

Article

“The Necessary Result of Piety”: Slavery and Religious Establishments in South Carolina Presbyterianism, 1800–1840

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Abstract: Historians have argued that disestablishment liberated American religion and allowed for the proliferation of religious practice and religious freedom, especially individualistic Evangelicalism in the South. This proposition reduced nearly all of southern Protestantism to Revivalist Evangelicalism, and failed to account for the powerful presence of coercive Protestant religiosity in older southern states such as South Carolina. While they shared certain Evangelical particulars with frontier populations, Protestants in South Carolina, especially Presbyterians, rejected individualized religion in favor of religiosity that favored and nurtured activist state protection of both antidemocratic political norms and chattel slavery. This essay argues that ostensibly disestablished Presbyterianism in South Carolina helped intellectually erect and socially perpetuate coercive religious and state power.

Keywords: slavery; Presbyterian; South Carolina; establishment; church; authority

In 1777, William Henry Drayton, respected scion of a wealthy planter from the coastal slaveholding Lowcountry of South Carolina, publicly confronted one of the pillars of South Carolina society: the Anglican church, generally known in North America as the Episcopal Church. Hordes of dissenting churches, Baptists, Methodists, and reluctantly disestablished Presbyterians, flooded into South Carolina’s Backcountry. Their churches, freed from the officialdom of the Anglican establishment and (in the case of the Baptists and Methodists) not requiring credentials, education or licensure, dissenting churches grew rapidly in number and in congregants. They complained that they paid taxes for the upkeep of other churches and that they outnumbered the Anglicans. The Episcopalian numerical minority, however, paid a majority of the state’s taxes however, and contributed exponentially more to the newly independent state’s economy. Drayton, assisted by Presbyterian cleric William Tennent, eventually succeeded in removing state institutional protection of Anglicanism in 1778. The state stopped institutionally protecting Protestantism in 1790. Historians have argued that disestablishment liberated American religion and allowed for the proliferation of religious practice and religious freedom, especially individualistic Evangelicalism in the South. This proposition reduced nearly all of southern Protestantism to Revivalist Evangelicalism, and failed to account for the powerful presence of coercive Protestant religiosity in older southern states such as South Carolina. While they shared certain Evangelical particulars with frontier populations, Protestants in South Carolina, especially Presbyterians, rejected individualized religion in favor of religiosity that favored and nurtured activist state protection of both antidemocratic political norms and chattel slavery. Historians often assume that Presbyterianism in South Carolina supported preexisting civil and political protections of slavery. This stemmed from the Spirituality of the Church doctrine, most famously articulated by mid-century divines such as James Henley Thornwell. The doctrine argued that because of the church’s inherently spiritual nature, ministers and the church in a religious capacity could not make binding declarations concerning the civil and political order outside the provisions given to Believers in the Decalogue.

While Presbyterians might uphold the spirit of the doctrine, they often abrogated the spirituality of the church by actively supporting state authorized institutions like slavery under the guise of non-intervention. Even a church that prided itself on independence from the state proved remarkably adept at creating and perpetuating slavery and an anti-egalitarian social order. This essay argues that ostensibly disestablished Presbyterianism in South Carolina helped intellectually erect and socially perpetuate coercive religious and state power (Snowden 1920; Davis 2000).

Southern religion, argued William E. Dodd at the beginning of the twentieth century, experienced the replacement of socially established and socially-oriented religion with an egalitarian individualistic faith based on the salvation of souls. “God-fearing men,” Dodd explained, “preached and prayed, wept and sang, till thousands of the neglected were made conscious of their individual existence and of their social importance.” Twentieth Century historians largely accepted individualism as distinctive of southern religiosity. John Boles’s seminal work on southern revivalism noted that the individual Christian was the measure of evangelicalism. “Individual converts composed the true church and participated in their own religious lives. “Evangelical religion was almost wholly an individual.” The importance of each person “accentuated the the individualistic concern of religion in the South. Because individuals were Christianity, there was no communal or societal emphasis.” Blake Touchstone neatly summed up the prevailing belief that southern Protestantism “emphasized saving souls—changing individuals, not society.” Christine Leigh Heyrman posited that southern religiosity created in the aftermath of the American Revolution was essentially liberal, individualistic, and optimistic (Baird 1844; Boles 1996, 1988; Dodd 1919).

Historians have overstated the degree to which individualistic, liberal, and personalized religion existed in the South. Studies of southern religion have often ignored the remaining social and political power of churches, such as Anglicanism and Presbyterianism, who had historical roots as established state churches. Such ecclesiastical bodies, often termed magisterial Protestants to reflect their historical official recognition by magisterial authority, or state polity, were massively overrepresented in the economic lives and in the halls of government in southern states, especially the older states of the Atlantic South.

Early Republican South Carolina’s Presbyterians affirmed both activist government and activist religion, without regard to *en masse* individualistic notions of religion. The state government necessarily affirmed the intertwined relationship of the good of corporatist public morality and social order. Thomas Reese, pastor of Salem Presbyterian Church in the Pee Dee region of South Carolina, argued in the last decade of the Eighteenth Century that morality as practiced in the American Commonwealth—a morality which governed civil society on a national scale—must surely be affirmed by the government South Carolina. He also affirmed the idea of “national” crimes and sins. Reese argued for religion to have an explicit place in political discussions, effectively arguing for the nationalization of Christian moral precepts. “The most profligate politician can expatiate on the necessity of good morals; but we hear little of religion from our most respectable statesmen.” During political discussions, Reese lamented, religion was “kicked out of doors, as having nothing to do either with morality or civil policy.” The indivisible “connection between this daughter of heaven and her genuine offspring morality, is forgotten, and the influence in civil society almost wholly overlooked.” On the differences over slavery in a national moral order, Reese waived them away with dexterous rhetoric. Disagreements over slavery, he argued, stemmed merely from local “custom” and in no way challenged the moral order of the commonwealth. He offered further proof of his intransigence over slavery by telling his readers he “cautiously avoided to embroil” himself in what he deemed an insignificant disagreement over local custom. National morality remained far more important to Reese. Sin and vice, he argued, “degrades a nation, renders them contemptible, and at last terminates in public misery and ruin: so virtue, which is the necessary result of piety, exalts, ennobles, and leads them to true substantial glory and felicity” (Reese 1788).

