Duties of the Officers and Members of a gospel Church*, 3rd ed. (Charleston, S.C: Printed by J. Hoff, 1808), 8-9, SCL; Bill J. Leonard, *Baptists in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 84; Summers, *Biographical Sketches of Eminent Itinerant Ministers*, 120.

young man, preaching on a circuit under the direction of a more senior preacher, he became frustrated that the older man did not allow him to preach more often. Upon inquiry, he found that the older man was acting to protect him from his own popularity with the people. Capers recalled later with a hint of bitterness that it was “all for no purpose under heaven but to keep me humble.” Like Asbury, many of the clergy distrusted themselves, searching for the seed of pride and guarding against the sin of self-glorification. A young James Henley Thornwell confessed to a friend after a successful address from the pulpit, “the orator is too conspicuous in everything I say...They admire the speaker, but are not made any better; they are delighted as they would be with a Fourth of July oration[.]” This ate at Thornwell not only because he worried that his audience derived no lasting or eternal benefit from his preaching, but also because it posed a danger to his own piety. “They compliment me very highly,” he wrote, “and I am afraid that I sometimes am pleased with their admiration[.]”⁴⁹

The price of not staying humble was dear, and every denominational history was littered with the wreckage of skilled preachers who had fallen prey to pride. In 1850 Baptist historian David Benedict recorded the tale of an early Baptist pioneer to South Carolina, Philip Mulkey, whose “success in the ministry was so great that he became exalted above measure in his own esteem, and that of his converts.” Absorbed in his success, Mulkey “fell into many heinous sins,” and ended his life “an outcast from the church and a disgrace to the precious cause of which he had been such and eminent champion.” Methodists could tell the tale of Beverly Allen, “a man of elegant manners and brilliant parts,” whose success and reputation as a preacher allowed him to marry into

⁴⁹ Wightman, *Life of Capers*, 136; Palmer, *The Life and Letters of James Henley Thornwell*, 101.

one of South Carolina's first families at a time when Methodists had yet to establish their reputation as an enlightened and refined people. Allen too fell victim to his own success and was expelled from the Methodist church in disgrace. The ever pessimistic James Jenkins estimated that following Allen's fall from grace, the Cherokee Circuit in upcountry South Carolina where he had been serving was decimated, "one man alone holding fast his integrity."⁵⁰

Stories the like of Philip Mulkey and Beverly Allen illustrated the dangers of taking too much pride in success or in allowing one's audience to focus too much on the messenger. It was, after all, William Hammet's eloquent Irish tongue that led to the Methodist schism in Charleston. Instead, evangelicals developed a way of talking about their oratory that leavened descriptions of the orator's prowess with humility and viewed the successful preacher as an honored instrument of God and a co-worker with the Spirit in harrowing up the soil of men's souls.

It was clear to all evangelicals, whether Arminian or Calvinist, that God was the author of great religious events. In a letter to his benefactor General James Gillespie, a young James Henley Thornwell described the service of ordination that had installed him as a pastor of a Presbyterian church in Lancaster, South Carolina in 1835. He was particularly pleased with the ordination sermon, "a thrilling production." As the service unfolded, Thornwell felt himself taking on the sacred office of a minister. He felt that he was "no longer a citizen of the world, but an ambassador of God, standing in the stead of Jesus Christ and beseeching men to turn from the unsatisfying vanities of a fleeting life" and place their trust in God. Thornwell clearly identified his new role as an ambassador

⁵⁰ Benedict, *A General History of the Baptist Denomination*, 706-707; Mood, *Methodism in Charleston*, 61-63; Jenkins, *Experience, Labours, and Gospel Sufferings of Rev. James Jenkins*, 50-51.

of Christ as nearly synonymous with preaching, and he felt certain that he could not accomplish his great calling without God's help.

It requires little experience to convince a minister that all his help must come from the Lord. We actually preach to dead men. There is a deep and settled carnality in the heart of man which the whole artillery of pulpit eloquence is unable to shake unless accompanied with the mighty influences of the Holy Spirit...No man can bring himself to feel the sinfulness of his own nature—the thunders of the sacred desk—although they may alarm for a season cannot unfold in their true light, the hideous features of depravity and guilt. The minister is but a sword in the hands of God to cut the guilty down and as a sword is utterly inefficient without...[the] power of God.⁵¹

Methodists were no less quick than their Calvinist brethren to emphasize the role of the Spirit, and frequently noticed if the Spirit was with them personally in their preaching, noting in diaries if they preached “with liberty” or were “led out” on a particular text. Methodists were, however, more likely to invert Thornwell's sword metaphor, making the preacher the wielder rather than the wielded. In 1856, looking back on decades of the growth of his own denomination during a period that had witnessed the movement of evangelicalism from the fringes of southern society to its very center, Francis Asbury Mood wondered at the “wonderful works of God” during the period, “when men, self-made in letters, wielded 'the sword of the Spirit' with such wondrous power and dexterity, that their congregations were smitten to the earth.”⁵²

Christian theology, even the strictest Calvinism, had never defined the events of history as being impelled by the direct and immediate influence of God, maintaining instead that God often chose in his sovereignty to carry out his will through the weak instrument of man, thus giving men some indefinite part to play in conjunction with

⁵¹ JHT to Gen. James Gillespie, June 13, 1835, Thornwell Papers, SCL.

⁵² See for example, Jeremiah Norman diary, vol. 5: 2, 9, 10, SHC; Mood, *Methodism in Charleston*, 178.

divine will in producing historical realities. Thus, evangelicals used the metaphor of instrumentality to displace themselves from center stage in the drama of salvation while still explicitly claiming an honor that came from being used by God to accomplish his divine purpose.

If evangelicals understood that a preacher's effectiveness as an orator was a complex mix of natural ability and the influence of God's spirit, they also understood that external and physical attributes contributed in no small measure to the general impact of an address. This was the important difference between a written sermon and one delivered by an orator with a vigorous and masculine form. "The mere reader," William Wightman wrote, "misses the world of influence originating in the oratory of *manner*." A distinctive voice, a certain presence in the pulpit, a noble face or affecting expressions—these could all aid the sacred orator in influencing his audience. The whole of effective oratory was more than the sum of its parts, and an effective address was a seemingly effortless melding of physical appearance, voice, gesture, expression, emotion, and ideas. All of those who sought honor through oratory, whether evangelical or not, understood that the physical aspects of oratory were just as important as the content, and perhaps more so. Plotting his future rise to power and fame, the young Henry Hughes noted in his journal, "Today, I commence the Study of the Association of ideas with Gesture," noting elsewhere, "I continue my vocal, facial & gesticulatory exercises." For evangelicals, the oratorical ideal was the union between body and mind that expressed itself in a natural and powerful speaking style. Late in his life, William Martin could still recall with crystalline clarity the first time he saw William Capers preach and the unity of attributes

that translated into an impressive address. “That sermon was preached on the 26th July, 1830,” Martin recalled, “but the face, the voice, the manner, and the theme of the preacher are all fresh in my memory still.”⁵³

Honor had always been closely related to physical attributes. Indeed, the physical attributes of the evangelical orator may have been even more important to his effectiveness in southern culture than we have previously understood. Bertram Wyatt-Brown has argued that in the traditional culture of the South in which honor flourished, physical and biological attributes influenced perceptions of personal worth relatively more than they did in the North, where observers tended to devalue appearances in favor of inner qualities that were revealed in behavior and, just as importantly, in restraint. Southern estimates of individual worth, as one traveller noted above, were made in an instant and based nearly entirely on externally visible attributes. Thus, when evangelicals in the Deep South gave special attention to the physical attributes of preachers and the physical characteristics of their preaching, as they always did, they were not making ancillary observations. Rather, they were elucidating a connection between the worth of the man and the worth of the message that they knew was important to how their audiences received that message.⁵⁴

A preacher’s most essential asset was his voice. A voice with the timbre and tone to resonate along the full range of powerful themes contained in the gospel message would carry a young preacher a long way, and its lack could doom an otherwise promising

⁵³ Summers, *Biographical Sketches of Eminent Itinerant Ministers*, 96-97; Berry, *Princes of Cotton*, 224, 225. William Martin, “Reminiscences of a Methodist Preacher, No. 6,” clipping from *Southern Christian Advocate* in back of “Reminiscences” journal, SCL.

⁵⁴ Wyatt-Brown, “The Ideal Typology,” 25; Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 34, 48-50.

career. A preacher's voice was called on to express the dangers of hell as well as the joys of heaven, to reach into the rocky terrain of the unbelieving human heart and obtain purchase. William Martin described Whitefoord Smith in his journal as "one of the most eloquent preachers in this country, blessed with a loud, strong, yet sweet melodious voice." William Wightman recalled that Bishop Henry Bascom's voice approximated "articulate thunder." At times, descriptions of memorable addresses reduced the person of the preacher to the sound of his voice, as Wightman did in recalling William Capers as "a voice, at its full thunder, rolling flame-girt words over the assembled thousands around him." A voice did not have to be deep or resonant to accomplish its purpose, and different timbres sometimes suited specific tasks. Whitefoord Smith, regarded as an eloquent orator himself, recalled James Dannelly, an itinerant from the 1830s who had a wooden leg, walked with a stick, and regularly reduced his audiences to tears. The main attributes that Smith recalled about Dannelly were the peculiar shrillness of his voice and his "great power in the pulpit." Sheer volume was important, too, as criticisms sometimes centered on a preacher being too quiet. When Samuel Wells Leland visited his family in Columbia in 1854 he heard James Thornwell give his farewell address to the graduating class. No admirer of Thornwell, Leland admitted that the address was "a good discourse, as it is impossible, almost for anything ordinary to come from him," but complained that Thornwell's voice was "too weak" to fill the college's new chapel. Others would have disagreed.⁵⁵

Accounts of evangelical preaching frequently described the physical person, grace,

⁵⁵ William Martin journal, Sept. 30, 1842, SCL; Wightman, ed., *Life of Capers*, 253-254; Smith, "Random Recollections of a Superannuated Preacher, No.5" in *Southern Christian Advocate*, March 17, 1883, p2; Samuel Wells Leland journal, Dec. 3, 1854, SCL.

and posture of the preacher in a way that left little doubt that these elements were integral parts of successful preaching. Christine Heyrman's observation that southerners ranked preachers in the same way they did race horse and hunting dogs is particularly apt here, as the physical descriptions of clergy were clearly related in observers' minds to their effectiveness as preachers. Descriptions frequently emphasized how well the physical body and deportment of a preacher conformed to an ideal masculine type. William Martin frequently equated the physical aspects of his fellow preachers to other, less visible attributes, remembering Stephen Olin as "that man, head and shoulders physically, as he was mentally above his brethren," and recalling Whatcoat Asbury Gamewell as "tall, handsome...I doubt if I ever met a young man of purer morals than this young man." Making explicit the connection between physicality and preaching success, William Wightman wrote of Henry Bascom:

In fine, one must not lose sight of the personnel in accounting for the celebrity and success of Dr. Bascom's preaching. When he rose in the pulpit, you had before you one of the model specimens of perfect, I might say majestic manhood. Upon him nature had impressed the visible signatures of eminence, the patent of true nobility. His appearance would have been distinguished among kings and princes. His stature was about six feet: he carried himself perfectly erect; and so symmetrical was his form that it set off his dress, no matter of what quality, cut, or style.

Wightman retold the story of how a friend had once dressed Bascom in an unfashionable, round-breasted coat to try and rid the future Bishop of his "stylish appearance," only to find that the coat only made Bascom appear more striking than before.⁵⁶

Posthumous recollections of eminent evangelical clergy nearly always contained physical descriptions along with accounts their preaching prowess, and observers tended

⁵⁶ Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 222; Martin, "Reminiscences of a Methodist Preacher, no. 10," Jan. 7, 1882, in *Southern Christian Advocate*; Martin, "Reminiscences of a Methodist Preacher, no. 8," Dec. 17, 1881, in *Southern Christian Advocate*; Summers, *Biographical Sketches of Eminent Itinerant Ministers*, 107-108.

to draw these recollections from the periods when their subjects had been in their physical prime. Thus Alexander Green remembered William Mckendree preaching to a crowd of rowdies “in the prime of life, his voice loud and commanding, his bearing that of undaunted courage.” William Wightman described Henry Bascom’s preaching “in the flush of its manly prime,” and William Martin recalled of his first encounter with William Capers, “He was then in the prime of his manhood...the whole man impressed me as no man ever impressed me before or since.”⁵⁷

Observers similarly took special notice of a preacher’s countenance, and the expressions his face wore while he pled God’s case before the crowd. At Richard Furman’s funeral, his eulogist remembered Furman’s addresses as moderator of the Baptist convention, recalling especially “the manly face over which charity had kindled a melting glow.” In the refined environs of Charleston, Furman had been further aided by “a countenance which seemed to realize some of the best designs of ancient and modern art.” The expressions of a preacher’s face could even communicate a message that transcended language itself. William Martin remembered a revival among the “Gaelic-Scotch” in the South Carolina backcountry in 1832 at which the lack of a common language between preacher and audience did not inhibit the spirit from using “the pervading sympathy, the countenance of the speaker, the place, the occasion, as agents in the great work of regeneration.”⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Ibid., 50-51, 102. Martin, “Reminiscences of a Methodist Minister No. 6,” in *Southern Christian Advocate*, loose clipping in back of journal, SCL.

⁵⁸ William T. Brantly, *The Saint's Repose in Death: A Sermon Delivered on the Death of the Rev. Richard Furman, D.D., Late Pastor of the Baptist Church, Charleston, S.C* (Charleston, S.C: W. Riley, 1825), 30, 36-37, SCL; Martin, “Reminiscences of a Methodist Preacher, no. 9,” Dec. 32, 1881, *Southern Christian Advocate*.

Whether employed in the pulpit, on the stump, at the bar, or on the battlefield, the purpose of oratory was to animate an audience into action. This ability, as Thornwell reminded the young collegians at South Carolina College, was the source of the deep connection in an oral culture between oratory and honor. And yet, if Thornwell had been given more time to unravel the distinctions between the oratory of the pulpit and other types, he would likely have struck on an important difference. Indeed, his friend William Palmer struck at the source of this distinction when he recalled of Thornwell that “Eloquence...gave to him that control which belongs only to one who has made himself master of the consciences of men.” This was the distinction between Thornwell as a religious orator and the men whom he praised in 1856. Hugh Swinton Legaré and William Harper were orators of a more traditional type whose eloquence was aimed at influencing the external actions of men in their political, economic, and martial capacities. Evangelical oratory was aimed instead at influencing an inner person. It was this distinctive focus that set evangelical oratory apart from other types of public address in its southern environment. In the South, evangelical preaching presided over the dawning of a new conception of selfhood that accompanied the more important transition of conversion, and it was in this arena that evangelicals claimed unmatched mastery, expertise, and honor as orators.⁵⁹

John Boles wrote of the turn-of-the-century Great Revival in the South that it was emphatically individualistic, characterized by a “personal, inward, pietistic theology.” This theology emphasized the need for the personal conviction of sin and the personal experience of forgiveness encompassed in conversion. Boles asserted that individual

⁵⁹ Palmer, *The Life and Letters of James Henley Thornwell*, 392.

conversion of sinners was the aim of evangelical preaching, which rarely looked beyond the individual, and only very rarely beyond the local congregation. Setting aside the evidence for a vibrant evangelical communalism that I have examined in previous chapters, as well as the warning of Donald Mathews that evangelicalism should not be viewed as the “religious mood of individualism,” it is nevertheless true that one of the striking features of evangelical experience was the intense introspection of its adherents and the emphasis on a religious “experience” that involved personal knowledge of, and a personal relationship with, the person of Christ.⁶⁰

This was not unique to the American South. Evangelicalism as it took shape in England under the aegis of the Wesleys and spread to America through the agency of George Whitefield was the full religious flowering of what Charles Taylor has called the “punctual self.” This conception of selfhood, which Taylor argued is historically traceable and closely related to the phenomenon of modernity, emphasized the need for personal experience in the quest for knowledge and truth. John Locke nicely encapsulate the belief that any true knowledge must be personal knowledge when he wrote, “I think, we may as rationally hope to see with other Mens Eyes, as to know by other Mens Understandings.” On this point in religious terms, as Taylor notes, Locke and the Wesleys would have been in emphatic agreement.⁶¹

Bruce Hindmarsh has connected the broad scholarship on modern selfhood to the emergence of the evangelical movement in early modern England. Examining the

⁶⁰ Boles, *The Great Revival*, 125, 125-42; Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, 39, 39-58.

⁶¹ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 159-176, esp. 167. In an American context, see Daniel Walker Howe, *Making the American Self: Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997).

hundreds of letters sent to Charles Wesley by those converted under evangelical preaching, Hindmarsh noted that converts “wrote again and again that what they heard from the early Methodist leaders was new to them, an unprecedented message communicated in unprecedented ways.” The novelty and power of the evangelical message in a culture that largely acknowledged the tenets of Christianity and the established church, Hindmarsh argued, was its original conception of the religious self. Potential converts were awakened to the idea that their thoughts as well as their actions could offend God, and that they needed to personally experience the grace and forgiveness of God in order to assure their salvation. “Whitefield's preaching, and that of the Wesley's,” wrote Hindmarsh, “seemed to name and call into being a new sense of interiority for these converts, a new space of spiritual and moral agency.”⁶²

It was this radical sense of interiority that lent evangelicalism in the South the individualistic emphasis that Boles and others have described. It was the realization, so impactful that it sometimes overran the boundary between mind and body, that this salvation, this damnation, were all “for me.” It was the experience of a young woman named McNeil, who was converted at a meeting attended by William Martin. “While we were singing the sweet songs of Zion,” remembered Martin, “she calmly rose from her knees, quietly repeating, as though speaking to herself, ‘I have found Him! I have found Him!’ She was converted, adopted into the family of Jesus Christ. She had found the pearl of great price.”⁶³

⁶² Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 137, 139. Hindmarsh, like Mathews, see an important communal element in evangelical selfhood. Converts were immediately ushered into religious communities that had significant similarities with other aspects of southern life.

