REBUILDING ZION:
THE RELIGIOUS RECONSTRUCTION OF THE SOUTH, 1863-1877

By

DANIEL WESLEY STOWELL

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

REBUILDING ZION: THE RELIGIOUS RECONSTRUCTION OF THE SOUTH, 1863-1877

By
Daniel Wesley Stowell

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Chairman: Bertram Wyatt-Brown
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This study explores how, in light of their understanding of God’s providence in the outcome of the Civil War, southerners and northerners rebuilt the religious life of the South. Adopting different interpretations of the providential meaning of the war, three groups—Confederates, northerners, and freedmen—defined what the religious reconstruction of the South should mean. The interaction among these visions determined the contours of religious reconstruction in the 1860s and 1870s and shaped much of late-nineteenth-century southern religious life.

Confederate Christians, confident of the righteousness of slavery and secession, believed that God permitted the overthrow of the Confederacy, but was chastising, rather than judging, southerners for their sins. This fine distinction was crucial to southern evangelicals’ self-understanding in the postwar period. Thus interpreting Confederate defeat, they saw little need for major reforms in their religious life, including the belief
that the freedmen should remain quietly in the biracial churches. While rebuilding their denominational organizations to uphold sectional identity, southern evangelicals staunchly refused to consider reunion with their politicized and radical counterparts in the North. Northern evangelicals insisted that God had judged the South for the sins of slavery and secession, meaning that southern denominations should not be entrusted with the fate of the South’s moral regeneration. Only northern missionaries and their religious scalawag allies were worthy, since they proclaimed a pure and loyal gospel.

The central fact of the war for freedmen was their deliverance from bondage. This conception of Confederate defeat mandated rapid separation from southern biracial churches. Many united with northern denominations who provided desperately needed financial and organizational assistance. Freedmen also zealously pursued educational opportunities for themselves and their children.

The Confederate plan for religious reconstruction predominated in the postwar South, but the other two views achieved some success. Most notable among these was the freedmen’s desire for separate black churches, despite objections from their white brethren. Focusing on the three major evangelical denominations in the states of Georgia and Tennessee, this study examines how each vision contributed to the contested process of religious reconstruction.
INTRODUCTION
STONEWALL JACKSON AND THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

On the evening of May 2, 1863, General Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson, a few of his officers, and several couriers rode beyond Confederate lines to reconnoiter the Federal forces along the Plank Road near Chancellorsville. Jackson was planning a night attack in the moonlight to capitalize on the successes of the past few hours. As Jackson’s party returned to their own lines over the unfamiliar ground, pickets of the 18th North Carolina Regiment mistook them for Federal cavalry and opened fire. Several members of the party were shot from their horses. One of the officers shouted to the pickets that they were firing on their own men. Believing this to be a Yankee trick, the pickets fired another volley. In the shooting, three bullets struck General Jackson, one in the right hand and two more in the left arm. One bullet severed an artery near the shoulder. That bullet struck the heart of the Confederacy, for it proved to be a mortal wound for Jackson.

Jackson’s sorrel bolted into the woods, carrying its wounded rider crashing into the branches. Jackson managed to rein in the horse and return to the road. Two of his officers carefully removed him from his saddle, and Jackson muttered, “My own men.” With much difficulty in the midst of a Federal artillery bombardment, Jackson’s men transported him to a field hospital where his left arm was amputated. Despite the success of Jackson’s bold flanking maneuver against superior Union forces, General Robert E.
Lee was troubled by the news: “Any victory is dearly bought which deprives us of the services of General Jackson, even for a short time.”

The following day, Lee sent a note to Jackson congratulating him on his victory and assuring him that “for the good of the country,” he would have chosen to be wounded in Jackson’s stead. On May 5, Jackson was moved to a field hospital ten miles south of Fredericksburg, where he showed signs of recovering from the amputation, but two days later, he developed pneumonia. Jackson’s wife Anna and their infant daughter Julia, not yet six months old, arrived the next day. He assured his wife that he was “perfectly resigned” to accept God’s will. Jackson had seen his daughter only once, some two weeks earlier before Federal troops marched toward Chancellorsville. He saw her only once more on Saturday, May 9. By the next morning, Jackson’s doctors had little hope for his survival. Anna told him he must prepare for the worst, and asked him if he wanted God to have His will with him. “I prefer it,” he replied. “Yes, I prefer it.” A few hours later, Jackson told those at his bedside, “I always wanted to die on Sunday.” And that Sunday afternoon, his wish was fulfilled.

The Confederacy mourned as it had for no other loss. General Lee lamented to his wife, “I know not how to replace him; but God’s will be done! I trust He will raise up someone in his place.” Mary Jones in Georgia wrote to her son, “The death of our pious, brave, and noble General Stonewall Jackson is a great blow to our cause! May God raise up friends and helpers to our bleeding country!”

On May 15, Jackson’s funeral was held in the Presbyterian Church in Lexington, Virginia, where Jackson had been a deacon and the superintendent of a black Sunday School. His pastor, the Rev.
W. S. White, began the funeral sermon by reading from the fifteenth chapter of I Corinthians: “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory. . . . But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Several days later in nearby Lynchburg, the Rev. James B. Ramsey of the First Presbyterian Church delivered a memorial sermon on the death of Jackson. Ramsey spoke for the entire Confederacy when he asked, “God has taken him, and why? . . . why this terrible blow? Why raise up just the instrument we needed, and then remove him when we seemed to need him as much if not more than ever?” He declared to his congregation that although “his loss seems irreparable” to both the church and the country in “this hour of our peril,” God could raise up others in Jackson’s place. Instead of questioning God’s decision to take Jackson from them, southerners should be thankful and hopeful that the Confederacy was blessed with such a “perfect Christian Hero.” Who could believe that “God would have given us such a man, and answered in every step his prayers for two eventful years, and blessed him as our defender, if he had not designs of mercy for us, and was not preparing for us a glorious deliverance, and us for it?” Jackson was great because “he honored God with all his heart and life,” and his success stemmed from his dependence upon God. If southerners followed his example, God would certainly secure their independence. Jackson’s death was designed to teach the Confederacy this vital lesson.²

The Rev. Robert Lewis Dabney, Presbyterian minister, Confederate chaplain, and Jackson’s chief of staff for a time, published a discourse on Jackson’s life soon after the General’s death. Searching for God’s purposes in Jackson’s death, Dabney asked
rhetorically, "Can the solution be, that having tried us, and found us unworthy of such a deliverer, he [God] has hid his favourite in the grave, in the brightness of his hopes, and before his blooming honours received any blight from disaster, from the calamities which our sins are about to bring upon us?" Dabney answered with a resounding "Nay.

Instead, he suggested, "may it not be, that God, after enabling him to render all the service which was essential to our deliverance, and showing us in him, the brightest example of the glory of Christianity, has bid him enter into the joy of his Lord, at this juncture, in order to warn us against our incipient idolatry. . . ." Dabney exhorted his audience that "while man is mortal, the cause is immortal. Away then, with unmanly discouragements, God lives, though our hero is dead."3

While Ramsey and Dabney offered their answers to the question "Why?" others were not as certain of the providential meaning of the hero’s death. For the religious citizens of the Confederacy, Jackson was "the chosen standard bearer of liberty" and "the anointed of God to bring in deliverance for his oppressed Church and Country." God had apparently struck him down in the midst of the struggle for southern independence, an act of Providence that raised serious questions about God’s plans for the Confederacy. Even the facts surrounding Jackson’s death seemed curiously providential: "The very time and circumstances of his death were all such as to awaken peculiar and melancholy interest, and so force attention to his example, as if God intended that not a single element should be wanting to perfect the influence of that example." He was unquestionably a Christian general, devoted to prayer and the religious welfare of his men; certainly God had not seized his life because of his iniquity.
He was at the height of his success; his troops had performed brilliantly in what became known as Lee's masterpiece, the battle of Chancellorsville. He was shot down by his own men, not by those of his enemy. Surely God had some message for the South in this calamity: "Men were everywhere speculating with solemn anxiety upon the meaning of his death." Some feared that God had "taken the good man away from the evil to come"; because of their sins, southerners were unworthy of such a deliverer. Others, like Ramsey and Dabney, more hopefully assured themselves that God intended to emphasize Jackson's Christian and military virtues by taking him in the zenith of his career and to teach the South to trust in no man, but in God alone.4 For the first time in the war, two months before the disasters at Gettysburg and Vicksburg, southerners paused to consider whether God would grant them ultimate victory.

Most Confederates shared the sentiments of Ramsey and Dabney. They quickly reassured themselves that God was only chastising them for their sins (including the sin of idolizing Jackson) and that they would soon regain divine favor. Two years later under the stress of a far greater disaster, southern evangelicals would repeat this process, assuring themselves that although they had been defeated on the battlefield, God had not deserted them. The Confederate attitude toward religious reconstruction began to take shape here in the midst of the war. After the initial shock of defeat and through the spring of 1866, southern Christians developed a theological understanding of the war that molded their attitudes toward the issues of religious reconstruction. Neither the death of Stonewall Jackson nor the collapse of the Confederacy, it was believed, were indications of God's stern hand of judgment. Instead, these tribulations were signs of
the Father’s hand of chastening. This distinction was central to the Confederate understanding of the war. The mysterious providence of God had a greater purpose for the South. In both events, God was scolding white southerners for their sinfulness but not abandoning them. Armed with this interpretation of their recent past, Confederate Christians were ready to face the challenges of reconstructing their religious lives.

Central to their vision was the adamant conviction that God still favored the South and its churches. Secession and slavery as an institution were not sinful, though most admitted that some abuses had existed in the practice of slavery. Since northern denominations were hopelessly political and radical, southern denominations had a duty to preserve the Gospel untainted. Furthermore, while northerners and freedmen controlled much of the political and economic life of the South, southern evangelicals had to maintain their churches as bastions of regional identity.

For many reasons, the freedmen should remain under the religious authority of their former masters. Emancipation did not release southern evangelicals from their duty to evangelize the black race as part of God’s providential plan for their elevation. The freedmen were too ignorant to proclaim the pure Gospel of Christ or to establish and maintain ecclesiastical organizations. They were vulnerable prey to political “missionaries” from the North, radicals who sought to incite the freedmen against their true friends, white southerners. Even more threatening was the possibility that ecclesiastical independence might lead to other forms of independence.

While white religious southerners were developing their understanding of the war and Confederate defeat, two other visions were forming. Religious northerners also saw
the hand of God in the great events of their day. Battlefield reverses were God's chastisements upon them, but they remained confident that their cause was just. The collapse of the Confederacy confirmed their belief that southerners had been rebelling against God. God, in righteous indignation against the sins of secession and slavery, had not merely chastened the South, but had brought His fierce judgment upon it. Because secession from the Union was a sin, northerners reasoned, secession from the national church bodies was also a sin. Now that the Union was restored, national denominational structures could also be reconstructed. The condition for readmission to the privileges of citizenship was a loyalty oath; naturally, the restoration of ecclesiastical ties should involve a declaration of loyalty to the church and a confession of the sins of secession and slavery. Because the southern churches were tainted with treason and slavery, they could no longer effectively minister to southern blacks, so a vast new missionary field was open to northern churches. Northern evangelicals would take the Gospel to the millions of black men and women living in ignorance and superstition in the South.

A small group of “religious scalawags” scattered across the South encouraged northern evangelicals in their vision of the providential meaning of the war and their approach to religious reconstruction. These religious scalawags were ministers and members of the southern churches who agreed with northern Christians that God had indeed severely judged the South for its sins. Some had been unionists trapped within the Confederacy. Others, however, were staunch Confederates who reevaluated their earlier beliefs in light of Confederate defeat. Whatever their background, they joined with the northern denominations, and many served as missionaries among both whites
and freedmen in the South. They desired a reunion of the severed denominations, though they were generally less strident toward their fellow southerners than were their northern brethren. Like political scalawags, religious scalawags became the objects of intense hatred by their fellow southerners. They were traitors to the southern cause, which lived on in the churches and in the providence of God.

Like white evangelicals, North and South, the freedmen also drew providential meaning from the war and its outcome. The monumental fact for them was God’s deliverance from bondage. Their freedom also provided black evangelicals the opportunity to establish churches and conduct religious services free from white supervision. While they quickly withdrew from the churches of their masters, the freedmen also realized that they could not provide church buildings, religious literature, or trained ministers without outside help. They accepted help from their former masters in many cases, while they offered their membership to northern black and white denominations in return for houses of worship and educational opportunities. The goal for blacks in the postwar period was to establish churches for themselves separate from the control of their former masters, and to this end, they accepted assistance from many sources.

The competition among these three visions of religious reconstruction determined the shape of the religious reconstruction of the South in the decades after 1865. Each vision of what constituted religious reconstruction was based on a different understanding of God’s purposes in the overthrow of the Confederacy. No vision was completely triumphant, nor did any of these approaches suffer complete disappointment. Each
contributed a part to the formidable task of rebuilding the religious life of the southern states.

The Confederate perspective of religious reconstruction, however, enjoyed by far the most success. Immediately after the war’s end, white southern evangelicals began to rebuild their shattered denominational organizations. Associations, conferences, and presbyteries met for the first time in several years in many places, and all voiced a commitment to rebuilding southern churches. They staunchly refused any efforts toward reunion with their northern counterparts, believing that such a step would corrupt their churches and forfeit God’s favor. Denominational newspapers resumed publication, and many denominational colleges made the first strides toward recovery. Sunday schools were reestablished in many churches and begun in even more. Southern denominational leaders worked diligently to provide “appropriate” literature for the Sunday schools, free from the taint of northern radicalism. In all these efforts, the primary motive was a genuine concern for the spiritual welfare of themselves, their families, and their fellow southerners, both black and white. However, an intimately related purpose was the retention of southern ideals and influences in their religious life. In virtually every aspect of Confederate efforts for religious reconstruction, pious efforts included an underlying element of southern sectionalism.

The freedmen’s perception of religious reconstruction also enjoyed success, especially in their goal of separating from their former masters’ churches. Despite white southerners’ advice that they were unprepared for independent spiritual governance, black southerners rapidly withdrew from mixed congregations and formed their own churches.
While southern white evangelicals offered some initial assistance in establishing church organizations and occasionally provided places for worship, their aid quickly diminished when it became clear that the freedmen intended to be permanently and completely independent. Black Christians then turned to northern missionary agencies and the Freedmen's Bureau for support in erecting school/church buildings and in training teachers and ministers.

The assistance that these agencies provided to the freedmen proved to be the major success of the northern vision of religious reconstruction. Although they made overtures toward reunion with their southern counterparts, northern evangelicals were never willing to offer the hand of fraternity without simultaneously condemning slavery and secession. Southern resolve, already strong, stiffened under northern castigation. Northern efforts to enter the South as a mission field also frightened and enraged white southerners. Northern denominations made some progress among whites in the unionist areas of the South, especially southern Appalachia, but their greatest successes came in evangelizing the freedmen. Teachers supplied with Bibles and educational materials and missionaries equipped with the funds to build churches quickly established congregations among the freedmen and made enemies among white southerners. More troubling, however, to the Confederate vision of religious reconstruction were the small groups of religious scalawags who actually joined the invaders and aided them in their unholy work. Southern churchmen could dismiss northern missionaries as having been corrupted by the false theologies rampant in the North. But southerners, some of them loyal Confederates, who accepted the northern notion that God had judged the South in
Confederate defeat posed a more serious problem. Religious scalawags were vehemently denounced as traitors, despite their attempts to moderate northern attitudes toward the South, a policy that demonstrated how important sectional solidarity was to insecure southern evangelicals.

Scholarship on the religious history of this period of southern history has generally neglected to examine the process of religious reconstruction broadly. Several historians such as Rufus B. Spain, John Lee Eighmy, Hunter Dickinson Farish, and Ernest Trice Thompson have examined the history of a single southern denomination during this period.5 Studies of northern evangelistic and educational efforts have often been cast along denominational lines as well. Work by Ralph Morrow, Donald G. Jones, Louis G. Vander Velde, and Robert Andrew Baker has examined the actions and attitudes of individual northern denominations involved in religious reconstruction.6 Some studies of black religion, such as those by Clarence E. Walker and Katharine L. Dvorak, also focus on individual denominations.7

By focusing on a single denomination, these works do not examine the similarities among the three major evangelical denominations. They also fail to examine critically the interaction between their subjects and the other two groups of participants in religious reconstruction. Too often they view the other groups through the eyes of their subjects, a practice that distorts their understanding of those who had different visions and priorities. Therefore, students of southern denominations find northern Christians uncharitable and unreasonable and view the freedmen as ignorant and helpless. Those who examine black denominations see southerners as unrelievably hostile to blacks and
consider northerners to be only marginally better in their paternalism. Scholars who explore northern denominations’ contributions to religious reconstruction view their efforts to assist the freedmen as a great humanitarian effort to assist the benighted freedmen. Ironically, however, they seem to accept some aspects of the southern critique of their subjects as unreasonable in their demands for contrition over slavery and secession.

A few studies have broken denominational barriers to examine more broadly one of the three groups involved in religious reconstruction. Both Charles Reagan Wilson’s examination of the civil religion of the Lost Cause and Gaines M. Foster’s analysis of the relationship between Confederate defeat and the emergence of the New South offer valuable insights into the initial southern white reaction to defeat, but the focus of both books is the flowering of the Lost Cause celebrations in the 1880s, 1890s, and 1900s.8 William E. Montgomery examines the spectrum of black denominations in his study of southern black churches in the last third of the nineteenth century, but his work does not address fully the interaction between black initiatives and those of southern and northern white Christians.9 While these works represent a step forward in their inclusion of all of the major denominations, a new framework is necessary for understanding religious reconstruction as a contested historical process.

All three major groups—southern whites, northern whites, and blacks—contributed to the rebuilding of southern church life in the decades after the Civil War. A full description of each group’s view of Confederate defeat clarifies how religious Americans, both black and white, northern and southern, formed their respective visions of religious
reconstruction. By dismissing the attitudes and actions of one or more groups as irrational, narrow-minded, or even un-Christian, many scholars have failed to understand the sincerity with which nineteenth-century evangelicals held to their interpretations of God's purposes in human history. Only by accepting each group's unique view of God's providence and the resulting plan of action as valid for their time and circumstance can historians achieve a better conceptualization of the religious history of this period.

Focusing on the Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians as representative of southern religion, this study examines how these groups faced the challenges of rebuilding in the aftermath of the Civil War. These three denominations embraced 94 percent of all the churches in the 11 states of the Confederacy. Methodists and Baptists alone accounted for 90 percent of all the churches in Georgia. While the examination of the response to defeat and of the formation of plans for religious reconstruction ranges across the entire South, and North as well, the analysis of the actual process focuses intensively on two states, Georgia and Tennessee. Georgia was the most populous state in the lower South and ranked only behind Virginia and Tennessee in population among the states of the Confederacy. It provided critical support for the Confederate war effort, supplying both men and materiel. Because the state was united in its support of the Confederacy and invaded by Union armies only late in the war, religious reconstruction did not fully commence until the end of the war. Tennessee's experience was much different. Invaded early in the war and marked by strong unionist sentiment in the eastern mountains, the state became a battleground from February of 1862. Nashville surrendered to Union forces in that month; Memphis followed in June. Much of the state
was occupied by Union armies for the remainder of the war. Wartime governor Andrew Johnson began the process of political reconstruction in 1862 and 1863, while newly arrived northern missionaries and blacks taking their first steps toward freedom inaugurated religious reconstruction in Tennessee. A comparison and contrast of how religious reconstruction developed among the three major evangelical denominations in these two states reveals the roles Confederates, northerners, and the freedmen played in the struggle for the soul of the South.

Notes


CHAPTER 1
GOD’S WRATH:
DISRUPTION, DESTRUCTION, AND CONFUSION
IN SOUTHERN RELIGIOUS LIFE

The experience of the Civil War shook the foundations of southern religious life between 1863 and 1865. White religious southerners made a strong commitment to the war effort, and the early years of the war were marked by a confidence in the Confederate cause and God’s support of it as evidenced by battlefield victories. As the war raged into a third year, however, the antebellum patterns of southern life became more vulnerable to change. Religious southerners generally did not question their beliefs that God wore gray and the Confederacy would succeed, though a few did. Their concerns were much less philosophical and much more practical. Not only had the North declared war on slavery, but northern armies were occupying larger sections of the South. Slaveowners feared that their human property might flee to Federal lines. Many areas of the South struggled with material privations, and numerous daily routines of life were disrupted by the war. The war also had a profound effect on southerners’ religious lives. Many of the extra-local functions of the churches were disrupted during the latter stages of the war; conferences, conventions, and synods could not meet. Religious newspapers and denominational colleges ceased to operate. In battle areas, church buildings were put to less than sacred use, as hospitals, barracks, warehouses, and even stables. Ministers left for the armies or took up secular jobs to support themselves and
their families. Some religious leaders complained that the war distracted their members from spiritual concerns and fostered certain types of sin, especially extortion. Northern missionaries followed Union armies and began to establish churches wherever they could find people willing to join, especially among the black population tasting freedom for the first time. The freedmen also began to test their new powers by forming churches of their own or breaking away from antebellum biracial congregations. Long before Appomattox, the war laid waste to the southern religious landscape, and tentative strategies for its regeneration were being formulated and tested.

Most local southern churches would survive in some form. The questions religious southerners faced in 1865 and 1866 concerned the relationship of local churches to their surrounding world. To whom would they minister? What strategies would they use? What changes were necessary to work effectively in the postwar South? With which other local churches would they unite in pursuit of these goals? How would they channel their resources? What particular endeavors deserved support—religious periodicals, evangelical colleges, Sunday schools, foreign missions, domestic missions with the black and Indian populations? Most importantly, what role did God wish for them to play? These were the questions that southern whites, freedmen, and northern missionaries faced. Their varied answers were influenced by the disordered condition of southern religious life in the aftermath of the Civil War.

One important blow to southern religious life during the war was the disruption of the denominations’ organizational apparatus. Established over decades and consolidated since the separation from their northern counterparts, these organizations
provided unity and direction for southern Christians. While most were not destroyed during the war, denominational structures and institutions increasingly ceased operations in the latter years of the war as Union armies occupied more of the Confederacy. These interruptions brought the lives of the southern denominations virtually to a standstill.

Across the South various religious meetings could not be held because of inadequate transportation or the presence of enemy forces. The Presbyterian Synod of Memphis, which included western Tennessee and northern Mississippi, was unable to meet in Trenton, Tennessee, in 1862, because the area had fallen far behind the Federal lines. It met at College Hill church in northern Mississippi instead. Because "the facilities for travel were destroyed, or monopolized by the army, and absence from home, unprotected, was more or less hazardous," the ministers of the synod "by common consent," chose not to meet at Florence, Alabama, in October 1863. The following year, members from two presbyteries of the Synod of Memphis met in Covington, Tennessee. Although they reassembled periodically for three days, no delegates from the other three presbyteries arrived, and they were forced to suspend the session for lack of a quorum. The Synod of Texas suffered a similar fate in 1863. The Synod of Nashville in middle and east Tennessee did not meet in 1862, 1863, or 1864. Even the smaller presbyteries had difficulty meeting in some areas. Most presbyteries in Mississippi did not meet in 1863 and 1864, and in eastern Tennessee, the Presbytery of Knoxville did not meet after 1863.¹

The quadrennial General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, scheduled to meet in New Orleans in the spring of 1862, was postponed when United
States forces under Flag Officer David Farragut captured the city in April. The General Conference did not convene again until 1866. The Tennessee Annual Conference did not assemble in 1863, and in 1864 only 13 of nearly 200 ministers met with Bishop Joshua Soule to conduct the business of the Conference. Other conferences suffered as well, especially from a lack of episcopal visitation. The Texas Conference did not see a bishop for five years, and the Arkansas Conference saw none for four years. Bishop Soule’s home in Tennessee was behind Federal lines for much of the war. Even Bishop George F. Pierce in Georgia met with only the Georgia and Florida Conferences in 1861. He wrote to his son, “I am cut off from all my Conferences by war and the lack of money.”2

Southern Baptists also had severe organizational problems. The Baptists of Mississippi held only one annual state convention during the war, while Arkansas Baptists suspended their convention between 1861 and 1867. The Virginia state organization that met in 1863 had only 35 present instead of the usual several hundred, and the entire meeting lasted only a few hours instead of days. The Nolachucky Association in Tennessee did not meet at all during the war, and many other associations gathered irregularly. In Georgia the state convention was to assemble in Columbus on April 21, 1865, but Union General James H. Wilson’s cavalry captured Columbus in a night assault on April 16 and the meeting was cancelled. The meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention itself was postponed from the spring of 1865 until the following year.3
Local churches suffered considerable disruption as well. The Candays Creek Baptist Church in southeastern Tennessee held no sessions between July 1863 and June 1864 because "there Arose a Rebellion People in force and Arms Against the Cuntry and Drove the male memers nearley all from ther homes and threwed the Cuntry in such a deranged Condition that we thought it best not to mete for a while." The Presbyterian Church in Monticello, Georgia, did not have a local meeting of the church elders between March and November 1863, because "all the members of the Session are in the service of the country." In 1864 the pastor of the Methodist Church in Port Gibson, Mississippi, reported that "the Church is scattered and wasted to a great extent by the war. . . . Sunday School is still kept up though frequently interrupted by the Yanks capturing teachers and other causes." A Georgia woman wrote in the summer of 1864 as Sherman’s army marched through the state: "No church. Our preacher’s horse stolen by the Yankees." The clerk of a Presbyterian church in eastern Tennessee wrote in April 1865, "the state of the church being such at this time owing to the fact that so many of the members were gone to the war on either side of the question that it makes it impossible to make out a true statistical report to Presbytery."4

While administrative meetings such as synods, conferences, and conventions were in disarray, the primary vehicles of denominational communication—the religious newspapers—also perished in the wartime conditions. These periodicals suffered from a variety of conditions caused by the war. Circulation rates plummeted as the movement of armies and the disruption of the mails cut off subscribers. In December 1860, the Baptist Christian Index in Macon, Georgia, had 4,900 subscribers. Two years later in
this relatively stable area of the Confederacy, only 2,100 copies were published, many of which went to soldiers in the armies. Inflation and shortages of paper also plagued the religious weeklies. The subscription rate for the Presbyterian Christian Observer climbed from $2.50 annually in 1861 to $5.00 in August, 1863, when the size of the paper was also cut in half. By May 1864 subscriptions cost $8.00, and in January 1865 the price rose to $20.00 per year. All three of the surviving Methodist weeklies also raised their rates to $20.00 by the end of 1864. The Southern Presbyterian lamented in April 1863 that “it is with deep regret that we return to the half sheet.” The paper mill that supplied its paper was burned, and the editors had been unable to secure any other supply of paper. The paper suspended for a month in December 1863 and January 1864 because of a lack of paper. The price of paper and printing rose so steeply that by June 1864, the editors of the Southern Presbyterian wrote that they could not continue to publish a half sheet without an annual outlay of $10,000 beyond the income of the paper. Although they did not expect to suspend so soon, it was “a matter of necessity” because they could no longer procure paper. The newspaper resumed publication in October 1864 with a new subscription rate of $10.00 for six months.5

Each of the three denominations had several newspapers published throughout the South. Southern Methodists, for example, were publishing ten weekly papers early in 1861, with a combined circulation of over 50,000. Only two remained after a year of warfare, the Southern Christian Advocate in Charleston, South Carolina, and the Richmond Christian Advocate in Richmond, Virginia. The North Carolina Christian Advocate ceased publication in May 1861, but revived with a new editor in April 1863.
as the Christian Advocate (Raleigh, North Carolina). The Texas Christian Advocate, published in Galveston, suspended operations in late 1861, but resumed publication in 1864 in Houston because Galveston was under Federal control. The Southern Christian Advocate fled from bombarded and blockaded Charleston to Augusta, Georgia, in April 1862. In mid-April 1865 the editor announced that the paper would move to Macon, Georgia, and resume in a few weeks. On June 29, a single issue appeared from Macon explaining that the editor left Augusta for Macon before the last issue went to press. General James H. Wilson’s cavalry forces “reached Macon before the editor did, and he found the place in possession of the United States forces, and the publishing house in ashes.” The June issue was designed to test the “future fortunes” of the newspaper. Although it had a “considerable amount of Confederate money on hand” when the currency collapsed, the paper was “now left without one dollar,” except what it had invested in printing paper. Two months elapsed before another issue appeared.6

Perhaps even more devastating for southern Methodists was the loss of their publishing house when Federal forces captured Nashville in February 1862. The facilities had produced the Nashville Christian Advocate, tracts for Confederate armies, many religious books, and even a pocket Testament, “proudly proclaimed as the first Bible entirely stereotyped in the South.” The editor of the Nashville Christian Advocate, Holland N. McTyeire, fled Nashville because “the Yankee officials would hardly allow me to edit such a paper as I liked, and I would not edit such a one as they liked. Even provided the Advocate could have been got out as formerly, there were no mails to take it off. Nashville would be cut off from the Confederacy where our readers are.” For
the rest of the war, the Southern Methodist Publishing House was used for the printing needs of the United States Government with much damage inflicted on the property.7

Baptist and Presbyterian periodicals suffered as well from the upheavals of war. The Union occupation of New Orleans ended the career of the Presbyterian True Witness. When Federal troops occupied Fayetteville, North Carolina, in March 1865, all of the property of the North Carolina Presbyterian was destroyed. The fire that consumed much of Columbia, South Carolina, on February 17, 1865, destroyed the plant that printed the Southern Presbyterian Review. The Southern Presbyterian newspaper had left that city and moved to Augusta, Georgia, in the summer of 1864, but ceased operations in April 1865 and did not resume publication until 1866. Two Presbyterian newspapers in Richmond, the Central Presbyterian and the Christian Observer, suspended publication after the fall of the city to Federal forces in April 1865. The printing office of the Central Presbyterian and the building and records of the Presbyterian Committee of Publication were destroyed in the Richmond fire, but the Christian Observer’s press was spared. The fire also destroyed the press that published the Baptist Religious Herald. Further to the south, both the Christian Index of Macon, Georgia, and the South-Western Baptist of Tuskegee, Alabama, ceased publication in April 1865; the South-Western Baptist never reappeared. By May 1865 the primary modes of communication for southern churches were inoperable. Few of the denominational newspapers began to publish again before 1866; some never recovered.8

The desolation of their newspapers was only one of many problems confronting southern evangelicals. Their missionary efforts also lay in ruins. Since separating from
their northern counterparts in the mid-1840s, southern Baptists and Methodists had been conducting their own foreign and home mission programs. In 1861, southern Baptists supported missionaries in China and in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria in Africa. Methodists also supported missionaries in China. In June 1863, the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention voted to invest all surplus funds in Confederate bonds, a policy that reaped disastrous results. The Board's corresponding secretary, James B. Taylor, travelled to Charleston and Savannah several times during the war to make arrangements with shipping companies for sending money to the missionaries. The Board urged southern Baptists in Kentucky, Tennessee, Missouri, and Maryland to send their contributions directly to the missionaries through a provisional committee in Baltimore.9

The war made life very difficult for southern missionaries in foreign lands. Baptist missionary Matthew Yates, who had supported himself through real estate transactions and as an interpreter for the foreign community in Shanghai, left China in 1863 to join his family in Switzerland. Methodists Young J. Allen and J. W. Lambuth supported themselves in China; Allen worked for the Chinese government as a translator. Baptist R. H. Graves wrote to the Foreign Mission Board from China in June 1864: “Brethren in America, I look for you to sustain me. I have come down into the well. You hold the rope. Do not let me fall.” T. A. Reid wrote from Nigeria in the spring of 1864: “I have not received a letter outside of this country for about three years. This has a discouraging effect upon me.” In a remarkable display of Christian charity, Dr. Thomas Carlton, the treasurer of the northern Methodist Missionary Society, honored
some large drafts for the southern Methodist China mission. This and other obligations left the southern Methodist Foreign Mission Board with $60,000 in debts when the war ended. By the spring of 1865, the Baptist Foreign Mission Board was almost wholly dependent upon organizations in Kentucky and Maryland for the support of its missionaries. The board had a debt of only $10,000 because many of its missionaries had resorted to self-supporting efforts. To meet its obligations, the foreign board had only $20,000 worth of Confederate bonds and notes, which were worthless at the war’s end. In December, 1865, the Baptist board began the process of reconstruction with $1.78 in its treasury.10

Southern Presbyterians, only recently divided from their northern brethren, had no organized foreign missionary efforts except for the work of 14 ministers among several tribes in the Indian Territory, an area considered part of the foreign mission field. The war in the West disrupted efforts among the Indians, the Creek Nation Presbytery was scattered in 1863 and 1864, and most of the Presbyterian missionaries supported themselves. One made tubs and barrels, while his wife and daughters made clothes. Another became a part-time cobbler. Southern Methodists also had missions among the Indians, though the war decimated their Indian membership, which dropped from over 4,100 to approximately 700 during the war. Most of southern Christians’ missionary energies were directed toward the Confederate armies with considerable results. Revivals swept most of the armies in the latter years of the war, and thousands were converted. However, financial devastation, poor communication with foreign missionaries, and
concentration on army missions left the southern denominations ill-prepared to resume normal missionary operations in 1865.  

Another important disruption in southern religious life was the suspension of nearly all evangelical colleges during the war. In the spring and summer of 1861, students abandoned the colleges and joined the army. By July 1861 Howard College in Alabama had lost 42 of its 62 students, two professors, and its president to the Confederate armies. In October 1861 a faculty member at Centenary College in Louisiana closed the college and wrote in the faculty minutes, “Students have all gone to war. College suspended: and God help the right!” Young men in colleges across the South left their studies to take up the weapons of war. The Conscription Act of 1862 drew the remaining students out of the colleges. Presbyterian Oglethorpe University in Georgia closed six weeks later, and many other colleges followed: LaGrange Synodical College in Tennessee, Erskine College in South Carolina, East Alabama Male College, and Richmond College in Virginia. Some colleges, such as Roanoke College in Virginia and Trinity College in North Carolina, remained open only by offering preparatory classes for younger students. Some female colleges, such as Wesleyan College in Macon, Georgia, remained open throughout the war, but others, such as the Woodland Female College in northwestern Georgia, disintegrated. The Baptist Female College of Southwestern Georgia and Andrew College, both in Cuthbert, were forced to suspend during the war.  

More important than the suspension of college exercises were the permanent losses suffered by these educational institutions. The Civil War decimated an entire
generation of southern men. Mercer University in Georgia lost 30 students to death in the war. The faculty of Mississippi College, a Baptist school, led almost the entire student body to the Virginia battle front. Of 104 who left, only eight returned. Large numbers of students and faculty from other evangelical colleges also died during the war. The libraries and furnishings of several institutions such as Stewart College and Cumberland University in Tennessee fell victim to the vandalism of both armies. The buildings of the Hearn School near Rome, Georgia, “were much injured, and the library and apparatus were destroyed by the soldiery.” An Iowa Cavalry regiment rode away from Murfreesboro, Tennessee, with the library and scientific materials of Union University.\textsuperscript{13}

The difficulty of recovering from these losses was compounded by the decision of most southern denominational colleges to invest their endowments in Confederate bonds and securities. The Presbyterian Theological Seminary at Columbia, South Carolina, had invested $250,000 in Confederate bonds, which were worthless at the end of the war. Oglethorpe University’s South Carolina and Alabama professorships, funded by Presbyterians in those states, evaporated when their endowments became worthless.\textsuperscript{14} Randolph-Macon College lost $45,000, Richmond College lost $86,000, and Howard College lost over $58,000 when the Confederacy collapsed; these amounts constituted most of each institution’s endowment. Two Alabama Methodist colleges, Southern University and the East Alabama Male College, lost endowments of $200,000 and $100,000, respectively. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in South Carolina and Union Theological Seminary and Hampton-Sydney College in Virginia also invested
heavily in Confederate bonds. Even those institutions that made safer investments suffered in the general financial wreck of the South. Land values plummeted, scholarships were uncollectible, and few students could afford tuition.\textsuperscript{15}

In addition to the disruption of their publication, missionary, and educational endeavors, southern denominations also suffered physical destruction, death, and loss of ministers and members. The occupation and destruction of church buildings and evangelical colleges in the South by both armies were widespread. Confederate armies confiscated many evangelical colleges for use as hospitals throughout the war. Centenary College and Mount Lebanon University in Louisiana, Emory and Henry College and Richmond College in Virginia, Oglethorpe University and Emory College in Georgia, and Howard College in Alabama served as Confederate hospitals during part or all of the war. Two female colleges in Cuthbert, Georgia, also served as Confederate hospitals: the Baptist Female College of South-Western Georgia and the Methodists' Andrew College.\textsuperscript{16}

Tennessee colleges suffered extreme hardships because the state was a battleground through much of the war. Stewart College, run by the Nashville Presbyterian Synod, was used as a Confederate hospital early in the war, then later as a Federal hospital and barracks. Federal soldiers who occupied the building in early 1862 "broke open the cases of the mineralogical and geological specimens and carried away many of the most valuable specimens, and choice portions of the books belonging to the Washington Irving Society, chairs, tables, curtains, etc., finally stripping even the College chapel of everything in it." Federal soldiers took control of La Grange
Synodical College in December 1863 and used it for a hospital. Later, they tore down the college building and used the bricks to build huts and chimneys for their tents as part of their winter quarters. Cumberland University in Lebanon, Tennessee, was occupied by Confederates early in the war until they were forced out by the arrival of Federal troops who destroyed the furnishings and scattered the library. After the Federal troops left the area in 1864, a Confederate brigade burned the main building to prevent its use as a Union armory. The colleges of Tennessee, however, were not the only ones to suffer devastation. Sherman’s army destroyed the Cherokee Baptist College in northwest Georgia, and soldiers burned the windows, doors, and sash of the Fletcher Institute in Thomasville, Georgia.17

Churches were also appropriated as hospitals by both armies, and hundreds were destroyed. All of the churches in Ringgold, Georgia, and Newnan, Georgia, were used as Confederate hospitals. The Old Sweetwater Baptist Church in eastern Tennessee “was occupied and used by the soldiers of one army or the other, Union or Confederate, for hospital and other purposes, so that church meetings could not be held.” The Baptist church of Bolivar, Tennessee, was used by the Federal army for a smallpox hospital for about two years, and the First Baptist Church of Memphis became the “Gangrene Hospital” for Federal troops. The Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian churches of Franklin, Tennessee, were used by Federal authorities as hospitals. The army occupied the Presbyterian church for about two months “removing therefrom the pews, pulpit, and other furnishings, which were materially damaged.” When Union forces occupied Marion, Alabama, at the end of the war, Howard College became a Federal hospital.18
Southern evangelicals sometimes gave up their church buildings only when compelled to do so. During the winter of 1862-1863, Confederate hospitals in Ringgold, Georgia, were told to expect more casualties from the front. According to one of the nurses present, “negotiations were at once opened for the only church in Ringgold not occupied by the sick.” Although the people declined to give it up, it was seized and the pews were taken out and piled up in the yard. Straw was placed upon the floor, and when the supply of pillows gave out, “head-rests were made by tearing off the backs of the pews and nailing them slantwise from the base-board to the floor.” Other southerners questioned the wisdom of taking the churches for secular uses. Kate Cumming, a Confederate nurse in Newnan, insisted, “I do not think there is any necessity for taking them at present, . . . and, without that, I think we should not have taken them.” She mused about the consequences of this action: “We act as if churches were built rather for our amusement than the worship of the living God. He has told us he is a jealous God, and will visit every sin against him; not only visit it on us, but on the third and fourth generation. If ignoring his sacred temple will not bring retribution, I think nothing will.” A “Daughter of the Church” from Augusta, Georgia, voiced similar sentiments in correspondence with the Southern Presbyterian: “Is it right that God’s temple should be set to any purpose but His own praise, unless from most absolute necessity? . . . Now our sanctuary is desolated, two weeks since. Those who profess to be clothed with military authority seized it for a hospital.” If there were no other place for the sick and wounded soldiers, “most gladly would we give them our churches, but when there are numbers of houses of business, and places of public amusement, that
could have been better adapted to the wants of our suffering soldiers, is it right that these officers should set aside the claims of religion and make their authority higher than His who rules the world?" \(^{19}\)

While southern civilians questioned whether churches should be used as hospitals, Federal troops confiscated and destroyed southern churches in the name of military necessity. The First Baptist Church of Decatur, Alabama, was destroyed to clear the range of guns. The Oak Grove Methodist Church in Jackson County, Alabama, was torn down, and the materials were used to build a pontoon bridge across the Tennessee river. The Boiling Fork Baptist Church of Cowan, Tennessee, the Methodist church of Saulsbury, Tennessee, and the Methodist church of Powder Springs, Georgia, were all dismantled to build quarters for Federal troops. All of the churches in Pine Bluff, Arkansas; Knoxville, Tennessee; and Fredericksburg, Virginia, were damaged or destroyed by Federal armies. The Dover Baptist Association in Virginia reported that "the commodious edifice of one of our largest churches is now a heap of ruins." Another church "pierced by the cannon balls of our invaders shows ghastly rents." Across the South several churches were used as warehouses, and the basement of the Central Presbyterian Church in Atlanta became a slaughterhouse for the Union army. \(^{20}\)

Twenty-six Baptist churches were destroyed by Federal forces in Virginia alone. Between ninety and one hundred Presbyterian churches were seriously damaged or entirely destroyed throughout the South; approximately one half of these were in the Synod of Virginia. In some cases at least, the destruction went beyond any claims of military necessity. In Hardeeville, South Carolina, an Illinois infantry regiment
destroyed a "large beautiful church." As one of them remembered, "the pulpit and seats
were torn out, then the siding and blinds ripped off. . . . Many axes were at work. . . .
it became a pile of rubbish." The Federal army had used the Baptist church in Bolivar,
Tennessee, as a hospital, "at the end of which time it was accidentally burned." Other
"accidental" fires destroyed Methodist churches in Triune, Tennessee, and Oakbowery,
Alabama.21

Not only did many local congregations lose their houses of worship, even more
lost their ministers. Hundreds of ministers entered Confederate service as chaplains and
missionaries to the troops, and hundreds more entered as common soldiers. By the fall
of 1862, 20 percent of the Methodist ministers in the Tennessee Conference were in
military service. The Ninth Arkansas regiment numbered 42 ordained ministers among
its ranks. Some did not return; for example, six members of the Methodist Georgia
Annual Conference died in Confederate service. At least 209 Methodist and 72
Presbyterian ministers served as commissioned chaplains in the Confederate armies.
Many more served as temporary missionaries. Another 141 Methodist preachers served
as either Confederate officers or soldiers. Some ministers such as Georgia Baptist H.
A. Tupper combined their religious and military offices; Tupper served as captain and
chaplain in the Ninth Georgia Regiment. The Alabama Presbyterian minister F.
McMurray entered the army as a captain "not only from patriotic motives, but especially
to be with the members of his church, who had entered the company of which he was
made Captain." A New Orleans Methodist announced, "Nearly every minister we know
is a member of a military company."22
The preachers who remained in their churches often faced severe difficulties in supporting themselves and their families. Although many congregations raised their pastor’s salary, the rapid inflation of Confederate currency made ministers’ livelihoods precarious. Pastors like Basil Manly, Sr. insisted that their churches pay their salaries or do without their services. Manly wrote in his diary, “Feeling as much responsible for the course of the Confederate States as any single man, I am as ready to bear my part in the trouble consequent as any man.” Accordingly, he informed one of the deacons of the church that he would accept $400 a quarter while the war lasted, “provided that can be paid with some reasonable promptitude and regularity.” Otherwise, “if I have to sustain my own expenses in preaching the Gospel, I must be near my home and resources; and strive to give such attention to my own means and business as to provide my support.” Methodist Bishops James O. Andrew, Robert Paine, and George F. Pierce had farms of their own, and Bishop John Early had enough resources to support himself and his family through the war.23

Many preachers, however, were not so fortunate. A Louisiana Methodist church sent their pastor, Benjamin F. White, away “without his salary being paid in full.” Another Louisiana Methodist minister, Dan Watkins, had served at Opelousas Station from 1860 to 1863 and had only one arm. He was sent away in 1864 “to dig for the support of his needy family. We drove him from his masters work and said to him in effect go dig with your one hand for your wife and little ones.” Ministers across the South were forced to find secular employment to support themselves. By 1862 most of the Methodist ministers in Florida had secular jobs “to supplement their support to the
point of actual necessity." School teaching was one of the most popular vocations, but some took up farming or other occupations. Thomas W. Caskey, declaring that his congregation could not pay him, went into partnership with a lawyer. A Methodist minister and historian who lived through the period wrote that the preachers were "forced to field and bench and counter to get bread."24

The suspension of seminaries, the drafting of ministerial students, and the inability of congregations to support their ministers created a shortage of clergymen in southern churches. Even after the war ended, many preachers continued in secular employment to support themselves. Battle had claimed the lives of some southern preachers, and Baptist minister J. L. M. Curry lamented that "few young men have the ministry in view." Many churches remained without pastors or shared the services of a minister with neighboring congregations of the same denomination.25

Local southern churches faced a variety of problems during the Civil War. The church building might be occupied and perhaps even destroyed by the soldiers of either army. The pastor might join the army as a chaplain or a soldier, or he might be forced to pursue some other occupation to provide for himself and his family. Every southern church also faced a loss in membership from a variety of sources. Thousands of evangelical men went to war, and many were killed on the battlefields of the war. A Georgia Methodist pastor complained that "on one Sunday there were forty male teachers in the Sunday-school, the next there were four." Families fled their homes, and churches, to move away from the advancing armies. While these refugees sometimes swelled the congregations of churches in interior regions, their absence devastated the
churches from which they came. The Presbyterian churches of North Carolina lost over two thousand members during the war, while the Methodist Episcopal Church, South lost approximately one third of its membership across the South between 1861 and 1866. While nearly 130,000 blacks left the southern Methodist fold, their exodus accounted for only half of the losses suffered by the Church during the war.26

Table 1-1: Membership Declines in the Major Southern Denominations, 1860-1866

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>1860-61</th>
<th>1865-66</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Southern Baptist Convention</td>
<td>649,518</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodist Episcopal Church, South</td>
<td>748,968</td>
<td>498,847</td>
<td>-33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian Church in the United States</td>
<td>72,000</td>
<td>66,528</td>
<td>-8%*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"The Presbyterian Church in the United States suffered a net loss in members despite the addition of approximately 10,000 members from its union in 1864 with the United Synod of the South, the southern branch of New School Presbyterianism. Without this infusion of members, the loss would have been over 21%.

Although the membership statistics given in Table 1-1 are undoubtedly inaccurate because of the breakdown of ecclesiastical structures in the later years of the war, they do reveal the general trend. More importantly, they reflect the perception of southern evangelicals when they considered their denominations in 1865 and 1866. Even in the relatively stable state of Georgia, invaded only late in the war, a variety of factors combined to produce dramatic decreases in membership, as Table 1-2 demonstrates.
Table 1-2: Membership Declines in Georgia Denominations, 1860-1866

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denominational Organization</th>
<th>1860</th>
<th>1866</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Georgia Baptist Convention</td>
<td>64,611</td>
<td>53,428</td>
<td>-18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia Annual Conference</td>
<td>84,120</td>
<td>66,122</td>
<td>-21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synod of Georgia</td>
<td>7,246</td>
<td>6,258</td>
<td>-14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Georgia Baptist Convention, Minutes, 1860, 1867; Georgia Annual Conference, Minutes, 1860, 1866; Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, Minutes, 1860, Presbyterian Church in the United States, Minutes, 1866.

Note: Baptist figures are those reported at the April 1867 meeting of the Georgia Baptist Convention. They were reported to the various associations in the fall of 1866. These totals include all associations that were members of the Georgia Baptist Convention in 1877. They do not include the many primitive, and non-aligned missionary Baptists in the state; the Georgia Baptist Convention represented approximately two-thirds of the Baptists in the state in this period. Of the 28 associations extant in 1866, the data for 14 were interpolated from known endpoints for each association. In several cases, the data were interpolated over only two years, but in others the range of missing data was much longer. Interpolation, therefore, smoothes what was probably a large loss of membership in 1864-65 and a recovery thereafter.

The Presbytery of Florida was one of the five presbyteries which made up the Synod of Georgia in this period.

Once again, the figures are not completely accurate, though it is difficult to determine if membership as a whole is overestimated by the use of previous years' figures or underestimated by the failure of some associations, quarterly conferences, and presbyteries to report their statistics. The withdrawal of black members from biracial churches had clearly begun by 1866, but it would not be complete until the mid-1870s. Baptist churches in the Georgia Association lost from 25 to 65 percent of their membership when black members withdrew to form their own churches. Over 90
percent of the Baptist Sunbury Association in Georgia were slaves in 1860. When 6,400 of Sunbury’s black members withdrew in 1865 and 1866, the association reorganized as the New Sunbury to include more whites. Boasting over 7,000 members before the war, the new association struggled to number more than 1,000 during Reconstruction.27

The excitement of war times also “took people’s minds off religion,” and in contrast to the revivals taking place in the Confederate armies, southerners at home generally took less interest in religion. Some lost all faith in the churches. A Kentuckian reported that he had known “elders and deacons, as well as private members, to forsake attendance upon divine service, give up even an outward show of holy living, and betake himself to drinking and swearing, all on account of politics.” Even as prominent a southern evangelical as La Grange College president John N. Waddel wrestled with his faith during the war. He “prayed as earnestly as I could” for the success of the Confederacy, but could not help feeling “that God is against us and my faith is weakened.” A contributor to the Southern Presbyterian late in 1864 feared that many “have not only lost confidence in man, but also in God. Yes, lost confidence in God,—especially in regard to the public affairs of the country.” The writer warned, “it is folly, or worse than folly to say that God has no hand in this war. . . . It is discouraging. . . . It leads men to despair and restrain prayer before God.” Because of the great contrast between the spiritual revivals in the armies and the lukewarm state of the churches, the Central Presbyterian in Richmond even urged the soldiers to pray for those at home.28
When the Confederacy collapsed and the war ended, the strain on southerners' faith was intense. Presbyterian Mary Jones of Georgia admitted that her "faith almost fails" and wondered if God had "forgotten to be gracious." Grace Elmore Brown of South Carolina struggled to comprehend the result of the war: "Hard thoughts against my God arise; questions of his justice, of his mercy arise, and refuse to be silenced."

"Night and day in every moment of quiet," she labored "to work out the meaning of this horrible fact, to find truth at the bottom of this impenetrable darkness." Baptist editor Samuel H. Ford wrote: "It is, indeed, a crisis with the churches, and with Christians throughout the South. The scenes of the last four years have tried, severely, our spirits, our temper, and our faith. . . . We felt that might had prevailed, and that right was overwhelmed. 'Where is God?' seemed to be the anxious questioning of each heart. . . . Is there a God? many, many asked, yet deaf to our prayers and heedless of our wrongs."

The Presbytery of South Carolina lamented that "the faith of many a Christian is shaken by the mysterious and unlooked-for course of divine Providence." Presbyterian William Safford wrote from Greensboro, Georgia, to his sister in Bolivar, Tennessee: "Bolivar is not the only place where people have been demoralized by the war, such is the state of things all over the country." Transitions to peace were especially difficult in border states like Kentucky, where one church member wrote in September, 1865: "For my own part I have almost become a heathen man as I have resolved, not to sit under the ministry of a teacher, that repudiates the commandment requiring allegiance, faith and loyalty to our government." Alfred Mann Pierce, a historian of Georgia Methodism, described the difficulty in the immediate aftermath of the war: "The faith of some, at
least for a period, failed outright; on the part of many others, faith grew feeble; on the part of well-nigh all faith had to struggle hard to survive." For most southern Christians, faith survived, but the transition was difficult.29

The closing years of the Civil War brought not only disruption and destruction but also confusion to southern religious life. New alternatives arose as northern black and white missionaries entered the South determined to gather southerners into the fold of northern denominations. Blacks enjoying freedom for the first time in occupied areas left the churches of their masters and joined white and black northern denominations. Disaffected whites also joined northern denominations, especially in Unionist areas such as southern Appalachia. In several areas, northern missionaries even seized southern church buildings under War Department orders and held services in them. The northern missionary efforts contributed substantially in many areas to the membership declines suffered by southern churches.

The Baptist Home Mission Society met in Providence, Rhode Island, in May 1862 to formulate a plan for missions in the South. A committee recommended that the Society take "immediate steps to supply with Christian instruction by means of missionaries and teachers, the emancipated slaves . . . and also to inaugurate a system of operations for carrying the Gospel alike to free and bond throughout the whole southern section of our country, so fast and so far as the progress of our arms, and the restoration of order and law shall open the way." Divine Providence was "beckoning us on to the occupancy of a field broader, more important, more promising than has ever yet invited our toils." In 1864 the Home Mission Society supported 25 missionaries in
eight southern states. By April 1865 the Society had 120 missionaries and teachers in the South.  