Reese’s generation worried over sin and vice but tolerated and even affirmed Christian slaveholding. The religious dispositions of South Carolina’s Revolutionary generation remained those

of an authoritative and aristocratic Protestant order, largely intolerant of non-Christian religions and to a lesser degree of Roman Catholicism. The Revolutionary War certainly bred emancipationists and even abolition sentiment in some quarters of the Presbyterian Church, even in the South, but it did not necessarily breed a commitment to religious diversity. Belief in a societal commitment to a Protestant establishment never entirely waned even while some South Carolinians flirted with emancipation. During the American Revolution the pastor of Charleston's Scots Presbyterian Church preached that all humans enjoyed equality in the sight of God. Planter Ralph Izard, wrote from Switzerland the year before the promulgation of American independence and bemoaned the presence of Roman Catholics in the Swiss republic. "It would be fortunate," Izard wrote, "for them if another Luther and Calvin could make them all protestants." Overwhelmingly Protestant British North America, Izard explained, had "no such cause for jealousy and disunion, and, therefore, I hope in God, she may guard against the fatal effects of them." Simultaneously, Reverend W.C. Davis warned against Christian slaveholding at the 1794 meeting of the South Carolina Synod. Synodical directives recommended ministers to prepare slaveholders and enslaved people under their care to prepare for eventual emancipation. Unitary religious culture did not preclude discussions on the innate contradiction of human bondage. In fact, Evangelical growth and the broad disestablishment of religion under the constitutional order enabled more voices to argue against emancipation (Izard 1844; Genovese and Fox-Genovese 2007; Farmer 1986; Heyrman 1988).

The still relatively new U.S. Constitution also presented an obstacle to the emancipationist sentiments of the Revolutionary Era. The document codified slavery and racial caste into law, and Presidency of Thomas Jefferson provided the expansionism to propel the pro-slavery U.S. constitutional order across the continent. The slavery-affirming constitutional milieu never enjoyed universal support. Even in the South, slavery seemed at best a necessary evil to some prominent planters. But as historian David Walstreicher noted, "antislavery would lose repeatedly in mainstream politics for the next several generations thanks in part to the Constitution's rules." That South Carolina's commitment to the Constitution necessitated the document's commitment to slavery remained obvious to all. South Carolinians, with the assistance of Georgia planters, made slavery the price of union. Any move against slavery, warned Thomas Lynch, precipitated an "end to the confederation." The constitutional convention put South Carolinian's worries to rest. Slavery enjoyed robust federal protection. Even northern divines who disliked the institution saw no reason to destroy the American union (Walstreicher 2009; Rael 2015).

Southern Presbyterians at the beginning of the nineteenth century in many ways mirrored magisterial New England Federalists more than the class of religious southern slaveholders that succeeded them. They praised activist religion and never embraced the moral disinterest in pressing social problems that typified later southern Presbyterian divines wedded to the spirituality of the church doctrine. South Carolina Presbyterians understood an explicit connection between the state and the affirmation and even regulation of state religiosity. Episcopalians and Presbyterians argued that ministers licensed in South Carolina should be obliged "to take an oath of allegiance fidelity to the same." The explosive numerical growth of Baptists in South Carolina and other southern states worried South Carolina's Establishmentarians. By the end of the Eighteenth century Presbyterians joined with Episcopalians to argue that Baptists' libertarian conceptions of churchmanship and civil society especially might represent a nefarious influence on state's moral and political order. Establishmentarians, including Presbyterians, marked Baptists as "unfriendly to the government." As early as 1786, South Carolinians complained that the new United States constitution failed to fully propagate and protect a national moral and religious order. Patrick Calhoun, Presbyterian ruling elder and father of future Vice President John C. Calhoun, complained to the South Carolina General Assembly that the new constitution "allowed too great latitude in matters of religion." Establishmentarians felt strongly that a religious establishment remained a necessity for ensuring a polity's moral and social order. Some Baptists even attempted to rhetorically coopt themselves into the Establishment. They warned their less magisterial brethren that "the laws of our country are the

barrier by which our persons, reputations and property are secured from the cruel depredations of the robber, the slanderer and the assassin." Establishmentarians regarded "these laws as sacred," and they would "mark those who do not." Some South Carolina establishmentarians even balked at the Bill of Rights' First Amendment guarantee of freedom of religion, viewing it as a potential attack on the state's religious establishment. Representative Thomas Tucker preferred that the federal constitution "leave the state governments to themselves" and not guarantee religious liberty across the federal union (Thompson and Michael 1977; Elliot 1830; Klein 1990; Sehat 2011).

South Carolina made the state's authority over religious organization, if not practice, explicit during the Federalist Era. Although the state guaranteed Protestant religiosity, it nevertheless retained the authority to regulate the conscience of its citizens. "The liberty of conscience thereby ordained," the South Carolina General Assembly declared in 1791, "shall not be so construed as to excuse acts of licentiousness, or justify practices inconsistent with the peace or safety of the state." The enduring establishment showed itself explicitly when the "Jewish congregation at Charleston, called Beth Elohim, or House of God," petitioned the legislature for legal incorporation, "with privileges and powers similar to those heretofore granted to religious societies of other sects and denominations." The same principle applied to Presbyterian and Baptist congregations. Far from separating church and state, South Carolina continued to join and even subordinate church to state officialdom in a way inconceivable to later nineteenth and twentieth century American Christians. The state, not the church, created the congregation's place in the civil sphere. South Carolina, not the synod or local presbytery "declared" Presbyterians in Hopewell "to be one established body corporate and politic, in deed and in name, by the name and style of the Presbyterian Church of Hopewell on Jeffries creek." That the state might incorporate the church seemed unremarkable. That the state established the church "in politic" indicated far more vigorous state control of religion than assumed by succeeding generations of Evangelical Christians, especially in the twentieth century (Carolina 1808).

