"Give them their Bible, and let them alone": Theology and Controversy among Early Alabama Baptists

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The Baptist movement as we know it today arose in pre-Revolutionary England in the context of persecution and dissent. With other nonconformists, Baptists were often beaten, fined, pilloried in stocks, and imprisoned for their faith. They became ardent champions of religious freedom—not only for themselves but for all persons. The Baptist struggle for religious liberty continued in America where Obadiah Holmes was publicly beaten on the streets of Danvers, Massachusetts, and John Leland was clapped up in a Virginia jail. One critic labeled the Baptists as "miscreants begat in rebellion, born in sedition, and nursed in faction."[1] The word "faction" in that unflattering epithet refers to what might be called the fissiparous tendency in Baptist history. From the beginning, Baptists faced not only opposition from without but also dissension and division—faction—from within. Why was this so?

To some extent, the tendency to fight and fragment over matters of faith and theology is endemic to Christianity as a whole for, as Karl Barth once said, there can be no dogmatics without polemics.[2] This is true because Christianity is more than a private, feel-good experience. It makes specific truth claims about God, the world, and history, claims that are eminently contestable. Its charter documents, the Holy Scriptures, can be (and have been) interpreted in

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[1] Henry Sacheverell, *The Perils of False Brethren* (London, 1709), 36.
[2] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1, §3.2, 82.

many diverse and incompatible ways. While this is true in every denomination, Baptists may be especially susceptible to fissiparous ways because of their distinctive understanding of the church. The church, Baptists of all kinds have held, is an intentional community made up of regenerated, repentant, and baptized believers. Bound closely to one another and to Christ by a solemn covenant, they are not subservient to the rule of bishops, presbyteries, the pope, or any other extra-congregational authority. These are some of the assumptions early Baptist pioneers brought with them when they began to pour into the wilderness of the "Old Southwest" territory, which encompassed the present-day state of Alabama.

Some years ago, Baptist historian Walter Shurden published a small book titled *Not A Silent People: Controversies That Have Shaped Southern Baptists*.[3] Shurden identified six major controversies that have beset the battling Baptists, especially in the early years of their formation in the South. He tagged each controversy in terms of a presenting question that has agitated Baptist people. "When did Baptists begin?" (history); "What about the heathen?" (missions); "What about the blacks?" (slavery/segregation); "What about other denominations?" (the church); "What must Baptists believe?" (theology/the Bible); "What about Genesis?" (science). While controversy is painful and often debilitating, it can also bring collateral benefits. "To fight

[3] Walter B. Shurden, *Not A Silent People: Controversies That Have Shaped Southern Baptists* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1972).

over your heritage," Shurden wrote, "is not a good way to learn about it; but even that is better than ignoring it altogether."[4]

In this presentation, I want to focus on four of these controverted questions, all of which percolated among Baptists in Alabama during the decades leading up to and immediately following the founding of *The Alabama Baptist* [hereafter *TAB*] in 1843. Early Alabama Baptists fussed about and often split over numerous theological issues, but in this talk I will focus on *Bible*, *grace*, *race*, and *church*, with special attention to the first two. The pages of *TAB* are replete with stories and opinion pieces about these and other theological controversies. I will allude to some of these by way of illustration though not, of course, in a systematic or comprehensive way. In a day when books were few and libraries rare, before the era of radio, television, and computers, church periodicals served not only as bulletin boards for religious events but also as sounding boards for religious ideas. On January 27, 1844, almost exactly one year after the first issue of *TAB* rolled off the press in Marion, readers were treated to this endorsement: "Next to the faithful preaching of the Gospel and the active, personal effort of the preacher, there is no more effective agent for the development of Christian feeling and the promotion of Christian efforts than a good religious paper."[5] In fact, papers such as *TAB* were a major means of theological education among Baptist

[4] Ibid, 31.
[5] *TAB*, January 27, 1844.

people, along with doctrinal sermons and associational circular letters.[6] If the motto of *The New York Times* is to publish all the news that is fit to print, that of *TAB* might well have been to publish all the theology that can be argued about.

John Stott once defined evangelicals as Gospel people and Bible people. Those two terms could well define the core identity of Baptists as well for, in essence, they summarize the material and formal principles of the Protestant Reformation. The material principle: justification by faith alone made effective to the sinner through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit; and *sola scriptura*: the normative authority of the Bible, the inspired Word of God, the touchstone of divine revelation and the standard by which all faith and practice must be tried. By horseback, covered wagon, boat, and sometimes by foot as they trudged along Indian trails, early Baptists brought the Bible with them to Alabama and they tried to shape their lives and their churches by its teachings. Many of the first Baptist pastors were self-taught farmer-preachers and it was not unusual for them to follow the plow by day and read their Bibles by night.[7]

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[6] Holcombe, *History*, 62. Several years before the founding of *TAB*, Holcombe wrote about the need for such a publication. "One great source of information, which comes within the reach of almost every individual, is the publication of periodicals, especially religious periodicals. But Baptists are found wanting in this particular; it is true there are many who receive, read, and we hope, *pay for*, religious papers; yet comparatively few Baptists in Alabama subscribe for them. Every family should have one, at least. We often hear professors of religion complaining of their ignorance; and why are they so ignorant? –Because they are determined to be so! Which will most benefit a family, $2, or $2,50, laid out for a good religious paper, or $3 or $4, paid for whiskey or tobacco?"

[7] Holcombe, *History*, 52.

Hosea Holcombe, who might well be called the father of Alabama Baptists, connected Baptist devotion to the Bible with adherence to religious freedom. Baptists, he said, have persistently asked one thing of the civil government: to "give them their Bibles and let them alone. Against the interference of the magistrate in the affairs of conscience, they have always protested."[8] Believing that God alone is the Lord of the conscience, Baptists rejected the hegemony of an ordained priesthood, the imposition of catechisms, creeds, and books of "stinted" prayer, together with laws of uniformity and courts of inquisition, all of which they regarded as forms of religious despotism.

At the same time, there runs through the pages of *TAB* over many decades a lively discussion about the proper role of creeds, confessions, and statements of faith. That Baptists had such and took them seriously is evident from looking at the founding documents of most Baptist churches and associations in Alabama. Hosea Holcombe himself preferred the Particular Baptist Confession of 1689, also known as the Second London Confession which was adopted by the Philadelphia Baptist Association in 1742 and printed by Benjamin Franklin the following year. Holcombe called it "the most complete representation of faith and order ever published" and believed it deserved wide circulation among the Baptists of his day.[9] For some years, First

[8] Ibid, 14.
[9] Ibid, 33.