⁶³ William Martin, "Reminiscences of a Methodist Preacher, no. 9", Dec. 31, 1881, *Southern Christian Advocate*;

It was in the realm of awakening, converting, and fashioning the new religious self that evangelical orators claimed for themselves a share of the honor that had always accrued to those who influenced others with their words. Evangelical preachers believed in the role of the Spirit in the process of conversion and disavowed any feelings of pride or self-importance that might result from implicating oneself too deeply in the miracle of conversion. Nevertheless, an unmistakable aura of regard settled around those whose skills as orators played a role in the great drama of salvation, and who could wield an emotional mastery over their audience, compelling them in a spiritual sense to the point where, as Thornwell had said of William Harper, “He left his auditors no time to criticize—they could only act.”⁶⁴

This emotional mastery over the inner selves of others was, first, the result of a thorough mastery of one’s own self. As Thornwell had reminded his audience at South Carolina College, the orator was “master of himself, & being master of himself is enable to become the master of others.” For evangelicals, this could, but did not necessarily, mean that the emotions of the orator should be kept in check, but rather that they should be exhibited properly. R.O. Burton of North Carolina described his fellow Methodist Hezekiah Leigh this way:

Often has the writer of this sketch listened to him when vast crowds at camp-meetings now trembled, now wailed, now shouted, while his great mind grasped and explained the way of life, and his heart swelled with joy along the track of truth. There he stood, glowing with love, his eye beaming with emotion, deeply moved, and yet so *self-poised* as to sway the vast multitudes who wept and rejoiced under his powerful preaching.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Thornwell, Semi-Centennial Address, 26-27.

⁶⁵ Thornwell, Semi-Centennial Address, 11; Summers, *Biographical Sketches of Eminent Itinerant Ministers*, 173.

Powerful performances such as this were similarly portrayed as the result of a deep and abiding denial of self and pride. After describing an example of the deceased James Adam's powerful preaching, Pierpont Bishop noted that the Presbyterian clergyman "appeared habitually to cherish a deep sense of personal weakness," that helped him in carrying out his duty as a minister. In 1825, "A Southern Methodist" published an account of early Methodist itinerant John Russell in the Charleston based *Wesleyan Journal*. What the writer most admired about Russell was his ability to powerfully convey spiritual truths through everyday images—"Their effect on the congregation was often like that of successive shocks of electricity," the writer remembered. At the highpoint of his sermons, "when he kneeled in the midst of weeping penitents," Russell exuded raw spiritual force, and the writer observed that "he indeed ceased to be like other men." Despite all this, the author was clear that this power was only the natural result of Russell's "deep self abasement."⁶⁶

The ability to master one's own self, to speak well but with humility, and to deliver the all-important gospel message with a power that reached into the deep and shadowed seat of the self, formed the essence of the evangelical oratorical ideal. In combination with the belief that preachers were God's honored instruments in carrying out his will, as well as the indistinctness of the interplay between the role of the spirit and the role of the preacher in the work of conversion, this provided a space within which evangelicals celebrated nearly mystical displays of oratorical power over their audiences. James Petigru Boyce remembered of Basil Manly that he had the ability to move an audience to the threshold of tears with a single sentence, and that his abilities as an orator were agile

⁶⁶ Bishop, *A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of Rev. James S. Adams*, 16, SCL; "Sketch: Rev. John Russell," *Wesleyan Journal*, Nov. 12, 1825.

enough to elicit a range of finely tuned emotional responses from those around him:

He had, beyond any other man I ever heard, a pathos which enabled him in a moment to melt a vast audience to tears. He had, indeed, singular power to accomplish this by the utterance of a single sentence. Oftentimes has he been known thus instantaneously to affect a heart to penitence or joy, to impress indelibly upon the mind a conviction of the duty to which God had called. Instances of this kind almost innumerable might be given.⁶⁷

The oratorical powers of others might be less finely tuned than those of Manly, but they took similar pride in being able to call forth an audience's deepest emotional responses. In the 1830s, the Methodist James Dannelly would hobble into the pulpit dragging his wooden leg and assail the audience in a shrill voice, drawing smiles because of the "plainness of his denunciations." "You may laugh," Dannelly would warn his audience, "but I'll make you cry before I'm done." Whitefoord Smith recalled that Dannelly frequently made good on his threat, and "the faces that were wreathed in smiles would soon be bathed in tears."⁶⁸

For Methodists, in particular, the moment of truth that proved beyond doubt that a preacher had roiled the waters in the deep well of selfhood was the point at which the preacher called forward the "mourners." Conversion was not usually instantaneous in any of the evangelical denominations. Rather, it encompassed a series of phases, the first of which was the conviction of sin, a phase that could last for hours, days, or even weeks before the sinner at last received the assurance of forgiveness. Mourners were those who had been convicted their sin, but were not yet converted. This first phase of the process

⁶⁷ James Petigru Boyce, *Life and Death the Christian's Portion: A Discourse Occasioned by the Funeral Services of the Rev. Basil Manly, D.D. at Greenville, S.C., Dec. 22, 1868* (New York: Sheldon, 1869), 67, SCL.

⁶⁸ Whitefoord Smith, "Random Recollections of a Superannuated Preacher, No.5," *Southern Christian Advocate*, March 17, 1883.

was what most evangelical preaching aimed to induce, and a successful sermon would produce visible signs of remorse and sorrow in an audience, proving that the message had hit the mark. The practice of calling forward the mourners was thus not so much an exhibition of the preacher's power over his audience in compelling them to come forward as it was an evidence of his having brought them to a moment of awful self-realization in which they could not help but publicly acknowledge their sinfulness and God's holiness. Calling forward the mourners was thus a kind of test of how deeply a preacher had been able to penetrate into the inner selves of his audience, and it could express in dramatic fashion the hitherto invisible impact of the message.⁶⁹

These moments could be quite dramatic, indeed, at least in the memory of eyewitnesses. In 1806, Lovick Pierce preached a sermon in Smyrna, Georgia, on Romans 6:6, "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him." As Pierce laid into his work, vividly describing the "old man" and his unspeakable sins and his gruesome crucifixion on the cross with Christ, a young woman at the back of the audience suddenly cried out and ran away, weeping and begging for mercy. Pierce, sensing that his audience was at the breaking point, immediately stopped preaching and called for mourners. As Pierce's brother Reddick recalled, "a simultaneous movement toward him followed." Reddick also recalled with satisfaction the "hundreds of yards of silk, and fine clothes generally" that were ruined by mourners who had not expected to be kneeling and lying on the red Georgia clay after a recent rain. At another camp meeting in Charleston, John Collingsworth preached what F.A. Mood recalled as an "incredibly moving sermon." When Collingsworth called for the mourners to come forward, the conviction of sin and

⁶⁹ Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order*, 4-9.

the fear of God lay so heavily on his audience that some rushed forward and some ran away. Many of those running away, Mood remembered, “overwhelmed by their sense of guilt even in their flight, fell to the earth in every direction, as if smitten by the hand of death.” The sound of weeping filled the camp area all night.⁷⁰

Part of the task of any orator was to read his audience aright, and for the evangelical orator it was especially to sense the spirit’s presence and to recognize the point at which rhetoric and emotion could be translated into action. Timing was essential in calling up mourners, but this lesson had to be learned from experience. Somewhere in South Carolina in 1834 the “deep sepulchral tones” of the young John B. Chappel combined with “an overwhelming sense of the Divine presence” to overcome the audience. As shouts and screams began to ripple through the crowd, Chappel stopped preaching and turned uncertainly to Whitefoord Smith, sitting behind him, and asked, “What shall I do, Brother?” Before Smith could answer, the elderly James Jenkins, a veteran of many such occasions, cried out from his seat at the front of the audience, “Call up the mourners, Chappel! Chappel, call up the mourners!”⁷¹

Descriptions of evangelical preaching both early and late celebrated the ability of the religious orator to wield influence over an inner person whose outer characteristics were frequently those associated with male honor. William Brantly described Richard Furman preaching in isolated parts of South Carolina in the early nineteenth century to “many of the hardy sons of vice, penetrated by his convincing eloquence.” F.A. Mood

⁷⁰ Summers, *Biographical Sketches of Eminent Itinerant Ministers*, 261; Mood, *Methodism in Charleston*, 128.

⁷¹ Whitefoord Smith, “Random Recollections of a Superannuated Preacher, No.8,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, April 14, 1883.

recalled of William Capers, “the proud sinner quailed beneath his eye, lit up with holy fire!” Undoubtedly the most common account of this kind is exemplified by William Martin’s recollection of a man who was converted the Chesterfield Circuit in South Carolina in 1833. Martin recalled that the man was “remarkable for his size, weighing some 350 pounds,” and had fought a duel some years before. All in all, “a man of the world, not having the fear of God before his eyes.” Nevertheless, by the end of the service, this colossus “prostrated himself on [the] damp ground, among a crowd who were crying ‘What shall I do to be saved?’” Martin knelt by the big man and laid his hand on his shoulder, only to find him trembling “like a frightened fawn.”⁷²

Episodes such as this well illustrate the threat posed by evangelical conversion to the traditional conception of autonomous manhood contained in honor. However, if interpreted properly they also illustrate the way in which evangelical preaching functioned to allow evangelicals to claim access to honor in a specific sense through the avenue of oratorical mastery over the inner selves of their audience. Evangelical reluctance to participate in affairs of honor or to respond to the insults and challenges hurled at them has frequently been interpreted as a wholesale withdrawal from the cultural structure of honor, but this interpretation lacks a broad enough definition of the ethic, and interprets this restraint only through the lens of evangelical values rather than from the standpoint of honor. Anthropologist Julian Pitt-Rivers noted long ago that the Christian teaching of forgiveness, or turning the other cheek to an insult or challenge could be interpreted in itself as an insult within the moral world of honor, an effort to “alter the rules whereby honor is achieved or lost.” The lack of response to a challenge

⁷² William Martin, “Reminiscences of a Methodist Preacher, No. 10,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, Jan. 7, 1882.

indicated superiority, which explains the often explosive secondary reactions of those who insulted or challenged evangelical clergy but received no response. Clearly, those on the side of unbelief interpreted the interaction between themselves and those in the pulpit as taking place within the pale of honor, evincing a fear that an exchange of honor was taking place to their disadvantage.⁷³

The fact that evangelicals did not respond in kind to the hostilities they encountered should not obscure a clear sense of contest and a struggle to exert a type of mastery over their audiences. The example of Christ, the teaching of John Wesley, and the examples of George Whitefield and Francis Asbury all left the way open for evangelicals to engage their oratorical skills to the utmost in order to bring audiences to the point at which they were compelled to act in a religious sphere that evangelicals claimed for themselves. Distinct from other types of southern orators, evangelical preachers did not practice their craft in crowded courtrooms, legislatures, or fields of battle. Instead, they wielded their abilities from the pulpit and aimed, with the aid of the spirit, to blow the spark of conviction into a flame that kindled a new sense of self alongside the miracle of salvation.

Few were better at this than William Capers. The main charms of Capers preaching style, as William Wightman remembered them, had to do with his elegant and refined delivery, and not necessarily with his wide learning. He remembered Capers as the “master of a style copious, elegant, and felicitous.” But Capers’ refined style could give way at times to the inspired attack of a true messenger of God. Wightman remembered a sermon he had seen Capers preach in 1822 at a camp-meeting in Putnam, Georgia, which,

⁷³ Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind*, 150-156; Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 206-252. Pitt-Rivers, “Honour,” 505; Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind*, 154-156.

even allowing for the exaggerations of time and memory, must have been impressive. At least a thousand people were present, and Capers, no doubt encouraged by the large crowd and his eternally important subject, “rose to the highest mood of impassioned feeling.” Wightman fell back on mythological imagery to describe the power of Capers’ address. “He seemed to drive the chariot of the earthquake, his steeds the storm clouds.” Capers painted for his audience a searing image of the damned in hell so realistic that Wightman remembered them as characters in the scene. “Incarnated...[they] passed in awful procession before the audience, crying, Woe, woe, woe!” One member of the audience professed later to Wightman that he still heard the voices of the damned crying out in the night. The effect on the rest of the crowd was “awful beyond description,” Wightman recalled. “The mighty crowd, as one man, dropped on the ground, and the voice of weeping and intercession smote the heavens.” One man in the audience, Wightman recalled, “was put into a state of derangement.”⁷⁴

The power that evangelical orators took pride in wielding over their audiences was the power to reach a facet of the self that their audiences were barely aware of and to awaken it. Looking back on the growth of their denominations in the Deep South over the first half of the nineteenth century, many evangelicals concluded that it had been the power of evangelical oratory that had finally won for the movement a seat at the southern table. Taking stock of a career that had witnessed the rise of his denomination from a

⁷⁴ Summers, *Biographical Sketches of Eminent Itinerant Ministers*, 81-82. It is uniquely appropriate that Capers drove a member of his audience to insanity, the quintessential ailment of the modern self. For more on insanity in South Carolina, see Peter McCandless, *Moonlight, Magnolias, and Madness: Insanity in South Carolina from the Colonial Period to the Progressive Era* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

despised sect to a populous and powerful denomination, William Capers did not think it was the Methodists who had changed. While Capers acknowledged that Methodists did not value poverty quite as highly as they once had, he thought they were still an “exceedingly humble” and “homespun” denomination. Capers meant the sartorial reference quite literally. What had changed, he thought, was that where the Methodist preacher’s humble homespun coat had once been widely scorned and mocked, it was now generally admired and honored. The change, Capers thought, was brought about by the power of Methodist preaching. “*That* power, in *that* preacher, reflected honor on his homespun coat,” Capers wrote, “and caused the coat itself to be admired.”⁷⁵

Whether Capers’ analysis was correct or not it was undoubtedly true that throughout the period of evangelical growth from the end of the Revolution to the Civil War evangelical clergy celebrated the religious orator’s ability to wield influence over his audience with words. Evangelicals were excluded by their beliefs from participating in many of the behaviors and social spaces that formed the cultural supports of male honor in the South. They universally condemned the duel, they did not (or were not supposed to) drink, fight, curse, gamble, or attend horse races. But as an important subset of the constellation of southern orators evangelicals enjoyed access to an important avenue to honor and regard in their culture. The ability to use one’s voice to convince, command, and control others was highly valued in the South’s mostly oral culture, and as James Thornwell reminded his young audience in 1856, one could hardly hope to achieve greatness in the South without it. Despite frequently being called on to address the citizenry or soldiery on important occasions, a role that allowed clergy to translate

⁷⁵ Wightman, *Life of Capers*, 202-203.

abilities gained in their sacred calling into secular regard, the main task of evangelical orators was specifically and rigidly spiritual—to awaken audiences and save souls. Early and late, evangelicals warned against the danger of taking too much pride in oratorical ability and the sin of seeking one’s own honor and reputation at the expense of the honor and glory of God. Nevertheless, the belief that ministers were honored instruments of God whose abilities played a role, along with the influence of the spirit, in awakening and shaping a new religious self, provided a space within which evangelicals celebrated the ability of their most gifted orators to reach the “great deep” of the human heart.

VI. 'An Everlasting Name': Ambition, Fame, Duty, Death, and the Evangelical Ideal

*'Now needs thy best of man;' so spake my guide:
 'For not on downy plumes, nor under shade
 Of canopy reposing, fame is won;
 Without which whosoe'er consumes his days,
 Leaveth such vestige of himself on earth,
 As smoke in air, or foam upon the wave.*

–Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, Hell, Canto XXIV

The name Beverly Allen echoed through the Methodist mind in South Carolina and Georgia in the first half of the nineteenth century as a cautionary tale of unbridled ambition, talent gone wrong, and the dangers of fame without virtue. Methodist historian George Gilman Smith gave Allen the dubious title of the “first apostate Methodist preacher in America.” But despite his eventual infamy, Allen had showed early promise. James Jenkins, himself a Methodist pioneer, recalled that the precocious Allen preached one of the earliest sermons he ever heard somewhere in North Carolina, while the Methodist historian F.A. Mood recalled Allen as “a man of elegant manners and brilliant parts,” who by his native talent and ambitious marriage “acquired an extensive influence and wide spread reputation as a preacher” in the neighborhood of Charleston in the late eighteenth century. Allen was one of the earliest Methodist preachers to reach Georgia, preaching in Wilkes County in the 1780s. Allen’s energy, charisma and talent were the raw materials from which lasting reputations were forged in the evangelical conquest of the Deep South in the years before 1830. Had he followed a different path, or leavened his considerable ambition and talents with prudence and restraint, Allen’s would

undoubtedly have been one of the revered names in the heroic annals of early Methodism in the region.¹

It was not to be. From the beginning, Methodist leader Francis Asbury had doubts about Allen. In 1786, Asbury noted in his journal that Allen had not followed his instructions to travel to Georgia and preach there, remaining instead in the vicinity of CainHoy, South Carolina. Asbury looked on this breach of discipline with dismay. “I was much grieved at Beverly Allen’s conduct; hurt to the cause of God may follow.” A few years later, according to F.A. Mood, during the foment and turmoil of a schism among the Methodists in Charleston, “suspicions of a foul nature,” probably involving charges of incest, arose concerning Allen. “He was watched, his guilt proven, and he was promptly expelled,” wrote Mood.²

Allen left Charleston and its environs in disgrace, entering into an ill-fated business venture in Georgia that quickly sunk him deep into debt. Allen then removed himself from any hope of redemption when some time later he barricaded himself in a room and fatally shot a federal marshal named Forsyth who was attempting to take him into custody for unpaid debts. Fleeing westward, Allen left one last searing image on the pages of Methodist history before fading into obscurity. According to legend, the apostate prophet stopped one Sunday “near the frontiers” to hear a sermon from a “Calvinistic clergyman” who was preaching the doctrine of predestination and “once in grace, always

¹ James Jenkins, *Experience, Labours, and Gospel Sufferings of Rev. James Jenkins, of the South Carolina Conference* (n.p.: Printed for the author, 1842), 35; Francis Asbury Mood, *Methodism in Charleston: A Narrative of the Chief Events Relating to the Rise and Progress of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, S.C., with Brief Notices of the Early Ministers Who Labored in That City* (Nashville, Tenn, 1856), 61-63; George Gilman Smith, *The History of Georgia Methodism from 1786 to 1866* (Atlanta, GA: A. B. Caldwell, 1913), 28.