South Carolina's enduring commitment to forms of religious establishments fit neatly in with the state's growing Presbyterian religious influences and the growing slave economy. Presbyterians influential in the formation of the United States government—Elias Boudinot, Roger Sherman, and John Witherspoon—all remained committed to religious establishments in the states. Witherspoon, Princeton's president and perhaps the best known Presbyterian to sign both the Declaration of independence and the United States Constitution, also represented the surprisingly national acceptance of slavery in the late eighteenth century. Witherspoon argued that slavery might prove to be an unlawful violation of certain rights, but he never called it sinful. More importantly, Witherspoon actively recruited students from slaveholding families, especially from South Carolina. The number of Princeton students from slaveholding states doubled during Witherspoon's tenure as the College's president. The politically powerful trustees of the College of New Jersey included nine Congressmen and four U.S. Senators and various state legislators from throughout the new republic. And most closely identified with the dispositions and politics of the Federalists (Noll 2002, 2007; Wilder 2013).

Witherspoon's acceptance of slavery fit neatly with Princeton's conservative conception of an ordered Protestant polity governed by an anti-democratic political and religious establishment. He repudiated the notion that citizens might make religious decisions for themselves. The very "depravity of our nature" meant that democratic agency relying on humanity's innate goodness inevitably led to "wars and fighting's" because humans remained governed by their individual lusts and passions. A human realm that relied on humanity's goodness in decision-making inevitably led to the "ravages of lawless power." Witherspoon argued for and hoped for instead for human humility ruled by 'the dominion of righteousness and peace.' Witherspoon conceived this dominion as a temporal possibility brought about by a robust and explicit entangling of civil and religious authority. He hoped that in the new United States "true religion and civil liberty may be inseparable and that unjust attempts to destroy the one may in the issue tend to the support and establishment of both." Witherspoon's conception of the civil realm pushed against the emancipationist sentiments of even some South Carolinians. Witherspoon's son-in-law David Ramsay, a Pennsylvania-born Presbyterian

layman, physician, and writer from Charleston slowly moved away from his anti-slavery dispositions through his relationship with Witherspoon (Witherspoon 1776; Taylor and Messer 2016).

Slaveholding families found Princeton a welcoming educational home for their young men while Witherspoon administered the College of New Jersey. He gave southern planters every reason to believe he remained solid on the slavery issue. In 1790 Witherspoon voted against a plan for gradual emancipation in New Jersey. When he died in 1794, he owned two slaves. Witherspoon's second cousin, Gavin Witherspoon, helped join Princeton Presbyterianism's national intellectual realm with South Carolina's enthusiasm for slavery. Gavin's son became a legislator and his grandsons attended South Carolina College. Another Witherspoon cousin, John Witherspoon, served a pastor of the Presbyterian church in the town of Camden while another, Colonel James H. Witherspoon, became a prosperous planter. Devout and Presbyterian, James' daughter Nancy eventually wed James Henley Thornwell. In the Witherspools and others South Carolina wed establishmentarianism nationalism with southern slaveholding (Wilder 2013; Palmer 1875).

Nationalism proved to be an enduring goal although not ultimate goal for the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. Historian William Harrison Taylor noted that "Presbyterians, like many others in the new nation, strove to further Christ's Kingdom. National unity was in the best interest of the United States, and so nationalism . . . was in the best interest of the body of Christ." While Presbyterian nationalism experienced certain numerical limitations in the South, the prevalence of elite slaveholders and Federalists in South Carolina's Presbyterian Church meant that nationalism found a relatively welcome reception and "for the most part the southern Presbyteries and Synods reflected the desires of the General Assembly." George Buist, pastor of a large Presbyterian church in Charleston and future President of the College of Charleston, worked vigorously to actuate the General Assembly's vision of a multi-denominational Protestant nationalism in South Carolina. "The royal law of love," Buist argued in 1793, formed the basis "of the Christian character." The Christian law of love transcended the individual and worked itself out in ecclesiastic bodies as well as through political bodies. "The love of our neighbor" shone forth "with resplendent lustre in the gospel" but also made itself manifest in every "part of the system of nature." Like the historic Reformers Buist conjoined moral law and natural law more readily than succeeding generations of Americans religious intellectuals. Moral law and natural law, therefore, "entered into every code of laws which has been published to the world." The state upheld the moral law and a largely inseparable natural law. The moral law of love was "not, however, an useless and inactive principle; on the contrary, it is the foundation of a virtuous character, and is, in truth, the fulfilling of the law. For where it exists in full force, it secures a complete discharge of all the social duties" (Taylor 2010; Buist 1794).

Buist and Witherspoon's echoed the Reformer Francis Turretin's argument that the interests of the national moral order and the natural order necessitated the social regulation of religion. Witherspoon argued that duty to God "should never be erased" in the moral law, and as such "loosening the obligation of religion" in society inevitably led to "justifying the indulgence of every natural desire." The state also held the duty of regulating and if need be suppressing "false religion." "Every doctrinal opinion, every form of government," Witherspoon declared, would be "brought to the test, and tried by its fruits" for its conduct upholding the law of God. Turretin became increasingly popular with South Carolina's Presbyterians as the Nineteenth Century progressed. The *Southern Presbyterian Review* published a gushing review of a new Latin edition of the Reformer's theology in 1848, declaring the work a "happy omen for theology of our times." Although Robert Lewis Dabney dissented occasionally from Turretin, the South Carolinian admired the Swiss thinker and approved of his reentrance in theological studies of the era. His influence at southern seminaries and colleges grew as well. Every major southern seminary included his works as textbooks, as did Columbia Presbyterian Seminary, South Carolina College, and the College of Charleston (Witherspoon 1759; *An Association of Ministers* 1848; Holifield 1978).