Baptist Tuscaloosa required verbal assent to the church covenant and articles of religion as a prerequisite for membership.[10]

At the same time, other Baptists were skittish about requiring confessional subscription, regarding this practice as an infringement on the conscience of individual believers. In 1846, the Coosa River Association debated whether a Baptist church could be duly constituted without a creed or confession of faith. Confessions, it was claimed, were divisive and subverted the authority of Christ and the Bible. The other side of this debate was argued by Jesse Hartwell, the first professor of theology at Howard College. He claimed that such instruments were nothing more than general summaries of what the Bible itself taught. In commenting on this debate, Wayne Flynt noted that "these two conflicting positions remained central to Alabama Baptists for 150 years and were no closer to being reconciled at the end of the twentieth century than in the middle of the nineteenth."[11] In 1882, *TAB* published an article by a reader who tried to strike a balance between the two positions.

> A man whose creed is the whole of religion is like a skeleton without flesh and blood. There is no warmth in him…there are many who think they are good Christians merely because they are sound in the creed. They are the stuff of which bigots, not martyrs, are made. They hate heresy worse than they hate sin, and forget that the worst heresy is an ungodly life. They hold truth in unrighteousness. But there is another kind of folly as bad, if not worse. This has no creed at all. All creeds are alike unworthy of respect… They may be true or false, it makes no difference…Creeds and doctrines are their aversions, and they hate them with perfect hatred, or regard them with a sublime

[10] Luther Q. Porch, *History of the First Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, Alabama* (Tuscaloosa, First Baptist Church, 1968), 65.
[11] *Alabama Baptists*, 77.

> indifference…Bishop Ryle recently gave a very fitting description of this sort of religion. He called it 'a jelly fish Christianity,' and said that it had not a bone in its body of divinity.[12]

Some Baptist leaders of a later generation, such as B. H. Carroll and E. Y. Mullins, presidents of Southwestern and Southern Seminary respectively, used the word "creed" in a positive sense and often spoke in an affirming way of "the Baptist creed." In Alabama, the issue would be raised to the level of white heat with the advent of Alexander Campbell and the Restorationist movement, with their two mantras, "No creed but the Bible," and "Where the Scripture speaks we speak, where the Scripture is silent we are silent."[13] But, whether Baptists came down on the confessional or libertarian side of this debate, across the board they resisted *creedalism*, and that for two reasons.

First, as we have seen, Baptists of all theological persuasions were ardent supporters of religious freedom, opposing state-imposed religious conformity and the attendant civil sanctions associated therewith. In Thomas Helwys's 1612 *The Mystery of Iniquity*, the first book published by a Baptist in England, there is a handwritten inscription addressed directly to King James I. Its words echo down the corridors of Baptist history:

> Hear, O King, and despise not the counsel of the poor, and let their complaints come before thee. The King is a mortal man and not God. Therefore he has no power over the immortal souls of his

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[12] *TAB,* July 13, 1882.
[13] Robert Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell* (Indianapolis: Religious Book Service, 1897), 1:231.

> subjects, to make laws and ordinances for them and set spiritual lords over them.[14]

For asserting the Crown Rights of the Redeemer in such a bold way, Helwys was locked up in Newgate Prison where he died several years later, leaving behind his wife Joan and their seven children.[15]

But, Baptists are not creedal in another sense as well: they have always resisted elevating any humanly devised doctrinal statement, however true its contents, above the Bible itself. As Baptists confessions themselves invariably declare, the Bible alone remains the *norma normans* for all teaching and instruction, "the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinion should be tried." For this reason, Baptists have refused to "canonize" any of their confessions, holding them all to be revisable in the light of the Bible, God's truthful and unchanging revelation. A classic statement of this view is found in the preface to the *Baptist Faith and Message* of 1963: "Baptists do not regard confessions of faith 'as complete statements of our faith, having any quality of finality or infallibility. As in the past so in the future, Baptists should hold themselves free to revise their statements of faith as may seem to them wise and expedient at any time.'"[16]

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[14] Thomas Helwys, *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity* (Amsterdam: n.p., 1612).
[15] Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 38. See also, Timothy George, "Between Pacifism and Coercion: The Early Baptist Doctrine of Religious Tolerance," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 58 (January 1984), 30-49.
[16] Timothy and Denise George, eds., *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 137.

None of this, of course, has kept the Bible from being at the center of numerous controversies in Baptist life over the past 175 years. In his history of Alabama Baptists, Wayne Flynt treats us to four rounds of the "battle for the Bible" within the state convention focusing mostly on Baptist reactions to the rise of biblical criticism in the late nineteenth century, the conflict over science and religion in the early twentieth, and the more recent SBC controversy over biblical inerrancy between moderates and conservatives.[17] However, three early reform movements among Alabama Baptists each had a theological dimension related to the Bible. The three reforms were the organization of Sunday Schools, the work of Bible societies, and the promotion of ministerial education.

Robert Raikes, a contemporary of John Howard, is usually credited with starting the Sunday School movement in eighteenth-century England. However, it was William Fox, a Baptist of London, who organized the Sunday School Society of England, the American counterpart of which was founded in Philadelphia in 1791. Sunday Schools became an important, if not universally embraced, aspect of Baptist life in Alabama. When public schools had to be closed for various reasons, the Sunday Schools helped to fill the gap. Sunday Schools advanced the cause of literacy by teaching children the alphabet, basic reading skills, and other elementary studies. Because the Bible was the textbook for Sunday School, religious instruction was at the heart of the

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[17] Wayne Flynt, *Alabama Baptists: Southern Baptists in the Heart of Dixie* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press*, 1998*), 260-266, 344-353, 380-391, 542-556.

curriculum. Sunday School promotion became a part of the general ministry of the local church, as this letter from an 1878 issue of *TAB* shows*:* "Pastors should endeavor to obtain the attendance of all their members on the Sunday-school. If the people *study* the Bible from week to week they will be the better prepared for hearing preaching. Who are the earnest, successful workers in the churches? They are the Sunday-school workers."[18]

Associations took up the cause as well. In 1851, the Coosa River Baptist Association organized a Book Society, with the objective of establishing a "depository of Bibles, religious books and tracts, at some convenient point within the bounds of the Coosa River Association, where our churches and others can be supplied at a cheap rate, with suitable religious books and publications."[19]

Tied to this was a strong emphasis on Bible memorization. "Thy Word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against Thee" (Psalm 119:11), a favorite verse from the Psalter, was a popular sermon text for Baptist preachers. On March 23, 1844, Howard's Jesse Hartwell published an article in *TAB* titled "On Knowing the Scriptures." The quoting of the Bible is a powerful weapon, he said, by which the Christian may successfully resist the temptation of the devil. Jesus himself did this, Hartwell pointed out, when confronting Satan in the wilderness. But who has time to memorize huge

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[18] *TAB,* June 20, 1878.
[19] *Minutes of the Coosa River Baptist Association*, September 1851.

tracks of the Bible? Well, suggested Hartwell, begin small. Read at least one chapter of the Bible every day and commit to memory as much as one verse.