² Francis Asbury, *Journal and Letters*, Elmer T. Clark, ed., (London: Epworth Press, 1958), 506; Mood, *Methodism in Charleston*, 61-63.

in grace.” At the end of the sermon, the travel stained stranger rose and with a “haggard countenance” warned the congregation that he was “living proof” that man could fall from grace and that he fully expected and deserved his damnation. Having proven this very Arminian point, Allen wandered off the pages of denominational history, of no further heuristic use to his erstwhile coreligionists except as an example of infamy. George Gilman Smith provided the most succinct evaluation of Allen when he called him “this gifted, but, alas! wicked man.”³

Beverly Allen’s enduring disgrace in the histories of Methodism penned in mid-nineteenth century served as a reminder that a reputation reverberated long after death severed its connection to a living person. His story, and the manner of its telling, is one indication that evangelicals participated fully in one of the most distinctive and mercurial aspects of honor, a manifestation of the ethic that had deep psychological roots in the southern mind and a nebulous presence in southern life and records. The idea of a “name” that preceded one in life and survived after death was one of the most essential and enduring aspects of honor, running across the boundaries of cultures and eras. Many of the most recognizable historical facets of honor derived from the double-edged concern, bordering on obsession, that one’s name be well regarded in life and well remembered after death. In life, as in death, the furthering and defense of individual and family name were central preoccupations. From the Spartan mothers who enjoined their sons to come back lying across their shields rather than flee the enemy, to South Carolina’s Mary Boykin Chesnut, who responded, “there are worse things than death,” to a

³ Mood, *Methodism in Charleston*, 61-63; George Gilman Smith, *History of Georgia Methodism*, 28.

correspondent's concern that her menfolk might die in the service of the Confederacy, those who lived by honor's tenets believed that a name was the most important thing one left behind when leaving the world.⁴

The concept of a "name" unified a tangle of concepts deeply ingrained and intertwined in the language of honor. Concepts like ambition, duty, and fame all found specific meanings in the context of honor as the materials out of which a lasting name was made. Ambition was the desire for honor, and devotion to duty honor's requirement, while fame was synonymous with the kind of public honor that, if achieved, could outlast death. For evidence of the hold these concerns had on southerners, especially on men, we can turn once more to the young Mississippian named Henry Hughes, who in his pathological obsession with making and leaving a name continually dwelt upon these related concepts in his diary. "My Destiny never let my ambition sleep," wrote Hughes in 1848. "Let me be the greatest mortal man that ever was or will be." A few months later, still awaiting his destiny, Hughes wondered in his journal, "Are my days to be vanity? Are my strong yearnings after glory to be powerless?" And then, "When shall I accomplish something which will confer visible tangible fame?" Two years later, Hughes concluded, "Mediocre fame is not worthy the labor."⁵

As with most forms of madness or near madness, Hughes' obsessions expressed in their most extreme form the more common desires for recognition and honor that many of his male contemporaries felt. Of course, for southerners these urges were gendered,

⁴ Quoted in Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 35.

⁵ Stephen William Berry, ed., *Princes of Cotton: Four Diaries of Young Men in the South, 1848-1860* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 216, 220, 253.

part of the active, public, and agonistic side of honor that was associated with men and public life. Thus, the two professions that Hughes thought most likely to end in fame and glory were those of a soldier or a statesman. Northern tutor Edward Hooker confirmed the wisdom of Hughes' choices when he recorded in his diary a conversation with a fellow boarder in Columbia in 1805. The man assured Hooker that militia posts were the most sought after because they represented the quickest way to achieve prominence in the region, and the most likely to land a man in the legislature. Wondering at such bald faced pursuit of influence, Hooker recorded, "So natural it is for Carolinians to exhibit in their common conversation, their ruling passion, ambition." Certainly southerners would have been surprised to hear themselves characterized in terms they used to disparage northerners, though they would no doubt have pointed out in their defense that their ambition was directed at a noble and intangible end, while the ambitions of their Yankee counterparts chased after the false gods of filthy lucre.⁶

Henry Hughes did not name the clergy as one of his prospective career paths. Nevertheless, the evangelical clergy of the nineteenth-century South were not exempt from the concerns that obsessed their fellow citizens. While excused on account of their office from some aspects of honor, like dueling, evangelical clergymen nonetheless felt the pressures and expectations of their culture as they related to masculinity, honor, and the pursuit of a name and reputation. This was increasingly the case as evangelicalism moved from the fringes of southern society in the eighteenth century to its center in the nineteenth. In the late eighteenth-century Deep South the calling to become a Methodist

⁶ Berry, *Princes of Cotton*, 253; Edward Hooker, *Diary of Edward Hooker, 1805-1808* (Historical Manuscripts Commission, American Historical Association, 1897), 880-881, South Caroliniana Library (SCL).

minister might still legitimately have been seen as a revocation of such worldly pursuits and ambitions. Indeed, still in the second decade of the nineteenth century, when a young Basil Manly declared his intent to become a Baptist minister, his father urged against it, pleading with him to choose “any honorable or profitable profession.” Manly himself, despite his eventual fame, initially interpreted his decision as a rejection of honorable and worldly avocation in favor of the penury and private labors of a clergyman. But by the 1830s evangelicals across the Deep South had begun to espouse the carefully formulated and qualified message that securing a name could be accomplished through the pursuit of God’s will and the occupation of the sacred desk, and that even in a secular calling ambition was no sin, provided it was directed toward appropriate ends. While some strains of evangelicalism continued to maintain a strong critique of the ambition for notoriety and public honor, an increasingly urban and educated evangelical clergy held up a different ideal of the public man that placed the minister of God alongside the soldier and the statesman in his contribution to society and recast into a religious mold the elements required to achieve a lasting name.⁷

The most important moment in the making of a name came after life had ended, when death put a period to the possibilities of biography and just as reputation began to harden into legacy. Thus, funeral sermons form one of the most fruitful sources through which to examine this aspect of evangelical rhetoric. As minister William Brantly told his audience on one such occasion, a man’s true worth could only be judged after he was gone. “Then,” Brantly preached, “the world will begin to look at the luminous track

⁷ A. James Fuller, *Chaplain to the Confederacy: Basil Manly and Baptist Life in the Old South*, Southern biography series (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 21.

which he has left behind him, and to infer the real glory of the fallen orb from the lustre of his train.”⁸

As the nineteenth century progressed, evangelicals became masters of the panegyric mode in the South, not only becoming among the primary interpreters of their society’s public men but also adapting the ancient form, descended from classical origins, to preserve and praise the memory of their own. The death of a public figure was an occasion to weave the memory of a great man into the history and fabric of his society and to create a lasting association. The commemorative sermon was in this sense the opening salvo of a long discussion, the first and most important interpretation of an individual’s impact and importance to his fellow man and to posterity. It was also an occasion to reinforce a particular vision of the church and society—by celebrating a revered figure’s admirable fulfillment of a particular set of ideals the funeral oration reinvigorated a community’s commitment to a mutually held vision of society and its leaders.

The classical tradition in which educated southerners were steeped placed a special emphasis on a speech given to commemorate the dead. Southerners like Basil Manly, educated at South Carolina College, would have read the historian Thucydides’ vivid account of the funeral oration given by the Athenian leader Pericles in honor of the city’s war dead. They would almost certainly have studied Plutarch’s biographies of famous men, written with the assumption that exemplary lives were meant to be studied so that they could be imitated. They may even have read the advice of Aristotle, who counseled that praise was a subtle form of suggestion. “Consequently,” the philosopher

⁸ William T. Brantly, *The Saint's Repose in Death: A Sermon Delivered on the Death of the Rev. Richard Furman, D.D., Late Pastor of the Baptist Church, Charleston, S.C* (Charleston, S.C., 1825), 20, SCL.

advised, “whenever you want to praise anyone, think what you would urge people to do; and when you want to urge the doing of anything, think what you would praise a man for having done.” Speeches cast in this classical mold could be found flowing from the podiums of the debating societies at every southern college and in many southern cities. Across a broad spectrum, southerners modeled their speeches on classical forms and suffused their orations with characters from antiquity. After 1830, looking back on an era of incredible growth and success for their denominations, evangelicals increasingly adopted this panegyric style, infusing it with biblical imagery and characters, to commemorate their own heroic dead, to argue their own ideal of the public man, and to narrate the proper way to go about winning a lasting name.⁹

Fame was won in public, and historically it was the reward of successful soldiers and statesmen. In the early years of the evangelical movement of the South, the evangelical clergy were much more often the originators of sermons praising famous men than the subjects of such addresses. When George Washington died in 1799, Richard Furman was perhaps the most prominent Baptist of his day, and his tenure as pastor of the First Baptist Church in Charleston dated to the beginning of the American republic. Furman’s famous sermon on the occasion of Washington’s death, given by invitation in Charleston, is a model of the traditional type of classically inspired commemorative address to be found everywhere in late eighteenth-century America. In it, Furman faithfully described Washington’s conformity to the mold of the classical hero, whose

⁹ Quoted in David A. deSilva, *Despising Shame: Honor Discourse and Community Maintenance in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1995), 17; Michael O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860*, vol. 2 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 421-422.

virtues had served to secure the prosperity and security of his nation and to win for him an undying name. He also wove into his address, by means of biblical analogies, the special place of the American people in God's providential plan.

Furman framed his sermon around the lament of the prophet Elisha when he saw the prophet Elijah ascending into the sky borne on a flaming chariot: "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof." For Furman, the parallel the passage drew between Elijah and Israel's armies as sources of national strength was particularly appropriate for America in the wake of Washington's death. Referencing the war in Europe between England and France, and the United States' possible entry into the conflict, Furman lamented, "While the alarm of war is still sounding; the chariot and horsemen of our American Israel has taken his upward flight!—The loss is great; it is sensibly felt by all."¹⁰

Furman then proceeded to examine Washington's life and find in it the recipe for everlasting fame. He explained how Washington's honor in life and in death had been enhanced by virtuous and selfless service to a great cause, placing the great man in a continuum of classical heroes:

He had for his own honor, and the honor of his country, completed a long course of great and dignified actions, without tarnishing his reputation; in such a manner as to give him full rank, if not precedence, among the great characters of ancient or modern times.¹¹

The effect was that Washington's significance overflowed the political arena and bordered on the religious, assuring his immortal fame. "Heaven has made him to us both

¹⁰ Richard Furman, *Humble Submission to Divine Sovereignty the Duty of a Bereaved Nation. A Sermon, Occasioned by the Death of His Excellency General George Washington* (Charleston: Printed by W.P. Young, 1800), 16-17, SCL.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

a Moses and a Joshua,” preached Furman, adding to the list of Washington’s biblical counterparts. “His example will live, though his body returns to its primeval dust.” The undying quality of Washington’s example was important to Furman not only in the abstract sense of Washington’s honor, but also for its practical effect on future generations. Furman took it for granted that ambition was one of the most basic human emotions, but one that had to be carefully managed and directed. In his address, Furman held up the revolutionary hero and first president to his audience as a mold that could channel and shape the ambitions of a younger generation, provided those ambitions were of the better sort:

To the rising generation, especially, this example is recommended. Let the American youth, fired with the laudable ambition of excelling in all that is great, virtuous, and amiable, improve the early part of their lives in forming their character by this excellent model: Then may we expect to see future Washingtons arise.¹²

Furman’s memorial address is much more easily situated in the broad tradition of American oratory and its classical antecedents than in the narrow confines of evangelical homiletics in the South at the turn of the century. In 1800, Furman was fairly unique among evangelicals in the Deep South for his learned and polished style of address, a function of his location in Charleston. Indeed he was one of the primary advocates in his denomination for an educated clergy, a position that encountered steady resistance among his fellow Baptists throughout his lifetime. And though he was certainly prominent in his own time, Furman’s legacy was only increased by the fact that in later years, as his religious descendants looked back, sometimes uneasily, to the rough and humble beginnings of their denomination in the Deep South, Furman stood out as a predecessor

¹² Ibid., 18, 23.

worthy of emulation, both in his refinement and his prominence as a minister and public man.¹³

Furman was also notable among southern evangelicals—although not among the Charleston clergy—in those early years for his participation in public life and his contributions to civil society. When he died in 1825 many of the sermons commemorating him dwelt upon his qualities as an exemplary and patriotic citizen. Joseph Cook listed Furman’s patriotism along with his learnedness and sincere friendship as parts of his character worthy of praise. Cook noted Furman’s service as one of the representatives who adopted the state’s constitution, as well as his role in the War of 1812, during which “he was seen, on the lines of Charleston, encouraging the men...both by his prayers and by his example.” The Rev. William Brantly, remarking on Furman’s friendship with Patrick Henry, asserted, “The ability with which he urged the principles of sacred truth on the one hand, and the firmness with which he asserted the rights of his country on the other, attracted the attention of some of the leading men of the Revolution.” The editor of the *Charleston Mercury* noted in Furman’s obituary, “As a citizen he was exemplary in discharging all civil duties.” Thus, if some segments of the evangelical movement, particularly in its early period, were “sharply critical of the actions of ‘public men’” and their honor, this was not true of Furman, a figure with one foot firmly planted in the sphere of public service and whose most famous oration was a eulogy praising a departed national hero. And while Furman might have been the exception among Baptists in 1800, when he delivered the memorial address for

¹³ James A. Rogers, *Richard Furman: Life and Legacy* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), 120-121, 160.

Washington, the way he combined sacred duties with secular influence would become a much more common ideal in the years after his death.¹⁴

If Furman's eulogizers did not compare him to the prophet Elijah as a source of civil and religious strength, they easily might have. Furman's record of public service and prominence, as well as his friendships with nationally recognized public figures like Patrick Henry, would have made such a comparison natural. William Brantly acknowledged as much when he despaired of fully capturing Furman's broad influence, saying "But he has filled so large a scope, has blended in a single life, and in a single character, so much duty and usefulness, and such a rare assemblage of all the qualities which adorn the minister of Jesus, that any representation commensurate with the magnitude of the subject, would appear over-charged." Though the eulogies given at Furman's death rehearsed the specifics of his influence on the public life of his city and nation, they did not make what in the following decades would become an increasingly common parallel between the prophet Elijah and the minister of religion as the mainstay of public virtue. In later decades the evocation of the evangelical clergy as national prophets in the mold of Elijah would make more sense, and in the years between Furman's death in 1825 and the Civil War evangelical ministers argued for the integral role of the clergy in sustaining civil society, opening up a rhetorical space in which the man of God could share in the public honor that attached to figures like Washington.¹⁵

¹⁴ Joseph B. Cook, *The Good and Faithful Servant Approved and Honoured by His Divine Master: A Funeral Sermon, Occasioned by the Much Lamented Death of the Rev. Richard Furman, D.D., Pastor Of the Baptist Church in Charleston, S.C* (Charleston, S.C., 1826), 32, SCL; William T. Brantly, *The Saint's Repose in Death*, 27; Rogers, *Richard Furman*, 256; Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), ix-x.

¹⁵ William T. Brantly, *The Saint's Repose in Death*, 24.

The prophet Elisha's lament, "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof," echoed through the tributes given for prominent clergymen in the years before the Civil War in South Carolina. Examples of sermons on this passage can be easily found in each decade after 1830 and across a denominational spectrum. Among others, the Rev. George Howe used the passage to anchor his sermon on the death of the Rev. Robert Means in Fairfield, South Carolina, in 1836. Relating the context of the passage, Howe could not resist pointing out to his audience the lesson to be learned from the figure of Jezebel, Elijah's steadfast enemy, "who affords to the reader of sacred history a lively illustration of the fatal power which can be wielded by one bad woman, placed in the centre [*sic*] of attraction and influence." In contrast, he held up Elisha's description of the departing prophet, which Howe interpreted to mean that "the man of piety, especially when endued by God with talent, and placed by him in a commanding station, is the defence [*sic*] and ornament of his country." The role of such a man, Howe proclaimed, was to instill in the public mind the virtue on which the security and prosperity of the nation depended. Thus Howe argued for a construction of the public sphere in which religion, and specifically men of God like Means, formed the very foundation of civil society and endowed men in public life, from legislator to soldiers, with the virtues that would restrain ambition and self-interest in the service of the public good. This in contrast with Jezebel, a woman whose position "at the center of attraction and influence" proved the ruin of her nation. As the main proponent of the virtues that would allow men to act worthily in the public sphere, Means became a kind of steward of the public good in Howe's interpretation. And as the comparison with Jezebel made clear, Howe drew a close association between virtue, the public sphere, and masculinity.

In his sermon Howe asked his audience to remember Means' "manly and noble form" as it had risen before them.¹⁶

In 1844, Presbyterian Pierpont Bishop preached on the same passage before the Bethel Presbytery, met in Chester, South Carolina, on the occasion of the death of the Rev. James Adams. In his sermon, Bishop claimed a preeminent place for the man of God in the public sphere:

In the days of the prophet, the chariot and the horsemen, were the terror of the battle field, and the means of victory, the very bulwark of national safety. But we are not informed that Elijah ever drew the sword as a warrior, or appeared with the chariot and the horse in the martial field. But he was a prophet of the Most High...he was very jealous for the honor of his Heavenly Master...he labored much to stem the tide of corruption, then sweeping like a desolating flood over the land of Israel...Now in proportion as he instrumentally stayed the progress of iniquity, he averted national calamity and ruin; and as he reclaimed from iniquity and sin, he secured national blessing...Well, then, might Elijah be esteemed a national blessing, since he accomplished more for his nation by his intercession with God, and his beneficent labor or the piety and virtue of man, than the chariot and the horsemen could accomplish in the day of battle.¹⁷

In 1855 at Trinity Methodist Church in Charleston, in a sermon titled simply, "Elijah," the Rev. Joseph Cross lamented the passing of Methodist Bishop William Capers. Remarking on the appropriateness of a comparison between the Jewish prophet and the southern Methodist Bishop, Cross commented, "It is fit that we should thus improve an event which has called the thousands of our Israel to mourning." By "Israel," Cross clearly meant the city of Charleston and the South, and not simply the Methodist Church. "How many in this city have felt the charm of his sacred eloquence!" Cross

¹⁶ George Howe, *A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of Rev. Robert Means, of Fairfield District, S.C., Preached in the Salem Church, On the Second Sabbath in June, 1836* (Boston, 1836), 591-592, 594, 596-597, SCL.