The nationalist establishmentarian principles espoused by Buist and Witherspoon remained powerful in South Carolina well into the Nineteenth Century. Witherspoon's Princeton exercised the

decisive influence on southern Presbyterianism and southern collegiate culture in the first half of the nineteenth century. By the 1820s most college and professors and teachers claimed Princeton as their alma mater, and through John Witherspoon's years teaching pastors destined for ministry in the South the institution exercised the decisive influence on the creation of southern intellectualism. Historian Charles Sydnor noted that if there was "such a thing as a Presbyterian type of mind, southern college boys were brought into close contact with it in the early nineteenth century." These young southern men, educated by Presbyterians affected the course of American intellectual development in decisive ways. Because of its preeminent place at the nexus of educating southern slaveholders at an institution of national influence, Presbyterianism "bound the nation's intellectual culture to the future of American slavery and the slave trade." The transformation of northern Presbyterian ministers to well-regarded denizens of an explicitly slave society proved remarkably easy. So long as they affirmed the acceptability of slavery, northern-born and often Princeton educated pastors enjoyed near-universal acclaim from laymen. When the northern-born Rev. Robert Smith died in 1803, his congregants from Savannah's Presbyterian Church—which served populations in South Carolina as well—attended his funeral en masse, along with other prominent citizens of the city and surrounding environs. A Vermont-born Presbyterian minister happily spent his final days in the comfort of a plantation on South Carolina's Edisto Island (Sydnor 1948; Wilder 2013; *Gazette of the United States* 1803; *Vermont Chronicle* 1826).

South Carolinians solicited northern as well as British clerics for their pulpits in the Early Republic. Scots seemed especially attractive to elite congregations. In 1793 the First (Scots) Presbyterian Church of Charleston sought not a revolutionary American but a "gentleman bred in the communion and principles of the Established Church of Scotland" to serve as the church's pastor. They might have easily found an educated Princetonian, but instead they looked for a minister from the established Church of Scotland. Charleston's Presbyterian reaffirmed their establishmentarian and magisterial commitment and hoped their new minister would "preach to a polite, well informed congregation, and that he will appear at the head of the Presbyterian interest in this State." Presbyterian interest in the state included the civil and social realm, a relationship later South Carolina Presbyterians denounced. When George Buist arrived in Charleston in 1793 he actively ingratiated himself into the city's cultural, social, and religious life and became "an acceptable minister to the Congregation, as well as an agreeable member of society." Buist held other offices while he served as a minister. He headed the College of Charleston and committed himself to education whole-heartedly before his early death in 1808. Presbyterians comfortably ingratiated themselves into state apparatuses in the Early Republic, and saw no issue with joining the church and state educational institutions officially in the person of their ministers (Sprague 1859).

The Presbyterian commitment to education, however, allowed slave-affirming conceptualizations of the American order to spread into the Old Southwest and into the political mainstream. Plantation profits faded almost as swiftly as religious revival. Upstate South Carolinians pushed farther afield to acquire lands for cotton, and they took Presbyterianism with them. Half of white South Carolinians born after 1800 immigrated. By the middle of the nineteenth century Georgia's population included 50,000 South Carolinians. 45,000 resided in Alabama and roughly 26,000 resided in Mississippi. Fully thirty percent of the immigrants to those three Deep South states hailed from South Carolina. As early as 1821 South Carolina's diaspora helped people the Deep South in noticeable ways. A newspaper in Huntsville noted that Carolinians and Georgians poured into the community looking for still-available cotton land. A generation of Presbyterian trained planters began to take their education into the rest of the Deep South, with far-reaching consequences (Ford 1988; *Alabama Republican* 1821).

Schooling, especially at the primary and secondary levels, served as the essential social southern and cultural catechesis available to elite children as well as a few students from yeomen backgrounds among southern Presbyterians. The best tutors tended to be religious ministers, and in the South Carolina backcountry Presbyterians came to be seen as best-suited to teach the budding backcountry master class. The importance of Presbyterian churches and schools cannot be overstated. In many

cases, they were the twin pillars of burgeoning civilization, and the masthead of material and social progress associated with the nascent American nation. Robert Mills, best known for pioneering American architecture, concluded in his 1826 travelogue of South Carolina that Presbyterian churches and schools generally served as the hallmark of civilization in a locale. The Abbeville District along the Savannah River particularly impressed Mills. “Abbeville may be regarded as the original seat of learning in the upper country, and from it has emanated that light and intelligence which manifested themselves there previous to, and during the Revolutionary War.” Attention to education, he noted, was vital. He praised the Presbyterians for their “remarkable” care regarding the education of the community’s youth. In Williamsburg County, the Session House of the Presbyterian Church doubled as the community’s school room (Mills 1826).

Moses Waddel, perhaps South Carolina’s best known secondary educator in the nineteenth century, moved to the Abbeville District from North Carolina and began an academy near the hamlet of Willington. He also married Patrick Calhoun’s daughter, joining the planter class. Waddel ran the best-known academy in the South Carolina back-country, and other Presbyterian ministers educated and created a generation of southern leaders committed to wedding Jeffersonian nationalism with the continuation of slavery. Waddel’s academy building also served as a church, codifying the religious component slaveholders’ education. Waddel’s institution trained such prominent southerners as William Crawford, Howell Cobb, Augustus Longstreet, Calhoun, Hugh S. Legare, James L. Petigru, and George McDuffie. Waddel preached on Sundays, and the building became a regular congregation. Waddel’s most famous charge, his young brother-in-law John Calhoun, illustrated the cultural, religious, and social dispositions of Waddel’s students. Far from being a raging democrat, Calhoun and the scions of Upstate Presbyterians held fast to the “conservatism of their class” and in many ways proved “more conservative in thought than the most aristocratic Europeans.” Historians might mythologize Upstate Presbyterians’ commitment to Jefferson, but as observers as early as Henry Adams noted, Calhoun’s “modes of thought were those of a Connecticut Calvinist” (Waddel 1891; White 1911; Adams 1903).