> But one verse a day treasured up in the mind, will amount in a year to no small portion of the Word of God. It would embrace more than thirteen chapters of the Epistle to the Romans, the most perfect system of divinity, which is extant, in so few words. It would be more than the whole of Hebrews, that masterly argument—more than the three epistles of Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians.[20]

Just think what could be accomplished by following this method for an entire year. Over ten years, a very large portion of the Bible would be committed to memory. Sunday Schools, and later Vacation Bible Schools and Baptist camping programs in the summer, advanced Bible literacy from generation to generation among Baptists in Alabama.

The American Bible Society was founded in 1816, the same decade that witnessed the missionary journey of Adoniram and Ann Hasseltine Judson to Burma, and the founding of the Baptist Triennial Convention. The aim of the American Bible Society was to provide a copy of the Bible, printed "without note or comment," to every American family. It worked through local auxiliary societies to fulfill this mission. At the March 1830 meeting of the Alabama Bible Society, there was concern that there were not enough Bibles to pass around. Alabama, it was said, had "5,000 perishing souls" and unless more copies of the Bible were forthcoming from the American Bible Society in New

[20] Jesse Hartwell, "On Knowing the Scriptures," *TAB,* March 16, 23, 1844.

York, many in Alabama would be bereft of the Word of God.[21] In 1845, a Bible agent in Perry County reported to the Alabama Baptist State Convention:

> I have supplied about twenty-five destitute families within a few miles of my residence. The heads of several of the families are members of the Baptist Church. One man to whom I gave the Bible could not read, neither could any of his family. But he said he wanted a Bible, that he might get his friends to read to him, when they called to see him. He also expressed a determination to learn to read, in order that he might peruse the Word of God for himself.

The Convention responded with an exhortation: "While sending the word of life to distant nations, we should not forget our own countrymen, our friends, our neighbors."[22]

The American Bible Society had been created to serve the entire country on behalf of all of the major Protestant denominations, including the Baptists. Eventually, however, Baptists would break with the national organization over a question related to the distinctive Baptist theology of baptism. In 1837, a number of Baptist members of the American Bible Society led by New York pastor Spencer Cone withdrew to organize the American and Foreign Bible Society. The issue was over how best to translate the Greek New Testament word *baptizo*. Both William Carey in India, and Judson in Burma, the two great icons of the early Baptist missionary movement, had made pioneer translations of the Scriptures into the indigenous tongues of Bengali and Burman, rendering *baptizo* not as "baptize" but rather as "immerse." The

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[21] John Fea, *The Bible Cause* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 47.
[22] "Report of the Board of Managers," *Alabama Baptist State Convention Annual Report* (1845), 23.

American Bible Society refused to fund these translations preferring to stick with the familiar wording of the KJV, which they claimed was more denominationally neutral. *TAB* reprinted a number of articles rehearsing this debate.[23] The ABS, it was said, was guilty of the same error made by the Council of Trent during the Counter-Reformation when it codified the Latin Vulgate as the only authentic rendering of the Scriptures. Debates on the proper translation of the Bible have continued to echo through Alabama Baptist history down to the present day, with the persistence of King James Version-only churches, and the recent acrimonious debates within the wider evangelical community on the gender-neutral version of the New International Version.[24]

The rise of formal institutions of higher education among Baptists in America must be seen in light of the quest for respectability on the part of Baptist citizens who were quickly becoming pillars of society in many places. Howard and Judson in Alabama were among twenty colleges Baptists had founded in sixteen states in the decades prior to the Civil War. This impetus for moral and educational uplift stands in contrast to the low esteem in which Baptist folk were generally held in the early nineteenth century. David Benedict was an alumnus of Brown University, the first college established by Baptists in America (1764). In the early nineteenth century he traveled

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[23] See, for example, *TAB*, June 1, 8, 1844; April 16, 1851; September 3, 1851.
[24] *TAB*, January 24, 1963, May 24, 1973, July 22, 1999, May 30, 2002, June 6, 2002, April 30, 2015.

through all seventeen states of the new republic collecting historical information and impressions about the Baptists. One person, "a very honest and candid old lady," gave Benedict the following impression she had formed of the Baptists:

> There was a company of them in the back part of our town, and an outlandish sort of people they certainly were…. You could hardly find one among them but what was deformed in some way or other. Some of them were hair-lipped, others were bleary-eyed, or hump-backed, or bowlegged, or clump-footed; hardly any of them looked like other people. But they were all strong for plunging, and let their poor ignorant children run wild, and never had the seal of the covenant put on them.[25]

While such a caricature may tell us more about the "candid old lady" Benedict interviewed than the Baptists she deplored, the fact is that Baptists did appeal, especially on the frontier, to those who were far removed from the benefits of education and civility. Peter Cartwright, himself a firebrand of the Methodist variety, had little use for the "proselytizing Baptist" preachers who, as he said, made so much ado about baptism by immersion that you would think "that heaven was an island, and there was no way to get there but by *diving or swimming*." Still, he admired the ability of Baptist preachers to appeal to the masses, observing that "our Western people want a preacher that can mount a stump, a block, or old log, or stand in the bed of a wagon, and without note or manuscript, quote, expound, and apply the Word of God to the hearts and

[25] David Benedict, *Fifty Years Among the Baptists* (New York: Sheldon and Co., 1860), 93-94.

consciences of the people."[26] What formal education had to do with this kind of effectiveness was not at all apparent to many Baptists during the era of the Great Awakening**.** Thus, in 1795 Isaac Backus published a list of all of the Baptist ministers in New England. Of the 232 he enumerated, only 13 had degrees attached to their names.[27]

In the era of the Great Revival, from the 1790s until the 1860s, Baptists and Methodists experienced unprecedented dynamism and growth. There were fewer than 900 Baptist churches in America in 1790, and more than 12,000 on the eve of the Civil War. During this same period, Methodists grew at an even faster pace, from 700 churches to 20,000. The theological differences between these denominations, not forgetting the more orderly Presbyterians, were taken seriously and debated furiously. But that fact should not obscure for us the overarching evangelical consensus they shared in their common appeal to the normative authority of the Bible. Even when they disagreed about how to interpret what the Bible said about baptism, predestination, or church governance, there was almost no debate about the Bible itself as the court of appeals to adjudicate such differences—"the final umpire in any controversy."[28] What Hosea Holcombe said to the Baptist churches in Alabama in 1839 would

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[26] Quoted, Sidney E. Mead, "The Rise of the Evangelical Conception of the Ministry in America (1607-1850)," *The Ministry and Historical Perspectives*, eds. H. Richard Niebuhr and Daniel B. Williams (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956), 246, 239. See also Robert Bray, *Peter Cartwright: Legendary Frontier Preacher* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005).
[27] Isaac Backus, *A History of New England with Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians Called Baptists* (Newton, Mass.: Backus Historical Society, 1871), 2:391-402.
[28] L. Russ Bush and Tom J. Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 131.

have been met with unanimous consent by all evangelical believers: "The Bible contains the will of heaven; it is the revelation of God! It should be your intimate companion—your familiar friend…it should be the strength of your soul, and the glory of your life. A proper understanding of the Scriptures is a most important point in the religion of the Son of God; without it, how can anyone serve God acceptably?"[29]

Joseph Walker, who was the corresponding secretary of the Domestic Board of Missions, addressed the theological class of Howard College in 1854 on "Mental Requisites of Pulpit Efficiency." He stressed the centrality of the Bible in the formation of young pastors. The Holy Scriptures, Walker said, are the oracles of God, the foundation and standard of all truth. "They are lovely as a casket of jewels handed down from the upper skies." Walker exhorted his young colleagues to study diligently so that they might rightly divide the word of truth and learn to discriminate between conflicting doctrines and contrary practices. But he was also concerned that his young listeners come to love the Bible, as well as know it. He spoke warmly of the Bible in terms of endearment: "This perennial stream of holy love," "the sweet waters of an endless life," "sweetest affection," and an "armory of heaven" filled with "the most persuasive invitations."[30]

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[29] Holcombe, *History*, 305-09.
[30] Joseph Walker, "Mental Requisites of Pulpit Efficiency" *The Baptist Preacher* (October 1854), 171.