In their fall meeting in 1863, the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church determined that their church must play a role in the religious reconstruction of the South and began to explore opportunities for missionary labor. Over the next two years, the annual conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church sent 21 ordained ministers into the South as missionaries. Over 500 northern Methodist preachers served as chaplains with Union armies at some time during the war, and many Methodist laypeople also journeyed south as teachers and missionaries. They went into areas of the South occupied by Federal armies such as New Orleans and Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Memphis, Nashville, and Murfreesboro, Tennessee; New Bern, North Carolina; and Beaufort and Charleston, South Carolina. In their 1864 episcopal address, the northern bishops proclaimed that “the progress of Federal arms has thrown open to the loyal Churches of the Union large and inviting fields of Christian enterprise and labor.” Although wrongfully excluded for 19 years by the southern Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church would occupy a “prominent position” in the cultivation of the southern fields. “And now that the providence of God has opened her way, she should not be disobedient to her heavenly calling, but should return at the earliest practicable period.” The General Conference of 1864 authorized the bishops to establish annual conferences throughout the South, and it organized the Church Extension Society to aid in erecting church buildings. Methodist missionary John P. Newman in New Orleans explained the northern Church’s mission in the South: “We hold and teach that loyalty is a religious
duty, as truly obligatory as prayer itself.” The message of loyalty did attract some southern whites such as those who organized the Holston Conference in east Tennessee during the last year of the war. The conference was officially made part of the Methodist Episcopal Church on June 1, 1865. In Kentucky several leading ministers had left the southern church by the end of the war. The West Virginia and Western conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South were broken up, and the Missouri Conference was divided.31

Northern Presbyterians also entered the wartime missionary endeavors in the South. In 1864 the Committee of Home Missions of the northern New School Presbyterian Church declared, “A great field of missionary operations is opening at the South.” Union and Kingston presbyteries in eastern Tennessee had withdrawn with other southern presbyteries in 1857 from the New School Presbyterian Church to form the United Synod of the South. After the United Synod voted to unite with the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America (Old School), these two presbyteries determined in September 1864 to return to the northern New School Presbyterian Church. The New School Presbyterians had also begun work in Missouri, but a raid by Confederate General Sterling Price toward Kansas City had disrupted their efforts among unionists there. The Committee of Home Missions insisted that “the work in Missouri and Eastern Tennessee we think may be considered a fair type of what must be done in fourteen of the Southern states. Both the labor and the expense will be very great. Prejudices will yield very slowly.” Old School Presbyterians in the North resolved in their 1865 General Assembly to direct their Board of Domestic Missions “to take prompt
and effectual measures to restore and build up the Presbyterian congregations in the Southern States of this Union by the appointment and support of prudent and devoted missionaries.” This decision to organize loyal presbyteries and synods in the South was taken in response to the “loud call from the Lord Jesus Christ to pass over and help to rebuild that part of the American Zion which has been so sadly laid waste by the rebellion and civil war.”

The early successes of northern denominations among whites in unionist and border areas like eastern Tennessee and Missouri proved to be their greatest, but neither they nor southern Christians were certain of that outcome in 1865. Northern evangelicals were confident that these gains were only the first of many; their southern counterparts feared they were right. Southern churchmen had more reason to fear the loss of their black membership, as northern missionaries of both races had much greater success among the freedmen who were beginning to act out their own interpretation of religious reconstruction.

In 1864 the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA) (Old School) organized two committees to work among the freedmen. Northern Methodists initially worked through nondenominational agencies, but in 1866 they formed their own Freedmen’s Aid Society. The Baptist Home Mission Society also worked actively among the freedmen. Franklin C. Talmage, a historian of Georgia Presbyterianism, insisted that while the southern churches remained open to the freedmen, they “abandoned the affiliation with the Southern church and formed a
connection with the Assembly of the Northern church because of hopes aroused by the Freedmen’s Bureau of that church."

Black northern Christians also sent missionaries into the South to gather freedmen into their denominational folds. The two most active were the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) Churches. These denominations believed the South had been providentially opened to them: “Heaven has graciously opened the way for the spreading of our beloved Zion in that land,” wrote one AME minister. The AME Church sent its first two missionaries to the Sea Islands of South Carolina in May 1863. Seventy-five more would follow them into the South by 1870. In December 1863, Bishop Daniel Payne went to Nashville and admitted two black Methodist congregations into the AME Church from the Southern Methodist Church. In the ten years following the war, the AME Church gained 250,000 members, the vast majority of them from the South. The AMEZ Church established itself in the South by receiving a black congregation in New Bern, North Carolina, early in 1864 and began missionary work in Florida and Louisiana later that year. By the end of the war, the exodus of black members from the biracial southern denominations had barely begun, but perceptive observers, North and South, realized what the wartime departures meant for the future.

Northern denominations solicited and received the aid of the Federal government and the Union armies in their missionary efforts. Throughout the South, church buildings sat vacant as ministers had entered the army or fled approaching Federal armies. After New Orleans was captured in 1862, at least 40 churches, including all five
Methodist and all five Presbyterian churches in the city, were without regular services. Churches in a variety of cities where the Union army had been successful were also idle. A chaplain with Federal forces in Nashville wrote to northern Methodist Bishop Matthew Simpson that most of the local pastors had deserted their congregations. The church buildings were either empty or occupied by the army. The Methodist Episcopal Church could “regain” the churches “if the matter could be properly presented to the government authorities.” Bishop Edward R. Ames hurried to confer with his friend, Secretary Edwin M. Stanton of the War Department. On November 30, 1863, Stanton issued an order instructing generals in the Departments of Missouri, the Tennessee, and the Gulf to “place at the disposal of Bishop Ames all houses of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in which a loyal minister, who has been appointed by a loyal Bishop of said Church does not officiate.” The generals were also directed to “furnish Bishop Ames and his clerk with transportation and subsistence when it can be done without prejudice to the service and will afford them courtesy, assistance, and protection.” On December 9, the same order was given concerning Methodist churches in the Departments of North Carolina, Virginia, and the South over which Bishops Osmon C. Baker and Edmund S. Janes had authority. On December 30, Stanton repeated the order for Kentucky and Tennessee under the direction of Bishop Simpson.35

Similar orders for the other northern denominations streamed from the War Department in the first three months of 1864. A January 14 order instructed commanders to turn over Baptist church buildings “in which a loyal minister of said Church does not now officiate” to the American Baptist Home Mission Society. On
February 15, missionaries of the United Presbyterian Church were given authority to seize Associate Reformed Presbyterian churches in the South. A War Department order of March 10 declared that military commanders were to give missionaries of the Board of Domestic Missions of the Presbyterian Church (Old School) and the Presbyterian Committee of Home Missions (New School) “all the aid, countenance, and support which may be practicable and in your judgment proper in the execution of their important mission.” Missionaries from the northern denominations quickly took advantage of these orders. Within the first four months, representatives of the Baptist Home Mission Society seized about 30 buildings.36

Northern Methodists, however, engaged in the most extensive campaign of church occupation in the South. Believing that thousands of southern Methodists were eager to rejoin the northern Church, Methodist missionaries and several of the bishops themselves entered the South to seize buildings and organize local, loyal churches. Bishop Ames left for the lower Mississippi Valley almost immediately after Stanton issued the order. Within a few weeks he had “appropriated, under the order of the War Department” and supplied a dozen churches formerly belonging to the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Ames took control of Methodist churches in Memphis, Little Rock, Pine Bluff, Vicksburg, Jackson, Natchez, Baton Rouge, and several in New Orleans. Bishop Simpson traveled to Nashville in January 1864 to establish loyal Methodism there. He placed Michael J. Cramer in charge of the churches in Nashville and authorized Chaplain Calvin Holman to occupy churches in Chattanooga. Cramer, after appealing over the heads of local officials to his brother-in-law, Ulysses S. Grant, secured both McKendree
Chapel and the German Methodist Church in Nashville. Chaplain H. A. Pattison acquired an order from General George H. Thomas granting possession of the Methodist church in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. Northern Methodist agents also occupied churches in Norfolk and Portsmouth, Virginia; Fernandina, Jacksonville, and St. Augustine, Florida; and Beaufort and Charleston, South Carolina.37

Southern Christians did not quietly accept the occupation of their churches by northern missionaries. In many areas they protested or attempted to disrupt the enforcement of the War Department directives. On the local level in Texas, Methodist Presiding Elder R. W. Kennon wrote in June 1865 to one of his preachers, O. M. Addison, that the minister assigned to the Galveston church was still away on a trip to acquire Bibles. "The Federals will take possession of the city in about a week—there will be Yankee Methodist preachers perhaps with the first expedition, and if we have no preacher in charge of the church, he will walk into it." Kennon urged Addison to take charge of the Galveston church to prevent the northern Methodists from occupying it: "You had better go down at once. I will furnish you with a certificate of your appointment to that charge." Border state Presbyterians around Louisville, Kentucky, urged the General Assembly of the PCUSA to disavow the order to save the Church from "the sin, the reproach, and ruin which this thing is calculated to bring upon her." Also at Louisville, Kentucky, in April 1864, a convention of southern Methodist ministers from states within Union lines met to protest the order which they regarded as "unjust, unnecessary and subversive alike of good order and the rights of a numerous body of Christians." They appealed to President Abraham Lincoln, whom they rightly believed
was not pleased with Stanton’s order, to “restrain and prevent its enforcement.” Lincoln did pressure Stanton to restrict the operation of the order to states in rebellion, thereby giving border state evangelicals some relief. By early 1865 Lincoln had begun the process of restoring church property to the southern churches. President Andrew Johnson continued the policy, and by the spring of 1866, with a few notable exceptions, the properties seized under the War Department orders had been returned to their original owners.38

From whatever vantage point southern evangelicals viewed their churches and denominations in the spring of 1865, they saw disruption, destruction, and confusion. All of the denominational structures were in disarray, from conferences and mission programs to newspapers and colleges. Local churches too felt the sting of war when ministers and laity went into the armies, church buildings were seized or destroyed, and their membership scattered. For some southerners, the war produced a crisis of faith; for most, it prompted reflection upon the religious implications of Confederate defeat. Some feared that the southern denominations were hopelessly disorganized. According to one contemporary observer, several members of the Southern Methodist Church, “losing faith in her future, were coquetting with an Episcopal Bishop for a union of churches—the M. E. Church South and the Protestant Episcopal South.” Others “were proposing to give up and go back to the M. E. Church.” The religious condition of the South spurred southern evangelicals to contemplate God’s purposes in the war and His future plans for them. The conclusions they drew from this examination shaped their approach to religious reconstruction.39
Where southerners saw devastation, northerners and freedmen saw opportunity. Northern Christians pondered the providential meanings of the war and the destruction of many southern religious institutions. The Methodist in New York City proclaimed as early as the end of 1863 that “the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, is shivered to atoms. It is doubtful if its General Conference will ever meet again.” The war and God’s judgment upon the South had opened the region to a free and loyal Gospel proclaimed by northern missionaries; they believed theirs was a vital role in the spiritual regeneration of the South, and they were determined to pursue that role. Black Christians in the South considered the disruption caused by the war to be their opportunity to shape their own religious lives to a greater degree than ever before.

Between 1863 and 1866, each of these three groups worked out its interpretation of the religious significance of the war. White southern Christians had the most difficulty grappling with the outcome, because they were forced to reconcile the righteousness of their cause with the reality of defeat. Their efforts to do so were shaped both by their antebellum attitudes and their wartime experiences. Throughout most of the war, white southerners were confident of God’s approval.

Notes
2. Daniel, “The Effects of the Civil War on Southern Protestantism,” 57; George F. Pierce to his son Lovick Pierce, Jr., 15 October 1861, quoted in George Gilman Smith, The Life and Times of George Foster Pierce (Sparta, GA: Hancock Publishing Co., 1888), 444.

4. Minute Book, Candays Creek Baptist Church, Bradley County, Tennessee, 1846-1866, 1st Saturday in June 1864, Tennessee State Library, Nashville, TN; Session Book, Monticello Presbyterian Church, Jasper County, Georgia, 1829-1904, 23 November 1863, Georgia Department of Archives and History, Atlanta, GA; Quarterly Conference Minutes, Port Gibson Station, Mississippi, 1829-1872, 18 June 1864, Mississippi Conference Historical Society, as quoted in Willard Eugene Wight, “Churches in the Confederacy” (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1957), 86; Dolly Sumner Lunt Burge, A Woman’s Wartime Journal: An Account of the Passage Over a Georgia Plantation of Sherman’s Army on the March to the Sea (Macon, GA: J. W. Burke, 1927), 19-20 (journal entry of 24 July 1864); Record Book, St. Paul’s Presbyterian Church, Hamblen County, Tennessee, 1858-1875, 2 April 1865, Tennessee State Library.


The Georgia Baptist Christian Index raised its subscription rate to $20 per year on January 12, 1865; two weeks later the price rose to $15 for six months. Christian Index (Macon, GA), 12, 26 January 1865.


According to W. Harrison Daniel, “inflation, a shortage of materials, and federal occupation forced the suspension of one-half of the religious weeklies in the South by the end of 1862.” All Southern religious newspapers faced occasional suspensions during the war. Daniel, “The Effects of the Civil War on Southern Protestantism,” 50-51; W.


Dr. George W. Carter, president of Soule University in Texas, became a colonel in the Confederate army and led his students to battle. Phelan, A History of Early Methodism in Texas, 464-67.


14. Southern Presbyterian, 4 January 1866; W. Harrison Daniel, “Southern Presbyterians in the Confederacy,” North Carolina Historical Review 44 (Summer 1967): 253. Presbyterian minister James A. Lyon wrote in his diary that he warned the Treasurer of the seminary that investing in Confederate bonds was unwise, because even if the Confederacy succeeded, he believed all Confederate money and bonds would be repudiated. James Adair Lyon, Diary, 1861-1870, entry for May 1863, Historical Foundation of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches; Synod of Georgia, Minutes, 1865, 12-13.


Even the Baptist trustees of the small Hearn School in Rome, Georgia, invested its endowment of $4,000 in Confederate bonds which became worthless in 1865. Georgia Baptist Convention, Minutes, 1866, 18.

17. Cooper, Southwestern at Memphis, 1848-1948, 30-31; Synod of Memphis, Minutes, 1860-1865, meeting of 1862, Historical Foundation of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches; John N. Waddel, Memorials of Academic Life (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1891), 365; Churches and Institutions of Learning Destroyed by the United States Military Forces During the Civil War. But Not as an Act of Military Necessity. The Materials Having Been Appropriated and Used (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1912), 12; J. Barien Lindsley, “Outline History of Cumberland University at Lebanon, Tennessee, 1842-1876,” Theological Medium 12 (October 1876): 437-38; Bone, A History of Cumberland University, 82, 87; List of War Claims, Confined Entirely to Claims for Use and Occupation or Rent, 34; Ragsdale, Story of Georgia Baptists, 3:106; Bainbridge District Conference, Minutes, 1867-1878, April 1868 meeting, South Georgia Conference Archives, Epworth-by-the-Sea, GA.


19. Beers, Memories, 80; Cumming, Kate, 144; Southern Presbyterian, 5 November 1863.


The Central Presbyterian Church in Atlanta was, according to its returning pastor, “very little injured” in its use by the Federal troops. Robert Quarterman Mallard Papers, Pastoral Record, 1855-1865, entry of May 14, 1865, Historical Foundation of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches.


25. J. L. M. Curry to Basil Manly II, 26 October 1866, Manly Collection of Manuscripts, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives. Basil Manly, Sr. is also Basil Manly II. Although his father was Basil Manly, Basil Manly, Sr. named his oldest son Basil Manly, Jr. Both Basil Sr. and Basil Jr. were active in the Southern Baptist Convention.

At least six Methodist traveling preachers in Georgia were killed during Confederate service. Owen, “Sanctity, Slavery, and Segregation,” 339.
26. Memorials of Methodism in Macon, Georgia, From 1828 to 1878 (Macon, GA: J. W. Burke, 1879), 34; Daniel, "The Effects of the Civil War on Southern Protestantism,"
   60.

27. By the spring of 1867, Georgia churches had begun to recover from the losses of the war, although many black members were yet to leave. The Georgia Association of the Georgia Baptist Convention, for example, lost 2,219 members between 1867 and 1868, most of them freedmen. Georgia Baptist Convention, Minutes, 1860, 1867; Robert G. Gardner, Charles O. Walker, J.R. Huddlestun, and Waldo P. Harris III, A History of the Georgia Baptist Association, 1784-1984 (Atlanta: Georgia Baptist Historical Society, 1988), 204, 213, 219.


   A correspondent to the Christian Index in January 1866 wrote that “the providence of God, in this unexpected consummation, is to us an unfathomable mystery—we do not comprehend, and we have no right to comprehend it. Who are we, that we should arraign the wisdom of the great God? . . . It is our duty to submit, and to believe that the Lord of all the earth will do right. Yet by this mysterious providence the faith of some good men, in the justice of God, has been shaken; against this evil effect they, doubtless, struggle; but the harm is, it deadens the zeal and excuses inertness.” “Religious Literature for the South,” Christian Index, 13 January 1866.

   The feeling that God had deserted them manifested itself in the army as well. One Presbyterian chaplain on hand for the surrender of the Confederate Army “wondered what had happened. Why had defeat finally overtaken the people of the South? Had God forgotten His flock?”. William E. Boggs, The Secession of South Carolina and Her


31. Sweet, The Methodist Episcopal Church and the Civil War, 100, 139; General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Minutes, 1864, 278-79; Frank K. Pool, “The Southern Negro in the Methodist Episcopal Church” (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1939), 45; Edward McPherson, The Political History of the United States of America During the Great Rebellion, 2d ed. (Washington, DC: Philip and Solomons, 1865), 523; Isaac Patton Martin, Methodism in Holston (Knoxville, TN: Methodist Historical Society, 1945), 81-87; Smith, The Life and Times of George Foster Pierce, 490.

32. General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (New School), Minutes, 1864, 545; Harold M. Parker, Jr., The United Synod of the South: The Southern New School Presbyterian Church (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1988), 271-74; General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (New School), Minutes, 1866, 77; General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (Old School), Minutes, 1865, 553-54.


CHAPTER 2
GOD'S CHASTISEMENT:
THE CONFEDERATE UNDERSTANDING OF THE CIVIL WAR

Religious southerners upheld the Confederacy both in victory and in defeat. Few, if any, groups could surpass Confederate clergymen in their devotion to the southern cause. They preached for it, prayed for it, and interpreted God's purposes in it from the beginning to the end. White religious southerners were certain, even through the bitter spring of 1865, that God favored the Stars and Bars. Then came defeat, sudden and complete. How could such a calamity befall the people and fledgling nation whom God favored and whose cause was righteous? The answer for most white religious southerners was that God was chastening the southern people for greater usefulness in the future.

In the fall of 1860 and the spring of 1861, however, southerners had little reason to worry about God's chastening. Abolitionists, Republicans, and northerners in general, southern churchmen believed, had much greater cause to fear God's wrath. Southern ministers supported, and sometimes even led, the movements for secession in the individual southern states. While South Carolina was moving toward secession with other southern states following closely behind, Louisiana wavered. The state's economic ties to the upper Mississippi Valley made secession an even more ominous decision for Louisiana's citizens. Presbyterian minister Benjamin Morgan Palmer, a native South
Carolinian, seized the chance to address the political crisis in his sermon on November 29, Thanksgiving Day. Palmer insisted that the conflict between the sections was rooted in “morals and religion.” God had “providentially committed” to the South the duty “to conserve and perpetuate the institution of domestic slavery as now existing.” Northern efforts to interfere with the South’s divine imperative were an offense against God. In short, Palmer proclaimed, “we defend the cause of God and religion.” The citizens of “all the Southern States” should “take all the necessary steps looking to separate and independent existence.” Closing his sermon with the declaration that “whatsoever be the fortunes of the South, I accept them for my own,” Palmer appealed for the divine protection of the South: “May the Lord God cover her head in this her day of battle.”

Thousands of copies of Palmer’s sermon were published in New Orleans and distributed throughout Louisiana and the South. Several newspapers reprinted the entire text of the sermon. Thaddeus W. McRae, a Presbyterian minister in Baton Rouge who had unionist sentiments, marvelled at the effect of Palmer’s sermon upon his congregation. On the same day that Palmer delivered his sermon in New Orleans, McRae preached a sermon which “depreciated the threatened revolution,” and several “leading Church members” congratulated him. Palmer’s printed sermon appeared in Baton Rouge the following morning, and “that afternoon I found my own prominent Elders and members on the other side.” Palmer’s sermon advocating the South’s duty to perpetuate slavery through secession “reconciled the majority of Presbyterians in the State to secession.”
Palmer, though perhaps one of the more eloquent on the subject, was hardly alone in his sentiments that southerners had a religious duty to protect and uphold slavery, and with it, southern society. The Alabama Baptist Convention, meeting at the end of 1860 in Tuskegee, unanimously adopted a resolution offered by Basil Manly, Sr., which declared that Alabama Baptists felt bound to declare themselves “subject to the call of proper authority in defense of the sovereignty and independence of the state of Alabama, and of her sacred right as a sovereignty to withdraw from this union.” In this declaration, they were “heartily, deliberately, unanimously, and solemnly united.” One observer believed that this declaration, like Palmer’s sermon in Louisiana, “did more to precipitate the secession of Alabama from the Union than any other one cause.” Throughout the South, thousands of preachers and editors of religious newspapers urged southerners onward toward secession.

During the war as well, evidence abounds of southern churches’ exhorting their members to support the Confederate cause. Publicly, ministers assured southerners that God favored the Confederacy and would ultimately give them the victory. Privately, religion provided individual southerners with the determination to continue in the struggle. From Charleston, South Carolina, Presbyterian Thomas Smyth declared that the fall of Fort Sumter “was a signal gun from the battlements of heaven, announcing from God to every Southern State, ‘This cause is mine.’” Shortly after the Emancipation Proclamation was issued, the Southern Presbyterian declared that “if by events a people were ever justified before God, if reason and Scripture are worth anything, then are we today right, right before Him and our own hearts, proved right by the terrible wrong and
sin surging against us.” In March 1863, Bishop George Foster Pierce of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South and Benjamin Morgan Palmer of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America delivered sermons before the Georgia General Assembly. Pierce declared before the legislators that God “is for us and with us.” The willingness of the Confederate Government to proclaim fast days “bring our country . . . into peculiar covenant relations with God, and enlist in our defense, the resources which God alone can command.” In Pierce’s view there was no “object proposed by our Government . . . [upon] which we may not consistently, piously, scripturally invoke the Divine blessing.” The cause of the Confederacy was the cause of God. The reason was simple: “the Southern people . . . have never corrupted the gospel of Christ.” Palmer reiterated Pierce’s sentiments, declaring “our cause is pre-eminently the cause of God himself, and every blow struck by us is in defense of His supremacy.” This paramount fact explained why southern ministers had “borne a distinguished part in this momentous struggle”; their loyalty to God compelled them to strike against the “wicked infidelity” of the North. Based on his understanding of God’s providence in the war, Palmer assured the Georgia legislature that “God is dealing with us, not in judgment, but in discipline.” Nine months later, Palmer confidently assured the South Carolina General Assembly that the divine purpose of the Confederacy was to preserve “God’s right to rule the world.”

The conviction that God was on the side of the South also permeated the Confederate armies. One of the more popular songs among the Army of Northern Virginia was “God Save the South,” which includes the following verse:
God made the right
Stronger than might.
Millions would trample us
Down in their pride.
Lay Thou their legions low,
Roll back the ruthless foe,
Let the proud spoiler know
God's on our side.6

Many preachers sent soldiers away to battle with words like those Methodist Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, the president of South Carolina College, used: "Gallant sons of a gallant State, away to the battle field, with the Bible in your arms and its precepts in your hearts. If you fall, the shot which sends you from earth, translates you to Heaven."7

On a personal level, the "sustaining faith" of Alabama soldier Hiram Talbert Holt encouraged him through many battles with the 38th Alabama Infantry in the Army of Tennessee. Shortly after the war began, he assured his wife that "the God of the just will be with us to shield us from harm & give us victory." After General Braxton Bragg’s defeat at Tullahoma, Tennessee, and the fall of Vicksburg in the summer of 1863, Holt despaired of victory. Only his personal faith sustained him as a soldier and as a southerner. In early September, Holt wrote that while he had suffered much in the past months, "yet I feel even more faith now in the declaration of the inspired writer than ever before. 'That all things work well together for those who serve the Lord.'” Learning of the death of his infant daughter whom he had never seen, Holt wrote to his wife, "I hope you have borne your loss with Christian fortitude, and that like good old Job, you have exclaimed, ‘The Lord giveth & the Lord taketh away, thrice blessed be
the name of our Lord.' Also remember whom God loveth he chasteneth." Less than a month later, he fell in a skirmish near Dalton, Georgia.⁸

Methodist chaplain Morgan Callaway of Georgia wrote to his wife in 1864: "What a thorough test this war is of faith in Christ.” Although it was “a dark hour truly for the Confederacy,” Callaway had “unchanged hope in ultimate success.” He told his wife Leila at home in Cuthbert that if she were able to see the necessity for men in the field, “you would be willing for your own Morgan’s life to be sacrificed in the sacred cause.” Although “offered on several bloody fields, God has not yet accepted it.” Fellow Georgia Methodist Thomas Conn wrote after the First Battle of Manassas that “knowing the Lord will do right, [I] can face the cannon’s mouth, . . . and if it is his will I should die here, can die, like a hero expecting a happy reunion with friends and relatives where there is no war.” Callaway survived the war and helped to rebuild the Southern Methodist Church in Georgia, but Conn was killed in battle.⁹

Southern civilians also relied on their religious faith to help them endure the adversities of war. Sarah M. Manly wrote in early 1862 to her three sons in the army, “I am humbly thankful that I have reason to believe that you have each enlisted under the banner of the cross of Jesus Christ. God knows that my greatest desire is (and has ever been) that you should be, sincere and consistent Christians.” Their father, Basil Manly, Sr., wrote, “Life itself is not too dear or precious to be offered up in defense of our country and the churches of our God.” Neither he nor his wife were willing to withhold their sons from serving their country “in the hour of her need. It is the service of God; and of the cause of humanity and religion.”¹⁰
Many Confederate Christians believed that southerners’ sins had aroused God’s wrath and that he would punish them by prolonging the war. In July 1863, Basil Manly, Jr. wrote to his brother Charles: “I know we have sinned and richly deserve chastisement, and I believe we should have it, and the Yankees may be used as the rod in God’s hand; but, for all that, I cannot believe we should be either subjugated or exterminated by them.” Methodist Leroy M. Lee addressed the same theme in his sermon to a congregation in Lynchburg, Virginia, on August 21, 1863, a national fast day. Lee insisted that because the Confederate cause was righteous, “failure is impossible, except by default of our own efforts, or by reason of our sins and unworthiness.” The chief danger to the Confederacy was “among ourselves. Our reverses are the punishment of our sins.”

When the tide of battle turned against the Confederacy, southern Christians turned for solace and inspiration to biblical examples of God’s miraculous deliverance of his chosen people from their enemies. In April 1864 Captain B. F. Eddins, a deacon in the Baptist church at Montgomery, Alabama, was mortally wounded by Union cavalry as they approached the outskirts of the town. Basil Manly, Sr. conducted the funeral and chose for his text Judges 6:13: “If the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us?” The passage relates the story of Gideon, one of the judges of Israel. When Gideon questioned God’s choice of him as a leader of the Israelites, the Lord said to him, “Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man.” With only 300 men and the help of God, Gideon miraculously defeated the hosts of the Midianites, who incidentally were camped on the north side of the Israelites. The lesson was clear
for the embattled Confederates: God's intervention could and would save the Confederacy. He did not need great armies to accomplish his purposes and drive back the invading hosts.¹²

Even to the very end, religious Confederates were certain that God would deliver the South and uphold its independence. The Ebenezer Baptist Association insisted in the fall of 1864 that “while the chastising rod of God has been visited upon us, a wicked people, we still believe we are on the side of truth and justice; and while we humbly bow to an Allwise providence, we humbly trust in God, hoping and believing that success will yet attend our cause.” Sounding the same theme, the Reverend H. C. Hornady, the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Atlanta, assured his congregation on December 24, 1864 that the “blackened ruins” amidst which they sat were evidence of the chastening hand of God. Just as an earthly father disciplines his children, “so the Lord by his chastening of us manifests his love to us, and gives us the assurance that we are his children, the dear objects of his love.” Despite the destruction, Hornady was confident of God’s favor: “My brethren, this is, indeed, one evidence that we are the children of God: that he has not forsaken us. He chastens us as we have been because we are his children, and he loves us as his children. When I survey the ruins by which we are surrounded, I still feel that a father’s hands holds the rod while he inflicts on us the stripes.” Hornady exhorted his church, “Coming out of the fire purified and chastened, but still not destitute of hope, let us be a faithful, earnest, and devoted people.”¹³

In late February 1865, a writer to the Baptist Christian Index warned that “the crying sin of the people of God throughout our beleaguered, devastated, and bleeding
country, is their want of faith in God, and our righteous cause.” The reason the war had dragged on for four years was simple: “It is our want of faith!” Throughout the war religious Confederates had blamed battlefield reverses on a variety of sins among the southern people, including extortion, moral laxity, intemperance, profanity, desecration of the Sabbath, and abuses of the institution of slavery. Near the end of the war, this Baptist beseeched all southerners to repent of their ultimate sin—their lack of faith in God and in the Confederacy. They must confidently call upon the Lord of hosts, and “speedily, we shall be taken out of the fiery furnace . . . [and] established as a separate and independent nation.”

As late as March 1865 the Presbyterian newspapers of the South urged their readers to put away despondency and “Stand fast; quit you like men.” Although the Confederacy had suffered serious reverses, other successful causes had struggled through worse circumstances. The editors exhorted their people to “take good heart in this holy work of defence, to which they are summoned by the unmistakable providence of God.” The role of encouragement was the “solemn duty” of the religious papers, because the conflict was devoted to saving for the South “the priceless boon of both civil and religious freedom.” In Georgia the Christian Index agreed. The editors felt that the crisis “demands that we give words of encouragement and cheer to our people.” They were not troubled and felt as strongly as ever that “under God, we will yet gain our independence.” To their readers they counseled, “despair not, but with eyes fixed on the glorious goal of independence, struggle on unfalteringly, till the shout of triumph goes up all over our land!”15
Of course the shout of triumph which went out across the land was uttered by northern armies, northern citizens, and northern Christians. Defeat crushed the people of the South, and deeply perplexed religious Confederates. They had been “taught in every Southern paper, and in almost every Southern pulpit, that the justice of the Southern cause must ensure its success.” Now they faced overwhelming defeat. “The South lies prostrate,” seventeen-year-old Emma LeConte confided to her diary in Columbia, South Carolina, “there is no help. . . . who could have believed who has watched this four years’ struggle that it could have ended like this! They say right always triumphs, but what cause could have been more just than ours? Have we suffered all—have our brave men fought so desperately and died so nobly for this?” A month later when remnants of the southern army had returned to Columbia, LeConte still found it hard to believe the Confederacy was no more: “The army is disbanded now—oh! Merciful God!—the hot tears rush into my eyes and I cannot write.”

The Reverend Moses Drury Hoge, Presbyterian pastor in Richmond, wrote to a close friend in May 1865: “The idolized expectation of a separate nationality, of a social life and literature and civilization of our own, together with a gospel guarded against the contamination of New England infidelity, all this has perished, and I feel like a shipwrecked mariner thrown up like a seaweed on a desert shore.” He continued, “God’s dark providence enwraps me like a pall; I cannot comprehend, but I will not charge him foolishly; I cannot explain, but I will not murmur. . . . I await the development of his providence, and I am thankful that I can implicitly believe that the end will show that all has been ordered in wisdom and love.” Hoge, like other
southerners, drew comfort from the Old Testament account of Job’s righteous suffering. Like Job, he concluded, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust him.” In September he was still uncertain of God’s purposes in the war: “I have not been very well since the surrender. . . . These inscrutable providences are like the half lines written in the palaces of the Cæsars—what is to come after will explain and complete their meaning.”

The Rappahannock Baptist Association gathered just six weeks after Lee’s surrender to survey the remnants of their group of churches and begin the work of religious reconstruction. They were certain that “the sore trials through which we have passed and the darkness which now overshadows us are a part of the workings of Providence.” Reflecting the common Confederate understanding of the war, they declared, “our severe chastisements . . . are ordained of God, as instruments to work for us a far more exceeding and eternal glory.” Like these Virginia Baptists, most religious southerners believed Hebrews 12:6-7 explained God’s dealings with them: “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?” God loved the South even though he allowed them to be defeated. He had greater things planned for the South which southerners could not then comprehend, according to the scriptural promise, “all things work together for good to them that love God.” They had to cling to faith when they lacked understanding. The firm belief that the defeat of the Confederacy did not signal God’s disapproval shaped white religious southerners responses to the issues of religious reconstruction.
The primary duty of southern ministers and editors in 1865 and 1866 was to convince themselves and their congregations that God had not deserted the South. To accomplish this task, they assured their churches that the southern cause had been righteous, that their afflictions were God’s chastisement rather than his judgment, and that God would eventually vindicate the South in some unknown way. The righteousness of the southern cause, the justice of God, and Confederate defeat could and would be reconciled.20

Even before the war ended, some ministers were developing a framework within which they could accommodate both the assurance of God’s continued favor and the military defeat of the Confederacy. In April 1864 Baptist clergyman Thomas S. Dunaway warned a Virginia congregation against believing “an idea which I have heard some advance, when they say that if our cause is just and right it will succeed in any event; and if it fail it is conclusive that our cause is a bad one, and God is displeased with our institutions.” Dunaway insisted that “an accurate acquaintance with the ways of Providence as manifested in the Scriptures, will disabuse our minds of this error.” Failure did not imply God’s final judgment. Rather, it might simply be part of his own “wise purposes” to “withhold success from his most faithful servants.”21 This argument was developed by a wide array of southern evangelicals in the immediate aftermath of the war to explain why God would permit the defeat of a righteous cause.

Near the end of 1865, a writer in the Baptist Religious Herald reflected on the providential meaning of Confederate defeat. Because Confederates were certain of the righteousness and the eventual triumph of their cause, “the blow that overthrew the
Confederacy, shook their faith in the righteous providence of God.” Something was obviously awry; “either the Confederate cause was wrong, or Providence does not always favor the right side.” The author quickly revealed where the problem lay. “Believing that the Confederate cause was righteous, we need not have our confidence in Divine Providence shaken by its failure.” Clearly, right did not invariably triumph over might. “That truth and righteousness will finally triumph, we have no doubt; but it is one of the mysteries of Providence, that in this world, and for a season, they are permitted to be obscured and perverted.” In conclusion, “there is nothing in the issues of our late unhappy and ruinous war to change our views as to the rectitude of the Southern struggle for independence.” The author examined the southern quest, and found it, on the whole, virtuous. It was their view of God’s providence, not their purposes in the war, that Confederate Christians needed to reevaluate.22

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America, meeting in Augusta, Georgia, in December 1865, assured southern Presbyterians that God had not forsaken them. “Our national sins have aroused God’s wrath, and caused Him to visit us with sore national calamities and bereavements.” They must “cordially acquiesce in the dispensations of his inscrutable Providence,” with the firm hope that God would pity his people and deliver them. Georgia Baptist S. G. Hillyer wrote to the Christian Index, “let us not falter in our faith, in this time of public and private calamity. Let us accept the chastenings of the Lord with all humility. They are the dealings of a father’s hand. His love in the method of its manifestation, may be incomprehensible. But he is too wise to err, and too good to be unkind.”23
Henry Holcomb Tucker, the editor of the Christian Index, admitted that “when the Southern Confederacy fell, thousands of hearts were crushed.” To those men and women the editor offered Christian consolation: “Whether you see the good that is to come of what has happened or not, is immaterial. God will be certain to subserve some grand purpose of mercy by it. The present result is not of man’s doings. God is the author of his own providences.” While many believed that “Providence had sent upon them an overwhelming calamity,” they must not challenge God’s will or lose faith in his plans: “The hand of the Lord is then in this thing. It is God who has done it. Will his saints complain? Do they doubt his wisdom? Do they question his goodness?” Instead of questioning God’s decision in the conclusion of the war, southern Christians must accommodate themselves to their changed circumstances. If they refused to do so, they were “fighting against his providence, and disobeying the evident inclinations of his will.” Tucker insisted that “the facts before us are the materials God has given us with which to operate, and to glorify him.” The conclusion of the Civil War, of course, did not reveal God’s will as clearly to everyone as Tucker seemed to indicate. Northern evangelicals, the freedmen, and southern religious scalawags all interpreted the facts before them differently than did the majority of Confederate Christians. In conclusion Tucker wrote, “we may console ourselves with this even in what seems to us to be the darkest providences, that ‘all things work together for good to them that love God’; so therefore comfort one another with these words.”

Benjamin Morgan Palmer, driven to Columbia, South Carolina, by the war, also believed God would vindicate the southern cause. Even after Lee’s surrender, Palmer
encouraged his congregation with the hope of future deliverance. Emma LeConte wrote in her journal on April 23, 1865: “Dr. Palmer this morning preached a fine and encouraging sermon. He says we must not despair yet, but even if we should be overthrown—not conquered—the next generation would see the South free and independent.”

Because they convinced themselves that the Confederate cause was righteous and God still looked upon them as his people, southern Christians adamantly refused to concede to northern charges that slavery and secession were sins for which God had judged them. They vigorously denied any accusations that the outcome of the war could be attributed to their peculiar institution or to their political course in 1861. The defense of both slavery and secession had important implications for other aspects of religious reconstruction as well.

The General Assembly of the Southern Presbyterian Church, meeting late in 1865, declared that the Church had no commission to propagate or abolish slavery; this matter of policy belonged exclusively to the State. However, “the lawfulness of the relation as a question of social morality, and of scriptural truth” was still a matter of vital importance. The belief that slavery was inherently sinful was “unscriptural and fanatical,” and the acceptance of this creed by any church “is a just cause of separation from it.” Although southern Presbyterians may have cause to repent “for neglect of duty or actual wrong towards our servants,” they did not have “to bow the head in humiliation before men, or admit that the memory of many of our dear kindred is to be covered with shame” because they held slaves.
In February 1866, a contributor to the Baptist Religious Herald challenged an editorial which suggested that the war had been God’s method of abolishing slavery. “Can it be,” he asked, “that it was the design of God in the late terrible civil war to overthrow an institution which he himself ordained, established and sanctioned, and which he ‘designed’ should exist forever?” Such a conclusion was ludicrous. God would not have allowed all of this suffering and bloodshed “that an inferior race might be released from nominal bondage and endowed with a freedom which, to them, is but another name for licentiousness, and which must end in complete extermination, so far as human foresight can judge.” The author declared, “I cannot, I will not believe it. . . . It was Satan that ruled the hour.”

Presbyterian theologian Robert Lewis Dabney offered a 350-page justification of slavery published in 1867 under the title, A Defence of Virginia, and Through Her, of the South. To the question, “Is not the slavery question dead? Why discuss it longer?” Dabney replied, “Would God it were dead! But in the Church, abolitionism lives, and is more rampant and mischievous than ever, as infidelity.” Therefore, the “faithful servants of the Lord Jesus Christ dare not cease to oppose and unmask it.” Dabney then proceeded to offer arguments supporting slavery from the Old and New Testaments, and from ethics and economics. “A righteous God,” he concluded, “for our sins towards Him, has permitted us to be overthrown by our enemies and His.” The southern people “suffer silently, disdaining to complain, and only raising to the chastening heavens, the cry, ‘How long, O Lord?’” Two years after the war ended, Dabney felt it his Christian duty to uphold the righteousness of slavery, and await future vindication by God.
Likewise, even a full decade after Appamattox, Methodist Thomas O. Summers, editor of the Nashville Christian Advocate, attacked the idea that slavery was an inherently sinful institution. As late as 1892, the Southern Baptist Convention articulated a religious defense of the institution through which the black slave “exchanged the degrading idolatry of his native land for the truths of the gospel, and from his cabin home the witchery of Christian melodies banished the voudoism of his fatherland.”29

Likewise, southern evangelicals defended the righteousness of secession, a course which they heartily supported only a few years before. In justifying secession, southerners reasserted their wartime arguments about the constitutional and moral right for states to secede from the Union. The force of arms had determined the fact of the future relationship of the states to the Federal government, but southerners insisted that morally they had acted correctly in 1861. The Christian men of the South, the Southern Presbyterian maintained in 1866, “still believe that those views of States’ Rights for which they battled so stoutly, and from which the right of secession naturally flows, were the views of the framers of the Constitution.” Most still agreed with Presbyterian Thomas Smyth of Charleston who in 1863 claimed that the South had exercised “the divine right of secession.”30

Neither slavery nor secession had provoked God into forsaking the southern people. Both the peculiar institution and the political separation were righteous before him, and although God had chastised Confederate Christians, he was only preparing them for greater usefulness in the future. With this understanding of God’s intentions in Confederate defeat, southern evangelicals considered one of the most important issues
of religious reconstruction—reunion with their northern counterparts. Northern Christians, meanwhile, had come to very different conclusions about God’s providence in the war, and had developed their own vision for the religious reconstruction of the South. When the two groups discussed the issue, their divergent visions of religious reconstruction quickly led to harsh accusations and uncompromising attitudes.

Initially, the southern churches were in such a critical condition that even their leaders displayed some doubts about their future. Quickly, however, Confederate Christians established their interpretation of the war as God’s chastening and committed themselves to rebuild their southern religious institutions. In Sardis, Mississippi, Methodist pastor Robert H. Crozier exhorted his congregation: “If we cannot gain our political, let us establish at least our mental independence.” Evangelicals across the South expressed the same sentiments. The first official signs of life from the Southern Methodist Church came from Missouri. There at Palmyra, Missouri, in June 1865, two dozen preachers and a dozen laymen gathered to discuss their future. They considered the maintenance of a separate and independent ecclesiastical organization “of paramount importance and our imperative duty.” For them to go into the Methodist Episcopal Church would be “to admit the charge that with the institution of slavery we stand or fall.” They acknowledged that different ideas for the religious reconstruction of the South had already been proposed. Referring to the northern Methodists, the report protested, “The only consolidation or reconstruction they would accept would be that we turn over to them our Church property and interests and influence; yield the whole field; confess that we have been wrong; indorse the politics of their Church as a condition of
membership; and become political hucksters instead of Gospel ministers.” Their congregations demanded with “great unanimity” that the Methodist Episcopal Church, South be preserved. The Palmyra Manifesto, coming from a border-state Conference, invigorated the southern Church. A month later, Bishop George F. Pierce affirmed in a letter to an Atlanta newspaper that “my deliberate judgment is, that our true policy is to maintain our present organization.”

In August 1865 Bishops Andrew, Paine, and Pierce of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, wrote a pastoral address to southern Methodists, making it clear that they had no intention of reuniting with the Methodist Episcopal Church. The majority of northern Methodists, they lamented, “have become incurably radical. They teach for doctrine the commandments of men. They preach another gospel. They have incorporated social dogmas and political tests into their church creeds. They have gone on to impose conditions upon discipleship that Christ did not impose.” Faithfulness to their “providential mission,” the Bishops proclaimed, required that southern Methodists “preserve our church in all its vigor and integrity, free from entangling alliances with those whose notions of philanthropy and politics and social economy are liable to give an ever varying complexion to their theology.”

The Memphis Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South met early in October 1865 to begin the process of reorganization. On the final day of the meeting, the Conference resolved that “we are decided in our purpose to maintain intact our present ecclesiastical relations; believing that our membership desire no change; and that any action of this Conference looking to a union with another church would be highly
prejudicial to Methodism.” The Conference also declared that “we heartily approve, and fully endorse the address of our Bishops.” Other southern Methodist conferences followed this example as they also expressed their commitment to southern ecclesiastical independence.33

The General Assembly of the Southern Presbyterians issued a pastoral letter to all of its churches in December, 1865. Southern Presbyterians, the letter declared, were forced to organize a separate assembly in 1861, and the reasons for that separation from the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America “not only remain as conclusive as at first, but have been exceedingly strengthened by events of public notoriety, occurring each succeeding year.” The General Assembly cautioned all southern Presbyterians to “repel all unworthy attempts of men who may lie in wait to deceive, and to cause you to fall from your own steadfastness.” The Southern Presbyterian insisted that “there is really no option in the matter.” Reunion would imperil the southern Church’s “purity and safety” and “dishonor the Great Head of the Church.”34

The ministers of the Georgia Baptist Association pledged their continued support of “the Southern Organizations of our denomination.” Any attempt to unite northern and southern Baptists “would be productive of trouble and confusion and not good.”35 In early 1866 the new editor of the Christian Index declared that he had received “several ably written articles in opposition to union of organization on the part of Northern and Southern Baptists.” Because his readers were “almost unanimous in opposition to this measure,” he considered it “needless to discuss it.” The following week, he observed that the editor of the Religious Herald declared that 99 of every 100 southern Baptists
favored the maintenance of their own southern organization. Not to be outdone, the editor exclaimed that the figure "nearer the truth" was 999 out of 1,000: "Southern Baptists are so nearly unanimous on this subject, that we think it worse than a waste of time to discuss it." To the paper's correspondents who wrote letters on the subject, he insisted that "it will be time enough to combat the proposition for reconstruction, when somebody advocates it... We think that the subject had better be dropped." In sum, "there is not the least prospect of a re-union of Northern and Southern Baptists, for many years to come, if ever." Ironically, in subsequent issues, the editor continued to discuss the reasons why he did not discuss reunion. Evidently the editor or his readers needed reassurance that no reasonable southern person would advocate reunion.36

While southern and northern evangelicals rejected reunion on the terms offered by their counterparts in the other section, Confederate Christians affirmed their commitment to rebuild their southern institutions. Denominational newspapers and colleges were destroyed during the war, and resumed operation only after much effort. Church buildings had to be rebuilt and organizational structures reestablished. Despite the difficulties, southern evangelicals quickly set to work rebuilding their religious lives. Only by reconstructing their "southern Zion" could Confederate Christians hope to maintain a separate southern religious identity and prepare for the unfolding of God's providential purpose for them.37

Another vital element of religious reconstruction for Confederate Christians was the religious future of the freedman. Underlying all of the southern evangelicals' decisions on this subject was a persistent and profound belief in the inferiority of the
black race. Several forces were at work in the months following the war that determined the future relations between black and white Christians in the South. Some Confederate Christians wanted little to do with the freedmen, socially or religiously. Infuriated over emancipation, they resented any efforts on behalf of the freedmen and preferred to leave them to the care of the northerners who had freed them. More southern evangelicals, especially ministers, believed it to be still their duty to evangelize the freedmen just as they had evangelized the slaves. As North Carolina Baptists resolved, the evangelization of the black race was “a special duty imposed by the Providence of God on Southern Christians.” Texas Baptist F. M. Law insisted that the religious instruction of the freedmen had to be “taken hold of, conducted and controlled by Southern people.” Of course, this effort was in no way intended to advocate equality in church relations. The structures of religious instruction which existed under slavery were to continue between whites and freedmen; God’s charge to southern Christians to uplift the black race had not ended with emancipation, nor had the attitudes of paternalism died when the slaves became free. This mixture of religious duty coupled with a desire to maintain control over an inferior race motivated most southern evangelicals in 1865.

The Alabama Baptist Convention clearly favored retaining black members in white-controlled churches: “The changed political status of our late slaves does not necessitate any change in their relation to our churches; and while we recognize their right to withdraw from our churches and form organizations of their own, we nevertheless believe that their highest good will be subserved by their maintaining their present relation to those who know them, who love them, and who will labor for the
promotion of their welfare." Basil Manly, Sr. wrote in late 1865 that the black members of his church had petitioned to be set apart as a separate church. Manly doubted the wisdom of such a step: "We think they are not yet prepared for the responsibility of an independent church state. We have told them so, but yet shall let go our hold of them, if after our advice, they desire it."

The Georgia Baptist Association, one of the member associations of the Georgia Baptist Convention, included churches in eastern Georgia between Athens and Augusta. At the end of the war, it had approximately nine thousand members. Nearly two thirds of this membership was black, including five independent black congregations in Augusta with over three thousand members. At the associational meeting in the fall of 1865, one of the churches sent two queries regarding its black members. After "considerable interchange of opinions" on this vital issue, the Georgia Baptist Association unanimously declared that it was permissible for black members to form churches of their own, but it was not considered "expedient at present in the country." The Association also determined that it was scriptural for churches to continue to receive black members.

The Georgia Synod of the Southern Presbyterian Church, meeting in Augusta in October 1865, feared that their members would believe themselves to be absolved from all obligation to labor for the salvation of black men and women since they were no longer responsible for them as owners. The Synod exhorted the churches "not to relax, but rather redouble their exertions for the religious instruction of the colored people." Georgia Presbyterians hoped that when the freedmen recovered from the "temporary
intoxication of suddenly acquiring freedom,” they would learn that, “after all, their late masters are their best friends and most efficient instructors.”

Southern evangelicals insisted that a primary reason for blacks’ leaving their churches was the efforts of northern missionaries, both black and white, who had descended on the South to stir discord among the freedmen. Confederate Christians had to attribute the exodus either to black ignorance or to outside influences; to do otherwise would shatter the myth of black complacency in slavery and would impugn their own attitudes toward black Christians. The General Assembly of the Southern Presbyterians, which met in November 1865, noted a “marked change” in the “religious deportment” of the black population. Instead of crowding the churches for instruction and worship as they formerly had, few of them were to be found in the Presbyterian churches. The General Assembly attributed this calamity to “the insinuations of designing men, who, for sinister purposes, have sought to alienate their affections” from their former ministers, and to a “misapprehension of the feelings we entertain for them as a people.” To admit that blacks left the biracial churches on their own initiative and for good reasons would not only shatter southern Presbyterians’ confident assumptions of black inferiority and docility, but would also belittle the results of their efforts to evangelize the slaves.

The members of the Georgia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, also meeting in the fall of 1865, pledged to continue evangelizing the freedmen under white ministers wherever possible. However, the Conference requested the Bishop to appoint the black pastors already selected by black congregations as supplies for those
churches because "we are desirous that all our colored members should continue to be members of the M. E. Church, South." Although the Conference disclaimed any power to transfer church property used by blacks before and during the war to the freedmen, they did recommend that trustees of church property permit black congregations to use church buildings even if none remained in the southern Methodist fold. Only by retaining black members within the southern organization could southern evangelicals insure the control necessary to maintain a measure of social mastery amid postwar disruptions.45

The decisions of most black Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians to leave the churches of their masters demolished white plans to maintain antebellum religious relationships. Faced with the fact of black exodus, southern church leaders repeatedly readjusted their stance toward black Christians. Initially, leaders believed that the antebellum patterns of paternalistic biracial churches could continue. Next, they attempted the organization of the freedmen into separate congregations with white ministers. Later, they accepted the idea that freedmen might have black ministers under white supervision. Eventually, they assisted in the organization of black associations, conferences, and presbyteries. Ultimately, they reluctantly admitted that the freedmen would have an entirely separate and independent denominational structure. In the five years that it took the Methodist Episcopal Church, South to adjust to this reality, the denomination lost all but a few thousand of its over 200,000 black members. In 1870 two white bishops of the southern Church superintended the establishment of the Colored
Methodist Episcopal Church into which most of the remaining black members transferred.\(^{46}\)

Southern Christians, confident of God’s support from secession to surrender, were dismayed at the collapse of the Confederacy. Why had God allowed this disaster to befall his people? When southern Christians contemplated this question, their ministers were ready with an explanation. Drawing heavily upon the reasoning they had developed to explain battlefield defeats during the war, southern ministers extended these arguments to cover the ultimate defeat of the Confederacy. All of these tribulations, from the loss of a skirmish to the collapse of the nation, were designed by God to chasten his southern children. These ordeals demonstrated God’s love and concern; He had not deserted them, but was instead purifying them for a glorious future vindication.

Believing that God had chastened them by defeat, Confederate Christians faced the daunting tasks of religious reconstruction. They continued to uphold the righteousness of slavery and secession, and closed ranks against northern Christians who insisted that the war demonstrated God’s disapproval of the sins of secession and slavery. Confronting the northern vision of religious reconstruction, southern evangelicals refused to discuss reunion with their northern counterparts who expected repentance. Instead of repenting, southern Christians judged themselves righteous and zealously began to rebuild the religious life of their southern Zion. While they accepted emancipation as a result of the war, most saw no need for a change in the traditional religious relationship between the races. The freedmen should remain in white churches where they would hear the “pure” gospel and where whites could exercise a measure of control over them.
Blacks, however, held a divergent vision of what religious reconstruction meant based on a different interpretation of the outcome of the war. Their withdrawal from biracial churches during and immediately after the war forced white southern evangelicals to modify their stance toward independent black churches in a vain attempt to retain some control over the religious lives of the freedmen. These attitudes, forged between 1863 and 1866, shaped Confederate Christians’ actions during religious reconstruction. The competition between their vision and the alternative views held by northern Christians and the freedmen determined the patterns of religious reconstruction during the next decade.

Notes

2. Thaddeus W. McRae Papers, typescript autobiography, 1880, Historical Foundation of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches, Montreat, NC.


The Georgia Baptist Convention, meeting in April 1861, declared that: “We declare it to be a pleasure and a duty to avow that, both in feeling and in principle, we approve, endorse, and support the government of the Confederate States of America.” Georgia Baptist Convention, Minutes, 1861.


Private Robert C. Beck also found solace in his religious beliefs. After being wounded in the foot on June 1, 1864, he crawled to the foot of a tree and waited for the battle to end. “Oh how comforting was prayer to me then in my time of distress. Oh who so dear a friend as Jesus in time of trouble.” Beck’s foot was amputated two days later, and he died on July 22, 1864. Undated entry, Diary of Robert C. Beck, April-July
1864, Robert Alexander Webb Papers, Historical Foundation of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches.

10. Sarah M. Manly to her sons, 15 February 1862, Basil Manly II to his sons, Charles, James, and Fuller, 16 February 1862, Manly Collection of Manuscripts, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, TN.


North Carolina Presbyterian minister, Calvin H. Wiley, wrote in his widely read book that “God is now chastening the country for its sins in connection with slavery.” Calvin H. Wiley, Scriptural Views of National Trials: Or the True Road to Independence and Peace of the Confederate States of America (Greensboro, NC: Sterling, Campbell and Albright, 1863), 191.


16. “The Scepticism Engendered by the War,” Christian Index, 13 January 1866; Earl Schenck Miers, ed., When the War Ended: The Diary of Emma LeConte (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 90, 99. Presbyterian Anna Safford wrote in her diary, “When the news of Lee’s surrender reached us, we could not believe it. It seemed such a tragic, thoroughly unbelieving-in-termination—so dreadful—that we thought it incredible.” Anna C. Safford diary, Safford Family Papers, Historical Foundation of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches.