Yankee Calvinists—comfortable with activist state religion—and their politics regularly influenced South Carolinians in the Early Republic. James Henley Thornwell’s emphasis on an apolitical spirituality of the church lay several decades in the future when northern educators ministers first arrived among South Carolina’s growing Presbyterian population. Nathan S. Beman, a transplanted New Englander and stepfather of future Fire-eater William Lowndes Yancey, preached political sermons in the South just as he had in northern states. His politics remained that of a convinced Federalist, complete with a powerful sense of American nationalism. He preached against the Embargo setup by Jefferson to punish British impressment of American sailors. He also railed against American involvement in the War of 1812. When he moved south in for his health, he kept his politics. But he refrained from importing northern intransigence on slavery. He hoped, in fact, that religion might make slavery more palatable to religious slaveholders by making it a mark of divine favor. He gained enough goodwill amongst slaveholding Presbyterians to serve as temporary clerk of the Presbyterian Synod of South Carolina and Georgia, and his views long with others ushered in a new era of Presbyterian affirmation of chattel slavery. Beman informed slaveholders that if they proselytized their slaves, God would reward them with more compliant human chattel. “Let the servant,” he instructed, “feel that he enjoys the distinction of the Son of God.” If slaveholders encouraged in their slaves the belief that they were the heirs “of the same glory to which the patriarchs and apostles aspired,” slaves would “cheerfully submit to the lot, though a humble and painful one which has been appointed him here below.” Beman owned slaves himself, and tortuously tried to reconcile his Federalist New England sensibilities with his closeted questions over slaveholding’s morality. Beman’s stepson hated him, but even Yancey’s biographer admitted the young man received an excellent education from the minister. More than that, he received a vision of the United States that affirmed both a powerful national identity and slaveholding (Walther 2006; Draughon 1966).

Chronology helped ease the wedding of slavery and nationalized Presbyterianism. At the beginning of the nineteenth century revivals swept the western states and then moved east across the Appalachian Mountains. Carolinians understood the revival to be truly national. Although the western states seemed most affected, South Carolina experienced a visible increase in public piety. Religiosity spread across denominational boundaries as well. Presbyterian churches, enjoying a substantive increase in attendance from the revival, understood that their church now represented the intellectual vanguard of a truly national religiosity and morality. The preceding two decades saw Deism and heterodox Christianity sweep the United States and the especially the South. Ebenezer Cummins, a minister in South Carolina's Abbeville District, worried that "Satan and all his power" had been "let loose" by Deism and unorthodoxy. He went, Reverend Cummins warned, about the South "like a roaring lion seeking whom he might devour." Evangelical revivals, however, gave new energy to older more traditional religiosity in the South. One Presbyterian cleric in South Carolina's Waxhaw district thrilled with the knowledge that "languishing, dying religion is beginning to revive in an astonishing manner." Another South Carolinian opined that there was "not a Presbyterian in the southern states, which is not in a state of revival" (Foote 1846; Woodward 1802; DesChamps 1952).

Presbyterian revivalism combined with increasingly lucrative agricultural pursuits, gave South Carolina Presbyterians a preeminent place in shaping a pro-slavery intellectual milieu. Much of the initial impulse stemmed from northern Presbyterians. In 1815 Eliphalet Pearson, a Boston Presbyterian, publicly called for religious education in the South. There were, he complained "in Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina and Virginia, which contain a population of 2,197,670 . . . not 126 ministers of competent education. This left leaving "2,071,670 souls without a regular stated ministry," a situation Pearson believed Presbyterians might remedy. An immediate and universal effort must be made," he argued "to provide religious instruction' for the destitute in our own land, by engaging all the pious and well disposed of our nation, to unite and act systematically in this work of self-preservation." By casting Presbyterian education in national terms, Pearson exposed the seriousness of Presbyterian prioritization of educating a united moral nation. Not every southerner seemed thrilled by northern Presbyterian's decision to educate southerners. Thomas Jefferson especially feared their influence, and warned his neighbors that Presbyterian educators would flood the South and poison the minds of young southern men and women (Pearson 1815; Richmond Enquirer 1816).

Presbyterians in South Carolina joined their northern brethren in affirming a moral national order that understandably concerned the increasingly democratic (and sectional) third President. Jefferson earned the scorn of Federalists throughout the Union for his perceived deism, and South Carolina Presbyterians joined the chorus lambasting the Virginian for his religious heterodoxies and penchant for democratization. Historian Jonathan Den Hartog noted that "in 1800, Federalists North and South shared many opinions, as well as fears, about the possible direction of the nation." Constitutional, political, and religious concerns" potentially made South Carolina's Presbyterians—men like Henry William De Saussure, "open to the type of evangelical and Combative Federalism Jedidiah Morse, Timothy Dwight, and other Northerners were developing." De Saussure's "strong" attachment "to order and good government" affirmed his belief that both brought about "the happy results of union and social order" and stemmed the infinite evils of civil dissensions." Like his northern Federalist brethren, De Saussure conceived of the United States and its people as a nationalized moral, social, and religious order under providential protection. After Jefferson won a second term De Saussure warned that "times are becoming very Critical, and I am fearful we shall have trouble in this land, so long favored with peace & prosperity. God in his providence may avert the Evil; & I pray that he may." Den Hartog noted that "De Saussure's use of providence went beyond merely the national providentialism so common in the new nation, rising instead to . . . belief in God's active involvement in the affairs of both nations and individuals." While De Saussure warned against a de-facto establishment of one particular denomination, he nonetheless affirmed the principle of church and state buttressing each other to support the national moral order and that of South Carolina (Den Hartog 2015).