Four years earlier, at the third annual commencement of Howard College, President Samuel S. Sherman presented a remarkable baccalaureate address on "The Bible a Classic."[31] A model of erudition, Sherman's address is interspersed with Latin quotations and references to numerous classical and literary figures—Cicero, Xenophon, Livy, Virgil, Homer, Rousseau, Schlegel, Dante, Coleridge, Milton, Shakespeare, Byron, and many more. He lamented the loss of the Bible in many college halls where, he said, "it has been silently removed, like a thriftless student." Sherman called for making the study of the Bible central to the educational enterprise in three ways: as a literary production, as a standard of morality, and as a manual for citizenship and uprightness in public life. He concluded his address with a stirring exhortation:

> Finally, gentlemen, take frequent counsel of that Book which is the source of all wisdom. Read it, study it. It is the only standard of human conduct, the only rule of human action. Cultivate the graces it inculcates, and let the heavenly Spirit which breathes in every page, pervade your whole lives…Let not the nightshade of skepticism overshadow and poison the morning of life, or the canker-worm of infidelity prey upon the hopes of manhood. Guard well your hearts from the seductive influences of every insinuation that may tend to shake your faith in the only chart that can guide you safely on the voyage of life, and when you reach the portals of the grave, it shall be your passport to unending joys.[32]

Such powerful perorations about the Bible from Sherman and his successors did not quell dissent from those who opposed formal training for

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[31] *TAB* published this address in several installments beginning on October 29, 1850.
[32] S. S. Sherman, "The Bible a Classic," A baccalaureate address delivered at the Third Annual Commencement of Howard College (Tuscaloosa: M. D. J. Slade, 1850), 31.

pastors. On February 21, 1878, *TAB* ran an article titled "Education of the Ministry—I'm Opposed to It," by a certain J. Trappe which reads for all the world like a spoof or a literary ruse—shall we call it a form of "fake news"? "Now, Mr. Editor," the correspondent writes, "I'm going to speak my mind plain on this matter."

> There is a good many preachers, of my sort, that think just as I do, but they are afeared to say anything. But somebody's got to talk out. If they don't, these educated preachers'll take this country, and then what'll become of me and my sort? Why, we'll have to quit, that's all there is in it.
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> My first objection is, educated preachers know too much, specially the young ones. You hardly ever hear of 'em preach, but what he says somethin' about the "original." Now, sir, there's no "original" in my bible. It's all solid gospel truth. They say the bible wasn't spoke in english but in greek or some other outlandish tongue. And if you don't understand the original, you know mighty little about what the postle' was botherin' about. Then they say the world wasn't made in six days, and that nobody but the Lord, and the educated preachers knows how long it was a makin'. Then they talk a heap about manuscripts, the oldest and the most reliable and so on. Now, sir, there's no manuscripts in my bible. They talk about numbers of things that I know nothin' about, and I don't expect the people know anything about 'em, and I don't believe they know much themselves. But then it sounds big.[33]

In a subsequent letter to *TAB*, Brother Trappe describes the effect one sermon by a college-trained preacher had on his congregation.

> And several of 'em took the paper [i.e. *TAB*], and some of 'em have begun to have family prayers and they are beginnin' to think about takin' up collections in the church on Sunday and sendin' money off to foreign lands, and that, too, when they owe me ten dollars on

[33] J. Trappe, "Education of the Ministry—I'm Opposed to It," *TAB,* February 21, 1878.

> last year's salary. How can they support me and send money to the heathen?[34]

As Brother Trappe's jibe reveals, the Baptist educational effort, exemplified at Judson, Howard, and other Baptist-sponsored academies and schools in Alabama, was closely linked to the Baptist missionary enterprise stemming from the epochal work of William Carey. William Staughton who was a personal friend of Carey had been present at the founding of the Baptist Missionary Society in England in 1792. Later, at his own inauguration as president of Columbian College in Washington, D.C., he linked the necessity of ministerial education to the worldwide missionary effort:

> In the present age, when missionaries are passing into almost every region of the earth, it is evident that, to enable them with greater facility to acquire new languages, and to translate the Scriptures from the original text, a sound and extensive education is not only desirable but necessary....[35]

In Alabama, the symbiosis of missions and education was challenged by the rise of two populist movements coming from opposite ends of the theological spectrum: an innervating, unevangelical Calvinism on the one side, and a straight-laced Arminianism led by Alexander Campbell on the other. To Calvinism and Campbellism must be added Landmarkism, another popular

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[34] Trappe, "More About Educated Ministers," *TAB,* March 14, 1878.

[35] Edward C. Starr, "William Staughton," *The Chronicle* (October, 1949). Quoted in Robert G. Torbet, "Baptist Theological Education: An Historical Survey," *Foundations* 6(1953), 315.

insurgency that posed the question of Baptist identity in a vigorous and polarizing way.

Campbell was a Scotch-Irish immigrant who had left the Presbyterians to be immersed as a Baptist in 1812. A gifted speaker and journalist, in 1823 he began to publish a widely circulated paper called the *Christian Baptist*. He aimed to "restore" the true church by returning to the literal, pristine purity of the New Testament and this led him to oppose colleges, mission societies, and other extra-biblical institutions, including the use of instrumental music in worship. Campbell was against both Baptist confessionalism and Baptist credentialism. He disagreed with his fellow immersionists over many aspects of church life and ministerial order, and especially objected to paying salaries to ministers and calling them by officious-sounding titles such as "Reverend" or "Doctor." Influenced by the philosophy of John Locke and Enlightenment reason, Campbell also denied the direct agency of the Holy Spirit in conversion. This ruled out what Baptists called "an immediate work of God's grace in the heart," and undermined one of the primary principles of revivalism.[36]

E. Brooks Holifield in his book *Theology in America* has claimed that "it would be no exaggeration to say that Baptist theology in America was, for the most part, an extended discussion—and usually a defense—of Calvinist doctrine." True, from the early seventeenth century, the Baptist movement was

[36] On Alexander Campbell and the role of the Christian movement in the context of the Great Revival, see Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 68-81.

marked by two distinct theological streams: the General Baptists who stressed the universal scope of Christ's atonement, and the Particular Baptists, who were Calvinist in soteriology. In America, however, as Holifield points out, "The Baptists gravitated after the mid-eighteenth century toward the Calvinism of the Westminster and Philadelphia confessions or toward Edwardean variations of it."[37] Yet within this Calvinist consensus, if we can call it that, there was considerable variety of views.