Confederate Vice President Alexander H. Stephens, imprisoned in the North, also drew comfort from the Biblical account of Job’s struggle to understand why God was allowing such affliction to befall him. In late June he wrote in his prison journal, “My before-breakfast reading was from Job—a favourite book with me. I have read Job oftener than any other book in the Bible, except perhaps St. John.” Myrta Lockett


24. “All Things Work Together for Good to Them that Love God,” Christian Index, 13 January 1866. In November 1865, the Christian Index reported revivals among Georgia’s country churches and concluded, “We should feel grateful for this evidence that the Divine favor is still graciously left to us.” “Revivals in Georgia,” Christian Index, 9 November 1865.


26. “A Pastoral Letter from the General Assembly to the Churches Under Their Care,” General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, Minutes, 1865, 385.


Gardiner H. Shattuck, Jr. rightly highlights a group of conservatives in the New South, of whom Dabney was one of the most prominent, who “utterly refused to compromise their antebellum principles.” They, unlike fellow evangelicals such as J. William Jones and Atticus Haygood, were never able to embrace the New South creed
and sectional reconciliation. Shattuck concludes that: "Defeat in the war, after all, triggered much soul-searching among religious southern whites." Most southerners, however, seem to have embraced parts of both schools of thought. Few brooded as long or as deeply about Confederate defeat as did Dabney. Most considered defeat to be divine chastisement, and they moved on to reconstruct the South politically, socially, economically, and religiously. They did not thereby reject the righteousness of either slavery or secession. Gardiner H. Shattuck, Jr., "'Appomattox as a Day of Blessing': Religious Interpretations of Confederate Defeat in the New South Era," Journal of Confederate History 7 (1991): 3.

29. Christian Advocate (Nashville, TN), 13 August 1875; "Report of the Home Mission Board," Southern Baptist Convention, Proceedings, 1892, iv. The Home Mission Board also insisted that since emancipation the freedman had found white southerners to be "his truest friends and his most efficient helpers."

In November 1871, J. L. Reynolds assured South Carolina Baptists that the Southern Baptist Convention had "never receded" from its views on slavery. It had "no confession to make" and "no repentance to offer" for its views. South Carolina Baptist Convention, Minutes, 1871, Appendix, 36.


For postwar defenses of secession, see Methodist Albert Taylor Bledsoe's Is Davis a Traitor: or Was Secession a Constitutional Right Previous to the War of 1861? (Baltimore, MD: Innes and Co., 1866), Presbyterian Robert Lewis Dabney's The Life and Campaigns of Lieut.-Gen. Thomas J. Jackson (New York: Blelock and Co., 1866), and Baptist John William Jones's The Davis Memorial; or Our Dead President, Jefferson Davis (Richmond, VA: B. F. Johnson and Co., 1890).


32. "Pastoral Address of the Southern Methodist Bishops," Southern Christian Advocate (Macon, GA), 31 August 1865.

33. Memphis Annual Conference, Minutes, 1865, 97, Luther L. Gobbell Library, Lambuth College, Jackson, TN.
34. “A Pastoral Letter from the General Assembly to the Churches Under Their Care,” General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, Minutes, 1865, 384; “Is Reunion with the Northern Church Desirable?” Southern Presbyterian, 22 February 1866.


36. Christian Index, 6, 13 January 1866. See also 20 January, 22 March, 3 May 1866 issues.


39. A writer to the Christian Index insisted that God had changed the relationship between the races in the South because southerners did not fulfill their duties as masters. The correspondent urged his fellow Christians to “labor so to form and regulate the new relations which are to arise, that the two races which God has brought together in this good land, may partake together of God’s bounty, and may live together in such a manner as to secure his approbation.” “Our Chastisement,” Christian Index, 10 February 1866.

Rufus Spain concluded in his study of the social attitudes of southern Baptists: “The Protestant churches of the South closed ranks after the Civil War in defense of the traditional relationship of the races. Except for recognizing the personal freedom of the Negroes, Southern churches exhibited no appreciable change of attitude as a result of emancipation.” Spain, At Ease in Zion, 44.

40. Alabama Baptist Convention, Minutes, 1865, 10.

41. Basil Manly II to Jane Smith, 16 November 1865, Manly Collection of Manuscripts, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives.


43. Synod of Georgia, Minutes, 1865, 14-15.

44. “Narrative of the State of Religion,” General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, Minutes, 1865, 380.

CHAPTER 3
GOD’S JUDGMENT:
THE NORTHERN UNDERSTANDING OF THE CIVIL WAR

Like their southern counterparts, northern clergymen and laity vigorously supported their section during the Civil War. Like Confederate Christians, the vast majority of the northern religious populace interpreted battlefield victories as evidence of God’s favor and defeats as divine chastisement. There, however, the similarities ended. The Union cause triumphed, and most northern Christians confidently assumed that God had given them the victory over the wicked South. The outcome of the war was God’s judgment upon the region for the sins of slavery and secession. A few more modest commentators believed the war a divine judgment on the entire nation, but they too admitted that God had demonstrated his displeasure with the causes for which the South had fought. Armed with this understanding of the spiritual significance of the war, northern churchmen addressed the issues of religious reconstruction in ways very different from their southern counterparts.

Historian Phillip Shaw Paludan concluded in his study of northern society during the Civil War that “no force shaped the vision that northerners had of the war more forcefully than religion.” No less than southerners, northern Protestants during the war looked to their churches and clergymen to understand the providential significance of this bloody struggle. How their clergymen interpreted for them God’s purposes in the war
shaped their attitudes toward the issues of religious reconstruction. Although many northern Protestants were initially hesitant about war and called for peace, their reluctance was swept away by the whirlwind of public outrage when the South fired on the flag at Fort Sumter. Once converted, they rallied to the Union cause and demanded a vigorous prosecution of the war.²

From the beginning of the war, northern Christians insisted that God had ordained the Federal government; therefore, the South’s revolt against the Union was a sin worthy of divine punishment. Members of the Methodist Detroit Annual Conference in 1861 declared that they “saluted the stars and stripes as next in our prayers and affections to the very Cross of the Redeemer.” The Northern Baptist Convention, meeting in Brooklyn, New York, in May declared that “the doctrine of secession is foreign to our Constitution, revolutionary, suicidal” and that the national government “deserves our loyal adhesion and unstinted support in its wise, forbearing, and yet firm maintenance of the national unity and life.” With a metaphoric flourish, the Baptist assembly insisted that “what was bought at Bunker Hill, Valley Forge, and Yorktown, was not, with our consent, sold at Montgomery; that we dispute the legality of the bargain, and, in the strength of the Lord God of our fathers, shall hope to contest, through this generation, if need be, the feasibility of the transfer.” The equally nationalistic New School Presbyterians, meeting in Syracuse, New York, adopted resolutions expressing their “amazement at the wickedness of such proceedings” as secession and armed rebellion. They also expressed their “undiminished attachment to the great principles of civil and religious freedom on which our national Government is based.”³
In contrast to the unified Methodists, Baptists, and New School Presbyterians, a deeply troubled and divided General Assembly of the Old School Presbyterians met in Philadelphia in May of 1861. Only half of the presbyteries from the border and southern states were represented, and the two greatest southern Presbyterian leaders, Dr. Benjamin M. Palmer and Dr. James H. Thornwell, were conspicuously absent. On the third day of the meeting, Dr. Gardiner Spring, aging conservative pastor of the Brick Presbyterian Church in New York City, asked the convention to form a committee to make resolutions of loyalty to the Union. The motion was tabled by a close vote. Undaunted, Spring insisted that the General Assembly take some action, and offered two resolutions. The first called for a national day of prayer for peace, and the other pronounced it the duty of the ministry and churches “to do all in their power to promote and perpetuate the integrity of these United States, and to strengthen, uphold, and encourage the Federal Government.” After five days of debate, the General Assembly passed the Spring Resolutions; in the wake of these resolutions, several southern presbyteries seceded from the General Assembly as soon as they met. On December 4, 1861, ten synods, encompassing 45 presbyteries with 72,000 members, united to form the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America.4

Newspapers across the North copied these resolutions by the leading denominations as evidence of the churches’ loyalty to the Union. Throughout the war, as Philip Paludan writes, “the churches of the North justified and energized the war effort.” Much the same as churches in the South promoted morale and sanctified the Confederate war effort, northern churches proclaimed the effort to maintain the Union
(and later to abolish slavery) a sacred cause. The Rev. W. O. Wyant, a Methodist war-recruit on his way to camp, told a Sunday School service in Greencastle, Indiana, in April, 1861, "I have never felt more confident of my acceptance with God, than I do at this moment. The offering that I bring, I am willing to sacrifice on the altar of my country; and should I fall, I will be with Jesus the sooner." Many northerners, and southerners as well, gave that sacrifice, each assured that he was dying for the cause of the Lord.5

Throughout the struggle, the northern Protestant denominations firmly supported the Federal government. When the Lincoln administration issued the Emancipation Proclamation, thereby making the destruction of slavery a war aim, the churches generally rallied behind the decision, though some believed it should have included all slaves and have been made earlier. The editor of the Western Christian Advocate wrote in 1863: "To emancipate the negro was among the least cherished designs of a loyal people of this country when they reluctantly took up arms against the Southern insurgents. . . . The work of emancipation has gone steadily and rapidly forward. . . ."

The Philadelphia Baptist Association, meeting in October 1864, declared that "American slavery . . . lies at the basis of the wicked attempt to overthrow the Government, is responsible for the bloodshed and crime of the past three years, and should be held accountable before God and man for every life sacrificed and every drop of blood shed."

No lasting peace could be expected "while slavery exists."6

Increasingly as the war continued, even those churches that had been silent on the issue of slavery came to condemn it.7 In 1863 the Old School Presbyterians issued a
statement reaffirming their 1818 report which had said: “We consider the voluntary enslaving of one part of the human race by another . . . utterly inconsistent with the law of God” and “totally irreconcilable with the spirit and principles of the Gospel of Christ.” All Christians had the duty “as speedily as possible to efface this blot on our holy religion, and to obtain the complete abolition of slavery throughout Christendom, and if possible, through the world.” By May 1864 the conservative Old School General Assembly had become adamant, even in the face of protests from border presbyteries: “The spirit of American slavery . . . has taken arms against law, organized a bloody rebellion against the national authority, made formidable war upon the Federal Union, and in order to found an empire upon the cornerstone of slavery, threatens not only our existence as a people, but the annihilation of the principles of free Christian government.” The continuance of negro slavery is “incompatible with the preservation of our own liberty and independence.”

Northern churches aided the Union war effort in other ways as well. Two thousand chaplains went south with northern armies, and northern Christians supported a variety of agencies designed to evangelize and comfort the Union soldiers. Ministers spoke at enlistment rallies, and offered benedictions over departing troops. Northern ministers and teachers followed Union armies to evangelize and educate the newly freed blacks in the South. These agents of northern denominations began the process of religious reconstruction in the South according to their own understanding of how God was working in human history. In New Orleans, in Tennessee, in coastal areas of the Carolinas, these missionaries started the process of rebuilding the religious life of the
South on very different foundations. Their experiences were important to the formulation of the northern understanding of the Civil War as well as northern plans for religious reconstruction in the post-war South.

As the war drew to a close, northern Christians believed they understood more clearly the workings of God’s providence in the ordeal. In early 1863, after Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, the editors of the *Christian Advocate and Journal* assured their readers that it “required little wisdom to see the moving of His hand” and even “less to see the design to be ultimately accomplished.” The New York East Annual Conference of the northern Methodist church declared, “As Christians and as patriots we cannot but recognize, in the events of our Civil War, the guiding hand of a Divine Providence. . . .” Presbyterian seminary professor Robert L. Stanton offered in 1864 a 562-page tract on *The Church and the Rebellion* in which he proposed “to set forth what we regard as some among the true purposes of God, now in process of being wrought out, by the stupendous events which are occurring in this nation.” Stanton condemned southern writers who had deceived themselves “in attempting to declare, beforehand, what He specifically intends in a given event, or in a series or long course of events.” Yet, he insisted, “the honest and devout student, aided by God’s word and Spirit, may be able to indicate with some approach to truthfulness, some, at least, of the grand results which the providence of God, as illustrated by daily occurring and consecutive events, is designed to reach.” While many southern writers believed that God had providentially committed to them the duty to “conserve and perpetuate” human bondage, Stanton interpreted God’s providence as tending to the result of “freedom and
elevation to the negro race.” Whether the rebellion succeeded or not, Stanton maintained, slavery was doomed. “How can any believer in God’s providence, which extends to all things,—in whose hand are the hearts of all people,—fail to see in these events the inevitable designs of God? How can he fail to read in them the doom of slavery?”

When the war ended and slavery was abolished throughout the Confederacy, northern Christians felt vindicated that God had favored their cause. Yet, they were not completely united on the proper attitude toward the defeated South. Some northern evangelicals were at first inclined to follow a lenient policy toward their southern brethren. However, the shot fired at Ford’s Theatre in Washington, D.C., on April 14, 1865, dramatically changed the attitude of northern Christians. Many who earlier had favored conciliation demanded harsh justice upon the South for the assassination of Abraham Lincoln; those who had urged a vigorous policy of political and religious reconstruction became even more committed. A few voices continued to counsel moderation, but they were, for the most part, uninvolved in the activities of the northern denominations in the post-war South. Most northern Protestants believed that southerners were chief among sinners because they promoted slavery and secession, and that they had received their just punishment from God in the war. These radical Christians, as Victor B. Howard labels them, were the ones who became missionaries and teachers, who passed resolutions condemning slavery and secession, who insisted that northern churches had a duty to aid the freedmen, and who provided the financial support for the southern efforts of their denominations. Formulated toward the end of the conflict, that
understanding of the war which gave birth to the northern vision of religious reconstruction was articulated by this large group of northern clergy and laity, whom Chester Dunham described as “opposed to slavery, to secession, to the Confederacy, and to easy terms of reconstruction,” either political or religious.12

The northern populace and the secular press anxiously anticipated pronouncements from the churches for their attitude toward the defeated South and especially toward southern Christians. The New York Times observed in the fall of 1865 that “the spirit which the Northern churches will manifest toward the Southern is awaited with great interest for its political as well as its religious bearings.” Upon the churches’ actions “depends the early restoration of the cordial reunion of the two sections. . . . No political scheme or policy for sectional concord can prosper unless they too ‘follow the things that made for peace.’” In contrast, the Nation insisted in the summer of 1866 that “religious unity will come after the establishment of moral unity, but not sooner.” The editors of the Nation wished “less pains were taken by the various religious bodies at the North to bring about ecclesiastical reunion with the South.” They believed, perhaps rightly, that “all efforts made by the North just now to heal the breach are only likely to make it wider than ever.”13 Northern secular observers at the time and historians since have considered the attitude of northern denominations uncharitable or even irrational.14 However, what they fail to understand is that the posture of the northern churches toward their southern counterparts rested firmly upon their conception of the providential results of the war. In an era when church discipline was regularly practiced,
northern Christians demanded repentance for flagrant sins as a condition for renewed fellowship.

Central to northern Christians' understanding of the providential significance of the war was their firm conviction that slavery and secession were sins which had been judged by God in the overthrow of the Confederacy. The General Assembly of the Old School Presbyterian Church, meeting in May 1865, declared that "the act of rebellion, to support the institution of slavery, was not only a great sin, but wholly unwarranted." The New York Independent in the summer of 1865 concluded that "the apostate church is buried beneath a flood of divine wrath; its hideous dogmas shine on its brow like flaming fiends; the whole world stands aghast at its wickedness and ruin." To a Methodist editor, the South was a "God-smitten region."\(^\text{15}\)

Northern religious leaders were confident that many southerners awaited only an opportunity to rejoin their respective national denomination, "the old mother church," as the Methodists especially were fond of referring to it. Wicked religious and political leaders had led the southern people astray, but God's thundering judgment in the war had revealed to them their errors. Many other southerners had remained loyal but were simply trapped by their geographical location in the midst of the Confederacy, a contention supported by the experience of East Tennessee Unionists. Thousands of these Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians were eager to have loyal ministers, and only needed to be organized to become once again part of the national denominations. In the midst of the war, the Christian Times and Illinois Baptist declared that "if ever a people were deceived, the people of the South, who compose the rank and file of the Southern
army are so.” The *Western Christian Advocate* insisted in 1863 that “the people (Southern) are beginning to see that their real oppressors are the Southern leaders of the rebellion. . . . We have always pitied the ignorant masses of the South. They have been deceived.” By 1864 the editors of the *Western Christian Advocate* believed that the return to the Methodist Episcopal Church had begun in the South: “Already the loyal Methodists of the South are earnestly desirous of returning to the bosom of the Methodist Episcopal Church, where they will be supplied with a loyal ministry. The result will be that the Methodist Episcopal Church will absorb the loyal Methodism of the South, and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, will die with the rebellion, which she, more than all others, helped to inaugurate. . . . Indeed, the process is already rapidly going on.” The early efforts of the New School Presbyterian Church also met with some success in the South: “A people whose loyalty could not be crushed turn fondly to our Church and welcome laborers among them from the North.”

By 1865, northern Christians were convinced that southern churches were unfit to minister to the spiritual needs of their members. Their clergy had perverted the gospel message by defending slavery and encouraging rebellion. The New England Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church dismissed the Church, South as contaminated with sin. Because it had been “so completely leagued with detestable sin,” its ministers and leading members were “incapacitated for the work of social, civil, and religious regeneration.” They had “fostered the most awful crime against man, society, and God,” and they had “nurtured the viper of rebellion in the Church and State.” Another commentator contended that the Methodist secession of 1844 and the southern secession
of 1861 were both founded on slavery: "The mischief thus begun in the Church has reached its culmination in the state, and now the death of the latter foredooms the former. The Siamese twins must go to one grave. . . ." Since the southern Methodist church would continue to be "utterly opposed" to the Methodist Episcopal Church and the national government, northern Methodists "surely cannot give over to them the spiritual culture of the millions of the regenerated South." A Presbyterian editor in Cincinnati felt certain that "the Christianity of the South has proven itself so far inferior and corrupt as to be unworthy of our confidence, and incompetent to the task of thus elevating, purifying, regenerating the masses of those who have lived under its benumbing power." Northern missionaries had much to do: "A purer faith is to be preached. . . . It is indispensable, even to the civil renovation of the South, that a true Gospel should be implanted there." The Baptist Christian Secretary believed that the southern clergy were more devoted to the lost cause of the rebellion than were the politicians: "They went into it on principle . . . that it was their duty, in order to save the divine institution of slavery, and they have not yet given up the argument, although divine Providence has abandoned the institution."17

Because of their loyalty to the institution of slavery and general corruption through rebellion, southern denominations were also unable to meet the spiritual needs of the freedmen. Furthermore, the southern denominations, only nominally concerned about black men and women when they were slaves, would remain apathetic. Regardless of their attitude, the freedmen would not accept ministers from the southern denominations. Here were millions of souls suddenly released from physical bondage
without spiritual guidance. Here was an enormous mission field thrown open to northern Christians.

With this understanding of God’s providential message in the war and the shape of America’s religious life, the northern churches set about formulating a plan for the religious reconstruction of the southern states. Developing slowly during the last years of the war, the components of the plan were fully articulated in 1865 and 1866. Because slavery had been at the heart of ecclesiastical as well as political secession, no barriers to the establishment of national institutions existed. “Slavery, the only ground of the division of the Church, being removed, why should we remain divided?” reasoned Daniel Curry of the New York Christian Advocate and Journal.¹⁸ The southern ecclesiastical structures, northern churchmen maintained, had been hopelessly perverted by the dual sins of secession and slavery where they had not been destroyed along with the Confederacy during the war. Only the northern, “national” churches could properly exercise spiritual oversight in the benighted South and throughout the nation. Northern Christians generally favored the reunion of Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians to form national denominations. However, they were not prepared simply to forget the war and merge with the southern bodies.

Since the southern clergy were unfit as a body to continue to minister, the best manner of effecting reunion would be through the reception of individuals and small groups rather than the organic merger of the northern and southern wings of the respective denominations. Only in this manner could the northern churches be certain that those whom they received were properly penitent over the sins of slavery and
secession. Each of the northern denominations required southerners who wished to unite with them to pledge their loyalty to the national government and to the antislavery pronouncements of the denomination. This practice enraged most southerners as an improper political condition for church membership. Northern Christians, however, felt these conditions were necessary to avoid future problems over the twin transgressions of the Confederacy. J. M. Pendleton urged the American Baptist Home Mission Society to begin evangelistic work in Kentucky and Tennessee with northern men. Southern missionaries were unacceptable until they would “repent and do works worthy of repentance.” Ministers entering the presbyteries of the Old School Presbyterian Church were to be asked whether they aided the rebellion and whether they believed that the “system of negro slavery in the South is a Divine institution.” If the candidate held either of these “doctrines,” he would not be admitted “without renouncing and forsaking these errors.” The Presbyter outlined a method for readmitting southern Presbyterians to the Old School Church. Ministers who had been leaders of secession “should never be permitted to return to our church as teachers or rulers.” Others who had supported the Confederacy “upon proper sense of their sins, and upon proper confessions and promises, might be restored.” Finally, those who had always remained loyal to the Government had “claims to be recognized as still in the church.” The General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1864 had revised the Book of Discipline to provide for the admission of southerners, “provided they give satisfactory assurances to an Annual or Quarterly Conference of their loyalty to the National Government and hearty approval of the anti-slavery doctrine of our Church.” When the
bishops of the northern Methodist church met at Erie, Pennsylvania, in June 1865, they extended an invitation to all members and ministers from any branch of Methodism to unite with them "on the basis of our loyal and antislavery Discipline."  

Contempt was the prevailing attitude among northern participants in religious reconstruction toward the southern churches as institutions and toward their leadership. Since they were fervent supporters of the rebellion to preserve slavery, southern religious leaders were hopelessly corrupt and the institutions which they controlled had to be proscribed. Secretary J. S. Backus of the American Baptist Home Mission Society denounced the Southern Baptist Convention: "if it is politically and morally wrong to support 'the Southern Confederacy,' how can it be religiously right to support 'the Southern Baptist Convention'?" Backus asked, "Would not the spirit which seeks now to perpetuate the Southern Baptist Convention, were it in its power, reproduce and sustain the Southern Confederacy?" The Methodist Western Christian Advocate insisted that there was a powerful argument for "a deliberate and persistent attempt to disintegrate and absorb" the southern Methodist church—"the argument of loyalty." The Christian Advocate and Journal believed that the northern church had a duty to enter the South independent of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, which had become "hopelessly debauched with proslaveryism and tainted with treason." In doing so, it would enter into conflict with the "spurious local Methodism of the country." Both the church and the state in the South were built upon the institution of slavery; "as with the State, so with the Church, the removal of slavery necessitates a disintegration and reconstruction." Daniel Curry, editor of the Christian Advocate and Journal, prescribed a "policy of
earnest and antagonistic aggression,” by which the Methodist Episcopal Church could “disintegrate the rival body, and absorb whatever of it shall be found worth preserving.”

If the complete disintegration and absorption of the southern churches proved impossible, northern churches still had work to do in the South among the native Unionist population, Federal soldiers stationed in the South, and the thousands of immigrants from the North who were expected to move south in search of economic opportunities. To all of these groups, southern “rebel” churches would be unacceptable. “There are true Union men in all parts of the South,” declared the Western Christian Advocate, “who can never be gathered into the fold of Southern Methodism, and who are awaiting, with anxious prayers and tears, the advent of the ‘old Church.’ It is our business to carry the Gospel, the sacraments, and all Church privileges, to these noble patriots and sterling Methodists.” The Christian Advocate and Journal likewise saw an important field in the South among whites: “There can be no doubt that very many Northern people—many of them soldiers of the Union army, with their families—will become permanent residents of the South. . . . There will also be very many genuine Union men of the South whose abhorrence of the rebellion will lead them to reject the religious services of a set of men by whom they have been so fearfully misled.”

As inviting as the southern missionary field was for the opportunities to minister to whites, it was far more appealing because of the millions of potential converts among the freedmen. God had brought a field of labor to the very door of zealous northern missionaries. Southern blacks would welcome northern missionaries carrying the true
gospel to them for the first time. They had to be educated so that they could read the Bible for themselves and become productive citizens of the reunited nation. As early as 1862, the American Baptist Home Mission Society had decided to take “immediate steps to supply with Christian instruction” the freedmen in the District of Columbia and in other areas controlled by Federal forces, and also “to inaugurate a system of operations for carrying the Gospel alike to free and bond through the whole southern section of our country, so fast and so far as the progress of our arms, and the restoration of order and law shall open the way.” By April 1865, the Society had 120 missionaries, teachers, and assistants in the South.22 Bishop Davis W. Clark of the Methodist Episcopal Church wrote to his wife from Nashville in early 1866: “it seems that God has committed this work especially to the Church, and calls her to do it now. The fields are ‘black’ for the harvest; but their very amplitude, and the greatness of the harvest, make me stagger as I look at the work to be done.” The choice of who should reap these fields which were “black unto harvest” became a source of intense competition during religious reconstruction.23

Northern Christians were initially encouraged in their views of religious reconstruction by a small group of southern ministers and laymen who accepted the northern understanding of God’s design in the outcome of the war. Never a large portion of southern churchmen or laity, these “religious scalawags”24 played a role in the early stages of religious reconstruction far out of proportion to their actual numbers. Generally southern Unionists and uncommitted Confederates, their ranks did include a number of staunch rebels who believed that God had smitten the South because of its
sins. Their public affirmations of the northern understanding of the war and vision of religious reconstruction convinced northern religious leaders that a strict policy toward their southern counterparts would be effective. Many more southerners, they reasoned, would follow these initial converts into the ranks of the northern denominations by admitting that slavery and political and ecclesiastical secession were sins. The presence of religious scalawags frightened uneasy southern religious leaders who feared that these “traitors” might actually be the vanguard of a more general defection from their disorganized ranks.

The first signs of dissent during the war came from East Tennessee, a stronghold of Unionist political sentiment. In October 1862 the Holston Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South met in Athens, Tennessee, under the leadership of Bishop John Early. Twelve preachers were charged with disloyalty to the Confederacy, and their cases occupied much of the convention’s business. Some of the ministers satisfied the Conference by making declarations of loyalty to the Confederate government. Two of the defendants were dismissed from the Conference and another was suspended for one year. At the annual conference meeting in 1863, 11 more ministers were charged with disloyalty and four were expelled. Again in October 1864, the Holston Conference expelled three members from a list of 12 defendants, this time for ecclesiastical rather than political disloyalty. These three men, the Convention charged, had met at Knoxville with others for the purpose of joining the Methodist Episcopal Church.25
Given this treatment at the hands of their Confederate brethren, Unionist Methodists in eastern Tennessee called for the organization of a rival Holston Conference. In May 1864 several Tennessee Methodists issued a call through the *Knoxville Whig and Rebel Ventilator* for Methodists “who are loyal to the government of the United States” to attend a convention in July. Meeting in the Protestant Episcopal Church in Knoxville, a convention of 55 delegates passed resolutions denouncing secession and the southern Methodist Church and calling for the establishment of a loyal Holston Conference united with the Methodist Episcopal Church. Prominent among the leaders of the convention was William G. “Parson” Brownlow, soon to be governor of Tennessee. In a recent visit to the North, Brownlow had met with northern Methodist Bishops Matthew Simpson and Davis W. Clark to discuss northern Methodist prospects in Tennessee. The convention estimated that 60 ordained ministers and another 65 unordained were ready to reestablish the Methodist Episcopal Church in East Tennessee.26

By June 1865 when northern Bishop Davis W. Clark was able to reach East Tennessee to organize the Holston Conference officially, over 5,000 Methodists were ready to join the new organization. Bishop Clark met in Athens, Tennessee, with six ministers imported from northern conferences and 40 preachers from East Tennessee. With the area divided fairly evenly between Unionists and Confederates, religious reconstruction in eastern Tennessee became a bitter rivalry which sometimes erupted into violence. Preachers were driven from towns by mobs from the opposing church, and litigation over church property continued for years. Northern Methodists distant from
the local conflict, however, were greatly encouraged by the rapid acquisition of
thousands of members. Surely thousands more across the South wanted to return to the
"old mother Church," and only needed to be organized. Thomas H. Pearne, one of the
Methodist missionaries in the South, wrote to the Christian Advocate and Journal
supporting the plan of the General Conference for receiving members. Through this
proposal, Pearne argued, 47 ministers and 6,500 members from the southern church had
already been admitted in Tennessee, Georgia, and North Carolina. When "Methodism
again covers all the country, North and South," he wrote, "teaching everywhere a pure,
unemasculated Gospel, enforcing alike on all a wholesome discipline, both as to loyalty
and liberty, the future unity and integrity of the nation, as well as its early, thorough
evangelization, will have a guarantee of incalculable value and strength."27

In September 1865 northern Methodists received further encouragement from a
group of Kentucky ministers. When the Kentucky Conference of the Methodist
Episcopal Church, South met for the first time since the end of the war, their Committee
on the State of the Church submitted both a majority and a minority report. The
majority report favored reunion with the Methodist Episcopal Church. The Conference,
however, adopted the minority report that endorsed the action of the southern Methodist
bishops in Columbus, Georgia, who called for the maintenance of a separate southern
organization. Eighteen ministers immediately withdrew from the Kentucky Conference,
and the next day, 15 of them were admitted to the Methodist Episcopal Church on the
basis of their declarations against slavery and secession as set forth in the Methodist
Discipline. Northern Methodists hailed them as “martyrs for the sake of our glorious Union,” who “in the interest of liberty and Union . . . have sacrificed all things.”

Several months later, Presiding Elder Jedidiah Foster followed their lead and transferred to the northern Church. In an article in the Western Christian Advocate, he explained to his fellow southern Methodists why he had made this decision. First and foremost, Foster reasoned, the cause of separation between the two branches of Methodism was dead. For whatever reason God had permitted the establishment of slavery, he “has certainly taken it away in his wrath.” To continue agitating the issue of slavery would be “wicked” and “heedless of the voice of God.” Second, because the division of the Methodist Church had contributed to the division of the nation, the southern Church had a duty to undo “the evil which she has been instrumental in bringing upon the country” by reuniting with the northern Church. Third, a reunited Methodist Church would wield a greater moral influence for the evangelization of the world, unhampered by sectional bickerings. Finally, Foster declared, he could not have held these sentiments in the southern Church “without being regarded as a disturber of the peace of the Church.” The “leading men of the Southern Church” as well as “all their church papers” are opposed to any talk of returning to the Methodist Episcopal Church, and “are laboring not to conciliate, but to exasperate and fill the mind with sectional hate.” Again the northern Methodists rejoiced at receiving repentant southern Methodists into their ranks.

The story and letters of the Reverend John H. Caldwell in central Georgia also encouraged northern Methodists in their plans. The Holston and Kentucky transfers
buoyed the spirits of northern Methodists, yet these areas were noted for Unionist sentiment throughout the war. Unlike these sections, Georgia had been deeply involved in both ecclesiastical and political secession and rebellion. The sentiments Caldwell expressed for the work of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Georgia were truly remarkable and vindicated those who argued that many people throughout the south still longed for a reunion with the "mother church" and the national government. Throughout the war Caldwell had been a vocal supporter of the Confederacy; in April 1864, he remained convinced that "he who looks at the past history of the conflict and views the present situation of things must be persuaded that God is on our side—that if He had intended to destroy us He would have done so long ago." In June 1865, however, Caldwell reflected on the defeat of the Confederacy and came to a radically different understanding of the providential meaning of the war. He determined that slavery "more than anything else, caused that war," and believed that its destruction was "one of the great and most beneficent consequences." He preached two sermons to his congregation in Newnan, Georgia, on the evils of slavery, and his congregation demanded his removal. Caldwell defended himself before the Georgia Conference in November, but ultimately withdrew from the southern Church and joined the Methodist Episcopal Church. Several more southern Methodist ministers soon followed him, and Caldwell quickly became the leader of the Methodist religious scalawags in Georgia.30

The northern Methodist press hailed Caldwell’s sermons as "a heroic example." The editors of the Christian Advocate and Journal believed Caldwell’s stand was "a significant indication" of the sentiments of Southern Methodists generally: "We cannot
doubt that there are many thoughtful ministers of Christ in the South of like mind; let them show like courage.” Ministers such as Caldwell encouraged northern Methodists in their assumptions about Confederate defeat and figured prominently in northern plans for the religious reconstruction of the south: “The safety of religion in the South depends to a great extent upon the immediate conduct of its pastors. God’s controversy with them is not yet concluded; but he ‘waits to be gracious.’” The Methodist Quarterly Review rejoiced in the belief that “such bold antislavery truth . . . uttered in Central Georgia” was “part of a revolution which will never go back.” The writer hoped that the sermons were “the beginning of a moral revolution of feeling which will result in the full conversion of our Southern brethren to the Gospel of truth and freedom.” When a southern-born minister in the heart of the South declared that the practice of slavery had been wrong and that he wanted to return to the Methodist Episcopal Church, northern Methodists were certain that he was only the first of many who would leave the southern Church. Caldwell’s actions confirmed their understanding of the providential meaning of the war as God’s judgment upon the South for the sins of slavery and secession, and helped shaped their attitudes toward southern Methodists who did not share Caldwell’s convictions.31

Old School northern Presbyterians also welcomed southern religious scalawags into their ranks. In North Carolina, for example, eight southern Presbyterian ministers in three separate areas of the state broke with the southern Presbyterian Church and organized churches and presbyteries which united with the northern Presbyterian denomination. Like their Methodist counterparts in Georgia, North Carolina’s
Presbyterian religious scalawags worked mostly among the freedmen and were ostracized by their former friends. In his study of this group of religious scalawags, Steven E. Brooks argues: “None of these groups, perhaps would have seriously threatened the Southern Church during ‘normal’ times, but combined with Yankee rule and Northern clerical invasion, their threat from within the Church itself evoked an intense reaction from their former colleagues.” By 1867 these ministers had gathered over 800 members into the northern Presbyterian fold.32

Thaddeus W. McRae, the Presbyterian minister who had observed the dramatic influence of Benjamin Morgan Palmer’s 1860 Thanksgiving sermon on his congregation in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, began organizing the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America in Texas. After Louisiana seceded, McRae left the state and spent the war years on the coast of Texas and in New Orleans after it was occupied by Federal troops. When the war ended, McRae returned to Texas to find that he had been discharged from the Presbytery of Western Texas, although he might return provided that he repented of his political conduct during the war. In early 1866 he became pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Austin. A majority of the congregation had been Unionists during the war, and soon after McRae arrived they left the southern Church and joined the northern Old School Presbyterian Church. In 1868, the Austin church together with churches in Galveston and Georgetown organized the Presbytery of Austin. The southern papers denounced McRae as “the Beecher of Texas,” but his activities encouraged Northern Presbyterians in the hope that other southerners would follow his lead.33
In November 1865, Secretary Thomas L. Janeway of the Board of Domestic Missions declared that there were many Presbyterians in the South who desired to unite with the old Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. The northern Church could not expect to occupy the South all at once, but “in the meanwhile, ministers South, loyal and true through all the storm of passion and of crime, will receive aid. The number of such increases. Every week brings letters from such asking what we can do and in what way the application is to be made.” Janeway was committed to helping these ministers; “we do not intend to give up the Southern States.” The Board of Domestic Missions reported to the 1866 General Assembly that it had commissioned thirteen loyal men in six southern states: “We have not thought it expedient, in the unsettled condition of things there, to send Northern men. We have found loyal men there, and the number is not so small.” Yet, the Board admitted that as far as southern Presbyterian leaders could maintain it, “the South is a sealed land to us.”

The New School Presbyterian Church also found religious scalawags among the ruins of its southern counterpart, the United Synod of the South. The majority of the New School Presbyterians in the South voted in August 1864 to unite with the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America, the southern Old School organization. In September 1864 representatives of Union and Kingston presbyteries in East Tennessee rejected union with the southern Old School body and voted to rejoin the northern New School General Assembly, which they had left in 1857. Meeting again in March 1865, the members of Union Presbytery declared that the war was not only “a crime against civil government: it is a crime against God, for it is rebellion against his
authority. In the fall 1865 meeting, they insisted that “all those who profess christianity and have aided or abetted in the late rebellion should confess their wrong before the proper church judicatory.” The presbytery proceeded to remove from its roll seven ministers “till they give evidence of repentance for complicity in rebellion.” Another minister who had supported the Confederacy confessed before the body “that events have convinced him that rebellion was wrong, and that so far [as] he has sympathized with it he has been in the wrong.” Accepting this confession, the presbytery recognized him as a member. The New School General Assembly of 1865 reconstructed Holston Presbytery, which together with the Union and Kingston presbyteries formed the reconstructed Synod of Tennessee. The General Assembly carefully instructed the three Tennessee presbyteries not to recognize or admit “any minister known to be disloyal to the Government of the United States.”

These religious scalawags adopted an interpretation of the Civil War which had much in common with the northern view. The abuses practiced under the institution of slavery, such as disregard for the marriage relationship and the ban on slave literacy, had forced black southerners into sinful relationships and inhibited their religious development. While few believed that slavery as an institution was morally evil, they did argue that the practice of slavery in the South had been wrong and were relieved to see it removed by the hand of God acting through the war. Corollary to this argument was the insistence that the southern Churches were unfit to care for the religious needs of the freedmen. Whatever their role among southern whites, the northern denominations
had a providential responsibility to minister to the newly freed slaves, to whom their southern counterparts were unable and often unwilling to minister.

Religious scalawags also declared secession in both church and state to be sinful, and generally believed that a small group of leaders had foisted these movements upon a reluctant southern public. Consequently, many of their fellow southerners earnestly desired reunion with the northern denominations, so that national Churches could be reestablished and carry out their divine mission to evangelize America and the world. To effect this union, they hoped for a simple union of the northern and southern branches of their respective bodies. On this issue they differed with northern leaders of religious reconstruction who insisted on individual repentance and the return of small groups to the denominational fold. As the process of religious reconstruction proceeded, however, these southern people in northern churches became far less optimistic about any prospects for reunion as the southern denominations stiffened and revived.

When northern Christians pondered the purposes of the Almighty in the years of strife through which they had just passed, the Civil War became a parable through which they might better understand themselves and their role in the providential unfolding of history. The conclusions which they reached had profound implications for the process of religious reconstruction in the South. While the whole nation had clearly been chastened and purified in the fiery crucible of civil warfare, God had reserved His harshest judgment for the haughty Southrons who defiantly championed rebellion and human bondage. Many southerners, however, had simply been misled by wealthy slaveholders and religious leaders into the Confederacy. By the end of the war, they
realized their mistake and anxiously awaited an opportunity to rejoin the national churches which had been barred from the South by the "slave power." The actions and reports of religious scalawags during the closing months of the war and the first months after Appomattox provided ample evidence to northern denominations that many southerners had been cut off from the Churches of their choice by the war. Because they had supported the war for the perpetuation of slavery, southern denominations were eminently unfit for the task of spiritual revitalization necessary in the South. Southern churches were both financially and morally bankrupt, unable to minister to whites and unwilling to minister to blacks. Providence had provided northern Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians with an unparalleled opportunity to refashion the spiritual life of the South. These elements comprised their understanding of God's purposes in the war as northern Christians looked southward in 1865 and 1866.

They also molded the northern plans for religious reconstruction. Slavery, the cause of disunion in church and state, was effectively removed from the nation's life by the Emancipation Proclamation, Federal forces, and the Thirteenth Amendment. Since the cause of separation was abolished, northern Christians expected ecclesiastical reunion to follow political reunion. Because unreconstructed Confederate Christians might cause division in the Churches, northern denominations required a profession of loyalty to the government and repentance for the sins of supporting treason and slavery, in effect, an acknowledgement that God had indeed judged the South for its sins. Southern ministers and laymen would have to come back individually or in small groups to assure their northern brethren of their sincerity. Northern missionaries and southern religious
scalawags would preach the pure Gospel in the South and gradually the empty shells of the southern denominations would disintegrate, and the faithful left within them would return to the “national” denominations. Even if the process of absorption took years to complete, many whites in the South—Unionists, northern settlers, European immigrants—would require the services of loyal, national churches because they would never enter a southern, proslavery church. Of course, the freedmen as well would no longer remain in the churches of their masters, and they needed the resources and the mature spiritual guidance which only northern Christians could provide for them. With this agenda for evangelization, northern clergymen and laity determined that they would have a role in the religious reconstruction of the South. Black and white southerners should not be left alone to rebuild their religious lives, for the results would be corrupt, or perhaps even dangerous to the reunited nation. When they began their program, however, northern Christians quickly learned that most religious southerners, both black and white, had different ideas about what constituted religious reconstruction.

Notes


2. Ibid., 344; Chester Forrester Dunham, The Attitude of the Northern Clergy Toward the South, 1860-1865 (Toledo, OH: Gray Co., 1942), 71-80; Oliver Saxon Heckman, “Northern Church Penetration of the South, 1860 to 1880” (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1939), 42.


7. John R. McKivigan has examined the efforts of northern abolitionists to convert northern denominations to their cause. Except for a few small denominations, he argues, northern churches remained indifferent or even hostile to an immediate emancipation program even into the Civil War. Rather than leading public sentiment against slavery, northern churches only belatedly and carefully embraced abolitionism. John R. McKivigan, *The War Against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches, 1830-1865* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), 183-201.


   Like their southern counterparts, northern ministers turned to the Bible for support of their understanding of the war and their plans for religious reconstruction. Baptist minister Alfred Patton of Utica, New York, declared on April 23, 1865: ‘Plainly, God is saying to us, by his providences to-day, what he said to his people of old, “Execute judgment upon them speedily, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment.’” Patton insisted that this passage from the Book of Ezra was God’s solution to the problem of reconstruction. Alfred S. Patton, *The Nation’s Loss and Its Lessons* (Utica, NY: Curtiss and White, 1865), 13; Paul Clyde
The editors of the *Nation* observed that "there is nothing which irritates the Southern people so outrageously as the assumption, on which nearly all our offers of reconciliation are based, that they have not only sinned, but sinned with the full knowledge that they were sinning—that they went into the war well knowing that they were about to commit a great crime. We accordingly not only look on their defeat as a piece of retribution, but we expect to them to see it in the same light, and to meet us as penitents in sackcloth and ashes, and take our advances to them as proof of our magnanimity and forgivingness." Northern evangelicals certainly believed that southerners had sinned in rebelling and in upholding slavery, though they did not believe that southerners deliberately defied God in doing so. Many, northern Christians believed, had simply been terribly misled into the war. What they did expect was for southern Christians to acknowledge in the outcome of the war God's disapproval of their actions and an admission that they had been wrong and also to express a desire to live differently in the future—in short, repentance. Despite the *Nation*’s criticisms, the position of northern evangelicals was not irrational, based on their understanding of the war.


16. Christian Times and Illinois Baptist (Chicago, IL), February 1862 (IX, No. 28); “The Prospect,” Western Christian Advocate, 1 April 1863; “A Change of the General Rule on Slavery,” Western Christian Advocate, 20 April 1864; General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (New School), Minutes, 1866, 314. See also Thomas H. Pearne, An Address on the Two Churches (Cincinnati, OH: Methodist Book Concern, 1867), 25; H. S. Foote, “Review of the War of the Rebellion,” Methodist Quarterly Review 48 (April 1866), 306-07; George Lansing Taylor, “Methodist Reconstruction,” Christian Advocate and Journal, 8 June 1865; and “Methodism in the South, From a Southern Standpoint,” Western Christian Advocate, 24 May 1865. In April 1865, the Western Christian Advocate declared, “We have never for a moment doubted that everywhere in Southern society a thorough but silent Union sentiment has prevailed. Nor have we doubted that at the practical division of the Church, in 1846, thousands parted from the old Church with heartbreaking reluctance.” “The Spirit of the South,” Western Christian Advocate, 19 April 1865.

17. “Report of Committee on the Reconstruction of the Church, New England Conference,” Christian Advocate and Journal, 27 April 1865; John Lanahan, “Southern Reconstruction,” Christian Advocate and Journal, 6 April 1865; “Methodism in the South,” Christian Advocate and Journal, 11 May 1865; Christian Herald and Presbyterian Observer (Cincinnati, OH), May 1865, as quoted in Dunham, The Attitude of the Northern Clergy, 208-09; Christian Secretary (Hartford, CT), September 1865, as quoted in ibid., 195. A contributor to the Methodist Zion’s Herald insisted that the “folly and sin” of the “proslavery and rebellious clergy” had “forever unfitted them for official position in a loyal church.” They were “unfit to be teachers, as much as any other criminals.” “The Methodist Church and the South,” Zion’s Herald (Boston, MA), 24 May 1865.

The northern New School General Assembly proclaimed in 1865 that “to disobey the civil law, unless required to do so by the law of God, is alike a crime against the State and a sin against God; rendering the offender justly amenable to punishment.” General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (New School), Minutes, 1865, 19-20.

Some southern Methodist ministers carried in their pockets a copy of the Report on Church Reconstruction by the New England Conference, and used it as a “campaign document” against any plans for reunion between the two churches. Zion’s Herald, 12 July 1865.

19. New York Examiner and Chronicle, February 1866, as quoted in Baker, Relations Between Northern and Southern Baptists, 96; General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (Old School), Minutes, 1865, 562-63; Presbyter (Cincinnati, OH), 17 May 1865; Doctrine and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1864 (Cincinnati, OH: Poe and Hitchcock, 1864), 84; “Action of the Bishops,” Western Christian Advocate, 28 June 1865. See also Vander Velde, The Presbyterian Churches and the Federal Union, 499-501.

Henry Lee Swint declared that the Yankee teachers who went south “believed that the people of the South had sinned, both in holding to that abominable institution, slavery, and in rebelling against the Union. . . . The people of the South were not only sinners, but defeated sinners, who refused to be properly humble and abject, and who, worst of all, refused to repent of the error of their ways.” Swint’s sarcastic tone reveals his own judgment of northern missionary/teachers. His interpretation is perhaps more accurate than he realized. In the eyes of northerners, southerners were worse, not because they had been defeated, but because they had been judged and still refused to repent. A sinner of any sort who behaved in this manner would be considered especially recalcitrant by a nineteenth-century evangelical. Henry Lee Swint, The Northern Teacher in the South, 1862-1870 (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1941; reprint, New York: Octagon Books, 1967), 56.


24. The phrase “religious scalawag,” as a descriptive term for white southern ministers and laymen who joined Northern denominations, is useful for three reasons. The mass of southern whites viewed these ministers in much the same way as they did southern whites who joined the Republican party—as traitors to their section and to the memory of the Confederacy. The term also easily distinguishes this group from northern ministers who came into the South after the war. Finally, the title emphasizes the political orientation of most southern members of northern denominations; many religious
scalawags were active political scalawags as well. The use of this label is not intended to be derogatory, though the label “scalawag” was initially applied as an epithet.


CHAPTER 4
GOD'S DELIVERANCE:
THE FREEDMEN'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE CIVIL WAR

Black Christians in Civil War America shared with their white brethren a strong belief in God’s providential intervention in human affairs. For northern and southern black evangelicals, the central fact of the war was the deliverance of four million black men, women, and children from the bonds of slavery.1 The central actor in this drama was God. The results of the war demonstrated his care for his children in bondage, and his condemnation of slavery and its beneficiaries. The northern people and northern armies were simply instruments in God’s hands to carry out his judgment. As such, however, northerners clearly demonstrated their greater righteousness in comparison to southerners.

Based on this understanding of the theological significance of the war, slaves and freedmen in the South began to develop their own vision for the religious reconstruction of the South. Greater autonomy in their religious lives was essential to this vision. For some this meant separate congregations within white-controlled denominations with white or black preachers. For many it meant complete separation from the churches of their masters and the establishment of churches with black pastors and black bishops or other denominational leaders. This process often occurred in spite of the protests of southern white religious leaders, who sincerely doubted the wisdom of independent black religious
organizations and just as sincerely lamented the loss of control over black religious life. The freedmen accepted northern missionaries for the valuable financial, educational, and organizational help they could offer but insisted that northerners too would not control their religious lives. Determined to accomplish their own spiritual autonomy, ex-slaves set about reconstructing their religious world as soon as the arrival of federal troops or the defeat of the Confederacy assured them of their political freedom. Despite the absence of financial resources, most freedmen left the antebellum biracial churches and formed church organizations of their own. Then began the laborious process of acquiring a meeting place, selecting church officials, establishing denominational connections, and providing for the education of black teachers and preachers. Only then could black Christianity in America reach its fullest expression.

The appropriation of evangelical Protestantism by African-Americans began in the eighteenth century, but the process accelerated rapidly in the nineteenth century. Many masters, themselves imbued with the spirit of evangelicalism, took their slaves to church with them or allowed them to go. Other large slaveowners permitted missionaries to preach to their slaves, and some even provided plantation chapels. A few slaves attended semi-independent black churches in the cities and towns of the South, which often had black preachers. Others worshipped secretly in the slave community, led by slave preachers and exhorters from their midst. Whatever the circumstances of their organized worship, many slaves eagerly adopted Christianity and drew from it both comfort and strength. By emphasizing different aspects of the Christian message than did their white
brethren and by retaining some elements of African religious systems, slaves developed a new syncretic African-American faith.

Slaves found within Christianity an indictment of the system under which they lived, a validation of their personal worth, and the promise of eventual liberation. Slavery violated God’s will because it degraded part of his creation. John Hunter, a fugitive from slavery in Maryland reported that he had “heard poor ignorant slaves, that did not know A from B, say that they did not believe the Lord ever intended they should be slaves, and that they did not see how it should be so.” Francis Henderson drew from the sermons he heard in a Methodist church the conclusion that “God had made all men free and equal, and that I ought not to be a slave.” Although Christianity proclaimed the duty of slaves to be obedient to their masters, it also declared that masters had certain obligations toward their slaves, an injunction which slaves quickly appropriated for their benefit.³

Slaves were attracted by the message that in God’s eyes all men were equal. Even the lowliest in social position were valuable to God, and eventually, “the last shall be first, and the first last.” Faithful slaves and cruel masters would both receive their just rewards in heaven, even if not on earth. Such doctrines gave slave converts a hope of future vindication and a sense of self-worth in the midst of the dehumanizing institution of slavery. With the absence of a sacred/secular dichotomy in their African culture, religion permeated the lives of blacks more completely than it did the lives of most whites.
Blacks identified themselves closely with the Old Testament Israelites, who, like them, had been enslaved by cruel masters. Although God's children had suffered in bondage for many years, he had intervened and miraculously liberated them. Moses represented for them deliverance as a people from bondage, while Jesus, who had suffered as they did, would redeem them individually from their personal sufferings by interceding with God. Just as God had delivered the suffering Hebrews from the hands of the Egyptians, so he would deliver his black children from their bondage, although in a manner as inscrutable in the providence of God as the reasons for their bondage. As the number of free blacks grew and especially as the abolitionist movement gained momentum in the North, the "Coming of the Lord" swept this side of Death, and came to be a thing hoped for in this day." For slaves during the late antebellum period and especially during the war itself, the dream of abolition was an integral part of their religion.

In the biracial churches, slaves found whites listening to them as they spoke of their conversion experiences and enjoyed a greater degree of equality with whites than anywhere else in southern society. Blacks frequently served as elders, deacons, and exhorters; some also ministered as preachers. Slaves especially enjoyed having black ministers preach to them. One ex-slave recalled, "Mostly we had white preachers, but when we had a black preacher, that was heaven." On the eve of the Civil War, 350,000 slaves were members of southern Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches. Hundreds of thousands more participated in southern churches without official
membership or worshipped in their own secret gatherings as part of the “invisible institution” of religious life in the slave community.6

Joel Williamson argues that during Reconstruction the “most distinctive trait of the black man’s religion was its emulation of the white ideal. Yet, there were differences which imparted to the Negro churches a flavor not generally shared by their white neighbors.” Peter Kolchin adds that “in most ways the black churches performed very much the same functions that the white ones did, and black religion served the same purposes as did white religion.” These interpretations raise the issue of African survivals and the distinctiveness of African-American religion, especially as it emerged after the Civil War. Scholars such as Albert J. Raboteau, Lawrence Levine, Sterling Stuckey, and John W. Blassingame have emphasized the persistence of African religious beliefs and practices among southern blacks in the antebellum period and beyond. While some slaves did attend biracial churches, these scholars argue, their primary religious experiences occurred either in a secret “world apart” or cleverly mixed with outward displays of Christianity. In contrast, John B. Boles insists that the “overwhelming majority” of slaves practiced their religion within biracial churches, rather than in the “invisible” religious gatherings of the slave quarters.7

William E. Montgomery attempts to resolve this debate by arguing that two kinds of churches evolved among African-Americans. The first was formally organized and denominational, while the other was a folk church, “the syncretistic product of a dynamic African-American culture.” The strength of the first lay among free blacks in the North and in the South; the second consisted of the churches of southern slaves. Emancipation
and the bond of race brought the two churches together organizationally after the Civil War with the possibility that the folk churches would be "structurally and doctrinally integrated" into the institutional churches. However, Montgomery argues, differences of class, experience, and culture continued to divide blacks in the postwar South.  

Williamson and Kolchin underestimate the differences between black and white churches; they differed in more than just "flavor." Important distinctions existed in preaching and worship styles, views of the social implications of Christianity, the providential meaning of the Civil War, and the proper course for the religious reconstruction of the South. Furthermore, these divergences were more important than the class distinctions within black Christianity which Montgomery highlights. However, the actions of many blacks in the first years of freedom also indicate that their commitment to the institutions and theology of evangelical Protestantism was stronger than many scholars suggest. The organization, ritual, and theology of black churches were in many cases patterned after those of white churches of the same denomination in the area. Newly freed blacks often painstakingly recreated structures and practices parallel to those of their white neighbors, even to the point of denominational bickering. As Boles wrote, "perhaps in no other aspect of black cultural life had the values and practices of whites so deeply penetrated as in religious services."  