De Saussure actively worked to perpetuate both Presbyterian religion and magisterial Federalist-style politics among South Carolina's planters and also among their children. During his time as Intendant (mayor) of Charleston he took an active interest in education. De Saussure's decision to lead the charge for the creation of South Carolina College proved to be an even more enduring legacy for the inculcation future generations of South Carolinians. In 1808 he moved to Columbia and regarded himself as a leading patron of the college. "The college of the State, which he had contributed so much to found, was an object of his unceasing care and interest." De Saussure served as a trustee and watched over the school's "affairs with an unceasing, industrious vigilance, as if its superintendence, and the advancement of its prosperity, were his own peculiar and exclusive duty." De Saussure cared deeply for South Carolina's youth, and "he delighted to watch for any indication of merit, and to develop whatever appeared promising in talent or character." De Saussure and others undoubtedly ensured that college prioritized the hiring of Presbyterians, beginning with R.B. Montgomery in 1806. Professorships at the college became Presbyterian sinecures ([Harper 1841](#)).

Educating youth with Federalist conceptions of a political and religious order transcended region in the Early Republic. South Carolina educated a larger percentage of its white youth than every slave state except Maryland and Virginia. Through Presbyterian dominated South Carolina College and the Federalists-dominated College of Charleston—led by a general establishmentarian Anglican and former Presbyterian New Englander, Jasper Adams—South Carolinians learned a Federalist-style view of the American nation that affirmed a powerful vision of state and religious activity, and a vigorous conservatism that affirmed slavery. Adams, a distant relation of the second President of the United States, argued in an emphatic sermon and series of letters to ex-President James Madison that Christianity "is the established religion of the nation, its institutions and usages are sustained by legal actions, and many of them are incorporated with the fundamental law of the country." He denounced divines and politicians who believed that "Christianity has no connection with our civil constitutions of government. True disestablishment, Adams warned, brought "absurd and dangerous consequences" ([Niles 1829](#); [Dreisbach 1996](#); [Adams 1833](#)).

By wedding religion and the state, Adams inferred an coercive political structure reminiscent of the civil polity laid out by John Calvin's *Institutes on the Christian Religion*. Submission to state authority characterized Adams' conception of a Christian citizenry's duties. "That the New Testament ranks this among the most important of Christian duties, may be fairly inferred from the strong language which it is accustomed to employ. We are not only 'to fear God, but to honor the king'" which Adams argued represented "civil government and magistracy of every kind." Christians must submit "to every person whom men have invested with any degree of lawful authority over you, 'whether it be to the king, as supreme, or unto governors,' that is, all subordinate magistrates." Adams denied the selective obedience that characterized Evangelicals, typically Baptists and Methodists but also some anti-slavery northern Presbyterians. Evangelicals rejected any coercion the state might levy on matters of religion but they still argued for the maintenance of a democratic and voluntarily upheld Christian moral order ([Sehat 2011](#); [Adams 1837](#)).

While Evangelicals tended to appeal to Christians' religious liberty, Adams cast Christian citizenry as a more total submission to a state that legislated on all manners of social and civil life, including religion. Those "ordained by men to perform the functions of governors, are to be obeyed for conscience' sake; and are, therefore, said by St. Paul 'to be ordained of God.'" Adams echoed St. Paul by concluding that there was no power but God, and "every form of lawful government and magistracy is sanctioned by the Almighty . . . even the idolatrous and persecuting Roman government had authority from God to exact obedience from those to whom St. Paul wrote." Whence he infers, that whoever resisted the power of the state "refuses just obedience to his lawful rulers" and resisted "the ordinance of God, and they that resist shall receive to themselves condemnation." Adams urged South Carolinians to "render to all," not entirely different than the more selective rhetorical affirmation of federal authority that characterized succeeding generation of South Carolinians, including Presbyterians like James Henley Thornwell, Benjamin Palmer, and others. Succeeding generations nonetheless echoed

Adams, especially regarding chattel slavery. The established religious order, Adams argued, also established chattel slavery. "It is well for masters constantly to keep in mind, how responsible their situation is, in respect to their servants, how much they are entrusted to their judgment, discretion, and good feeling." Strong "temptations of passion, prejudice, and mistaken interest" might lead them "to neglect or abuse the extensive discretionary power with which the laws of their country and the providence of God have invested them." But their place as slaveholders' came from God. The state and religious establishment protected that right, and religious masters upheld their duties to God and slave (Sehat 2011; Adams 1837).

Adams' College of Charleston leaned towards a vocal affirmation of general establishmentarianism principles and perpetuated that vision amongst the College's students. George Buist saw Christianity as the educational and political vehicle actualizing youth's fullest potential understanding of moral and natural law. "In nothing is the humane spirit of Christianity more conspicuous than in improving the state of children. In the most polished nations of antiquity we observe on this subject laws the most ridiculous, and customs the most shocking to humanity." But even Classical pagans, Buist argued, understood the importance of education to the creation and perpetuation of a national moral order. Greek and Roman "legislators had too much wisdom not to perceive that the youth were an important part of the community; and that, if they did not sow in spring, they could not reap in harvest." Christian influence and control of state morality, Buist argued, tempered the brutal excesses of Spartan militaristic infanticide, Athenian dissipation, and the autocratic power of the Roman paterfamilias. "Christianity," Buist claimed, "restored to nature its rights, and to virtue its reign. With the severe legislators of antiquity compare the mild and merciful Lawgiver of the universe." Buist appealed to an innately political conception of justice and mercy to affirm a national moral order. This appeal to a particularly Christian politic, for example, allowed his listeners to affirm both Christian morality in the moral order and the continued affirmation of human bondage. Buist touched on the possibility of unjust authority, and heavily alluded to slavery. "There may not be one reason" why an unjust master's "punishment should be delayed for a single moment. But would you throw a hundred industrious people out of employment, and leave them as a burden on the publick?" Justice, instead of mercy, might "cut off the hopes of many diligent and well-educated young men, who expected, by his means, to have been brought forward into notice, and to have served their country in an useful station." Would those who wanted slavery destroyed "reduce a family of innocent and helpless children to beggary, and turn them into the street without a friend or a protector?" Supposed justice of overthrowing slavery, Buist argued, was "more difficult to reconcile with the mercy of God, than to account for the present impunity of vice in perfect consistency with justice" (Buist 1809).