The Separate or New Light Baptists arose in New England in the context of the First Great Awakening. Led by Shubal Stearns and Daniel Marshall, the Separates rapidly expanded into the South which was at that time the most unchurched region of the country. Here they came into conflict with the Regular Baptists of the Philadelphia-Charleston tradition. The Regulars were more confessional, more associational, more given to learning and liturgy, and more devoted to building institutions and organizing for missions. The Regulars were the tradition of "order" while the Separates were known for their fervent "ardor." The Separates were champions of individualism, localism, and expressivism in worship. The worship of Separate Baptists has been described this way: "They rattled the rafters with their songs and were free to testify in church, to say "amen" or "glory," and to run or shout if they were moved by the Holy Ghost."[38] Both groups were represented among early Alabama Baptists but by the time the State Convention was formed in 1823, their differences had

[37] E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 278.
[38] http://www.sightlerpublications.com/history/SeparateBaptistRevival.htm

become less pronounced. If the Separates were less precise in their predestinarian beliefs, they, no less than the Regulars, believed in original sin, the doctrine of election, and the necessity of the new birth understood as a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. Separate Baptists were not General Baptists, although the genuinely Arminian side of the Baptist family was represented by the emergence of Free Will Baptists.

The Great Revival of the early nineteenth century did not eradicate these distinctions but it did draw Baptists of various kinds, as well as other evangelicals, into the common cause of proclaiming the Gospel to the lost. In Alabama, Hosea Holcombe was a Calvinist, but he was in friendly cooperation with popular Baptist preachers Daniel P. Bestor and Sion Blythe who did not ring all five bells quite the way he did.[39] Methodist Arminian John Wesley and Calvinist Anglican George Whitefield worked together in revivals and made common cause for the evangelical movement while strongly disagreeing over free will and predestination. There was often a united front in the cause of the Gospel, even amidst doctrinal and denominational diversity.

At the same time, however, a new and virulent strain of Calvinism, called by its opponents hyper-Calvinism, made strong inroads among Baptists on the

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[39] Holcombe, *History*, 50-51. Hosea Holcombe believed that most Alabama Baptist pastors "embraced the system of Dr. Fuller," while others had leaned toward Arminianism on the one hand or Antinomianism on the other. He acknowledged that many young preachers shied away from the doctrines of election and predestination since the could not "reconcile those sublime points of doctrine with their views; and with the use of means—the agency, and the accountability of man." He also acknowledged a confusion about the meaning of the labels used by the different parties: "What is called Calvinism with some, is denominated Arminianism with others; and a misunderstanding sometimes occurs, from a different manner of expression."

frontier, including Alabama. This led to major disruptions of fellowship and outright schism. A system of thought originating among British Congregationalists in the early eighteenth century, hyper-Calvinism promoted the doctrine of eternal justification. In this view, the elect were not only chosen in Christ from all eternity, they were actually justified before they were born, quite apart from repentance, faith, and a personal response to Christ and the Gospel. This view appeared to undermine the historicity of the Incarnation itself. The Philadelphia Confession of Faith rejected it plainly: "God did from all eternity decree to justify all the elect…nevertheless, they are not justified personally until the Holy Spirit doth in due time actually apply Christ unto them."[40]

Hyper-Calvinists also rejected what Andrew Fuller called "duty-faith," the idea that sinners who hear the Gospel message have a duty to repent and believe in Jesus Christ. It was not a far step from this belief to opposing the open, promiscuous preaching of the Gospel: it was useless to exhort unconverted sinners to do what they neither could do nor indeed had any obligation to do! On these theological grounds, hyper-Calvinists thwarted efforts to promote missions, evangelism, Sunday Schools, theological seminaries, and other humanly contrived programs that seemed to be unwarranted intrusions into the sovereign work of the Spirit. Daniel Parker,

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[40] "The Philadelphia Confession of Faith," 11.4. http://baptiststudiesonline.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/02/philadelphia-confession.pdf

described as a man of slight build and sporting a beard streaked with tobacco stains, set forth the most extreme form of hyper-Calvinism in his 1826 book, *Views on the Two Seeds*. Two-Seed-in-the-Spirit Predestinarian Baptists claimed that Christ and his elect ones were born of the pure seed of the woman (cf. Genesis 3:15), while non-elect reprobates were doomed because they carried within them the seed of the serpent, that is, Satan. This was a form of Manicheanism *redivivus*. Not all antimission Baptists bought into Parker's scheme, but Hosea Holcombe did encounter some Two-Seeders in his travels through the Tennessee Valley of northern Alabama, a stronghold of the antimissionary movement.

By 1844, antimissionism had become a thriving subculture among Baptists in the South, with some 900 antimission preachers, 1,622 churches, and 68,000 members.[41] Around this time, many of the hyper-Calvinists became known as Primitive Baptists, a name that remains to this day, though they were also called, usually by their pro-mission foes, anti-effort and antinomian. They were also called "Hard-Shell," "Hard-Rined," "Squared-Toed," and "Broad-Brimmed." The Primitives were fiercely independent as well as strongly deterministic in their doctrine of election, and they refused to support the missionary appeals of promoters such as Luther Rice who came to Alabama on his campaign to raise money for the Judsons. (He collected $1.75 from the Baptists of Huntsville though apparently the money was never delivered.)

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[41] David Edwin Harrell, Jr., "Religious Pluralism: Catholics, Jews, and Sectarians," in *Religion in the South,* ed. Charles Reagan Wilson (Jackson. MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1985), 66.

Daniel Parker compared Rice to Johann Tetzel, whose hawking of indulgences in the time of the Reformation prompted Martin Luther's posting of his Ninety-five Theses. Soon, Primitive Baptists and Missionary Baptists were pitted against one another in rival associations. For example, in 1858, seventeen churches left the Alabama Association to found the Ebenezer (Primitive) Baptist Association. No member church of the Ebenezer Association was allowed to participate in Sunday Schools, the State Convention, mission societies, tract societies, temperance organizations or any other society tributary to the missionary plan.[42]

On occasion, though not often, it was not the Primitives who withdrew to form their own association, but rather a minority who leaned strongly in the opposite direction—toward the Arminian alternative. Such was the case with the North River Association organized by a certain David W. Andrews who led the association to alter its confession on the doctrines of election and effectual calling. In 1844, Basil Manly, Sr., who was then the president of the University of Alabama, had written the annual circular letter of the Tuscaloosa Association on this very theme. An article on "Election," published in *TAB* the same year may well have been a summary of Manly's letter.[43] Now, in the wake of the Andrews controversy, Manly was called on once again. On April 8, 1849, he preached a notable sermon titled "Divine Efficiency Consistent with Human Activity." In this sermon, Manly rejected the freewillism of Andrews and the

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[42] Karen Stone, *The History of First Baptist Church of Wetumpka* (Montgomery: Brown Printing Company, 1996), 12.
[43] *TAB*, September 7, 1844.