When the southern states seceded and civil warfare erupted, black Christians expectantly awaited their promised deliverance. After yearning for freedom for their entire lives, slave Christians felt that God had heard their petitions and was coming to their aid and vindication. A slave in Franklin County, Mississippi, during the war went
secretly into the woods to pray, but he prayed so loudly that he was discovered and punished. Undaunted, he continued to pray. At one point his master beat him so unmercifully for praying that "his shirt was as red from blood stain 'as if you'd paint it with a brush.'" Decades later, his wife Candus Richardson told an interviewer, "I prayed too, but I always prayed to myself." She proudly declared that it was her husband's prayers and "a whole lot of other slaves' that cause you young folks to be free today." Clayborn Gantling, another ex-slave, reported that he had "heard slaves morning and night pray for deliverance. Some of them would stand up in de fields or bend over cotton and corn and pray out loud for God to help 'em and in time you see, He did." Gantling like many other slaves knew the source of their deliverance: "I tell you chile, it was pitiful, but God did not let it last always."10

For southern black Christians in 1860, God was real. They knew him and knew that he cared for them. They also discerned that the supporters of slavery had violated God’s will by holding them in bondage. God would not allow this sin to continue either perpetually or unpunished. Although they were uncertain how or when, black Christians were confident that God would deliver them. And on January 1, 1863, He did. Fundamental to the freedmen’s understanding of the Civil War, as they looked back on it, was the belief that God had divinely intervened in human history to emancipate them. Furthermore, the Civil War itself had been primarily neither a chastisement nor a judgment of the South (though it was certainly the latter), but rather a vehicle for the providential liberation of four million black men, women, and children. This revolution revealed the spiritual significance and purpose of the war. God had heard their prayers;
God had been faithful to his children. Henry Blake, a former slave in Alabama, remembered that “aftuh Surrender, Niggers dey sung, dey prayed, dey preached, yassuh.” An old slave preacher named Jesse Wallace “'clared dat God loved his folks en sent his angels down tuh set his folks free en yuh shoulder seen de shoutin.”11

God had also judged white southerners for their sins. Like northern evangelicals, the freedmen believed that God had poured out his judgment upon the South for the sins of slavery and secession. Savilla Burrell, an ex-slave from South Carolina related a visit to her old master years after the war: “I went to see him in his last days and I set by him and kept de flies off while dere. I see the lines of sorrow had plowed on dat old face and I 'membered he'd been a captain on hoss back in dat war. It come into my 'membrance de song of Moses: ‘de Lord had triumphed glorily and de hoss and his rider have been throughed into de sea.’” The scriptural reference is to Exodus 15:1, a passage which relates the Israelites’ celebration of their deliverance from the pursuing Egyptian army that had perished in the Red Sea. Just as the Egyptians had been punished for their enslavement of the Jews, so southerners had been judged for their mistreatment of black slaves.12

Bishop Daniel Payne of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church returned to his native state of South Carolina in May 1865. In 1835 the South Carolina legislature had prohibited schools like the one he conducted for black children in Charleston. Payne, a free black, fled the state and settled in Philadelphia. There he joined the AME Church and was ordained a bishop in 1852. As he passed through Charleston once again in 1865, Payne reflected on the religious significance of the war. The devastation which
surrounded him, “the burned, ruined walls of the Circular and Cumberland Churches,” all demonstrated to Payne “the devastating hand of war, and the hot indignation of that God who, when he stretches out his arm against the oppressor, never draws it back till every fetter is broken and every slave is free.” Accompanying Payne was Richard H. Cain, a minister of the AME Church who was born in Virginia and taken to the North by his parents. As he surveyed the ruins of war-torn Charleston, he declared that the city had become “a monument of God’s indignation and an evidence of His righteous judgments.”

The North held an important place in blacks’ understanding of the providential significance of the war. Although God himself had effected their deliverance, the freedmen believed God had chosen northern armies, northern people, and northern Christians as his instruments. One former slave recalled: “When the war was over de people jus’ shouted for joy. De men and women jus’ shouted for joy. ’Twas only because of de prayers of de cullud people, dey was freed, and de Lawd worked through Lincoln.” A freedwoman emerging from the water in a baptismal service shouted: “Freed from slavery, freed from sin. Bless God and General Grant.” Several South Carolina blacks told missionary Austa M. French of their prayers for the North. One ex-slave told her, “I pray dat God bless you, and gib you success! Massah angry, but mus’ pray for de comin’ ob de Lord, an’ his people.” Another said, “I knew God would bless you, an’ give victory, I feel it when I pray. . . . I knew God would bless de North.”
Thomas L. Johnson recalled that in Richmond blacks who could read "believed that the eleventh chapter of Daniel referred directly to the war," and that "we often met together and read this chapter in our own way." Although many were perplexed by verse 5 which told of the great strength of the king of the south, "verses 13-15 would be much dwelt upon" for they spoke of the ultimate triumph of the North:

For the king of the north shall return, and shall set forth a multitude greater than the former, and shall certainly come after certain years with a great army and with much riches. And in those times there shall many stand up against the king of the south: also the robbers of thy people shall exalt themselves to establish the vision; but they shall fall. So the king of the north shall come, and cast up a mount, and take the most fenced cities: and the arms of the south shall not withstand, neither shall there be any strength to withstand.

As Johnson later reflected, he and others "eagerly grasped at any statements which our anxiety, hope, and prayer concerning liberty led us to search for, and which might indicate the desirable ending of the great War." God would surely bless northern armies against the wicked South, they reasoned. As the war drew to a close, slaves, freedmen, and free blacks viewed northern armies as liberating agents of God. Clearly, racist attitudes permeated northern society, and many individual northerners were deeply racist. However, most freedmen concluded that, given the choice between northern and southern whites, northerners were the more genuinely interested in their political, social, and spiritual interests. The results of the war even seemed to be God's validation of this opinion.15

As Johnson's reminiscences suggest, southern blacks struggled to understand the providential meaning of this great conflict. Their white brethren in the North and in the
South were engaged in the same pursuit, though the conclusions which they reached were different. As Carter G. Woodson wrote in his *History of the Negro Church*, “God was moving in a mysterious way to perform wonders which in the near future would make all things plain. Stand still, therefore, and see the salvation of the Lord.” Although southern black Christians were willing to wait for the Lord’s deliverance, they did not stand still. Instead, they began slowly to fashion a new religious life for themselves during the latter half of the war.

The first and primary action of black Christians during the war was to leave the biracial churches of antebellum times as an exercise of personal freedom and as an expression of religious independence. For some this action took on a symbolic importance similar to that of leaving their place of bondage. The exodus would not reach its peak until several years after the war, but the vanguard of this migration left the churches of their masters in 1863, 1864, and 1865. This movement was most obvious in those areas disrupted by fighting or under the control of Federal forces. In 1864 the Rappahannock Baptist Association in Virginia reported that many of its slave members “have been excommunicated from the churches, and others will be, for joining our enemies, and in some instances entire congregations have been broken up.” Soon after Union troops occupied New Orleans in April 1862, blacks in that city began to organize new churches.

Although northern black and white missionaries followed Federal troops into the South to organize churches, they often found black churches or the black members of biracial churches already organized. When Bishop Daniel A. Payne travelled to
Nashville, Tennessee in December 1863, he found a committee waiting for him who represented 63 blacks. He immediately organized them into “St. John’s Church” and accepted them into the AME Church. Missionary James W. Hood of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) Church arrived in New Bern, North Carolina in January 1864, where he found 400 black former members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South ready to join one of the African Methodist congregations. Although a missionary of the Methodist Episcopal Church had been ministering to them for a year, they joined the AMEZ Church.18

In Savannah and Augusta, Georgia, several black churches with large congregations had existed since before the war. Augusta had six black churches—two Methodist, three Baptist, and one Presbyterian. At least four had black pastors. Throughout the state, there were 28 semi-independent black Baptist churches. N. I. Houston, the pastor of the Third African Baptist Church of Savannah, greeted AME missionary James Lynch when he arrived in the city shortly after Union troops occupied the city in December 1864. Deserted by their regular white pastor from the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, the black Methodists of Andrew Chapel in Savannah were kept together by William Bentley, C. L. Bradwell, and William Gaines. When Lynch arrived in the city, he proposed to them that they join the AME Church and made secret arrangements with the Rev. C. L. Bradwell “to take out the church.” The proposal was “thoughtfully considered” and “after mature deliberation was accepted.” When the Quarterly Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South in Savannah met on July 22, 1865, no representative of Andrew Chapel was present, and the minutes noted that
“it is said that it has withdrawn from our connections and attached to the African Methodist Church.”

Often these black churches were held together or newly organized by slave preachers and exhorters. In the spring of 1865, the Rev. Morris Henderson, a recently freed slave preacher, led the black portion of the congregation out of the First Baptist Church in Memphis to form their own church. Another slave preacher, John Jasper, established the Sixth Mount Zion Church in Richmond. Black Methodist congregations in Norfolk and Portsmouth, Virginia, and a black Baptist congregation at Hilton Head, South Carolina, all had black pastors. White evangelicals often looked upon black slave preachers with suspicion. Confederate soldier Morgan Callaway wrote to his wife Leila in September 1863 about one of their slaves: “I told you in the first letter I wrote you about Lawrence, that he cost me a great deal of money. . . . He is not a very bad negro, but like all negroes who go to the Army he is considerably spoiled. He is a moral negro. I mean he does not curse nor get drunk, but he has no business preaching.”

In other areas blacks did not have structured congregations or preachers. Some had simply withdrawn from the churches of their masters and were uncertain about how to proceed. Others had left the homes of their masters in search of lost relatives or simply as an exercise of their freedom. The efforts of northern missionaries in Union-occupied areas were vital to the religious organization of these ex-slaves, and all of the northern evangelical denominations enjoyed at least some success among the freedmen during the war. The wartime exodus, however, provided only a hint of what was to follow.
Southern blacks welcomed northern black and white missionaries for the organizational and financial help they could offer. They sometimes made great efforts to connect themselves to the northern denominations. When blacks in northern South Carolina heard that a black denomination was holding a conference in North Carolina, two black leaders walked from Lancaster, South Carolina to New Bern, North Carolina, a distance of 300 miles, to learn about the AMEZ Church. The following year, Bishop J. J. Clinton organized the South Carolina Conference of the AMEZ Church. Although northern missionaries played an important role in the organization of black religious life in the postwar South, their role should not be exaggerated. As William E. Montgomery has observed, the northern missionaries’ “primary contribution to the continued progress of the church was in releasing the great creative energy of southern blacks themselves.” Missionaries often served as catalysts for a change in church relations, but they did not create the conditions which initially prompted the freedmen’s desire for separate churches. Those conditions had roots deep in the antebellum past and first found expression in the crucible of war and emancipation.21

By 1865 and 1866, then, the freedmen had developed their own vision of what religious reconstruction should be, based on their interpretation of God’s purposes in the war and on their wartime experiences. This vision had five major elements. The first part of the freedmen’s model was the assertion that their former masters could not properly look after their religious interests. The leadership of southern society and southern churches were stained with the sins of slavery and secession. They had been guilty of starting a fratricidal war to uphold the wicked institution of slavery, and God
had judged them severely for their sins. Furthermore, southern white ministers often neither understood nor addressed their spiritual needs. One freedman insisted that white ministers did not understand the slaves: “We couldn’t tell NO PREACHER NEBER how we suffer all dese long years. He know’d nothin’ ’bout we.” Even after the war, whites continued to preach to blacks much as they had before the war. Charles J. Oliver, after preaching a sermon on Lazarus and the rich man to the white congregation, “proceeded to the church of the colored people.” It was so late that many had gone home, but to those who remained, Oliver “preached them a little sermon about the contract.”

Blacks who challenged the antebellum racial barriers after the war met firm resistance. One freedwoman who tried to sit with the whites in a Montgomery, Alabama, church was “very politely told that accommodations were prepared for her in another part of the building, and she moved off quickly and took her place in the gallery.” The newspaper which reported the incident ridiculed, “The old woman was hardly to blame. She knew no better, and probably had been told that she was as good as the whites, and entitled to as many privileges.” Implicit in the newspaper’s patronizing tone was the widely shared belief that freedmen were entitled to no more religious privileges than they had as slaves. The white leaders of the Antioch Baptist Church in Savannah allowed blacks to continue to attend, but they had to remain in the gallery as they had done as slaves. If blacks were to enjoy greater religious freedom, they would not find it in the biracial churches of the antebellum period. In response to such attitudes among whites, one black Presbyterian who had joined the northern Church
told a friend who remained in the southern Church, “Come down out of the gallery to the ground floor in your own church.”

The second element of the black vision follows directly from the first. Since southern white ministers could no longer care for the spiritual needs of the freedmen, they needed to establish their own churches in which they could govern their own religious lives. Despite advice from their white brethren to the contrary, blacks throughout the South both during and after the war withdrew from biracial churches. Basil Manly, Sr. complained from Alabama: “Our colored members have petitioned the church, to be set apart, as a separate church. We think they are not yet prepared for the responsibility of an independent church state. We have told them so, but yet shall let go our hold of them, if after our advice, they desire it.” What Manly seemingly did not recognize was that white southern evangelicals could not hold freedmen in the churches if they were determined to leave, as the black members of the Baptist Church in Montgomery were.

Black ministers, representing 26 black Baptist churches in South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida, met in July 1865 at Hilton Head, South Carolina, to organize the Zion Baptist Association. Other associations quickly followed. The Thomasville Association was formed in 1865 from black Baptist churches in three counties in southern Georgia. The Shiloh Association consisted of churches in east central Georgia, while the Ebenezer Baptist Association was formed for black churches in north Georgia. In 1866, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, freedmen left the biracial Baptist church and formed the First African Baptist Church of that city. In 1865, black members of the Primitive Baptist
churches of the South organized their own denomination, the Colored Primitive Baptists in America, in Columbia, Tennessee.25

When a congressional committee asked a black minister in Marietta, Georgia, if blacks preferred their own churches, he told them that “most of them prefer to have them to themselves.” In December 1865, the black Methodist congregation in Marietta had “voted the minister out, and he in the pulpit at the time.” The Reverend Samuel W. Drayton, a black minister in Augusta, joined the AME Church and took his entire congregation with him. Black Methodists in Macon, Georgia, voted to unite with the AME Church in the summer of 1865.26

Also during the summer of 1865, Andrew Brown, a black layman from Dalton, Georgia, met missionary James Lynch in Atlanta, who told him about the AME Church. When the Methodist Episcopal Church, South sent a white preacher to the black Methodists in Dalton, Brown told him, “we must look for ourselves.” Brown and the rest of the black congregation left, but they “were in a sad plight, for there was not an ordained minister from Chattanooga to Atlanta.”27

Some southern white ministers realized their inability to retain black members and aided in their withdrawal. Methodist preacher David Sullins, appointed to Wytheville, Virginia, by the Holston Conference in 1866, realized that the large black membership of this church was no longer content to remain in the gallery or in the rear seats. Sullins told the black members about the AMEZ Church, and “believing they would do better in that church than in ours, I called their leaders together and explained it to them, and advised them to go into that organization.” Sullins invited a minister of the AMEZ
Church to Wytheville, and “we got the colored folks together, and after a little talk they agreed to go in a body to that church.” Sullins took out the church register and transferred all of the black members, and he concluded that “all were pleased.” Few southern ministers were so willing to see their black members depart, although Sullins might be better credited with acceptance of the inevitable. His account demonstrates that these black Methodists had grown restive under the antebellum patterns and “were beginning to assert their independence.” Sullins simply aided a change which he was unable to stop.28

In a few remarkable instances, white ministers actually left the southern denominations to continue to minister to the freedmen in northern denominations. After North Carolina Presbyterian Samuel C. Alexander was accused of disloyalty to the Confederacy in mid-1864 and his church refused to pay him, he began work among the freedmen. Another North Carolina Presbyterian, Sidney S. Murkland, organized a separate congregation for black Presbyterians and built a church for them on his farm near the white church. In response the white members drove him from the pulpit. Both Alexander and Murkland later joined the northern Presbyterian Church (Old School). As pastor of the Covington and Oxford, Georgia colored charges for 1866, southern Methodist John W. Yarbrough found that his congregations wanted to transfer to the Methodist Episcopal Church. Yarbrough was “willing to join that Church and serve them as their pastor.” Writing to the superintendent of the Georgia and Alabama Mission District of the northern Church, Yarbrough insisted that although he would be “cut off” from many friends and relatives, “I want to do something for the poor colored
people and the Church South has not the ability to help us if they had the will. My charge will follow me.” A more accurate assessment would be that Yarbrough followed his charge.29

Some Baptist churches were quick to encourage black majorities to leave because their congregational form of polity raised the fear of black majority control of local churches. The Coosa River Baptist Association advised churches with a few black members to allow them to remain, but those with black majorities should seek racial division. In northwestern Alabama, white Baptists encouraged black independence since blacks were in the majority of many local congregations and “if they saw proper to exercise their rights as members, now being free, they could control those churches and call whom they pleased as pastor.”30

The decision to leave the biracial churches was sometimes a difficult one and occasionally even caused dissension within the black community. In Wilmington, North Carolina, 625 black members and 17 black class leaders voted to leave the Front Street Methodist Episcopal Church, South and join the AME Church. Four black class leaders and approximately 200 black members remained in the congregation with some 200 white members. General John M. Schofield ordered on March 5, 1865 that the church building would be available to the AME congregation for half of each day and to the southern Methodist congregation during the other half. When one of the AME class leaders was addressing the congregation, he condemned those who had remained in the southern Church: “I’se got no faith in no man what won’t go wid he own race. Some of dese niggers is reb niggers—dey secessioners. Dey ants to be stayin’ in de white folks
church. Dey Judases, dey betray dar own color.” He then called by name several of the black class leaders who had not left the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and concluded “dey all belong to de secesh crowd.” One of those leaders, Tom Smith, was in the crowd and stood up to return the insult: “You de secesh niggers yourself—you secede frum de Church of God!”

Black Baptists in Albany, Georgia, suffered from a similar division. Blacks and whites in the Albany Baptist Church worshiped separately, but they belonged to the same local church organization. On October 14, 1866, the leadership appointed a biracial committee to visit the black congregation and “consult with the brethren and examine into their ability to sustain the Gospel and maintain church government.” On November 23, the black congregation met in conference and “after some discussion upon the subject of a division or a withdrawal of the colored church from the whites,” they “unanimously decided that they remain together at least another year.” Seven deacons for the black church would be ordained on the fifth Sunday in December, and the church would retain the Reverend Ralph Watson, a black preacher, as their minister. White church members declared that Watson’s “Christian character is above reproach” and that his services were “blessed of the Lord.” By February 1867, however, the black Baptists were divided among themselves. Members of the black congregation sent a letter to the white members charging the Reverend David Hines, “a member of our church,” with “serious irregularities” including creating a “faction and schism in our church by leading off a portion of our members and establishing a new church.” For these and other offenses,
they asked that Hines "be suspended from the exercise of his office as an Elder" until he could be tried before the church.32

The third part of the freedmen's plan for religious reconstruction was their desire for black preachers. Slave preachers had been an important part of antebellum black religion, and were often the primary ministers to black congregations or the black members of biracial congregations. Eugene Genovese concluded that "slaves heard their own black preachers, if not regularly, then at least frequently enough to make a difference in their lives." Anderson Edwards, a Baptist slave preacher in Texas, preached "what massa told me" publicly, but "on the sly," he told them "iffen they keeps prayin' the Lord will set 'em free." A preacher on a plantation in Mississippi preached on the themes of obedience to masters while whites were present, but when they were not, "He come out with straight preachin' from the Bible." Ex-slave James Childress from Tennessee remembered that slave preachers promised that faith in God would deliver them from slavery. Ex-slave Walter Calloway of Alabama reported that whites sometimes sent their minister to the plantation to preach to the slaves, but "dey druther heah Joe," their slave preacher. Although they were usually illiterate, many slave preachers were quite eloquent and they shared life experiences with their black congregations, a bond which no white preachers, or northern black missionaries, shared. In 1863 a white minister observed that "the 'colored brethren' are so much preferred as preachers. When in the pulpit there is a wonderful sympathy between the speaker and his audience. . . . This sympathetic influence seems the result of a . . . peculiar experience."33
When freedom came, blacks continued to look to their slave preachers, elders, and exhorters to guide their religious lives. Louise A. Woodbury, an American Missionary Association representative in Norfolk, Virginia, observed that blacks “have been obliged to listen to white ministers provided, or placed over them by their masters, while they have had men among themselves whom they believe were called of God to preach, who were kept silent, by the institution from which they are now freed.” To remain under the supervision of white preachers “is too much like old times to meet with their approval. Their long silent preachers want to preach and the people prefer them.” An Alabama newspaper complained that the black masses believed the pronouncements of black preachers and preferred them over the whites.34

Slave preachers and exhorters were anxious to form autonomous congregations from the plantation missions and black portions of biracial congregations after the war. One northern Methodist missionary remarked that “Veteran preachers among the late slaves were prompt to offer their welcome services.” Monroe Boykin, an ex-slave and member of the Baptist church in Camden, South Carolina, led 66 of his fellow freedmen out of that church and founded the Mount Moriah Baptist Church in 1866. Alexander Bettis, an exhorter in the Baptist church in Edgefield, South Carolina, led 17 members out of that church and went on to establish dozens more black churches. Nathan Ashby, who had preached to slaves in the basement of the Baptist church in Montgomery, Alabama, founded the new First Baptist Church of Montgomery after the war. White southerners considered these preachers to be unfit leaders of the freedmen. A South Carolina Presbyterian missionary complained that “the large negro membership
is . . . much scattered, and, I dare say, few can ever be gathered together again. They are, I am told, much carried away and misled by ignorant preachers of their own color.”

Although slave preachers and exhorters resented and resisted all efforts on the part of northern black and white missionaries to depose them as leaders of the freedmen, they eagerly sought out ordination or licensure from denominational representatives. Monroe Boykin, who began a black Baptist church in Camden, South Carolina, was ordained by two northern missionaries. A southern Methodist minister in Virginia wrote AME leaders that blacks in his congregation wanted to join their organization, “but without authority and no one to give it, they can do nothing while others are busy.” While organizing a black church in Helenaville, South Carolina, in 1863, AME missionary James Lynch licensed two local preachers and two exhorters. He marvelled, “I never saw men appreciate anything so much in my life.” Prince Morell of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, made an even greater effort to secure his ordination. Morell travelled to Mobile in November 1865 where he met and was ordained by “persons who went form Mobile to New Orleans for the purpose of being ordained themselves that they might thus be qualified to ordain Prince.” They gave Morell “a certificate that they had ordained him at the call and request” of the Baptist Church in Tuscaloosa. Basil Manly, Sr., whose son Charles was pastor in Tuscaloosa, declared that this idea “was wholly and absolutely false.” On June 24, 1866, Charles met with the black members of the church and chastised them for the “unscriptural and disorderly way of procuring a sort of quasi ordination for Prince” with which at least some of the black members had concurred.
After addressing them, Charles Manly left them to discuss the matter. That evening they sent him a note declaring that they wished to withdraw. While most black Christians in the South desired ecclesiastical separation from their former masters, they did not repudiate denominational precepts. Some black preachers, such as Prince Morell, made great efforts to ensure that they were ordained or licensed by legitimate denominational representatives.36

The fourth component of the freedmen’s vision of religious reconstruction involved the relationship with the various denominational agents who entered the South during and after the war. Generally, the freedmen welcomed the assistance of northern black and white denominations, provided they did not attempt to exert complete control over the ex-slaves’ religious lives. Southern black Christians had considerable experience with local church life in the antebellum period. Some had been black preachers, elders, and exhorters. Black church members had observed if they had not always participated in many of the organizational functions of the local church. In some areas, a committee of black members was appointed to oversee church discipline among the slave members. Although their decisions usually had to be approved by the white congregation, this practice gave black members experience in church government, and as Albert Raboteau maintains, “so laid a foundation upon which freedmen would rapidly build their own independent churches after emancipation.”37

There were, however, clear limits to black participation in antebellum church life. While they were received into the fellowship and governed by the same church discipline, black members did not have a voice in the selection of pastors or other church
leaders. Furthermore, they had little experience with denominational organization. In this area especially, southern black Christians had to rely on northern black and white missionaries and on southern white ministers for guidance. The extra-local aspects of church polity were quite important in the hierarchical Presbyterian and Methodist churches, though considerably less so in Baptist churches. This gap in the slaves’ religious experience explains why northern missionaries often found independent black congregations in many areas of the South. Although these freedmen were certain that they no longer wished to remain in biracial churches, they were uncertain about how and with whom to connect at the denominational level. Much of the early growth of the AME and AMEZ Churches in the South occurred when preexisting local black congregations added their names to the roll of those denominations. In Georgia, for example, the AME enrolled strong black churches in Augusta and Savannah in 1865. From these two centers, “it was only a matter of time when the radiating influence should draw in other outstanding bodies of Methodist Christians.” Soon, “large and interesting bodies of colored Methodists” in Macon, Columbus, and Atlanta were added to the AME Church.38

The final element in the freedmen’s religious vision for the religious reconstruction of the South was their intense desire for schools to teach their children and also for colleges to train black preachers and teachers. The main objective of many black Baptist associations was education. They often established a school or joined with other associations in founding schools. Andrew Caldwell, a Methodist religious
scalawag, reported from Rome, Georgia, that all the freedmen there "unite in one thing, and that is a great desire to have their children educated." 39

In this aspect of religious reconstruction, northern missionaries and northern funds were particularly welcome and they played a vital role in the erection of schoolhouse/churches and in the provision of teachers until black teachers could be trained. The Freedmen's Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church established 59 schools for freedmen throughout the South in its first year of operation. All three biracial evangelical denominations in the North established colleges in the South to train black teachers and preachers, as did the two African Methodist denominations. This accomplishment formed the northern evangelicals' most enduring legacy from religious reconstruction. The federal government, through the Freedmen's Bureau, also supplied desperately needed funds for schools and teachers. 40

Armed with a vision of religious reconstruction which included these five elements, southern freedmen faced the challenges and uncertainties of religious reconstruction. The black church became the central institution in most black communities, a center of social, economic, educational, political, and of course, religious activity. From it came the black community's leaders. From it sprang the hope that God, who had delivered them from bondage, would continue to watch over them in freedom. Throughout much of Reconstruction and beyond, black religion functioned as, in the words of E. Franklin Frazier, "a refuge in a hostile white world." 41 Ironically, this role parallels that played by the religion of white southerners in the postwar South, a refuge in a world which for a time was controlled by others.
Notes

1. Northern black evangelicals took part in the religious reconstruction of the South primarily through the activities of African Methodist Episcopal and African Methodist Episcopal Zion missionaries. Many of these missionaries were born free, and they shared some of the same religious ideals and attitudes as northern white missionaries. Furthermore, southern blacks did not always welcome black missionaries; old slave preachers and exhorters jealously guarded their positions in the changing black communities. However, northern blacks’ understanding of the significance of the war, their vision of religious reconstruction, and their race ensured that they had more in common with the freedmen than with white missionaries. Like the freedmen, they believed that emancipation was the central providential fact of the war. Therefore, black missionaries are grouped with the freedmen rather than with their white counterparts from the North.

In April 1866 the AME denominational newspaper, the Christian Recorder, reported that “the religion of the South is debauched. With many the failure of the cause has led to infidelity in God’s providence. In no instance did any one express the idea that the South had done wrong on slavery and rebellion. Even in the revivals lately reported, there has been no confession of sorrow for their sins.” By accepting these statements made by Joseph E. Roy, an agent of the American Baptist Home Missionary Society, the AME Church united with northern white denominations in a dim view of the state of southern religion. However, the AME also entered into fraternal negotiations with the “debauched” Methodist Episcopal Church, South to receive its black members who wanted to leave, a step which was unthinkable for the Methodist Episcopal Church. “Religious Condition of the South,” Christian Recorder (Philadelphia, PA), 28 April 1866; Leon F. Litwack, Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery, (New York: Random House, 1980), 4

2. Strife developed between black and white Baptists when whites tried to control black Baptist associations and conventions. Blacks were not allowed to participate in the management of the American Baptist Home Mission Society. When the American Baptist Publication Society, at the behest of southerners, refused to accept black contributions to its Sunday school literature, blacks were outraged. In 1886 they organized the National Baptist Convention, and soon the National Baptist Publishing House began to publish its own Sunday school literature. John Hope Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom: A History of American Negroes, 2d ed. (New York: Knopf, 1965), 398.


The Methodist Episcopal Church, South had 171,857 black members, the Southern Baptist Convention had approximately 150,000, and the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America had, in the South, as many as 30,000 slave members. These totals do not include black members of Baptist churches that were not affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention. Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1860 (Nashville, TN: Methodist Publishing House, 1861), 293; Southern Baptist Convention, Proceedings, 1859, 60-61; Ernest Trice Thompson, Presbyterians in the South (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1963-1973), 1:443.


Boles insists that the underground church is an “insufficiently understood and greatly exaggerated aspect of slave religion.” The meetings in the slave quarters and brush arbors supplemented rather than supplanted worship in biracial churches. Boles, Black Southerners, 163-64.

This recent debate parallels in important respects the earlier disagreement between E. Franklin Frazier and Melville J. Herskovits about the survival of Africanisms in black culture in America. Frazier insisted that slaves were stripped of most of their culture by the process of enslavement, while Herskovits maintained that many Africanisms survived and had an important influence upon African American culture in the United States. E. Franklin Frazier, The Negro Church in America (New York: Schocken Books, 1964); Melville J. Herskovits, The Myth of the Negro Past (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1958).

8. Montgomery, Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree, 36-37.


Although the following catechism, used at a freedmen’s school in Richmond, Virginia, was probably written by a northern white teacher, the ideas that it expresses were common among the freedmen themselves:

“Are you glad you are free?”
“Yes, indeed.
“Who gave you your freedom?”
“God.
“Through whom?”
“Abraham Lincoln.”

National Freedman (New York) 1 (1 June 1865), 162.


18. Payne, Recollections of Seventy Years, 156; James W. Hood, One Hundred Years


20. Thomas O. Fuller, History of the Negro Baptists of Tennessee (Memphis, TN: Haskins Printing Co., 1936), 64; Alrutheus A. Taylor, The Negro in the Reconstruction of Virginia (Washington, DC: Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1926), 189; Montgomery, Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree, 86; Morgan Callaway to Leila Callaway, September 1863, Morgan Callaway Papers, Special Collections, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University, Atlanta, GA.


22. French, Slavery in South Carolina and the Ex-Slaves, 127.


24. Basil Manly II to Jane Smith, 16 November 1865, Manly Collection of Manuscripts, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, TN.


28. David Sullins, Recollections of an Old Man: Seventy Years in Dixie, 1827-1897 (Bristol, TN: King Printing Co., 1910), 327.

Apparently, either Sullins also wrote to the AME church or his Recollections were in error about which denomination received the black membership of his church. In the fall of 1866, he wrote to the journal of the AME that freedmen in Wytheville were “very anxious, indeed, to see a minister of your Church, and learn from him what they had better do as to church relations. The most intelligent and reliable among them want to connect themselves with you, and desire to hold the congregation together until they may have an opportunity to do so. . . . But without authority and no one to give it, they can do nothing while others are busy.” Perhaps Sullins wrote to both the AME and AMEZ denominations, and the first one to send a representative won the “prize” of black members. D. Sullins, “Macedonian Cry,” Christian Recorder, 1 September 1866.


30. Coosa River Baptist Association, Minutes, 1866; Josephus Shackleford, History of the Muscle Shoals Baptist Association (Trinity, AL: By the author, 1891), 84.


32. Albany Baptist Church Records, 1860-1899, Mercer University Library, Special Collections, Macon, GA.


34. Litwack, Been in the Storm So Long, 461; Clarke County Journal, 18 October 1866, quoted in Kolchin, First Freedom, 119.


CHAPTER 5
CROSSING JORDAN: THE BLACK QUEST FOR RELIGIOUS AUTONOMY

By 1866 southern black Christians knew how religious reconstruction should proceed. They were now free, or in the terms of their favorite biblical metaphor, they had been delivered from their Egyptian bondage and the exodus had begun. However, much remained to be done to reach the promised land in their religious lives. The wilderness and the River Jordan remained to be crossed. Over the next decade, the freedmen made that voyage with help from a variety of sources. During this period their vision of religious reconstruction, formulated during the war and in the immediate aftermath, took concrete form.

While some black Christians left biracial churches during the war and in 1865, the period from 1866 to 1870 witnessed the largest black withdrawal. In some cases, northern black and white missionaries served as catalysts for the restive black members of biracial congregations. In other places, blacks withdrew to form autonomous churches which only later formed links with other churches or joined northern denominations. Southern whites attempted to influence the religious lives of their former bondsmen by assisting in the establishment of separate churches and ecclesiastical organizations. The southern Methodists and the Cumberland Presbyterians went so far as to establish entirely separate denominational structures for their remaining black members. However, these
initiatives came only after white religious leaders realized they could no longer hold blacks under the authority of their own denominations. Blacks were unwilling to accept the antebellum patterns of church relationships and whites refused to grant black ministers and members equal privileges in ecclesiastical affairs. Under these conditions, the black withdrawal continued.

As Figure 5-1 demonstrates, the three major evangelical denominations in Georgia lost their black members quickly after 1865. By 1870, the Methodist Georgia Annual Conference reported only 1,504 black members out of a membership of 27,371 a decade earlier. In that same year, the constituent associations of the Georgia Baptist Convention counted only 10,354 out of a pre-war membership of 27,691. The Presbyterian Synod of Georgia had few, if any, black members in 1870. The synod ceased reporting black membership statistics in 1866 because there were so few. The majority of its 643 black members in 1860 had gone into the northern Presbyterian Church or left the Presbyterian faith entirely and joined the Baptists or Methodists. In 1877, only one Baptist association had more than a handful of black members, and most of them drifted away in the following years. The autonomy of local congregations and a loose denominational structure explain Baptist churches’ relative success in retaining black members. Although Baptists retained more of their black membership longer, the trend was clear in their case as well. Refused equality in ecclesiastical bodies and generally treated with indifference, black Baptists slowly withdrew and formed associations of their own.
The black withdrawal from white churches sometimes disrupted white ecclesiastical structures. At the beginning of 1865, for example, the Sunbury association of Baptist churches along the coast of Georgia from Savannah to Darien boasted 7,542 members, of whom 6,857 (91%) were black. In July of 1865, 20 black Baptist churches withdrew from Sunbury and, together with three Florida and three South Carolina churches, formed the all-black Zion association. With this massive loss of membership, Sunbury dissolved. On November 24, 1866, Baptists from 11 churches in three separate associations—Sunbury, Piedmont, and Union—met in Liberty County to organize the
New Sunbury association. Even with the influx of churches and members from neighboring areas, this New Sunbury association had only 843 members, of whom 115 (14%) were black. By 1875 the New Sunbury association reported no black members.²

The Georgia association of Baptists, which included the city of Augusta and neighboring counties to the northwest, had a very different experience with its black members. The association initially lost 55% of its black membership in 1866 when it “granted Letters of Dismission to the following churches, all in full fellowship and good standing, viz: Central African, Ebenezer African, Spirit Creek African, Springfield African, and Thankful African.” These five black congregations, all located in Augusta, had enjoyed a semi-independent status in the antebellum period, and quickly departed the association after the war. However, other blacks in the Georgia association who attended biracial churches were slow to leave the organization. While most associations were rapidly losing their black members, the Georgia association still had 2,172 blacks in 1870, and 2,046 in 1875. In the latter year, the Georgia association had almost twice as many black members as all of the other associations in the Georgia Baptist Convention combined. The white ministers and members of the Georgia association seem to have made a greater effort than those of other associations to maintain contact with their black membership. Many of the blacks who left joined the all-black Ebenezer association, organized in 1867. The Ebenezer association exchanged fraternal messengers with the Georgia association from 1869 to 1880.³

After black Georgia Baptists withdrew from biracial churches, they began to create associations of their own. The primary motive for forming associations was
education. Many of the associations founded a school or joined with other associations in establishing schools. After these early schools closed, the associations diverted their efforts toward scholarships to the handful of black colleges which had been erected with the aid of northern Christians. Often the black associations drew their membership from white associations with similar geographical boundaries. The Zion association, organized in 1865 along the Georgia coast, drew heavily from the biracial Sunbury association. The Walker association (1868) in east central Georgia absorbed much of the black membership of the Hephzibah association, while the Southwestern Georgia association (1870) consisted largely of black members of the Bethel association. The freedmen of the Walker association began the Walker Baptist Institute in Waynesboro in 1881, and the Southwestern Georgia association operated the Americus Baptist Institute in Americus. In 1870 representatives from several black associations met in Augusta to form the Missionary Baptist Convention of Georgia. By 1877, Georgia had 26 black Baptist associations with a combined membership of over 91,000.4

The Georgia Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South also experienced a dramatic loss of members. The black congregation of Andrew Chapel in Savannah left the Methodist Episcopal Church, South in the summer of 1865 and joined the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. No minister had been appointed by the Georgia Annual Conference for Andrew Chapel when the conference met in January 1865. However, when the quarterly conference of the white church met in November, they voted to request that the Georgia Annual Conference continue to appoint a preacher to Andrew Chapel. Like many other white southern Christians, these Savannah
Methodists were confident that the freedmen would shortly return to the fold. In June 1867 the Eatonton Methodist Church sadly noted that “the entire colored charge have dissolved their connection with us and united with the African M. E. C.”

The September 1867 minutes of the Bainbridge District in southwest Georgia demonstrate the frailty of the freedmen’s relationship to the southern Church. On the Spring Hill and Camilla circuits and in Thomasville, the “colored people adhere to our church.” In the Ocklocknee mission the “colored people adhere to our Church up to this time,” but in Bainbridge, they were “not doing as well as desired.” At Albany the black Methodists had withdrawn to the AME Church, while on the Blakely circuit, they were divided, “some of them gone over to the African Methodist Episcopal Church.” That year the Bainbridge District reported 1,646 black members; the next year, 242. At the third session of the Georgia Conference of the AME Church in 1869, the assembled delegates received the “cheering news” from Fort Valley that “the colored Methodists there desired to give in their adherence to our church.” Across the state throughout this period, black Methodists left the southern Church, and united with one of the three northern Methodist denominations—the Methodist Episcopal Church, the AME Church, and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) Church.

The experience of Hopewell Presbytery in Georgia illustrates the difficulties of reaching acceptable adjustments between the races in religious matters. The Hopewell Presbytery, located between Augusta and Macon, had 145 black communicants in 1863, 61 of whom were members of the Macon Church. The church had appointed three black men, David Laney, Joseph Williams, and Robert Casters, to act as exhorters for the
black portion of its congregation. In April 1866 the black members of the Macon Church petitioned the Hopewell Presbytery that they be set apart as a separate congregation. The presbytery ordained the three black exhorters as “Presbyterian ministers, with power to preach the gospel, to administer the sacraments of the Church, to solemnize marriages, and to ordain ruling-elders and deacons.” The presbytery agreed to ordain them with two provisions. First, the black ministers “shall be regarded as ordained ministers in the Presbyterian Church only in connection with their own people.” Second, the presbytery would not ordain the black ministers “unless they shall obtain, from them, previously, a public expression of their adhesion to the doctrines and discipline of the Presbyterian Church, and are fully persuaded of their personal piety, and their competency to instruct colored congregations in religious matters.” The presbytery also appointed David Laney pastor of the separate black First Church of Macon.

Within a year the arrangement had become unsatisfactory to the black ministers. Joseph Williams wrote a protest to the presbytery, complaining that black ministers held an inferior position in that body and requesting that he be dismissed. The three black ministers had already organized Knox Presbytery, the first all-black presbytery in the nation, which later joined the northern Presbyterian Church. In response, Hopewell Presbytery struck the names of the black ministers from their rolls. Other black Presbyterian congregations were established in Savannah, Macon, Dalton, Athens, Atlanta, and Newnan. In 1868 the presbyteries of Knox, Catawba (North Carolina), and Atlantic (South Carolina) united to form the Atlantic Synod of the northern Presbyterian
Church. This synod included all of the northern Presbyterian work along the Atlantic coast and in 1873 had 6,600 members.8

Southern white Christians responded to the black exodus with a mixture of dismay, relief, and irritation. In the face of black withdrawals and the threat of losing all influence in black religious life, white evangelicals were forced through five stages of accommodation in an attempt to retain at least some of their dwindling black membership. The adjustment did not take place at the same rate in all denominations and in all locations, nor did all individual churches with black members go through each of these five steps. In some areas, the process began during the war, proceeded rapidly, and was virtually complete by 1865. In other places, whites only gradually changed their attitudes in the 1870s. The larger pattern which emerges is one of whites' gradually relinquishing their control in response to black initiatives throughout the South, a process which was complete by the mid-1870s.

At first, white churchmen insisted that emancipation need produce no change in blacks' ecclesiastical relationships. Moreover, any change would be unwise and perhaps dangerous. In 1865 the Bark Camp Church in Burke County sent a message to the Hephzibah Baptist association, asking simply, "What is the proper status of the colored members of our churches?" While admitting that the black members' political status had been changed, the Hephzibah association insisted that their social status "remains the same as during slavery" and that "ecclesiastically, their 'status' and church relations are unaffected." The General Assembly of the southern Presbyterian Church, meeting in Macon, Georgia, in December 1865, received a similar query. The General Assembly
resolved that "whereas experience has invariably proved the advantages of the colored people and the white being united together in the worship of God we see no reason why it should be otherwise, now that they are freedmen and not slaves." Displaying a similar attitude, the Antioch Baptist Church in Savannah, Georgia, permitted blacks to attend its services as long as they remained in the rear section of the building they had occupied during slavery.9

Central to the assumption that antebellum relationships should persist was the belief that white southern Christians understood the freedmen best and were also best prepared to help them. The first pastoral letter issued by southern Methodist bishops after the war urged southern Methodists to assure black members "that as heretofore we have been, so we will continue to be, their friends, and in every available way aid their moral development and religious welfare." The Memphis Annual Conference declared: "We are bold to assert that the best friends the black man ever had, or will have, are the Ministers of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South."10

White southern evangelicals feared that if they did not maintain religious contact with the freedmen in their midst, black religion would deteriorate into superstition. As the Methodist Memphis Annual Conference warned, "if we do not provide amply for their religious wants, we fear that ignorant and superstitious men will rise up among them as teachers and guides, who will lead them into false notions of religion that will ultimately culminate in the worst forms of superstition, idolatry, and barbarism." Reeling from the loss of over ninety percent of its 1865 black membership, the Bethel Baptist association in southwestern Georgia declared in 1870 that "with few exceptions,
the colored population are not now commonly enjoying the preaching of a gospel sound either in doctrine or precept.” Instead, “the religious meetings among them are generally becoming noted for extravagance and disorder, and often for performances violative of common decency.”

White Christians’ also feared that northern missionaries would gain undue influence among the freedmen. The Southern Baptist Convention in 1866 expressed its concern over northern missionaries among the freedmen: “While we are not opposed to any right-minded man aiding in this important work, it is our decided conviction, from our knowledge of the character of these people, and of the feelings of our citizens, that this work must be done mainly by ourselves.” By 1869 the editor of the Baptist Christian Index in Atlanta attributed the difficulties of evangelizing the freedmen to “industrious and widespread efforts of political and fanatical emissaries to alienate Baptists ‘of African descent’ from their white brethren in the South—to induce their withdrawal from our churches—to lead them to forsake our ministry, and accept in lieu of it the ministry of ignorant persons of their own color, or of ‘loyal’ (and often irresponsible) adventurers from a distance.” These northern missionaries persuaded the freedmen that “they had never heard the ‘full’ or even the ‘true’ gospel from their old instructors” and created “in their minds a demand for ‘social equality’ as the condition of religious fraternity.”

The second stage of the white response to black restlessness was the provision of separate black churches with white ministers. These churches would remain within the parent ecclesiastical organization. Methodist editor David S. Doggett, who would be
elected bishop in 1866, wrote in the fall of 1865 that the southern Methodist Church must organize its black members into independent congregations and supply their pulpits with “judicious white ministers.” These white ministers were especially important because northern ministers “would inflict incurable damage upon this nascent churches.” A closely related third stage was that of providing black ministers to separate churches still under the authority of the local and regional white church bodies.

Black ministers and other leaders quickly learned that they would not be accepted as equals in white ecclesiastical bodies. When a black Baptist church in La Grange, Georgia, petitioned for admission to the Western Baptist association in 1866, a committee formed to consider the request recommended that the association “receive the colored Church at La Grange, under its watch-care.” The association requested that the black congregation report their statistics each year “by letter,” and urged them to forward funds for “missionary or other purposes” to the association. In 1868 two more black churches, Antioch and Canaan, were admitted into the association “upon the basis the La Grange colored church was in 1866.” At the same time, the La Grange black church, “having joined the African Association of Atlanta,” was removed from the roll of churches.

When it requested statistics from the La Grange church by letter, the Western association was expressing its desire that no black representatives attend the associational meeting. The Ebenezer Baptist association made its demands more explicit when in 1867 it resolved to admit black churches into membership provided that they, “in all cases, represent themselves by some orderly white brethren of the nearest white church.” If
the black churches failed to send white representatives, “their connection [will] be dissolved.” The members of the Ebenezer association made the racial proscription complete by insisting that any black association which wanted to correspond with them had to “represent themselves by white messengers.” Unsatisfied with excluding blacks as voting members of the association, they wanted no blacks in their midst at all.15

The fourth stage of white adjustment came in response to black demands for more autonomy and greater authority over their churches. In this phase white churches encouraged the establishment of separate black associations, conferences, and presbyteries. In part this decision was a method of dealing with the issue of equal representation for black ministers and congregations which continued to plague the white ecclesiastical structures. Unwilling to admit blacks to equality in these bodies, southern white Christians advocated the formation of parallel organizations. In 1866 white Georgia Baptists in the Western association recommended to their black brethren “the propriety of constituting churches of their own” and pledged their “assistance in organizing an Association, if they so desire.” The sooner black Baptists were able to care for themselves, the association frankly admitted, “the better it will be for them and for us.” In 1871 the Washington Baptist association between Atlanta and Augusta, Georgia, resolved to “recommend to the colored churches in our midst to organize themselves into an association.”16 For black Baptists, the formation of associations generally marked their withdrawal from the southern body, if they had not already left as individual congregations. As early as February 1866, the Christian Index correctly
predicted that black separation from the white Baptist churches was "only a question of time."  

As they gradually realized that their black members would not remain in biracial churches led by white ministers, southern Methodists moved toward the establishment of independent black conferences. In the General Conference of 1866, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South adopted a plan for the organization of black churches, districts, annual conferences, and even a "separate Conference jurisdiction for themselves, if they so desire and the Bishops deem it expedient." Over the next four years, five black annual conferences were organized. In November 1867, Bishop Robert Paine organized the Memphis Colored Conference in Jackson, Tennessee. Some 10,000 members from the Memphis and Tennessee conferences of the southern Methodist Church joined the new conference. Of 14 presiding elders, only one, Isaac Lane, was black. In January 1869, Bishop George Foster Pierce organized the Georgia Colored Conference in Augusta with approximately 13,000 members. At least six of the 16 districts in the conference had black presiding elders. Three other conferences, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Alabama, were also organized in 1868 and 1869.

Cumberland Presbyterians likewise began organizing an entirely separate church structure for their black members. Replying to the desires of its black membership and to black claims for equal representation in the presbyteries, the General Assembly of 1869 approved the formation of black presbyteries. Over the next two years, black presbyteries were organized in Middle Tennessee (Elk River), West Tennessee (Hopewell), and East Tennessee (Greenville). In November 1871 at Fayetteville,
Tennessee, these presbyteries united with the Huntsville Presbytery of Alabama to form the first synod.20 Black Presbyterians in the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS) followed suit after 1874. In response to appeals from the Synods of Mississippi, Memphis, and South Carolina, along with the Presbytery of East Hanover in Virginia, the General Assembly of the PCUS urged its presbyteries and synods to organize black churches which would then be organized into black presbyteries and synods.21

Torn between genuine Christian concern for black southerners and their own pervasive racism, white southern evangelicals were sometimes uncertain of the will of God. Georgia Baptists in the Western association, when faced with the request of a black church for admission to the association, insisted that the questions involved were “grave and complicated in their character and exceedingly difficult of solution.” The hesitancy of the 1869 General Assembly of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church to endorse black presbyteries stemmed from a broader uncertainty about how to treat its black membership, a subject “environed with no ordinary difficulties.” However, Moses T. Weir, a black minister, forced the issue by requesting to be seated in the Assembly as the representative of a newly formed black presbytery. In response to Weir’s challenge and a request from black leaders for their own presbyteries, the Assembly instructed its synods to form black presbyteries “whenever, in the judgment of the Synod, the best interests of the colored membership of the Church will be subserved thereby.” The Assembly declined to seat Weir because “it would not be for the advancement of the Church, among either the white or the colored race, for the ministers of the two races to meet together in the same judicatories.” The Assembly thought it
“prudent for all our Church judicatures to confine themselves to such steps as are obviously necessary and proper for the present and await the further developments of Divine Providence before determining upon an ultimate policy.”

The final stage of white adjustment to the black exodus was the organization of an entirely separate and independent denomination for black members. By the time the southern Methodist and Presbyterian Churches and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church had reached this decision, most of their black members had departed to northern denominations. In 1870 the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South approved the formation of a new denomination for its black members. The original plan in 1866 had provided for separation, but the black jurisdiction would remain under the authority of the General Conference, bishops, and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. In 1870 the bishops announced their intention of “organizing them into an entirely separate church, and thus enabling them to become their own guides and governors.” It also provided for the transfer of church property once the new Church had been established, and appointed a delegation to advise and assist the black members in the organization of their General Assembly.

In December 1870, forty-one black ministers and laymen from the southern Methodist Church met in Jackson, Tennessee, to organize the Colored Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church. Six delegates came from Georgia, and 13 came from Tennessee. The Organizing General Conference elected two bishops, William H. Miles of Kentucky and Richard H. Vanderhorst of Georgia, both born slaves. On the final day of the conference, Bishops Robert Paine and Holland N. McTyeire officially consecrated
Bishops Miles and Vanderhorst. In a symbolic gesture fraught with more meaning than perhaps either set of bishops realized, Bishop Paine called Bishop Miles to his chair while Bishop McTyeire left his seat for Bishop Vanderhorst. Paine said, “The time has come for us to resign into your hands the presidency of this body, and the episcopal oversight of your people. . . . Henceforth, you are their guides and governors!” The formation of the CME Church marked the end of most white southern involvement in the religious lives of black Methodists.24

The culmination of the movement toward segregation in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church came in May 1874. At the Publishing House of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Nashville, delegates organized the General Assembly of the Colored Cumberland Presbyterian Church. The new Church had seven presbyteries with 46 ministers and only 3,000 communicants.25 The PCUS waited even longer before organizing its black members into a separate church. By 1895 it had only 70 black churches with some 700 members scattered throughout its territory, including seven in Georgia and five in Tennessee. Three years later, on May 19, 1898, representatives of four independent presbyteries and two PCUS presbyteries, representing approximately 1,500 black Presbyterians, met in New Orleans and organized themselves into the Synod of the Colored Presbyterian Church in the United States and Canada. In 1899 the name of this Church was changed to the Afro-American Presbyterian Synod, and in 1917 it quietly reentered the southern Presbyterian Church.26

These five stages of white attitudes highlight several important aspects of religious reconstruction. Blacks were clearly the important historical actors in this movement;
white evangelicals in passing through these various phases were reacting to black demands. Not all black members left the biracial churches immediately. White attempts to retain some degree of control over the religious lives of their former slaves were directed only at those who remained within the southern churches. Those who left were beyond the reach of either white accommodation or control. These varying attempts at accommodation also emphasize the gulf which separated black and white Christians. Southern white evangelicals firmly refused to treat their black members as equals; black Christians increasingly determined to accept nothing less.

Outside of the official ecclesiastical reactions to black withdrawal, some southern whites violently opposed the establishment of independent black churches and schools and especially those having any association with northern denominations. Northern Presbyterians reported from Tennessee in 1866 that “four schoolhouses, two of them used as churches, erected by the freedmen, were burned by lawless persons.” In February 1869 the large AME church building in Macon, Georgia, was burned by an “incendiary.” A few weeks later, another arsonist burned the freedmen’s school in Clinton, Tennessee.27 Although these acts of violence cannot be linked directly to southern churches, they tacitly encouraged such actions by insisting that independent bodies of black Christians or those linked with “radical” northern denominations were dangerous to southern society.28 These attacks were most frequent during the late 1860s when reconstruction governments controlled the southern states on the strength of black votes and denominational competition for black members was especially intense.
Black evangelicals who departed southern Churches in the decade following the Civil War needed assistance in four major areas. First, they needed organizational help. For the independent-minded Baptists, the establishment of a separate local congregation was often sufficient. However, most Christian freedmen were illiterate and unfamiliar with the procedures for constituting a government for a local church, so even black Baptists often needed some assistance. For the more hierarchical Methodists and Presbyterians, whose organizations were in important respects built from the top down, the authority of bishops, conferences, assemblies, synods, and presbyteries was an important part of their religious life. Nevertheless, some congregations of black Methodists and Presbyterians became virtually independent in the disruptions of the war and the immediate aftermath, and only later did they connect themselves with another ecclesiastical organization.

The newly emancipated Christians' second need, closely related to the first, was for the licensing of their preachers and the ordination of their ministers. Again, black Methodists and Presbyterians placed more emphasis on this requirement than did black Baptists, but in all denominations, both the black ministers themselves and their congregations wanted a duly constituted authority to recognize and approve these newly emerging leaders.  