South Carolinians coopted these anti-emancipationist historic conceptions of church, morality and state authority to support their society's innate inequalities. Inequality in South Carolina, typically associated with an economy dominated by planters, insinuated itself into a burgeoning capitalist economy as well. Affirmation of societal inequality allowed a robust interstate slavery trade to develop, increasing South Carolinian's capital even as the plantation economy faltered after 1820. South Carolina religion thus actively upheld inequality, bit it agrarian or capitalist. No Presbyterian in South Carolina believed that Christianity should be removed from its preeminent place in the moral order, and only the assumed preexistence of a Christian moral order precipitated the American conception of church and state. More telling was the fact that South Carolina Presbyterians remained fiercely committed to state regulation of slavery. A slaveholding Christian moral order upheld state prerogatives, and state power upheld the Christian slaveholding moral order. Slavery gave lie to the pleas of separation of church and state. Far from being divorced from politics, Slaveholding Presbyterians saw their world through this lens. Far from breeding an ethic of Christian liberalism and democratic freedoms, the Christian moral order often squelched the aspirations of poor whites and especially enslaved African Americans. Enslaved peoples, like their masters, remained under the force of moral law. David Ramsay, born in Pennsylvania and vocally anti-slavery, until he moved to South Carolina during the last decade of the Eighteenth Century, that African Americans needed moral improvement before

they might enjoy moral, cultural, social, and even religious parity. Ramsay initially believed that white that “pride and avarice are great obstacles in the way of black liberty.” But exposure to South Carolina conservatism convinced him that attempts to introduce freedom to enslaved people would disorder morality and society. By the 1790s, Ramsey no longer believed in the moral or social possibility of freedom for South Carolina’s enslaved peoples. Ramsey might protest that establishment made the church “a worldly sanctuary” that succumbed to “ambition, pride, and avarice,” but he never granted the church’s ability argue for emancipation nor did he believe the state had the right to coerce the church towards emancipation. Slaveholding joined church and state because any disruption of that relationship in the South ultimately challenged slavery, who must remain subordinate in the social and moral. “They who have been born and grow up in slavery” Ramsey argued, “are incapable of the blessings of liberty” (Baptist 2013; Longfield 2013; Ramsey 1819).

South Carolinians understood that far from being merely a civil institution, the relationship between master and slave stemmed from the Christian understanding of moral and natural law. William Riley told a gathering largely comprised of young Presbyterian slaveholding communicants that Christian moral and philanthropic minds were “too expansive to be confined to the narrow bounds of self and home.” The moral regeneration of the continent remained their ostensible goal. Although Christians might work for Christ kingdom in their “domestic circle,” when they surveyed “the widely extended hemisphere, he must be anxious for the period when the nations of the world shall be influenced by one common sentiment, and when it may be proclaimed that Christ is King on earth, as he is now King of saints” Young Presbyterian layman eventually, Riley averred, bring the “sunbeams of grace to “Asia, Africa, Europe and America.” Thus, Riley argued, “may the grace of God, through our instrumentality, take deep root, and run from heart to heart, and house to house, till the whole country is blessed with the gracious fruits of the Gospel.” The Christianization of enslaved peoples remained an important facet of redeeming the moral nation. Riley understood that some in South Carolina remained averse to their “servants” joining their churches, but he argued that slavery’s Christianization, not emancipation, brought about the divine moral order. Slaves receiving communion and partaking in other religious observances inevitably became more pacific. More importantly, church slaves meant better policing of slaves. Slave catechesis “brought the whole internal concerns of the plantations before the minister; who, every Sabbath, after Service, carefully examined the heads of the different classes.” Often, Riley noted, “the first intimation a master had of his being plundered, was the restoration of his property, through the vigilance of the pastor, his leaders and their classes.” Most importantly, Riley confined slavery to “the non-essential differences, which exist among us,” which would never “prevent unity of action.” Slavery and what Riley offered as small socio-cultural differences “may divide us in some of the minor walks of Christian life, but in the great concerns of ‘doing good and loving mercy’, we can cordially unite” (Riley 1821).

State Religion played a vital role in preserving and regulating the relationship between master and slave. While the existence of slavery need not divide Christians, the maintenance and ordering of the slave order remained a sphere for both church and state in the Early Republic. The First Presbyterian Church of Columbia tried Richard Sandley, a slaveholder and communing member, for the murder of one of his slaves. The charged Sandley officially with “the death of a negro man.” Sandley “fully acknowledged the charge,” and chose instead to argue that the enslaved person’s life stemmed from inadvertently harsh punishment. The elders eventually determined that the death to be an accident and fully acquitted the Mr. Sandley of all design to take the life of said negro.” They chose only to “admonish Mr. Sandley in relation to this unhappy affair & caution him against giving way to passion when the life of a fellow creature is concerned.” In cases like Sandley’s and others churches tended to discipline white violence more for disordering the social realm than for assault on the humanity of enslaved people. In the case of an overseer hitting his employer’s slave, Robert Elder argues, that “in such cases, it would seem the offense was more against” property owners than enslaved persons. The maintenance of the slaveholding order remained the primary concern of both church and state. Churches, Elder rightly notes, “mirrored” southern courts and “viewed violence against blacks as

primarily a transgression against an owner's property rights, and only secondarily, if at all, an assault on a slave's person." Far from being separate, church and state worked closely together to maintain the slaveholding order (Elder 2016).