Arminians, while strongly affirming the free moral agency of every individual as well as the necessity for sinners to repent and believe the Gospel. Manly's major appeal, however, was not to doctrine as such but rather to Christian experience.

> But how was it in your experience? Let us go back in our consciousness, with this question: for, if there is a work of grace in us, that work is a subject of consciousness, to some extent. Now I ask any Christian man to say—Did you go, irrespective of motive; go first to meet him and then he came to meet you? Did you, without a change of heart, resolve to change your own heart? And did this effort, self-determined, self-sustained, self-dependent, succeed?
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> If so, the credit of the whole operation, the merit of the work, belongs to you. The Christian heart replies;--no, Jesus sought me first. I remember a pious old Methodist Lady, singing with my Mother, that hymn—"Come thou fount of every blessing," and when she reached the verse "Jesus sought me when a stranger, wandering from the fold of God"—she burst into tears, and hid her face in her handkerchief, and said,--Yes, it was so, it was so."
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> There spoke the true Christian heart. Take a true believer away from theological creeds and technicalities, from the musty volumes of controversy and the arena of bitter strife, and there is but one voice on the subject;--"not unto us, not unto us, but unto God be all the glory."
>
> How began that work, and who began it? Oh! if I had a tongue that could alarm the dead in their narrow house,--and, for an audience the assembled universe; I would rejoice to shout the acclamations of Glory to their rightful object. It is all due to God who loved me first, and gave himself for me;--who, when I was guiltily disinclined to it, brought my unwilling heart to seek him. Then, and thus, it began; hence, it is of grace, not of works.
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> I do not apprehend that there is a Christian in the whole world who, if we were to go no farther, would disagree with this view."[44]

[44] Thomas J. Nettles, ed., *Southern Baptist Sermons on Sovereignty and Responsibility* (Harrisonburg, Virginia: Gano Books, 1984), 18-19. On the Andrews controversy see Hosea Holcombe, *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Baptists in Alabama* (Philadelphia: King and

Although Manly never backed away from his Calvinist convictions, he did mellow over time. Like Hosea Holcombe who had witnessed so many divisive fights over the doctrines of grace, Manly became less rigid in extending Christian fellowship to those with whom he differed on some matters. Both Holcombe and Manly, I believe, would have agreed with William F. Broaddus as he reflected back on his own long life of ministry:

> As I grow older, my conviction is increased that a pure Christianity does not consist in conformity to a rigid code of religious opinions. If a man holds fast in lip and life to the great doctrine of 'Justification by Faith'—takes Jesus for the Captain of his salvation; and, rejecting human traditions, is willing to submit himself to the laws of the great King of Zion, as those laws are laid down in his word; that man is welcome to my Christian fellowship, though he may hold some opinions, on questions not involving the honor of Jesus, differing from mine.[45]

It would be interesting write a history of *TAB* by tracing the intellectual biography of its editors across the years. Most of them were outstanding pastor-theologians with strong opinions on matters of Baptist faith and life. One of the most interesting and overlooked of the editors was Hardin Edwards Taliaferro.[46] A native of North Carolina, he moved to Alabama from Tennessee in 1835. Taliaferro was a tanner, a printer, a farmer, and a camp meeting preacher. On three separate occasions, he served as pastor of Talladega

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Baird, 1840), 184-85. Cf. also D. W. Andrews, *The History of David, or The Preacher's Looking Glass* (Tuscaloosa: Gazette Book and Job Print, 1885), 43-44.

[45] Quoted, Tom Nettles, *The Baptists*, 2:246.

[46] On Taliaferro, see Irma Russell Cruse, "Hardin Edwards Taliaferro: Baptist Preacher-Editor, 1811-1875," unpublished MA thesis, Samford University (1984).

Baptist Church. After moving to Tuskegee, he edited with his brother-in-law Samuel Henderson, the *South Western Baptist*, and also served as pastor of four small churches in Macon County. After the Civil War, he edited a secular paper, *The Tuskegee News*, and served as the pastor of several black churches working with the American Home Mission Board. Lacking the refinement and wealth of a gentleman theologian such as Basil Manly, Sr., Taliaferro was more expressive and emotional in his preaching. He smelled more of the tannery and the sawdust trail than he did of the university and the tall steeple. Yet he shared the basic theological framework of evangelical Calvinism with Manly who wrote an introduction for Taliaferro's most famous book, *The Grace of God Magnified: An Experimental Track*, published in 1857.

A remarkable spiritual autobiography of some 122 pages, *The Grace of God Magnified* is a one of the most revealing discussions of doubt, struggle, and loss of faith published by any Baptist in the nineteenth century. What Taliaferro experienced was not a momentary affliction, but rather a riveting dark night of the soul which lasted for more than twenty years. During this time, he continued to preach and served a number of churches, but he could find no solace from his doubts and struggles. He wondered whether he had ever been genuinely converted. He doubted whether an omnipotent God, whose sovereign grace he affirmed, could in fact be gracious to him. This was, of course, the same question that had plagued Martin Luther and, after him, John Bunyan. At one point, Taliaferro writes: "I am a seventeenth-century

man in my theology and feelings. I prayed to God for Bible and old-fashioned piety and spirituality. I wanted no superficial stuff."[47]

The works of Puritan divines, especially Jonathan Edwards and Thomas Boston, brought him to the threshold of reassurance, but it was the Bible itself, especially the Psalms and the Gospels, that saw him through his wrenching depression and darkness into the light. Taliaferro's breakthrough tracks the experience of Luther who, when consumed with his own doubts about divine grace, was told to look to the wounds of Jesus, and also that of Ignatius Loyola who in his S*piritual Exercises* recommends visualizing the events of Jesus life and death on the cross. Taliaferro found renewal in this same way.

> My mind recurred to the life of Christ as it is written in the four evangelists. I began at Bethlehem, followed the blessed Son of God through every event of his life, in the order of their occurrence, with more vivid distinctness than I had ever beheld them before. Light broke into my soul as I viewed each event, till I got to the Garden of Gethsemane, when sweet and tender emotions were kindled in my dormant heart, as I beheld the Son of God on the cold ground in deep agony for my sinful soul. But when I arrive at the cross, having passed the ill-treatment and condemnation of my Savior, my heart was broken to pieces in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. I gazed at that bleeding One for a moment, then passed rapidly on to the sepulcher, the resurrection, the ascension from Olivet, but soon returned to that delightful place, the cross. I was melted, completely subdued, and broken down in contemplating that spectacle…JESUS, *crucified for my sins*![48]

This experience happened to Taliaferro when he was in his early forties and it gave him a new lease on life and ministry.