¹⁷ Pierpont Edwards Bishop, *A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of Rev. James S. Adams Preached Before Bethel Presbytery During Their Spring Sessions, 1844, in Catholic Church, Chester District, S. C* (Columbia, S.C., 1844), 3-4, SCL.

asked, “How often in our churches has he transported the listening multitude heavenward as in a chariot of fire!” After a lengthy description of Elijah’s ministry, Cross made clear that, like Elijah, the work of a man like Capers was not only more significant than that of the warrior or the statesmen, but would win the kind of renown that would not fade with the passage of time. And although the fame that Joseph Cross claimed for Capers was mostly of the spiritual variety, based on his selfless pursuit of the cause of Christ, it was clearly mixed with earthly acclaim:

In short, Elijah solemnly joined hands with God against the workers of iniquity. He lived and labored for the reformation of his people. He sought to throw barriers athwart their path to ruin...This is the true aim of life, This is the true vocation of the preacher. Here is real sublimity of character. What, in the comparison, are all the achievements of the fine arts, of eloquence, or of arms? What is it to subjugate continents, and levy tribute upon nations? 'He who converteth a sinner from the error of his ways' performs a nobler work, than if he had shed oceans of hostile blood...That one soul is worth more in his Master's estimate than a whole material world. He who devotes his life to such a work, in the highest sense, answers the end of his existence. He realizes the idea of his Creator...Meriting the commendation of the best of men, he compels the admiration of the worst...His name shall outlive those of your Homers and Shakspeares [*sic*], Platos and Bacons, Tullys and Websters, Caesars and Napoleons, as long as Jehovah's reign shall survive the empires of the earth. Unwritten by the annalist, unspoken by the orator, unsung by the poet, it lives 'in the Lamb's book of life--in the archives of Immanuel's kingdom--while the mausoleum moulders, and the sarcophagus decays, and proud temples perish, and pyramids sink in the sand.¹⁸

The evangelical panegyric often mirrored the construction of its classical counterpart in the way that it offered its subject’s spiritual virtue and selflessness as the basis of a lasting name. Just as Washington had not sought out his reputation, but instead had single-mindedly and selflessly pursued the good of his country, men like Capers sought only the glory and honor of God. “No preacher,” said Cross of Capers, “ever made

¹⁸ Joseph Cross, *Elijah: A Sermon, Occasioned by the Death of the Rev. William Capers, D.D. ... Delivered in Trinity Church, Charleston, Feb. 4, 1855* (Charleston, S.C., 1855), 5, 14, SCL.

more of Christ, and less of himself.” In the commemorations of Capers both at the time of his death and in later years, his advocates repeatedly pointed to the financial sacrifices made by this well-born Carolinian in the service of Christ and the church. At Capers’ funeral, Cross proclaimed, “Not many in these latter years have made greater sacrifices for the Church of their choice. In other relations, he might have occupied an enviable position among the gifted sons of his country; but like the heroic apostle, what things were gain to him he counted loss for Christ.”¹⁹

In a sketch of Capers published a few years after his death, William Wightman repeated the same theme, tying Capers’ unselfish service directly to his lasting reputation:

He spent a handsome patrimony in the service of the Church, and was often reduced to straits and shifts to get on...But, nevertheless, God was gracious to him all the while: he succeeded in educating his children; saw most of them happily married, and usefully engaged in the honorable employments of life; and left to them what is better than houses or lands--the legacy of an untarnished name, of an example bright in paternal excellence, illustrious in life-long consecration to the highest good of his fellows.²⁰

Of course, the essential ingredient of lasting fame, whether in the political or religious sphere, was success. However admirable George Washington’s character and sacrifice may have been, Richard Furman and countless other eulogists would not have committed him to the ages in 1800 if he had not also presided over the creation of a new nation in the 1780s. There were similar patterns at work that allowed men like Furman and Capers to be memorialized in the heroic style in the antebellum South. When Richard Furman died in 1825, he cast a long shadow across the significant progress of the Baptists

¹⁹ Ibid., 16-18.

²⁰ Thomas O. Summers, ed., *Biographical Sketches of Eminent Itinerant Ministers, Distinguished, for the Most Part, as Pioneers of Methodism Within the Bounds of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Nashville, Tenn., 1859), 86-87.

in the Deep South in the past fifty years. Nevertheless, he died in an era when evangelical dominance in the Deep South was still largely inchoate, awaiting the sweeping revivals of the early 1830s to solidify the hold of evangelical religion on the southern soul. By the time William Capers died in 1855, however, his fellow Methodists looked back on his life through the lens of decades of incredible growth for their denomination, a period in which Methodists moved from the radical fringe to the center of the cultural current of the South. This had been, wrote Methodist Thomas O. Summers, the “heroic age” of Methodism. Such success made tributes to Capers’ success and fame as a minister seem natural.²¹

In the decade before the Civil War, the evangelical influence in the South was so evident and widespread that it only remained for eulogists to rehearse how well men like William Capers deserved the accolades of enduring fame. It was still an argument, but one that took less effort in light of the spread of evangelical religion in the South. If Richard Furman was unique among an earlier generation of southern evangelicals for his engagement and influence on public life, a function largely of his location in Charleston as well as his own talent, by the 1850s public influence came with the ecclesiastical territory, making influence a matter of degree and adding strength to the argument that ministers were worthy of the honor that accrued to the memories of public men. In his sketch of William Capers’ life, William Wightman quoted Matthew Arnold: “Great men can only act permanently by forming great nations.” Nevertheless, wrote Wightman:

It is a noble distinction, worthy of the highest aspiration of the soul, to be able to impress upon large bodies of leading minds, whether in the State or in the Church, the principles, sentiments, activities, which carry on the progress of society in virtue and wisdom...It is this posthumous life of influence, spreading out into the

²¹ Ibid., viii.

far-reaching and remote results, long after one's brief time on the earth is past, which, after all, is the true measure of human greatness.²²

It was assumed that for most men, religious or not, fame did not come unlooked for or without effort. It had to be sought, and there was a name for this seeking: ambition. Ambition became an increasingly knotty rhetorical problem for southern evangelicals as their denominations gained influence in the decades before the Civil War. From a religious point of view, the problem with pursuing the “posthumous life of influence” that William Wightman ascribed to his fellow Methodist William Capers was that it bespoke a potentially sinful preoccupation with attaining prominence in the here and now. This had not always been a problem for southern evangelicals. In a memoir published in 1842, the octogenarian itinerant James Jenkins felt compelled to defend himself against the charge that he had originally entered the ministry for “the love of money; the desire of obtaining a rich wife...a wish for ease; a thirst for popularity, &c.” Jenkins pointed out that he still was not rich, did not have a rich wife, was certainly not popular, and had never been idle. He then listed the paltry amounts of money he had received each year as a minister of the gospel. Certainly few could accuse those of Jenkins’ generation, entering the ministry around the turn of the century, of having pursued ambitions of any traditional sort. Even in 1860, the majority of the South’s clergy labored in obscurity and relative penury.

After 1830, however, the rhetorical ground increasingly shifted underneath the pulpit as the evangelical laity became more and more socially prominent and influential

²² Ibid., 89-90.

and as the evangelical clergy increasingly took their place among the South's professional classes in the burgeoning city churches. On the whole, evangelical sermons before 1860 were steadfast in their denunciation of the active pursuit of worldly fame and influence, recommending instead selfless service to God and his glory. But evangelicals now had to come to terms with the fact that the choice to be a minister of the gospel was no longer the bald renunciation of place and position that a young Basil Manly had considered it to be in the 1820s. Indeed, Manly himself turned out to be wrong about his decision, going on to become one of the most prominent and sought after churchmen of his day. Baptist William Brantly, who followed Manly as pastor of Richard Furman's First Baptist Church in Charleston in the 1840s, laid out the changed ground in a sermon titled "Dangers to Which Ministers of the Gospel are Exposed,"

The respectability of their office is perilous to the rigid virtue of ministers. The world, it is true, hates religion and all its advocates; but there is, nevertheless, in the present day, a large portion of all communities ready to accord a favourable reception to religious characters. Among such, ministers can always find an honourable place. They have a ready admission to the best society, and there, are distinguished with that respect and confidence which are given to its most deserving members...They are tempted to use that very religion which is not of this world, as a passport to popular applause, and a stepping-stone to worldly influence, and advancement.²³

If being a messenger of Christ was no longer a renunciation of worldly ambition and fame in southern society, the same was true of being a follower of Christ. In the early years of the evangelical movement in the South the messengers of the gospel had preached the countercultural message that true honor came from God alone, and had attempted to turn the rules of honor on their head, proclaiming that shame suffered for the

²³ William Theophilus Brantly, *Sermons* (n.p.), 285-286, SCL. On the urban clergy, see E. Brooks Holifield, *The Gentlemen Theologians: American Theology in Southern Culture, 1795-1860* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1978). Most of the ministers in this chapter fall into the group Holifield examined.

sake of Christ was honor before God. This message helped new converts refuse and reinterpret the shame and social stress of accepting a religious message that many viewed with uncertainty or outright derision in the years surrounding the turn of the century in the Deep South. In these early years most of the evangelical clergy clearly defined the ambition for worldly honor among the faithful as a sin, despite the obvious pride that they took in prominent converts. As evangelicals climbed the social ladder and their ministers and members became more influential, however, they began to temper this message by carefully delineating the dangers of ambition and the proper channels in which it could flow.

The kind of naked ambition for power exhibited by the megalomaniacal Henry Hughes, who recorded his desire to be a despot in his journal, was easily categorized as the sinful desire for self-aggrandizement. Nevertheless, the same sentiments in a milder form were to be found and even openly acknowledged among many of the young men who would later become prominent clergymen in the Deep South. William Capers, looking back on his younger self, discerned the urge for distinction in his early activities. “I was looking with downright ambition (perhaps I should say vanity) to enter the Legislature as soon as I should be of age,” wrote an older Capers regretfully. In pursuit of this ambition, Capers decided upon the law as a profession, but was swayed one night in 1808 when attending a dinner at the home of the Revolutionary War hero General Thomas Sumter where the general informed the young men of the impending war with England and “the occasion it must furnish for glorious deeds and immortal honor.” “My idol was transferred to another temple,” recalled Capers, “and not as a lawyer, but a chivalrous soldier, rising rapidly to eminence and fame, was I to seek my destiny.” His

father, a revolutionary veteran himself, disagreed, and Capers continued his study of the law for the time being.²⁴

Other young ministers expressed their desire to be useful in the service of God in terms that closely echoed the raw yearning of the young Mississippian Hughes. In 1835, a newly ordained James Henley Thornwell wrote to his mentor, General James Gillespie, describing the ordination service and linking his own ambitions to his desire to serve God. “God forbid that I should live in vain,” wrote Thornwell, immediately adding, “It is my sincere and heartfelt desire to glorify him in all things, to surrender [*sic*] myself life, soul and body, entirely and devotedly to his service and through prayer and toil to win many souls unto Christ.”²⁵ In another letter to his friend Alexander Pegues, Thornwell, orphaned as a young child and taken in by Gillespie, recorded his private fear of passing from the world without leaving a trace:

To die unknown, unhonoured, and unsung, like the wild beast of the field, I hope in God may never be my gloomy fate. When we walk into our church-yards, among the numberless tombs with which we meet, how few bear any other memorial of their dead than that they lived and died.²⁶

Thornwell, who would go on to true national prominence as a defender of the Southern way during the sectional arguments of the following decades, would no doubt have been pleased, then, with the recollection of Methodist William Martin, who in the 1880s described an 1836 visit to the home of Thornwell’s mentor General Gillespie, in the process recording Thornwell’s success in leaving behind more than the simple dates

²⁴ William M. Wightman, *Life of William Capers, D. D., One of the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Including an Autobiography* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1902), 50-51, 69.

²⁵ J.H. Thornwell to Gen. James Gillespie, June 13, 1835, James Henley Thornwell Papers, SCL.

²⁶ Benjamin Morgan Palmer, *The Life and Letters of James Henley Thornwell* (Richmond, 1875), 94.

of his earthly existence. “This was the early, happy home of that truly great and good man [Thornwell],” wrote Martin. “Here I made his acquaintance, while he was a young man just entering on that brilliant career which brought him to a point in the Presbyterian Church second to no living man, His fame was world wide.”²⁷

Even as they knew the tug of ambition themselves, clergymen like Thornwell were unequivocally clear that the only right sort of ambition was that which sought to honor and glorify God. For the generation of southern evangelicals who came of age in decades following 1830, this did not necessarily mean the pursuit of the clerical profession. Instead, it implied an elaboration on the Protestant idea that all areas of life were sanctified to the glory of God and the furthering of His kingdom. In an undated sermon, Thornwell argued the idea that although from an earthly perspective fame might be all of a piece, what truly mattered were the ends towards which the ambitions of famous men had pointed along their paths to prominence:

Those whom the scriptures commemorate as having obtained a good report are in nothing more strikingly diverse from those who are enrolled in the records of human fame than in their simple allegiance to God... Alexander’s conquests, considered in themselves, were more conspicuous than those of Joshua. the fortitude of Regulus quite as remarkable as the patience of Job, & the victories of Caesar no less signal than the triumphs of David, but Alexander sacrificed to glory, Regulus to pride, & Caesar to ambition—while Joshua, Job, and David sacrificed only to God.²⁸

Grand actions undertaken solely in the service of selfish ambition, Thornwell argued, were sinful, while actions done in the service of God flowed from a holier and, in the end, more laudable and lasting sort of ambition.

²⁷ “Reminiscences of a Methodist Preacher, no. 13,” Feb. 14, 1882, *Southern Christian Advocate*.

²⁸ Undated sermon on Hebrews 11:7, folder 67, Box 2, James Henley Thornwell Papers, SCL.

In the 1840s and 1850s, the preaching of prominent Methodist Whiteford Smith exhibited a carefully calibrated view of ambition that took for granted the presence of the urge to excel in the human heart, and pressed on those in the audience the need to examine the ends toward which this urge directed itself. In 1849, in the midst of an epidemic illness sweeping the nation, Smith preached a sermon in which he recited a litany of national sins that might have called down the judgment of a just God. Among them he counted the improper ambitions of the clergy, which had produced an internecine and quarrelsome spirit in the church:

But as among the twelve a controversy arose which of them should greatest, so it is to be feared a spirit of human ambition has sadly corrupted the churches of our day; and the work which might well have employed the hearts and hands of angels, has been measurably lost sight of in the struggle for human pre-eminence.²⁹

In other settings, however, Smith was clear that ambition itself was no sin, provided it was godly in its origins, character, and pursuits. “Ambition,” noted Smith to an audience of Emory College undergraduates in 1851, “has been a fertile theme for denunciation among moralists.” He might have added “and among Methodist preachers.” Nevertheless, in front of an audience of young men setting out into the world to make their way, many of them in the secular professions, Smith delivered a carefully qualified blessing of the desire to win distinction and public acclaim. He argued that while the rolls of fame were filled with the names of warriors and statesmen, they also contained (or should contain) the names of men who had won renown in fields of action other than the battlefield or political office. He elucidated a conception of ambition and its main end,

²⁹ Whitefoord Smith, *National Sins: A Call to Repentance. A Sermon Preached on the National Fast, August 3, 1849, in Cumberland Church, Charleston, S. C.* (Charleston, S. C., 1849), SCL.

fame, that harmonized with an evangelical theology in which all actions and activities were properly pursued for the glory of God.³⁰

Ambition, Smith informed the Emory undergraduates, “has usually been exhibited as an unhallowed and insatiate lust for fame and power, and illustrated by the names and characters of Alexander and Cesar [sic] and Bonaparte.” But it was a mistake, argued Smith, to define ambition solely by reference to these examples when there were so many others “of a different, and even an opposite kind.” While Smith acknowledged the general declaim of a certain kind of ambition, he argued, “the contemplative mind may be permitted to question the common denunciation.” “Ambition, rightly considered,” argued Smith, “is the desire to excel. It may safely be assumed, that this is an impulse of our nature, felt by every generous mind, prompting to every lofty and noble act.” Smith continued, quoting an essay from the eighteenth century British publication *The Spectator*, “Though the pure consciousness of worthy actions, abstracted from the views of popular applause, be to a generous mind an ample reward, yet the desire of distinction was doubtless implanted in our natures as an additional incentive to exert ourselves in virtuous excellence.” But if ambition was a natural human impulse that could spur on admirable actions, it was also, like all human impulses, subject to the distorting force of Adam’s fall. “Like every other passion which the Creator has given our race,” Smith warned his audience, “it is liable to abuse.” Nevertheless, the inevitable abuses resulting from unrestrained ambitions should not obscure its more honorable ends.³¹

³⁰ Whitefoord Smith, *Ambition Vindicated; An Address Delivered Before the Few and Phi Gamma Societies of Emory College, Oxford, Ga., on the 23rd July, 1851* (Macon, Ga., 1851), 3, SCL.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 3-4, SCL.