The third prerequisite for establishing a stable and independent religious life was the acquisition of church buildings. Many black congregations were shut out of the buildings they formerly occupied once they bid farewell to the southern denominations. Although a church might have been built entirely by slave labor and used only for black
worship services, the building itself was owned by white trustees. Black Christians were rarely able to wrest control of a church building from unwilling trustees through resort to military or judicial authorities. Recently freed from bondage, they had few resources to devote to the erection of church buildings, and therefore they looked to others for help. As AME missionary Thomas Crayton wrote from Lumpkin, Georgia, in 1867, "Our greatest want at present are houses of worship. Oh, that the Lord would send us help to fill that want!" 

Their fourth desire was for the education of black men and women to provide the freedmen with preachers and teachers. Excluded from formal learning, these ex-slaves coveted education for their children and a trained ministry for their churches. As with church buildings, freedmen lacked sufficient resources to establish educational institutions alone.

For Baptists and Presbyterians, two broad sources of religious aid were available to meet their needs, the southern denominations from which they had departed and the white northern denominations which had sent missionaries among them. Black Methodists also enjoyed these sources of support and received additional benefits from two northern black denominations, the AME and AMEZ Churches. The federal government, through the agency of the Freedmen’s Bureau, assisted all denominations of black Christians in their quest for church buildings and education, furnishing money and materials for schoolhouse/churches and for paying teachers. Each of these particular groups was willing to help meet the needs of southern black evangelicals, but they too had their own priorities and often embraced a different and conflicting view of
religious reconstruction. The freedmen's decision to ask for assistance and the responses of those whom they asked were crucial factors in determining the shape of black religious life in the post-war South.

Southern white denominations were the most readily available source of aid, but black evangelicals were sometimes reluctant to accept advice and direction from their former masters. Nevertheless, individual southern white ministers and congregations did provide vital assistance for local black churches taking their first steps toward organizing their own churches. In some cases blacks and whites shared a genuine emotional attachment to each other which manifested itself in a harmonious division and continued interaction after the separation.

White church organizations were eager to give counsel in order to maintain some measure of control over black religious life. The Hephzibah Baptist association, "knowing that our colored brethren are unacquainted with the mode of constituting and organizing a church, and believing that they will need the assistance of pastors and other brethren when such a work is undertaken," urged its member churches to "offer their services to the colored brethren to aid and assist them." Even after black churches were organized "they will still need counsel and advice in discipline, and in many other things."33

Another important benefit from the white churches was the use or transfer of property. Lacking a clear view of the fate of its black membership in December 1865, the Georgia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South declared that it had no right to transfer property held by trustees for black members of that church.
However, in cases where no blacks remained members of the southern Methodist Church, the Georgia Conference recommended that the black former members be permitted to use the church buildings for worship. The primary legacy of white southern Methodists to their black membership after the organization of the CME Church in 1870 was the transfer of church property valued at approximately $1,000,000 to black CME trustees. White Baptists in Darien, Georgia, displayed a similar mixture of benevolence and resignation to the new religious situation. After General Sherman’s troops burned the Baptist church there during the war, white Baptists decided not to rebuild and gave the church lot to Baptist freedmen.34

Although southern white evangelicals declared that they had a responsibility to provide education for black ministers and teachers, little aid actually followed. Early in the 1870s, the Southern Baptist Convention supported two black students in schools started by northern Baptists in the South. In 1875, however, Southern Baptists discontinued this work citing denominational poverty. In the 1880s Southern Baptists held a limited number of ministers’ institutes for the education of black pastors. Interest in this venture soon failed as well. Although many Baptist state conventions acknowledged their responsibility for providing for evangelization and education among the freedmen in the late 1860s, most said nothing about the freedmen after 1870. The Augusta Institute, a Baptist college for training black ministers, had been in intermittent operation since 1867, but the Georgia Baptist Convention ignored it until a native southerner, Dr. Joseph T. Robert, took the presidency of the school in 1871. Robert, a former slaveholder who had moved to the North in 1850, rapidly built up the
institution, and in 1879 it moved to Atlanta and became the Atlanta Baptist Seminary. Beginning in 1872, the Georgia Baptist Convention passed several favorable resolutions praising the “sound and wholesome instruction” offered at the Augusta Institute. In 1876 the Convention observed with pleasure that the school was, “as such enterprises in our midst should all be, under the immediate care of a Southern man.” However, the southern state body offered no financial support for the struggling school. The Rev. E. K. Love, a black missionary, testified in 1878 to the positive effects of Robert’s efforts. Black churches which had ministers trained under Robert “are in better order, know more about the Holy Bible, have clearer ideas, less superstition, and yell less during preaching” than other churches. Robert had done a “great work” in teaching Georgia’s blacks “the true manner of worshipping the great God.”

Southern Presbyterians and Methodists likewise paid lip service to the ideals of black education but produced little tangible support for freedmen’s education. Only in the 1880s did the Methodist Episcopal Church, South make any serious effort to educate southern blacks. Southern Methodists, responding to an appeal from the CME Church, organized Paine College in Augusta, Georgia, in 1883, a joint educational venture sponsored by the two Churches for the education of black ministers and teachers. The first president of the institution, George W. Walker, was a white presiding elder from the South Carolina Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. In Jackson, Tennessee, the CME Church had begun its own institution in 1882. By 1887 the new president of Lane Institute was the Reverend Thomas F. Saunders, a member of the Memphis Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South and a former
Confederate soldier. These two white college presidents, whose salaries were paid by the southern Methodist Church, provided a measure of white southern control, but they also encouraged southern white financial support for these colleges, resources which would have been unavailable otherwise.\textsuperscript{36}

Northern white denominations were a second and perhaps more important source of assistance for freedmen. Much to the consternation of white southern evangelicals, representatives of the American Baptist Home Mission Society (ABHMS), the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA) entered the South on the heels of Union armies and continued to come throughout the 1860s and into the 1870s. Although initially these missionaries intended to minister to both black and white southerners, they soon found their most fertile missionary field among the freedmen. Black Christians found northern denominations appealing because they represented the delivering power of the North, the tool God had chosen to humble the South and set the captives free. Northern missionaries also declared that their Churches did not make distinctions on the basis of race. As religious reconstruction progressed, however, many black Christians came to understand that their northern brethren were only slightly less paternalistic and racist than southern evangelicals. Nevertheless, northern white missionaries did provide help by organizing black churches and by providing the freedmen with ministers or ordaining those who already served them.

The most important service northern white missionaries and denominations performed was their ability to tap northern sources of financial assistance. Early in
religious reconstruction, this aid was directed toward acquiring land, erecting church/school buildings, and providing elementary education. Later, northern religious philanthropy was directed toward the establishment of southern colleges which would train black preachers and teachers.\textsuperscript{37}

Southern black Methodists also received assistance from two northern black denominations, the AME and AMEZ Churches. Organized in 1816 and 1820, respectively, both of these denominations grew out of local black congregations which had withdrawn from the Methodist Episcopal Church. Prior to the Civil War, these denominations expanded among the black population of the northern states. In 1866 the AME Church had approximately 50,000 members, while ten years later it had over 300,000 members. The AMEZ Church had 4,600 members in 1860; by 1870 its ranks had swelled to 125,000. The vast majority of this growth was among the freedmen of the South.\textsuperscript{38}

Although these northern black denominations did not have the financial resources available to their white counterparts, they appealed to Methodist freedmen because they were black, and some of the missionaries had been born slaves. Lacking the resources initially to provide church buildings, the primary benefits which the northern black Methodist denominations brought to the freedmen were organization and the authority of licensing and ordination.\textsuperscript{39} Several of the earliest representatives of these denominations in the South had remarkable organizational abilities. Ministers and bishops such as James Lynch, Henry M. Turner, Daniel Payne, and Joseph J. Clinton rapidly organized the black portion of southern Methodist congregations into self-sustaining churches.
They recognized and authorized the existing leaders in most of these congregations and gathered hundreds of thousands of black Christians into their denominations. Having established local congregations, these missionaries aided them in appealing to the Freedmen's Bureau or northern benevolent sources for aid in buying a lot, building a church/schoolhouse, and securing the services of a teacher.

The presence of so many denominations vying for members created much turmoil in religious reconstruction. The competition among denominations for black members is amply illustrated by the Methodist experience in Georgia. From 1866 forward, the Methodist Episcopal Church, the AME Church, and the AMEZ Church all competed for the black Methodists who were leaving the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. After 1869, they were joined by the CME Church as well. Figure 5-2 illustrates the numerical results of this rivalry, as well as the loss of black members by the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.

The highest prizes in the competition for black Methodists were the large semi-independent congregations in the larger towns of the state. Augusta had two such black Methodist congregations. The Reverend Samuel Drayton, one of the few black ministers ordained before the war by the southern Methodist Church, was pastor of one, while Edward West, only recently ordained, was the pastor of the other. In 1865, missionary James Lynch enrolled Drayton and his congregation in the AME Church. West's church, however, was divided, and West adhered to the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. In 1866 AME missionary Henry M. Turner wrote that West, "the cat's paw of the Southern Church," was "old and ignorant, and I suppose he thinks he is doing right."40
Figure 5-2: Black Methodist Membership in Georgia, 1860-1877

Note: Georgia’s Methodist membership statistics differ from regional averages because the CME Church was comparatively strong in the state, while the AMEZ Church was particularly weak. The CME Church was strongest in the states of Georgia, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Alabama. The AMEZ was strongest in North Carolina, Alabama, and South Carolina. Several efforts to obtain reliable AMEZ data failed, but sources suggest no more than a few thousand members in the state during this period. The strength of the AME Church was more evenly spread across the South.

White minister James E. Evans of Georgia had chaired the Committee on Colored Membership at the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South in 1866. The committee’s report favored the channeling of those black members who desired to leave the southern Church into the AME Church to prevent them from joining the Methodist Episcopal Church. From mid-1866 to late 1867 AME missionaries and southern Methodist preachers cooperated, and whole black congregations were transferred to the AME Church. In return, AME missionaries agreed not to attempt to break up
congregations of black Methodists who wished to remain in the southern denomination and to adhere strictly to "the one work of preaching the gospel." Although the AME bishops asked the southern General Conference to cede church properties used by the freedmen to their denomination, the southern Methodists declined.41

In 1866 Fortune Robeson, an AME minister following the instructions of his presiding elder Henry M. Turner, attempted to take charge of the black church in Lumpkin, Georgia. The white southern Methodist pastor, J. C. Simmons, insisted that the black congregation had not requested to join the AME Church because it expected to become part of black structure within the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, as provided for by the 1866 General Conference. Simmons wrote to the Southern Christian Advocate for advice. The reply came from James E. Evans, pastor in Columbus and chairman of the recent General Conference's Committee on Colored Membership. Evans declared that those who wanted to join the AME Church could do so, but the AME Church had pledged not to interfere with congregations that wished to remain in the southern Church.42

Determined not to interfere with southern Methodist congregations, AME missionary Henry M. Turner did not attempt to recruit the Trinity Methodist Church in Augusta and its pastor Edward West. However, on June 15, 1867, Bishop Joseph Jackson Clinton organized the Georgia Conference of the AMEZ Church with the large Trinity Methodist Church in Augusta as the leading congregation. Turner declared that Clinton, "with a flank move, which certainly bespeaks considerable strategy for him, attacks this moral citadel, and with such a surprising pressure, that he carried everything
before him." Clinton’s victory was short-lived. Soon after the close of the organizational meeting, Trinity Church with its pastor Edward West left the AMEZ Church. In 1869, West became the presiding elder of the Augusta District of the Georgia Colored Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South and in 1870 went with that conference into the CME Church. As James W. Hood, a bishop and historian of the Church, wrote, “our hopes for Georgia were lost. Augusta was one of the three important points in Georgia at that time. The Methodist Episcopal Church held Atlanta, the African Methodist Episcopal Church held Savannah, but if we could have held Augusta we should have been in as good fix as any of them; but we failed to hold Augusta, and so lost Georgia.”

Representatives of all of the Methodist bodies frequently resorted to such military metaphors to describe the congregations they had captured, secured, or held for their particular branch of Methodism. For example, Andrew W. Caldwell, a white religious scalawag in the Methodist Episcopal Church worked among the freedmen in Rome and Cartersville. An AME minister with the support of the local southern Methodist minister was attempting to attract black Methodists in Cartersville to his denomination. Caldwell wrote to his supervisor that “our loss of Cartersville would be a signal triumph to our enemies, and this will be the result unless we give them aid speedily.” AME minister Henry M. Turner wrote to the denomination’s newspaper in Philadelphia that he was “happy to inform you that I have captured Griffin, Ga., and every one of the colored Methodists in it.” The weapons of this warfare were promises of church buildings for
worship and schoolhouses and teachers for education. The prizes were black congregations.44

Similar problems plagued black Methodists in Tennessee. In Nashville, the St. John’s Chapel AME church organized by Bishop Payne in December 1863 was afflicted with division. B. L. Brooks became pastor in November 1865, and by June 1866 had increased the membership to around 300. However, 30 of the original members left the church and went back to the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. These original members then claimed the property because it was deeded to white trustees. In August “judgment was given” against the AME congregation and they had to leave the church building “simply because the people would not worship under the spiritual direction of the Methodist Church South. For this crime we were compelled to leave the house that we had built in the days of slavery.” One year later, the AME congregation had purchased a lot on Capitol Hill for $3,000 and had completed the basement of their church.45

The critical assistance which black Christians received from northern and southern denominations should not obscure their own contributions to the rebuilding of their religious lives. The freedmen’s intense desire for a new religious life is best illustrated in their remarkable efforts to secure church and school buildings and establish schools. From Lumpkin, Georgia, an AME minister wrote in 1867, “Our people are earnest for education, and while much is being done in many parts of this howling wilderness of sin and ignorance in this country, not a dollar has been given by the Government, or from any other source, yet we have from three hundred to three hundred and fifty attending
day school in this county.” In 1867 John H. Caldwell, a missionary of the Methodist Episcopal Church in western Georgia, collected $300 from the freedmen in Grantville and $400 from those in Whitesville. The Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church agreed to provide $350 for the former and $300 for the latter place. After these funds had been pledged, Caldwell wrote to the Superintendent of Education for the Freedmen’s Bureau to request contributions of $350 and $300 to establish a church and school building in each of these communities. The Bureau granted the money with the provision that the lot be deeded to black trustees. In 1870 superintendent John W. Alvord of the Freedmen’s Bureau marvelled when he learned that freedmen in Macon, Georgia were erecting a $10,000 brick church which was “planned and constructed by their own mechanics—tasteful in style, and to be paid for wholly by themselves.” Alvord noted that the freedmen “give more liberally for church purposes than even towards the support of their school.” That black Georgians, only a few years out of slavery, could raise these sums attests to their commitment to education and to a separate religious life for themselves.46

Not all black Christians had the resources to support either their churches or educational institutions. An AME minister wrote from Albany, Georgia, that although they had “a very neat little church here,” it was poorly furnished, “for the people all seem very poor and therefore not able to contribute much for church purposes, and barely able to pay the expenses of their pastor.” Although these black Methodists were willing to “do their duty,” the “necessities of life forbid their giving very largely.”47
By 1870 most black southerners had withdrawn from the antebellum biracial churches and had entered either a northern denomination or a separate organization established by southern churches for their black members. However, separation did not resolve the racial issues which confronted southern religion. As late as 1878, the issue of race was still troubling a few white churches directly. In that year, the Reverend Henry F. Hoyt and his congregation of 70 in the Presbyterian Church in Darien, Georgia, were forced "to decide definitely the position of our colored members in our church." The church was divided over the status of Mrs. Todd, a hispanic member of the church. Insisting that they would decide the question upon the "principle of right, not of expediency," one group offered a resolution insisting that it was not right "to break down the social barriers between the white and colored races, even in the house of worship or at the communion table." Therefore, "we deem it right to assign our colored members a subordinate position both in the church and at the Lord's table." In a second resolution, however, the authors declared they did not "class Mrs. Todd with the colored race, but on account of her free birth, her Spanish parentage, her education, and her intimate association with the whites," she was entitled to all of the privileges of the white race in the church. After discussion, the first resolution was amended to declare that "while we do not consider it right to endeavor to break down the social barriers between the white and colored races, still we do not deem it right to assign our colored members a subordinate position either in church or at the Lord's table." In light of this change, the resolution regarding Mrs. Todd was stricken out.
Racial issues also plagued the operations of northern white denominations in the South and hampered efforts at reunion between the sectional bodies of the major evangelical denominations. While southern black Christians were establishing a religious life for themselves separate from the domination of southern whites, northern and southern whites were acting out their own plans of religious reconstruction. At a crucial period in the establishment of independent black churches, northern and southern denominations offered both organizational and material assistance. Yet they did so without surrendering their own priorities and ideals for rebuilding the religious life of the South. Black Christians crossed the wilderness and the River Jordan in the years between 1865 and 1877, but the promised land they found was inhabited and the contours of its religious life were contested by two other groups.

Notes

1. Baptist figures in Figure 5-1 are based on the 35 associations which were members of the Georgia Baptist Convention in 1877 and are not inclusive of all black Baptists in biracial churches. Anti-missionary, primitive, and black associations are excluded. Of the 107 Baptist associations in the state in 1877, 35 were affiliated with the Georgia Baptist Convention, 46 were primitive or neutral toward missions, and 26 were black associations. The Convention reported no statistics in 1865 and 1866. These data were reconstructed from a survey of all extant associational minutes. Missing associational data for some years were interpolated from known end points. Approximately 18% of the annual figures for the entire period are interpolations. Because associations met in the fall, and the Georgia Baptist Convention met in April, figures reported are from the previous year. This schedule produces a one-year lag in the statistics. This effect does not occur with the statistics for Georgia Methodists and Presbyterians because the Georgia Annual Conference and the Synod of Georgia met late in each year.

Blacks departed the six churches of the original Sunbury association that entered the New Sunbury association even more swiftly. In 1866 these churches had only 432 white members and 72 black members. By the following year, they had only one black member. New Sunbury Association, Minutes, 1866, 1867.

3. Robert G. Gardner, Charles O. Walker, J. R. Huddleston, and Waldo P. Harris III, A History of the Georgia Baptist Association, 1784-1984 (Atlanta: Georgia Baptist Historical Society, 1988), 268-70, 275. By 1880 the Georgia association had only 570 black members, though this number was still larger than the black membership of all the other associations in the Convention combined.

4. Wagner, Profiles of Black Georgia Baptists, 48, 54, 66; Georgia Baptist Convention, Minutes, 1877.

5. Georgia Annual Conference, Minutes, 1864, Haygood S. Bowden, History of Savannah Methodism from John Wesley to Silas Johnson (Macon, GA: J. W. Burke Co., 1929), 128; Eatonton Methodist Church, Quarterly Conference Minutes, 29 June 1867, Georgia Department of Archives and History, Atlanta, GA.

6. Bainbridge District Conference, Minutes, September 1867, South Georgia Conference Archives, Epworth-by-the-Sea, GA; South Georgia Annual Conference, Minutes, 1867, 1868; Wesley J. Gaines, African Methodism in the South, or Twenty Five Years of Freedom (Atlanta, GA: Franklin Publishing House, 1890), 22.

In 1870 the Bainbridge District reported 137 black members in three circuits or charges. Beginning in 1871, the district reported no black members. South Georgia Annual Conference, Minutes, 1870.


10. “Pastoral Address of the Southern Methodist Bishops,” Southern Christian Advocate (Macon, GA), 31 August 1865; Memphis Annual Conference, Minutes, 1865, Report of Committee on Missions.
11. Memphis Annual Conference, Minutes, 1866, Report of Committee on Religious Interests of the Colored People; Bethel Baptist Association, Minutes, 1870, 8-10. The Bethel Association had 2,972 black members in 1865, but by 1870 it retained only 231.

12. Southern Baptist Convention, Proceedings, 1866, 86; Christian Index (Atlanta, GA), 10 June 1869.

13. Episcopal Methodist (Richmond, VA), 2 August 1865.

14. Western Baptist Association, Minutes, 1866, 6-7; 1868, 3-4.

15. Ebenezer Baptist Association, Minutes, 1867, 2.

Southern Baptists in other areas of the South expressed similar feelings. A committee report suggesting that churches and associations be allowed to use their own judgment in admitting black members sparked a heated debate in the 1867 North Carolina Convention. James D. Hufham, editor of the state Baptist paper, led the fight against the report, declaring that he would not sanction any report that allowed the reception of both races “promiscuously, with equal privileges, into our Churches, Associations and Conventions.” Black members, he insisted, must be received “on the old footing, without any voice in the discipline of the church or the management of its affairs.” After debate the committee report was amended to recommend that churches aid black members in the organization of their own churches. North Carolina Baptist Convention, Minutes, 1867, 25; Rufus B. Spain, At Ease in Zion: A Social History of Southern Baptists, 1865-1900 (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967), 50.

16. Western Baptist Association, Minutes, 1866, 6-7.

17. Christian Index, 24 February 1866.

18. General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Journal, 1866, 58-59.


21. Thompson, Presbyterians in the South, 2:309; General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, Minutes, 1874, 588-96; H. Shelton Smith, In His Image,

22. Western Baptist Association, Minutes, 1866, 6; General Assembly of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, Minutes, 1869, 23-24; Campbell, One Family Under God, 40; Barrus, Baughn, and Campbell, A People Called Cumberland Presbyterians, 165-67.

   The Cumberland Presbyterian General Assembly of 1868 urged the presbyteries to provide ministers for the freedmen. However, “the leadings of Providence may hereafter show more plainly whether they should be constituted a separate ecclesiastical body.” Barrus, Baughn, and Campbell, A People Called Cumberland Presbyterians, 166.

   Baptist leader Basil Manly II wrote in the spring of 1866, “The experiment of freeing the blacks is too new, and unfinished, for us to understand the divine procedure. Both the giving and the learning of the lesson require time and patience. We have the promise that God will strengthen our heart. Let us wait on the Lord, therefore.” Basil Manly II to Miss Jane Smith, 6 March 1866, Manly Collection of Manuscripts, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, TN.

23. Lakey, The History of the CME Church, 174-76; General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Journal, 1870, 167.


25. Campbell, One Family Under God, 38-39; Barrus, Baughn, and Campbell, A People Called Cumberland Presbyterians, 168; B. W. McDonnold, History of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, 4th ed. (Nashville, TN: Board of Publication of Cumberland Presbyterian Church, 1899), 437.

   Prewar estimates of 20,000 black members in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church are probably exaggerations, but most black Cumberland Presbyterians did not remain in the Church long enough to enter the Colored Cumberland Presbyterian Church. Barrus, Baughn, and Campbell, A People Called Cumberland Presbyterians, 168.

26. Thompson, Presbyterians in the South, 2:323, 325; Murray, Presbyterians and the Negro, 150-51.


28. See, for example, the Christian Index, 17 June 1869, in which northern teachers are denounced as “abolitionist emissaries” who “engender strife and disaffection,” “encourage the negro in insolent assumption,” and “fan the flames of open hostility between the races.”

Baptist minister Thomas O. Fuller wrote in 1917: “It is generally thought that a large number of men entered the ministry as a mark of appreciation for what the Lord had done for them in breaking the chains of slavery.” Thomas O. Fuller, *History of the Negro Baptists of Tennessee* (Memphis, TN: Haskins Printing Co., 1936), 47-48.

30. In Vicksburg, Mississippi, “some of the leaders of the white [Methodist] congregation promised to help the blacks build a church and permitted them to use the basement of their church until the new building was completed.” But, AME minister Hiram Revels reported, “so far as my knowledge extends, our people, from a painful recollection of their past and a happy realization of their present ecclesiastical relations, determined to decline the offer.” *Christian Recorder*, 5 August, 7 October 1865.

AME minister Wesley J. Gaines took charge of the Atlanta, Georgia, congregation in 1867, and they worshipped “in an old church given to our people before the war.” However, “as we had no deeds to the property, we bought a lot of ground on Wheat St.” In March 1868, they laid the foundation of a large church building. By May 1869, the congregation was meeting in the building but still needed $1,500 to complete it. Gaines issued a call for assistance through the AME Church’s newspaper, the *Christian Recorder*. *Christian Recorder*, 8 May 1869.

31. “Letter from Georgia,” *Christian Recorder*, 14 September 1867. Also in 1867 the black Ebenezer Baptist Association reported that a majority of its churches were “in a destitute condition for want of shelter and of Ministers to organize them, and to aid in gathering their scattered members together.” Ebenezer Baptist Association, *Minutes*, 1867, 11.


For a discussion of the Freedmen’s Bureau, the primary vehicle for government assistance to the freedmen, see William S. McFeely, *Yankee Stepfather: General O. O. Howard and the Freedmen* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968).


For examples of southern whites’ ordaining black ministers, see Fuller, *History of the Negro Baptists of Tennessee*, 58.

In some cases, whites served as secretaries for black denominational meetings. When no member of a meeting could write and no other person was available, some Baptist associations “chose some good brother as the ‘memorandum’ of the meeting and
it was the duty of this person to tell what was done at the last meeting, when the next meeting convened.” Fuller, History of the Negro Baptists of Tennessee, 106-07.


35. Spain, At Ease in Zion, 53, 60-61; Georgia Baptist Convention, Minutes, 1872, 17; 1873, 19; 1874, 27; 1875, 26; 1876, 21 (quotation); 1877, 20; Christian Index, 11 April 1878; Harold Lynn McManus, “The American Baptist Home Mission Society and Freedmen Education in the South, With Special Reference to Georgia: 1862-1897” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1953), 291-300; Willard Range, The Rise and Progress of Negro Colleges in Georgia, 1865-1949 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1951), 24-27.


Atlanta Baptist Seminary became Morehouse College in 1913.

36. Lakey, The History of the CME Church, 446-51; Anna L. Cooke, Lane College: Its Heritage and Outreach, 1882-1982 (Jackson, TN: Lane College, 1987), 9, 14-15. Saunders was replaced by James Albert Bray, a black Georgian, as the president of Lane in 1903; Paine did not have a black president until 1971.

37. The work of northern white denominations among both the freedmen and whites in the South is addressed more extensively in Chapter 8.


39. Henry M. Turner wrote in December 1865 that “colored preachers, from all quarters, are calling upon me for authority to preach.” Christian Recorder, 30 December 1865.

40. Montgomery, Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree, 86; Christian Recorder, 20 January 1866.

41. Christopher Hendrick Owen, “Sanctity, Slavery, and Segregation: Methodists and
Society in Nineteenth-Century Georgia” (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1991), 413, 416; Walker, A Rock in a Weary Land, 96-98.

The Southern Methodist-AME alliance did not last beyond 1867. In 1869, the AME Church newspaper published an indictment against the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, charging it with treason against God, Jesus, the Church, the Government, and liberty. *Christian Recorder*, 13 March 1869.


45. *Christian Recorder*, 19 May, 2 June 1866, 10 August 1867. Similar quarrels plagued black congregations in other states. In New Bern, North Carolina, the Reverend James W. Hood of the AMEZ Church convinced a local black Methodist congregation to unite with his church, despite the efforts of a white missionary of the Methodist Episcopal Church and two black AME missionaries to attract the congregation into their denominations. Hood, *One Hundred Years of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church*, 290-92.


Blacks in Savannah contributed $1,000 as early as 1865 for teachers, and by 1867, the freedmen wholly or partly supported 152 schools and owned 39 of the school buildings. Range, *The Rise and Progress of Negro Colleges in Georgia*, 14.


48. Note regarding Session of Presbyterian Church, Darien, Georgia, 26 July 1878, Henry Francis Hoyt Collection, Historical Foundation of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches, Montreat, NC; Jacqueline Jones, *Soldiers of Light and Love: Northern
CHAPTER 6
SOUTHERN CHURCHES RESURGENT:
DENOMINATIONAL STRUCTURES AND RELIGIOUS NEWSPAPERS

To reinvigorate their sectional religious identity, white southerners had to reestablish their denominational organizations. In the late 1860s white congregations could barely sustain themselves, and could do little for religious education or missions without uniting with other congregations. If southern denominations failed to reorganize themselves, local churches would either exist in isolation or be forced to accept an even worse fate—union with the northern denominational organizations. Fierce sectional loyalty insured that few churches or even individuals would choose the latter option. Revulsion at the idea of reunion with the haughty northern Churches spurred white evangelicals to greater efforts in rebuilding their religious institutions on an explicitly southern basis.

The religious life of whites in Georgia in the 1860s and 1870s was dominated by three denominations—the Georgia Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, the Georgia Baptist Convention of the Southern Baptist Convention, and the Synod of Georgia of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. In 1860, these three organizations had over 150,000 members in nearly 2,000 local congregations. An additional 20,000 members belonged to several hundred independent, mostly Baptist, churches unaffiliated with these three statewide organizations. The next largest
denominational organization in the state, the Protestant Episcopal Church, had only 2,000 members. Cumberland Presbyterians, though numerous in neighboring Tennessee, had only four churches in the northwestern corner of Georgia with fewer than 500 members.

Ninety percent of Tennessee congregations were part of four denominations—Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Cumberland Presbyterian. Tennessee Baptists had general organizations in each of the three major geographical divisions of the state—the West Tennessee Baptist Convention, the General Association of Middle Tennessee, and the East Tennessee Baptist General Association. Methodists in Tennessee were also divided into three regional conferences—the Memphis Annual Conference in the west, the Tennessee Annual Conference in the central section, and the Holston Annual Conference in the east. Tennessee’s southern Presbyterians were divided into two synods—the Synod of Memphis in the western portion of the state and the Synod of Nashville in the central and eastern sections. The more numerous Cumberland Presbyterians had four synods either wholly or partly in Tennessee—the West Tennessee Synod, the Middle Tennessee Synod, the East Tennessee Synod and the Columbia Synod. Together, these four denominations in 1860 had some 175,000 Tennessee members in over 2,000 local churches.

The principal statewide organizations consisted of smaller regional groups—Methodist Quarterly Conferences, Baptist Associations, and Presbyterian Presbyteries—each of which contained from five to fifty local churches. These organizational structures existed primarily to facilitate the financial support of educational institutions and domestic and foreign missionary endeavors by the state or national
organizations. For example, Georgia’s locally oriented Baptists united in a common Convention to support “Missions, Education, the Sunday School work, and the collection of funds for benevolent purposes.”¹ In the more hierarchically organized Methodist and Presbyterian churches, church councils had greater disciplinary authority but their activities demonstrated that educational and missionary activities were central to their existence as well.

When southern Christians began to reconstruct their religious lives in the middle of the 1860s, denominational structures were the logical foundations upon which to build. But first these foundations had to be repaired from the damage they had suffered during the dislocation of war and the devastating loss of black members. After recovering from the initial shock of defeat, southern religious leaders perceived in the destruction of the war a chance to rebuild their institutions, much as New South leaders saw the same destruction as a chance to industrialize the South. From the start, denominational leaders understood the important role religious newspapers could play in uniting disparate churches behind the common goal of religious reconstruction. In the pages of these journals, southern editors proclaimed southern ideals and condemned northern denominations. They urged paternalism toward the freedmen and garnered support for denominational colleges and Sunday schools. In short, denominational newspapers strengthened ties between individual churches and larger ecclesiastical bodies, while forging a distinctive southern religious identity, based upon their understanding of God’s providence in the great conflict just ended.
The largest burden of responsibility for southern religious reconstruction fell upon the ministers of the various denominations. They were the first line of defense against the devil and the North. The Western Baptist Association in Georgia solemnly declared in 1866 that “we should be grateful to our God for protecting the lives of our preachers, for surely Zion has much need for watchmen on her walls.” Sounding a note of caution, the 1865 meeting of the Synod of Memphis urged churches to fill their pulps quickly, but only with “known and tried men.” Presbyterian minister Robert Langdon Neely observed in his manuscript history of the synod that “the caveat was inserted on account of the uncertainty of men and things in those days.”

Some Confederates determined to enter the ministry in gratitude for their survival through the war. One of the most famous of their number was General Clement A. Evans from Lumpkin, Georgia. Evans returned home in May 1865 and on June 7, wrote to the presiding elder of the Americus District seeking to join the Georgia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Sitting upon the battlefield immediately after the conflict at Fredericksburg, the general determined to become a Methodist preacher, realizing that “I should have devoted myself to the ministry in the beginning of life.” Although struck by bullets five times, Evans felt that his life was “safe during the entire war.” Certain that “God has graciously preserved me for a good purpose,” Evans wrote that “the deep sense of gratitude, of obligation and of love I feel knows no bounds.” In December 1865, Bishop George F. Pierce appointed Evans to the Manassas Circuit in Bartow County, Georgia. General William T. Sherman’s army had desolated the area, and the people were “broken-down, broken-hearted, poverty-stricken.” Evans “took pot-
luck with them” and ministered to them for three years. He later reminisced that the appointment was “in some respects the best I ever had.”

For most men who were interested in entering the ministry, the obstacles were imposing. The Southern Presbyterian complained that “not a few of our pious young men would be glad to qualify themselves to preach the everlasting gospel, but have not the means to prosecute their studies.” Only with denominational assistance could many young candidates ever hope to receive ministerial training.

Even established ministers had difficulty devoting their attention to religious reconstruction in the immediate aftermath of the war. The Southern Presbyterian noted that “many of our best and most earnest preachers have been compelled to betake themselves to school-keeping, or some other secular employment, in order to provide the means of subsistence for their families.” By 1868 the Synod of Georgia recommended to the presbyteries to fix the minimum salary for ministers at $600 per year. In accordance with this plan, “no church should expect the services of a minister all his time that can not raise $600 for his support.” As evidence that “the all-absorbing passion for personal welfare, and for individual safety” had captured the southern heart, the Christian Index in January 1866 called attention to “the number of ministers who are forced by want to embark in secular pursuits.” The Tennessee Conference of the southern Methodist Church urged its members to support their pastors: “Where you cannot furnish your ministers with money, give them shelter, send them food; give them a portion of the products of your field, your shops, your trade.” In 1873 the Holston
Conference of the same Church complained that only 69 percent of the preachers' claims had been paid in the previous year.6

Critical to the success of any effort for religious reconstruction was the revitalization of the local churches. Scattered, demoralized, and often without leadership, these individual congregations had to be secured to the southern denominations to prevent them from looking to northern denominations for support.

The 1865 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS) instructed the Executive Committee of Domestic Missions to survey the churches and to determine which needed financial help and which were in a position to aid other churches. The committee also arranged for the collection and dispersal of funds. However, during the 1865-1866 year, fewer than one fifth of the churches contributed anything to the cause, and the vast majority of money contributed to domestic missions was designated specifically for the support of weak churches. Thomas C. Johnson, a historian of the denomination, wrote three decades later, "Her work for the time was not so much to establish new churches as to repair old ones. Jerusalem had to rebuild her own walls before she could dwell in safety and repossess the land."7

Yet there were some signs of hope among the devastation. Revivals flourished in some areas. Many returning soldiers became more faithful to the churches in the aftermath of their wartime experiences. In the fall of 1865, the Christian Index noted that among the revivals in the country churches, "it has been pleasant to observe that our young men who had just returned from the army were among the first to manifest an
interest for their souls, while great numbers of them have been converted and become praying members of the churches with which they united."8

Despite the devastation, ministers expected their congregations to rally to the cause of religious reconstruction and chastised them when they did not. The Executive Committee of the New Sunbury Association on the coast of Georgia reminded the churches in 1867 that since “the war has been past now for more than two years,” it was “time to stop pleading it as a cause for neglecting to build meeting houses and to supply the Gospel.” Their excuses only barely disguised their “selfishness” and “love of the world.” If Christ’s love “burns in our hearts,” the committee reminded the association, His cause “may be carried forward in hard times.” In the same year, the Bethel Baptist Association in southwest Georgia reported, “with sadness of heart, that the churches generally are in a very cold, declining state.”9

Despite considerable progress in recovery in the years after the war, an 1869 survey of the condition of Baptists in Georgia still found some areas in need. The Reverend Sylvanus Landrum, pastor of Savannah’s First Baptist Church, chaired a newly formed Committee on the State of Religion and Religious Destitution in the State. In the corner of Georgia north and east of Athens, the committee reported, “there is not a minister who is supported while preaching the gospel.” North of Augusta for twenty miles, “there is much need of preaching.” Around Knoxville in central Georgia the area was in a state of “most deplorable destitution—churches without preaching and general demoralization.” On the coast the destitution was “well nigh universal,” and the “flourishing town” of Thomasville was without a pastor. Most of the city churches had
pastors, but “there is much complaint of theatre going, balls, worldliness, and also want of integrity in reference to promises and commercial honor.” Landrum closed the report by insisting that among Georgia Baptists, there was “a great want of ministerial consecration and ministerial support,” “much destitution in the churches, and many neighborhoods unprovided with the preached Word.” The report called for prayer and self-denial, rather than the use of the war and poverty “as pleas for the love of the world and the idolatry of covetousness.”

By 1871, Georgia Baptists fared better. The Committee on the State of Religion happily declared that “there is a more general supply of preaching and fewer churches without pastors than existed two years ago.” The members displayed “a manifest improvement in the willingness to give,” and “there is a decided improvement in morals.” The committee urged the Baptists of the state to “carry forward, with conquering power, the banner, bearing the inscription: GEORGIA FOR JESUS!” Committee reports to the convention in 1874 and 1875 likewise reported the state of religion as “encouraging.” By 1874, the state had “very nearly as many churches as are needed,” and in some areas had too many. In some localities, the committee suggested, it would be wise for two or more weak churches to unite. In 1877 the committee noted thankfully that while the war “entailed calamities which might have been more ruinous than they are, our Lord has given us marvelous growth.”

Although southerners mounted an intensive effort for religious reconstruction in the late 1860s, much remained to be done in the 1870s. Many congregations had either rebuilt their damaged churches or built entirely new edifices. Yet in 1871, the North
Georgia Annual Conference, “one of the most prosperous conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South,” reported that of its 606 church buildings, only 177 were ceiled or plastered and only 151 had stoves.\textsuperscript{12}

Wartime devastation created postwar opportunities for denominational restructuring which would make southern churches more effective. The devastation of General Sherman’s march through Georgia together with the complementary wreckage by retreating Confederates destroyed the Cherokee Baptist Convention in the northwestern section of the state. Many rural churches were left without ministers and with only a few members. As late as 1869, one minister was preaching to six different churches in this area. In 1866 the Middle Cherokee Baptist Association lamented that “many of our churches were destroyed and flocks scattered during the occupancy of the country by the enemy. Many of the ministers, formerly within our bounds, who sought safety during the late war in other sections, have not returned, and in consequence there is great want of ministerial labor.” To meet this emergency, the association suggested the appointment of a missionary “to labor within our limits, to destitute churches and sections.” The Middle Cherokee Association also indefinitely postponed the election of delegates to the Cherokee Baptist Convention and “agreed to refer to the Churches composing this body the question of joining the Georgia Baptist Convention.”\textsuperscript{13} The Georgia Baptist Convention was receptive to the idea; the committee on the State of Religion and Religious Destitution in the State told the 1869 convention that if “the brethren of this section could be persuaded to identify themselves with this Convention and with Mercer University, your committee are of the opinion that mutual good would
result." The constituent associations of the Cherokee convention—Coosa, Middle Cherokee, and Tallapoosa—all joined the Georgia Baptist Convention between 1869 and 1875.

In the unsettled context of religious reconstruction, several ecclesiastical bodies reorganized. After a lengthy discussion and two votes, Georgia Methodists narrowly decided in 1866 to divide the Georgia Annual Conference into two more manageable conferences. A Committee on the Division of the Conference recommended "in view of all the circumstances connected therewith, and the general good of the church, that the division should take place." The Conference, on November 30, voted 63-56 in favor of division. Three days later, after a motion for reconsideration, the Conference voted 65-51 to divide. Consequently, the Methodist churches in the state were divided along a line running just north of Columbus and Macon and just south of Augusta. The newly formed North Georgia Conference encompassed nine presiding elders' districts with nearly 45,000 members, while the South Georgia Conference had seven districts with 26,500 members.15

While Georgia Methodists divided, Tennessee Baptists moved toward greater unity. Each of the three regional associations had considered the possibility of a statewide union of Baptists. In 1873 the associations appointed committees to discuss the viability of a united state convention. The committee from the East Tennessee Baptist General Association called for a meeting in Murfreesboro in April 1874. Forty delegates assembled to consider unification. A Committee on Unification proposed a constitution for the "Tennessee Baptist Convention." After expressly forbidding ecclesiastical
jurisdiction over the member churches, the Constitution declared that the purpose of the Convention was to “promote the educational interests of the Baptists of Tennessee.” This unification conference also appointed a committee of nine (three from each section) to consider the best location for a “well-endowed, thoroughly equipped University, of the highest order.” Four months later, the committee chose Jackson, Tennessee, as the site of the new Southwestern Baptist University.16

Although Tennessee Baptists united into a common convention to support educational and other projects, provincialism and suspicion of a strong state organization remained in some areas. After some debate, both the West Tennessee Baptist Convention and the General Baptist Association of Middle Tennessee and Northern Alabama dissolved in 1874. The East Tennessee Baptist General Association, however, did not vote to disband until 1885.17

While state religious bodies were regrouping and assessing the damages done by four years of strife, the sectional denominational bodies provided both inspiration and assistance. Both the Presbyterian General Assembly and the Methodist General Conference considered new names for their organizations in the wake of the failure of the Confederacy. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America met in December 1865 at Macon, Georgia. After delegates had proposed 16 different names and debated the issue thoroughly, they chose the name Presbyterian Church in the United States, which received 42 votes. The name Presbyterian Church, South came in a distant second with seven votes. The Reverend Dr. Frederick A. Ross proposed the latter name because it “expresses the truth,” and “it
would harmonise different parts of our body." Ross insisted that "We are not going to unite with the Church North; let them, if they wish, unite with us." A majority of the General Assembly consciously avoided the use of "South" or "Southern" both to woo border state Presbyterians and to avoid any misinterpretation "that we are contending for merely temporary and sectional ends." However, a strong element of sectional identity remained, as the delegates' attitude toward the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America made clear.18

The General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South met in New Orleans in April 1866 to consider the future of that Church. Many believed the word "South" in the name dampened the appeal of the Church among border state Methodists. After considering nine alternative names, the Conference voted 111 to 21 to rename the organization "The Methodist Church." After reconsidering this decision the next day, the Conference decided upon "The Episcopal Methodist Church" instead. The General Conference submitted the change to the Annual Conferences, three fourths of which had to approve for the change to take place. Most Annual Conferences were less concerned about appealing to border state Methodists than was the General Conference, and in a triumph of sectional identification, the requisite number of conferences did not approve the change in name.19

The 1866 General Conference gave impetus to a variety of efforts designed to rebuild southern Methodism. This first meeting of the entire church since 1858 "challenged and revived the confidence of the people, and sounded the keynote of the quadrennium for renewed activity and lofty endeavor. Preachers and people everywhere
responded, and once more, after a long, dark period of decimation, demoralization, and depression, the church went forward." Since several of the bishops of the Church were in feeble health, the General Conference elected four new bishops to supplement the ranks of the episcopacy and give it renewed vigor for the challenges of religious reconstruction.20

Georgian Edward H. Myers chaired a Committee on Changes of Economy which reviewed the various proposals for changes in polity and submitted them in seven different reports to the Conference. The subjects of these reports included changing the name of the church, changing the reception of members and the social meetings of the church, establishing district conferences, forming episcopal districts, instituting lay representation, extending the pastoral term, and adopting a new constitution for the church.21

After considering these various reports, the conference enacted a broad series of constitutional reforms, which abolished class meetings, probationary periods for membership, gender segregation of church services, and the ban on pew rentals. It also extended the maximum pastoral term from two to four years. Most importantly, it provided for the election of lay delegates to the General Conference, a reform which meant that the Church would reflect the social attitudes of all white southerners more closely than did its antebellum counterpart which was led by a ministerial elite.22

The Southern Baptist Convention was also active in providing both leadership and financial support for state conventions, associations, and local churches. Georgia Baptists in 1869 acknowledged the assistance they had received from the Domestic
Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. Georgia had “received a liberal return” from the Board and the state’s “destitution has not been overlooked.” Since 1865 seventeen Georgia Baptist ministers and several feeble churches had been aided by the Domestic Board. Georgia Baptists considered the Board “a necessity in the land,” and believed it provided “evidence of our interest in the great work of Southern evangelization.”

Dramatic increases in membership were the most tangible manifestations of the successful reconstruction of the South’s religious life. Patterns of membership growth also provide a unique glimpse at the way average white southerners reacted toward competing visions of religious reconstruction. Georgia’s white population increased by 38 percent between 1860 and 1880, rising from 591,550 in the former year to 816,906 two decades later. As Figure 6-1 illustrates, the white membership of each of Georgia’s principal denominations grew steadily during these decades. Moreover, denominational growth far outstripped the growth rate of the white population. The Synod of Georgia grew by 55 percent in these two decades to number slightly over 8,600 communicants in 1880. Although the Methodist Georgia Annual Conference and the Georgia Baptist Convention lost virtually all of their black members, their growth in white membership gave them a net increase over the two decades. According to its statistical reports, the white membership of the Georgia Baptist Convention grew from 41,000 members in 1860 to over 84,000 in 1880, an increase of 105 percent. White Methodist membership grew by two-thirds from a total of 56,749 in 1860 to 94,925 in 1880. In stark contrast, the
missionary efforts of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Georgia never garnered more than 4,000 white members in this period.

![Figure 6-1: White Membership in Georgia Denominations, 1860-1877](image)

Although Tennessee churches enjoyed much the same recovery in membership in the western two-thirds of the state, east Tennessee remained deeply divided. Home to a large number of Unionists during the war and actively cultivated by northern missionaries, east Tennessee became notorious for religious strife. The statistical records of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South in Tennessee demonstrate the contrast between the Methodists of west and central Tennessee who remained overwhelmingly loyal to the southern Church, and those of east Tennessee who were divided between the northern and southern Churches. Figure 6-2 shows that the Memphis and Tennessee Conferences rapidly recovered their prewar strength and grew steadily in the 1870s. Although the
Holston Conference of the southern Church doubled in size between 1867 and 1877, it was crippled by the loss of 21,161 (75 percent) of its members between 1865 and 1866.

![Figure 6-2: White Methodist Membership in Tennessee, 1860-1877](image)

Most evangelical Georgians and Tennesseans remained in their southern churches and many of their neighbors joined them there in the decade following Appomattox. Only in eastern Tennessee did large numbers of white Christians join northern denominations. There, mountain unionists rejected the southern vision of religious reconstruction and embraced instead the northern vision.

In the struggle for the religious loyalty of black and white southerners, the southern religious press staunchly protected the principles of their denominations. This service made their revival of paramount importance to the maintenance of southern ecclesiastical organizations. The religious journals were the watchdogs against northern
intrigues from without and lack of commitment from within. The Synod of Memphis in 1865 “keenly felt” the importance of religious literature. According to one member of this synod, Robert Langdon Neely, “the publication of religious papers in our church was scarcely established at this date, the mass of people never seeing one, and as for good new books of a religious character, no one expected to see them.” Although “distant publishers” were willing to supply this demand, much of their material was “unfriendly and unsuitable.” The synod exhorted all Presbyterian families to supply themselves with “reliable religious readings, and, in reference to papers, suggested that they patronize such papers as would truly and faithfully advocate and represent the interest and feelings of our church.”

The Southern Presbyterian, published in Columbia, South Carolina, served the southern Presbyterians of several states including Georgia. The last wartime issue was published in Augusta on April 6, 1865. A new editor, the Reverend James Woodrow, resumed publication of the newspaper in Columbia on January 4, 1866. Woodrow made clear in the inaugural issue that the Southern Presbyterian would remain thoroughly southern: “A Presbyterian newspaper (published in the South, where there never has been a departure, by our ecclesiastical denomination, from the true doctrine of the spirituality of the Church . . . ) is, in its very name, sufficiently distinctive.” Although they emphasized the spirituality of the Church, the editors did not pledge “to abstain from all allusion to public affairs” since “these affairs are frequently interlaced with grave ecclesiastical matters.”
By the summer of 1866 southern Methodists had reestablished nine of their periodicals, including the Southern Christian Advocate in Macon, Georgia, and the Christian Advocate (Nashville) and Memphis Christian Advocate in Tennessee. Methodist James O. Andrew wrote to his fellow bishop Holland N. McTyeire, "Surely we have a fine array of newspapers if that be regarded as any proof of prosperity."26

The Southern Christian Advocate, edited by the northern-born but staunchly southern Edward H. Myers, returned to normal publication in Macon in August 1865 to circulate "those conservative and unifying opinions that the present time demands." Myers reasoned that the "conservative and harmonizing influence" of the religious press was never "more needed, than at a period of change such as that through which Southern society is now passing." Bishop Pierce proclaimed that the paper was "a church necessity." In the current state of the country, Methodists must have "a medium of communication with the preachers and the people, in order to conserve the great interests committed to our charge." What Myers and Pierce wanted the Southern Christian Advocate to help preserve was both religious and distinctively southern.27

Methodist preachers and laity in the churches also believed a religious newspaper was essential. The members of the Bainbridge District in south Georgia resolved to endeavor to increase the circulation of the Southern Christian Advocate because it was "eminently calculated to promote the Spirit of piety, zeal and earnest devotion to the Church and all its interests."28

Although the Southern Christian Advocate resumed publication in the fall of 1865, not until 1868 did subscriptions meet the expenses of publication. In December of that
year, the North Georgia Conference hailed it as “one of the very best religious periodicals in the country,” which would soon “rival, if not exceed, its former capacity for usefulness.” If the debts which the newspaper accumulated in the first years after the war could be paid, “the success of the paper will be secured beyond ordinary contingencies.” By 1871, the North Georgia Conference was proud to proclaim that the Southern Christian Advocate had “overcome all the difficulties that once embarrassed its publication.” If the preachers and laity “will but do their duty,” the newspaper “will prove a power and a blessing to the Church.”

The Christian Advocate in Nashville reappeared in January 1866 after book agent John B. McFerrin convinced President Andrew Johnson to return the Southern Methodist Publishing House seized by Federal troops in 1862. Once able to reoccupy the publishing house, McFerrin and financial secretary Richard Abbey ran the press and published the Christian Advocate until Thomas O. Summers, former book editor, returned to Nashville in the late spring of 1866 to begin editing the paper.

Georgia Baptists’ Christian Index, published in Macon, did not resume regular publication until January of 1866. In the fall of 1865, the Houston Baptist Association in central Georgia urged its members to read and support the Baptist Banner, published in Augusta, and the Christian Index, “soon to be resumed in Macon,” because both “have ever been good and safe papers for the reading public.” These periodicals were “safe” because they were both religious in content and southern in loyalty.

The Christian Index rendered valuable service to Georgia Baptists as they rebuilt their religious lives. In a trial issue in November of 1865, the newspaper proclaimed its
desire to “maintain and uphold the various enterprises of Christian Benevolence in which the Baptists of Georgia and the adjoining States are engaged.” It promised that the “various educational interests of the denomination shall receive constant attention, and whatever we can do to foster and sustain them, shall be done.” The publishing office of the Christian Index, now in Atlanta, would be the “Baptist Headquarters and Sanctum of the Brethren.”

The new editor of the newspaper, Henry H. Tucker, declared the Christian Index to be “a necessity to our denomination,” which was “never more needed than now.” Foremost among his qualifications as editor, Tucker proclaimed himself to be “a Southern man—Southern by birth—as were his ancestors before him for six or seven generations—Southern in all his habits of thought and sympathies.” Still, Tucker declared, he hoped to “elevate himself and his readers above sectional feelings.” Although perhaps not as bitter in tone as some other religious periodicals, the Christian Index remained one of the most conservative southern Baptist newspapers, firmly upholding the Confederate vision of religious reconstruction.

Tennessee Baptists had to wait longer for the reemergence of their paper. The Tennessee Baptist of Nashville, edited by the vociferous leader of Baptist Landmarkism, J. R. Graves, was forced to suspend operations in 1862. On February 1, 1867, Graves resumed publication of the paper in Memphis with its original title, The Baptist. Conscious of his duty as a denominational spokesman, Graves immediately called Baptists’ attention to the hardship suffered by pastors and their families who were not properly supported by their congregations.
When the Christian Index resumed in Atlanta in January 1866, it also served as the periodical for Alabama Baptists. The South-Western Baptist, published until April 1865 in Tuskegee, Alabama, did not survive the war. Rather than attempt to launch several small papers “upon the hazards of a not very promising future,” Alabama Baptists agreed to unite with Georgia Baptists in the support of the Index. The Reverend Samuel Henderson, former editor of the South-Western Baptist, continued for a time to edit a page devoted to Alabama Baptist issues. Henderson insisted that “the necessity for a religious newspaper has never been so extensively and imperatively felt as now.” Pastors needed it “to encourage and sustain them.” Churches needed it “as they emerge from that baptism of suffering which they have endured for more than four years.” Baptist families needed it “to preserve them from the contagion of an alien literature that would lead them to repudiate the faith of their fathers.” The denominational organizations needed it “to supplement their efforts to meet the demands which are upon them.”

The consolidation of newspapers was also evident in other denominations. In 1874 the Cumberland Presbyterian Board of Publication purchased the subscription lists of the Banner of Peace of Nashville, Tennessee, the Cumberland Presbyterian of Alton, Illinois, and the Texas Cumberland Presbyterian of Tehuacana, Texas. The Board then began the publication of the Cumberland Presbyterian from Nashville.