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[47] Grace, 110.
[48] Ibid, 83-85.

Taliaferro's book was distributed widely not only in Alabama but throughout the South. It reveals the struggle that is at the heart of the Christian faith and it confirms the statement of John Calvin that there is no such thing as true faith that is not tinged with doubt.[49] The resolution of Taliaferro's doubts is a testimony to the Christocentric and crucicentric shape of evangelical and Baptist spirituality.

If Alexander Campbell was a restitutionist seeking to restore the true New Testament church, then James Robinson Graves was a continuationist asserting an unbroken succession of Baptist churches through the ages.[50] There was no need to restore the true church, he thought, because Baptists had never lost it! And if Baptist churches were the only true churches, it followed that Baptist ministers were the only true ministers, and Baptist ordinances the only true sacraments. In an age of increasing denominational conflict, Landmarkism reinforced the Baptist tendency to isolation and separation. No "pulpit affiliation" with other churches. No "open communion" with other Christians. No "alien immersion" accepted from other duly dunked but not bonafied Baptist believers.[51]

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[49] In the context of dealing with faith in the struggle against temptation, Calvin writes: "Surely, while we teach that faith ought to be certain and assured, we cannot imagine any certainty that is not tinged with doubt, or any assurance that is not assailed by some anxiety. On the other hand, we say that believers are in perpetual conflict with their own unbelief." *Institutes*, 3.2.17.

[50] On Graves and his continuing legacy among Southern Baptists, see James A. Patterson, *James Robinson Graves: Staking the Boundaries of Baptist Identity* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2012).

[51] See, for example, *TAB,* "Christian Fellowship and Church Fellowship," November 5, 1850; "Baptismal Regeneration," December 18, 1859. Landmark influence can be detected in this defense of closed communion: "But do not Baptists keep away from the Lord's table, their pious

Like Samuel Sherman and Milo Jewett, Graves was a native of Vermont but he lacked the erudition and classical training of these educational leaders. However, like Whitefield and Spurgeon, he was a spellbinding orator who could hold an audience of thousands in thrall. He was also a gifted journalist, a shrewd publicist, and a natural born controversialist. Graves wrote biting sarcastic treatises against the Methodists, the Presbyterians, the Campbellites. He was death to anything that smacked of Roman Catholicism. He also attacked his fellow Baptists who dared to question any of the Baptist landmarks he promoted. Graves was a peerless rabble-rouser but the most divisive aspect of Landmarkism came from his disciples. Tarleton P. Crawford, who had been a Southern Baptist missionary in China since 1852, and who was married to the remarkable Martha Foster Crawford of Alabama, proposed a reconfiguration of Baptist mission strategy based on Graves's local church ecclesiology. William Heth Whitsitt, professor and president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, was forced to resign because of Landmarkist opposition to his reconstruction of early Baptist history.[52] Alabama Baptists were deeply invested in the Whitsitt controversy partly because one of their

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Pedo-baptist brethren? No: Baptists do no such thing. These pious brethren keep themselves away, by refusing or neglecting to qualify themselves for admission to the table…Now, who are proper candidates? Somebody must decide the question. *Who* shall decide it? *The Minister,* certainly, by universal consent. The Presbyterian minister admits to the table *only* those whom *he* regards as the proper candidates. The Methodist minister does the same. May not the Baptist minister have the same privilege?" June 10, 1843.

[52] *TAB* covered this controversy extensively. See, for example, "The Question in Baptist History," February 25, 1897; "The State Convention and the Whitsitt Question," December 9, 1897; "The Whitsitt Matter," November 25, 1897, December 9, 1897, April 21, 1898, August 4, 1898; "The Convention and the Whitsitt Matter," June 2, 1898; "Statement by Dr. Whitsitt," July 9, 1896; "Whitsitt Controversy," January 7, 1897.

own, Judge Jonathan Haralson of Selma, the first layperson to be elected as president of the SBC, presided over the convention for nine years during the dispute and tried to hold things together as best he could. Some associations in Alabama defended Whitsitt while others called for his resignation. All the while, *TAB* tried to be fair and balanced, not taking sides in the fight but giving voice to both sides. At the end of it all, after Whitsitt's resignation, *TAB* took a moment to pat itself on the back for its even-handedness in the fray. "We congratulate ourselves on the course we have pursued on the 'Whitsitt matter.' We have no pardons to ask or regrets to offer. Our conscience is quite clear regarding the manner in which we have treated the controversy and those engaged in it."[53]

Can anything good be said about the legacy of J. R. Graves? James E. Tull, an insightful scholar of the Landmark tradition, gives this answer:

> In his own time, Graves sounded a rallying cry to a dispirited Baptist community in the Southwest. His strident denominationalism put iron in the Baptist blood, shored up the Baptists' faltering ranks. …Graves life was a passionate quest for the purity of the church. The singlemindedness and the courage with which he pursued this aim deserves the greatest respect. Anyone who undertakes a sober estimate of his contribution, however, is likely to have serious misgivings concerning the benefit of his long-range influence."[54]

Landmarkism arose at the same time as the abolition controversy and the division of Northern and Southern Baptists in the years prior to the coming

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[53] *TAB,* June 2, 1898.
[54] James E. Tull, *Shapers of Baptist Thought* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1972), 150-51.

of the Civil War. Some scholars have tied the lingering legacy of Landmarkism to the persistence of racism in the Southern Baptist Convention.[55] But this theory offers too small an explanation for so large a problem, for slavery was the original sin of the American covenant. Its promotion and defense among Baptists in the South, including Alabama, was pervasive and not the preserve of any particular wing or party within the denomination.

One of the ironies of Baptist life in the South in this period is the fact that while white Baptists championed both political and religious freedom, most of them felt no obligation to extend that principle to the slaves they owned, bought, sold and whose forced labor supplied the economic advantage they enjoyed. It is true that only a minority of Alabama Baptists were slave owners.[56]

Several distinct attitudes toward slavery can be identified among Alabama Baptists. First, there were a few—a very few—among the Baptists of Alabama who opposed slavery outright. Most notable in this group were Lee and Susanna Compere. Originally from England, they came to Alabama from Jamaica where they had served as British Baptist missionaries. The first Baptist church in Jamaica had been organized in 1791 by George Liele, a former slave from Virginia. There were no Baptist slaveholders on the island. The Comperes brought with them to Alabama a deep commitment to end

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[55] See, for example, James Maples, "One Legacy of Landmarkism: Its Impact on Racial Struggles in the Southern Baptist Convention," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 40 (August 2014), 175-194.