Smith's address was also at home in a broad Protestant tradition, elucidated most fully by Max Weber and others, that saw earthly vocations as sacred callings that could be pursued with holy intent and fervor. In one part of his address, Smith delivered a classic Protestant formulation of the holiness of work as a vocation, coupled with an appeal to classical and modern examples of ambitious action resulting in honorable fame:

It is common to those who denounce ambition, to consider it only when its objects are dominion and fame—when the conqueror's path is crimsoned with blood, and the scepter has been won by violence or fraud. They look not to the botanist when he traverses weary fields; nor to the scientific inquirer while he spends years in laborious experiment to discover some recondite truth; nor to the student when his lamp pales before the dawning day...nor to the sage philosopher as he settles some great question which is to crown the toils of his life and give immortality to his name. Ambition, with them [those who denounce ambition], is connected only with the names of warriors and with deeds of arms, as though there had been no Socrates, nor Plato, nor Aristotle,—no Milton, nor Newton, nor Locke,—no Cincinnatus, nor Cato, nor Washington.³²

Even self-interest and an eye towards fame were sanctioned, as long as they remained secondary aims. “Nor let it be supposed,” Smith proclaimed, “that an act must needs be disinterested and agent have no respect to his own reward, to constitute it virtuous and praiseworthy.”³³

The sources and influences that lay behind Smith's 1851 address can be peeled back in layers that go far deeper than the Methodist rapprochement with southern culture in the Deep South, reaching back far beyond even the nineteenth century, as his appeal to classical heroes attests. But certainly the speech bears witness to the fact that by 1851 Methodists were no longer the cultural outsiders they might have been in the 1780s. Smith urged his (mostly Methodist) audience on towards occupations that spanned the

³² Ibid., 4.

³³ Ibid., 6.

width and breadth of southern society, assuming that many of them would indeed be successful and influential in their communities, states, and nation. Smith's speech was not a call to cultural isolation, or (solely) an admonishment of the dangers of ambition. It was, just as its title, "Ambition Vindicated," suggests, a reassurance that religion need be no obstacle to aspiration, and a call to go out and conquer. Some in the audience at Emory that day would no doubt go on to become Methodist ministers, and Smith's messages applied no less to them than to their fellows. After 1830 in the Deep South, the influence wielded by prominent evangelical clergy could be viewed without much contradiction as a ripe field for the righteous ambitions of the young men of the South.

Ambitions were shaped not only by intentions or ultimate ends, but perhaps most significantly by examples. Just as in 1800 Richard Furman held up George Washington as a model for younger generations to emulate, so ministers like Whiteford Smith urged the veneration of heroes as an appropriate method of forming holy ambitions. "In all ages, and among all people, it has been usual to cherish the memory of the illustrious dead," Smith declared, "that by the honors paid them, the young might be stimulated to imitate their examples and emulate their fame." Smith here repeated almost verbatim the advice of the philosopher Aristotle, who recommended praise, particularly of the dead, as a method of encouraging certain types of behavior. Nevertheless, Smith insisted to his audience:

Nor has this practice been confined to those who were destitute of divine revelation. The scriptures of truth have recorded in glowing terms the achievements of patriarchs and heroes, of prophets and apostles and martyrs,

exhorting us to follow in their steps, ‘who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness,’ and triumphed over all their enemies.³⁴

It is significant, and appropriate to his audience, that the record of Godly fame to which Smith pointed included prophets as well as warriors. While Smith drew his heroes of scripture, James Henley Thornwell, in his notes for an address to the undergraduates of South Carolina College in 1855, recommended to their attention heroes of a more recent vintage. Delivering the address in the college’s new chapel, Thornwell used the structure to drive his point home:

This building is the true successor of the old Chapel & you the true successors of the noble men who gave it all the glory that it had. Let us make this latter house more glorious than the first[.] It is nothing that the first commemorated the names of [George] McDuffie, [Hugh] Legare, [William C.] Preston & such men—South Carolina is South Carolina still—& as long as she retains her ancient characteristics she will continue to be the mother of heroes, scholars & statesmen. There are men now before me whose names portent will not willingly let die, if they are only true to themselves... Do your duty, Gentlemen, & coming generations will point to you as proudly as you point the great men that have gone before you.³⁵

Thornwell’s heroes carried less of a sacred aura about them than did Smith’s, but they were nevertheless men of politics, the speech, and the pen, rather than warriors. Such descriptions implicitly included the possibility that men of the cloth themselves could win the kind of public and undying fame that would shape the ambitions of subsequent generations. Indeed, by the 1850s in the South the evangelical clergy were public figures whose influence over the public rivaled the other public professions. It was no doubt true in the South of the 1850s, as northerner Edward Hooker had observed in 1805, that young southerners of ambition eagerly sought militia posts as the nearest and

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

³⁵ Address to the College, October 1, 1855, oversize materials folder, James Henley Thornwell Papers, SCL.

surest path to political influence and fame among their fellow southerners. Nevertheless, by the 1850s a constellation of prominent evangelical clergy like Thornwell, who served as president of South Carolina College, proved that political influence was only one of the avenues to winning a lasting reputation.

If ambition was the starting point of winning a name, and the emulation of virtuous heroes its method, there were other qualities that those hopeful of future fame did well to consider. Central among these was self-mastery. Southern evangelicals, like most nineteenth century Americans, held a view of human nature in which the passions were held in balance by the reason of the intellect and by self-control. Mastery of the self, as Whiteford Smith informed the Emory undergraduates, echoing a common refrain, was the first qualification of greatness. “He cannot be called truly great,” Smith proclaimed, “who is the slave of any passion.” According the Smith, it was this failure to rule the self that had tainted the fame of many a great man. “Many of the names which stand connected with discoveries in science, with the ripest scholarship, with the profoundest attainments in literature, as well as with the mightiest triumphs in war, are dimmed and obscured by the presence of some ignoble passion which has conquered the conqueror.” Smith offered as an example Alexander the Great, who “fell victim of bacchanalian revelry.”³⁶

A lack of self-mastery could turn the potential for honorable fame into ill repute. This, after all, had been the downfall of Beverly Allen, who had fallen prey to his own success, succumbed to temptation, and ended by killing a federal marshal and fleeing

³⁶ Whitefoord Smith, *Ambition Vindicated*, 7.

westward in disgrace. This was the moral of Allen's story as it reverberated through the pages of Methodist history in the nineteenth century: great ambition and great talent might be used to further God's glory and, secondarily, to achieve a name for oneself, but reverse the order and disaster was sure to follow. The lesson to be learned from the story of Irish Methodist William Hammet, leader of a schismatic movement in the Methodist Church in Charleston in the 1790s, was much the same. Retelling Hammet's tale in the 1850s, Methodist historian F.A. Mood told of Hammet's journey from his native land to the islands of Antigua and Jamaica where his ministry flourished alongside the newly formed Methodist societies, but where Hammet was almost martyred for the faith on account of the Methodist's well-known antipathy to slavery. Hammet eventually made his way to Charleston, where, according to Mood, he immediately became a "star," drawing crowds of people eager to hear the gospel message delivered with an Irish lilt. Many of Charleston's Methodists demanded that Hammet be appointed to the city as its minister, against Methodist protocol in which congregations had no part in picking their own ministers. Francis Asbury refused. In any case, Hammet himself refused to join the American Conference, denouncing it as a schismatic movement that failed to honor the leadership of the Wesleys and whose ministers did not wear the wig and vestments that Hammet thought proper to a minister of God. Instead, Hammet formed his own church, called the Primitive Methodist Church (a name that many southerners in the 1790s must have found redundant), and had his followers fund the construction of a large church, Trinity, in Charleston.³⁷

³⁷ Mood, *Methodism in Charleston*, 48-58.

F.A. Mood judged the schism “a most disastrous affair” for the young Methodist movement in Charleston, while in the years following the schism Francis Asbury began using Hammet as an example in one of his sermons to warn his ministers of the dangers of popularity. Mood contrasted the honorable fame Hammet might have won by his zeal and sacrifice for the Methodist cause in the Caribbean with the damage he did in Charleston. “Better, far better for his fame, had he remained in Kingston, Jamaica, and suffered martyrdom from the mobs, than thus have brought disaster to the church, and subsequent unhappiness to himself and others,” wrote Mood. Whatever he may have been to his followers and himself—Mood noted that Hammet “retained his popularity as a man and a minister for a number of years after the schism”—in the view of Mood and in the annals of American Methodism Hammet’s name was one of enduring obloquy.³⁸

The courage to act rightly when religious or moral principle diverged from popular opinion also formed an indispensable part of the character of any truly great man, Smith argued. He distinguished this form of courage as of a different, higher sort than that to be found on the battlefield. “Perhaps no developement [*sic*] of this principle [courage] is so rare, and certainly none more deserves admiration, than that of a good man daring to do right at the sacrifice of interest or emolument, and against the voices of the multitude,” Smith declared. “Shall he be called courageous, who, when the voice of conscience and the voice of God, alike proclaim the right, shrinks away from the act because it meets not the popular favor?” This was in one sense a uniquely evangelical view of courage. For while the idea of moral courage was not alien to the set of attributes

³⁸ Ibid., 58-60, 73.

valued by the wider honor culture in the South, the emphasis was typically opposite from the one that Smith described.³⁹

Others drew finer distinctions, more in line with the ethical assumptions of honor, between a craven submission to popular opinion and a healthy respect for the established boundaries enforced by public sentiment. In his autobiography, William Capers wrote:

The man who would make himself popular, stoops and crouches to just that degree. He puts himself in a posture for any thing...a chameleon of any color, a fawning spaniel or a barking cur...Not so as to the respect of the individual for public sentiment; that is, the common judgement of society as to the proprieties of life and conduct. Popularity works against society; this feeling of respect for public sentiment works for it. This [respect] proceeds from a feeling of the responsibility proper for the individual towards the community: that [popularity] affects to honor the community for individual advantage.⁴⁰

In pulpit and print, odes to the illustrious evangelical dead often invoked the inviolate sense of duty that had marked them during life. Another of the martial virtues that in the nineteenth century was in the process of being tamed and put to use in descriptions of the professional and political varieties of honor, a faithful adherence to duty was one of honor's most basic demands, and thus a cornerstone in the construction of a name in life and a legacy in death. Memorialists appealed to the evident devotion to duty on the part of the dead as proof of their honor and worth, and in order to urge the living to perform their own roles with similar diligence. Duty was also, as E. Anthony Rotundo has argued in his examination of the transformation of masculinity in America since the Revolution, a key component of what he identifies as the ideal of communal

³⁹ Whitefoord Smith, *Ambition Vindicated*, 11.

⁴⁰ Wightman, *Life of Capers*, 190.

manhood that held sway in eighteenth-century America. “Every social relationship was organized as a conjunction of roles,” wrote Rotundo, while “each role was governed by a set of duties owed to others.” Unlike in the modern era, personal identity was “bound up in the performance of social roles, not in the expression of self.” In the South, where the communal ideal of manhood held sway much longer than elsewhere in the country, conceptions of manhood were unavoidably filtered through the lens of honor, in which honor depended upon the reflection of claims to identity in the mirror of communal authority. Thus, the evangelical clergy fully participated in the devotion to duty that formed a crucial part of the ideals of masculinity and honor in the South.⁴¹

Unsurprisingly, one of the most important ways in which ministers themselves defined their duty was in reference to God and their role as His holy messengers. At times, their devotion to duty in this regard could be as demanding as any soldier’s, superseding their earthly responsibilities. In 1811, Methodist James Jenkins wife was struck by a “severe attack of pleurisy” just as Jenkins was about to leave to begin traveling his circuit. As soon as the doctor assured Jenkins that his wife was not likely to die, though very ill, Jenkins left to keep his appointments. “I left,” he wrote, “committing her to the care of the Lord. I consider myself and family safer when we are discharging our duty, though a hundred miles apart, than we are together, if found neglecting it.” A year later, Jenkins sense of duty was once again tested when his young son James was caught in a gin, leaving his collar and breast bones crushed. “His agony was so great we had to turn him, when necessary, by the sheet,” Jenkins recalled. Nevertheless, the circuit

⁴¹ E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: BasicBooks, 1993), 12-13. It could be argued that Rotundo’s communal manhood ideal retained its strength much longer in the South than elsewhere, due to the existence of slavery, a traditional, hierarchical society, honor culture, and the rural character of southern life.

awaited. “My appointments commenced the next day, and I knew not what to do; whether to stay and nurse my child, or to go and do the work of the Lord.” Jenkins decided to go, and his son eventually recovered. “I have frequently left my wife, or children, sick in the bed, and found them better on my return,” he wrote, linking his performance of his duty to God’s care for his family. Though this attitude can seem callous to the modern reader, it was Jenkins’ devotion to a perceived higher duty, as well as his steadfast belief that the every last detail of his family’s fate rested in God’s hands, that allowed him to leave his family in God’s hands. Elsewhere in his memoir, describing a period of spiritual trial, Jenkins recorded the dangers he associated with being derelict in his duty to God. “I backslid in heart,” he recalled, “and the light of God's countenance was obscured. I became sensible of my loss, and endeavoured [*sic*] to ascertain the cause, but could not perceive wherein I had neglected any duty, or yielded to any temptation.”⁴²

Duty to God unavoidably implied duty to the church and to fellow ministers, fellow Christians, and even to the unredeemed. “He possessed a strong will, and was inflexible in purpose to do his duty,” wrote the Rev. R.O. Burton of Hezekiah Leigh. “He was a man of true courage and independence of character...and with a vivid sense of his responsibility as a man and minister, he met his difficulties with firmness, bore troubles with fortitude, and spoke his sentiments with independence.” As a result of his devotion to duty, Leigh left behind “an unblemished character as a man and a Christian minister.” Similar statements testifying to a stalwart sense of duty can be found everywhere in the extant evangelical literature of commemoration.⁴³

⁴² Jenkins, *Experience, Labours, and Gospel Sufferings of Rev. James Jenkins*, 164-165, 167-168, 45-46.

⁴³ Summers, *Biographical Sketches of Eminent Itinerant Ministers*, 170.

Duty also implied sacrifice, exactly the kind of self-sacrifice for which Richard Furman had praised George Washington. “I have heard him state repeatedly,” wrote one observer of the late William M. Kennedy, “that for a number of years his private resources had been annually diminished to meet the wants of his family. Still he never complained, nor swerved from the path of duty, ‘for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.’” Preaching on the death of William Capers, the Rev. Joseph Cross noted the choice ministerial appointments Capers had refused on account of his loyalty to the Methodist cause. “In other ecclesiastical connections, handsome settlements were offered him at two different periods of his life; but his head and his heart were both Wesleyan, and no earthly advantage could tempt him to a compromise of duty and conscience.” Indeed, in seeking out the interpretive key to Capers’ life, his biographer William Wightman thought that the single most important lesson to be gleaned from his subject was “the paramount law of duty” which had so often led Capers to leave the family he dearly loved in the service of the church.⁴⁴

Nor were such remembrances reserved only for the bright stars in the evangelical firmament. The same sentiments can be found in resolutions such as the one recorded by the church clerk of the Brushy Creek Baptist of Greenville County, South Carolina, in 1827, commemorating the life of the church’s late pastor Lewis Rector. “We consider the death of this excellent man of God as a sore bereavement-and a heavy chastisement upon the Church,” the clerk recorded. “Faithful to his God he discharged his duties with

⁴⁴ Summers, *Biographical Sketches of Eminent Itinerant Ministers*, 150-151; Cross, *Elijah*, 17; Wightman, *Life of Capers*, 232, 502.

conscientious fidelity to man.” Duty to God implied duty to man, and the faithful performance of those duties was the standard by which reputations were judged.⁴⁵

Even when practiced by ministers, duty remained a martial virtue, and battlefield imagery was common in funeral sermons and eulogies. What evangelicals specifically invoked with language, of course, was scripture itself, especially passages such as one where Paul instructed the church at Ephesus to “put on the whole armor of God,” as well as a passage in Second Timothy: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (Ephesians 6:10-17; 2 Timothy 4:7). Nevertheless, the language of the battlefield and martial glory also allowed evangelicals to describe the heroism of God’s messengers and their devotion to duty in terms that echoed the tributes to soldiers who had achieved glory and the pinnacle of honor. Remembering William Kennedy of the South Carolina Conference, the Rev. James Stacy recounted Kennedy’s unwillingness to leave itinerant ministry:

His soul has felt, it still feels, the love of Christ constraining him to labor in the master's vineyard...he hear's his 'Captain's' calling the sons of the church to valorous deeds, and the shouts of victory as they rise from the lips of the sacramental host, in swelling tones, to heaven!...How can such a man consent to be 'laid aside' as a useless thing? How can such a soldier consent to put his armor by, and cease to fight the battles of the Lord, while a vestige of strength remains?⁴⁶

It was a question meant to stir the hearts of a younger generation to acts of spiritual heroism in the service of God’s heavenly kingdom, a task in which they might also, perhaps, win for themselves a lasting reputation on earth.

⁴⁵ Brushy Creek Baptist Church Records (Greenville County, South Carolina), June 9, 1827, SCL.

⁴⁶ Summers, *Biographical Sketches of Eminent Itinerant Ministers*, 160.