Other newspapers were not so fortunate. After the destruction of the Cherokee Baptist Convention in northwest Georgia during the war, its Baptist Banner struggled on in Augusta for a short while and then dissolved. The East Tennessee Baptist, begun in
November 1869 lasted less than a year. Despite the editor’s plea that no newspaper outside of east Tennessee was satisfactory, the 35,000 Baptists of the area did not respond. In February 1870, the editor insisted that “both labor and sacrifice will be necessary to carry on what we have begun.” If “the friends of the paper” would do their part, he argued, “we believe we shall succeed.” Two months later, the editor still condemned the “apathy” and “do-nothing spirit” of east Tennessee Baptists. Soon thereafter, the paper ceased publication.37

In addition to the revival of many of their religious newspapers, southern evangelicals also restored other parts of the religious press to support the southern vision of religious reconstruction. The Southern Methodist Publishing House reopened in late 1865. According to the Nashville Christian Advocate, “No institution of the South suffered to a greater extent during the war . . . than did the Publishing House of the M.E. Church, South.” By 1870, however, the immediate postwar debt of $71,000 had been reduced to $41,000. Recovery ended abruptly in February 1872 when a fire destroyed most of the two buildings occupied by the Publishing House. Equipment, supplies, the stock of books, and denominational records were all destroyed.38

Book agent Albert H. Redford determined immediately to rebuild the Publishing House, and projected that $50,000 would be needed. After the expenditure of over $176,000, Southern Methodists had a four-story building that was the pride of the denomination. However, the high cost of rebuilding and Redford’s financial mismanagement drove the Publishing House deeply into debt by 1878. In that year the General Conference appointed a committee to investigate Redford’s report about the
organization. Instead of having $300,000 more in assets than in liabilities, as Redford claimed, the Publishing House had $46,000 more in debt than it possessed in assets. The Conference overwhelmingly chose John B. McFerrin, then 71, to attempt to sell $300,000 in bonds and save the Publishing House. Appealing to sectional pride, McFerrin asked Methodists across the South to consider the alternative if his mission failed: “The Bishops, the General Conference officers, the preachers, the people—men, women, and children—are gathered on the Public Square in Nashville, in front of the Publishing House, to witness the sad and shameful scene—the sale of the honor and good name of the Southern Methodist Church!” Among the Confederate Christians who had upheld a distinctively southern denomination during religious reconstruction, this appeal found a receptive audience. All of the bonds were sold within two years.39

The Southern Methodist Publishing House supported the southern approach to religious reconstruction by publishing such works as The Disruption of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1844-1846 (1875), a history of the division of Methodism written by Edward H. Myers, the polemical editor of the Southern Christian Advocate from 1856 to 1871. Myers’s interpretation upheld the constitutionality of the division and reinforced the belief that the political activities and radicalism of northern Methodists forced southern Methodists to withdraw from the corrupted Methodist Episcopal Church. In his introduction to Myers’s volume, Thomas O. Summers insisted that fraternal relations could not be established by a simple assertion to “let by-gones be by-gones.” Instead the two Churches had to delineate their current relationship carefully and then proceed to establish fraternity. Summers declared that “the South cannot recede from its platform.”
including its “views on slavery,” nor did he “ask the North to recede from its.” With such intransigence on both sides, reunion efforts had little chance for success. The Southern Methodist Publishing House and Summer’s Christian Advocate (Nashville) defended at every point the maintenance of a separate southern Methodist Church and carefully surveyed their ranks for any sign of acquiescence to northern overtures.40

Southern Presbyterians supplemented their newspapers by resuming the publication of the quarterly Southern Presbyterian Review. It too upheld southern views and institutions. In 1870, for example, the journal published an article written by Rev. Dr. A. W. Miller entitled “Southern Views and Principles Not ‘Extinguished’ by the War.” Miller, the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, originally wrote the article in November 1865. In response to northern assertions that southerners “accepted the situation,” Miller declared that southerners did so only in one sense: “The providence of God has sorely smitten them, and humbled them, and they desire to bow in submission to His holy will.” However, “it does not follow that the providence of God has decided against the justice of their cause.” Miller insisted that “accepting the situation” did not mean that southerners “abandoned their former distinctive views and principles.” Citing Old Testament accounts of the defeat of the Jews by neighboring nations, Miller argued that “Providence, for wise ends, may permit an ungodly nation to prosper for a time.” To be victorious, both the cause and the people supporting it must be righteous. The South lost the war because “God frustrates a righteous cause on account of the sins of those who espoused it.” If southerners had maintained a proper relationship with God, “Southern principles would have been
crowned with speedy victory.” The people of the South, therefore, “whilst submitting humbly to the terrible rebukes of a holy God for their sins, do not thereby surrender their well-established views and principles, political and moral: the first, supported by the Constitution of the country; the last, protected by the Scriptures of eternal truth.” That the Southern Presbyterian Review chose to publish this article in 1870 demonstrates that the moral and ecclesiastical battles of religious reconstruction still raged.41

The speedy restoration of southern denominational institutions and religious newspapers gave Confederate Christians a distinct advantage over northern missionaries who came south seeking penitent rebels and unionists. Southern ministers preached a different version of God’s purposes in the war, and once denominational mechanisms were again in working order, southern churches began to receive thousands of new members. Denominational periodicals zealously guarded against laxity among southern Christians and mercilessly attacked northern denominations and their missionaries. In the contest for white Christians, southern Churches won an overwhelming victory as they grew far more rapidly than did northern Churches in the South. Their remarkable growth even outstripped that of the population in general. Furthermore, southern evangelicals labored not only for the revival of southern religion in the present, but also for its perpetuation into the future as well. To ensure that the next generation of Southern Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians kept the southern faith, they worked tirelessly to revive and establish Sunday schools and denominational colleges throughout the South.
Notes

1. Georgia Baptist Convention, *Minutes*, 1874, 24. The Constitution of the Noonday Baptist Association of Georgia, formed in 1858, declared that the object of the association was “the promotion of vital piety in its members, the nurture of all the churches, especially new or struggling ones, in its bounds, the fostering of educational enterprises in the denomination, the encouragement of Sunday-schools, the diffusion of religious books, and the collection and distributions to missionary and other objects.” George T. Light, *A Brief History of the Noonday Baptist Association* (1858-1958) (South Pittsburg, TN: Hustler Printing Co., 1958), 6.

2. Western Baptist Association, *Minutes*, 1866, 6; Robert Langdon Neely Collection, Manuscript Historical Sketch of the Synod of Memphis, 1880, 172, Historical Foundation of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches, Montreat, NC.


   Evans served as a preacher of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South in Georgia for 25 years. Alfred Mann Pierce, *Lest Faith Forget: The Story of Methodism in Georgia* (Atlanta: Georgia Methodist Information, 1951), 113.


   J. L. M. Curry wrote from Alabama that “many churches are without pastors. Many preachers are seeking support in secular occupations. Very few young men have the ministry in view. Those who have are unable to educate themselves, and the churches imagine themselves to be too poor to furnish the ‘wherewith.’” J. L. M. Curry to Basil Manly II, 26 October 1866, Manly Collection of Manuscripts, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, TN.

   After returning from Confederate service to Mississippi, Baptist James B. Gambrell found that “there were many difficulties about getting into the ministry, even after it came to be pretty plain to my mind that that was my calling.” James B. Gambrell, *Parable and Precept: A Baptist Message* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1917), 92-93.


estimated that only 50 percent of the pastors' salaries had been paid. The 1868 South Carolina Conference reported that many preachers had to undertake secular work to supplement their salaries. Missouri Annual Conference, Minutes, 1867, 27; South Carolina Annual Conference, Minutes, 1868, 39.


9. New Sunbury Association, Minutes, 1867, 7; Bethel Baptist Association, Minutes, 1867, 12.

   Charles Manly reported the same conditions from the area around Tuscaloosa, Alabama in the fall of 1866: "I find the people throughout the whole country in quite a depressed condition. . . . there is little interest in religion. . . . The condition of a great many is much worse now than it was at the time of the surrender. But the general decay of godliness is one of the most distressing features of our whole condition." Three weeks later, Manly wrote "the people have little religion." Charles Manly to Basil Manly, Jr., 5, 25 September 1866, Manly Collection of Manuscripts, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives.

10. Georgia Baptist Convention, Minutes, 1869, 9-10.

11. Georgia Baptist Convention, Minutes, 1871, 8-9; 1874, 28; 1875, 27-28.


13. Middle Cherokee Baptist Association, Minutes, 1866, 6-7.

14. Georgia Baptist Convention, Minutes, 1869, 9-10.

15. Georgia Annual Conference, Minutes, 30 November, 3 December 1866, Special Collections, Pitts Theology Library, Emory University, Atlanta, GA; John W. Burke, Autobiography: Chapters from the Life of a Preacher (Macon, GA: J. W. Burke and Co., 1884), 112.

16. Tennessee Baptist Convention, Minutes, 1874, 3-5; W. Fred Kendall, A History of the Tennessee Baptist Convention (Brentwood, TN: Executive Board of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, 1974), 144-49.

   In 1907 the trustees of Southwestern Baptist University voted to change the name to Union University. Kendall, A History of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, 197.


23. Georgia Baptist Convention, Minutes, 1869, 13. See also The Baptist (Nashville, TN), 18 May 1867.

24. Robert Langdon Neely, Manuscript Historical Sketch of the Synod of Memphis, 1880, Robert Langdon Neely Collection, Historical Foundation of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches.


26. American Annual Cyclopedia and Register of Important Events 5 (1865) (New York: Appleton, 1870), 553; Bishop James O. Andrew to Bishop Holland N. McTyeire, 7 June 1866, John J. Tigert IV Collection, Papers of Holland Nimmons McTyeire, Incoming Correspondence, Special Collections, Vanderbilt University Library, Nashville, TN.

27. Southern Christian Advocate (Macon, GA), 29 June 1865.

28. Bainbridge District Conference, Minutes, 1867-1878, April 1870 meeting, South Georgia Conference Archives, Epworth-by-the-Sea, GA.

29. North Georgia Annual Conference, Minutes, 1868, 16; 1871, 33.


The Southern Methodist Publishing House also published the Banner of Peace
newspaper for the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and the Christian Index for the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church.

31. Christian Index, 6 January 1866; Houston Baptist Association, Minutes, 1865, 4.


34. The Baptist, 1 February 1867.

Landmarkism arose over the question of whether pedobaptist organizations were true churches, entitled to recognition as such. Graves and his many followers insisted that they were not legitimate churches. Landmarkism was also distinguished by its insistence upon a continuous existence of a minority of true (Baptist) churches from the time of Christ and by the practice of closed communion.

In 1889, The Baptist of Memphis and the Baptist Reflector of Chattanooga merged into the Baptist and Reflector, published in Nashville.

35. Samuel Henderson, “To the Patrons and Friends of the South-Western Baptist,” Christian Index, 6 January 1866.


37. “Shall We Succeed?” East Tennessee Baptist (Knoxville, TN), 11 February 1870, “Faults and Failings,” East Tennessee Baptist, 1 April 1870.


CHAPTER 7
EDUCATING CONFEDERATE CHRISTIANS: SUNDAY SCHOOLS AND DENOMINATIONAL COLLEGES

The proper education of young southerners formed an integral part of the Confederate vision of religious reconstruction. Southern Christians understood that the perpetuation of their efforts to maintain a distinctive religious identity depended upon their success at transmitting cultural ideals to the next generation of southerners. The primary instruments used to accomplish this goal, other than the churches themselves, were Sunday schools and denominational colleges. Both institutions existed in the antebellum South, and both were disrupted by the war. During religious reconstruction, however, Sunday schools appeared in ever larger numbers of southern churches. In these schools young children could be taught both the basics of the Christian faith and devotion to the southern forms of American evangelicalism.

Southern denominations also devoted extraordinary efforts to the reestablishment of their colleges after the war. As with other aspects of religious reconstruction, the postwar support for colleges stemmed from both a genuine concern over the religious and intellectual training of southern youth and a desire to educate them in the tenets of the southern interpretation of the nation’s spiritual heritage and recent history. Southern colleges and seminaries were the training grounds for the next generation of ministers.
who would uphold southern religious ideals against the world, the devil—and the
northern denominations.

Even before the Civil War, southern Christians had established Sunday schools
in a few of their larger churches. Most of their Sunday school materials came from the
American Sunday School Union in Philadelphia. During the 1840s and 1850s, however,
southerners became increasingly suspicious of this organization, fearing that it had
become "an abolition society." In 1859 the Central Baptist Association in Georgia
declared that it "regretted" that in most of its Sunday schools "the Union school books
are retained." The following year, the Central Baptist Association affirmed that "the
Word of God and the Hymn Book are the only necessary books" for Sunday schools,
though "other works are sometimes used advantageously."¹

During the Civil War, southerners began to publish their own Sunday school
periodicals when possible. Samuel Boykin, native Georgian and the editor of the Baptist
Christian Index, began the Child's Index in 1862 with a salutation telling southern
children that "Since we have been engaged in repelling our wicked invaders, you have
been deprived of the neat and interesting papers you used to get from the North." The
Child's Index, which became the Child's Delight after 1866, filled the demand for a
southern Baptist children's periodical.²

An editorial in the Southern Presbyterian in the spring of 1861 contended that one
of the "most indispensable" needs facing southern Presbyterians was that of a "religious
paper for our Sunday-schools." They could no longer depend upon their former sources
in the North because many southerners "entertain a profound distrust of everything and
everybody at the North," even more are determined to boycott northern businesses, and the mails were sure to be interrupted. Even if it were possible to continue receiving northern publications, the editors asserted, it would be undesirable because one country should not depend upon another, and because "the Southern mind is now being injured by its condition of pupillage in things literary, benevolent, and religious." Furthermore, "the Sunday-school work has characteristics at the South which it has no where else; e.g., plantation Sunday Schools, and schools for the negroes in our churches." For all of these reasons, the Southern Presbyterian supported the establishment of a southern Sunday school paper on a union basis with support from different denominations.³

Presbyterian efforts bore fruit in December 1861 when the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America ordered the publication of a Sunday school paper. The Children's Friend did not appear until August 1862 because of the difficulty of obtaining paper and a printer. The paper was published by the Presbyterian Committee of Publication in Richmond, Virginia, and began publication with 3,000 subscribers. Methodists likewise began the publication of a Sunday school newspaper. Entitled the Children's Guide, this illustrated paper was published by John W. Burke in Macon, Georgia.⁴

The standard fare of these Sunday school periodicals were religious stories and reports of Sunday school activities throughout the South. In keeping with the nineteenth-century preoccupation with death, the papers also included obituaries of children who had faced death bravely with Christian resignation. In some issues, editors sought to instruct their young readers on the issues of the war and its consequences. An advertisement for
the Child's Index boasted that the periodical included "instructive stories, pleasing anecdotes, illustrations of history and natural history, and, by its scriptural enigmas, sets the young to 'searching the Scriptures.'"5

To help children cope with the death of loved ones, the Children's Friend published "A Furlough and Discharge" in October 1862. In this story a brave little North Carolina girl tells her pastor that God gave her brother "a furlough and a discharge too!" Her brother had died in a Richmond hospital after failing to secure a furlough to return home. The writer hoped that "every little girl and boy who reads these lines, and who has lost a dear brother since this war began, might be able to say what this little sister did, 'God gave him a furlough and discharge too.'" The readers should remember that "God will take care of all his people, and all his children, and take them away from this world of sorrow and trouble, to that peaceful home in heaven, where war, and the sin that makes it, shall never come."6

By July 1863, the Children's Friend declared that it was becoming "a favorite with the children, all over the Confederacy." Sunday schools of all denominations—Episcopalian, Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians—were using it for instruction. As it began its second year of publication the following month, the editors apologized that "we cannot give you those pictures, which we sent to England for, for we know children like to look at pictures." They feared that "our enemy's blockading ships have captured them." If the plates had fallen into enemy hands, "they will no doubt keep them, for what do they care for the children in the Confederacy? Have they not driven many little children with their dear mothers from their homes, and burned
their houses, so that they have now no home?” Reflecting the Confederate understanding of the war, the editors continued, “How much we ought to pray that God would forgive the sins for which he is now chastening us, and put an end to this dreadful war.” They urged all the children as well as adults to “pray for this, and many times every day.”

Turning to a spiritual application, the editors declared that another war existed in which all children should be soldiers: “that is the war against your sins, and against the world, and against the devil.” Although the readers of the Children’s Friend were too young to enter the armies of the Confederacy, “none are too young to enter the army of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Children were fond of “playing soldiers,” but if “you become Christians, you will be real soldiers; and you will be certain to get the victory.”

Near the end of the war, the Child’s Index published the story of “A Little Hero,” written by Mrs. M. J. M. As the story opens, Willie tries to comfort his mother after the Yankees had stolen all of their food and horses and killed their livestock. All they had left was some corn, but brave little Willie said, “Well, then, mother, we can live on parched corn and water.” Beaming with pride, Willie’s mother praised her “TRUE SOUTHERN BOY. The Yankees would soon throw down their arms if every mother had such a son.” Willie and his brother Eddie had told the Yankees that they intended to be “Federate soldiers” when they grew up, and the officer in command of the Union soldiers said to himself, “No reconstruction here.” Puzzled, Willie later asked his mother what reconstruction was. His mother replied that reconstruction “is admitting we are wrong, to quit fighting, to give up our slaves and lands and to be in truth the slaves ourselves of the wicked Yankees.” “But, mother, how can anyone do this,”
Willie asked. “We feel sure we are right; how then can we acknowledge we are wrong? Why this would be story in the sight of God.” His mother agreed, “No true soldier, no brave man, wants reconstruction.” Defiant, Willie exclaimed, “I’LL never go back to the Yankees. No, no, never; I’ll eat parched corn all my days before ever I’ll be for reconstruction.” The author concluded her story by asking, “who will emulate the spirit of Willie?” She hoped “all would take for your motto, ‘NO RECONSTRUCTION.’”

In another issue of the Child’s Index, editor Samuel Boykin described the landing of the pilgrims and their early settlements but condemned their descendants, the “Yankee nation.” The Yankees, who were trying to deprive southerners of “not only our religious liberty, but of every other kind of liberty,” had forgotten what their ancestors had suffered for these same freedoms. They “refuse to let us have Bibles, prevent our getting them from Europe, and when they can they steal what we do bring.” They have imprisoned southern preachers, and “deprive us of our churches, and burn them or use them as stables and storehouses.” If Yankees triumphed, they would “take away all our churches, stop the mouths of our preachers by law, and not even let us pray in our families as we wish.” Boykin urged southern children to “pray to God to change their minds” for they were “blinded by fanaticism and infidelity.” Southerners should also “pray to God to forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Hopefully, God would soon allow southern armies to drive them from the South and establish the Confederate nation so that southerners could enjoy all of their “rights and liberties.”

At the 1862 meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, Basil Manly, Jr., a strong advocate of Sunday schools, chaired a Committee on the Need for a Sunday
School Board. The committee proclaimed that the Sunday school was "the nursery of the Church, the camp of instruction for her young soldiers, the great Missionary to the Future." The time had come for Baptists in the Confederacy to move beyond cooperation with other denominations and "commence this work on our own account." Some might question the wisdom of making such an attempt in wartime. To them the committee declared that "the need of Sunday Schools is as great as ever, is even greater with us than heretofore." More children were orphans and destitute; more were ignorant and neglected. "These must grow up to vice and ruin—must poison the very roots of our young Confederacy—must infect the moral atmosphere in which we and our children shall live, unless met by early and vigorous efforts." Who would care for these "helpless ones," if not the "Churches of Christ"? Although many laborers were in the army, more than enough remained at home who were either too old or too young for the army. Furthermore, the Sunday schools could also expect aid from "that never failing and invincible corps of reserves, the sisterhood, who are ready for every good word and work, and need only to have the way opened and pointed out to them." The Southern Baptist Convention formed a Sunday School Board in 1863 with Manly as president. By early 1865, the Board was publishing several books "by Southern authors," including the new and enlarged "Confederate Sunday School Hymn Book."¹⁰

The Civil War provided new opportunities for southern evangelical women to teach Sunday schools when male teachers left for the war. The Washington Baptist Association in Georgia described the work of Sunday school teachers as similar to that of ministers in its 1864 meeting: "Your committee consider the Sabbath School in
connection with the Bible Class, second only to the preaching of the gospel as an instrument of good. . . . Every member of the church, both male and female, should feel the responsibility resting on him or her in this important work.” Despite the importance attached to the Sunday school, women clearly remained in subordinate positions within the churches. The evangelical ideal of womanhood gave these teachers opportunities for social interaction beyond the family circle, but it also proscribed their autonomy and independence.11

When the war ended, southern evangelical leaders renewed their commitment to Sunday schools. They lamented the absence of Sunday schools in many churches, especially rural ones. The Central Baptist Association complained in August 1865 that “it is a painful fact that too many christian parents take no interest in the Sabbath Schools—a large number of our country churches have none at all.” Baptists in western Tennessee admitted that they had not been “sufficiently careful to foster and promote Sunday Schools in our bounds.” Sunday schools could be “a most efficient means of instilling moral and religious sentiments into the minds of children, and properly training the rising generations for the momentous responsibilities which must soon devolve upon them as members of society and of the church of God.” Although several churches in the area had “large and flourishing” Sunday schools, “the large majority of the Churches in West Tennessee are without schools.”12

Southern churches made several attempts to organize and expand their Sunday school work. In 1867, for example, the South Georgia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South established a Sunday School Society. According to its
constitution, the society was “to supervise the general interests of Sunday Schools within the bounds of the Conference, to devise ways and means for furnishing books to destitute Sabbath Schools, to suggest the best means of conducting Sunday Schools, and to do all in its power to increase the interest of our people in this most important agency of the church.” During the 1860s and 1870s both state and denominational bodies appointed Sunday school missionaries. In 1867 octogenarian Lovick Pierce began his work as the Sunday school agent for the South Georgia Conference, a position which he held for the next four years.¹³

Thomas C. Boykin likewise served as Sunday school evangelist for Georgia Baptists from 1874 to 1894. The Baptists of the state had formed a Sunday School Association in April 1868 at a meeting in Augusta. The motto of the new association was “A Sunday School in Every Baptist Church Throughout the State.” The association urged pastors, deacons, and laity to organize and maintain Sunday schools in their churches. When the Tennessee Baptist Convention formed in 1874, many wanted a Sunday school evangelist for the state, but the new convention did not have the financial resources. In 1881 W. A. Therrell was appointed as Tennessee’s Sunday school evangelist through an agreement with the American Baptist Publication Society in Philadelphia.¹⁴

At the denominational level as well, the Sunday school attracted renewed attention after the war. In 1870 the southern Methodist General Conference appointed Atticus G. Haygood as the first denominational Sunday school secretary. Haygood moved from Georgia to Nashville, Tennessee, to begin his new work. He revised the Sunday School
Visitor and began work on a series of lessons for different age groups drawn from the same scriptural text. Although successful at first, Haygood’s system came under considerable criticism by the time he resigned in the fall of 1875. His successor, W. G. E. Cunyngham, began in 1876 to utilize the International Series of lessons, which were aimed at all American Protestants rather than emphasizing Methodist doctrines as Haygood had done. Despite this change, Haygood’s energetic work as Sunday school secretary had vitalized the growing Sunday school movement in many Methodist churches across the South.  

Southern Baptists had a more difficult time with their Sunday school organization. The Sunday School Board, organized in 1863, moved to Memphis in 1868. The Southern Baptist Convention in 1870 considered the possibility of closer cooperation with northern Baptists in Sunday school work, but determined that it was “eminently wise and proper to maintain our existing organization, and devote our energies to the development and nurture of our own resources.” Despite this unwillingness to unite the board with northern efforts, controversies with J. R. Graves and financial problems led the Convention to merge it with the Domestic Mission Board in 1873. Most of the denominational Sunday school work lapsed for two decades, except for the publication of Kind Words, until the Convention formed a new Sunday School Board in 1891.

As part of their renewed commitment to Sunday schools, southern evangelicals resumed the publication of Sunday school periodicals started during the war and began others. The southern Presbyterian General Assembly in December 1865 instructed its Committee of Publication to resurrect the Children’s Friend, which had been published
for three years prior to the destruction of the Richmond offices in April 1865. The
destruction of John W. Burke’s Macon publishing house by Federal cavalry in April 1865
ended the publication of the Methodist Children’s Guide. Although he promised to
“commence the Guide again” when he got a suitable press, the periodical never
reappeared. Other publishers revived the Sunday School Visitor for southern Methodist
Sunday schools in 1869.17

Baptist Samuel Boykin, wartime editor of both the Christian Index and the Child’s
Index, sold his interest in the Christian Index, but restarted his Sunday school periodical
early in 1866 with the new title of the Child’s Delight. Southern Baptist seminary
professors in Greenville, South Carolina, also perceived the need and began the
publication of the Sunday school periodical Kind Words in 1866 to meet the demand for
southern Sunday school literature. In December 1866, the editors urged southern
Baptists to “show Kind Words to everybody, circulate it everywhere, and send us large
orders with money.” Only one dollar for ten monthly copies for a year was a small price
to pay for “our own Southern paper.” During the summer of 1868, Kind Words moved
to Memphis, Tennessee. Boykin’s Child’s Delight merged with Kind Words in 1870,
and Boykin became one of the editors of Kind Words. He expressed his sincere hope
that “all will continue to subscribe for KIND WORDS, THE CHILD’S DELIGHT.
Their old editor will still write for them, and try his best to give them a good and
profitable paper.” Although the Sunday School Board ceased to exist as a separate entity
in 1873, Kind Words continued publication. In 1891 the new Sunday School Board
adopted and enlarged the *Kind Words* series, for which Samuel Boykin continued to serve as editor and writer until his death in 1899.18

Southerners remained concerned in the postwar era about the corrupting influence that northern Sunday school literature might have on their children. The North Carolina Baptist *Biblical Recorder* warned in 1866 against purchasing Sunday school literature from northern publishers, because such publications might brand Confederates as “traitors and criminals.” In 1869 the Committee on Sabbath Schools of the North Georgia Annual Conference admitted that the “Lesson Paper Systems (such as that published by Adams, Blackmer & Lyon, of Chicago) are great improvements,” but they objected to “the locality where they are issued.” The Committee greatly preferred to have “all our Sabbath School Books especially written and published here at home.” “Is this impossible?” the report asked. “Surely we might, at least, make selections and compilations from those which are not objectionable, and have them published at our own house.” The ministers made their reasoning explicit: “Northern sentiments and interpretations do not always correspond with ours, and we prefer to have home books, and home teaching, and home publishers, if so it may be.” The Sunday School Society of the South Georgia Annual Conference urged “all our Pastors to adopt the uniform system of lessons prepared and published by our Publishing House.” The Methodist *Christian Advocate* of Nashville insisted that in conducting Sunday schools, “we wish to supersede the use of all such questionable helps as Barnes’s Notes, Questions, etc. of the American Sunday-school Union, and Special Lessons gotten up by parties who are, as far as our Church is concerned, utterly irresponsible—Mimpriss, Chicago, and others,
which we cannot indorse.” The choice of textbooks for Sunday schools was “a very serious matter,” and “our pastors ought not to sanction the introduction into our schools of books of instruction gotten up by Northern Houses and others over which we have no control.” As with so many other elements of religious reconstruction, Sunday schools needed southern teachers using southern materials to uphold southern ideals.19

Southern Sunday school periodicals carefully upheld southern denominations and the memory of the Confederacy and its heroes. The content of these newspapers during the Reconstruction era was much the same as during the war. Young southerners continued to receive numerous stories about children who learned valuable moral lessons. Occasionally, Confederate heroes emerged in these stories. In one entitled, “She Never Gave Me Aught But Pleasure,” the author began, “So wrote General Lee of a daughter who died during the war.” The lesson for young readers was clear: “I want you to live so as to give your dear father and mother pleasure, and only pleasure. To do this you must obey them promptly, cheerfully, and at all times.” The author turned the great general’s memorial to his daughter into a goal for all southern children. In another article, John Broadus wrote about “Tommy and His Rules.” Tommy asked his father for a set of rules to live by, and his father obliged by giving him a list. Every other rule on the list was “Tell the truth.” Tommy wondered why this rule was repeated so often, and his father replied that he wanted Tommy to be “like a man I read about, not long ago.” The man was Colonel Coleman of Virginia, “who belonged to Lee’s Army, and was killed during the war.” Of this man “whom everybody admired and loved,” his mother had said that she had never known him to tell a lie in his whole life, except on
one occasion. Later, she found that she was mistaken about that incident. Tommy’s father declared, “Ah! Tommy, if only your dear mother could say when you are grown, that you never told a lie, from baby up to man!” This story transforms a Confederate hero into a moral hero as well, a model for young southerners like Tommy.20

The efforts of denominational organs to increase both the number and quality of southern Sunday schools led one Georgia committee to declare, “We believe this to be emphatically a Sunday School era.” These initiatives enjoyed considerable success in the decade and a half after the war. The Georgia Baptist Association in 1866 voted to form a committee on Sunday schools and ask its member churches for Sunday school statistics in their annual reports. By 1878 the Association proudly reported that no church “is without a Sabbath School,” and some had two or more. Evangelist Thomas C. Boykin reported to the Georgia Baptist Convention in 1876 that he had organized 61 new Sunday schools in the previous year, yielding a total of 567 schools with over 21,000 students. By the following year, Boykin declared that there were nearly 700 Sunday schools with approximately 25,000 scholars.21

Southern Methodists also enjoyed considerable gains. The number of Sunday schools in the Tennessee Conference doubled between 1866 and 1869. By 1877 the conference had 384 Sunday schools with 21,250 students. The North Georgia Conference in 1867 reported 471 schools and 23,810 Sunday school scholars. By 1877 the total had risen to 585 schools and 30,487 students. The South Georgia Conference also enjoyed considerable growth. In 1867 it reported 221 schools and 10,049 students. A decade later the conference had 322 schools with 12,619 scholars.22
The development of southern Sunday schools involved more than just numerical increase. Many Sunday schools met for only part of the year, were union schools which served several denominations, or did not subscribe to denominational periodicals. In 1872, for example, the Methodist South Georgia Conference had 276 Sunday schools. However, only 141 were using Dr. Haygood’s uniform lessons, only 162 were described as “successful,” and only 94 met through the winter months. In 1873 the Americus District resolved to “establish Sunday Schools at each one of our appointments, upon a strictly methodistic basis, and discourage as much as possible, in a prudent way, the patronage of Union Schools.” The following year, the pastor of the Sumter Circuit “depreciated the habit of S. Schools going into winter quarters.” The Bainbridge District resolved in 1871 to “use our best exertions to establish a Sunday School in connexion with every church, if possible, in the bounds of the District.” That same year, the Bainbridge District also recommended “the S. School Magazine, the S. S. Visitor, Our Little Folks, and Haygood’s System of Uniform Lessons to the adoption of all our Sunday Schools, as valuable auxiliaries in the religious instruction of Children.” By 1873 the District rejoiced because “our own series of Uniform Lessons & S. S. papers are being generally introduced,” and the meeting urged all “to adopt & introduce into the schools our own literature.” Even Sunday school statistics revealed much work yet to be done. In 1876, 428 Georgia Baptist churches did not have Sunday schools, and of 167 Presbyterian churches in the Synod of Georgia in 1875, only 84 had Sunday schools. Nevertheless, Sunday schools were gaining favor across the South among both the
denominational leadership and the laity, and many of these churches would establish schools in the next few years.23

By the 1880s most southern evangelical churches had Sunday schools that inculcated Christian, denominational, and southern values in their students. These “nurseries of the church” were training the next generation of southern evangelicals who could be trusted to uphold the Confederate understanding of the war and the southern forms of evangelicalism into the next century. The training begun in the Sunday schools was continued in denominational colleges, where religious southerners could safely send their sons and daughters without fear of corruption. Like other institutions in southern religious life, Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian colleges were expected to uphold the Confederate understanding of the Civil War and the southern plan for rebuilding Zion.

The report of the trustees of Mercer University in 1866 manifested the guiding ideals behind the revival of southern denominational colleges in the 1860s and 1870s: “Knowledge is power. If the sons of the South are to possess that power and influence which will be demanded in their sunny clime, they must be educated. They will be the more useful and happy if their education is secured in their native State.” The report on education from the same meeting of the Georgia Baptist Convention proclaimed that “the proper mental and moral training of all classes and conditions of our young people is the great desire of all Christians and of all lovers of our race.” Georgia’s young men and women should be trained in the South by southern teachers to “meet the demands of the oncoming generation of our noble Commonwealth.” At the 1867 meeting of the Georgia Baptist Convention, the Committee on Education urged all “faithful Christians who desire
the purity of Zion” to support education. Baptists should, “as a denomination, looking not only to the political, but the religious future of our country, determine to do our part in wielding that powerful instrumentality for good—the education of the young.” Furthermore, “let us see to it, that every year there shall go forth from our academies, colleges, and professional schools, increasing supplies of earnest, educated men, who will become centers of influence, and perpetuate our ideas in the political and religious institutions of the country.” When political institutions were in the hands of others, southern evangelicals could send their sons and daughters to denominational colleges, which, unlike state schools, were free from Republican domination. There, the Confederate vision of religious reconstruction could be reinforced among the next generation of southern Christians.24

The fortunes of Georgia’s three principal denominational schools reveal much about the difficulties of rebuilding religious education in the 1860s and 1870s. Georgia Baptists were proud that their Mercer University at Penfield remained open throughout the war when virtually all other colleges suspended operations. However, thirty Mercer students died in the Civil War and most of the rest served in the Confederate army. The four faculty members were paid very little during 1865, and the close of the war “left the University without income, and all our people without money for purposes of education.” Under these circumstances, the president resigned to become president of a college in Kentucky. Denominational leaders had attempted several times in the 1850s to relocate the University to a more accessible town, but their efforts failed. In August 1865, an Atlanta man resurrected the issue of removal when he offered 45 acres of land
on the Macon and Western Railroad in Atlanta if the school moved there within five years. Because of opposition to the move within the Convention, however, the college struggled on at the rural village of Penfield.25

In December 1866, the newly elected Georgia legislature attempted to aid the state’s impoverished colleges by enacting a law to support the education of maimed or indigent soldiers at one of five colleges—the University of Georgia, Emory College, Mercer University, Oglethorpe University, and Bowdon Collegiate Institute. The law provided for the support of the soldier until his graduation. In return the soldier had to teach in the state’s schools for as many years as he had received support. The state would reimburse the school for the student’s expenses up to a maximum of $300 annually. The University of Georgia received over $50,000 of the more than $100,000 expended by the state during the two years of the program. The $27,000 which Emory College received provided critical support to the Methodist institution in the difficult early postwar years. In the two years the law was in effect, Emory received more support from the state than from paying students. The other three colleges together received another $27,000 through this program.26

Mercer President Henry H. Tucker complained in the spring of 1867 that he could not accept the state’s offer because payment was tendered in “State bonds, of an inferior grade and of a character which I am sure must make them entirely worthless.” Although the University had given and would continue to give free tuition to Confederate veterans, it could not provide them with board, clothing, and books “gratis, or . . . furnish them for unmarketable bonds, which amounts to the same thing.” After Governor Charles J.
Jenkins was removed from office in early 1868, President Tucker inquired of military commander General George Meade whether the state’s appropriation for disabled soldiers would continue. Meade replied that the program would continue so long as black and Federal veterans were accepted on an equal footing with Confederate soldiers. Tucker and the faculty refused to accept students on these terms, which were not “in accordance with our own sense of duty or propriety.” When the state convention met in April, however, the delegates had lost their patience. Undoubtedly envying Emory College’s receipt of vital support from this source, the committee assigned to examine the report of the Board of Trustees grew irritated with the faculty and trustees. The University had “already suffered in public esteem, and must continue thus to suffer so long as other institutions render efficient this appropriation, and Mercer alone does not.” The committee urged the trustees and faculty to “place Mercer in the same relation to disabled soldiers that is sustained by like institutions in the State.” Mercer probably received little support from this source, as the 1869 state legislature repealed the 1866 act outright and appropriated funds only through the end of 1868.27

To overcome some of the financial difficulties which the University faced, the Board of Trustees determined in the spring of 1867 to move Mercer and appointed a committee to investigate possible locations. This plan created an immediate storm of protest from several associations led by the powerful Georgia Association in which Mercer was located. In response to this outcry, the trustees realized that it was “inexpedient to attempt the removal of the University.” The Georgia Baptist Convention in 1868 passed three resolutions that it hoped would settle the issue. The first expressed
the Convention’s persuasion that Mercer’s current lack of prosperity was not “exclusively attributable to location.” The second resolution declared that the continued agitation of the subject injured the University, and the Convention “earnestly and affectionately entreat our brethren to cease the agitation of the subject of its removal from the town of Penfield.” The third resolution instructed the trustees to “put the University buildings and enclosures in a state of complete repair” in order to promote “the permanency and efficiency of the University.”

The controversy over Mercer’s remote location arose again, however, in the state convention meeting of 1870. After discussing the issue for half of the three-day conference, the Georgia Baptist Convention voted to move Mercer to a more suitable location. The decision to move Mercer did not go unchallenged; the Georgia Association condemned it as “unwise, injudicious, morally wrong, and necessarily tending to the destruction of the unity and the educational interests of the Baptists of Georgia.” The primary reasons cited for removing Mercer from Penfield were that the town was too small to provide satisfactory public accommodations and patronage and that it was too far from the railroads. Chief among the virtues of Macon, Mercer’s new home, were the $125,000 offered by the city and its central location which was “of easy access by railroad from every part of the State.” The relocation proved successful as Mercer was second only to the University of Georgia among the state’s colleges in the 1870s.

The Presbyterians’ Oglethorpe University followed a much different course in postwar Georgia. Located in the small village of Midway near Milledgeville, Oglethorpe closed under the pressures of war and did not reopen until 1867. At the 1865 meeting
of the Synod of Georgia in Augusta, the Committee on Oglethorpe University recommended that the University remain closed until more resources were available. The Committee also “seriously doubted whether [Oglethorpe] can ever successfully accomplish its design where it now is, or till it shall be situated in a city or a large town.” Soon after the University reopened in 1867, the Synod passed a resolution that Oglethorpe “should be removed from its present location to some point more favorable to its prosperity.” In 1868 the Synod considered the possibility of uniting the resources of Oglethorpe with Davidson College in North Carolina. By the end of 1869, Georgia Presbyterians narrowly passed a resolution to relocate Oglethorpe in Atlanta, with the promise that the city would donate ten acres of land and the citizens would raise $40,000 for the college. The University opened in Atlanta in October 1870. Despite a promising start with about 120 students (including those in the “preparatory department”), the university had within two years consumed virtually its entire endowment. The Synod of Georgia in November 1872 ordered “the prompt and unconditional close of the exercises of the Institution.” Central to Oglethorpe’s failure was the small base of Presbyterians in Georgia. Although the college enjoyed sponsorship from the Synods of Alabama and South Carolina as well as the Synod of Georgia, the denominational base remained considerably smaller than that supporting either Mercer University or Emory College. The relocation to Atlanta produced “disastrous results,” and the Synod soon lost its rights to the property donated by the city for Oglethorpe. In 1874 the synod lamented “the entire loss . . . of all the funds left by the war and which it took years of hard labor to accumulate, a fund which should have been held sacred.”
The movement of Mercer University and Oglethorpe University from small, isolated villages to growing cities reflected the aggressiveness of southern evangelicals who were determined to redeem the South. No longer content to minister only to a rural membership and less concerned about isolating students in a separate evangelical community, southern denominations moved several of their colleges to cities in the late nineteenth century. Others, like Vanderbilt University, began in larger cities. The decisions to move both Mercer and Oglethorpe rested on the belief that more accessible locations near railroads would increase enrollment. Furthermore, many towns and cities were willing to offer large sums of money and tracts of land for the social and economic benefits the college would bring. These offers were quite attractive to denominational colleges struggling for survival in the postwar South. The geographical movement paralleled a social transformation as evangelical Churches became increasingly influential in southern society. The change also claimed a heavy price as religious colleges removed from the safety of social and geographical isolation to the dangers of assimilation in southern cities.31

Georgia Methodists’ Emory College in Oxford had closed in 1862, and its endowment vanished with the failure of the Confederacy. However, by the end of 1866, the school was once again in operation. Much of the college’s support in 1867 and 1868 came from the Georgia legislature’s program to educate disabled Confederate soldiers. Bishop George Foster Pierce also called for 500 people to join him in pledging $20 per year to provide a temporary endowment. He announced that Emory had “risen from the dead.” Although ravaged by the war, “her pulse of life is strong, her heart full of hope,
and her future bright with promise.” He warned his “friends and brethren” that if they did not rush to join him in supporting the college, “I shall be compelled to worry you with line upon line.” In 1869 the North Georgia Annual Conference protested the repeal of the law providing education for disabled soldiers. It hoped that “a returning sense of justice and humanity may yet induce the General Assembly to reconsider their action and restore an appropriation at once just, humane, benevolent and patriotic.” Despite this setback, Emory College continued to grow and remained the capstone of Methodist education in Georgia.32

During the Reconstruction era, Tennessee evangelicals sought to build major universities that would serve both their state and the entire South. During the 1870s Tennessee Christians established three new universities in the state—Southwestern Presbyterian University in 1873 at Clarksville, Southwestern Baptist University in 1874 at Jackson, and Vanderbilt University (originally to be called the “Central University of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South) in 1875 at Nashville. Each of these institutions achieved some success, but Vanderbilt became by far the most prominent in its brief career (1875-1914) with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.33

The origins of the Southwestern Presbyterian University lay in the difficulties which many southern Presbyterian colleges faced in the aftermath of the Civil War. Early in 1866 the Southern Presbyterian was “pleased to learn that an effort is soon to be made” to unite the three Presbyterian colleges in La Grange, Tennessee; Oakland, Mississippi; and Midway, Georgia. None of these institutions was “now in a condition to stand alone.” Although all three did soon fail, only the La Grange Synodical College
joined in the effort to organize the university. La Grange College, property of the Synod of Memphis, lost most of its endowment during the war, but it still possessed valuable land in Arkansas. The synod mused in 1866 that “six years ago its success seemed certain,” but “today it lies prostrate in the dust and its glory has departed.” The synod appointed a committee to examine the possibility of reviving the college.34

The Synod of Nashville faced a similar problem with Stewart College of Clarksville, Tennessee. After failing to gain support for Stewart from the Synod of Memphis, a committee employed an agent to raise funds, but he became so discouraged that he soon gave up. In October 1868 conditions were so bleak that the trustees of the college “desire finally to wind up and dispose of the College enterprise.” Since there were “parties ready to take it off their hands,” the trustees believed it was “a favorable time to close it up” since it was, “in its present condition, only a source of mortification and reproach.” Unready to admit defeat, the Committee on Stewart College proposed a final effort to save the school. It assessed $6,000 on the various churches of the synod for the relief of the college with the understanding that if satisfactory progress were not made in three months, the trustees could dispose of the college property at their discretion. Immediately after the synod meeting adjourned, one member visited the Synod of Memphis then in session. After two years of consideration, the Synod of Memphis was ready to admit that it could not sustain La Grange College. It pledged $1,000 in aid to Stewart College and agreed to join the Synod of Nashville in the control and patronage of the institution. This support, together with contributions from the churches of the Synod of Nashville and private donations, saved the college.35
The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States considered the possibility of establishing a central southern Presbyterian university in 1867 and 1868, but in the latter year indefinitely postponed the proposal. Prominent southern churchmen James A. Lyon and Benjamin Morgan Palmer continued to advocate the idea, and the issue resurfaced at the General Assembly of 1871. Opposition was strong, however, and the General Assembly simply urged the synods not to begin any more colleges, but rather to unite in the support of existing institutions. The Synod of Nashville seized upon this idea and urged other synods in the southwest to unite with it in the support of a single university. In 1873 commissioners from the synods of Alabama, Arkansas, Memphis, Mississippi, and Nashville met to create the Southwestern Presbyterian University out of the assets of Stewart College in Clarksville. The Synod of Texas later joined the alliance. At the time Stewart was the only institution of higher learning in the entire Mississippi Valley that belonged to southern Presbyterians.36

Tennessee Baptists faced a similar dilemma with their Union University in Murfreesboro. This school did not resume classes until 1868, but the Tennessee Baptist Educational Society which owned the college closed it in 1873. The Society cited few students, the country’s financial crisis, an epidemic of cholera, and strong competition from state schools as the reasons for closing Union. When the Baptists of Tennessee united into the Tennessee Baptist Convention in April 1874, they adopted a new constitution. Article 5 of the constitution pledged the convention to “promote the educational interests of the Baptists of Tennessee, as a special object.” The Committee on Education of the Convention insisted that it was “of vital importance to the
denominational interests of the Baptists of the State” to establish a “well-endowed, thoroughly equipped University, of the highest order.” A committee appointed to select a location for the proposed university met in July to consider Chattanooga, Jackson, McMinnville, and Murfreesboro. The committee decided upon Jackson because the town offered the campus and endowment of West Tennessee College and subscriptions of $150,000. The committee also recommended that the Board of Trustees for the university include members from Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Texas. A special August meeting of the Tennessee Baptist Convention approved the actions of the committee, and the Southwestern Baptist University began operations in September 1874. In 1875 the Tennessee Baptist Educational Society voted to transfer all of the assets of Union University to Southwestern Baptist University, but the trustees of Union University never transferred the property. Despite its goal of being a Baptist university for several states, Southwestern actually garnered little support outside of western Tennessee.37

Some southern Methodists in the 1860s and 1870s increasingly favored the establishment of a theological school to train ministers. Conservatives, however, under the leadership of Bishop George F. Pierce, opposed a theological school as detrimental to “experiential religion.” They successfully blocked the proposal for a theological school at the General Conference of 1870. Undaunted, advocates of theological training determined to achieve their goal by joining forces with those southern Methodists who wanted to erect a great central university. Prominent among those favoring the new institution were Bishops Holland N. McTyeire and Robert Paine. In January 1872 a
convention of delegates from nine conferences in the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee, met in Memphis to formulate plans for a large southern Methodist university. The Memphis Convention decided that the proposed “Central University of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South” would need a minimum endowment of $1,000,000 and should not begin operations until at least $500,000 had been raised. Bishop Pierce once again led the opposition to the plan and declared that “every dollar invested in a theological school will be a damage to Methodism.” “Had I a million,” Pierce proclaimed, “I would not give a dime for such an object.” Despite this division among the leaders of the Church, the College of Bishops approved the proposed university in May 1872. The school remained only a plan, however, because efforts to raise the sum necessary to begin the enterprise yielded only modest returns.

In March 1873 Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt offered $500,000 to the university with the conditions that it be located “in or near Nashville,” and that Bishop McTyeire be elected president of the Board of Trustees and equipped with broad veto powers. In accepting this offer, the Board changed the name of the school to Vanderbilt University. Later gifts from the Vanderbilt family raised the wealth of the institution to $1.5 million by 1890. As historian Hunter D. Farish noted, Vanderbilt University in the latter part of the nineteenth century had “a financial independence enjoyed by no other Southern university.”

Denominational colleges for women also struggled to survive in the late 1860s and 1870s. Some recuperated quickly, like the Methodists’ Wesleyan Female College in Macon, which soon continued its career as a “dispenser of sanctified learning.” Others,
such as the Baptist Female College of South-western Georgia in Cuthbert, reopened for a while but soon perished. This college was suspended during the war, but resumed in 1866. In 1868 it closed again with “dilapidated” buildings and no teachers until 1871 when it was revived again. In 1875 the Baptist Female College closed forever, and four years later the state took over the property for use as an agricultural school. Most religious colleges for women followed the course of the Methodists’ Andrew Female College in Cuthbert, which strove to remain open and weathered the years of Reconstruction with a handful of college and a few preparatory students.39

Those colleges which survived offered instruction to young women in a thoroughly southern atmosphere. In 1866 the Georgia Annual Conference commended the recently reopened Andrew Female College and its “corps of competent teachers, all of whom are graduates of Southern Institutions.” The 1867 Almanac of Andrew Female College boasted that the faculty were all “genuinely Southern” and that the president of the college, A. L. Hamilton, had been an officer in the Confederate army for four years. In Jackson, Tennessee, Amos B. Jones—Methodist minister, Confederate soldier, and Ku Klux Klan member—served as a professor and later president of the Memphis Conference Female Institute. The “thoroughly qualified president” of La Grange Female College in Georgia between 1870 and 1872 was the Rev. Morgan Callaway, who served in the Confederate army. Callaway was later a professor at Emory College. Southern evangelicals could safely send their daughters to such schools with the assurance that they would receive proper religious, and southern, educations.40
Throughout religious reconstruction, southern churchmen urged their congregations to educate their children in southern denominational colleges. The ministers of the Bainbridge District of the southern Methodist Church resolved to impress upon all the importance of having their sons and daughters educated “where the better feelings of the heart, no less than the faculties of the mind, are trained and cultivated.” The North Georgia Annual Conference could not “with too much emphasis express the conviction that Georgia Methodists should educate their sons and daughters, as far as possible, at our own institutions, and especially at those under the ownership and patronage of this Conference.” Five years later, the conference still resolved to “urge upon Georgians to educate their children in Georgia, and upon Methodists to educate their children at our Conference schools.” The West Tennessee Baptist Convention notified its members that “it is their duty to God, to truth, to their own families, and to posterity, to patronize their own schools and colleges.” Fearing that “the late political revolution” would be followed by “greater revolutions in the social and religious world,” Georgia Baptists insisted that “the proper education of the head and the heart is, perhaps, the best defence we can provide for posterity.”

Concern for the perpetuation of their cultural and religious values prompted southern evangelicals to devote much energy to the support of Sunday schools and religious colleges. Sunday schools would begin the mental and moral training of the next generation of southern Christians. Through the development of organized schools and the use of southern Sunday school literature, southerners could provide their children with a proper respect for their spiritual heritage and safeguard the religious interests of
the South. The training begun in Sabbath schools would continue in the religious colleges scattered across the South. Most southern Christians in the 1860s and 1870s agreed with Methodist Atticus Haygood, who in 1874 called evangelical higher education "the cause of the Church, and, therefore, the cause of God."42 The zeal for religious education became so great in some areas that denominational leaders denounced the proliferation of small, poorly funded colleges. To remedy this problem, southern conventions, conferences, and synods began joint efforts to support a few central colleges. These citadels of southern evangelicalism formed a vital part of the Confederate vision of religious reconstruction. In them young men and women would receive religious educations free from the corrupting influences rampant in the North. From them young southerners would go forth to take their place in upholding the values of southern Christianity.

Notes


4. Children's Friend (Richmond, VA), August 1862, November 1862.

5. Advertisement for the Child's Index, Christian Index (Macon, GA), 5 January 1865.


   In June 1863 Manly, as president of the Sunday School Board, sent a letter under flag of truce to Richard Fuller of Baltimore requesting 25,000 New Testaments. Manly wrote, "We wish to push on vigorously the work of Sunday School instruction for the sake of the children, and for the sake of our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ." Letter from Basil Manly, Jr. to Richard Fuller, 15 June 1863, Manly Collection of Manuscripts, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives.

   Various ministers also tried to get political leaders involved in providing support for Sunday schools. The Rev. C. W. Parker of Waynesville, Georgia, asked Confederate Vice President Alexander H. Stephens if he or President Jefferson Davis would "write me or the children through me a few thoughts on the Sunday School." Parker wanted "to use every inducement to get the uprising generation interested in the Sabbath School cause." Rev. C. W. Parker to A. H. Stephens, 15 February 1862, Alexander H. Stephens Papers, Library of Congress, quoted in T. Conn Bryan, "Churches in Georgia During the Civil War," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 33 (1949): 292.


12. Central Baptist Association, Minutes, 1865, 4; West Tennessee Baptist Convention, Proceedings, 1865, 10; ibid., 1866, 6.

13. Constitution of the Sunday School Society of the South Georgia Annual Conference, 1867, South Georgia Conference Archives, Epworth-by-the-Sea, GA; Minutes of December 1868, December 1869, and December 1870, Minutes of the Officers and Board of Managers of the Sunday School Society, 1867-1872, South Georgia Conference Archives.

In 1878 the Hephzibah Baptist Association in Georgia commended the work of Thomas C. Boykin. He "visited some of our churches last spring, and seemed to impart a new impetus to the work. Churches that before could not keep up a school more than a few weeks at a time have been in successful operation ever since his visit, and have good prospects for the future." W. L. Kilpatrick, *The Hephzibah Baptist Association Centennial, 1794-1894* (Augusta, GA: Richards and Shaver, 1894), 142-43.


A letter from Georgia in 1866 to *Kind Words* demonstrates the support such publications had: "I like your little paper very much. The color of it is not quite as white as that of some papers, but I do not think any the less of it for that. It has an honest look. Everybody knows that the war has broken us; and I like to see a coat that is in keeping with a man's purse. I think, too, the little shady countenance, which tells of our late troubles, has a tale in it of itself, and only makes *Kind Words* sweeter and more interesting." *Kind Words*, April 1866.


The North Georgia Conference committee also complained that "all of our Sunday School music, and most of the hymns are Northern productions. Many of them are sentimental and silly, and some of them are worse."

In May 1866 Charles Manly wrote to his brother Basil about a poem entitled "Glad and Free," which had appeared in the Sunday school periodical *Young Reaper*, published in Philadelphia. Charles Manly wrote to the editor of the *Young Reaper* that "if he thought proper to publish any more such articles in the paper, I would prefer that he would not send them to us; as I should not distribute them and did not care to pay
postage on what would be waste paper.” The editor replied that he thought Manly was too sensitive about the freedmen. Manly declared that while the editor could publish what he wanted, “even those things which he knew would be offensive to Christians at the South, we would also reserve to ourselves the right of not circulating papers which contained objectionable statements—especially when the objection to them was that they were false and irritating.” Charles Manly to Basil Manly, Jr., 28 May 1866, Manly Collection of Manuscripts, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives.


22. John Abernathy Smith, Cross and Flame: Two Centuries of United Methodism in Middle Tennessee (Nashville, TN: Commission on Archives and History of the Tennessee Conference, 1984), 211; North Georgia Annual Conference, Minutes, 1871; ibid., 1877; South Georgia Annual Conference, Minutes, 1867; ibid., 1877, 27.

23. Minutes of 13 December 1872, Minutes of the Officers and Board of Managers of the Sunday School Society, 1867-1872, South Georgia Conference Archives; Minutes of 4 April 1873, 2 April 1874, Americus District Conference, Minutes, 1867-1878, South Georgia Conference Archives; Minutes of April 1871, April 1873, Bainbridge District Conference, Minutes, 1867-1878, South Georgia Conference Archives; Georgia Baptist Convention, Minutes, 1876; Synod of Georgia, Minutes, 1875, 18.