[56] According to the 1860 U.S. Census, only 35% of white Alabamians owned slaves.

slavery. Second, there were other Alabama Baptists who held an ambivalent attitude toward slavery. Hosea Holcombe should probably be included in this group since he did not think it morally right to own slaves and gave away to his half-brother the one slave he had inherited from his mother's estate. Holcombe also opposed the Alabama state law, which went into effect in 1832, making it illegal to teach a slave how to read. Holcombe also teamed up to do evangelistic work with a slave preacher named Job Davis, holding revivals and preaching at camp meetings throughout the state. But, clearly the majority of Alabama Baptists favored slavery, believed it to be a God-ordained institution worth defending, and put forth biblical justifications for it in pulpit and print.[57] The most influential in this group was doubtless Basil Manly Sr. who repeated the arguments for slavery put forth earlier by noted Baptist leaders Richard Furman and Richard Fuller.[58]

For as long as possible, the official Baptist policy about slavery was one of neutrality. Southern Presbyterian theologians had developed the notion of "the spirituality of the church" which excluded the church from social and political issues of public import, and Baptists in the South mostly followed this

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[57] Examples of this view are numerous in *The Alabama Baptist.* See "Slavery As It Is," April 20, 1844; "The Convention and Slavery," May 18, 1844, June 1, 1844, June 22, 1844; "Slavery," August 28, 1850. Typical of the defense of slavery, this statement ties the ownership of persons to property rights: [Slavery] "was reprehended in neither the Old of the New Testament, and it may therefore be safely inferred, that there is no greater evil—moral evil—in the ownership of slaves than in the ownership of lands, houses or money."

[58] Benedict, *General History of Baptists*, 2:207. What David Benedict discovered about slavery in his journeys through the antebellum South fits well with Alabama Baptist attitudes. He found that "many let it alone altogether; some remonstrate against it in gentle terms; others oppose it vehemently; while farther the greater part…hold slaves, and justify them the best way they can."

same line of thought. However, as abolitionist "agitators" became more vocal, and as respected leaders from the wider Baptist world spoke out strongly against the evil of slavery, Baptist neutrality on the subject began to wear thin.

At the turn of the century, on December 30, 1800, William Carey had written a letter to William Rogers expressing shock at an advertisement he had read in an American newspaper, "To Be Sold, A Negro Man, etc." Carey commented: "I hope everyone who names the name of Christ departs from the iniquity of holding their fellow creatures in slavery."[59] Spurgeon was born in 1834, the same year in which Carey died. By 1860, Spurgeon was the preaching sensation of London, had become, though still in his twenties, one of the best-known Baptists in the world. Like Carey, Spurgeon embraced the cause of abolition and this made him a preacher *non grata* among many Baptists in the South. On February 17 of that year, citizens of Montgomery gathered in the jail yard to burn the "dangerous books" of this "notorious English abolitionist" who was called by one correspondent from Florida, a "beef-eating, puffed-up, vain, over-righteous pharisaical English blab-mouth."[60] The news of the burning of Spurgeon's sermons in Montgomery spread throughout the country and elicited this response from the *Poughkeepsie Eagle* in New York: "There will—unless this fanaticism is soon checked—be a general

[59] William Carey to William Rogers, December 30, 1800; John Rippon, *The Baptist Annual Register*, 2:810-811.
[60] "A Southern Opinion of the Rev. Mr. Spurgeon," *The New York Herald* (March 1, 1860).

bonfire of another Book, which has something of a circulation [in the] south, and which declares it to be every man's duty to 'let the oppressed go free.'"[61]

Spurgeon's abolitionist views and his refusal to take communion with a slaveholder did not set well with the *South Western Baptist*. Editor Samuel Henderson wrote:

> We had just received a box of Mr. Spurgeon's sermons to sell, but have *sent them back* to the publishers with all possible dispatch. WILL NOT EVERY BOOK-STORE AND COLPORTEUR IN THE SOUTH DO THE SAME? …Indeed, a bonfire made of his books would not express too strongly the honest indignation of an insulted South.[62]

One week later, the book burning Henderson called for took place in the city that would soon be the capital of the Confederacy.

Historian Mark Noll has written about the Civil War as a theological crisis.[63] Part of the crisis related to the doctrine of providence and how the ways of God could be understood in the whirlwind of history. This was the theme of a sermon, "The Purpose of Calamities," preached by Basil Manly, Sr. in Montgomery in 1862. Taking his text from Judges 6:13, "If the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us." Manly declared that the people of God

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[61] Quoted, *The Lost Sermons of C. H. Spurgeon*, ed. Christian T. George (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2016), 1:xvii-xix.
[62] *South Western Baptist*, February 9, 1860 italics original.
[63] Mark A. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

were not exempt from the disasters and wreckage of history. With a glimmer of the profound insight of Lincoln's Second Inaugural, he recognized that God for his own reasons may not answer our prayers the way we want. His ultimate purposes could not be easily identified with either side of the struggle. Facing this grim reality, Manly declared, we have two options. "We can either submit or oppose." Shortly thereafter Manly wrote in his diary, "Everything now in our country seems dark and uncertain. We are to glorify God in the fires."[64]

The theological crisis had a deeper dimension as well, one embodied in the relationship of race to slavery. As Philip Schaff, the Swiss-born church historian at Mercersberg, Pennsylvania, put it succinctly: "*The negro question lies far deeper than the slavery question.*"[65] To some extent, the debate over slavery was yet another "battle for the Bible," as Baptists and other Christians hurled scriptural texts back and forth. Yet "the negro question"—the question of race—and the slavery question were not identical and, as Noll argues, the failure to distinguish the two "meant that when the Civil War was over and slavery was abolished, systemic racism continued unchecked as the great moral anomaly in a supposedly Christian America."[66] We still live today with the results of that hermeneutical failure.

Newspapers sometimes are named after instruments of reflection—gazette, observer, reflector—more commonly, mirror. In the many changes of

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[64] "The Purposes of Calamities," Sermon preached in Montgomery on the Fast Day appointed by Jefferson Davis, February 28, 1862. Samford University Special Collections F 758a.
[65] Mark Noll, *Civil War, 51*. Schaff's italics.
[66] Ibid, 52.

name, location, and ownership *TAB* has undergone since 1843, I have not discovered any of these words used in the title of the paper. But *TAB* has in fact been a mirror, a mirror held up to the life of the people of God called Alabama Baptists. It has reflected their journey of faith—a journey of ups and downs, twists and turns, at times combustible, divisive, quixotic, but at its best it has ever pointed forward toward that City with Foundations whose builder and maker is God. A religious paper like *TAB* is not a theological journal, but theology has never been absent from its concerns. *Bible*, *grace*, *race*, and *church*—among many other theological beliefs and practices such as feet washing—have been treated extensively in its pages. But *TAB* has a larger mission than merely to reflect what it sees with accuracy and fairness. Its greater purpose, as editor Bob Terry has put it, is to help "advance the cause of Christ in Alabama and around the world…to help [its readers] understand the issues of the day through a biblical perspective and to grow as Christian disciples." If I may put it this way, *TAB* is a two-way mirror: one through which we look to see the world and the church, and also a mirror which helps us to see the world and the church through the eyes of the Savior's love.

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