Duty arose most directly from the responsibilities associated with one's place in society or office, and thus must be examined alongside the way in which evangelicals thought about the "office" of the ministry, the duties associated with it, and the relation of both to honor. What was clear to evangelicals across a denominational spectrum was that the ministry should not be viewed as an avenue to honor, wealth, or status. *A Summary of Church Discipline* published by the Charleston Baptist Association in 1808 instructed that ministers were "to preach with the view of bringing souls to Christ, and not for the sake of honor or filthy lucre." Nevertheless, while ministers were not to seek out the pulpit for the sake of honor, church members were instructed to treat the office and its occupant with reverence and honor:

As ministers are the representatives of Christ, and employed by him in a work that is both useful and honorable, there are certain duties incumbent on all members of churches towards them. As (1) they owe them distinguishing honor and reverence; and are to hold them in reputation as the ambassadors of Christ [scripture passages cited] and to esteem them highly for their work's sake.⁴⁷

Though this was not entirely different from the way in which public servants or politicians were supposed to approach their offices, or from the way that such figures were to be treated by the public, the ministry was different. Aspirants to political office, despite their avowed and self-abnegating interest in the public good, were assumed to possess and allowed to display an appropriate measure of ambition. Politics, after all, was power. The ministry not only held out the possibility of real sacrifice, it also held the sacred aura of a divine calling that allowed limited room for the outright expression of personal aspirations except in the service of God. Nevertheless, the ministry contained a mix of sacred and secular duties, and across the nineteenth century, the pastorate was in

⁴⁷ Charleston Baptist Association (S.C.), *A Summary of Church-Discipline: Shewing the Qualifications and Duties of the Officers and Members of a gospel Church*, 3rd ed. (Charleston, S.C., 1808), 8-9, 15, SCL.

the process of a transition in which the pulpit became less a sacred calling and more a professional occupation in the South. In possibly the most comprehensive study of the evangelical clergy yet compiled, Beth Barton Schweiger traced three generations and more than eight hundred Baptist and Methodist ministers in Virginia across the span of the nineteenth century. Central to her description of the changes that occurred during that period was the transformation of the clergy from “self-educated stump-speaking revivalists early in the century into professionals who valued seminary degrees and polished pulpits.” Even by the end of the nineteenth century not all pulpits were polished, and there remained throughout the century a vast divide between urban and rural pulpits, but the distinction between the ministry and the agricultural work that occupied the mass of ordinary southerners was significant. “In a society devoted primarily to agriculture,” wrote Schweiger, “they made the pastorate an avenue of social mobility.” Although a spiritual calling topped the list of reasons why young men chose to go into the ministry, “they did not choose preaching in isolation from other considerations.” “The antebellum Southern pastorate,” wrote Schweiger, “often attracted young men who intended to make a living with their heads, not their hands.”⁴⁸

Whatever the other attractions of the pulpit, the sacred nature of the ministry continued to be a defining characteristic not easily dismissed, and it figured prominently in the way the clergy thought about the office. James Henley Thornwell, as ambitious a young man as ever entered the ministry, described his entrance into the clergy as a

⁴⁸ Interestingly, the decades surrounding the Civil War may have been the high water mark of clerical influence in southern society, and as Schweiger charts the growth of church bureaucracies, she writes, “Ironically, the growth of denominations in the late nineteenth century diminished pastors’ influence in the community outside the church...as their empire expanded, the world that pastors administered was an increasingly insular one.” Beth Barton Schweiger, *The Gospel Working up: Progress and the Pulpit in Nineteenth Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 6, 19, 21, 169.

moment of separation from the world and a subordination of his own personality to the cause and person of Christ. “I felt that a new era had commenced in my life,” he wrote, “that I was no longer a citizen of the world, but an ambassador of God, standing in the stead of Jesus Christ and beseeching men to turn from the unsatisfying vanities of a fleeting life and to fix their hopes on the enduring sources of beatitude which surrounds the throne of God.”⁴⁹

For those sincere followers of Christ who believed in the reality of salvation and damnation, the task of “standing in the stead of Jesus Christ” was a monumental duty, one not carried lightly. Across the South, young men considering the ministry agonized over God’s calling on their life, frequently expressing doubts about their worthiness and abilities to perform its duties. Methodist William Martin recalled that he was appointed a class leader against his will, thinking himself unworthy. “I tried in a very feeble and imperfect manner to discharge the high and important duties now devolving upon me with fear and much trembling often wishing that I could be permitted by God, and the Church, to live in obscurity,” he wrote. Nevertheless, and to Martin’s great dismay, the church soon offered him a license to exhort, pushing him one step further towards official ministry. “I felt like I would have to fly,” Martin remembered, “but knew not where to fly.” The next step was inevitable. Despite pleading his lack of education and his mother’s poverty and need of him, Martin was appointed a preacher on a circuit. “I feared the wrath of God more than every thing else,” he recalled, “I also felt a constant burning zeal for the Glory of God and the salvation of souls. I therefore took license to preach at a quarterly meeting.” Martin would repeat this pattern of self-doubt and deprecation at

⁴⁹ James Henley Thornwell to Gen. James Gillespie, June 13, 1835, JHT Papers, SCL.

every step as he ascended the Methodist church hierarchy. He was ordained a Deacon in 1830, and then an Elder in 1832. At annual conference 1834, Martin was appointed along with William Kennedy and George Pierce to work in Charleston for the year. “My feelings on this occasion I need not attempt to describe for it beggars language,” Martin wrote of his appointment to the important post. And in 1835, when the other minister appointed to Charleston left to attend conference, Martin wrote with a mix of pleasure and uncertainty, “I find myself for the time being, Bishop of the M[ethodist] E[piscopal] Church in Charleston, God give me grace for the mighty charge!”⁵⁰

The secular responsibilities of office also bore directly on personal honor, and this applied as fully to the evangelical clergy as it did to other professional classes in the South. In the summer of 1841, Methodist Whiteford Smith received a letter from his colleague William Wightman in Charleston, who wrote to inquire about the financial records of the Methodist publishing concern, publisher of the Methodist periodical the *Southern Christian Advocate*. Smith had served as editor of the publication for a short period in 1840, and Wightman, now serving as editor, asked Smith about apparent gaps in the financial records of the concern, noting that during the previous year nearly two thousand dollars in subscription fees had been collected, even though “according to the published receipts, not a cent of it was owing.” Wightman also asked why F.W. Capers, son of the prominent William Capers, had been on the payroll of the concern as a clerk when, as far as Wightman could tell, “no services were rendered by him?”⁵¹

⁵⁰ “Reminiscences, 1807-1861,” 4-5, 12-13, 22, 77 William Martin Papers, SCL.

⁵¹ W. Wightman to W. Smith, August 28, 1841, Whitefoord Smith Papers, Duke University Rare Book and Manuscript Library (DU).

Wightman's letter was nothing less than an oblique accusation of financial graft, or at the very least gross negligence of duty, and Smith took it that way, quickly drafting two replies over the next few weeks. In a letter dated three weeks after Wightman's initial communication, Smith tersely informed Wightman that the younger Capers' clerkship was under the authority of the Publishing Committee which ran the concern, and thus not his affair since he had merely served as editor of the *Advocate*. As far as other records were concerned, Smith referred Wightman "to the Treasurer's Book (a copy of which was handed you by myself) for all amounts paid the said clerk by me while acting as Treasr. [*sic*] all which were regularly entered." Finally, Smith one-upped Wightman, informing his fellow minister that he had written to Bishop Capers himself, informing the great man of Wightman's letter and alerting him to the possibility of further inquiries regarding his son and the publishing concern. "I have written to Mr. Capers apprising him of the substance of your letter, & informing him of my purpose of referring [*sic*] you to himself for the information desired," wrote Smith. He ended the letter with a challenge, daring Wightman to make his accusation openly:

I should be sorry to construe your letter into an insinuation of connivance on my part at any neglect of the clerk's duties, although I confess myself at a loss to understand the reason the interrogatories addressed to me, the duties of editorship being so entirely distinct from those of the clerkship. If any implication of neglect on my part is intended, I shall be highly gratified at the most minute examination into the matter by the Pub. Committee when I am in the city, which I expect will be in a few weeks."⁵²

Wightman quickly replied in a conciliatory manner, nevertheless justifying his initial communication in terms that made clear he still suspected Smith. In a thinly veiled threat, he wrote that he had simply wanted Smith to be aware of the matter, "should the

⁵² W. Smith to W. Wightman, September 22, 1841, Whitefoord Smith Papers, DU.

subject be hereafter called up, either before the Conference or the public.” No further discussion of the matter can be found in Smith’s correspondence, but clearly both men were aware that more was at stake than the money involved. A scandal of the kind Wightman implied would have involved not only the honor and reputation of Smith, but also the good name of the Methodist Publishing Concern and, through his son, Bishop William Capers. The carefully worded, highly formal, correspondence mirrors precisely the epistolary exchanges that sometimes preceded duels in the South, although the affair was much more likely to be settled before a committee rather than on the field of honor. Clearly, many of the same matters, issues of honor, identity, reputation, and duty, were at stake.⁵³

Duty and honor were also involved in decisions to accept a call or to switch pulpits. The problem in some such cases was that it could be difficult to determine exactly where one’s responsibilities lay, and, as the following case attests, unraveling the threads of ambition, duty, obligation, and honor could be an extremely delicate business. In 1855, James Henley Thornwell had declared to the undergraduates at South Carolina College, “Do your duty, Gentlemen, & coming generations will point to you as proudly as you point the great men that have gone before you.” Thornwell’s own devotion to the ideal of duty, his view of it as an expression of God’s will, and his keen sense that it was directly related to his honor and his reputation, can be seen in an exchange of letters ten years earlier when Thornwell nearly left South Carolina to occupy the pulpit of the famous Second Presbyterian Church in Baltimore.⁵⁴

⁵³ W. Wightman to W. Smith, October 11, 1841, Whitefoord Smith Papers, DU

⁵⁴ Address to the College, October 1, 1855, oversize material folder, James Henley Thornwell Papers, SCL.

In the fall of 1845, Thornwell was serving as the chaplain at South Carolina College, an influential post in which he was universally popular, already having won recognition throughout the state, if not the nation, as a churchman of rare depth and talents. Nevertheless, Thornwell was dissatisfied with the post, feeling he was not sufficiently supported by the unpopular administration of the college, and he determined to leave. The impetus for his departure was a call from the church of his close friend R.J. Breckenridge of Baltimore, a prominent Presbyterian in his own right who had recently accepted the presidency of Jefferson College in Pennsylvania. The Baltimore church brought their call before the Charleston Presbytery, the ecclesiastical body responsible for dismissing Thornwell from his duties at the college, and, after lengthy deliberations the Presbytery approved the move over the protestations of prominent clergy like Thomas Smyth of Charleston, who argued that Thornwell should be prevented from going for the good of Presbyterianism in the state.⁵⁵

Concerns of honor were present at every step of this process, not least in Thornwell's decision to take what seemed at the time a more prominent position in Baltimore. It was important to Thornwell, as well, that the church's decision to call him be unanimous, reflecting a uniform opinion of him and a universal desire on the church's part to receive him. The vote to call a minister, practiced in both the Presbyterian and Baptist denominations, was frequently a point of sensitivity for a minister's sense of self-worth, mirroring the implications of political elections for the personal honor of the candidates for public office. In 1850, Maria Taylor wrote to her relative James C. Furman about the election of a minister at a Baptist church in the Beaufort district of South

⁵⁵ Palmer, *The Life and Letters of James Henley Thornwell*, 267.

Carolina. Only two thirds of the church voted for the new minister, wrote Taylor, and “some staid away to keep from voting for him or giving offence.” When William Capers was elected a Bishop in the Methodist Church, he claimed in a letter to his wife that he had not suspected the honor and that it happened almost without comment. His biographer William Wightman added: “It was highly honorable to Dr. Capers that he should have been elected in the manner just related [i.e. with little discussion]. His high character, his known devotion to the itinerant ministry, and his past services, rendered unnecessary the slightest effort on the part of his friends to secure his election.” Despite his protestations of indifference, Capers was highly conscious of the implications of office for personal honor. A few years before being elected Bishop, he had submitted his name to South Carolina College expecting to be named its president. When offered a mere Professorship, Capers turned it down as almost an insult, averring that its duties amounted to “little else than a chaplaincy.”⁵⁶

Thornwell must have been pleased at the result, then, when Alexander Boggs, an Elder in the Baltimore Church, wrote assuring him that the call had been unanimous. “It affords me infinite pleasure in saying that it was by acclamation, not [illegible] one dissenting voice[,] being entirely unanimous—Such an election very rarely happens and I trust that such an expression will urge you in the line of your duty to accept the call.” Another Baltimore Elder wrote to Thornwell with the same message. Thornwell had been

⁵⁶ Kathryn Carlisle Schwartz, *Baptist Faith in Action: The Private Writings of Maria Baker Taylor, 1813-1895* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 48-49; Wightman, *Life of Capers*, 414-415, 353-354.

elected, wrote Henry McElderry, “without a breath of opposition, or a single dissenting voice.”⁵⁷

Things seemed set for Thornwell’s departure to Baltimore. He began selling his furniture and discharging servants for the move, convinced that God’s will and his duty and ambitions pointed northward. Nevertheless, he lamented leaving South Carolina. “You may well imagine how bitter is the necessity of leaving my native State,” he wrote to his old mentor General James Gillespie. “I had hoped to spend my days in South Carolina, to breathe my last in her borders and deposite [*sic*] my bones in her dust.” He must have been a little unsettled as well in his perception of the move to Baltimore as a furthering of his ambitions by the letter of William Giles, a member of the Baltimore church, who wrote Thornwell to congratulate him after the Charleston Presbytery had released him to accept the Baltimore call. “To change the field of one’s labour, even for a few brief months I know to be embarrassing,” wrote Giles, “how much so then when that change is for life and from one of honor and great usefulness to one that is comparatively unknown[?]” Such sentiments, undoubtedly meant to be an expression of humility, were not calculated to feed Thornwell’s ambition, but he nevertheless submitted his resignation to the college Board of Trustees on the twenty-fifth of November.⁵⁸

Thornwell professed to be shocked when the Board of Trustees refused his resignation in an attempt to keep him, invoking an obscure rule that professor’s must give one year’s notice before leaving the college. Furthermore, in the same session, and

⁵⁷ Alexander Boggs to JHT, July 3, 1845, JHT Papers, SCL; Henry McElderry to JHT, July 11, 1845, JHT Papers, SCL.

⁵⁸ JHT to James Gillespie, October 1, 1845, JHT Papers, SCL; William F. Giles to JHT, October 14, 1845, JHT Papers, SCL; JHT to SC College Board of Trustees, November 25, 1845, JHT Papers, SCL.

possibly in response to a list of Thornwell's demands, the trustees installed the eminent orator and statesman William C. Preston—an ardent admirer of Thornwell's—as the college president and made numerous other changes which Thornwell had earlier demanded in order to make his position at the college more attractive.⁵⁹

When Thornwell wrote to his friend, and the Baltimore church's erstwhile pastor, R.J. Breckenridge, informing him of the trustees' decision and professing himself powerless to fight against it, Breckenridge reacted with shock, describing his "sorrow and alarm" at "your inclination to submit to this refusal." Suspecting, probably rightly, that the trustees would not have chosen this course without Thornwell's tacit approval, Breckenridge launched a lengthy argument in order to convince his friend that both his sacred and secular duty bound him to remove to Baltimore. The college, argued Breckenridge represented merely "a civil corporation, acting contrary to the clear conclusion of God's church." Moreover, Breckenridge cited the "considerable expense" and "considerable privations" sustained by the Baltimore church to secure Thornwell's leadership. Finally, Breckenridge summed up his points succinctly and sharply: "Two objects, very dear to me, seem at stake: the good of the church at Baltimore, and your good name; which is not a whit less dear to me."⁶⁰

It was the last point, a veiled warning, which seems to have prompted Thornwell to pen a veritable treatise on duty and its relation to honor in response. "I have been deeply grieved that your conclusions differ so widely from my own," wrote Thornwell. He argued that the rule invoked by the trustees, even if rarely used, still retained the

⁵⁹ See J.D. Blanding to JHT, November 26 and again on November 28, 1845, JHT Papers, SCL.

⁶⁰ Palmer, *The Life and Letters of James Henley Thornwell*, 271-272.

weight of moral obligation. He assured his friend that the trustees were “men of God” who were “governed by a solemn sense of public duty.” Responding to Breckenridge’s unspoken implication that the board had acted in accordance with what it believed to be Thornwell’s wishes, he insisted that the decision was “wholly and exclusively, *their* act, and not *mine*. But being done, my duty was decided. I was under a solemn obligation to remain. I had made a contract upon taking my chair, and it was not for me to dissolve it.”⁶¹

Thornwell then entered into a lengthy logical argument concerning the conditional nature of duty, and the way it ultimately must coincide with God’s will and be malleable to the course of events. Although he had believed it to be God’s will and thus his duty that he go to Baltimore, “An event takes place, which shows that I cannot go to Baltimore without the breach of a moral obligation. This settles it, that is not the *Divine will* that I should go. They [the church] then cease to be bound by the call, and I by the acceptance.” Finally, Thornwell argued that the issue was not finally one of which authority to follow, civil or sacred, but was instead a matter of personal duty and honor. “You insinuate that, in yielding to this action, I yield to civil authority, in a spiritual matter,” wrote Thornwell. “The mistake is this: It is *my own promise, my own* solemn compact, that I respect, and not *authority*.” Honor, in other words, was the ultimate end to which Thornwell looked. The editor of Thornwell’s published writings noted that the letter “reveals a sensibility to considerations of honour, and discloses principles upon which difficult questions of duty may be resolved.” Thornwell’s famously technical mind often delved into the depths of

⁶¹ Ibid., 272-279.

theological truth, but in this case he turned his attention to the finer points of duty, honor, and God's will.⁶²

Whatever his sense of duty, it was probably Thornwell's pride that led him to acknowledge to Breckenridge that his duty in this case was made easier by the fact that the trustees had "voted an appropriation to render my place of preaching much more elegantly comfortable and inviting than it is now." Combined with the election of the energetic William Preston as the college president, Thornwell must have felt it somewhat convenient that his duty called him to stay in South Carolina. He must have been somewhat dismayed, then, when the church in Baltimore renewed its call, voting to wait on him until his probationary period at the college was over. This new development seemed, once again, to throw a different light on the demands of duty and God's will. "In regard to myself and my prospects—I hardly know what to say," Thornwell wrote James Gillespie in March of 1846. "I have been shut up in honour to go to Baltimore, at the expiration of the year and have made an engagement to supply the church during the summer." The only hope of Thornwell's advocates in South Carolina was the Charleston Presbytery, which could rescind its approval of the Baltimore church's call and Thornwell's request to change the field of his ministry. Colonel William Preston, the new president of the college, though not a Presbyterian himself, was not long in pursuing this avenue of keeping Thornwell in Columbia. "Col. Preston is very much opposed to my going," Thornwell wrote Gillespie, "and has had an interview with some members of Presbytery and I suspect that he has got them pledged to put an interdict upon it." In an unprecedented move, the Presbytery reversed itself, giving as its cause Thornwell's

⁶² Ibid.

indispensability to the cause of Christ in the state in his position at South Carolina College. Thornwell, no doubt a little pleased to be fought over, quietly acquiesced. “My comfort is that the whole matter is in the hand of God,” wrote Thornwell to Gillespie, “who will order all things right. My sincere desire is to do his will. I have no personal or private ends to subserve.”⁶³

At every point in the Baltimore affair, Thornwell was guided by the assumption that a duty clearly discerned was by definition God’s will. There was also little contradiction for Thornwell between God’s will, his duty, his ambitions, and his personal honor and reputation, all of which eventually pulled in the same direction—away from Baltimore. By 1845 Thornwell was already an important man. Certainly few other ministers, upon transferring to another field of ministry, would have roused the cooperation of political and ecclesiastical power that rallied to keep Thornwell in South Carolina. But his example is only different from others in degree, and serves to show that concerns of duty, personal honor, and reputation were inseparable from the office of a clergyman.