The 1861 catalog of Mercer University demonstrates the tenor of its teaching. Part of the student’s senior year would be devoted to “a special study of the subject of Slavery... in order that our young men may be qualified to defend the institutions of their country. It is needless to say that the teachings of the Bible on this subject will be thoroughly examined, and considered authoritative.” Every student was expected to develop “a practical mastery of the argument on that question, which of all others of earthly interest, is most important to the people of the Confederate States.” Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Mercer University, 1860-1861 (Penfield, GA: Mercer University, 1861), 31-32.


In 1868, 89 of Emory’s 103 students were supported by the state program, and the college received $4,511.50 for their tuition and expenses. Ralph Eugene Reed, Jr., “Fortresses of Faith: Design and Experience at Southern Evangelical Colleges, 1830-1900” (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1991), 278.


30. Synod of Georgia, *Minutes*, 1865, 13; 1867, 22; 1868, 13; 1869, 13-14; 1870, 19; 1871, 18; 1872, 15-16.

Oglethorpe University had some $30,000 of endowment left at the end of the war. By 1872, this fund had dwindled to $2,608. “Oglethorpe University,” *Southern Presbyterian*, 18 January 1866; Synod of Georgia, *Minutes*, 1872, 15.


In 1861 the Mercer University catalogue, reflecting antebellum concerns, praised the institution’s location as the “retired and quiet village of Penfield.” There students would be “protected by law from the most fruitful sources of temptation; and the moral and religious influences of the place are well calculated to promote good order and diligent habits.” The Georgia Baptist Association continued to embrace these concerns when the Convention debated the relocation of Mercer in 1870. The Association insisted that the “sylvan retreats of the present locality are incomparably more favorable to the good morals of young men than the haunts and purlieus of vice of Macon, or any other city.” *Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Mercer University*, 1861, 23; Georgia Baptist Association, *Minutes*, 1870, 5.
Between the Civil War and World War I, eight evangelical colleges moved from villages to cities and towns along the railroads. Besides Mercer and Oglethorpe Universities, they were: Randolph-Macon College, 1868; Howard College, 1887; Trinity College, 1892; Centenary College, 1906; Emory College, 1914; and Southern University, 1919. During the same period, no state-sponsored colleges in the South moved from their antebellum locations. Reed, “Fortresses of Faith,” 300.

32. Georgia Annual Conference, Minutes, 1866, 20; George Gilman Smith, The Life and Times of George Foster Pierce (Sparta, GA: Hancock Publishing Co., 1888), 496, 503; North Georgia Annual Conference, Minutes, 1869, 17.

33. The Southwestern Baptist University became Union University in 1907. The Southwestern Presbyterian University moved to Memphis in 1925 and became Southwestern. In 1945 the name was changed to Southwestern at Memphis. In 1984 Southwestern at Memphis became Rhodes College.

34. “Union of Synodical Colleges,” Southern Presbyterian, 15 February 1866; Synod of Memphis, Minutes, 1866, 195, quoted in Ernest Trice Thompson, Presbyterians in the South (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1963-1973), 2:353; Robert L. Neely, Manuscript Historical Sketch of the Synod of Memphis, 1880, Robert Langdon Neely Collection, Historical Foundation of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches, Montreat, NC.

35. Synod of Nashville, Minutes, October 1868, October 1869 (microfilm), Columbia Theological Seminary, Atlanta, GA; Neely, Historical Sketch of the Synod of Memphis, Robert Langdon Neely Collection, Historical Foundation of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches; Waller Raymond Cooper, Southwestern at Memphis, 1848-1948 (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1949), 36-46.

36. Thompson, Presbyterians in the South, 2:353-56; Cooper, Southwestern at Memphis, 47-59.

37. Tennessee Baptist Convention, Minutes, 1874, 3-4; Kendall, A History of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, 139-40, 146-51; 165-67; Richard Hiram Ward, A History of Union University (Jackson, TN: Union University Press, 1975), 30-35.


39. Samuel Luttrell Akers, The First Hundred Years of Wesleyan College, 1836-1936 (Macon, GA: Beehive Press, 1976), 89-92; North Georgia Annual Conference, Minutes, 1868, 13; Bethel Baptist Association, Minutes, 1866, 9; ibid., 1869, 8; Ragsdale, Story


Baptist minister J. L. M. Curry was another Confederate soldier who later served in southern denominational colleges. Curry was president of Howard College from 1865-1868 and was a professor at Richmond College from 1868-1881.

41. Minutes of April 1870, Bainbridge District Conference, Minutes, 1867-1878, South Georgia Conference Archives; North Georgia Annual Conference, Minutes, 1869, 17; ibid., 1874, 13; Georgia Baptist Convention, Minutes, 1870, 12.

CHAPTER 8
"A PURE AND LOYAL GOSPEL":
NORTHERN MISSIONARY EFFORTS IN THE SOUTH

While black and white southerners implemented their plans for religious reconstruction, northern evangelicals supported a major missionary effort in the South. Determined to spread “a pure and loyal gospel” in this benighted region, as northerners deemed it, hundreds of missionaries and teachers travelled south under the banners of their denominations. According to northern Church leaders, God had issued his stern decree upon slavery and had crushed the government and armies that upheld it and had given northern evangelicals a vast mission field to occupy. They would be disregarding His manifest will if they failed to meet the challenge. Initially, northern Christians approached religious reconstruction with much confidence, but their efforts increasingly clashed with the competing visions held by black and white southerners. Ultimately, they had to reevaluate their mission in the South and concentrate on a few, more limited goals.

Northern Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian missionaries moved rapidly into the South behind the advancing Union armies as early as 1861. They were joined in their ministrations by both freedmen and religious scalawags. Northern preachers often occupied the prominent positions of authority and served the larger city churches, but southern converts played a vital and underappreciated role. These men who had left the
southern denominations conducted most of the "northern" missionary labor in the South during religious reconstruction. For example, the ministerial ranks of the Tennessee, Holston, and Georgia Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church consisted overwhelmingly of southern white and black preachers. Only a handful of presiding elders and pastors in centers like Nashville, Knoxville, Chattanooga, and Atlanta were from outside the South.

Northern missionaries had access to much of central and western Tennessee after the surrender of Nashville and Memphis in the first half of 1862. Work among the freedmen in these two cities began in 1863 and 1864. Eastern Tennessee was not an open mission field for northerners until the end of the war, but southern Unionists began internal organization early in 1864. With the ground thus prepared, northern denominations reaped a much greater harvest there among whites than in the rest of the state. Missionary endeavors began in Georgia on the coastal islands and in Savannah late in 1864, but the rest of the state was inaccessible until mid-1865.

By 1865 all four of the major northern evangelical denominations (Baptist, Methodist, New School Presbyterian, and Old School Presbyterian) had begun evangelistic and educational work in the South. In April 1865, the American Baptist Home Mission Society (ABHMS) already had 120 missionaries, teachers, and assistants in the South. The American Baptist Publication Society resolved in that year as well to raise a fund of $50,000 "to appoint Sunday School colporteurs or missionaries to traverse the Southern States; to reorganize Sunday-schools among the whites, and start them among the blacks." From 1866 to 1872, the ABHMS employed from 60 to 100
missionaries in the southern states, a total which represented one third of its entire mission force. The Society was particularly active in Tennessee, which ranked behind only Missouri and Virginia as a focus of northern Baptist missionary labor; the state had 14 missionaries in 1866 and 10 in 1868. Georgia had only three northern Baptist missionaries in 1866, seven in 1868, and five in 1871.1

In late 1866 the Board of Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church declared that emancipation had "opened at our very door a wide field calling alike for mission and educational work. . . . The school must be planted by the side of the Church; the teacher must go along with the missionary."2 In August of 1866 at Cincinnati, Ohio, several Methodist ministers and laymen had organized the Freedmen's Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church with Bishop Davis W. Clark as its president. Methodists had become increasingly distressed with the nonsectarian Freedmen's Commissions who insisted that educational and missionary work be conducted separately. Furthermore, other denominations were beginning their own separate efforts among the freedmen, and the Methodist Episcopal Church sought to gain members through educational work. More northern Methodists began to agree with the clergyman who wrote that "from the start . . . Methodist hands should have handled Methodist funds . . . to found Methodist schools." The Freedmen's Aid Society handled the work of the Methodist Episcopal Church among the freedmen, while the Missionary Society supported efforts among white southerners. During its first six years of existence, the Freedmen's Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church spent $315,100 in the South.3
Northern missionaries initially entered the South to minister to both whites and blacks. They urged white southerners to return to the northern denominational bodies just as the southern states were to return to the Union and expected to find many southern Christians sobered by God’s judgment in the war and ready to repent of the sins of slavery and secession. They also anticipated finding many others who never supported either but were trapped by geography within the Confederacy. Both groups would form a strong foundation on which to reestablish the northern denominations in the South. The early successes among religious scalawags, both clergy and laity, reinforced these optimistic assumptions. Northern missionaries did manage to raise their denominations’ banners in areas populated by Unionists and in several of the larger cities where northern emigrants constituted the majority of their congregations. Elsewhere, as historian James Moorhead observed, they were “almost universally shunned by the white people of the South.”

Despite the ensuing disappointments, the ABHMS as late as 1873 remained committed to meeting the needs “among millions of the poorer class of whites in the South, who cannot read and write.” The Society testified that no appointments were “voted through with greater heartiness or unanimity” than those for the benefit of white southerners. In some cases southern white missionaries were supported by the Society, “brethren they are in some instances of rare worth and piety and devotion.”

One of the most successful efforts by the ABHMS in the South was its church edifice program. This plan helped small churches build houses of worship, and devastated churches in the postwar South eagerly participated. Statistics for the period
of religious reconstruction are scarce, but both black and white churches received aid. In 1881 white churches in Georgia still owed the Society $800 on loans made during the period from 1870 to 1875. Black churches in Georgia owed $1,750 on loans from the same period. Also in 1881 in Tennessee, white churches owed $8,977 and black churches owed $1,000 for loans made between 1871 and 1876. Since churches applied for assistance on an individual basis, the Southern Baptist Convention did not oppose this plan, though it did begin its own church building program in 1884.6

Nashville was one of that handful of southern cities where northern denominations could establish congregations among northern emigrants. The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA) (Old School) gained entrance into central Tennessee when three ministers and one elder of the southern Nashville Presbytery withdrew to form a separate Nashville Presbytery in connection with the northern Presbyterians. By 1866 the PCUSA (Old School) had 13 missionaries at work in the South, but the General Assembly was clearly displeased with the meager results of the Board of Domestic Mission’s attempts “to secure a footing among our seceded southern churches. The only direct effort to reach our southern churches was made in Tennessee; but the attempt was a complete failure.” In 1870 the Nashville Presbytery had only 122 members in two churches, one of which was a black church. In the same year, the corresponding southern presbytery had 2,074 adherents in 23 churches.7

Northern Methodists also established a congregation in Nashville. During the war, Methodist chaplain Michael J. Cramer appealed to his brother-in-law, Ulysses S. Grant, for possession of McKendree Chapel. The church passed into the hands of the
Methodist Episcopal Church early in 1864. Authority for this seizure came from the 1863 War Department order which granted northern Methodist missionaries the right to occupy all houses of worship "in which a loyal minister . . . appointed by a loyal bishop" did not officiate. In January 1865, military governor Andrew Johnson ordered the church returned to the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, but various rear-guard tactics kept northern Methodists in possession of the edifice until August, much to the dismay of southern churchmen. After being forced out of the McKendree church, the white congregation built Union Chapel with $10,000 from the northern Methodist Church Extension Society. Northern Methodists also made some inroads among the white population in the surrounding countryside of middle Tennessee. When the Tennessee Conference was organized in October 1866, it counted nearly 1,000 whites among its members. By 1868 the Conference had over 3,000 white members.8

Most southerners viewed northern missionaries and religious scalawags with suspicion and contempt. When a group of northern teachers in Bainbridge, Georgia, attended a local church with some of the "best citizens of the town," nobody spoke to them. In four months the only white person who visited their quarters was the local Baptist pastor, "a man of Union sympathy." Other whites "carefully avoided them." One teacher who went south "disposed to be generous to the Southern people" quickly learned that southerners "would accept no sympathy that was not founded on the acknowledgement that right was and always had been on their side." Methodist religious scalawag John W. Yarbrough began to understand the hostility he would face when a fellow minister in the southern Church wrote him: "These northern missionaries are
instigated of the devil and are in league with hell.” The author did not yet know of Yarbrough’s impending pact with the devil.⁹

In some instances the Ku Klux Klan threatened northern ministers and drove a few from their churches. In many areas the Klan and other vigilante groups burned schools and persecuted northern teachers. The Southern Presbyterian Review insisted that northern missionaries were simply political emissaries who preached politics rather than salvation. Even worse, the accusation went, they stirred racial antagonisms. They went to areas where southern churches had once striven hardest to Christianize the slaves, and they attempted to provoke divisions for their own aggrandizement.¹⁰

Southern Appalachia, especially eastern Tennessee, was the primary exception to the generally hostile reception which northern missionaries received from white southerners. During the war and for long afterward, this area was deeply divided between Confederates and Unionists. Eastern Tennessee alone provided between 30,000 and 40,000 soldiers for Federal armies during the Civil War.¹¹ Both during the war and after, eastern Tennessee’s religious landscape was fractured along lines parallel to the political divisions in the region. Because of their particular forms of ecclesiastical government, which bound them closely to state and national organizations, southern Presbyterians and Methodists were the most bitterly divided. The rift produced dozens of lawsuits as contending parties laid claim to various church properties for themselves and the Church to which they belonged.

In 1857 five synods seceded from the New School branch of the PCUSA and formed themselves into the United Synod of the South. The Synod of Tennessee with
four presbyteries was one of these synods. In 1864 the United Synod of the South joined with the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America. In Tennessee, however, the Union and Kingston presbyteries of the United Synod met in September 1864 with the southern ministers absent and voted unanimously to reunite with the New School PCUSA. In May 1865 the General Assembly of the PCUSA (New School) recognized these two presbyteries and accepted their commissioners as members of the Assembly. It also organized a new Holston Presbytery and combined the three presbyteries into the Synod of Tennessee. After listening to reports from two unionist ministers in the area, the Assembly declared that the occupation of eastern Tennessee, “now reopened by Divine Providence, is the positive duty of the Presbyterian Church.” The body requested its Home Mission Committee to send ten of its pastors to labor in that area for three months. In 1866 the Synod of Tennessee reported 2,260 members, and its membership remained between 2,500 and 2,750 for the rest of the decade.12

The ecclesiastical divisions at the national level also rent congregations at the local level. Two elders and a minority of the members of the Presbyterian church in Jonesboro united with Holston Presbytery of the PCUSA (New School) shortly after the war. After efforts to regain possession of the property failed, southern Presbyterians formed their own church early in 1868 and connected it to the Holston Presbytery of the southern Presbyterian Church in the United States. By 1870 Jonesboro had a northern church with 90 members and a southern church with 50 members. In Mars Hill, Tennessee, a missionary from the Home Missions Committee of the northern New School occupied the Presbyterian church in 1865. He and a successor continued to minister
there to a congregation which included some of the prewar members. In January 1868, members of the old church, strengthened by returning refugees, voted almost unanimously to join the southern Presbyterian Church. However, the minister and elders dropped from the roll all those who had aided or sympathized with the Confederacy, and the northern faction continued to use the building. In 1870 the Mars Hill Church (northern) had 57 members, while the Mars Hill Church (southern) had 58 members. An 1872 bill of equity filed by southern Presbyterians prompted the chancery court to order the northern Presbyterians to hand over the church property.13

With the reorganization of the Synod of Tennessee, northern New School Presbyterians also gained control of the synod’s school, Maryville College. Just days after the surrender of Fort Sumter, the college closed as students left to join both armies. Two professors supported the Union and the president and a tutor favored the Confederacy. After the war one of the professors, Thomas Lamar, returned from the North and reopened the college with northern financial support. To the horror of the southern Presbyterian Christian Observer, “the doors and classes of this institution are now thrown open very widely for the admission of both sexes and colors.” Despite southern hostility, the school continued to operate, though with a predominantly white student body.14

Eastern Tennessee was also fertile ground for the Methodist Episcopal Church. Division within the Holston Conference of the southern Methodist Church began with the purges of 1862, 1863, and 1864. A large majority of the ministers favored the Confederacy, but a sizable minority supported the Union. During these three annual
meetings, a total of 35 ministers were charged with disloyalty to the Confederacy or the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Ten were expelled or suspended.\(^\text{15}\)

In response to these tactics, "Parson" William G. Brownlow began recruiting preachers and laymen into the Methodist Episcopal Church early in 1864. Brownlow insisted through the columns of his newspaper, the *Whig and Rebel Ventilator*, that "God's retribution" was being visited upon southern Methodists. As a religious scalawag, Brownlow adopted most of the northern understanding of the war and acted accordingly, though with considerably more ardor than most. In July 1864 a convention of unionist Methodists led by Brownlow proclaimed their loyalty to the Federal Government. They also declared themselves the true Holston Annual Conference and insisted that they were "entitled in law to all property belonging to said ecclesiastical organization." With God's help, they intended "to claim and hold the same and rebuild the waste places of Zion." In June 1865 Bishop Davis W. Clark organized the Holston Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Athens, Tennessee. Thirty-three former ministers of the Church, South and six transfers from other conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church formed the new Holston Conference with 5,146 members. Over the next three years the defections from the southern Methodist Church continued. By May 1866, its membership had climbed to 13,918; eighteen months later the Conference had 18,897 members. By 1868, most of the movement of members between the two Methodisms in eastern Tennessee had ceased. The Holston Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church had 20,790 full members, including 1,277 black
members. The Holston Conference of the Church, South enrolled 26,180 white, but only 172 black, and 75 Indian members.16

The Athens Female College, an institution of the southern Church in Athens, Tennessee, closed under the pressures of war in 1863. In 1865 the president of the college, the Rev. Erastus Rowley, joined the northern Holston Conference. Rowley filed a claim in chancery court requesting that the property be sold to satisfy a debt of $6,000 owed him by the college. At the forced sale, representatives of the Methodist Episcopal Church purchased the property and established East Tennessee Wesleyan College for white students. In 1868, the institution, now with 120 students, was renamed East Tennessee Wesleyan University. In 1871 the school added theological and law departments.17

Throughout eastern Tennessee the two Holston Conferences appointed preachers to the same charges. Both conferences assigned ministers to Athens, Chattanooga, Cleveland, Decatur, Kingston, and several other towns. Both northern and southern Methodists were committed to maintaining their Church in this section of the state. Since preachers from each Church were sent to many areas of eastern Tennessee, conflicts over church buildings and parsonages inevitably erupted. Both groups in local congregations which were divided in their loyalties between northern and southern Methodism claimed the right to exclusive use of the church property. Members of the Methodist Episcopal Church were quite successful at gaining control. As late as 1869, the Methodist Episcopal Church still held 46 churches and three parsonages that had belonged to the Church, South before the war. Negotiations between the two Holston Conferences on
property issues proceeded diplomatically but fruitlessly. In several areas southern Methodists retrieved these properties through the courts. In 1880 a court awarded the parsonage of the Jonesboro Circuit to southern Methodists and required northern Methodist trustees to pay $800. Northern Methodists also occupied the Church Street church in Knoxville for ten years before a threatened lawsuit compelled them to give up the property.18

Like northern Baptists, the Methodist Episcopal Church established a Church Extension Society in 1864 to aid in the erection and repair of church buildings. East Tennessee Methodists made full use of this service, as the Church Extension Society appropriated $10,000 for the Holston Conference in 1866. Half that amount went toward the construction of a church at Knoxville, while other funds were used for building and paying building debts in Cleveland, Chattanooga, Athens, Loudon, Jonesboro, and elsewhere.19

Despite some limited successes among whites in cities, in Appalachia, and in border states, northern denominations were most successful among the southern black population. Reflecting a common theme in northern missionary efforts, the General Assembly of the PCUSA (New School) concluded in 1867: “The work at the South has been more encouraging among the freedmen, wherever they have been able to send missionaries, than among the whites.” There were few black missionaries available, however, and “the prejudice against all Northern men, among the whites at the South, both loyal and rebel, is such as to hinder the usefulness and comfort of missionaries sent from the North.”20
Northern missionaries devoted much of their early attention to providing educational assistance to the freedmen. In its first year of operations in the South, the Freedmen's Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church began schools in nine southern states with 52 teachers and 5,000 enrolled pupils. In its second year, the Society had 59 schools with 7,000 students, including 17 schools in Tennessee and 11 schools in Georgia. In the fall of 1865 northern Methodist missionaries in Nashville began a school in the basement of the blacks' Andrew Chapel. Within a few months, they had 180 pupils, and soon the number climbed to 610. By 1867 the school had 800 students of all ages. In Georgia, the Methodist Freedmen's Aid Society sponsored 31 teachers between 1865 and 1873. Several Methodist religious scalawags also started schools for freedmen in conjunction with their missionary efforts. Northern Presbyterians and Baptists also supported schools for freedmen throughout the South. The Committee on Freedmen of the PCUSA (Old School) employed three teachers for Georgia freedmen in 1869, while the New School Home Missionary Committee had one in the state. During the period from 1865 to 1873, northern Baptists through the ABHMS supported 11 teachers for freedmen in Georgia.\(^{21}\)

While they provided rudimentary education for thousands of freedmen, northern denominations also began to organize presbyteries, associations, and conferences in the South. Northern Presbyterian organization in the South began in 1866 when the Catawba Presbytery of the Old School Church was organized in the Carolinas and Georgia. Knox Presbytery was established in Georgia the following year, and in 1869 these two presbyteries and the Presbytery of Atlantic constituted the Synod of the Atlantic.\(^{22}\) With
their looser denominational structures, northern Baptists were less likely to organize associations among the freedmen, but they eagerly sought cooperation with those black associations formed by the freedmen in the 1860s and 1870s.

Northern Methodists were the most active in establishing conferences among the freedmen. When the Tennessee Conference began in 1866 in the middle and western portions of the state, three quarters of the membership was black. By 1869 the Conference had 5,493 black members, but its membership declined in the early 1870s, probably due to the formation of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church. By 1879 the Methodist Episcopal Church claimed 6,117 black members in middle and western Tennessee.23

The formation of the Georgia Annual Conference in 1866 and 1867 demonstrates how northern and southern preachers worked together to enact the northern vision of religious reconstruction. Bishop Davis W. Clark created the Georgia and Alabama Mission District in January 1866 when he met in Atlanta with a group of seven religious scalawags. All were ministers in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Clark appointed the Rev. James F. Chalfant of Cincinnati to be the superintendent of the mission district. Over the next year and a half, these preachers joined by other religious scalawags and black preachers, gathered together congregations from Macon to the Tennessee border. Several white congregations in the mountains of north Georgia joined the new organization, but the majority of members came from the black population. Large black congregations transferred from the southern to the northern Methodist Church in Rome, Newnan, La Grange, Griffin, Jonesboro, Oxford, and elsewhere in
central and northern Georgia. Despite harsh opposition from native whites, religious scalawags also began schools for the freedmen in each of these towns with assistance from the Freedmen’s Bureau and the Freedmen’s Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Throughout religious reconstruction, the Georgia Conference had a few prominent northern ministers such as Erasmus Q. Fuller and Nelson E. Cobleigh as members, and Atlanta even served as the home of Bishop Gilbert Haven after 1872. However, the principal troops for northern Methodism in the conflicts of religious reconstruction were the religious scalawags and black preachers who manned the various charges around the state and experienced first-hand the southern white hostility. At the organization of the Georgia Annual Conference in October 1867, approximately 8,000 blacks and 2,300 whites had been gathered into the Methodist Episcopal Church. By 1877, the denomination had 12,600 black and 2,800 white members in Georgia.24

The Methodist Episcopal Church had several advantages over its primary rivals, the African Methodist Episcopal and African Methodist Episcopal Zion Churches. Well organized and well supported, the Freedmen’s Aid Society was able to carry on simultaneous evangelistic and educational programs over a large part of the South. The northern Methodist Church gained many adherents in the South through promises of support for building churches and paying teachers. In Griffin, Georgia, for example, a group of blacks voted to join the northern Methodist Church after a representative promised that “they should have help to build a church, [buy] Sunday School books, and [pay] a teacher.” The Methodist Episcopal Church also appealed to southern blacks through its claims to color blindness. Many missionaries echoed the call of Timothy W.
Lewis, who when presenting his Church to freedmen in Charleston insisted, “there will be no galleries in heaven [and] those who are willing to go with a church that makes no distinction as to race or color, follow me.”

In 1863 the Executive Board of the American Baptist Home Mission Society declared that soon “the entire South would be one vast home mission field.” That same year, missionaries went to work among the freedmen in Tennessee. The Rev. Isaac C. Hoile and six other workers began missionary work in Memphis. The Rev. Simon Quackenbush and three assistants represented northern Baptists in Nashville, while others labored in Chattanooga and Knoxville. From these centers, northern Baptists organized churches and schools among black Baptists in the state. Throughout the South between 1862 and 1894, the ABHMS spent $2,452,000 on black evangelization and education.

Northern Baptist missionaries had begun work among Georgia freedmen by the end of 1865. By 1871, 30 missionaries commissioned and supported by the ABHMS had labored in Georgia for a total of more than 3,000 weeks, delivered almost 3,000 sermons, and participated in the conversion of nearly 1,000 black men, women, and children. At the end of 1865, one of the Society’s missionaries wrote, “If there were seven times as many Sabbaths as there are, I could find work abundant. I have numerous calls upon me to preach in places I have not been able to answer.” Even in 1878 a black missionary appointed by the ABHMS concluded that “many places—in fact, most places, are as dark as midnight.” He complained that in some churches a person could not be baptized unless he or she “has seen God, been to hell, seen the devil, heard a voice, or felt a mysterious shock.” Others claimed they had a Bible in their hearts,
which they could read at any time. These doctrines were “preached from the pulpit.” Although the state was in “a pretty dilapidated condition,” he concluded, it was not “beyond the reach of Divine grace.”

One of the Society’s principal methods of promoting black education was through the holding of Ministers’ Institutes. The practice originated with the efforts of southern Baptist Ebenezer W. Warren, pastor of the First Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia. In the early 1870s, Warren gathered uneducated black ministers and deacons from the surrounding area together and provided them with a study of fundamental doctrines for about ten days. The program was so effective that the Southern Baptist Convention endorsed it in 1875, and the next year the Convention’s Domestic Mission Board began sponsoring institutes. In 1878 the ABHMS voted to cooperate with the Southern Baptist Convention in conducting Ministers’ Institutes for the freedmen, and S. W. Marston was appointed Superintendent of Missions to the Freedmen. In the first year of operation, this joint effort was responsible for 33 institutes, which were attended by 1,119 black ministers and deacons. In 1881 the ABHMS reorganized its participation by organizing newly renamed Biblical Institutes around its freedmen’s schools in the South. The Society also hoped to cooperate with the Baptist conventions in each of the southern states for the appointment of a general missionary to the freedmen of that state. Cooperation in Biblical Institutes now meant participation in all of the activities of the Society in the South. Under these conditions, most southern state conventions recoiled from further cooperation. The Tennessee Baptist Convention, however, seriously considered cooperating formally with the ABHMS in mission work. After one minister
proposed the appointment of a committee to explore the issue with the Society, another objected that such an alliance would be humiliating to the Domestic Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. The motion was defeated, but the Convention appointed messengers to attend the Society’s jubilee convention in 1882.28

The ABHMS had begun limited cooperation with the Georgia Baptist Convention in 1878. Although the Society had been active in missionary work among Georgia freedmen since 1865, the Georgia Baptist Convention took no official notice of it until 1872. After he was elected Corresponding Secretary of the newly organized Georgia Baptist State Mission Board in 1877, James H. DeVotie received a request from Corresponding Secretary S. S. Cutting of the Society suggesting a “fraternal talk” regarding missionary efforts in Georgia. DeVotie hoped that the Society could help in evangelizing the freedmen. Georgia Baptists could not do the work alone, but, DeVotie confided, “You can help us if you find a safe way.” The Georgia Baptist Convention could not enter into a direct alliance with the ABHMS because “we would lose more at home than we would receive from you.” DeVotie suggested that the Society provide $1,000 and allow the Georgia Board to appoint missionaries who would report to the Society. In 1878 one white and three black missionaries began work with the Society paying two-thirds of their salaries. Later, the plan was modified so that the Society, the Georgia Baptist Convention, and the Georgia Missionary Baptist State Convention (black) each contributed one third of the salaries of two missionaries to Georgia freedmen. Cooperation between the ABHMS and white Georgia Baptists ended early in the 1880s,
and the Southern Baptist Convention reasserted its interests in Georgia in 1883, when it appointed W. H. McIntosh to conduct Ministers’ Institutes in the state.\textsuperscript{29}

Both northern and southern blacks contributed substantially to the work of freedmen’s aid organizations. In many cases, they organized schools for their children, and increasingly, they contributed to the various freedmen’s aid societies. Between 1862 and 1874, blacks contributed $478,995 to the total of nearly $4 million spent by these organizations. As early as 1865, Savannah blacks contributed $1,000 for their first teachers. Of the 236 schools for freedmen in Georgia in 1867, 152 were entirely or partially supported by blacks, and they owned 39 of the buildings.\textsuperscript{30}

With the demise of the Freedmen’s Bureau in 1870 and waning support from private sources, northern Christians had to reevaluate their southern evangelistic and educational plans. By the early 1870s most areas of the South lay within a network of associations, conferences, and presbyteries affiliated with northern denominations, so fewer missionaries were necessary. Northern evangelicals also determined to focus their attention on a few colleges and universities to train black preachers and teachers, leaving elementary instruction to southern states themselves. Northern white denominations commanded the resources necessary to establish colleges for blacks in the 1860s and 1870s. Northern Baptists founded the Nashville Normal and Theological Institute at Nashville and the Augusta Institute at Augusta, Georgia, in 1867. The Methodist Episcopal Church began Central Tennessee College at Nashville in 1865 and Clark University at Atlanta in 1870. Northern Presbyterians concentrated most of their
attention on the establishment of Biddle Memorial Institute at Charlotte, North Carolina, begun in 1867.31

Central Tennessee College began in 1865 in the basement of Clark Chapel in Nashville. After a brief tenure in an old gun factory and unsuccessful attempts to purchase property for the school, the college finally moved to a dilapidated two-story mansion which was repaired with funds from the Freedmen’s Bureau. In 1876 the college created a medical department. During the next two years, the five Meharry brothers, farmers in Indiana and Illinois, gave more than $30,000 for the new Meharry Medical College. For many years thereafter Meharry trained over half of all black American doctors and dentists.32

The origins of Clark University in Atlanta lay in a primary school which northern Methodist minister J. W. Lee and his wife started in Clark Chapel in early 1869. Its success prompted the Freedmen’s Aid Society to adopt it, and the school moved to another building in 1870. In 1872 the institution opened a theological department, which after a substantial gift from northern Methodist minister Elijah H. Gammon in 1883, became Gammon Theological Seminary. However, Clark did not begin regular college-level instruction until 1879. The institution was named for Bishop Davis W. Clark because of his participation in southern evangelism and because of his daughter’s gifts after his death in 1872.33

In its early years of operation in the South, the ABHMS supported many schools which provided elementary instruction, but in the 1870s the Society devoted its primary attention to higher institutions of learning. The Augusta Institute began in February 1867
at the Springfield Baptist Church in Augusta with 40 students. Three women missionaries were the first teachers. For the next four years, a variety of northern white leaders tried to run the school without success. In August 1871, the Rev. Joseph T. Robert, a southerner who had lived in the North since before the war, assumed control of the school. In 1872, Robert and one assistant taught 44 students. By 1877, the student body had grown to 84, including 51 studying for the ministry. Robert moved the school to Atlanta in 1879 and renamed it Atlanta Baptist Seminary. Although the school was designed to train preachers and teachers, President Robert found that “ministers, indeed, with but few exceptions, were entirely untaught, and unable to read the scriptures.” Therefore, the college was forced to begin with primary departments which taught basic skills.34

The Baptists’ Nashville Institute declared that its “primary object” was “to prepare young men for the ministry and both men and women for teachers.” The school began when Dr. D. W. Phillips came to Nashville in 1865 and began a class in his home for young black men intending to become ministers. Later in the year, the class transferred to the basement of the black First Baptist Church. Also in 1865 the ABHMS bought an abandoned government building for $1,000. It was taken down and rebuilt on a lot northwest of the city, where the Nashville Institute continued for nearly a decade. In 1874 the school transferred to an estate southwest of the city with a brick “mansion house” and 30 acres of land, which had been purchased for $30,000. In 1877 the Institute had six teachers and 129 pupils.35
Religious colleges sponsored by northern denominations did not train large numbers of students. Neither Clark University nor Atlanta Baptist Seminary ever had more than ten students at one time in the college department until the end of the century. The first college class was formed at Central Tennessee College in 1874 with two students. In 1878 the college had its first graduate. However, black men and women trained at these colleges wielded an influence over black education in the region out of proportion to their number.

The initial enthusiasm for southern evangelization and education in northern evangelical circles began to fade in the 1870s. In response to declining resources, the Freedmen’s Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church applied for recognition as one of the approved organizations of the denomination. The Methodist General Conference of 1872 consented to the request and urged northern Methodists to support the Society. In 1876 the General Conference granted “a very large increase” in the annual budget of the Society. Despite the official recognition, the apathy of many northern Methodists continued to hamper the operations of the Freedmen’s Aid Society.

Apathy among the laity stemmed in part from declining interest in the pulpit. In his study of northern Protestant sermons during Reconstruction, Paul Brownlow found only 17 sermons in the period from 1869 to 1877 that discussed reconstruction problems. All but one of the 11 preachers who discussed the freedmen shared two assumptions—that blacks were unequal and that God was taking care of black southerners. In sharp contrast to the far greater number of sermons on reconstruction in the years 1865-1868, none of these sermons demanded punishment for the South or
its leaders. Northern clergymen were more interested in promoting sectional reconciliation. Brownlow concludes that the “general lack of pulpit interest in the whole subject of reconstruction indicates that many preachers may have no longer cared what happened to the South.”

The retreat from religious reconstruction meant fewer missionaries and less financial support for evangelizing and educating southerners. The northern Baptist Home Mission Society had supported from 60 to 100 missionaries in the South in the late 1860s and early 1870s; after 1872, it sponsored only from 30 to 50 workers. Part of the decrease stemmed from the decision not to employ students during summer vacations after 1872. However, the decline also reflected a redirection of the Society’s efforts toward the West. In 1877, 12 of the Society’s 38 missionaries in the South labored in Indian Territory. Only from one to five missionaries worked in each of the former states of the Confederacy. By 1881, 31 of the 60 missionaries working in the South were in Indian Territory, Texas, and New Mexico. Outside of Texas, only 17 worked in former Confederate states.

Contribution statistics reveal a small base of financial support among northern Christians even at the height of religious reconstruction—a base which grew even smaller in the 1870s and 1880s. In 1867, 526 Old School Presbyterian churches (21%) contributed to evangelical work among freedmen; another 1,982, however, did not. The Committee on Freedmen complained that missionary work among southern blacks “has not been sustained in a manner at all commensurate with its importance.” In 1872 after reunion with the strongly antislavery New School Presbyterians, still only 1,120 local
churches (24%) supported freedmen’s work; 3,469 made no contribution. A greater percentage of northern Methodists churches supported the Freedman’s Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, but in the 1870s nearly half took no collection for this purpose. In 1875, 5,124 local congregations (56%) contributed; 4,050 did not.40

Some northern Christians also rightly believed that their efforts to evangelize the freedmen interfered with the process of reunification with the southern denominations. Presbyterian leaders in 1871 professed their desire to avoid “all unpleasant collision with the Southern churches” over the issue of evangelizing the freedmen. In their attempts to evangelize southern whites, members of northern denominations, especially religious scalawags, became increasingly willing to sacrifice the interests of the freedmen.41

Even as Methodist missionary work in the South was taking shape, racial separation became the norm. Segregated congregations soon gave rise to segregated presiding elder’s districts, so that blacks and whites met only at the Annual and General Conferences. Even there, among ministers of the gospel, racial antagonisms sometimes erupted. When Bishop Calvin Kingsley tried to administer the sacrament simultaneously to both black and white ministers at the 1867 meeting of the Holston Conference, whites denounced the practice as “an unnatural and disgusting practice” and “a strike for Negro equality.” When Bishop Gilbert Haven tried the same experiment in Georgia, the white ministers refused to partake of the sacrament and left the meeting. The racial antagonism also extended to the ordination of ministers. A preacher in eastern Tennessee complained about “Negro equality” after he was “ordained to deacon’s orders . . . with . . . the colored brethren.” One Georgian in a similar circumstance “refused to be ordained” and
left the conference without ordination. He insisted that “he could never meet the opposition at home should he be thus ordained.”

As early as 1869, black members of the Holston Conference requested that they be organized into a separate body. The Conference did not set them apart, but it did create three districts with black presiding elders and preachers. In 1874 the Conference resolved that when the “growth of this work shall make it desirable on their part, to organize a separate Conference for the benefit of this people, we will cheerfully give our influence in favor of such a measure.” At the 1875 meeting, the Conference instructed its delegates to the General Conference of 1876 “to give their votes and influence for the establishment of all such separate Conferences as the interests of the Church among the white and colored races may require, and as both races may desire.” Within the Holston Conference, the cause of freedmen’s aid met with indifference. In 1877 the conference determined in the next year to present the cause in all the churches and to collect an offering. The collections totaled $36.75.

In 1869 the fledgling Georgia Conference was also beginning to polarize along racial lines. The physical setting of the Georgia annual conference that year illustrated a trend toward segregation. Originally scheduled for Lloyd Street Church in Atlanta, the conference was transformed into a camp-meeting at Rataree’s Grove, five miles from Atlanta. Two large brush arbors were built on the campgrounds about a quarter of a mile apart. “Two services per day were held in each so that the races worshipped simultaneously, but separate. Business sessions were attended by the two races jointly in a rude building mid-way between the two camps.” At this conference, nine black
preachers introduced a petition requesting that "districts be manned by colored ministers, and that as soon as may be proper in your judgment, we be organized into a separate conference." The conference gave some sanction to the plan by organizing one black district with Adam Palmer, a black preacher, as presiding elder.\textsuperscript{44}

During the October 1871 meeting of the Georgia Conference, two religious scalawags introduced a resolution to instruct their delegates to the 1872 General Conference "to move that Body to authorize the setting off of a colored annual conference in Georgia" and that the preachers in Georgia discuss the issue among themselves and come to the next conference prepared to take action. After discussion the resolution was adopted by the conference. The 1872 General Conference, meeting in Brooklyn, New York, in May, authorized the Missouri and St. Louis Conferences to establish racially separate conferences if the bishops felt "the interests of the work required it," but declined to separate other conferences. Erasmus Q. Fuller, editor of the \textit{Methodist Advocate} in Atlanta, complained that the General Conference "practically took no action upon the question of the colored conferences." Many conferences which had requested division had few white members and were practically black conferences, he argued, and "they have never felt many of the embarrassments found in some localities," like the Georgia Conference.\textsuperscript{45}

The subsequent October meeting of the Georgia Annual Conference and those in 1873 and 1874 again passed resolutions requesting a racial separation of the Conference. The 1875 session contemplated the racial segregation of the Georgia work, but some black members and northern preachers voted down a proposal by other blacks and white
religious scalawags for a racial division of the conference. The two sides compromised on asking for a geographical rather than racial division. Opponents of segregation also passed a resolution disclaiming "any movement which looks to the separation of our work into a white and colored conference."46

However, the 1876 General Conference approved the separation of the southern Conferences provided that the action was "requested by a majority of the white members, and also a majority of the colored members." The Georgia work of the Methodist Episcopal Church was immediately split into the Georgia Conference and the Savannah Conference, presumably along geographical lines.47 In the midst of the fall meetings of these new conferences, however, a commission of ministers from both met in Augusta to adjust the boundaries of the two bodies. Citing the fact that "the conference lines are irregular and inconvenient, giving much needless travel to ministers in the work," and the desire of a number of black ministers and congregations in the Georgia Conference to transfer to the Savannah Conference, the commission voted to transfer the La Grange district from the Georgia to the Savannah Conference. It also declared that the Savannah Conference "shall have free access to all the people of color throughout the State of Georgia without regard to geographical lines," and that the Georgia Conference would have charge of all white Georgians. No person could be denied membership, however, on the basis of "race, color or previous condition." Presiding Bishop Levi Scott approved the action of the joint commission, and the racial division of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Georgia was completed.48
At the 1876 meeting of the Tennessee Conference, white ministers asked for a racial division because of the “effect of the present condition of the Conference on the white work.” Fifty-one white clergy supported division, and 44 black preachers opposed it. Only a handful of white ministers were willing to oppose separation, including John Braden, who wrote “Not a single colored man would have voted for division on the merits of the question.” The Conference postponed the decision for a year, but black members agreed to divide the Conference if a majority of whites continued to desire it. In 1877 whites withdrew and formed the Central Tennessee Conference with some 4,400 members.49

By 1884, 25 of the 28 Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the former slave states contained only black or only white ministers and members. The efforts of northern Methodist missionaries to minister to the freedmen and their commitment to a measure of ecclesiastical equality drew many black southerners to their Church but dampened their appeal among white southerners. In a capitulation to southern mores and an expression of their own spirit of caste, southern members of the Methodist Episcopal Church appealed for the racial division of their Conferences. This futile bid for respectability failed to draw more white evangelicals to the Methodist Episcopal Church and undermined much of northern Methodism’s critique of the southern Church’s attitude toward the freedmen. It did, however, seem to have some positive effects on the efforts to establish fraternal relations with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.50
Armed with the belief that God had judged the South for the sins of “men-stealing” and rebellion, northern missionaries moved southward behind Union armies to gather wayward white southerners and vulnerable freedmen into the folds of their Churches. Unfortunately for their plans, these groups had other ideas about what was necessary for religious reconstruction. Freedmen welcomed the financial, organizational, and educational support afforded them by northern Christians, but they resented the “spirit of caste” which continued in ecclesiastical bodies and denominational schools. By the end of religious reconstruction, black evangelicals were isolated organizationally. Both the southern Churches from which they withdrew and to a lesser extent the northern Churches to which they adhered had been unwilling to accept their assertions of religious equality. White southern evangelicals loathed the northern missionaries and teachers who, in their minds, came only to steal their churches, engender strife among the races, and destroy the southern social order. Perhaps even worse were those traitors to the South, the religious scalawags, who joined the invaders in their unholy work. In such a climate of accusation and ecclesiastical warfare, proposals for the sectional reunion of the major evangelical denominations had little hope for success.

Notes


2. Letter dated 8 November 1866, Freedmen’s Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Annual Report, 1869, 2.


From 1881 when the program was reorganized until 1894, the ABHMS gave $28,902.38 in gifts and $13,888.05 in loans to non-black (white and native American) churches in the South, and $8,271.00 in gifts and $29,720.00 in loans to black churches. Baker, *Relations Between Northern and Southern Baptists*, 132.


12. General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (New School), *Minutes*, 1865, 14-21; ibid., 1866, 207-08; Harold M. Parker, Jr., *The United

13. Christian Observer (Richmond, VA), 12 June 1872; Thompson, Presbyterians in the South, 2:130-34.


15. Isaac Patton Martin, Methodism in Holston (Knoxville, TN: Methodist Historical Society, 1945), 74-78.


17. Martin, Methodism in Holston, 94-97.
   East Tennessee Wesleyan became Grant Memorial University in 1886.
   Also in 1886 Chattanooga University opened in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Despite the General Conference ruling that “no student shall be excluded from instruction in any and every school under the supervision because of race, color, or previous condition of servitude,” the administration of Chattanooga University refused to admit several black students in 1886. School trustees insisted that black students would be “fatal to the prosperity of the institution” and would “excite prejudice and passion.” In 1889 Grant Memorial University and Chattanooga University united under one chancellor and board of trustees with the name U. S. Grant University, but the school retained the two campuses. Freedmen’s Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Annual Report, 1886, 23-29; Walter W. Benjamin, “The Methodist Episcopal Church in the Postwar Era,” in The History of American Methodism, ed. Emory Stevens Bucke (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1964), 2:377-78; Martin, Methodism in Holston, 96, 176-77.


19. Ibid., 118.

20. General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (New School), Minutes, 1867, 555.

Mission Society and Freedmen Education in the South, With Special Reference to Georgia: 1862-1897" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1953), 254.


25. Western Christian Advocate, 26 September 1866; ibid., 12 April 1865; William E. Montgomery, Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree: The African-American Church in the South, 1865-1900 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 72.

The General Conference of 1872 supported the missionaries’ claims of equality by passing what became known as the “magna charta of black rights in the Methodist Episcopal Church.” This document declared, “There is no word ‘white’ to discriminate against either race or color known in our legislation; and being of African descent does not prevent membership with white men in Annual Conferences, nor ordination at the same altars, nor appointment to presiding eldership, nor election to the General Conference, nor eligibility to the highest office in the Church.” Quoted in Heckman, “Northern Church Penetration of the South,” 195.


29. McManus, “The American Baptist Home Mission Society and Freedmen Education in the South,” 279; Baker, Relations Between Northern and Southern Baptists, 137; Georgia Baptist Convention, Minutes, 1878, 18.

The Georgia Missionary Baptist State Convention was organized in 1879.

31. Many of these colleges have changed their names since their founding. The Nashville Normal and Theological Institute became Roger Williams University in 1883. Late in the nineteenth century, Central Tennessee College was renamed Walden University, but fire and financial difficulties forced the college to close in 1922. The Atlanta Baptist Seminary, formerly the Augusta Institute, became Morehouse College in 1913. Clark University was renamed Clark College in 1940. The Biddle Memorial Institute became Johnson C. Smith University in 1923.


   The number of missionaries in the South supported by the ABHMS climbed again in the 1880s and 1890s, but the majority continued to be located in the Southwest—in Indian Territory, Texas, and New Mexico. Baker, *Relations Between Northern and Southern Baptists*, 111-12.
40. General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (Old School), Minutes, 1867, 446; ibid, 1866, 76; Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, Annual Report of the Committee on Freedmen, 1872, 77-79; Freedmen’s Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Annual Report, 1875, 54.

41. General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, Minutes, 1871, 510.

42. Morrow, Northern Methodism and Reconstruction, 193; Methodist Advocate (Atlanta, GA), 16 September 1874; Christian Advocate (New York), 12 April 1872.

43. Martin, Methodism in Holston, 138, 156-57.

44. Edmund J. Hammond, Methodist Episcopal Church in Georgia (n.p., 1935), 124-26; Georgia Annual Conference, Minutes, 1871, 13; Methodist Advocate, 15 September 1869.

45. Georgia Annual Conference, Minutes, 1871, 13; Methodist Advocate, 26 June 1872; Barclay, History of Methodist Missions, 3:314.


47. General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Journal, 1876, 331. The Georgia Conference initially consisted of the Atlanta, Dalton, and Ogeechee Districts; while the Savannah Conference embraced the Rome, Macon, Augusta, and Savannah districts. Ibid., 372, 377.

48. “Division of Georgia Conference,” Methodist Advocate, 8 November 1876; Hammond, Methodist Episcopal Church in Georgia, 139. See also Stowell, “The Negroes Cannot Navigate Alone.”

49. Smith, Cross and Flame, 172-73; Barclay, History of Methodist Missions, 3:318.

50. Dwight W. Culver, Negro Segregation in the Methodist Church (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1953), 59. Of the 25 segregated Conferences, 12 were white and 13 were black. The three mixed Conferences consisted mainly of whites.
CHAPTER 9
ONE NATION UNDER GOD?: EFFORTS TOWARD SECTIONAL REUNION

No other issue reflected so well the divergence between the Confederate and the northern visions of religious reconstruction as the question of denominational reunion. In no area was southern identity more pronounced. Georgia and Tennessee Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians vehemently rejected any plans for reunion with their counterparts in the North. Perhaps the sectional rancor of the postwar period would seem unavoidable but for the example of other denominations. Northern and southern Episcopalians quickly healed the de facto breach in their organization. Even the Cumberland Presbyterians were able to restore their national unity in 1866. Yet each of the three largest evangelical denominations remained bitterly divided in the aftermath of the war.

The northern and southern wings of the Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian Churches remained separate because each insisted that their interpretation of the Civil War was correct, and therefore, their policies toward religious reconstruction should be implemented. Even before the war ended, southerners made it clear that they wanted little to do with their coreligionists from the North. One North Carolina minister declared, “You may put me down as one of the number that will never, no never, consent to a union with the Yankees. I hope that this is the sentiment of every Presbyterian.”1
Soon after the war ended, most southern clergymen and laity proclaimed their determination to maintain their sectional denominations. Bishops James O. Andrew, Robert Payne, and George F. Pierce met in Columbus, Georgia, in August 1865 to prepare a "Pastoral Address" to the ministers and members of their church. In discussing the issue of reunion with the Methodist Episcopal Church, the southern bishops wrote, "we must express, with regret, our apprehension that a large proportion, if not a majority of northern Methodists have become incurably radical." They "teach for doctrine the commandments of man," "preach another gospel," and "have incorporated social dogmas and political tests into their church creeds." Northern pulpits were "perverted to agitations and questions not healthful to personal piety; but promotive of political and ecclesiastical discord, rather than of those ends for which the church of the Lord Jesus Christ was instituted." Given this view of the northern church, the bishops could "anticipate no good result from even entertaining the subject of re-union with them." The duty of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South to maintain itself as a bulwark of southernness was clear: "Fidelity to what seems our providential mission requires that we preserve our church in all its vigor and integrity, free from entangling alliances with those whose notions of philanthropy and politics and social economy are liable to give an ever varying complexion to their theology."²

During that same month, a group of Methodist laymen in Macon, Georgia, demonstrated their loyalty to the southern Church. By reuniting with the Methodist Episcopal Church, they insisted, southern Methodists would "yield the position we have so often taken, admit the charges we have so often refuted, and by accepting political
tests of church fellowship stultify ourselves and compromise the essential principles of the Gospel."³

A few southern Methodists desired union with the Methodist Episcopal Church, but their plans too were influenced by the southern vision of religious reconstruction. Prominent among those initially desiring Methodist reunion was Braxton Craven, president of Trinity College (now Duke University) and pastor in Raleigh, North Carolina. His letter to northern Methodist bishop Edward R. Ames in July 1865 offers interesting insights into both the prospects for and limitations of Methodist fraternity. Craven insisted that the northern Methodist bishops "did too much, or not enough" in their meeting in June 1865. There the bishops determined "to occupy, as far as practicable, those fields in the Southern states which may be opened and which give promise of success." Craven feared that "time will inevitably increase the difficulties in the way of a successful operation or adjustment."⁴

With a prophetic voice, Craven warned Bishop Ames not to be overconfident of the northern Church's chances of success in the South: "The action of the Holston Conference, St. Louis, and some other localities, may seem like the dawn of a glorious day to the M. E. Church, and to the unobservant may promise easy and rapid success, but clouds, darkness and storm will usher in and continue with a day commenced on that plan." Southern Methodism was "neither dead in sin, nor corrupt in the practices of the traitor." Two paths lay ahead: "it will either move on to great and lasting good within its own regular organization, or go back in a body to its former position." Insisting that "I do zealously favor reconstruction," Craven wrote that the "vast majority" of southern
Methodists agreed. Ecclesiastical divisions and denominational quarrels “manifestly impede the work of God,” and the separation of the two branches of American Methodism “ought not to continue.” However, the conditions of reconstruction that had been proposed by northern Methodists were “neither Methodistic nor desirable.” No church in history, he argued, has made “articles of faith or tests of membership” out of “political questions.” Here Craven joined other white southern Christians in insisting that slavery and secession were fundamentally political rather than moral issues. To effect Methodist reconstruction, Craven proposed that the Churches revoke the separation of 1844, that southerners adopt the discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and that southern Methodists enter the church “as we now are, including conferences, Bishops, appointments, and all other things.” On this point as well, northern and southern visions of religious reconstruction clashed. Northerners insisted on receiving southern Methodists individually or in small groups, while southerners desired a merger of equal bodies.5

Craven optimistically assured Bishop Ames that “reconstruction is practicable, easy, and Christian; it is every way desirable, and I believe, very generally desired, if it can be accomplished in the mode and spirit above indicated.” Nevertheless, many southerners thought “that the church North does not desire reconstruction on any basis whatever.” Craven disagreed for he did not believe northern Methodists were so self-righteous, self-confident, or intolerant as to reject fellowship with their southern brethren. “Why,” he asked, “should not Methodism be reconstructed on fair Christian terms?” After expressing the hope, “May wise councils prevail, and may the work of
God prosper in our hands," Craven closed the letter "I remain respectfully your brother in Christ." This letter and its author represent a small group of moderates in both branches of Methodism who desired to restore the national denomination. Even in this conciliatory document, however, the contrast between northern and southern visions of religious reconstruction stands out in bold relief. Craven was willing to admit much of the northern interpretation of the war when he wrote, "We of the South have erred, we have been punished, and I trust we have repented." Yet his plan for reunion remained firmly within the southern vision of reconstruction. The northern denominations had to readmit southerners as a body without inquiring into their views about slavery or secession. The northern vision of religious reconstruction prohibited such terms, and the prospects for an early reunion evaporated.6

Only one southern Methodist conference made a serious attempt to pass resolutions in favor of a speedy reunion. The Kentucky Conference, located in the eastern section of the state, considered the issue of reunion in its September 1865 meeting. The majority of a committee on the state of the Church presented a report calling on the Methodist Episcopal Church, South to initiate steps toward reunion. The Conference, however, rejected this report and instead adopted a minority report. The minority resolutions declared that "we hold ourselves ready to consider," through the agency of the General Conference, any terms presented by the Methodist Episcopal Church which would initiate "a union of the two great coordinate branches of Episcopal Methodism in the United States." In the meantime, the Kentucky Conference would "earnestly maintain our present relation." Most of the dissenters soon withdrew and
joined the Methodist Episcopal Church, followed by several thousand members. Thereafter, the Kentucky Conference was firmly entrenched in the southern Methodist fold.  