The union of church and state on slavery helped perpetuate slaveholding amongst congregations with generally anti-slavery sentiments. The Palmer family, members of the Congregationalist Circular Church in Charleston, upheld the slaveholding order even as they pursued an activist religious ethic inherited from New England. In 1820 Edward Palmer, a cousin of future Presbyterian luminary Benjamin Morgan Palmer, held membership in "several societies—one, a Musical Association; another a Young Men's Missionary Society—at which I had been called to deliver public addresses. On one of these occasions, Mr. Jonas King, afterwards a distinguished missionary to Greece, was present." King, a New Englander, made a powerful impression on Palmer. After a religious meeting King and Palmer walked home "and in the course of conversation," King asked Palmer if he "had ever thought of the ministry myself. I promptly replied: 'Look, my dear sir, at a fond wife and four lovely children, whom I am bound by every tender and holy tie to support, and then say whether that question can be asked.'" King's encouragement accompanied that of Rev. Dr. Porter Andover Seminary. Porter also met with Palmer "and, after a long and interesting interview, not only encouraged the step, but imposed upon me the prayerful consideration of the matter; all of which culminated in my departure to the North in 1820." In the Early Republic the influence of New England Federalists—Andover especially spawned establishmentarian Calvinists—remained perfectly respectable among planter families committed to slaveholding, largely because Federalist Congregationalist conceptions of church and state could be easily coopted to defend the slaveholding order (Johnson 1906).

Ecclesiological ties between South Carolina's Federalists-influenced magisterial-minded Presbyterians, and New Englanders, remained firm even during the Nullification Crisis. Unionism remained common amongst Presbyterians more than other confessional groups. Charleston Presbyterian merchantmen feared the loss of their commercial relationships with New England. In the Pee Dee Region Presbyterians publicly embarrassed a member of the church in Indiantown for publicly espousing Nullification. The Nullifier wore a cockaded hat to church, signifying his allegiance to the Nullifiers. Boys in the congregation put a cockade necklace on a dog and allowed the animal to jaunt through the sanctuary. The incident prompted laughter from the congregation and humiliated the errant Nullifier. Other Presbyterians viewed South Carolina's actions with less humor. John Witherspoon of Camden saw Nullification and the political discord that stemmed from it as an ominous "dark cloud" "gathering over our country." The Presbyterian church, he feared, might also be "overshadowed" by the events shaking the political landscape. William MacDowall remonstrated against the "reckless spirit of opposition to the general government." Columbia's Presbyterians, drawn from elite planters but also from the state's small but powerful elite merchant class, remained heavily devoted to the cause of the Union. The sanctuary of the First Presbyterian Church in Columbia served as the meeting place for Unionists throughout the crisis (McGill 1897; Snay 1997; DesChamps 1954).

Despite political rumblings over Nullification Boston Presbyterians—generally National Republicans and soon to be Whigs—held a charity meeting "for the benefit" of the theological seminary "at Columbia." The Synod of South Carolina and Georgia chartered the seminary a few years earlier, but the institution relied heavily on support from outside South Carolina. Even South Carolina's Nullifiers found the largess of Massachusetts Presbyterians praiseworthy. A newspaper in Columbia told its readers: "We have a certain regard for Boston, her spirit, her intelligence, her liberality; and (though loving little else in Massachusetts) we love, at least, the ancient sturdiness of that state." South Carolinians admitted that even in political scuffles that divided them from Massachusetts that the Bay State fought "bold and fair . . . strongly and well; and we verily believe that she alone, if the late contest had come to arms, would have joined battle with all the ancient spirit." South Carolina scorned "windy New York, or leaden Pennsylvania," and never made much account of them. "But Massachusetts is a true foe, and we like her" (Niles 1833).

South Carolina Presbyterians espoused Unionist nationalism and engaged in friendly banter with New Englanders in the press during the Nullification Crisis because the conflict never directly impugned the institution of slavery. For the same reason South Carolinians did not question the conflation of church and state during the Early National period to the degree described by later historians. Only as American religiosity increasingly divided over the place of slavery did southern divines separate slavery from the conjoined moral and natural law regulated by the historical partnership of church and state. Led by a younger generation of clerics like James Henley Thornwell, South Carolina Presbyterians hoped to protect slavery by divorcing its preservation and regulation from a religion and a religiously influenced state. Thornwell's Spirituality of the Church doctrine declared church and state strictly separate and veritably untouchable. South Carolinians began to deny the immorality of slavery at precisely the same time they denied that the church could speak about human bondage. It should not be considered a coincidence that the congressional agitation over abolitionist pamphlets in 1836 so immediately preceded actions by the Presbyterian Synod of South Carolina and Georgia removing emancipationists provisions from the Synod's official positions. The same year John Calhoun declared slavery a positive good the South Carolina's Synod unanimously declared that they considered "Slavery as a civil institution, with which the General Assembly has nothing to do, and over which it has no right to legislate." The same year a South Carolina Presbyterian applauded his fellow co-religionists in Virginia for declaring that "slavery is not sin" but admitted that such a declaration was a departure from historic Presbyterian moral orthopraxy in both the North and South. "Which one of all the weekly religious periodicals has assumed this ground?" ([Southern Christian Herald 1838](#)).

Thornwell's separation of state and religion certainly created a religious reality wherein individualized religiosity flourished, but religious individualism remained an anomaly. Subsequent association of conservative Protestant Christianity with capitalism and so called small government economic policies relied on religious practice being divorced from state and social considerations. South Carolina's Presbyterians before the Civil War associated religious authority with moral, social, and state authority. South Carolina Presbyterians in the Early Republic understood that the church and state in conjunction could, within certain limits, tell them what to do with their slaves, how to live their lives, and even how to spend their money.

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