Perhaps because it would have been unseemly for clergymen, the humble servants of Christ, to proclaim their own honor too loudly, they frequently emphasized the honor that must be paid to their office, and thus to them as representatives of Christ and His church. The end of all ministerial efforts was God’s glory, but in accomplishing this end ministers themselves were honored. In his sermon on the death of the Rev. James Adams, Pierpont Bishop proclaimed, “It may not then be unprofitable for us to contemplate for a

⁶³ Ibid., 275, 280. JHT to Gen. James Gillespie, March 27, 1846, JHT Papers, SCL.

time, the ministerial character of one whom God so highly honored as an instrument in promoting his own glory.”⁶⁴ In a sermon titled, “Ministers of the Gospel,” Baptist William Brantly laid out the logic by which ministers shared in the glory and honor of God, reconciling the humility with which the calling must be pursued with the honor it conferred:

Finally, let it be remembered that the faithful heralds of the Gospel, are the GLORY OF CHRIST. The application of an epithet so high and honourable to imperfect men, may seem to require some justifying considerations. To us then it would appear, that they are called the Glory of Christ, because Christ is not preached without them, because he has suspended his glory upon the issue of their efforts, because his religion, possessed and exemplified by them, constitutes their most genuine glory.⁶⁵

Sentiments such as these opened a rhetorical space in which a clergyman’s rigid regard for his own honor could be justified, since his honor was theoretically derivative, flowing directly from and taking part in God’s own honor. In his sermon on the death of the Rev. Horace Pratt, Basil Manly expounded the mix of humility and a zealous regard for the honor of one’s office that this conception of clerical honor created. “Although keenly sensitive to whatever was rude, insolent, overbearing, or disparaging, and never for a moment permitting his own rights, or the dignity of the body to which he belonged, to be violated,” Manly proclaimed of Pratt, “he habitually acted as though he ‘esteemed others better than himself.’”⁶⁶

It was this conception of the clergy as the humble stewards of God’s reflected honor that echoed through the vitriolic debates that split the Baptist and Methodist

⁶⁴ Bishop, *A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of Rev. James S. Adams*, 9, SCL.

⁶⁵ William Theophilus Brantly, *Sermons*, 254-255, SCL.

⁶⁶ Basil Manly, *Grief for Departed Worth: A Sermon in Commemoration of the Rev. Prof. Horace S. Pratt, A.M* (Tuskaloosa, Alabama, 1841), 36, SCL.

churches in the 1840s. Many of the southern clergy proclaimed that ministers of God who allowed themselves to be treated dishonorably were not worthy of the gospel. In a speech railing against a resolution barring slaveholders from holding national office in the Methodist Episcopal Church, Georgia Methodist George F. Pierce proclaimed, “Finally, I say, pass this resolution, and the whole of the Southern States are hurled into confusion at once, and the brother that would lie down to be trampled upon by such an act of this body, would be regarded as unworthy [of] the office he held, and unworthy to preach the gospel of Jesus.” According to his biographer, when Basil Manly authored the Alabama Resolutions in 1844, demanding that the national convention affirm positively that slaveholders could be appointed missionaries and hold national office, his main concern was the implied slight to the honor of the southern clergy, and especially to himself. When the national convention replied that “If anyone should offer himself as a Missionary having slaves, and should insist on retaining them as his property, we could not appoint him,” Manly and others spearheaded the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention.⁶⁷

Evangelicals believed that remembering the dead was a duty incumbent upon the living. It was a duty that the clergy justified by appeal to Holy Scripture as well as human wisdom. In his sketch of the life of Methodist Bishop Henry B. Bascom, published in 1859, William Wightman quoted Lord Byron. “Theirs,” wrote Wightman of Bascom and

⁶⁷ Methodist Episcopal Church, South, *History of the Organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South: Comprehending All the Official Proceedings of the General Conference; the Southern Annual Conferences, and the General Convention; with Such Other Matters as Are Necessary to a Right Understanding of the Case* (Nashville, 1845), 21; Fuller, *Chaplain to the Confederacy*, 212-227; Joe M. King, *A History of South Carolina Baptists* (General Board of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, 1964), 216.

his ilk, “are the ‘deeds which should not pass away/And names that must not wither, though the earth/ Forgets her empires’.” In the introduction to a collection of biographical sketches of famous southern Methodist ministers, editor Thomas O. Summers invoked the apocryphal book Sirach, written by the Jewish scribe Ben Sira:

“‘Let us praise famous men,’ says Sirach. ‘The Lord hath wrought great glory by them--leaders of the people by their counsels, and by their knowledge of learning meet for the people, wise and eloquent in their instructions--the glory of their times. There be of them that have left a name behind them, that their praises might be reported. Their bodies are buried in peace, but their name liveth for evermore.’”⁶⁸

In a funeral sermon preached in 1851, Baptist minister J.J. Brantly appealed to more orthodox scripture to remind his audience of their responsibility to remember the dead:

It was a heavy charge against the Jews in Isaiah's days, that 'when the righteous were taken away, no man laid it to heart.' For us to see without concern the removal of those who are the spiritual 'salt of the earth' and the 'lights of the world,' would argue a sad want of devout sensibility. And surely honor is due from us, to those whom God has honored. 'It is an homage due to departed worth whenever it rises to such a height as to render its possessor an object of general attention, to endeavor to rescue it from oblivion, that when it is removed from the observation of men it may still live in their memory, and transmit through the shades of the sepulchre some reflection, however faint, of its living lustre.’⁶⁹

Just as with other forms of memory, the task of remembering the great men of God was partly entrusted to institutions. In 1857, Whiteford Smith addressed the Historical Society of the Methodist South Carolina Conference. “Our Society had its origin in that feeling of our nature which prompts us to cherish with veneration & love the memories of our predecessors, & which attaches no ordinary value to whatever may

⁶⁸ Summers, *Biographical Sketches of Eminent Itinerant Ministers*, 93, vii.

⁶⁹ J. J. Brantly, *The Reward of Godly Fear: A Sermon on the Death of Young John Harrington, Esq* (Newberry, S.C., 1851), 18-19, SCL. Brantly's quote is from English Baptist Robert Hall's "A Funeral Sermon for the Rev. Dr. Ryland."

serve to illustrate their virtues & perpetuate their names,” proclaimed Smith. Once again arguing for the interpenetration of the religious with the public sphere, and thus for minister’s share of the honor accorded to statesmen, he likened the task of remembering the church’s heroes to that of memorializing the nation’s founders. While other societies with “larger pretensions” chronicled the acts of “those who participated in the founding of our republic, it is our object to preserve memories of those who in the more quiet pursuits of a religious life have contributed to the establishment of our institutions, to the conservation of order, & to the developments of those moral & religious principles which alone can secure & perpetuate the best & highest form of civilization ever known to the world.”⁷⁰

That Smith advocated the memory of those whose work contributed to the “conservation of order” and the moral foundations of civilization is significant. Evangelical eulogy and memorials after 1830 were the product of a specific historical moment. The way in which southern Christians remembered the dead, and thus the way in which they conceived the task of winning a name for the living, were anchored in the language of an older era but looked forward to burgeoning modern conceptions of honor and reputation that were tied to the professional and commercial life. In his monumental examination of the development of the modern self, Charles Taylor described as a key feature of modernity in eighteenth-century Europe the “recession of the aristocratic honour ethic,” which “stressed the virtues of the citizen life, of the search for fame and renown, and gave a central place to the warrior virtues.” In the place of this war-like

⁷⁰ Whiteford Smith, November, 1857, “An address before the Historical Society of the So. Ca. Conference,” Whiteford Smith Papers, Duke University.

ethic, Taylor saw the rise of a “bourgeois outlook,” tied to rise of commerce, which “stressed the goods of production, an ordered life, and peace—in short accented the activities of ordinary life.”⁷¹

This same shift can be seen taking place in the American South a century later. Ironically, considering the ancient link between honor, death, and fame, many ministers of this era won their undying laurels in the minds and memory of their fellows by presiding over the emergence of the pulpit as a modern profession and the institutionalization of evangelical revivalism as the Methodists and Baptists transferred much of the energy they had spent proselytizing the South into building denominational structures that matched their growing importance and influence. As Beth Barton Schweiger described, over the course of the nineteenth century the southern clergy transformed their pulpits into vessels of professional ambition and upward mobility. In this process, ambition, fame, and honor, too, had to be tamed. In a sketch of the life of Georgia Methodist Ignatius Few, Alexander Means described and lauded this change. “Mankind have in all ages and in every stage of civilization been accustomed to respect and reverence those who have been gifted with high capabilities or who have been distinguished for the exercise of any recognized virtue,” wrote Means. He gave examples: the “South Sea Islander” honored the man whose “stalwart arm most successfully wields the fatal seal club,” while the “wild native of the West...honors with the sceptre of his tribe the veteran hunter of a thousand skins or the battle worn warrior of a hundred scalps.” Means then gave magniloquent thanks that the avenues to honor and fame had been rendered appropriate for a more civilized era:

⁷¹ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 285.

Here [in modern civilized society] a lofty, durable, deathless reputation is not the precocious offspring of an hour, or the capricious boon of wayward fortune, thrown full formed upon the world, but, like the stalactical columns in the grotto of Antiparos, the slow and silent aggroupment of millionaire molecules, accumulated through the lapse of tedious and toilsome years, imperceptibly growing in strength, expanding in beauty, and swelling in noble proportions, until the eye is ravished with its crystalline purity and classic form, and earth and heaven may safely repose their interests upon its unbending shaft.⁷²

In this new era, the older language of heroism, fame, duty, and honor mixed with modern emphasis on self-improvement and upward mobility. Sermons and sketches from this period frequently exhibit a language drawn from the pervasive American rags-to-riches success story. In 1859, William Wightman described a young Henry Bascom

beset with poverty, misunderstood by friends, grappling manfully with difficulties in the process of self-education, riding hard circuits on the outposts of civilization, his pay a dollar a month for four hundred sermons and three thousand miles travelled on horseback, during one of these early years, and yet indomitably girding on the armor by which the battle of life and the highest distinctions of usefulness and greatness were to be won.

“All this,” wrote Wightman, ”surpasses a romance in thrilling interest.” Little did Bascom imagine, Wightman continued, that he would “win a name mentioned with respect from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and die lamented by a whole Church!”⁷³

In terms of language, the way southern evangelicals conceived the task of winning a name thus took place in the twilight of the aristocratic honor ethos and at the dawn of modernity. Nowhere can this aspect of evangelicalism be better viewed than in the way southern evangelicals memorialized their dead in the decades before the Civil War. Using a form of address that harked back to the Greeks and Romans, and which was most often employed to render posthumous honor to departed military or political heroes,

⁷² Summers, *Biographical Sketches of Eminent Itinerant Ministers*, 301-302.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 95.

evangelicals instead praised men whose most conspicuous feats of heroism took place in pulpits from which they sought to spark the fundamentally modern experience of evangelical conversion. These same men presided over growing denominational bureaucracies and the rise of the clergy as a professional class, driven by the modernizing belief that, as Beth Barton Schweiger put it, the gospel “worked up,” and that evangelical religion “was the main source of progress in their world.” In this way, the evangelical clergy were part of a shift in which the older forms of fame and martial honor were redefined for the modern worlds of business, commerce, and the professions, even as they tried to argue for their place in an older constellation of public honor and fame.⁷⁴

In 1877, an aging William Martin gave a sermon in Columbia to the new recruits of the South Carolina Conference on the occasion of his fiftieth year of ministry. In his address, he reminded his audience that they were part of an ongoing battle between heaven and hell, though one in which the victory was sure. “[God] will not suffer the gates of hell to prevail against His Church,” Martin proclaimed. He then set the struggle on which the young ministers were to embark in the long context of Christian history and heroes. In the same way that Richard Furman had positioned George Washington at the end of a long line of classical heroes, Martin placed the Methodist ministers who had died in the preceding year at the tail end of an illustrious string of spiritual warriors:

What though all the Apostles are gone! What though Luther, Calvin and Melancthon are gone! What though Latimer and Ridley are gone! What though the Wesleys, Whitfield and Fletcher are gone! What though Coke, Asbury, McKendree and Soule are gone! What though [William] Capers and [John Osgood] Andrew are gone! What though our own beloved and honored Fleming,

⁷⁴ Schweiger, *The Gospel Working Up*, 8-9.

the devoted Daniel and the saintly [Alexander] Pegues have all gone within the present year, in the prime of their manhood and in the midst of their usefulness!

Still, Martin assured them, God and the Church would prevail. So, too, Martin implied, would the names of the heroes who took part in that victory. He reminded the young men before him of the example of his friend Ignatius Few, “who loomed up, a star of the first magnitude, but who, alas! fell early; but, thank God, he fell at his post with armor on, and left behind him a name that will never die.”⁷⁵

Every culture, and every subculture, operates on the basis of ideal types that form and shape the desires and ambitions of its inhabitants. To find those types we must look to what people praise as the living reshape the dead into the mold of the ideal. By examining how evangelicals approached the idea of a name won in life and living on after death, this chapter has argued for the full participation of evangelicals in one of honor’s most cherished ideas. As evangelical religion solidified its hold on the South after 1830, and as the ministry took its place alongside other respectable professions, the southern clergy shaped the idea of a name in their own image, using it to praise and to instruct. It was in the summing up of a life that all the disparate threads of honor—duty, office, fame, reputation, and legacy—came together. In their praise of the dead as well as their own words and actions, the southern pastorate steadfastly declared that ambition in pursuit of God’s glory was no sin, and that duty was the defining characteristic of the ministerial office. They advocated for the ministry’s place as a central pillar supporting the civil sphere, and thus for ministers as public men deserving of public honor. They argued that their office was deserving of honor, not on their own account, but because

⁷⁵ William Martin, "A Semi-Centennial Sermon, Delivered before the Undergraduates of the Conference, on the Fiftieth Anniversary of his Ministry, December 12, 1877...at Columbia, South Carolina," 3, 5, SCL.

they took part in God's honor. They argued that the dead must be remembered for the sake of the living, and that fame won in the service of God would and should live on.

Epilogue: 'He was the only man in South Carolina who could have achieved that thing':
James Henley Thornwell and the Guardhouse Riot at South Carolina College

In February of 1856, Mary Betts of Marion, South Carolina, received a letter from Duncan McIntyre, a student at the state college in Columbia, regarding a recent disturbance at the college in which her fiancé John Charles McClenaghan had taken part. “On yesterday,” McIntyre wrote, “the students [of the] College engaged in a contest, with [the] Police of the city.” McIntyre wrote for McClenaghan, he explained, since the latter’s hand had been “quite badly hurt” in the affair. McIntyre assured Betts that her fiancé was well despite his hand and would soon resume writing the nearly daily letters that she had come to expect. A few days later, McClenaghan did write. In an unsteady scrawl he remarked, “Tis sooner than I expected to write, but the thought of your anxiety harasses me.” He had been more badly hurt in the fracas than he had let McIntyre relate and was now convalescing at the home of South Carolina senator and past president of the college, Colonel William C. Preston. “My right hand was almost broken and the swelling was so great that I could not use it,” he wrote. “My head was horribly beat up, and I was altogether a lovely specimen of ‘the human face divine’.” The next day he wrote again, worrying about his fate without giving many details of what precisely had occurred. “College days with me are over,” he said. “Whether it will be with a dismissal as a rebel, or suspended I know not but if I am not in gaol [*sic*] I will be in Marion in three weeks.” No doubt to head off Betts’ anxiety, he wrote that Colonel Preston assured him that he would not go to jail, though McClenaghan himself was not so sure.¹

¹ Duncan McIntyre (Columbia, SC) to Mary S. Betts, February 20, 1856; J. McClenaghan (Columbia, SC)

McClenaghan, who would go on to serve the Confederacy as a soldier and his state as a politician, played a more central role in the Guardhouse Riot of 1856 than he let on in his letters to Mary Betts. The riot occupied front pages and editorial pens in newspapers from Greenville to Charleston in the months after it occurred and provides a vivid window into the relationship between religion and honor in the South in the late antebellum period. Overshadowing even McClenaghan, the principal actor in the drama that unfolded in Columbia in February of 1856 was Presbyterian minister James Henley Thornwell, who had only the year before resigned as president of the college and now served as a professor at nearby Columbia Seminary. Together, McClenaghan, the collegiate firebrand who was himself the son of a Methodist minister and who married the daughter of a Methodist minister, and Thornwell, the eminent Presbyterian churchman, college president, and public man of letters, provide an illustration of the different ways in which southern religion was related to southern honor on the eve of the Civil War.