The southern Methodist bishops assured their Church that “Whatever cause has been lost, that of Southern Methodism has survived.” When they addressed the General Conference of 1866 “in respect to the separate and distinct organization of our church,” the bishops asserted that “no reasons have appeared to alter our views as expressed in August last. No proposal of fraternal relations has come to us from others.” Unwilling to initiate an attempt at reunion, southern Methodists awaited an offer that would not come for two more generations—the merger of the two Churches as corporate bodies. In the summer of 1866, the aging Bishop James O. Andrew wrote to the newly elected Bishop Holland N. McTyeire about the issue of reunion. Andrew, whose slaveholding was the spark that divided the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1844, wrote to the stridently southern and progressive junior bishop about a speech by Dr. Daniel Curry, the editor of the Christian Advocate and Journal in New York. Andrew mused: “He is certainly coming round. He seems willing to let each church do its in its own way [sic] no formal union of the two churches yet maintain fraternal relations and kindly intercourse with each other individually. I think that is pretty near the right ground but possibly I may not have properly understood him but I leave the whole matter in the hands of God.”  

Southern Presbyterians also intended to maintain their ecclesiastical separation. The North Carolina Presbyterian declared: “Better, far better, would it be for our future
spiritual welfare, to be even subjugated by their civil power, if so be that we keep ourselves distinct in matters of faith and church government, than ever to strike hands with them again in common ecclesiastical association.” When their General Assembly met in Macon in December 1865, southern Presbyterians made it clear to their northern brethren that they had no intentions of reuniting. When discussing its relations to other churches, the General Assembly insisted that the ministers of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA) had “no further or higher claims on our courtesy than any other churches of the same section of country, which hold to the same symbols of faith and order with ourselves.” The General Assembly issued a pastoral letter to the churches which exhorted southern Presbyterians “to walk in love towards all your fellow Christians,” but to be “on your guard against attempts to disturb and divide your congregations.” The Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS), they insisted, was “a branch of the Church as complete in our organization, as thoroughly distinct and harmonious, and as secure in our prospects as any other in the land.” Southern Presbyterians, like their Methodist counterparts, repudiated any suggestions of reunion with northern denominations on virtually any terms.¹⁰

In January 1866 the editors of the Southern Presbyterian advised their readers that they should “expect no help from the Northern church. Thus far Northern Christians (the great mass of them, at least,) have showed no real sympathy in our behalf.” If they were to offer any help, the editors warned, “it will be sure to come in a way and through channels that it will be neither safe, wise, nor honorable for us to accept.” In response to the criticism of northern Presbyterian newspapers about southerners’ unwillingness to
consider reunion, the Southern Presbyterian insisted that the acts of the northern Church had “compelled us to take up and maintain an attitude of independence.” In effect, “the door of readmission has been violently closed in our faces, and then we are reproached for remaining outside.” If the evil of schism applied to the perpetuation of two branches of the Church, “the sin lies at the door of the Northern Assembly, and not at ours.” However, in a later issue, the editors of the Southern Presbyterian considered the question, “would it be desirable for us to accede to a reunion, even if it could be effected on the most honorable terms?” If the northern Presbyterian Church had remained where it stood in 1861, “we would feel no special repugnance to the resumption of our former relationship.” But that Church had “gone far astray” on matters of doctrine, discipline, constitutional principles, and the proper province of the Church. It had repeatedly acted “as the hand-maid of the State,” “violated the Constitution of the Church” by legislating on non-ecclesiastical matters, and adopted “new and unwarranted terms of communion.” For all of these reasons, southern Presbyterians could not reunite with their northern brethren without “imperilling our own purity and safety, and doing dishonor to the Great Head of the Church.” Even if the hand of fraternity were offered by the northern General Assembly, some southern Presbyterians felt morally obligated to refuse it.11

Among independent-minded Baptist associations, the primary motive for cooperation was the support of missionary endeavors. At the end of the war, northern Baptist associations expressed a desire to unite the efforts of the American Baptist Home Mission Society (ABHMS) with those of the Southern Baptist Convention. However, those southern associations that met in 1865 “were unanimous in favor of continuing
their former separate societies, and against fraternization with the Northern societies.” The Virginia General Association urged its churches “to decline any co-operation or fellowship with any of the missionaries, ministers, or agents of the American Baptist Home Mission Society.” They feared that “radical” northern missionaries would alienate the freedmen from southern whites by preaching “politics rather than religion” and “equal suffrage rather than repentance.” Southern Baptists were particularly outraged over the Home Mission Society’s seizure of southern church property during the war. Both at the state level and in the Southern Baptist Convention, they expressed their determination to maintain separate southern organizations and missionary efforts.12

In stark contrast to their evangelical brethren, Cumberland Presbyterians managed to reunite their organization with a minimum of sectional bitterness. Cumberland Presbyterians enjoyed two distinct advantages over their fellows in other denominations. First, the denomination was concentrated geographically in the border states of the Upper South. They had no churches in the Northeast beyond Pennsylvania and few in the states of the Lower South. Second, the Cumberland Presbyterian leadership deliberately tried to avoid both debates on slavery before the war and the formal division of the Church during the war.13

When the General Assembly of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church met in Saint Louis in May 1861, only 37 of the 97 presbyteries were represented. The Rev. Milton Bird delivered the opening sermon and insisted that in heaven “there is no Northern and Southern religion.” At the 1862 meeting, when no southerners were present, the General Assembly resolved to “allay and not exasperate the feelings of those who differ from us,
and we most earnestly and affectionately advise our ministers and members to cultivate forbearance and conciliation.” At the next two annual meetings, radical Unionists had stronger representation. During the 1864 conference in Lebanon, Ohio, the Unionists passed resolutions against slavery and secession. In effect, the declaration against rebellion was an attempt to excommunicate all those who had voluntarily supported the Confederacy. Only after “repentance and humiliation before God and the Church” could those who had aided rebellion be allowed to reenter the Church. The 1865 Assembly met in Evansville, Indiana, in May, and accepted several delegates from the Unionist areas of East Tennessee. During the 1864 and 1865 conventions, staunch Unionists were in firm control of the General Assembly and supported the northern vision of religious reconstruction. They expected repentance from the erring southern members of their denomination as a condition for readmission.14

What the northern Cumberland Presbyterians failed to foresee, however, was the willingness of some northern and many border-state conservatives to compromise in order to restore the unity of the Church. During the war, southern Cumberland Presbyterians remained remarkably committed to an undivided Church. At a convention held in August 1863 in Chattanooga, Tennessee, one member of the assembly had proposed the organization of a separate southern Church. At this suggestion the Rev. W. M. Reed, a Confederate colonel, rose to address the body. Reed complained that while the world wanted ecclesiastical “deliverances,” it failed to recognize that “the whole manhood of our Southern churches is giving its deliverances, with muskets in the trenches, not on paper in church judicatures.” Those who wanted more, who asked “in
addition that we put Caesar above Christ, and rend Christ’s body, in order to show our patriotism, are not entitled to our respect.” Instead, the proper course was to “wait, and pray, and hope.” Reed believed that the Cumberland Presbyterian Church “will remain undivided, no matter what comes of this bitter civil struggle.” When the motion came to a vote, even its author voted no. Throughout the rest of the war, southern Cumberland Presbyterians expressed their determination “steadfastly to resist any movement which looked toward the division of the church.”

In May 1866, the General Assembly met in Owensboro, Kentucky, with Milton Bird as the clerk of the conference. Bird enrolled southern delegates without questioning them on their loyalties during the war. Once enrolled, the southerners, together with border-state conservatives, formed a majority against the northern faction. The Committee on War and Slavery reported a majority report and two minority reports to the entire conference. None of the reports, however, was acceptable to the body as a whole, and Milton Bird offered a substitute which was amended and adopted. The bland resolutions in this report condemned any movement which would tend to unite Church and State, opposed the prostitution of the pulpit for political or sectional purposes, and insisted that the expression of political sentiment was “no part of the legitimate business of an Ecclesiastical Court.” This resolution effectively negated those passed in 1864 and 1865 by the northern-controlled General Assembly. The final resolution declared that “nothing in the foregoing shall be construed as an expression of opinion upon Slavery or Rebellion.”
Understanding the important role church newspapers would play in successfully healing the breach in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, the General Assembly adopted a proposal by Rev. G. W. Mitchell of Tennessee. The resolution "earnestly recommended" that the editors of the church newspapers "exclude from their columns such articles as may manifestly engender unholy strifes and divisions among brethren, and mar the peace and unity of our beloved Zion." The united Church continued to grow throughout the rest of the nineteenth century; between 1860 and 1900, the membership and the clergy approximately doubled.¹⁷

The experience of the three largest evangelical denominations was considerably different. Instead of following the Cumberland Presbyterian example and reuniting as some members in both North and South desired, these Churches remained divided along sectional lines. From the end of the war through the rest of the decade of the 1860s, Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line insisted that their fellow churchmen of the other side favored continued separation for specious and selfish reasons. Each side identified several barriers erected by the other which precluded reunion.

Northerners accused southerners of desiring to perpetuate organizations based on slavery and rebellion. Theodore Tilton, editor of the New York Independent contended that the spirit of rebellion remained "potent and insolent in its civic and religious forms." Northern churches had to work independent from the "unregenerate and apostate" southern denominations. Tilton concluded that "the Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist,
will not soon resign their independent form for Northern fraternity. They will indulge their rancor and pride in the safe walls of their ecclesiastical fold.”

Furthermore, southern Churches and clergymen, stained with terrible sins, were unfit to serve as agents of religious reconstruction in the South. The Central Christian Advocate of St. Louis declared in 1865 that the “only true theory of Methodist reconstruction is to push on our work.” The Methodist Episcopal Church must “occupy the territory, whether there be a Church South or not, and we shall soon find that we have restored the unity of Methodism in a manner honorable to ourselves, and eminently beneficial to all loyal men, black or white, in the Southern States.” The Northwestern Christian Advocate in Chicago was particularly disturbed by “decided secessionist” southern Methodist Bishops George F. Pierce and Robert Paine. While willing to do “everything honorable and righteous for a united Methodism,” the editors of the paper “would hesitate long before consenting to do business under such men.” In October 1865, the West Wisconsin Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church resolved that because the members and ministers of the southern Church, “after instigating treason and rebellion, have not shown evidence of penitence and reformation,” allowing them to return “would be countenancing sin, and tend to the impurity of the Church.”

Southern evangelicals, in turn, rejected any discussion of reunion because their northern coreligionists had become “incurably radical” in their political activities. Northern Christians had added political tests to their conditions for membership by insisting that southern ministers and members confess and renounce the sins of rebellion and slaveholding. The Southern Presbyterian proclaimed that “Christian men of the
South” could “do neither without perjuring their consciences in the sight of God.” The editor of the Baptist Christian Index assured his readers that if reunion with the northern Baptists depended upon the South’s humbling herself, “there can be neither union nor communion between us this side of eternity.” Only if northerners were willing to put away these political tests and accept southerners as equals could reunion take place. Otherwise the sin of schism lay at their door, and “not at ours.”

Furthermore, northern missionary efforts constituted an “invasion” of southern ecclesiastical territory, complete with the capture of church properties. Southern Methodists were particularly outraged by the policy of “disintegration and absorption” which the northern Church adopted in the South. This hostile invasion must cease and southern church property had to be restored before southern evangelicals would consider merging the sectional religious bodies into common national Churches. In 1867 southern Methodist editor Thomas O. Summers declared the terms on which southern Methodists might consider fraternity and union: “Let Northern Methodists repent of the wrongs they have done us; let them cease the defamations of the living and the dead; let them restore the property they have taken from us; let them suspend their schismatical movements on our territory; let them abrogate all their political lists of membership.” If, after doing so, they proposed terms for reunion, Summers was confident that the southern General Conference would give them “a candid and courteous consideration.”

Finally, the status of black church members posed a barrier to reunion which grew more serious over time. By the 1870s southern churches were virtually bereft of black members. However, many of those who left joined northern biracial
denominations. Ever fearful of the spectre of social equality, white southern Christians opposed the integration of denominational bodies. Although they continually voiced their commitment to black evangelization, Southern Baptists refused to allow blacks the full privileges of membership. Southern Presbyterians resisted the idea of black ministers in their synods and assemblies. Southern Methodists shuddered at the thought of a black bishop presiding over their conferences. Even after blacks were relegated to their own conferences within the Methodist Episcopal Church, the issue of race continued to be a significant obstacle to Methodist reunion.

Although the sectional bitterness of the 1860s waned in the 1870s as political reconstruction drew to a close, the prospects for denominational reunion did not improve.22 The northern and southern wings of the three major evangelical bodies gradually established fraternal relations in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, but southern Christians remained steadfastly committed to their sectional organizations. The negotiations over the proper relationship of the two Churches in each denomination clarify the issues at stake in religious reconstruction and demonstrate how the results of that process continued to influence southern religious life into the twentieth century.

Unlike the Baptists and Methodists who divided in the 1840s, American Presbyterians had split into sectional camps only in 1861.23 Despite the short separation, prospects for sectional reunion were no brighter among Presbyterians in 1865 than they were in the other major evangelical denominations. During the conflict, the General Assembly of the PCUSA passed resolutions condemning slavery and secession. Shortly after Appomattox, the General Assembly of the PCUSA voiced its commitment to "pass
over and help to rebuild that part of the American Zion which has been so sadly laid waste by the rebellion and civil war.” After pronouncing southern Presbyterians “schismatical,” the General Assembly declared it was ready to receive into “ecclesiastical fellowship” any who would “properly acknowledge and renounce their errors.”

Northern Presbyterians opened the way for fraternity in 1868 when the northern General Assembly formally acknowledged the separate and independent existence of the PCUS. In 1869 the northern General Assembly sent Christian salutations to the southern General Assembly, and in 1870 the first General Assembly of the reunited Old and New School Presbyterians in the North expressed its desire to restore fraternal relations with the Southern Church “on terms of mutual confidence, respect, Christian honor and love.” To this end, the Assembly appointed a committee to confer on the issue of opening friendly correspondence.

The General Assembly of the PCUS met this proposal with hostility. Dr. Benjamin M. Palmer chaired the committee to which the proposal was referred. Palmer was personally opposed to the appointment of a committee, fearing that fraternal relations might lead to reunion. Others were somewhat more conciliatory, so the General Assembly appointed a committee to confer with the northern Presbyterians. However, under the leadership of Palmer, Robert L. Dabney, and Stuart Robinson, the General Assembly gave the committee specific instructions that “the difficulties which lie in the way of cordial correspondence between the two bodies must be distinctly met and removed.” The General Assembly went on to list the specific barriers to fraternity, including political declarations by the northern Assembly, the “total surrender of all the
great testimonies of the Church” in the union of the Old School General Assembly with the New School General Assembly, the treatment of ministers in Missouri and Kentucky who were expelled from the northern Church, and accusations against the entire southern Presbyterian Church of heresy, blasphemy, schism, and treason. To this list might be added the conflicting claims to church property and the status of black church members, important obstacles in later negotiations.26

Upon learning that the southern committee had very specific instructions, the northern General Assembly discharged its committee. Once again in 1873, however, the northern Assembly tendered the olive branch. Delegates passed a resolution declaring “all action touching the brethren adhering to the body popularly known as the Southern General Assembly” had been, since the reunion of northern Presbyterians in 1869, “null and void.” The 1874 southern General Assembly appointed a committee without specific instructions to confer with a northern Presbyterian committee, not on the issue of union, but on fraternal correspondence. A significant minority opposed the appointment of a committee, but they were satisfied when the moderator appointed to the committee only men who were committed to the southern vision of religious reconstruction, including Dr. Palmer.27

The two committees met in Baltimore in January 1875. Southern representatives insisted that the two groups meet separately and communicate in writing. They demanded the removal of two major obstacles before fraternal relations could be established. The first barrier was the “unjust accusations” made against the southern Church. The second barrier was “the course pursued in regard to Church property.”
Northern commissioners reminded the southerners that the northern General Assembly had declared "null and void" all statements derogatory to the southern Church. They also promised to refer the property questions to the next General Assembly. The Baltimore conference closed without establishing fraternal correspondence.  

For the next seven years, the cause of fraternal relations made little progress. In 1882, however, movement came from an unexpected source. Four southern presbyteries, including Holston in eastern Tennessee, sent overtures to the General Assembly of the PCUS, requesting the formal interchange of delegates with the PCUSA. A minister from Washington, D.C., moved that a committee be appointed to bear greetings to the northern Assembly and pledge cooperation in missionary endeavors. Most of these pleas came from areas of the upper South where southern and northern Presbyterian churches existed side by side. Southern Presbyterians there hoped to gain official recognition of growing fraternity in those areas. Opposition was centered in the deep South, and especially among the older members who had fought the battles of religious reconstruction. The overtures and resolution were referred to the Committee on Foreign Correspondence, which presented a report recommending that the requests be denied. For two days, the Assembly debated the issue and members took strong stands on both sides. Then, in a remarkable turn of events, a new motion was referred to the Committee on Foreign Correspondence. This time, the committee unanimously approved the proposal. In essence, the motion requested each Assembly "to remove aspersions cast upon the Christian character of the other" and then to exchange delegates. The following resolution was adopted by a near-unanimous vote and telegraphed to the
northern General Assembly in session at Springfield, Illinois: "That while receding from
no principle, we do hereby declare our regret for and withdrawal of all expressions of
our Assembly which may be regarded as reflecting upon, or offensive to, the General
Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America." Two days later,
northern Presbyterians sent a telegram informing the southern body that their General
Assembly had adopted the same resolution in reference to the PCUS. Immediately, both
General Assemblies elected fraternal delegates.29

The decision in 1882 to establish fraternal relations marked the end of an era of
bitterness among northern and southern Presbyterians. It did not, however, signal the
end to sectionalism in the southern Presbyterian Church. Led by Benjamin M. Palmer
and Richmond K. Smoot, a substantial group of southerners wanted relations with the
PCUSA to go no further. When the Upper Missouri Presbytery petitioned the southern
General Assembly of 1883 to appoint a commission to discuss organic union with the
northern Presbyterians, the answer was emphatic: "The question of organic union is not
to be entertained as a subject before the church." In 1887 more overtures appeared
favoring closer relations with the PCUSA. The southern General Assembly appointed
a committee to discuss with a northern committee all subjects "now regarded as obstacles
in the way of united effort or the propagation of the Gospel." Prominent among these
barriers was the status of black members in the northern Church. Opposition to the
committee in the southern General Assembly came principally from the synods of
Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina, areas where seven black presbyteries had
been established by the PCUSA.30
The two committees met in Louisville, Kentucky in December 1887 to discuss their differences. In addition to the status of black members, the committees discussed the spirituality of the Church, ecclesiastical boards, and doctrine. Southern commissioners discovered that the two Churches were closer on these points than they had expected. On the question of most serious importance, the status of black churches, the northern committee declared that their Church was “not in favor of setting off its colored members into a separate, independent organization.” Several months before the joint commission met, prominent leaders of the PCUS, including Dabney, Palmer, and Smoot, cited the race issue as “an insuperable barrier to union with the Northern Church.” Upon no other topic were “the Southern people more sensitive, to no danger are they more alive, than this of the amalgamation of the two races thrown so closely together and threatening the deterioration of both.” This “peril” confronted southern Presbyterians “in the proposal to reintegrate in the Northern Church, as being one of the early steps leading surely to that final result.”

Even if all other difficulties could be resolved, the matter of black members proved insurmountable. After the southern committee reported to the General Assembly of 1888, that body proclaimed that the obstacles to reunion had not “to any considerable extent” been removed. The General Assembly of the PCUS approved this report and voted to discontinue negotiations by a vote of 84 to 43. A protest signed by 38 delegates who desired to continue negotiations revealed a growing sentiment toward closer cooperation with the PCUSA. However, the older generation of ministers who had fought the battles of religious reconstruction, together with some younger recruits,
effectively blocked every effort to resurrect the issue.\textsuperscript{32} When the PCUSA and three southern presbyteries requested the appointment of a committee of conference in 1894, the southern General Assembly declined by a vote of 91 to 67. Once again it raised the old issues of the proper relation of church and state, the status of black members, and church property disputes. To these were added the status of women in the Church and the disruption which would result from discussing reunion. Although the issue resurfaced periodically, the relationship established between the churches in the 1880s—fraternal relations and cooperation, but no union—persisted well into the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{33}

Despite the initial barriers which existed to reunion, northern Methodists continued to seek out common ground with their southern counterparts. At virtually every point, they were rebuffed by southern Methodists intent on maintaining their separate, sectional organization. Two northern conferences, the New York and the New York East, sent messages to the southern General Conference of 1866 requesting that body to appoint commissioners to discuss the subject of reunion. Although willing to unite in prayer for the restoration of “Christian love and sympathy” between the Churches, the southern General Conference emphatically rejected any discussion of reunion.\textsuperscript{34}

Undaunted by this refusal, northern Methodist bishops in April 1869 appointed three of their number to meet with the southern bishops. Early in May, Bishops Edmund S. Janes and Matthew Simpson\textsuperscript{35} traveled to St. Louis to discuss “the propriety, practicability, and methods of reunion” with the southern bishops at their annual meeting. Janes and Simpson delivered a communication from the northern bishops which declared
that since the division of the Churches "has been productive of evil, so the reunion of them would be productive of good." Because "the main cause of separation has been removed, so has the chief obstacle to the restoration."36

The southern Methodist bishops replied a week later "at sufficient length to be understood," as one of them later reported. They declared that fraternal relations must be restored before any question of union could be considered. Furthermore, the bishops insisted that they had no authority to act on the issues of the "propriety, practicability, and methods of reunion." They reminded the northern bishops of the obstacles which hindered any such discussion. They were particularly outraged by the "avowed purpose" of northern missionaries to "disintegrate and absorb our societies, that otherwise dwelt quietly." Their practice of "taking possession of some of our houses of worship" had "inflicted both grief and loss on us" and appeared to the world as not only "a breach of charity, but an invasion of the plainest rights of property." Perhaps most importantly, the southern bishops rejected the idea that "the main cause of separation has been removed." Slavery, they contended, "was not, in any proper sense, the cause, but the occasion only of that separation, the necessity of which we regretted as much as you."37

When the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South assembled at Memphis in 1870, Bishop Edmund S. Janes and Dr. William L. Harris of the northern Church appeared bearing fraternal greetings. They requested that the southern Methodists appoint a commission to meet with a similar group from the northern Church to discuss reunion. In response, the General Conference endorsed the 1869 actions of its bishops, declined to appoint a commission, and resolved that "the true
interests of the Church of Christ require and demand the maintenance of our separate and distinct organizations.”

The 1872 General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church elected delegates to bear fraternal greetings to the 1874 General Conference of the southern Church. The delegation attended the General Conference in May 1874 at Louisville, Kentucky, as the first official fraternal delegates elected since the division of 1844. After listening to the northern delegates, the General Conference appointed a committee of nine ministers and laymen to consider the matter. Their report insisted that while corporate union was “undesirable and impracticable,” they welcomed “measures looking to the removal of obstacles in the way of amity and peace.” The General Conference appointed delegates to bear fraternal greetings to the 1876 northern General Conference. Among those chosen was the ninety-year-old Dr. Lovick Pierce, who in 1848 was turned away by the northern General Conference in his mission as a fraternal messenger from the southern Church. The 1874 General Conference also selected a commission to meet with a similar commission from the northern Church “to adjust all existing difficulties.”

After the northern General Conference designated a commission “to settle disturbing questions,” the two groups met at Cape May, New Jersey, in August 1876. The two delegations, each consisting of three ministers and two laymen, discussed several issues which hindered the establishment of formal fraternity. Southern representatives insisted that northern Methodists officially recognize the legitimacy of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. They requested that the northern commissioners acknowledge that the two General Conferences were “each rightfully and historically
integral parts of the original Methodist Episcopal Church constituted in 1784.” The northern delegates quickly declared that each of the Churches was “a legitimate Branch of Episcopal Methodism in the United States.” The joint commission also adopted a “Declaration and Basis of Fraternity,” established guidelines for settling church property disputes, and investigated 14 cases. Of the ten cases which the conference decided, nine favored local societies of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, as did the general rules adopted to settle property claims.40

The Cape May conference marked the end of religious reconstruction for Methodists. Northern Methodists recognized the permanence and legitimacy of the southern Church, which they had hoped in 1865 would disintegrate in the face of their intensive missionary efforts. At every General Conference after 1876, northern and southern Methodists exchanged fraternal delegates. However, none of these visitors proposed a union of the two Churches.

Not coincidentally, the Cape May conference occurred just months after the Methodist Episcopal Church capitulated to the idea of segregated conferences in the South. In 1874 southern Methodists had identified the northern Church’s “mixed Conferences, mixed congregations, and mixed schools” as one of several barriers to reunion. At the request of both black and white ministers in the South, the General Conference of 1876 approved the racial division of the southern work. Critics of this plan maintained that the General Conference was ready to offer “the dark brother as a sacrifice for the fraternal fellowship of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.” The
African Methodist Episcopal *Christian Recorder* lamented that “with repentance or without it, the [Church] South must be appeased.”

On the local level, the tensions of religious reconstruction gradually relaxed. In Carroll County, Georgia, southern Methodist Frank Robinson accepted the invitation of a nearby northern Methodist church to bring his Sunday school class to a local gathering. Previously “full of bitterness” toward northern Methodists, Robinson reported, he would have “felt myself disgraced to have been seen entering your Church.” However, the kind invitation “has melted my heart and driven this bitterness out.”

For 60 years after the end of religious reconstruction, northern and southern Methodists made only halting progress toward reunion. In 1898 a Joint Commission on Federation met for the first time. By the time it closed its work in 1916, the commission had promoted cooperation in foreign missions and created a common hymnal, catechism, and order of worship to be used by both Churches. In 1916 the Joint Commission on Unification began efforts to reunite the two Churches. In 1923 the commission developed a plan for reunion, which the northern Church adopted in its 1924 General Conference. A special General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South also met in 1924 and approved the plan. However, the southern annual conferences also had to approve the plan by a three fourths majority for it to take effect. While unification won a majority of the votes, the vote fell far short of the three fourths necessary. Importantly, five southern bishops had opposed the plan. Although black members were relegated to a separate regional conference, some southerners feared
losing their identity and their church property in a united Church where they would be a minority; others opposed the modernism in the northern Church. 

However, on the local level, fraternity and unity of spirit continued to grow. In Tennessee and elsewhere in the South, southern Methodists sometimes visited nearby northern Methodist conferences, and northern ministers returned the favor. When the Methodist Episcopal Church dissolved its Central German Conference in 1932, Barth Methodist Church in Nashville returned to the southern church. Even more remarkably, northern and southern Methodists also exchanged several other churches in central Tennessee to improve flexibility among their charges. When the vote for reunion came in 1937, southern Methodists in the Tennessee Conference voted 187 to 72 in favor of the merger. 

Even in the 1930s, the issue of black members continued to cripple reunion negotiations. Some northern Methodists wanted equal representation in the merged conferences in the South. Southern whites sought a union of whites only after the northern Church had given its black members independence or turned them over to the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church. Compromisers settled upon the creation of a racially separate Central Jurisdiction for black members of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The creation of the Central Jurisdiction insulated blacks from the rest of the united Church except at the highest levels. Although it perpetuated segregation and geographical overlapping, the Central Jurisdiction did allow blacks to elect their own bishops and presiding elders.
By 1935 commissioners from the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the Methodist Protestant Church had devised a new plan for unification into “The Methodist Church.” This time all three General Conferences approved the plan, the annual conferences ratified these decisions, and the three churches merged into one in the spring of 1939. Ninety-five years after the division of 1844, northern and southern Methodists were once again in the same Church. The issues which prevented reunion during religious reconstruction remained strong enough in 1925 to foil a unification plan, but by the late 1930s a new generation of Methodists in both sections overcame the old animosities and joined together.

Like their Presbyterian and Methodist brethren, southern Baptists staunchly resisted the idea of uniting with their northern counterparts. The primary vehicle for northern Baptist efforts in the South was the ABHMS. The Society reentered the South in 1862 to work among the freedmen. Considering these missionary efforts an invasion of their territory, Southern Baptists were very critical of the Society.

At the 1867 meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, southern Baptists outlined what they considered to be the basis for cooperation with the ABHMS. Since the northern Baptist Society wanted to aid in the religious instruction of the freedmen, the Southern Baptist Domestic Mission Board was instructed to “make known to that Society our willingness to receive aid in this work, by appropriations made to the Boards of this Convention.” In 1868, when the ABHMS sent delegates bearing “Christian greeting” to the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Baltimore, the Convention declared that “as we ask no concession of principle, we make none” in receiving the
northern Baptist delegates. Southern Baptists also reiterated their desire for financial assistance, insisting that the Domestic Mission Board had “peculiar advantages for prosecuting this work—experience, proximity to the field, interest in the people—and they are willing to receive aid in its conduct.” Southern Baptists wanted the ABHMS to recognize the South as a territorial unit in which only they could work.46

The Convention also appointed a committee to confer with the ABHMS at its meeting later in 1868. The committee included some of the most prominent ministers in the Convention, including J. B. Jeter, John A. Broadus, Richard Fuller, Basil Manly, Jr., J. R. Graves, and H. A. Tupper. Broadus requested that the Southern Domestic Mission Board be permitted to approve any missionaries sent among the freedmen by the Mission Society. Northern Baptists rejected this proposal as an unreasonable restraint on their ability to appoint whom they wished. In turn, the northern Society presented a formal plan for cooperative efforts to “lift up the millions of freedmen to the exercise of all the rights and duties of citizenship and Christian brotherhood.” Believing that this statement implied social equality between the races, the southern delegates rejected the proposal because of its “political” objectives.47

In 1870 the Southern Baptist Convention considered the possibility of an organic union with the ABHMS. After discussion, the Convention declined to pursue reunion. J. B. Jeter chaired a special committee instructed to consider the whole issue of cooperation with northern Baptists. Its report declared that “All are agreed that the Convention and its Boards should be maintained in their integrity. No measures which endanger their existence or diminish their efficiency, are to be tolerated. All the energies
of Southern Baptists should be directed to their support and the increase of their usefulness.” Moreover, the committee concluded, “the further agitation of a subject which has absorbed so much of the valuable time of this body, at its last three sessions, tends only to disturb our own harmony, without promoting fraternal relations with other bodies.”

Despite the Southern Baptist Convention’s official hostility to reunion, individual state conventions began in the 1870s to cooperate closely with the Home Mission Society’s evangelistic efforts among southern blacks. In 1879, for example, the Georgia Baptist Convention entered into an agreement with the Society for conducting missions among the freedmen. Once again in 1879 the Southern Baptist Convention considered uniting its Domestic Mission Board with the ABHMS, but the proposal was firmly rejected. Fifteen southern states and territories sent representatives to the Jubilee meeting of the ABHMS in 1882 to discuss plans for future cooperative work. After 1882, both black and white local Baptist congregations increasingly looked to the Home Mission Society for financial assistance in building church edifices.

By the early 1880s the ABHMS clearly overwhelmed the efforts of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Home Mission Board. The northern force of 67 missionaries in the South was triple the Home Mission Board’s number, while the ABHMS spent $85,000 in the region annually compared to a budget of $28,000 for the southern Board. Many southern Baptists feared that the life of the Convention itself was at stake. The solution was to revive the Convention’s domestic missionary activities. In 1881, the Convention moved its Domestic Mission Board from Marion, Alabama, to Atlanta, Georgia. With
a new name and a new executive secretary, the Home Mission Board under Dr. Isaac T. Tichenor reasserted the territorial conception of missionary work and fostered a growing denominational consciousness. During the 1880s the Home Mission Board increasingly challenged the supremacy of the ABHMS in the South. In Georgia, for example, the cooperation between the northern Society and the state convention, which began in 1877 as an effort to support missionaries to blacks in Georgia, ceased by 1885. At the 1881 meeting of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, a minister proposed that a committee be appointed to confer with the ABHMS about cooperative efforts in mission work. Another minister, however, argued that such a move would be humiliating to the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. Tennessee Baptists declined to work with the northern Society, and determined instead to cooperate with the southern Board.50

In 1894 the Southern Baptist Convention appealed to the ABHMS for greater southern participation in black evangelization, “believing that the time has come when it should enlarge its work among the colored people of the South.” The Convention appointed a committee to meet with a similar one from the Home Mission Society. The two groups met at Fortress Monroe, Virginia, in September 1894. After two days of deliberation, the conference unanimously adopted two resolutions and considered a third. The first proposed that the Convention appoint local advisory committees where black schools existed to advise the ABHMS on changes which it considered desirable. Southerners pledged to support the schools morally and financially and to encourage young blacks to attend them. The second resolution proposed that the Convention and the Society jointly appoint missionaries to black southerners, conduct ministers’ and
deacons’ training institutes, and strengthen black Baptist missionary organizations. The third item proposed by southern delegates involved territorial limits on new missionary efforts. Although the Society’s representatives had no instructions on this matter, they promised to present it to the society. Both the Society and the Convention later approved all three proposals.51

The Fortress Monroe agreement marked the end of religious reconstruction for Baptists. Southern Baptists won a major victory for their vision of religious reconstruction when the Society formally recognized the territorial unity of the South and the Southern Baptist Convention as its representative. The ABHMS did not immediately withdraw, but it did begin to curtail its operations in the South. Southern Baptists pledged greater financial support for evangelistic and educational efforts among black southerners, but by 1900 the plan for greater coordination of missionary efforts had clearly failed because white Baptist state conventions refused to support it. Despite the failure of greater cooperation, Southern Baptists had won the field by the turn of the century. The formation of the Northern Baptist Convention in 1907 gave further impetus to the idea of sectional boundaries in Baptist missionary work, and northern Baptists increasingly focused on the Northwest and northern cities in their missionary endeavors.52

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, northern and southern evangelicals slowly withdrew from the battles of religious reconstruction and achieved a measure of intersectional peace. These settlements came only after each side had once again aired its grievances. Although some southerners were anxious to restore harmony and even unity, most of the initiatives for fraternity and reunion came from northern
bodies. Most southerners were intent on retaining their sectional identity and upholding the Confederate vision of religious reconstruction. Their ability to prevent the reunion of the denominations which many northerners and some southerners desired attests to the success of the Confederate vision in this area. Methodists were able to effect a sectional reunion, but this reconciliation came only after three quarters of a century of negotiations. Even after the ecclesiastical warriors of religious reconstruction died, their successors upheld the propriety and necessity of separate southern organizations. Northern evangelicals achieved a measure of success in establishing fraternal relations at all, but they did so only after southern ecclesiastical pride had been satisfied and their own black members had been slighted. In the discussions of reunion, as elsewhere, the southern vision prevailed through its unyielding commitment to the Confederate interpretation of the Civil War.

Notes
3. Southern Christian Advocate, 31 August 1865.
5. Ibid., 43-45. Southern Methodist bishops declared in August 1865 that “the abolition, for military and political considerations, of the institution of domestic slavery in the United States does not affect the moral question that was prominent in our separation in
1844.” “Pastoral Address of the Southern Methodist Bishops,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, 31 August 1865.


Dr. Daniel Whedon, editor of the *Methodist Review*, represents the moderate group in northern Methodism. Early in 1866, Whedon wrote hopefully of the southern bishops’ declarations of loyalty to the national government. Several months later, he wrote that “with the efforts I, almost alone, have made with the Church, South, I have found that reasoning appeals, made as a reasonable Christian man, to Southern Methodism, do meet with a cheering response.” He warned the northern Methodists against ruining their efforts in the South through “bad temper mistakenly supposed by us to be high moral sternness.” *Methodist Review* (New York) 48 (January 1866): 124-30; *Christian Advocate* (Nashville, TN), 9 August 1866.


Fraternal relations or fraternity indicated a formal recognition of one ecclesiastical organization by another. The practical aspects of the relationship included the exchange of greetings between conferences, conventions, or assemblies; cooperation in revivals and mission work; and the opening of pulpits and churches to the opposite denomination. In many cases, individual instances of local cooperation existed before the denominations recognized the fact officially. Ralph E. Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1956), 93-94.

9. James O. Andrew to Holland N. McTyeire, 7 June 1866, John J. Tigert IV Collection, Papers of Holland Nimmons McTyeire, Incoming Correspondence, Special Collections, Vanderbilt University Library, Nashville, TN.


The Holston Presbytery in eastern Tennessee resolved in the fall of 1865 that it was “ready and willing to unite with the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. whenever that body was willing to receive it on such terms as are laid down in the Word of God and the time-tried Standards of the Presbyterian Church.”

Likewise in 1866, the Nashville Presbytery in central Tennessee declared its willingness “to resume our connection with that branch of the church North as soon as the Synod can do so in honor and with good conscience.” Ernest Trice Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1963-1973), 2:128, 153.


15. B. W. McDonnold, History of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, 4th ed. (Nashville, TN: Board of Publication of Cumberland Presbyterian Church, 1899), 383, 404-05.

16. Barrus, Baughn, and Campbell, A People Called Cumberland Presbyterians, 161-63; General Assembly of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, Minutes, 1866, 48-49.

17. General Assembly of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, Minutes, 1866, 37; Barrus, Baughn, and Campbell, A People Called Cumberland Presbyterians, 187.


20. “Who Has Prevented Reconstruction?” Southern Presbyterian, 8 February 1866; Christian Index (Atlanta, GA), 9 November 1865.


22. For a discussion of the general process of sectional reconciliation, see Nina Silber, The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993). Silber highlights the growing desire for reunion at the expense of black Americans and women. Northern and southern denominations, which Silber does not examine, were less enthusiastic about reunion than many other groups, though their efforts to establish fraternal relations were influenced by the general restoration of sectional harmony at the expense of black Americans.
23. The New School Presbyterian Church had divided in 1857. Its southern wing, the United Synod of the South, united with the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America (Old School) in 1864. The northern wing of the New School Presbyterians united with the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (Old School) in 1869.

24. General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (Old School), Minutes, 1865, 554, 560-61; J. Treadwell Davis, Relations Between the Northern and Southern Presbyterian Churches, 1861-1888 (Nashville, TN: Joint University Libraries, 1951), 9-11.


27. General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, Minutes, 1873, 503; General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, Minutes, 1874, 502-06; Thompson, Presbyterians in the South, 2:229-31.

28. Thompson, Presbyterians in the South, 2:232-33; Davis, Relations Between the Northern and Southern Presbyterian Churches, 16-18.


30. General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, Minutes, 1883, 57-58; ibid., 1887, 222-23.

31. General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, Minutes, 1888, 456-63; Southern Presbyterian, 18 August 1887; Thompson, Presbyterians in the South, 2:256-58.

32. Thompson, Presbyterians in the South, 2:258; Davis, Relations Between the Northern and Southern Presbyterian Churches, 33-34.

Among the younger recruits was Dr. Thomas Cary Johnson, professor of Church History at Union Theological Seminary. His history of the southern Presbyterian Church, published in 1894, defended the Church’s continued separate existence. Johnson lamented that when the southern General Assembly issued its apology in 1882, “she lowered her banner. She merged her witness for the truth—forsaking the nobler course under the whips of some goody-goody scolds.” Thomas C. Johnson, History of the Southern Presbyterian Church (New York: Christian Literature Co., 1894), 473.

The Presbyterian Church in the United States and the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America did unite in 1983.


35. Bishop Thomas A. Morris was also appointed to go, but was unable to do so because his wife was ill.


Many ministers of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the South were outraged by the Cape May meeting. One of their number insisted that “we met the enemy and we surrendered.” See Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction*, 89-90.


42. *Methodist Advocate* (Atlanta, GA), 15 July 1874.


When Stonewall Jackson lay mortally wounded at Chancellorsville in 1863, the religious life of the South was still immersed in the preoccupations of the antebellum era. By 1877 the foundations of southern faith had been shaken, less by the outcome of the war itself, however, than by the emerging forces that the war unleashed. The failure of the Confederacy’s bid for independence opened the South to new opportunities, though hardly ones that were welcomed by white southern evangelicals. Southern Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian organizations were by no means dead, and they all reasserted themselves as guardians of sectional identity and religious purity in the postwar period. The impulse was to return as quickly as possible to the old conventions and familiar issues, but circumstances required considerable readjustment.

The three principal competitors in the southern religious economy of the 1860s and 1870s were white southerners, white northerners, and freedmen. The small number of northern black missionaries from the African Methodist Episcopal and African Methodist Episcopal Zion Churches shared many of the same attitudes and outlooks as the freedmen to whom they ministered, and therefore must be included in that group. A larger body of southern white ministers and laity openly repudiated the southern denominations and joined northern Churches at their first opportunity. These religious
scalawags shared much of the northern view of the war, and played an important role in reinforcing northerners’ preconceptions about the South and its people.

Each of these three groups interpreted God’s purposes in the Civil War differently. White southern evangelicals believed Appomattox to be a severe chastisement by their heavenly Father who continued to love them in spite of their numerous sins. The sins for which God was punishing them included “extortion” or greed, reliance on men rather than God, and even several wrongs—reluctantly acknowledged—associated with the system of slavery. These shortcomings included the failure to recognize slave marriages or to respect family ties among slaves, harsher punishment of slaves than of whites by the legal system for similar crimes, and the prohibition against teaching slaves to read, a proscription which prevented them from reading the Bible. At the same time, southerners emphatically rejected the Yankee conviction that slavery was inherently sinful.¹

Adopting this conception of the providential meaning of southern defeat, Confederate Christians proceeded to formulate a plan for rebuilding their religious lives. Since, on the whole, their treatment of slaves had been governed by the laws of God as contained in Scripture, they saw little reason for change in southern racial practices. Black Christians should remain quietly in the galleries and the rear of churches where they could continue to receive wholesome instruction from their “best friends.” Although slavery had been eradicated in the war, white southerners insisted that the peculiar institution was not the issue over which they separated from their northern brethren before the war. Disputes over church governance and the proper purview of
ecclesiastical bodies were the real causes of division, and northern Christians' actions during the war only made these differences more difficult to remedy. To southern Christians, the northern denominations had become increasingly politicized and radical, and their seizure of southern church property under war department orders especially rankled. They could not accept northern offers for reunion without surrendering their beliefs and their sense of regional identity.

Northern evangelicals interpreted Confederate defeat as God's just judgment upon white southerners for the crimes of human bondage and political treason. Because of their active participation in these crimes, reasoned the victors, they were unfit to serve as agents of moral regeneration. "Hopelessly debauched with proslaveryism and tainted with treason," as one northern editor described their condition, southern Churches could not minister effectively to either white southerners or the former slaves. Furthermore, northern churchmen believed, many white southerners had never really supported the Confederacy, or, for a time, had been misled by scheming leaders. At heart, they longed for the return of the "national denominations" from which they had been unwillingly separated. At first such opinions seemed to be verified by the emergence of the religious scalawags, whose numbers were thought greater than they actually were. These southerners who accepted the northern interpretation of the war returned to the northern denominations at their first opportunity. Concentrated in the border states and Appalachia, many had been Unionists throughout the war, but a few had supported the Confederacy and now repented for this error. In an era when church discipline was an important part of religious life, northern evangelicals demanded similar displays of
repentance from all southerners as a condition for readmission into the northern denominations. Wartime missionary labors among black contrabands within Union lines also convinced northern Christians that they had a providential duty in the South. In the closing years of the war, northerners vowed to enter the South to preach a "pure and loyal gospel" to whites and minister to the spiritual and educational needs of the freedmen.

Armed with this understanding of the religious meaning of the war, northern evangelicals vigorously prosecuted an ecclesiastical "invasion" of the South. Missionaries organized congregations of southern Unionists in some areas, and in other places, they welcomed freedmen eager to leave the southern churches. Northern teachers also went south to staff schools for southern blacks. The educational effort served as an important implement for northern evangelistic efforts; wherever they organized a school, northern Christians were able to establish a local congregation for their denomination as well. While northern missionaries and teachers were moving southward to erect churches and schools, northern denominations also sought reunion with their southern counterparts. Believing that slavery was the primary cause of separation, they saw in the death of slavery an opportunity for renewed unity. However, they continued to demand repentance as a condition of reunion.

For black southerners and northern black missionaries, the real meaning of the war lay in the deliverance of four million people from bondage. God had heard their prayers, and He had been faithful. He used northern armies to set His children free by overthrowing the government erected to preserve slavery. In the terms of their favorite
biblical narrative, the freedmen had been delivered from Egyptian slavery as a result of the war, but a wilderness remained before them. They would need help to cross the River Jordan to reach the Promised Land. Black southern Christians quickly withdrew from the churches of their masters, despite the laments and warnings of their former brethren. They then turned to northern missionaries for organizational, educational, and financial aid. In return they offered themselves as members in the numbers-conscious northern denominations.

The competition among these three visions of religious reconstruction shaped the southern spiritual landscape into the twentieth century. The new alternatives in religious affiliation led to a rapid expansion in the number of local churches in the 1860s. In 1870 Georgia Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians had 31,000 more church seats and 450 more congregations than in 1860. In the same period, while general property values fell dramatically, the church property of these denominations rose in value by nearly a million dollars. Tennessee's churches grew even faster. Between 1860 and 1870, Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Cumberland Presbyterians in Tennessee provided space for 122,000 more people and formed nearly 800 new local churches. Although the 1880 census did not report statistics on church organizations or capacities, other evidence indicates that the proliferation of churches continued in the 1870s. Some of the growth is attributable to natural increase in the population and a greater tendency to join organizations of all sorts, but the greater number arose from the establishment of northern white churches and freedmen's churches. In many areas of Georgia and middle and western Tennessee, towns with one Baptist church in 1860 had two in 1870, one
black and one white. In eastern Tennessee, localities with one Methodist church in 1860 had two or perhaps three in 1870, one southern white, one northern white, and one black. In some areas black Methodists divided among themselves, and two or more churches sprang up to compete with the parent congregation. These patterns were repeated across the South and in all three denominations.

By 1870 southern churches were segregated to a far greater degree than they had been before the war. Shortly after departing southern biracial churches, black Baptists began to form associations and often cooperated with the American Baptist Home Mission Society in evangelistic endeavors. Black Presbyterians united with one of the northern Presbyterian churches (who themselves united in 1869) and were organized into presbyteries and synods, which were rarely biracial. Black Methodists enjoyed a greater variety of choices. The Methodist Episcopal Church was attractive because it provided funds to build churches and schoolhouses and pay preachers and teachers. It also proclaimed itself the only racially inclusive Methodist Church, a claim, however, increasingly divorced from reality as the Methodist Episcopal Church became internally segregated in the 1870s. The African Methodist Episcopal and African Methodist Episcopal Zion Churches appealed to racial pride and won hundreds of thousands of southern adherents in the postwar South. The Colored Methodist Episcopal Church, organized by the southern Methodist Church in 1870, received the remaining black members in the southern Church and drew others away from the three northern organizations. The competition among these four Churches for black members was
fierce in the 1860s and 1870s, but when religious reconstruction ended, the era of proselytizing efforts had largely passed.

Conflicts over white members also raged in portions of Appalachia and the border South during religious reconstruction. In eastern Tennessee and elsewhere, both churches waged a relentless war in the late 1860s over members and church property. Many southern evangelicals changed loyalties during the period, and a few changed twice. By the late 1870s, thousands of white southerners belonged to “northern” denominations.

In response to these assaults, southern white Churches marshalled their considerable organizational, educational, and cultural resources in an attempt to reassert dominance over the religious life of the region. Shortly after the war ended, each southern Church declared its determination to rebuild and continue its antebellum mission, one that included a defiant sectionalism. The Confederacy had died. But the South remained, and southern Christians committed themselves to perpetuating this self-conscious section within the larger nation. During reconstruction, religion served as a bulwark of sectional identity for southerners when the South’s political and economic fortunes were to some extent outside of their control.

Within a year after Appomattox, most southern religious newspapers had revived and many of the denominational organizations had convened to assess the damages. Some associations, conferences, and presbyteries were holding their first meeting in several years. From this moment forward, they began to rebuild their institutions. Some newspapers failed and some denominational boundaries had to be redrawn, but given the
general poverty in the section, the recovery was swift and dramatic. Prominent among southern evangelicals’ plans for religious reconstruction was the transmission of their values to the next generation. Accordingly, they devoted much time and many resources to developing a strong system of Sunday schools and a network of denominational colleges. In both, young southerners could be taught reverence for the South, its institutions, and its leaders. Taught by southern teachers and supplied with materials written by southern authors, students would learn to appreciate their spiritual heritage and know how to defend it against any and all foes—including northern Christians.

As religious reconstruction progressed, northern churchmen retreated from their earlier demands for repentance and tried repeatedly to arrange an organic merger between sectional wings of each denomination. Each time, southern representatives adamantly refused. Only Cumberland Presbyterians were able to effect a reunion, and their ability to do so was in part a reflection of their strength in border states, rather than in the more polarized Deep South and New England areas. Southern Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians insisted that their northern counterparts had become incurably radical and had prostituted their churches for political purposes. Furthermore, they had violated the constitutions of their respective denominations and tyrannized southern minorities. In the clash over reunion, southern Churches won a resounding victory by opposing reunion and by agreeing to the establishment of fraternal relations only after northern Christians had yielded to all of their demands.

Despite the successes of the Confederate vision of religious reconstruction, the triumph was incomplete. Most importantly, black southerners did not remain under the
spiritual oversight of their former masters. Nor did northern Churches respect the exclusive territorial claims southern Churches put forward. Instead, they launched a massive missionary and educational campaign in the former Confederacy. Although never as successful as northerners had hoped, hundreds of thousands of black and white adherents to northern Churches by the late 1870s testified to the success of this operation.

Although Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians within each section continued to debate heatedly among themselves such issues as infant baptism and the proper form of church government, they largely agreed about the main features of religious reconstruction. A few variations in practice arose between the locally autonomous Baptists on one hand and the more hierarchical Presbyterians and Methodists on the other, but remarkable similarities existed on most major issues. All three southern Churches initially sought to retain their black membership, and all went through a similar process of adjustment to black demands for more religious autonomy. All three refused reunion with northern Churches and instead committed themselves to rebuilding their own organizations. All four northern denominations (three after 1869) believed that they were chosen by God to evangelize and educate the freedmen and to a lesser degree southern whites as well. All had initially demanded repentance as a condition of readmission to membership, but later sought closer relations with their southern counterparts on virtually any terms. They also gradually retreated from providing elementary education for the freedmen, and concentrated instead on supporting a few black colleges. On virtually every issue of religious reconstruction, sectional animosities proved stronger than denominational distinctions.
Comparisons between the states of Tennessee and Georgia also reveal more similarities than differences. The two states experienced religious reconstruction in slightly different ways. The process began during the war in Tennessee, but did not commence in Georgia until the summer of 1865. Eastern Tennessee, with its large contingent of Unionist residents, provided a far more fertile ground for northern missionary efforts among whites than any section of Georgia, though some whites in the mountains of north Georgia did join northern Churches. Otherwise, religious reconstruction proceeded in both states with striking similarity. The strategies employed by all three groups in these two states had much in common, and evidence suggests that the pattern in other southern states was comparable.

The contest for the soul of the South between 1863 and 1877 reaffirmed the importance of religion in southern public and private life. As Edward Ayers has written in his history of the New South, even those indifferent or hostile to the churches "could not escape the images, the assumptions, the power of faith." The contested process of religious reconstruction in the South forced black and white southerners and white northerners to confront the meaning of the Civil War for their religious lives and to act upon that understanding. The decisions they made dramatically changed the religious landscape of the South and continued to affect the section and the nation into the twentieth century.

Notes

1. In June 1865, Georgia Methodists were outraged when one of their number insisted that the master-slave relationship had a corresponding moral responsibility. The performance or neglect of this responsibility "determines the moral character of slavery."
“Judged by this severe test,” the minister declared, “I fear our institution as we have held it in practice, is wrong.” See Daniel W. Stowell, “‘We Have Sinned, and God Has Smitten Us!’: John H. Caldwell and the Religious Meaning of Confederate Defeat,” Georgia Historical Quarterly 78 (Spring 1994): 1-38.


3. United States, Census Office, Eighth Census of the United States (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1866), 4:368-70; United States, Census Office, Ninth Census of the United States (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1872), 1:533. Property value for all Georgia churches rose by $1,121,564 from 1860 to 1870. In 1860, Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians owned 96% of all Georgia churches, but only 83% of the church property in value. The 1870 census does not give property value by denomination, but if these denominations (still comprising 96% of Georgia church organizations) held the same proportion of church property, their holdings would have risen in value by approximately $931,350 between 1860 and 1870.


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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Born in Madison, Georgia, in 1964, Daniel W. Stowell grew up in the towns of Covington, Georgia, and Newnan, Georgia. A 1982 graduate of Newnan High School, he entered the University of Georgia that same year. In 1986 he graduated from the University of Georgia with a bachelor’s degree in history and political science. From 1986 to 1988 he studied history at the graduate level at the University of Georgia. He completed his master’s degree in 1988 under the direction of Dr. Jean E. Friedman. His thesis was entitled “The Failure of Religious Reconstruction: The Methodist Episcopal Church in Georgia, 1865-1871.” He began work on the Ph.D. in 1988 at the University of Florida under the direction of Dr. Bertram Wyatt-Brown. In 1987 he married Miriam Ruth Keener, and they have two sons, Samuel and Joseph.
I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree Doctor of Philosophy.

Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Chairman
Richard J. Milbauer Professor of History

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree Doctor of Philosophy.

Kermit L. Hall
Professor of History

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree Doctor of Philosophy.

Samuel S. Hill, Jr.
Professor of Religion

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree Doctor of Philosophy.

Darrett B. Rutman
Graduate Research Professor of History

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree Doctor of Philosophy.

C. John Sommerville
Professor of History

This dissertation was submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Department of History in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate School and was accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Dean, Graduate School