Neither John Charles McClenaghan nor James Henley Thornwell were foreigners to the demands of honor. Nor were they unknown to one another. Throughout his life, in his writing, sermons, and correspondence, Thornwell evidenced a preoccupation with the concerns of honor, closely parsing his own ambitions and actions in accordance with its demands. His biographer Benjamin Morgan Palmer noted this as one of his most praiseworthy attributes and the source of the authority he wielded over the student body as president of the college, calling it “his innate sense of honour.” For McClenaghan’s part, the riot was not the first time he had proved willing to resort to violence for the sake

to Mary S. Betts, February 23, 1856; J. McClenaghan (Columbia, SC) to Mary S. Betts, February 24, 1856, John Charles McClenaghan Papers, SCL.

of his honor. In his semi-annual presidential report to the board of trustees of the college in 1854, Thornwell informed them of the near duel between McClenaghan and John Taylor Rhett, both leaders of the riot two years later. McClenaghan admitted sending a challenge to Rhett over some undisclosed affront, and Rhett accepted. The duel, it appears, was never fought, but expulsion was automatic in such cases. Nevertheless, Thornwell argued for leniency. Rhett's widowed mother had recently moved to Columbia to be near her son, he informed the board. Meanwhile, he noted that McClenaghan's father was a "pious & estimable clergyman of the Methodist Church," who had not wanted his son to attend the college. Expelling his son, Thornwell argued, would only cement his dislike of the institution and confirm his suspicions that the college had corrupted his son. Neither McClenaghan nor Rhett was expelled, a decision Thornwell may have lived to regret.²

In many ways the riot in 1856 was similar to many other such events at colleges across the South during this period. Housing hordes of thin-skinned young men together in close quarters with one another and the surrounding town, colleges became hothouses for conflict and unrest. At the college in Columbia a decade earlier, a young Robert Hardin Reid recorded in his journal a fight between intoxicated students and the town marshals in his journal. "There has been great excitement tonight up town," he wrote, "— a fight between the students and the Marshals[.] three students against seven Marshals." That episode ended when the faculty arrived at the guardhouse to take custody of the lone inebriated student the marshals had been able to overpower. Nevertheless, Reid wrote,

² Benjamin Morgan Palmer, *The Life and Letters of James Henley Thornwell* (Richmond: Whittet & Shepperson, 1875), 395; JHT to Board of Trustees, South Carolina College, May 3, 1854, oversize materials, James Henley Thornwell Papers, SCL.

“The affair I think upon the whole a serious one.” The marshals would have to step lightly around town to avoid conflict, he thought, especially since one of the students involved “swears vengeance.”³

In contrast, the 1856 riot nearly ended in tragedy. The fullest account came some months after the incident in a report by college president Charles F. McCay to the board of trustees. On the night of February 18, three students were walking home past the city guardhouse when they encountered several town marshals, including the chief marshal, a man named Burdell. One of the students, named Niles, who “had been drinking ale excessively,” approached the chief marshal and began to berate him over the marshals’ treatment of his brother sometime earlier. At some point, the student struck Burdell in the chest with his fist. “A blow from a drunken man who had just taken four pints of ale could not probably have been severe,” McCay noted dryly in his report. Nevertheless, Burdell responded with his club and beat Niles until he lay “prostrated on the pavement as a dead man.” The marshals took Niles and locked him in the guard house, thereby adding insult to injury since, as McCay noted, “it is not customary to lock up people of respectable connexions within its walls.”⁴

A crowd of angry students soon gathered, intending to free the inebriated and incapacitated Niles by force. But when the guards handed Niles over to them, the students began to slowly disperse and move back to the college. McCay, who had rushed to the scene to “be sure that all of our young men had left the scene of disturbance,” was in the

³ For honor on southern college campuses, see Robert F. Pace, *Halls of Honor: College Men in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004); Robert Hardin Reid journal, June 16, 1845, Robert Hardin Reid Papers, SCL.

⁴ McCay’s report to the Board of Trustees, May 7, 1856, USC (South Carolina College) Board of Trustees Minutes, SCL.

guardhouse talking with Chief Marshal Burdell when they heard the noise of the crowd returning. Suddenly, John McClenaghan and his onetime opponent John Taylor Rhett burst into the guardhouse with “short clubs,” demanding vengeance on Burdell. They were immediately beaten back by Burdell and half a dozen marshals. “Bloody blows were given and received but all was over in a very short time,” wrote McCay, who watched from behind a table as the scene unfolded. “I was unable amidst the noise and the suddenness of the attack to interpose my authority or prevent the fight,” wrote the hapless president.⁵

The attack on the marshals caused a general alarm in the city and stoked the anger of the students into open rage and a desire for vengeance. Columbia’s mayor called out the militia to suppress the rioting students, while the students themselves broke into the armory of the College Cadets and armed themselves. But upon hearing that the immediate fighting was over, both sides settled in for the night, waiting the next morning to act. The following morning the mayor and McCay moved quickly to avert a catastrophe. The mayor agreed to appoint a panel of citizens to investigate the matter and possibly dismiss Chief Marshal Burdell. But when McCay presented the proposal to the students, a bruised and bandaged McClenaghan stood and objected, and the other students deferred to him. McCay and the faculty, at a loss, agreed that classes should be held as usual at eleven o’clock. But as they conferred, McClenaghan once again took matters into his own hands. McCay recalled:

The bell was about to ring for recitation when instead of this we heard the alarm bell ringing up town & the cry of College sounding through the Campus. The students rushed up the street with their rifles in their hands & the Faculty with them. As I reached to corner of the main Street I saw the armed students before &

⁵ Ibid.

behind me & the military of the Town drawn up at the Market House & a large crowd of citizens in the Street Anticipating a bloody collision.⁶

It appeared that McClenaghan and Rhett had gone directly from the meeting with McCay in search of Burdell, and having found him, attacked him once again, and were, once again, badly beaten by Burdell and his fellow marshals. The ensuing scene was a serious one, with nearly two hundred students arrayed against the town's militia. As Thornwell's friend and biographer Benjamin Morgan Palmer recalled, "a single pistol shot would have been the signal for a massacre, that would have carried mourning into the best families of the State and stained the soil of Columbia with the blood of the proudest sons of the Commonwealth." Onlookers, "gentlemen of the highest character," reported Palmer, probably referring to McCay and Colonel William C. Preston, tried in vain to convince the students to relent and return to the college.⁷

At some point, as the situation appeared ready to spiral out of control, Thornwell appeared, having been summoned from his theology class at Columbia Seminary. According to "one who was a participator in the scene," Thornwell quickly took stock of the situation and addressed the students, telling them that if they would return to campus and let him determine the right and honorable course of action, he promised not to betray their trust. "If I find you are in the right, and there be no redress but in fighting," the witness recalled Thornwell saying, "I will lead you myself and die in the midst of you." The students relented, and marched back to the college chapel with Thornwell at their head chanting "College! College!", where, still armed, they listened as he, William

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Palmer, *The Life and Letters of James Henley Thornwell*, 396; McCay's report to the Board of Trustees, May 7, 1856, USC (South Carolina College) Board of Trustees Minutes, SCL.

Preston, and others advised them that forbearance was the honorable course and convinced them to accept the mayor's proposal instead of staining the reputation of the college with the blood of the town militia.⁸

It was a remarkable display of authority and native command on Thornwell's part. "It is not at all unsafe to say," wrote Benjamin Palmer, "that he was the only man in South Carolina who could have achieved that thing." Thornwell's biographer may have overstated the case, but clearly the opinion in South Carolina in the wake of the riot reflected a similar tone. Congressman John McQueen, whose son took part in the riot, wrote Thornwell a month later from Washington, thanking him for his role in forestalling disaster. He had heard, he wrote, that "but for yourself & a few other Gentlemen they would have fired on the boys."⁹

From start to finish and for everyone it touched, the main significance of the events in Columbia that winter involved honor and shame. Certainly for McClenaghan, John Taylor Rhett, and their compatriots, the key issue was the affront to themselves and the student body committed by Bardell and the marshals, an insult they believed required a violent retort. Their actions could not be condoned, but many observers thought they could be excused. "I do not by any means justify the students in their violation of the Laws of the college, or of civil society," wrote John McQueen to Thornwell, "but even in their imprudence they have laws among each other that they may not violate." An editorial published in the *Daily South Carolinian* about the same time mirrored this tone

⁸ Ibid., 395-396. McCay includes "Col. Gregg, Dr. Thornwell, Hon W.[J.?] Dessaussure, & Hon. W.C. Preston," as those who addressed the students in the chapel. See McCay's Report to the Board of Trustees, May 7, 1856, USC (South Carolina College) Board of Trustees Minutes, SCL.

⁹ Ibid., 396; John McQueen to JHT, March 14, 1856, James Henley Thornwell Papers, SCL.

of veiled approval when its author called McClenaghan “that clever, though perhaps wild boy.” Finally, William C. Preston confirmed to McClenaghan as the latter recuperated in his home that though he may have broken the letter of the law, he had not done anything dishonorable and would not go jail. The law of honor to which McClenaghan had answered was a higher law than the one the town marshals enforced.¹⁰

For the ill-fated and short-lived presidency of Charles F. McCay, the riot may have been the deciding factor. He departed the presidency the next year. A professor of Mathematics at the college before becoming president, there were hints that McCay had been elevated to the presidency simply to keep the German political philosopher Francis Lieber, whose political and religious views were suspect, from the office. The students had never taken to McCay, and the very day before the riot McCay and the faculty had been considering what to do about an “extremely disrespectful” resolution by the student body asking for the reorganization of the faculty and a reconsideration of McCay as college president. His behavior during the riot did little to raise his standing in the eyes of anyone. He failed to prevent the initial attack, despite being in the same room as McClenaghan and Rhett when they stormed the guard house. He then failed to prevent the students from breaking into the armory and arraying themselves against the town militia. In his report to the board of trustees in May, McCay failed to mention how the riot had been subdued. “It has been said,” he told the board, “that the riot was the result of inefficient government in the College or of an inability to controll [*sic*] the students on the part of the Faculty or the President.” In the editorial in the *Daily South Carolinian*,

¹⁰ John McQueen to JHT, March 14, 1856, James Henley Thornwell Papers, SCL; Editorial by “Zophar,” in *Daily South Carolinian*, March 11, 1856, SCL; J. McClenaghan (Columbia, SC) to Mary S. Betts, February 24, 1856, John Charles McClenaghan Papers, SCL.

penned anonymously by “Zophar” three weeks after the riot, the author laid the blame for the entire affair squarely at McCay’s feet. Even the riot’s instigator, John Charles McClenaghan, blamed McCay for failing to control the students. Zophar reported that at a meeting following the riot, McClenaghan had addressed McCay directly, saying, “My expulsion is for your misconduct and incompetence, not for mine. If you had done your duty, I should have gone back to my poor old father and mother an educated gentleman, instead of being driven off for a street brawl.” It was an unfair accusation coming from McClenaghan, but it did not matter. McCay’s impotence and failure to exert his authority was damning. Rumors even began to spread that a cowardly McCay had tried to employ and arm itinerant Irish laborers against the students. Congressman John McQueen wrote Thornwell that he hoped the rumor was false, but if it was true “my son never shall graduate under him, & it seems to me that the limits of the state ought to be too warm for him.”¹¹

Most of all, the events in Columbia that February confirmed the honor and authority of Thornwell. The Presbyterian minister had performed what some observers thought nearly a miracle. Like Moses parting the Red Sea, Thornwell had stood between the two roiling walls of armed men and exerted his authority through sheer force of personality. Benjamin Palmer called it a “superb illustration of the majesty of his sway over the students of the College.” Thornwell had only accomplished the feat, wrote Palmer, by virtue of the “absolute repose of the students” in his sense of honor. Everyone connected to the situation seemed to have the same opinion. Indeed, in the same letter he

¹¹ USC (South Carolina College) Faculty Minutes, February 18, 1856, SCL; McCay’s Report to the Board of Trustees, May 7, 1856, USC (South Carolina College) Board of Trustees Minutes, SCL; Editorial by “Zophar,” in *Daily South Carolinian*, March 11, 1856, SCL; John McQueen to JHT, March 14, 1856, James Henley Thornwell Papers, SCL.

wrote thanking Thornwell for his role in preventing bloodshed, Congressman John McQueen also informed Thornwell that he had advised his son to come to the minister for advice on whether or not to leave the college. The central issue, as McQueen wrote, was one of honor, which McQueen completely trusted Thornwell to resolve. McQueen wanted his son to return to Columbia, he wrote, but only “provided he can do so without compromising his honor or forfeiting the good will of the right minded of his fellows at the same time.” Strikingly, the prominent congressman begged the Presbyterian minister to give his son guidance on the matter.¹²

Thornwell’s calming of the crowds fit into a recurring motif in the discourse of honor: the man whose innate sense of authority and honor were so evident that by his very presence he could command assent and exert control. Thornwell’s feat preceded by two decades one of the most famous such events in South Carolina history. In 1876, ex-Confederate General Wade Hampton III, soon to be installed as governor of the state’s first post-Reconstruction government, stood on the statehouse steps in Columbia and prevented a crowd of nearly five thousand of his frenzied fellow Carolinians, who thought the election had been stolen from Hampton by the forces of black Republicanism, from storming the statehouse and ousting the Republican government by force. Hampton’s status as a hero of the Lost Cause, his imposing bearing, and the crowd’s implicit trust in his word, were all credited with preventing a disaster and securing his eventual assumption of the governorship. “Amazingly,” wrote historian Rod Andrew, “the crowd dispersed. Within minutes, the streets were calm.” Near the same spot in the

¹² Palmer, *The Life and Letters of James Henley Thornwell*, 395; John McQueen to JHT, March 14, 1856, James Henley Thornwell Papers, SCL.

same city twenty years earlier, a Presbyterian minister had accomplished a similar achievement.¹³

The events in Columbia in 1856 and the personalities connected to them illustrate in action many of the connections between honor and religion in the Deep South that have been examined in this dissertation. In the shadowy figure of John Charles McClenaghan's father, the Methodist minister who opposed his son's enrollment in the state college because of its corrupting influence, it is possible to see the enduring divide, however narrow, between evangelical religion and the southern mainstream, between the honor that came from God and the honor that had to be defended before man. No doubt the father would have denounced his son's violent attachment to his honor as an aberration, a misperception of the true nature of honor and its source. Nevertheless, McClenaghan himself suffered no negative repercussions to his reputation or career in the wider community as a result of his actions. On the contrary, there is every evidence that his headlong pursuit of redress established his reputation as a man of honor and raised him in the estimation of his peers and superiors, men like Colonel William C. Preston. "I have been establishing a reputation, and it is a funny affair," he wrote to Mary with obvious pleasure in the days after the riot as he convalesced at Preston's home. For men, the laws of honor and the edicts of religion sometimes diverged.¹⁴

We know little of McClenaghan's own religious proclivities. He was not a man much given to introspection. But we do know that he eventually married a pious wife.

¹³ Rod Andrew, *Wade Hampton: Confederate Warrior to Southern Redeemer* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 369.

¹⁴ John Charles McClenaghan to Mary S. Betts, February 27[AM], 1856, John Charles McClenaghan Papers, SCL.

Mary Betts was the daughter of Charles and Julia Betts. Her father had been an itinerant Methodist minister, and in 1823 her mother Julia wrote to her absent husband from Edgefield, South Carolina, describing the progress of religion in those parts and the “most impressive sermons” of Baptist Basil Manly. The daughter of such parents, Mary nevertheless married a man who nearly fought a duel in his freshman year of college, sparked a near massacre over honor two years later that ended his college career, and wrote to her from Virginia in 1861, where he was serving in the Confederate army, telling her that he had recently served as a second in a duel. The experience, he wrote, had convinced him of two things: “a well conducted affair of honor is a good thing. 2nd The wisdom of being prepared for it under the code.” Only a nuanced understanding of the gendered expectations of honor and the way that evangelical religion stood in harmony with female honor and identity in the South can make sense of what appears to have been a harmonious marriage.¹⁵

The figure of Thornwell is perhaps the most complex of all, illustrating the extent to which the southern clergy could participate in the mainstream of southern honor on the eve of the Civil War as well as the extent to which they remained separated from and opposed to its most extreme and essential demands. In the moment, Thornwell assured the students that if necessary he would “die in the midst of you” to preserve their honor, but at the college chapel he convinced them that the more honorable course was to lay down their weapons and let the rule of law take its course. Here Thornwell relied on the genteel mode of honor that meshed so well with evangelical religion to argue that it was more honorable to do right than to take revenge.

¹⁵ Julia Betts to Charles Betts, February 18, 1823, John Charles McClenaghan Papers, SCL; J. Charles McClenaghan to Mary S. Betts, November 22, 1861, John Charles McClenaghan Papers, SCL.

It was an argument he would not make four years later when secession threatened to bring on civil war. "I gave up the union with great pain," Thornwell wrote to his old mentor General James Gillespie in 1861, "—but I saw no alternative—Black Republicanism had rendered it utterly impossible to remain in it with honour. I always thought that war would be the consequence, but preferred war to ignominious submission." Like most, but not all, the clergy, Thornwell did not himself take up arms, and died before the South's defeat. Nor did he live long enough to mourn the loss of his oldest son, Gillespie, who died in defense of the South's honor while serving in Wade Hampton's cavalry in Virginia. For white southerners, the Civil War forged anew the relationship between evangelical religion and honor. The deaths of thousands of young men like Gillespie Thornwell sacralized the South's cause, and in the wake and carnage of the war the clergy arose among the primary interpreters and preservers of their memory. The ideal of the noble Christian Confederate soldier linked memory, honor, religion, and violence in a way that had not existed in the first half of the nineteenth century, making it that much more difficult to separate the honor that came from God from its earthly variety. For white southern women, the war shook the very foundations of their social identity, but the link between religion and female honor held firm till at least the end of the nineteenth century. In evangelical churches, especially among the Baptists, the practice of communal discipline declined across the last half of the nineteenth century, giving way before the forces of a modern individualistic conception of sin and guilt that saw such things as mainly a personal, not a communal, concern. Finally, for black southerners, among the many things the war redefined was the dishonor and social death of slavery. No longer were they forced to find the antithesis to slavery's

shame in the water of southern rivers, the bread and wine of communion, or the right hand of friendship offered by white hands. In many ways, the story of the relationship between honor, religion, and identity in the South in the hundred years that follow this study belongs to them.¹⁶

¹⁶ James Henley Thornwell to General James Gillespie, November 19, 1861, James Henley Thornwell Papers, SCL.

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Abbreviations:

SCHS South Carolina Historical Society
 SCL South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina
 MU Mercer University Special Collections
 BHC Baptist Historical Collection, Furman University
 SHC Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
 EU Woodruff Library, Emory University

Methodist

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